

Chopsticks

A bridge between the past and the present...

Chopsticks are synonymous with Japanese culture. They can be found in every kitchen in every household. In Japan, there is a belief that "The life of the Japanese begins



and ends with chopsticks." When new-borns reach 100 days, they are fed using chopsticks for the first time in a ceremony to wish for their healthy growth. This ceremony is called "Okuizome" in Japanese, meaning "the first time to eat using chopsticks". Chopsticks are surely part of our modern lives.

● In the ancient times...

The Japanese word for "chopsticks" is "hashi" which also means "bridge".



In Japan's early history, people thought of chopsticks as one of the ways in which humans were linked with the gods, and considered them sacred. They thought that one stick was for humans, and the other for the gods. When eating, the tips meet creating a bridge between the two. At that time they shared food with the gods.

● Let's use chopsticks!

Generally Japanese children are taught proper etiquette for holding chopsticks from as early as two or three years old. Parents have traditionally made them practice until their form is correct. However, these days, proper form seems to be becoming less and less important for more and more parents.

When you start your meal, you hold your chopsticks in one hand and your dish in the other. You can cut, whisk, stir, wrap, or roll your food. Then you can pick it up and place it gently in your mouth. Unlike in the west where most meals require a knife, a fork, and a spoon, chopsticks can be used in a myriad of ways.



If you want to hold your chopsticks properly, follow this basic instruction.



First, you should place one chopstick in the webbing of your thumb, and rest the tip on your ring finger. ⇒ Then grip the second chopstick with your thumb, index finger, and

middle finger, similar to holding a pencil. ⇒Then line up the tips so that they are touching. When you eat, only the upper chopstick should be moved.

●Where are they from? Are they originally from Japan?



In the very beginning of Japan's history, chopsticks were made from a single piece of bamboo that was joined at the top like tweezers and were called "Orihashi". And they were only used by an Emperor.

It was around the early 7th century when two separate type of chopsticks appeared in Japan . They were brought from China by a group of Prince Shotoku's delegates. That was the time when the custom to use chopsticks at mealtimes started in Japan.



Also, initially, they were generally made of bamboo. That's why the Chinese character “hashi” includes the character for "Bamboo" on its top-like this 箸。

In the 18th century, people used chopsticks made of various types of wood such as cedar, pine, sandalwood, teak etc.

Today, stores offer chopsticks elaborately crafted from lacquered wood, and at the other end of the spectrum, those made of plastic and disposable wood.

Now in our high-tech society, many aspects of Japanese culture may be disappearing, however, chopsticks are not only surviving, but thriving!

