

= The Chinese Restaurant =

" The Chinese Restaurant " is the 11th episode of the sitcom Seinfeld 's second season on NBC , and is the show 's 16th episode overall . The episode revolves around protagonist Jerry (Jerry Seinfeld) and his friends Elaine Benes (Julia Louis @-@ Dreyfus) and George Costanza (Jason Alexander) waiting for a table at a Chinese restaurant , on their way to see Plan 9 from Outer Space . Unable to get a table , they decide to wait and talk amongst each other , while George tries to use the phone that is constantly occupied and Jerry recognizes a woman , but he is unsure where he has seen her before .

Co @-@ written by the series ' creators Seinfeld and head writer Larry David , the episode is set in real time , without any scene @-@ breaks . It was the first episode in which Jerry 's neighbor Kramer (Michael Richards) did not appear , much to Richards ' disappointment , as it turned out to become a highlight among the show 's episodes . Considered a " bottle episode " , NBC executives objected to its production and broadcast due to its lack of an involved storyline , thinking that audiences would be uninterested . It was not until David threatened to quit if the network forced any major changes upon the script that NBC allowed the episode to be produced , though the network postponed broadcast to the near end of season two .

First broadcast in the United States on May 23 , 1991 , the episode gained a Nielsen rating of 11 @.@ 7 / 21 . Television critics reacted positively to " The Chinese Restaurant " , which is widely considered as one of the show 's " classic episodes " . In 1998 , a South Florida Sun @-@ Sentinel critic wrote that the episode , along with season four 's " The Contest " , " broke new sitcom ground " .

= = Plot = =

Jerry , George , and Elaine decide to eat dinner without a reservation at a Chinese restaurant before seeing a one @-@ night showing of Plan 9 from Outer Space , which Jerry exultantly calls " the worst movie ever made ! " The maître d ' (James Hong) repeatedly tells the party they will receive a table in " 5 , 10 minutes " , but with no result . Besides having only a short time until the movie begins , the characters have other worries :

Jerry previously lied to his uncle , saying he could not join him for dinner ; he prefers to see the film , yet feels guilty .

George is anxious because , the night before , he left his girlfriend Tatiana during foreplay because he needed to use a bathroom and thought hers was too close to her bedroom to provide enough privacy . He wants to call Tatiana to invite her to join them , but is repeatedly prevented from using the restaurant 's payphone , as it is first occupied by a man (Michael Mitz) who ignores George , and then by a woman who is rude to him .

Jerry notices a woman (Judy Kain) he has seen before , but cannot remember her name .

Elaine is frustrated by being extremely hungry .

Jerry dares Elaine to take an egg roll from someone 's plate and eat it , offering her " fifty bucks " to do so . Elaine approaches a table with an elderly couple and tells them that her friend will give her \$ 50 to eat one of their egg rolls , and she is willing to give them \$ 25 of it . As she softly speaks the offer without moving her lips , they fail to comprehend her . She awkwardly walks away , then laughs off her attempt . George is finally able to call Tatiana , the answering machine answers his call , and George leaves a message . Tatiana calls the restaurant to reach George , but the maître d ' calls " Cartwright " instead of " Costanza " , and she " said curse words " when he told her that George is not there . When the mysterious woman encounters Jerry , he remembers belatedly that she is his uncle 's receptionist .

Plan after plan is thwarted : Elaine tries bribing the maître d ' , but is unsuccessful . They could get food to go , but they can 't eat Chinese food in a taxicab . Elaine is ravenous , but refuses to eat concession stand food at the movie theater .

George decides he 's no longer in the mood for the film ; Elaine wants to leave and get a hamburger ; Jerry decides that he might as well have dinner with his uncle . As soon as they leave ,

the maître d ' calls their party .

