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The Designed Object, Utility, and Strengths: Chopsticks

I chose this pair of chopsticks because it is an object I will use regularly to eat different types of asian cuisines. I find that eating certain foods such as sushi, ramen, or pho are much easier to eat using them. Additionally, this pair of chopsticks is reusable. They are a sleek, stainless steel alternative that looks modern while also allowing for more usage than disposable wood ones.

Chopsticks are used by grasping the two sticks in one hand, and positioning the fingers to move the tips of the chopsticks together and apart in order to pick up something. Chopsticks are also used for cooking by just grasping them with the hand, and rotating your hand to stir or push things in a pan. They are commonly used for cooking because they allow the user to distance themselves from the heat of the stove/fire more than, for example, a spoon would allow. In terms of eating, chopsticks are designed to be thin enough, and a comfortable length to hold two identical sticks in the same hand. By placing them between one's fingers and moving them like tweezers or cooking tongs, the object allows small things to be picked up and moved. These are the two primary uses for chopsticks today.

The object affords being held and grasped. It affording moving or pushing small objects (such as with cooking), or picking up objects. These affordances are all visible, but it may not be natural to use chopsticks in the "correct" way the first time, rather than simply stabbing the object to pick it up. The thin, long form of chopsticks resemble many other stick-like objects that can be grasped and held by a human hand, such as pencils or knives. Without knowing what the object's intended use, chopsticks

afford many of the same things that a stick or rod would, but when offered or used in context, a person can realize more of their affordances.

Historically, chopsticks were first used by the Chinese for cooking, since they afforded reaching into and stirring things in boiling pots. Chopsticks are the result of cultural and technological shifts in China. Chopsticks were used for cooking since around 1200 B.C., and emerged as eating utensils around A.D. 400. According to [history.com](https://www.history.com), due to a population spike, people began cutting food smaller to decrease cooking time and energy usage. Smaller, bite-sized pieces made way for chopstick usage, and a decrease in the need for knives for eating. Confucius also influenced this movement of chopstick usage by spreading the belief that knives, a symbol of violence, should not be present when one sits down to enjoy a meal.

One of the main constraints of chopsticks is the physical hand dexterity that is required to hold them properly and pick up things without dropping them. They are less intuitive than forks or knives, where, as long as you simply grasp the handle, accomplish the task. There are not many material constraints. Early chopsticks were made of metal or stone, and in the 1800s, the Japanese introduced the first wood and bamboo chopsticks. This would then lead to usage of disposable chopsticks around the world. The only material constraint that chopsticks have is that they must be sturdy and solid. There are no environmental constraints, but there are some cultural constraints. At many asian restaurants (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.) in the United States, tables are usually set with chopsticks. Where these cultures are very prominent, many people will already know how to use chopsticks, but in areas of the US or even in

other countries with less east asian influence, there will be less people who have used chopsticks or know how to use them, regardless if they know what they are or not.

