ABSTRACT

A pair of chopsticks comprising a first chopstick having a long narrow body, at least one tine on a first end, a second end opposite the first end, and a connection means disposed on the first chopstick body; a second chopstick having a long narrow body, at least one tine on a first end, a second end opposite the first end, and a connection means disposed on the second chopstick body; and wherein the at least one tine of the first chopstick is proximate the at least one tine of the second chopstick when the connection means of the first chopstick is releasably secured to the connection means of the second chopstick.
COMBINED FORK AND CHOPSTICK ASSEMBLY

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The invention relates generally to improvements in eating utensils, and more particularly to combining features and elements of chopsticks and forks. In particular, the invention relates to a pair of chopsticks which are operatively arranged to allow a user to connect the chopsticks to provide a plurality of tines on one end to function as a fork and the ability to disconnect the chopsticks to provide a traditional set of chopsticks with the end opposing the tines.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Since the present invention relates both to forks and chopsticks, and is in fact a combination of these two articles of manufacture, it is perhaps useful to understand these products to better appreciate their unique combination.

[0003] A fork is a tool, usually used as a piece of cutlery or kitchenware. A fork includes a handle with several tines (usually two, three or four), which are generally narrow, on one end. The fork as an eating utensil was a feature primarily of the West, whereas in Asia chopsticks were more common. However, with recent trends, forks are increasingly available throughout Asia as well. The fork is used to scoop and lift food to the mouth or to hold food in place while cutting or cooking it. Food can be lifted either by spearing it on the tines, or by collecting it on top of the tines, and holding it atop the tines horizontally. To allow for this spoon-like use, the tines may be curved slightly upward.

[0004] Chopsticks are a pair of sticks which are generally small and have an even-length taper. They are generally believed to have originated in ancient China, and are the traditional eating utensils of China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Chopsticks are commonly used in those five countries and their associated cuisine. In addition, chopsticks have gained popularity and are increasingly found in some areas of Tibet and Nepal that are close to Han Chinese populations, due to cross-cultural influences. In South East Asia, similar chopsticks are used to eat noodles. Chopsticks are typically made of wood, bamboo, metal, bone, ivory, and in modern times, plastic as well. To use chopsticks, the user maneuvers the sticks in one hand—between the thumb and fingers—and is used to pick up pieces of food.

[0005] While forks are generally intuitive and easy to use, chopsticks require a great deal of skill and practice to be used effectively when eating. In a variety of restaurants, patrons might request chopsticks if they are proficient with the techniques and proper handling of chopsticks, while other patrons may request a fork if they are unable to efficiently handle their food with chopsticks. In still other cases, a patron may wish to try using chopsticks, and then later change his or her mind and wish to use a fork to continue eating. Heretofore, the restaurant has been required to provide both forks and chopsticks separately to provide patrons with a utensil of their choice. This creates additional cost and takes up valuable storage space. Also, patrons have had to choose between using a fork or a pair of chopsticks and had to utilize two utensils if they changed their mind, creating additional waste.

[0006] While forks and chopsticks have long been known, there has been a longfelt need, for a combined chopstick and fork assembly that combines the elements and features of a fork and a chopstick, that can be used by a variety of patrons as a fork, a pair of chopsticks or both, at the discretion of the patron.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention broadly comprises a pair of chopsticks including: a first chopstick having a long narrow body, at least one tine on a first end, a second end opposite the first end, and a connection means disposed on the first chopstick body; a second chopstick having a long narrow body, at least one tine on a first end, a second end opposite the first end, and a connection means disposed on the second chopstick body; and wherein the at least one tine of the first chopstick is proximate the at least one tine of the second chopstick when the connection means of the first chopstick is releasably secured to the connection means of the second chopstick. In a preferred embodiment, the first chopstick connection means is at least one protrusion and the second chopstick connection means is at least one receiving hole. In the preferred embodiment, the pair of chopsticks further includes an assembled chopstick including a first end having at least three times tines upon connection of the first chopstick connection means and the second chopstick connection means. In a second embodiment, the first chopstick connection means is a dowel pin fixedly secured in a receiving hole and the second chopstick connection means is a receiving hole. In a third embodiment, the first chopstick connection means is formed integral to the first chopstick body.