= = Production = =

" The Chinese Restaurant " was written by series co @-@ creators Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld and directed by Tom Cherones , who directed all of season two 's episodes . David came up with the idea of the real @-@ time episode while he and Seinfeld were waiting for a table at a Chinese restaurant in Los Angeles . When David presented the episode to NBC executives , he received a negative reaction . The network felt that there was no real story and viewers would not be interested . Executive Warren Littlefield commented that he thought there were pages missing from the script he had received . David argued that each character had a storyline : Jerry 's story was he recognized a woman but did not know from where ; Elaine 's story was that she was very hungry ; and George 's story was that he was unable to use the phone . NBC disagreed and objected to the broadcast of the episode . To satisfy the executives , staff writer Larry Charles suggested the group 's storyline to be on their way to a one @-@ night screening of Plan 9 from Outer Space , and thus introducing a " ticking clock " scenario to the story . When the NBC executives still objected , David threatened to quit the show if the network would force any major changes upon the script . Seinfeld supported David and NBC eventually allowed them to produce " The Chinese Restaurant " without any significant alterations , although they strongly advised them not to go through with it , and postponed the broadcast until near the end of the season . In 2015 , Seinfeld writer Spike Feresten revealed that the host 's calling " Cartwright " instead of " Costanza " was a subtle allusion to the classic western show Bonanza . " Bonanza " rhymes with " Costanza " and the show 's main characters are the " Cartwright " family .

" The Chinese Restaurant " was first read by its cast on December 5 , 1990 , and it was filmed on December 11 . Filming took place at CBS Studio Center in Studio City , Los Angeles , California , where all filming for the second season took place . As only one location was used , it took roughly half of the time it usually took for an episode to be filmed . Cast members have remarked that the filming was shorter than on any other episode . A few changes were made ; in the first draft of the script , George , Jerry , and Elaine entered the restaurant talking about their least favorite holiday . In the version that aired , they talk about combining the jobs of policemen and garbagemen into a single job . In the original draft , the three friends also discussed how to spend the long waiting period in the future , with George suggesting they bring a deck of cards and that Jerry bring a jigsaw puzzle with nothing but penguins . One scene was cut before broadcast , featuring George explaining to Jerry that he pulled his hamstring while trying to untuck the covers of a hotel bed during his recent stay in Boston . George can be seen grabbing his hamstring as he walks to the phone . The scene was later included on the Seinfeld seasons one and two DVD boxset .

At one point in the episode , Jerry mentions having a sister . She is never again mentioned in the series .

= = = Cast = = =

" The Chinese Restaurant " was the first episode that did not feature regular character Kramer (Michael Richards) , Jerry 's neighbor . David explained that the reason for Kramer 's absence was because ? during Seinfeld 's early seasons ? the character never left his apartment and did not go out with the other three . Richards was still displeased with the absence of his character , as he felt the episode was a breakthrough and ? as such ? essential for the series ' development . In an interview for the Seinfeld first and second season DVD box set , he commented , " The Chinese restaurant episode was so unique , and I just wanted to be a part of that because it was cutting edge . I knew that was a very important episode ; it was so odd . "

Michael Mitz ? who portrayed one of the payphone occupants ? would return in season five as a photographer in " The Puffy Shirt " . The maître d ' was portrayed by actor James Hong ; it is one of the actor 's most famous roles in the United States . (In fact , he had a small part in a season one episode of The Bob Newhart Show in 1972 , portraying a man who is mistaken for a maître d ' .)

Judy Kain ? known for a recurring role on Married ... with Children ? guest @-@ starred as Lorraine Catalano , the receptionist of Jerry 's uncle . David Tress guest @-@ starred as Mr. Cohen , a guest who enters the restaurant and receives a table without reservation , as he is good friends with the maître d ' . Larry David 's voice can be heard among the group of elderly people Elaine offers money for one of their egg @-@ rolls . Norman Brenner ? who worked as Richards ' stand @-@ in on the show for all its nine seasons ? appears as an extra ; he is sitting by the door of the restaurant when George , Jerry , and Elaine enter , and is still at the same spot when they leave .

