



Chopsticks, Designed to be 'Held'

Reincarnated into Fancier and More Reliable Forms

There is a Korean children's song that uses the chopsticks as a motif, which goes "Which two things are the same? Two chopsticks in a pair are the same!" Regardless of a person's age, chopsticks are the first things that come to mind for Koreans when asked to find two identical things that come in a pair. Chopsticks are widely used around the world, by around 30% of the global population. Although the shape of the sticks differs from country to country, one thing remains constant- that they are made of two identical sticks. This seems natural as you need at least two sticks to pick up food.

Same Number of Sticks, Different Designs

The factor that influences the design of the chopsticks most is the food. The function of chopsticks changes depending on the properties of the food, and the design of the chopsticks follows its function. For example, Chinese chopsticks are traditionally long and thick. This is because thicker sticks are better for gripping oily food. Also, the length is longer because of the custom of placing food in the middle of the table and transferring it to personal plates. In contrast, Japanese chopsticks are shorter and pointed at the ends. This is due to the fish-heavy diet, requiring the removal of bones.

What about Korean chopsticks then? Korean chopsticks fall in the middle between Chinese and Japanese chopsticks in terms of length, but what matters more than length is the material. The material has to be durable, to withstand use with hot broths and stews, and not stained by food that have been marinated or pickled in sauces. It has to be able to carry a large amount of food, or heavier pieces of food without breaking. This is why Korean chopsticks have long been made with metal. These are the basic designs of chopsticks based on the respective dining cultures they hail from.

Designed to be 'Held', to be 'Had'

Korean chopsticks have evolved over the years to maximize functionality or efficiency. More importantly, with the Korean diet moving away from the traditional format of rice and soups with every meal, the design of Korean chopsticks has been slowly changing. Chopsticks optimized for different types of food, be it noodles, rice, or oily food, are being introduced. The main idea behind these designs is the maximizing of the 'holding' function according to the properties of the food.

Recent chopstick designs make you want to hold them. When holding chopsticks of various shades and colors, the hand becomes part of the design. It is hard to resist the temptation to own these chopsticks. From earthy designs using materials found in nature, to the use of eco-friendly non-toxic materials such as silicon and corn, chopsticks continue to evolve in the present day. It is a familiar presence that has always been by our side, but reincarnated into fancier and more reliable forms.