[0008] In a fourth embodiment, the first chopstick connection means is at least one first magnet with a first pole facing away from the first chopstick and the second chopstick connection means is at least one slot extending into the body proximate the first end of the second chopstick. The first chopstick and the second chopstick connection means are releasably secured and horizontally secured upon vertical engagement of the at least one protrusion and the at least one receiving slot. In a sixth embodiment, the first chopstick and the second chopstick further comprise finger locating grooves in the first chopstick body and the second chopstick body.

[0010] The present invention also broadly comprises a pair of chopsticks including: a first chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side, and a second side; a second chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side, and a second side; and wherein the first chopstick connection means is at least two protrusions proximate the at least two tines and the second chopstick connection means is at least two receiving holes proximate the at least two tines.

[0011] The present invention further broadly comprises a pair of chopsticks including: a first chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side and a smooth second side, a second end opposite the first end, and a finger locating groove on the first side and on the second side of the central body; a second chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side and a smooth
second side, a second end opposite the first end, and a finger locating groove on the first side and on the second side of the central body; and wherein the first chopstick connection means is at least two protrusions proximate the at least two tines of the first chopstick and the second chopstick connection means is at least two receiving holes proximate the at least two tines of the second chopstick.

[0012] It is a general object of the present invention to provide a combined chopstick and fork assembly which is capable of being used as a pair of chopsticks and a fork.

[0013] It is a general object of the present invention to provide a pair of chopsticks with a releasable connection means.

[0014] It is a general object of the present invention to provide a pair of chopsticks which are capable of being connected to form a fork.

[0015] These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciable from the following description of preferred embodiments of the invention and from the accompanying drawings and claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] The nature and mode of operation of the present invention will now be more fully described in the following detailed description of the invention taken with the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0017] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a disconnected state;

[0018] FIG. 2 is an enlarged view of the section of FIG. 1 labeled "FIG. 2";

[0019] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a connected state;

[0020] FIG. 4 is a perspective view of a second preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a disconnected state;

[0021] FIG. 5 is an enlarged view of the section of FIG. 4 labeled "FIG. 5";

[0022] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of a dowel pin;

[0023] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of a second preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a connected state;

[0024] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a third preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a disconnected state;

[0025] FIG. 9 is an enlarged view of the section of FIG. 8 labeled "FIG. 9";

[0026] FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a third preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a connected state;

[0027] FIG. 11 is a perspective view of a fourth preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a disconnected state;

[0028] FIG. 12 is an enlarged view of the section of FIG. 11 labeled "FIG. 12";

[0029] FIG. 13 is a perspective view of a fourth preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a connected state;

[0030] FIG. 14 is a perspective view of a fifth preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a disconnected state;

[0031] FIG. 15 is an enlarged view of the section of FIG. 14 labeled "FIG. 15"; and, FIG. 16 is a perspective view of a fifth preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks in a connected state.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0032] At the outset, it should be appreciated that like drawing numbers on different drawing views identify identical, or functionally similar, structural elements of the invention. While the present invention is described with respect to what is presently considered to be the preferred aspects, it is to be understood that the invention as claimed is not limited to the disclosed aspects.

[0033] Furthermore, it is understood that this invention is not limited to the particular methodology, materials and modifications described and as such may, of course, vary. It is also understood that the terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular aspects only, and is not intended to limit the scope of the present invention, which is limited only by the appended claims.

[0034] Unless defined otherwise, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood to one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs. Although any methods, devices or materials similar or equivalent to those described herein can be used in the practice or testing of the invention, the preferred methods, devices, and materials are now described.

[0035] FIGS. 1 through 3 are a perspective view of a disconnected state, an enlarged view of the receiving buttons, and a perspective view of a connected state, respectively, of a preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks 1 of the present invention. The pair of chopsticks includes first chopstick 4 and second chopstick 6. First chopstick 4 includes first half 8 of central body 9 with tines 10 extending from the first end of the first half. First chopstick 4 also includes second half 12 of the first chopstick tines 10 extending from the second end of the first chopstick. Tines 10 taper from thick to thin as they extend from the first end and are curved slightly upward in order to be able to pick up food. However, one of ordinary skill in the art should immediately recognize that the tines could be any thickness, do not need to be tapered, nor do they need to be curved slightly upward.

[0036] First half 8 also includes a connection means, male buttons 12, which are located in recessed depressions within body 9 of first chopstick 4. Male buttons 12 are fixedly secured in the recessed depressions with an adhesive, a press fit, or any other securing means known in the art. However, male buttons 12 do not need to be fixedly secured in the recessed depressions and can instead be fixedly secured to a smooth side of first half 8. The buttons are located on the first half and spaced apart so that they prevent relative rotation of the chopsticks and provide stability when the chopsticks are combined, as described infra. Male buttons 12 are advantageously located on a side of first half 8 that is perpendicular to the plane formed by tines 10. Male buttons 12 are snap buttons which can be composed of metal, plastic, or other suitable material. Locating male buttons 12 on a side perpendicular to tines 10 allows all of the tines to be located on virtually the same plane and proximate one another. Second half 14 of the first chopstick is similar to a traditional chopstick. The second half tapers from central body 9 to second end 16. Second end 16 is located directly opposite the first end and tines 10.

[0037] Second chopstick 6 is similar to the first chopstick, with a different connection means. Second chopstick 6 includes central body 18, first half 20, and second half 22. First half 20 includes female buttons 24 as a connection means. In the preferred embodiment, female buttons 24 are located in recessed depressions within first half 20 and are snap buttons which can be composed of metal, plastic, or any other suitable material. First half 20 also includes tines 26 which extend from the first end of the second chopstick and are similar to tines 10 of the first chopstick. Female buttons 24 are also located on a side of first half 20 that is perpendicular...
to tines 26. Since both the male buttons and the female buttons are located on perpendicular sides of their respective chopsticks, tines 10 and tines 26 are located on virtually the same plane and proximate one another when the chopsticks are connected as seen in FIG. 3. By located on the same plane, we mean the tines of both chopsticks extend in the same direction, are not substantially offset from one another, and all lie in virtually a single plane. Female buttons 24 are spaced along first half 20 similar to male buttons 12 such that female buttons 24 are aligned to receive male buttons 12. Buttons 12 and 24 are arranged so that when they are connected, tines 10 and 26 are aligned as seen in FIG. 3. In addition, the spacing of buttons 12 and 24 prevents relative rotation or movement. By relative rotation or movement we mean rotation or movement of only one of the chopsticks without similar rotation or movement of the other chopstick. Second half 22 of the second chopstick is also similar to a traditional chopstick which tapers from central body 18 to second end 28, which is directly opposite tines 26.

[0038] The sides of first half 8 and first half 20 which do not include male buttons 12 and female buttons 24, respectively, are generally smooth and do not include protrusions similar to a fork. Upon connection of first chopstick 4 and second chopstick 6 at male buttons 12 and female buttons 24, the chopsticks are releasably secured to form a fork having at least three tines in a preferred embodiment. If the connection means are located in recessed depressions, then the proximity of the chopstick bodies may essentially have three tines extending from the assembled chopsticks. If the connection means are not located in recessed depression, then the chopstick bodies will have four tines extending from the assembled chopsticks. However, one of ordinary skill in the art should immediately recognize that any number of tines may be incorporated and is within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed.

