The *Chinese* Politeness is, on all Occasions, very troublesome and disgustful to the rough and unpolished *Europeans*; but in nothing so much as in their Feasts: For the Whole is made up of Ceremonies and Compliments. These Entertainments are of two Sorts; the ordinary, consisting of about twelve or sixteen Dishes; and the more solemn, which require twenty-four upon each Table, as well as more Formalities. When the Ceremonial is punctually observed, three *Tye-tse*, or Billets, are sent to those who are invited. The first Invitation is made the Day, or two Days, before the Feast; but this last is rare: The second, in the Morning of the Feast-Day, to put the Guests in Mind, and intreat them not to fail coming: And the third, when every Thing is ready; and the Master of the House is disposed, by a third Billet, carried by one of his Servants, to let them know, he is extremely impatient to see them.

The Hall, wherein the Feast is served-up, is commonly adorned with Flower-Pots, Pictures, *China* Ware, and such-like Ornaments. There are as many Tables as Persons invited; unless the Number of Guests obliges them to set two at a Table; for they rarely put three at these great Feasts. These Tables are ranged in a Row, on each Side the Hall; and the Guests placed so as to face each other, fitting in their Arm-Chairs. The fore Part of the Tables is set-off with Silk Ornaments of Needle-work, resembling those belonging to *Romish* Altars; and though there are neither Table-Cloths nor Napkins, the curious Japanning makes them look very neat. The Ends of each Table are often covered with several great Dishes loaded with Meats ready carved, and piled up like a Pyramid, with Flowers and large Citrons on the Top. But these Pyramids are never touched, being only for Ornament, like the Figures made of Sugar, at Feasts in *Italy*.

When he who gives the Entertainment introduces his Guests into the Room, he salutes them all, one after another; and then calling for Wine in a Small Cup, either of Silver, precious Wood, or Porcelain, placed on a little japanned Salver, he takes it with both Hands, and, bowing to all the Guests, turns his Face towards the great Court of the House, and advances to the fore Part of the Hall; then, lifting up his Eyes and Hands with the Cup, pours the Wine on the Ground, by Way of acknowledging, that whatever he is possessed of, is the Gift of Heaven. He next causes Wine to be poured into a China or Silver Cup; and, after making a Bow to his principal Guest, places it on the Table where he is to sit. The Guest returns this Civility by endeavouring to hinder him from taking the Trouble; and, at the same Time, causing Wine to be brought in a Cup, advances a few Steps, as though he would carry it to the Place of the Master of the Feast, which is always the lowermost; and who, in Return, prevents him, with certain common Terms of Civility. Immediately after, the Steward brings two small ivory Sticks, (called *Quay-tse*; and by the English, *Chop-Sticks*) adorned with Gold or Silver, which serve instead of Forks, and places them on the Table, in a parallel Petition, before the Chair, if there were not any placed before, as there usually are. This done, the Host[[1]](#footnote-1) leads the chief Guest to a Chair, which is covered with a rich Carpet of flowered Silk; and then making another low Bow, invites him to fit: But the Guest does not comply, till after a great many Compliments, excusing himself from taking so honourable a Place. He next prepares to do the same to all the rest; but they will by no Means fuller him to take so much Trouble.

All these Ceremonies being over, they sit down to the Table; at which Instant, four or five principal Comedians, in rich Dresses, enter the Hall, and make low Bows all together, knocking their Foreheads four Times against the Ground. This they perform in the midst of the two Rows of Tables, with their Faces towards a long Table[[2]](#footnote-2), set out like a Buffet, full of Lights and perfuming Pans. Then rising up, one of them presents a long Book, containing, in Letters of Gold, the Names of fifty or sixty Plays, which they have by Heart, for the principal Guest to choose one. He refuses, and fends it to the second, with a Sign of Invitation; the second to the third, and so on. But they all make Excuses; and returning him the Book, he, at last, consents, opens it, runs it over with his Eyes in an Instant, and pitches on the Play which he thinks will be most agreeable to the Company; who being shewed the Title by the Comedian, they testify their Approbation by a Nod. If there should be any Thing in it liable to Objection, such as one of the principal Persons in the Play having the fame Name with one of his Auditors, or the like, the Actor ought to apprize the Chooser of it.

The Representation begins with the Music; which are Bassoons or Brass or Steel, whose Sound is harsh and shrill; Drums of Buffalo-Skins, Flutes, Fifes, and Trumpets, whose Harmony can charm none but Chinese. There are no Decorations for these Banquet-Plays. They only spread a Carpet on the Floor; and the Comedians make use of some Rooms near the Balcony, from whence they enter to act their Parts. There are commonly a great Number of other Spectators in the Court, let-in by the Servants: And the Ladies, who are willing to be present, are placed out of the Hall over-against the Comedians; where, through a Lattice made of Bambû, and a Sort of silken Net, they see and hear all that passes, without being seen themselves.

1. In the Original, it is the Steward, who seems to be confounded with the Master of the House. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This must be placed at the upper End of the Hall. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)