

LIFESTYLE

Manners maketh man, and China's wealthy

Rich Chinese people are starting to see that having millions in the bank account means nothing if one doesn't know how to behave like a refined gentleman or lady

By YURAN in Shanghai
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Having style and sophistication is the name of the game in China's wealthy circles these days as a growing number of people are signing up for etiquette courses as a means of bridging cultural differences and embracing Western values.

Han Bing, a 35-year-old businesswoman who runs a company promoting luxury brands, is just one of many who believe that wealthy Chinese people still have much to learn when it comes to exuding class and elegance in social settings.

"Some Chinese people often leave the impression that they are wealthy but not noble... Taking the etiquette courses helps a lot," said Han, who has lived in Europe for five years and took courses by Image Collective Communication, a company that works with an English brand to offer etiquette courses in China.

Han has also enrolled her seven-year-old daughter in etiquette courses, saying that it is important the latter grows up knowing how to be well-mannered as that would make it easier when it comes to expanding her social network in the future.

This trend comes as no surprise to Sara Jane Ho, the founder of China's first etiquette school Institute Sarita, who foresaw it as early as 2012. The 29-year-old Harvard Business School graduate opened the school in Beijing after attending a two-month intensive course at Institut Villa Pierrefeu, the last and most famed of Switzerland's traditional finishing school.

"I am a multicultural person with diverse interests, hobbies and social circles. Institute Sarita is a platform for similar-minded women to pursue a meaningful and tasteful international lifestyle," said Ho of her motivations behind setting up the school.

While Ho conceded that the popularity of such schools are on the decline in the West, she insisted that many wealthy families around the world still acknowledge the importance of possessing good etiquette.

"Western parents send their children to Switzerland or similar schools in the UK for the same reason that the Chinese are now studying etiquette — they understand that the world we live in is very global," said Ho, who was born in Hong Kong and graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy, an elite boarding school in the United States.

Available to women only, Ho's school offers two courses for married (the hostess course) and single individuals (the debutante course) to learn social etiquette and protocol, including dress sense, table manners and business etiquette. Her students range from wealthy wives and successful businesswomen to young people from the second generation of rich families across the country. The courses are conducted mainly by Ho and her business partner and each 10-day program costs 80,000 yuan (\$12,587).

"Today's modern woman has to take on the roles of wife, mother, daughter and businesswoman. She needs to be polished not only in her dress sense but also in social skills and know how to behave in various settings," said Ho.

Vivian Gu, a customer who



Image Collective Communication often invites Diana Mather (middle right), the director of training from The English Manner, a global provider of contemporary protocol, etiquette, communication and cross-cultural integration tuition, to coach local wealthy individuals. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Sara Jane Ho, a 29-year-old Harvard Business School graduate, is keen to share her multicultural experience and lifestyle to more ladies in China with her women-only courses in Institute Sarita, China's first etiquette school. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Keen competition

Chinese organizations too have been keen to join this steadily growing niche industry. Milner views the increasing competition as an implication that etiquette, or specifically British etiquette, is becoming a valued quality here in China.

The China Children's Etiquette Education Association is an organization founded in 2014 that offers professional training to tutors, and it is planning to introduce more children's etiquette courses across in China. The organization has trained over 500 tutors who are now qualified to provide etiquette courses on traditional Chinese and Western protocols to children aged two to eight.

"Chinese adults lack etiquette and manners in some ways and this should be improved given China's growing economy. It is better to start with teaching children etiquette rules," said Huang Wanyun, the secretary-general of the association. Huang added that primary schools in China have already started adding etiquette training into their education syllabus in order to ensure that the children emerge more confident and refined.

According to Xiong Bingqi, deputy director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute in Beijing, while the trend is a positive thing for Chinese people, such initiatives should not be deemed as mandatory for everyone, especially children. Rather, he believes the key focus should be on a holistic education.

"It is a good sign that the rich Chinese people acknowledge they do not have much style and sophistication even after spending fortunes to buy luxury goods," said Xiong. "But it is important to note that the focus should be on achieving diversity in education."

Xu Junqian in Shanghai contributed to the story.

runs a language school in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, said that she has gained much from Ho's hostess course.

"It has taught me how to be a more elegant wife who is able to appear in formal parties with good manners. It has also made me a better mother who is capable of being a role model for my daughter," said Gu.

Ho's debutante courses are often attended by ladies as young as 14, the majority of whom are from wealthy families who see the training as a good way to prepare their children for overseas education.

"The course helps with the transition to life in another country and it helps me obtain basic knowledge on how to communicate with others in formal occasions," said Joyce Feng, a 21-year-old university

student in Canada who took a course in Institute Sarita two years ago.

Choosing the British standard of excellence

The English have throughout time been renowned for their association with impeccable etiquette and it's thus unsurprisingly that many wealthy people have opted to learn from the British.

The Shanghai-based Image Collective Communication works with The English Manner, a global provider of contemporary protocol, etiquette, communication and cross-cultural integration tuition, to offer regular coaching courses to China's high net worth individuals.

"I've noticed that the consumption level of Chinese people is approaching the



The younger people start, the easier it is to learn. I am very pleased to see that Chinese children are really good at observing everything, much better than Western children."

Diana Mather, director of training at The English Manner

world standard but their level of social etiquette is still not on par with Western countries like Britain," said Angelina Du, who founded The Image Collective Communication in 2013.

Du has over the past two years invited professional tutors from the UK to Shanghai to conduct courses on English style etiquette, like how to shake hands, the correct way to dine at the table, and how to partake in afternoon tea. Her courses are also often attended by children between the ages of six to 12, as more and more parents are eager for their children to get a good head start.

Besides etiquette courses, Du is also working to expand her range of services to include other types of high-end lifestyle courses teaching flower arrangement, art

appreciation and culinary skills.

"The younger people start, the easier it is to learn. I am very pleased to see that Chinese children are really good at observing everything, much better than Western children, and I am very impressed with how Chinese children are so willing to learn," said Diana Mather, director of training from The English Manner. "If they learn those etiquettes at a very young age, it will become their second nature."

Another company that offers British etiquette training in China is Debrett's, a famous luxury lifestyle brand with more than two centuries of history. Its chief executive Joanne Milner said that they decided to open their first China office in 2014 because of two compelling factors.



Shanghai-based Image Collective Communication offers a variety of high-end lifestyle courses targeted at China's high net worth individuals, including wine tasting, table manners and flower arrangement. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY