



## Is Convenience Worth the Cost?

*Is convenience important in our life? Even if convenience means we harm our environment.*

Life is easier because of convenience products. We use a car even to go to a place nearby. We want to make our lives more comfortable. When we are hot, we use air conditioning. When we are hungry, we just go to a convenience store. Disposable chopsticks provide convenience and comfort. They are convenient because they are used just once, so there is no need to wash them. They provide comfort, because at a restaurant, you can use new chopsticks. However, we throw away too many chopsticks every year at the cost of a lot of trees.

Portable chopsticks are a better option. In 1998, two hundred and forty-five billion disposable chopsticks were consumed in Japan, according to research by Tokyo University. That means each person in Japan used two hundred disposable chopsticks a year at the cost of two million and four hundred and ten thousand trees. If you were to stack all the discarded chopsticks the pile would be three times as high as Mt. Fuji.

Disposable chopsticks not only destroy trees, they damage the environment of other plants as well, creating a vicious circle. Ninety four percent of all the disposable chopsticks Japanese people use are imported from China.

Many Chinese are poor. And people who are poor need money to live, so they export their resources (in this case trees) to earn a living. However, to save costs, instead of thinning out forests by cutting some trees and leaving others, they cut down all the trees. When they cut all the trees, they destroy the environment, meaning they can't grow plants any more. If they can't grow plants, they can't earn a living. This is where the vicious circle starts.

In October, during the university festival my friends and I launched the Portable Chopsticks Project to raise awareness of the problems caused by disposable chopsticks. Every year at the festival there are many booths offering food with disposable chopstick. Many disposable chopsticks end up in the garbage box.

Our plan was to show portable chopsticks, give some as presents and tell about the damage caused by disposable chopsticks. That way we could raise awareness about the environmental problems caused by disposable chopsticks. We wanted everyone to know the facts and take action. If we could convince students concerned about the environment to use portable chopsticks, we could save a lot of trees in the world.

We know from experience that it is hard to change your lifestyle. Once, I went to eat out with my friend and she was upset because she said to me "I forgot to bring my chopsticks, I will destroy the natural environment." But I told her we raised awareness with the festival project, so we did well.

We have become accustomed to our convenient life, so acquiring a new custom to protect the natural environment is not easy. It is difficult to suddenly change lifestyles, but we planted seeds of awareness about the impact of convenience items on the environment. We know, not all the seeds will bloom. However we could grow the seeds gradually.

**-by Yoko Hatano**