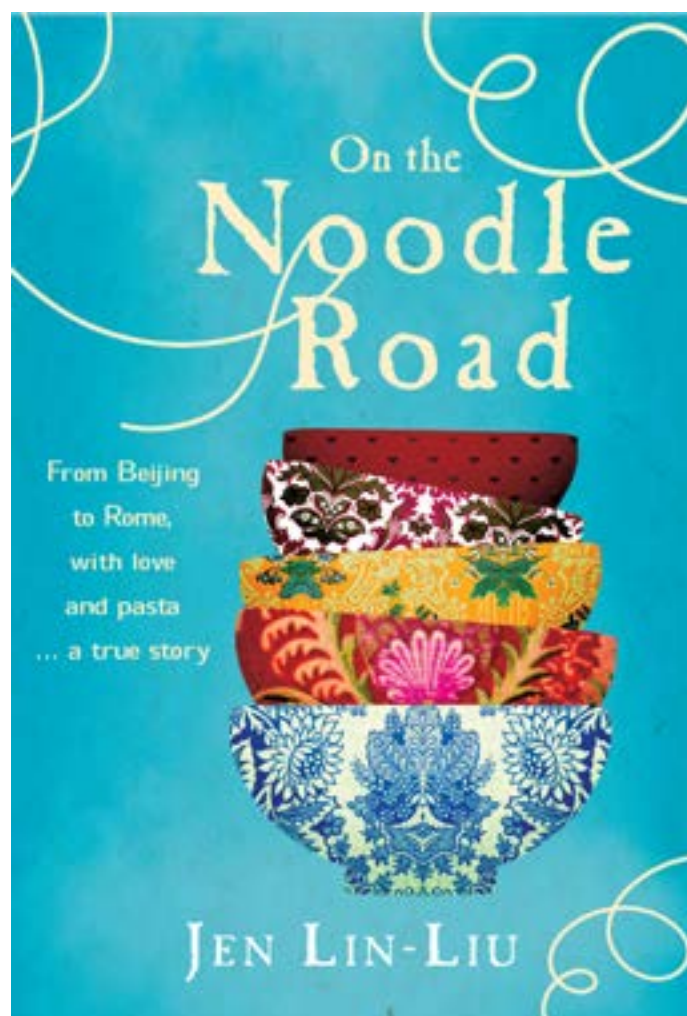


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

'Feasting her way through an Italian honeymoon, Jen Lin-Liu was struck by culinary echoes of the delicacies she ate and cooked back in China, where she'd lived for more than a decade. Who really invented the noodle? she wondered, like many before her. With her new husband's blessing, she set out along the ancient trading route of the Silk Road to discover the connections, both historical and personal, eating a path through western China and on into Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, and across the Mediterranean.

Her fascinating journey takes Lin-Liu into the private kitchens where the headscarves come off and women not only knead and simmer but also confess and confide. The thin rounds of dough stuffed with meat that are dumplings in Beijing evolve into manti in Turkey - their tiny size the measure of a bride's worth - and end as tortellini in Italy. And as she stirs and tastes, listening to the women talk about their lives and longings, Lin-Liu gains a new appreciation of her own marriage, learning to savour the sweetness of love freely chosen.

About the author

Jen Lin-Liu was born in California but has lived in China for more than half of her adult life. The founder of Black Sesame Kitchen, a Beijing cooking school, she is the author of a previous book, *Serve the People: A Stir-Fried Journey through China*. She has written about food, culture, and travel for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Saveur*, *Newsweek*, *Travel + Leisure*, and others.

Reviews

"Thrilling... While carbo-loading in Tibet, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, and Iran, among many other stops, Lin-Liu serves up insights on these societies—with a focus on women's roles—along with generous helpings of detail and humour. A-" – *Entertainment Weekly*

"A wonderful peek into a largely unknown world. And the dozen-plus recipes featured are a bonus... pass the noodles, please." – *USA Today*

"On *The Noodle Road* has pretty much everything you could ask for in a food book." – *Bon Appetit*

"No matter where she's eating, Lin-Liu captures the dishes she samples mouthwateringly... An intelligent beach read that will set your stomach rumbling." – *Los Angeles Times*

"Lin-Liu is hungry for knowledge, not just a full plate. Her narrative strengthens as she goes from home to home, cooking with women whose status in society renders them mute outside the protected space of their own kitchens... The offering that lingers longest is that capacity for wonder and empathy which opens up between hosts and visitors in even the most closed societies. It makes you wish that the world's cultures could mingle more freely, making peace by breaking bread. For now, though, this book stands as a tantalizing glimpse of what might be." – *NPR*