= = Themes = =

The episode is widely considered to encapsulate Seinfeld 's " show about nothing " concept , with The Tampa Tribune critic Walt Belcher calling it " the ultimate episode about nothing " , and Lavery and Dunne describing it as " existential " . Critics had a similar reaction to season three 's " The Parking Garage " , in which the four central characters spent the whole episode looking for their car . The structure of " The Chinese Restaurant " ? described as " elongation " ? drags a small event out over the course of an entire episode . Lavery and Dunne suggest that this structure critiques sitcoms with implied moral lessons (such as those found in so @-@ called " very special episodes ") . Vincent Brook ? as part of his analysis regarding the influence of Jewish culture on Seinfeld ? has said that the episode also conveys the theme of entrapment and confinement in a small space , a recurring theme on the show . The relationship between the characters and food is another recurring theme of the series . In Seinfeld , specific food items are associated with individual characters and food itself is a " signifier of social contracts " .

Linda S. Ghent , Professor in the Department of Economics at Eastern Illinois University , discusses some economic issues in this episode . Just before Jerry 's dare about the egg roll , Elaine says , " You know , it 's not fair people are seated first come first served . It should be based on who 's hungriest . I feel like just going over there and taking some food off somebody 's plate . " Ghent discusses the history and reasoning behind rationing mechanisms and economic efficiency , which are the bases behind how tables are seated at restaurants , rationales which are perhaps invisible to hungry or impatient customers . Elaine 's attempt at bribery is an example of opportunity cost : the trio are willing to pay more than usual to get a table , if at least they can get a table . Ghent also gives Jerry 's willingness to lie to his uncle as another example of opportunity cost : " Did I do a bad thing by lying to my uncle and saying I couldn 't go to dinner ? Plan Nine from Outer Space ? one night only , the big screen ! My hands are tied ! " .

= = Reception = =

When the episode initially aired in the United States on NBC on May 23 , 1991 , it received a Nielsen rating of 11 @.@ 7 and an audience share of 21 ? this meant that 11 @.@ 7 % of American households watched the episode , and that 21 % of televisions in use at the time were tuned to it . Seinfeld was the eighteenth most @-@ watched show of the week , and the sixth most @-@ watched show on NBC . NBC executives held a meeting after the broadcast to determine the fate of the show , and decided it would receive a third season order if the writers would put more effort into episode storylines .

" The Chinese Restaurant " received very positive responses from critics and is considered one of Seinfeld 's first " classic episodes " . Kit Boss , a critic for the Ocala Star @-@ Banner , wrote that the episode was " like real life , but with better dialogue " . Various critics and news sources have praised how the episode defines the show 's " show about nothing " concept . Critics have also noted that aside from being a turning point for the show , the episode also became a turning point for television sitcoms ; one South Florida Sun @-@ Sentinel critic commented that the episode , along with the season four episode " The Contest " , " [...] broke new sitcom ground and expanded the lexicon of the ' 90s . " Vance Durgin of The Orange County Register praised how the show " wrung " so much comedy " out of a simple premise " . The episode was also included in a list compiled by The Star @-@ Ledger called " 50 events that shaped TV ? and our lives " between

1900 and 1999 . The Charlotte Observer has called " The Chinese Restaurant " the best Seinfeld episode , referring to it " the very epitome of the classic Seinfeld format " .

Critics also praised Louis @-@ Dreyfus ' and Alexander 's performances ; The Age critic Kenneth Nguyen stated that they " characteristically , rock [ed] their line readings " . Michael Flaherty and Mary Kay Schilling of Entertainment Weekly , who graded the episode with an A ? , commented , " George is at his pressure @-@ cooker best , but it 's Elaine ? famished and in high dudgeon ? who is the centerpiece . " David Sims of The A.V. Club gave the episode an A + , saying " it 's a deftly @-@ plotted , extremely funny example of the ' show about nothing ' label that Seinfeld assigned itself " .