[0039] Further, since the connection means is snap buttons, the user can easily connect the chopsticks to provide a plurality of tines on a first end to function as a fork or disconnect the snap buttons to provide a pair of chopsticks which function as traditional chopsticks by allowing relative movement of second end 16 and second end 28. In addition, both first chopstick 4 and second chopstick 6 include finger locating grooves 30 and 32 respectively, which allow the user to more easily and ergonomically use the chopsticks or fork.

[0040] FIGS. 4 through 7 are a perspective view of a disconnected state, an enlarged view of the receiving holes, a perspective view of a dowel pin, and a perspective view of a connected state, respectively, of a second preferred embodiment pair of chopsticks 40 of the present invention. The second preferred embodiment is identical to the first preferred embodiment with the exception of the connection means. Pair of chopsticks 40 is arranged similar to chopsticks 1 described supra. Chopsticks 40 include first chopstick 42 and second chopstick 44. First chopstick 42 includes central body 46 and protrusions 48 located on first half 50. Protrusions 48 can be formed integral to chopstick 42 during the forming process or by a material removal process after the forming process. Protrusions 48 are alternatively formed by locating dowel pin 52 within receiving hole 54. Dowel pin 52 is then fixedly secured in receiving hole 54 with an adhesive, a press fit, or any securing means known in the art. Once the dowel pins are located within the receiving holes, the dowel pins function similar to protrusions 48. Accordingly, the following discussion also applies to the dowel pin arrangement. Protrusions 48 are properly spaced on the first half to prevent relative rotation or movement of the chopsticks with respect to one another.

[0041] Second chopstick 44 includes receiving holes 54 located on first half 56. The receiving holes are spaced similar to the protrusions so that receiving holes 54 are arranged to releasably secure protrusions 48 when the first and second chopsticks are located proximate one another. Receiving holes 54 are integral to first half 50 and formed by drilling holes in one side of the chopstick or another suitable forming process during manufacturing. Similar to the first preferred embodiment, the second half of first chopstick 42 and the second half of second chopstick 44 each taper from the central body towards their respective second ends, which are opposite the tines on their respective first halves and first ends. Also similar to the first preferred embodiment, protrusions 48 and receiving holes 54 are located on sides which are perpendicular to the tines so that the tines are arranged parallel and proximate one another upon securing the chopsticks together. Further, the sides of first half 50 and 56 which do not have either protrusions 48 or receiving holes 54 are smooth. Since the protrusions of the first chopstick are releasably secured within the receiving holes of the second chopstick, the user can easily adapt the pair of chopsticks to form a fork with tines on a first end which extend from the body when the pair of chopsticks are connected. The user may also disconnect the chopsticks and use the pair of chopsticks similar to a traditional pair of chopsticks.

[0042] FIGS. 8 through 10 illustrate a third preferred embodiment of the present invention with first chopstick 60 and second chopstick 62. The third preferred embodiment is identical to the first and second preferred embodiments with the exception of the connection means. First chopstick 60 connection means is two protrusions 64 which are generally triangular in shape. Advantageously, each triangular protrusion is tapered to have a wider width as it extends from the body of the chopstick. Second chopstick 62 connection means is two receiving slots 66. Receiving slots 66 are shaped similar to protrusions 64, however are slightly larger in size so that the protrusions can be located within the receiving slots.

[0043] In order to releasably secure first chopstick 60 and second chopstick 62, protrusions 64 are vertically engaged with receiving slots 66. By vertically engaged, we mean that first chopstick 60 and second chopstick 62 move relative to one another in a direction perpendicular to protrusions 64. When protrusions 64 are engaged with receiving slots 66, the tapered shape of the protrusions and the slots prevents horizontal movement or rotation while still allowing the user to release the chopsticks by sliding the chopsticks vertically relative to one another. Although the protrusions and the receiving slots have been described as triangular in shape, any shape which can be releasably secured with vertical engagement of the chopsticks and also prevent horizontal engagement and limit relative horizontal movement can be used and is within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed. In addition, while the protrusions and receiving slots have been described and are illustrated as a pair of protrusions and receiving slots, any number of protrusions and receiving slots can be used and is within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed.

