

# Chopsticks

Like a knife or fork, chopsticks are utensils used for eating. People throughout Asian countries like China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam use chopsticks on a daily basis. Chopsticks were developed in China over 5,000 years ago.

Historians think that the earliest versions of chopsticks were probably twigs used to retrieve food from boiling water or oil in cooking pots. The first sets of known chopsticks were found in China in the fabled ruins of Yin, in Henan province, where the earliest examples of Chinese writing were also found. They were made of bronze, and long, so they were also used for cooking rather than eating.

People began to use chopsticks for eating around 400 BC when food and resources became scarce. Chefs figured out that they could conserve fuel by cutting food into smaller pieces so that it would cook more quickly. These bite-sized pieces of food were the perfect size to be picked up by chopsticks, plus diners didn't need to use knives at the table. This new practice fit well with the teachings of the philosopher Confucius, who believed that knives reminded people of violence and war. A vegetarian, he said in one of his famous quotes: "The honorable and upright man keeps well away from both the slaughterhouse and the kitchen. And he allows no knives on his table." Knives soon were replaced with chopsticks becoming the primary eating utensil.

More and more countries began to use chopsticks, and every country had a different style. For example, in Japan, men and women used different lengths of chopsticks. Japan also introduced chopsticks made out of bamboo that were disposable. Permanent chopsticks were made of anything from jade to ivory. At one point during the Chinese dynastic times, people used

chopsticks made of silver. They believed that if the silver turned black, it would be a sign that their food was poisoned. Silver has no reaction to arsenic or cyanide though, so it could not show if food was poisoned, but garlic, rotten eggs, or onions all release hydrogen sulfide that can turn silver chopsticks black.

Today, chopsticks are used by billions throughout the world. Chopstick etiquette is a highly important factor in Asian cultures and history. Different countries use a variety of designs and have different usage customs. On the practical side, chefs have varying preferences in the chopsticks used in their restaurants

For example, longer chopsticks are more conducive to maneuvering long, slippery noodles, as well as eating from deeper bowls. Some prefer those with tapered ends and others prefer those with more pointed ends. Many restaurants use disposable chopsticks made of wood or bamboo, but some are moving to metal or other reusable chopsticks in order to reduce waste and timber consumption.