

## Chopsticks Chat

You've tried it, right? Attempted to appease your growling stomach with the aid of two tiny sticks? Some of us just have more luck than others. Ever wonder where these specialized utensils came from?

It is believed that the first chopsticks were developed over 5,000 years ago in China. Early Asian man would retrieve his food from the fire using sticks or branches broken from trees. Later, as the population grew and resources became scarce, people would cut food into smaller pieces to save fuel because the smaller portions cooked faster. This eliminated the need for knives, and chopsticks became the utensil of choice. By 500 AD, chopsticks had spread from China to other countries such as Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. While initially only used for religious ceremonies in Japan, chopsticks quickly gained popularity there as well, and their use became as widespread as the rest of Asia in no time.

Modern chopsticks are two long, thin, usually tapered, pieces of wood. Bamboo has been the most popular material of chopsticks because it is inexpensive, readily available, easy to split, resistant to heat, and has no perceptible odor or taste. Cedar, sandalwood, teak, pine, and bone have also been used. The wealthy, however, often had chopsticks made from jade, gold, bronze, brass, agate, coral, ivory, and silver. In fact, during dynastic times it was thought that silver chopsticks would turn black if they came into contact with poisoned food. It is now known that silver has no reaction to arsenic or cyanide, but if rotten eggs, onion, or garlic are used, the hydrogen sulfide they release might cause these chopsticks to change color.

Chopsticks are called "kuai zi" (KWAI dzuh) in Chinese, which resembles the pronunciation of other two words, "soon" and "son." Therefore, it is a tradition in some areas to give chopsticks as a gift to newly-married couples, wishing them the joy of the quick birth of a child.

Chinese eating utensils are normally chopsticks, spoons, and bowls. Forks are not used on the table and never will you see a knife. It is thought that Confucius, a vegetarian, advised people not to use knives at the table because knives would remind them of the slaughterhouse. It is also thought that because the Chinese take their meals very seriously, they traditionally felt that the meal table should be a place of peace and harmony. The knife could be used as a weapon, and could disrupt the harmony of the table. Because of this, the knife, and anything else that could disrupt the harmony, was banned from the table.

Chopsticks themselves have been the source of many superstitions. It is thought that if you break a chopstick, you will have bad luck. If you drop a chopstick, you will have to pay for the meal. (Remember that one!) When using chopsticks, your palm should face upwards to prevent good fortune from falling out of your hand. Unmarried women should take particular notice of how they hold their chopsticks. It is thought that the closer a woman holds her chopsticks to the tip, the closer to home she will find her husband!

Test Your Chopsticks Etiquette!  
Did You Know...

- Do not stick chopsticks vertically into your food, especially not into rice. Only at funerals are chopsticks stuck into the rice that is put onto the altar.
- Chinese traditionally eat rice from a small bowl held in the left hand. The rice bowl is raised to the mouth and the rice pushed into the mouth using the chopsticks. Some Chinese find it offensive to scoop rice from the bowl using a spoon.
- The blunt ends of chopsticks are sometimes used to transfer food from a common dish to a diner's plate or bowl.
- It is acceptable to transfer food to the plates of closely related people (e.g. grandparents, parents, spouse, children, or significant others) if they are having difficulty picking up the food. It is also a sign of respect to pass food to the elderly first before the dinner starts (part of the Confucian tradition of respecting one's elders).
- Don't lay your chopsticks across an empty bowl when you finish your rice. Bowl-crossing chopsticks are considered to be "bridging death," which is very bad luck.
- When you hold your chopsticks, don't hold them too far from the tips. Holding your chopsticks like this is considered disrespectful to your parents and an indication that you will not take care of your parents when they get old.

Next time those sticks taunt you from the side of your plate in the Chinese restaurant, give them a try!!

**This Web Wisdom was brought to you by:**

<http://www.asianartmall.com/chopstickshistory.htm>

<http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/odds-ends-eat.htm>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chopsticks#Chinese\\_etiquette](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chopsticks#Chinese_etiquette)

<http://www.adam.com.au/holden/hiddendragon24.htm>