
“NO, LET ME PAY”

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All families have some sort of oil that they run their engine on. The world tells us that this is love, but if you ask me, that's totally secondary. The reality is, families are both complicated and annoying. We are bound to them by blood obligation, yet we relate to them as if they could be people we met at a lunchtime cafeteria. But they're not. What I mean by this is that my mother is my mother by flesh and blood, but in all honesty as much as I love her I see her as a human being that is separate from me. I can see all her flaws, insecurities and idiosyncrasies and not relate them back to me. Is that how you see the members of your family too? Or am I just super emotionally severed?

If I am emotionally severed, then my perspective about Chinese families comes exactly from this perspective. I don't think dishonesty is something that oils white families but for most Chinese families this is the oil to the engine. I'm not suggesting that they are all liars and cheats, but there is a culture of saying one thing and meaning something else entirely. Whenever I'd bring this up, people would quickly hush me up, smiling above me with condescension at my act of honesty. How could I be so...well...honest? That's just too much for them. One instance of this is the role of the dishwasher. After a family dinner, someone would volunteer to do this exciting job before someone else abruptly cuts in to exhibit their grace

in trying to take over the job instead. Before you know it, the entire family is fighting over to do this job. The funny thing is, no one really wants to do it.

It's the same with footing the bill at restaurants. It is no exaggeration to say that I have actually seen three to four adults fight in public over who would foot the bill after a restaurant meal. Family members and friends alike are so desperate to wash their money down with their meal. Who do they think they are kidding? No one ever wants to pay but they always have to air their graces about it.

Understandably, it has caused me a lot of pent up resentment over the years, having to live in this tacit culture. No one says it, but we are all thinking the same thing.

Perhaps dishonesty is the ugliest word to describe Asian families. In another light, you could describe them as culturally adherent. They follow the rules of their culture like an elbow never leaving the bannister—to a fault.

It's hard for someone like me to live amongst this kind of culture. Mainly because I am a tell-all book and find it really difficult to bullshit people. There are moments of honesty in Chinese families but they come at such a price. They are only uncovered during do-or-die moments. And when those happen, you sort of wish they wouldn't be so damn honest.