“Lin-Liu writes gorgeous descriptions—‘Split pomegranates hung on wooden posts, their pink pearls spilling out of the peel’—and intimate, penetrating portraits of the people she encounters.” – *The Daily Beast*

“Lin-Liu’s storytelling comes alive with well-chosen details... wonderful... Reading this book might turn you into a born-again epicurean.” – *Bloomberg*

“What Lin-Liu eats and cooks along the way, from noodles to stews to meatballs, speaks to long interconnections among peoples and languages and foods (recipes of the most intriguing dishes appear throughout the book). Lin-Liu is a generous, warm, sensitive writer... Conversations along the road raise what turn out to be more important questions, especially about the role of women in cultures, in families, and in kitchens.” – *The Boston Globe*

“[An] ambitious adventure... Lin-Liu serves up several tasty and insightful tidbits along the way.” – *Chicago Tribune*

“The story of her journey is not merely culinary. Without entering the terrain of the sloppily confessional, Lin-Liu worries about how the trip will strain her new marriage, is frank about her ambivalence with her new designation as someone’s “wife,” and, grappling with those anxieties on her trip, she makes not only culinary observations about the places she visits, but cultural ones as well... smart and engaging, with the descriptions of certain dishes so evocative as to be dangerous to read on an empty stomach.” – *Bust*

“No matter how tempted you might be to skip straight to the 20 mouth-watering recipes included in Jen Lin-Liu’s *On the Noodle Road: From Beijing to Rome with Love and Pasta*, don’t; it would be like inhaling dessert first and spoiling an elegant five-course gourmet meal... Flavourful and thoughtful... You’ll be glad you’ve welcomed Lin-Liu into your kitchen.” – *American Way*

“Delightful... This book is not just for foodies or cooks: any and all will enjoy it.” – *Library Journal* (starred review)

“Lin-Liu made a point of invading the kitchens of her hosts and local cooks, and she was amazed at similarities between regional noodle dishes and rustic Italian food; appalled or pleasantly surprised by strange ingredients; and, from yurt to hovel, delighted by the local hospitality. Lin-Liu’s journey is a bold palate-awakening adventure, endearingly rendered.” – *Publishers Weekly*

“A quest for the origins of the noodle becomes a journey from the open-air ovens of Urumqi to the eating clubs of Istanbul. Jen Lin-Liu introduces us to chefs and home cooks who open up their kitchens and their hearts, sharing recipes along with sour-sweet memories of their own lives. *On the Noodle Road* is a savoury exploration of how food crosses cultures and what it brings to us, whether it is sustenance, community, or consolation.” – Leslie T. Chang, author of *Factory Girls*

“Some writers follow the money; Jen Lin-Liu follows the noodle. Whipping up a delicious concoction of a travelogue as she journeys between China and Italy, she proves that food is not only the way to the heart but a way into understanding the psyches of the people doing the cooking and eating.” – Barbara Demick, author of *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*

“Of value to both travellers and gourmets.” – *Booklist*

“A footloose, spontaneous and appetite-whetting journal of culinary adventure.” – *Kirkus*

“I was so riveted by Jen Lin-Liu’s *On the Noodle Road* I could hardly put it down. I found it moving, enlightening, and funny, offering insight into contemporary life infused with a social history of food. Joyful and thoroughly entertaining.” – Ken Hom, chef, author, and BBC-TV presenter

“Whether she’s attending cooking school in Iran or showing us how to find a Turkish pork speakeasy, Jen Lin-Liu is the perfect guide to all the flavours and fascinations of the Silk Road.” – Peter Hessler, author of *River Towns*, *Oracle Bones*, and *Country Driving*

For discussion

- ☞ Combining in one book, a travelogue, a history, a cultural investigation, a food diary, recipes, and a memoir sounds like a big ask. Do you think Jen Lin-Liu has done this successfully?
- ☞ Jen Lin-Liu set out on a culinary journey along the Silk Road to discover the origins of pasta. But her personal circumstances also loomed large in her mind. Is this combination of the public and personal a good fit?
- ☞ On Lin-Liu’s journey through small villages in China and Tibet, Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Italy, she learns much about the various cultures. Which areas did you find most interesting and why?
- ☞ Throughout her trip, Lin-Liu writes about the ways the roles of women versus men are viewed. Discuss.
- ☞ What is the role of food in our Western society? Does that differ to the way you experienced the roles of food in other societies as you read *On the Noodle Road*?

Suggested further reading

Garlic & Sapphires - Ruth Reichl

Secrets of the Red Lantern - Luke & Pauline Nguyen

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life - Barbara Kingsolver

Salt: A World History - Mark Kurlansky

The Sweet Life in Paris: Delicious Adventures in the World’s Most Glorious - and Perplexing – City - David Lebovitz