

MEDIA RELEASE



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Food and eating serious part of doing business in China

Business people should give food serious thought when they travel to China, a Deakin University researcher said at its Law School's Food Law and Policy Symposium (Saturday, January 18).

Dr Mona Chung, from the University's School of Management and Marketing told the symposium that food can be used as an effective business tool in China.

"Food and eating is in Chinese culture," Dr Chung explained.

"Food provides the opportunity to be social. Important deals can be made during a banquet. Trust can be built at a dinner table. Negotiations can be continued at lunch."

Dr Chung said the Chinese believed they were able to examine a person's integrity and conduct through the way they ate.

"This is the reason why a guest is always invited to dine with a host," she said. "Those who eat by themselves and never allow others to eat first present a poor personal quality. A good host will always put food into their guest's bowl and will continue to do so through dinner. The host will invite the guest to have more, to drink more. It is a sign of good manners."

Dr Chung said western business people often misunderstood banquets in China as a form of bribery.

"Dining out is an important tool in building Chinese business relationships, it is a way of socialising and building networks," she said.

"Many Westerners can find banquets intimidating, particularly the etiquette surrounding them. To eat to satisfy hunger is not the prime purpose of attending a Chinese banquet."

To start with seating arrangements are very different and follows a strict hierarchical order.

During the banquet, "It is the duty of a host to show that the guests are properly received, so the higher the position of the guest, the more elaborate the banquet will be. This is reflected in the delicacies and the amount of alcohol served."

Dr Chung said business people were also intimidated by the amount of alcohol served at such occasions.

"For the Chinese drinking is part of their hospitality and it is a part of long lasting relationship building. It is also a way of building trust. The Chinese have a saying 'the truth reveals after drinks', so if a guest trusts a host enough to have a good drink without worrying about the truth coming out it is an indication of their honesty and trust."

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Top tips for the eating business in China

- Don't pig yourself out on one dish that you like. Chinese meals are to be eaten with harmony that all courses must be consumed.
- Delicacies such as snakes, frogs, scorpions are rare and expensive and should be appreciated with enthusiasm as your host will have gone to a great deal of trouble to organise them.
- Guests are never forced to drink, however it is your Chinese host's responsibility to ensure you are wined and dined, even if this means bringing in drinkers to ensure the guest does not drink alone.
- You must not drink or eat alone at a banquet.
- Know the traditions of Chinese festivals and their significance can go a long way to building a business relationship
- Banquets and functions are a way of doing business - as Foster's found stopping the practice can lead to all sorts of problems with the supply chain