

1. 你要请客吃饭吗?

Are You Asking Me Out to Lunch?

Dǎ zhāohu de jīběn yàodiǎn
打招呼的基本要点

(Essentials of greeting)



This was John's first visit to China for a business trip. He found out that people mentioned meals frequently, which often confused him. Why do people talk about this subject in the working environment all the time, and what is so interesting about eating meals?

After a couple of days, he was asked by someone the same question as well. One day he met Dajun, his

colleague, at the door of their office.

Yuēhàn dì-yī cì chūchāi dào Zhōngguó. Tā fāxiàn Zhōngguó
约翰第一次出差到中国。他发现中国

rén píngshí cháng tíjǐ yǒuguān chī fàn de huàtí , zhè hěn shì ràng
人平时常提及有关吃饭的话题，这很是让

tā kùnhuò : Wèi shénme Zhōngguó rén zǒngshì huì zài gōngzuò chǎng hé
他困惑：为什么中国人总是会在工作场合

zhōng tán dào chī de wèn tí , bìng rú cǐ piān'ài zhè ge huà tí ?
中谈到吃的问题，并如此偏爱这个话题？

Jǐ tiān yǐ hòu , tā yě pèng dào le bèi bié rén xún wèn yǒu guān
几天以后，他也碰到了被别人询问有关

chī fàn de qíng jǐng . Zhè tiān , tā zài bàn gōng shì mén kǒu pèng dào le
吃饭的情景。这天，他在办公室门口碰到了

tā de tóng shì Dà jūn :
他的同事大军：

Dà jūn : Chī fàn le ma ?
大军：吃饭了吗？

Dajun: Have you eaten?

Yuēhàn : Méiyǒu a , nǐ ne ?
约翰：没有啊，你呢？

John: Not yet, how about you?

Dà jūn : Wǒ yě méiyǒu . Ò , wǒ yí huìr yǒu ge huì , dé xiān zǒu yí
大军：我也没有。哦，我一会儿有个会，得先走一
bù , zài jiàn .
步，再见。

Dajun: Me neither. Oh, I have a meeting and have to go
now. Bye!

Yuēhàn : Nǐ zhè bú shì yào qǐng wǒ chī fàn ma ?
约翰：你这不是要请我吃饭吗？

John: So you are not inviting me out to lunch?

Dàjūn : Nǐ xiǎng de dào tǐng měi , děng wǒ yǒu shíjiān zài shuō , xiànzài
大军: 你想得倒挺美, 等我有时间再说, 现在
wǒ bìxū zǒu le .
我必须走了。

Dajun: You wish! Wait until I'm free. I have to go now.

Yuēhàn : Nà nǐ wèishénmeyào wèn wǒ yǒu méiyǒu chī fàn ?
约翰: 那你为什么要问我有没有吃饭?

John: Why did you ask me then?

Dàjūn : Zhè nǐ hái bù zhīdào ? Zhè zhǐshì Zhōngguó rén de yí jù wèn-
大军: 这你还不知道? 这只是中国人的一句问
hòuyǔ .
候语。

Dajun: You didn't get it, did you? This is just the Chinese way of greeting.

Yuēhàn : Shénme ? (Yì liǎn bù jiě de shénqíng)
约翰: 什么? (一脸不解的神情)

John: What? (confused)

It was a very awkward situation for John when Dajun asked him if he had eaten a meal. He did not know how to reply. After asking Dajun about it, John figured out that 吃饭了吗? is a common greeting similar to “Hello” in English. He learned in his Chinese class to use 你好 to greet others. This was not the case. How should John reply? What does he do wrong next?

Dàjūn jiàndào Yuēhàn wèn tā shìfǒu chī guo fàn le , Zhèràng
大军见到约翰问他是否吃过饭了, 这让

Yuēhàn gǎndào hěn bú zìzài , shènzhì yǒu diǎnr bùzhīsuǒcuò .
约翰感到很不自在，甚至有点儿不知所措。

Dāng tā qǐngjiàoguò Dàjūn hòu cái gǎomíngbai , “ chī fànle ma ? ”
当他请教过大军后才搞明白，“吃饭了吗？”

yuánlái shì Zhōngguó rén chángyòng de yì zhǒng dǎ zhāohu yòngyǔ .
原来是中国人常用的一种打招呼用语。

Yuēhàn cóng tā xuéguò de Hànyǔ kè li hái jìde , zài hé tārén
约翰从他学过的汉语课里还记得，在和他人

jiànmiàn dǎ zhāohu shí yòng “ nǐhǎo ” , dàn xiànzài xiǎnrán bú shì zhè
见面打招呼时用“你好”，但现在显然不是这

zhǒngqíngkuàng . Nà Yuēhàn jiūjìng yīnggāi zěnmé huídá ? Xiàmiàn
种情况。那约翰究竟应该怎么回答？下面

tā yòu zuò cuòle shénme ne ?
他又做错了什么呢？

Yuēhàn : Lili , nǐ chī fànle ma ?
约翰：莉莉，你吃饭了吗？

John: Lily, have you eaten?

Lili : Xiànzài chī fàn tài zǎole ba , nǐ shuō de shì wǎnfàn hái shì wǔ
莉莉：现在吃饭太早了吧，你说的是晚饭还是午
fàn a ?
饭啊？

Lily: It is too early to eat right now. Do you mean lunch
or dinner?

Yuēhàn : Bú shì , bú shì . Wǒ zài duì nǐ shuō “ Hello ” . Dàjūn
约翰：不是，不是。我在对你说“Hello”。大军
shuō “ chī fànle ma ? ” shì “ Hello ” de yìsi .
说“吃饭了吗？”是“Hello”的意思。

John: No, no. I meant to say “Hello.” Dajun said that
“Have you eaten?” means “Hello.”

Lili : Hāha , nà nǐ yě děi zài chī fàn de shíjiān wèn a .
莉莉：哈哈，那你也得在吃饭的时间问啊。

Lily: Well, you should ask that question at meal time.

What is wrong when John uses the question 你吃饭了吗? to say hello to Lily? It seems that 你吃饭了吗? and 你好 are different. What should John do?

Zhè cì Yuēhàn duì Lili yòng “ nǐ chī fànle ma ” dǎ
这次约翰对莉莉用“你吃饭了吗”打
zhāohu , kě xiǎnrán yǒudiǎnr bù tài duìjìn , gǎnjué shàng
招呼，可显然有点儿不太对劲儿，感觉上
zhè jù huà hé “ nǐ hǎo ” hái shì yǒu suǒ bù tóng 。 Nàme Yuēhàn
这句话和“你好”还是有所不同。那么约翰
jiūjìng yīnggāi zěnmě zuò ?
究竟应该怎么做？

Cultural Tips 文化提示

Foreigners coming to China for the first time are usually confused by Chinese customs especially when being asked 你吃饭了吗? Do they want to invite me to dinner? Do they think I am broken? Why do they care so much whether I have eaten or not?

Literally, 你吃饭了吗 is a simple question about eating. On most occasions, however, this sentence is used as a form of greeting. This is because in the past, food was scarce and the general public was concerned whether there was enough food. Asking someone 你