[0044] FIGS. 11 through 13 illustrate a fourth preferred embodiment of the present invention with first chopstick 70 and second chopstick 72. The fourth preferred embodiment is identical to the first and second preferred embodiments with the exception of the connection means. First chopstick 70 includes first magnets 74 located in recessed depressions of
The magnets are secured in the depression with an adhesive, press fit, or any other securing means known in the art. Each magnet is arranged to have either the north or south pole of the magnet facing outward. By the pole facing outward, we mean the pole of the magnet that is directed away from the body of the chopstick that the magnet is secured in. For example, a magnet with the north pole facing outward would be secured in the depression so that the south pole of the magnet faces the inside of the chopstick depression and away from the second chopstick when the chopsticks are connected. Similarly, the north pole of the magnet is facing away from the chopstick which it is secured in and is directed towards the other chopstick when the chopsticks are connected.

Second chopstick 72 also includes second magnets 78 located in recessed depressions of first half 80. The magnets are secured in the depression with an adhesive, press fit, or any other securing means known in the art. The first chopstick magnets and second chopstick magnets are aligned so that when the magnets of each chopstick are aligned with the magnets of the other chopstick, the magnets attract one another. Accordingly, first magnets 74 and second magnets 78 must be arranged to have different poles facing outward. Although both of first magnets 74 do not need to have the same pole facing outward, each first magnet 74 must have a pole facing outward which is opposite of the pole facing outward form the corresponding second magnet 78. Advantageously, if the north pole of one of first magnets 74 and the south pole of the other one of first magnets 74 are directed outwards, it would be impossible to improperly align the chopsticks and the times. By this we mean that the magnets would repel one another unless the north and south poles are properly aligned with the appropriate corresponding magnets of the other chopstick.

Figs. 14 through 16 illustrate a fifth preferred embodiment of the present invention with first chopstick 82 and second chopstick 84. The fifth preferred embodiment is similar to the preceding preferred embodiments with the exception of the arrangement of the connection means. By arrangement of the connection means, we mean that the connection means of the chopsticks is located in a different location. Although the fifth preferred embodiment is shown and described with the connection means of the first preferred embodiment, the connection means of the second, third, fourth, as well as any other connection means known in the art are easily adaptable to the fifth preferred embodiment of the invention and are within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed.

First chopstick 82 connection means are female buttons 86 located on a side of first half 88 which is parallel to tines 90. In a preferred arrangement, female buttons 86 are located on the bottom side of first half 88 as seen in Fig. 15. Second chopstick 84 connection means are male buttons 92 located on a side of first half 94 which is parallel to tines 96. In a preferred arrangement, male buttons 92 are located on the top side of first half 94. Similar to the previous embodiments, first chopstick 82 is releasably secured to second chopstick 84 when male buttons 92 are located in female buttons 86. In this arrangement, tines 90 and 96 are parallel to one another, yet each create a plane which is offset from one another, or in other words are located atop one another.

In another preferred arrangement (not shown), female buttons 86 are located on the top side of first half 88. In this arrangement, tines 90 and 96 are again parallel to one another, yet each create a plane which is now further offset from one another when the first and second chopstick are connected.

Advantageously, when the user separates the chopsticks of any of the preferred embodiments, the user can operate the chopsticks as traditional chopsticks in which the ends opposite the times move relative to one another to pickup food and other objects. The chopsticks are preferably composed of wood, however they can be composed of bamboo, metal, bone, ivory, ceramic, plastic, or any other suitable material known in the art.

