

Unit 9
The Taboos in
Western Culture and
Etiquette

Part 1 Background building

Part 2 Some Knowledge about Taboo

**Taboo
food**

**Taboo
drinks**

**Taboo
number**

Part 1 Background building

Taboo

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graph TD; A([Taboo]) --> B["'Taboo' is a ritually sanctioned prohibition against contact with a thing, a person or an activity. The word itself originated in Polynesia, where taboo played an important cultural role, but the concept is universal."]; A --> C["The use of the word 'taboo' is drawn from 'tapu', meaning 'not allowed', and traces back to the year of 1777 and the English explorer Captain James Cook, visiting a place he named 'the Friendly Islands' (now Tonga)."];
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The use of the word “taboo” is drawn from “tapu”, meaning “not allowed”, and traces back to the year of 1777 and the English explorer Captain James Cook, visiting a place he named “the Friendly Islands” (now Tonga).

Taboo

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Superstitions

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It means a belief, practice, or rite irrationally maintained by ignorance of the laws of nature or by faith in magic or chance; or irrational belief that an object, an action, or a circumstance not logically related to a course of events influences the outcome.

It means a prohibition, excluding something from use, approach, or mention because of its sacred and inviolable nature, or a ban or an inhibition resulting from social custom or emotional aversion.

Taboo

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Superstitions

Notes:

But sometimes, the concept of taboo and superstition can interlace with one another, for example, the people's attitude toward the number "13" in western countries.

Part 2 Some Knowledge about Taboo

A taboo is a strong social prohibition (or ban) against words, objects, actions, or discussions that are considered undesirable or offensive by a group, culture, society, or community. Therefore, breaking taboo is usually considered offensive.

Some taboo activities or customs are even prohibited by law and transgressions may lead to severe penalties. Other taboos result in embarrassment, shame and rudeness. That's why it is necessary for us to know some basic taboos in the western world to avoid awkward situations in communication.

Taboo food

Amphibians and Reptiles

Both **Judaism** and **Islam** strictly forbid the consumption of amphibians such as frogs and reptiles such as crocodiles and snakes.





Nevertheless, frogs are raised commercially in certain countries and frog legs are considered a delicacy in France, Portugal, China, Caribbean and in parts of the USA and India.

Birds



The Old Testament of the Bible explicitly states that the eagle, vulture, and osprey are not to be eaten. Interestingly, bats are also included in this list of “birds”.



Pigeon

Pigeons are raised and eaten in parts of the Middle East, Asia and Europe, where the young birds are known as “squab”.



Dove

In North America, pigeons (as doves) are a hunted game bird in many areas, however, urban pigeons are considered unfit for consumption.

Many people also find the thought of eating the meat of crows and other **scavengers** (食腐动物) repulsive, as evidenced by the expression **“eating crow”** (自取其辱)。



Crow



Swan

Eating swans is generally considered unacceptable in Europe and America. Swan is a protected bird in England.

Deer/Reindeer

Although reindeer is popular as a dish in Alaska, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia and Canada, many people in the United Kingdom and Ireland are squeamish about the idea of eating reindeer meat.



This relates to the popular culture myth of the reindeer as assistant to Father Christmas, as opposed to the “cow of the north” vision of the Northern countries.

Cats

The Dragon, Tiger and Phoenix



Dogs

In a number of countries around the world, apart from being kept as pets, certain breeds of dogs are slaughtered as a source of meat and specifically raised on farms for that purpose.

According to the ancient Hindu scripture (印度教经文), dog's meat was regarded as the most unclean (and rather poisonous) food possible—it was worthy only for the lowest of the untouchable castes (贱民).

Paying more attention to the people who keep dogs as pets, we never treat them with the meat of dogs.

The eating of horse meat is a food taboo to most people in the United Kingdom, the US, and Australia, and its supply is sometimes even illegal.



Horses

Like lobster and dog, it is forbidden in Judaism, Hinduism, and some sects of Christianity.



However, it is fairly common in Scandinavia and parts of continental Europe, and is considered a delicacy in Japan, where it is also eaten raw as a type of sashimi.

Insects



But the taboo against insects as a food source generally do not apply to honey. Many vegetarians avoid honey as they would consider it as animal products.

Except for certain locusts and related species, insects are not considered suitable for eating in western countries. Generally speaking, insects have been prevented from consuming as food in European cultures.



Living animals

Western culture forbids any portion that is cut from a live animal. Even in cultures that do not prescribe ritual methods of livestock slaughter, the consumption of animals that are still alive is often seen as barbarity.



In Shanghai, China, and surrounding areas, live shrimp is a common dish served both in homes and restaurants. The shrimp are usually served in a bowl of alcohol, which makes the shrimp sluggish. Local belief is that live shrimp are “healthier” than those served “already dead” or cooked.

Offal

Offal is a traditional part of many European and Asian cuisines, including such dishes as the well-known steak and kidney pie (牛排腰子饼) in the United Kingdom.



In countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States, on the other hand, many people are sick of eating offal. In these countries, organ meats that are considered edible in other cultures are more often regarded as fit only for processing into pet food under the euphemism “meat by-products”.



Except for liver (chicken, beef, or pork), and intestines used as natural sausage casings, organ meats consumed in the U. S. tend to be regional or ethnic specialties.

Snails

Snails have been eaten for thousands of years, beginning in the Pleistocene (更新世, 约250万年前). They are found throughout the Mediterranean region in archaeological sites dating between 12,000 and 6,000 years ago.



They are also seen a notable delicacy in France and other Mediterranean countries.

However, in Britain, Ireland, and America, eating them may be seen as disgusting.

Taboo drinks

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graph TD; A[Taboo drinks] --> B[Alcohol]; A --> C[Blood];
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Alcohol

Some religions—most notably Hinduism, Islam, Baptists (浸衣派) and other Evangelical Christians(福音派基督徒)—forbid or discourage the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Blood

Drinking blood is a strong taboo in many countries, and is often vaguely associated with vampirism (the consumption of human blood). Although blood sausage, or blood made into cake form, is quite popular in many parts of the world, it is considered repulsive in most of the United States. Followers of Judaism and Islam are forbidden to drink blood or eat food made from blood.

Taboo number

6

In western culture, especially in Christian world, number “6” is an evil number. In the Bible, asserts 666 to be “the number of evil”, associated with the beast, and antagonistic creature. In modern popular culture, 666 has become one of the most widely recognized symbols for Satan or the Devil.

13

In the west, number “13” is always unlucky, always indicating occurrence of disaster or symbol of misfortune. It is mainly to come from a religion: Jesus was betrayed by Judas, and made a great sacrifice; they totally are 13 people. And that is exactly Friday, so if the 13th plus Friday, it will be thought to be a very dangerous day. In West of medieval times ages, the scaffold was certain to have 13 steps, and the salary of executioner had 13 pieces of gold coin.



Odd and Even number

The western people see the even number as the symbol of misfortune, but the odd numbers as a symbol of good luck. And the Russian believe odd number means happiness, the even number indicates disaster. And therefore, the wedding to send flowers is odd number, but the even number on funeral. British people hatching chicken to take to the hen of egg always are odd number. If you take the even number, it means a possibility to grow worse, or keep not good chicken. By the way, many west people like to use odd numbers price when doing business.

**The end of the
course**

All my thanks!