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*Food atlas*

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Back in 1945, there was a wave of genocide that almost swallowed up between 400,000 and 2 million people, which is known as the Vietnamese famine of 1945. Vietnam has developed and left that past so far behind and needless to say, the ways people treat food have also alternated. Considering that table manners in Vietnam were created to shape what, when, and how people consume food, it is nearly certain that Vietnamese people’s behaviors towards cuisine is not only influenced by their biological needs but also largely by its availability. By examining table manners in Vietnam, we shall have the answer for if such behaviors are vital for their existence or it is solely a ritual.

Table manners of the Vietnamese are quite rich, detailed and may vary from regions to regions. Civilized and considerate people demand that meals should be eaten with respect because they believe, and it is true that, to have a full table, it takes a lot of work from many people, from farming to production, to distribution, to shopping and cooking, etc. Traditional Vietnamese families tend to be extended with three, or sometimes four generations living together so a family meal or *“bữa cơm”* is the place to nurture the family bonds and also dedicated to practice culture.

As much as children are expected to grow up healthily, they must also be brought up to be polite. If children are not equipped with life principles at an early age, they might grow up with bad and rebellious personalities. One of the first lessons that shape children into their right minds is how to behave at the dining table. Children learn to be grateful for their parents’ hard work and cherish the moment when all family members are together. When they grow up a little, they can start helping with some work such as: laying and cleaning the table. This way, they will learn to take care of others instead of receiving it only. This is extremely important because it is not only about politeness but also a part of character education.

To Vietnamese people, dinner is the most important meal of a day. While the daily meal routine differs between town and country settings, women are normally expected to be the one to prepare food in Vietnam. The image of a family woman in the kitchen preparing delicious dishes is always etched into the memories of each person. Normally, a proper home-cooked meal includes rice as the main carb, a veggie dish, meat or fish as the protein, and a bowl of hot soup. Rice is the Vietnamese staple food thanks to their wet rice cultivation. All dishes are moved up at the same time onto a round tray which, according to a common belief, represents happiness, fullness, and togetherness. A round tray allows family members to sit in a circle and easily communicate with each other, which is an especially important thing to strengthen a family’s bond.

It might be a little overwhelming at first to learn about Vietnamese culture through their table manners yet there is one primary thing to keep in mind that behind everything is an inherent meaning. Chopsticks are a type of utensil that cannot be missed in any meal in Vietnam. The custom of using chopsticks forms a whole philosophy in Vietnam. It is the philosophy of duality and plurality. They are always used as a pair and sold as a bunch. Beside serving food and using chopsticks, any Vietnamese person is assumed to know when to start eating, how to create conversations at the table and not to make noises, and, of equal importance, when to leave the table. Through some key cultural features and meanings in Vietnamese family meals, it shows that eating and drinking to Vietnamese people have become a way of life, a way of behavior, or more broadly, a way of being.