Thus, it is seen that the objects of the present invention are efficiently obtained, although modifications and changes to the invention should be readily apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art, which modifications are intended to be within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed. It also is understood that the foregoing description is illustrative of the present invention and should not be considered as limiting. Therefore, other embodiments of the present invention are possible without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

What is claimed is:
1. A pair of chopsticks comprising: a first chopstick having a long narrow body, at least one tine on a first end, a second end opposite said first end, and a connection means disposed on said first chopstick body; a second chopstick having a long narrow body, at least one tine one a first end, a second end opposite said first end, and a connection means disposed on said second chopstick body; and, wherein said at least one tine of said first chopstick is proximate said at least one tine of said second chopstick when said connection means of said first chopstick is releasably secured to said connection means of said second chopstick.
2. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said first chopstick connection means is at least one protrusion and said second chopstick connection means is at least one receiving hole.
3. The pair of chopsticks of claim 2 wherein said protrusions are formed integral to said first chopstick body and said receiving holes are formed integral to said second chopstick body.
4. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 further comprising an assembled chopstick including a first end having at least three times upon connection of said first chopstick connection means and said second chopstick connection means.
5. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said first chopstick connection means is at least one first magnet with a first pole facing away from said first chopstick and said second chopstick connection means is at least one second magnet with a second pole facing away from said second chopstick, said second pole having a polarity opposite of said first pole.
6. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said first chopstick connection means is a dowel pin fixedly secured in a receiving hole and said second chopstick connection means is a receiving hole.
7. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said connection means of said first chopstick is located on a half of said first chopstick proximate said at least one tine and said connection means of said second chopstick is located on a half of said second chopstick proximate said at least one tine.
8. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said connection means of said first chopstick is a plurality of male button
snaps and said connection means of said second chopstick is a plurality of female button snaps.

9. The pair of chopsticks of claim 8 wherein said plurality of male button snaps and said plurality of female button snaps are fixedly secured in a plurality of recessed depressions.

10. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said at least one tine is two tines on each of said first end of said first chopstick and said second chopstick.

11. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said first chopstick connection means is at least one protrusion extending from said first chopstick body proximate said first end and said second chopstick connection means is at least one receiving slot extending into said second chopstick body proximate said first end.

12. The pair of chopsticks of claim 11 wherein said first chopstick and said second chopstick are releasably secured upon vertical sliding engagement of said at least one protrusion and said at least one receiving slot.

13. The pair of chopsticks of claim 12 wherein said first chopstick is secured to said second chopstick upon said vertical sliding engagement to prevent relative movement between said first chopstick and said second chopstick.

14. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said at least one tine of said first chopstick is parallel to and offset from said at least one tine of said second chopstick.

15. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said second ends are movable independent of each other upon releasing said first chopstick connection means and said second chopstick connection means.

16. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said first chopstick and said second chopstick further comprise finger locating grooves on said first chopstick body and said second chopstick body.

17. The pair of chopsticks of claim 1 wherein said first chopstick and said second chopstick are composed of a material selected from the group consisting of wood, bamboo, metal, bone, ivory, ceramic, and plastic.

18. A pair of chopsticks comprising:
a first chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side, and a second end; and,
a second chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side, and a second end; and,
wherein said first chopstick connection means is at least two protrusions proximate said at least two tines and said second chopstick connection means is at least two receiving holes proximate said at least two tines.

19. The pair of chopsticks of claim 18 wherein said first chopstick further comprises a smooth second side parallel to and opposite said first chopstick first side and said second chopstick further comprises a smooth second side parallel to and opposite said second chopstick first side.

20. A pair of chopsticks comprising:
a first chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side and a smooth second side, a second end opposed said first end, and a finger locating groove on said first side and on said second side of said central body; and,
a second chopstick having at least two tines on a first end, a central body with a connection means on a first side and a smooth second side, a second end opposed said first end, and a finger locating groove on said first side and on said second side of said central body; and,
wherein said first chopstick connection means is at least two protrusions proximate said at least two tines and said second chopstick connection means is at least two receiving holes proximate said at least two tines.