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A lot is made of supposedly complex Chinese systems of etiquette, but the reality is that in most situations there are very little surprises. When spending time with fellow students or conversing with locals, you don't have to worry about making some horrible mistake that could lead to anyone taking offense. However, there are social situations where a little bit of etiquette is important, and knowing this will make you feel more at ease. Here are our top three tips on simple China etiquette that will find you useful when you study in China.

1. Refusing to let you pay. As you start to study in China and make acquaintances don't be surprised when your Chinese friends will adamantly refuse to let you pay for a meal. This is their way of showing they are not greedy, but more importantly expresses friendship and shows friendly respect. If they absolutely insist on paying, let them, but you must learn to repay the favour another time by being even more insistent yourself. If this is difficult, you can always talk about sharing the bill in future. As you study in China you will see that this separating of the bill is the preferred option for many foreign students, therefore as you develop your relationship with your new found Chinese friends, don't be shy in insisting it in the future.
2. Guanxi and Mianzi aren't so important. Guanxi (relationships) and mianzi (face) are supposedly important within Chinese society. If you make contact with someone and they do you a favour, they will expect it to be repaid as an obligation. Also, showing your respect and appreciation is important so that you can both maintain face or respect. However, both of these concepts are most important in business, and not so much in your daily social interactions. Take your time to understand them with your friends, and then when it comes to business dealings in a few years you will be ready to enter this complicated world. For now however, your goal is to study in China and learn Chinese. In given time as you learn the language, these elements of society will become natural to understand.
3. Superstition. Perhaps the most important thing to know is that many Chinese people are quite superstitious, and much of the etiquette plays into this. For example, placing your chopsticks upright in a rice bowl can be seen as bad, because it can be reminiscent of the incense sticks that burn during funerals. However, don't be afraid of making a mistake, because after all you are there to learn and truly friendly people will not have a problem. If you are worried about attending a specific dinner or meeting a new group of people, you can ask some of your local Global Language advisors to give you more specific tips.

Knowing some basic etiquette helps to make things easier when making new friends or attending functions in China, but in reality the universal concepts of being polite and respectful will see you through in most cases.

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