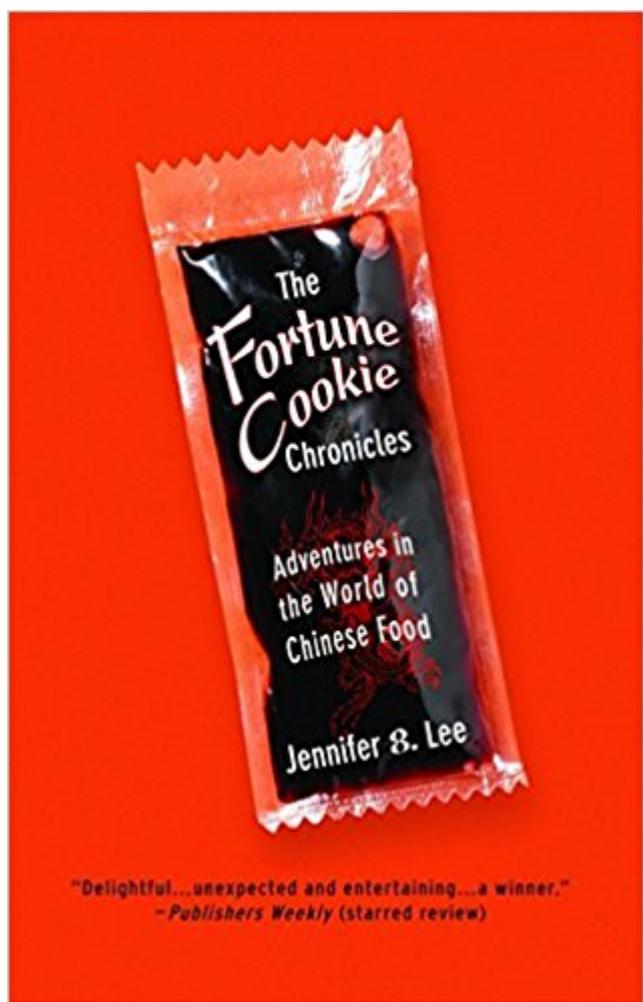


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# The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures In The World Of Chinese Food



## Synopsis

FEATURED ON TED.com and The Colbert Report. If you think McDonald's is the most ubiquitous restaurant experience in America, consider that there are more Chinese restaurants in America than McDonalds, Burger Kings, and Wendy's combined. Former New York Times reporter and Chinese-American (or American-born Chinese). In her search, Jennifer 8 Lee traces the history of Chinese-American experience through the lens of the food. In a compelling blend of sociology and history, Jenny Lee exposes the indentured servitude Chinese restaurants expect from illegal immigrant chefs, investigates the relationship between Jews and Chinese food, and weaves a personal narrative about her own relationship with Chinese food. The Fortune Cookie Chronicles speaks to the immigrant experience as a whole, and the way it has shaped our country.

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Readers will take an unexpected and entertaining journey "through culinary, social and cultural history" in this delightful first book on the origins of the customary after-Chinese-dinner treat by New York Times reporter Lee. When a large number of Powerball winners in a 2005 drawing revealed that mass-printed paper fortunes were to blame, the author (whose middle initial is Chinese for prosperity) went in search of the backstory. She tracked the winners down to Chinese restaurants all over America, and the paper slips the fortunes are written on back to a Brooklyn company. This travellike narrative serves as the spine of her cultural history "not a book on Chinese cuisine, but the Chinese food of take-out-and-delivery" and permits her to frequently but

safely wander off into various tangents related to the cookie. There are satisfying minihistories on the relationship between Jews and Chinese food and a biography of the real General Tso, but Lee also pries open factoids and tidbits of American culture that eventually touch on large social and cultural subjects such as identity, immigration and nutrition. Copious research backs her many lively anecdotes, and being American-born Chinese yet willing to scrutinize herself as much as her objectives, she wins the reader over. Like the numbers on those lottery fortunes, the book's a winner. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School "Lee takes readers on a delightful journey through the origins and mysteries of the popular, yet often overlooked, world of the American Chinese food industry. Crossing dozens of states and multiple countries, the author sought answers to the mysteries surrounding the shocking origins of the fortune cookie, the inventor of popular dishes such as chop suey and General Tso's chicken, and more. What she uncovers are the fascinating connections and historical details that give faces and names to the restaurants and products that have become part of a universal American experience. While searching for the "greatest Chinese restaurant," readers are taken on a culinary tour as Lee discovers the characteristics that define an exceptional and unique Chinese dining experience. Readers will learn about the cultural contributions and sacrifices made by the Chinese immigrants who comprise the labor force and infrastructure that supports Chinese restaurants all over the world. This title will appeal to teens who are interested in history, Chinese culture, and, of course, cuisine. Recommend it to sophisticated readers who revel in the details and history that help explain our current global culture, including fans of Thomas L. Friedman's *The World Is Flat* (Farrar, 2006) and Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner's *Freakonomics* (Morrow, 2006). "Lynn Rashid, Marriots Ridge High School, Marriotsville, MD Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

American Chinese food is, to me, a fascinating concept as it's neither American nor Chinese " as the author found when she tried to trace General Tso in his home town and found the military hero, not the culinary genius. This book almost couldn't have been written without the show and tell of digital photography where she used her camera to show various dishes as she tried to track them across China. This coming from a woman who spoke Mandarin was essential as I don't think she'd have gotten half the stories she did without that tie.I

loved the two-fold premise of the book, tracking the iconic fortune cookie from its creation in Japan, or maybe Korea, or possibly even California to the winning lottery tickets as well as the author's own heritage. Her early chapters, and the final wrap including her father, who was a PhD away from being a delivery man• being admonished not to leave menus when he brought food to a sick friend, reminded me a little of Steven Shaw's *Setting the Table* as he was also a fan of Upper West Side Chinese. The book perfectly toed the line between memoirs and food & travel writing and is a fit for fans of both genres. I especially enjoyed her trip around the world to find the best Chinese food. Such a fun part of travel. Although I'm not personally a huge fan of Chinese food, I might have to sample more of it.

Jennifer 8. Lee uses a search for the origin of fortune cookies to take us on a historical tour of America's favorite ethnic food, Chinese cooking. And what a trip it is. As might be expected for something as humble as the fortune cookie, there is not a clear documented history. Nevertheless, through a lot of sleuthing, as well as talking to other fortune cookie detectives, Lee shows how the origin in a Japan where a cracker made at temples morphed into the cookie we know today. There, of course, is a bit of tragedy in the story. Many of the Japanese bakeries that had been supplying the early cookies to Chinese restaurants in the 30s were all closed when the Japanese-Americans were locked up in internment camps during WW2. Chinese bakers took over, and the fortune cookie's fate was sealed. Lee also delves into the history of Chinese restaurants in the US, and their ubiquitous appearance. She explores the challenges and sociological aspects of running and staffing the restaurants, and discusses the illegal immigration, using the famous Golden Venture ship grounding in New York, which supplies so many of the waiters, dishwashers and cooks who make-up the workforce of the industry. Lee also reveals the history of some of the most popular Americanized dishes, General Tso's chicken and Chow Mein, which are unrecognizable back in China. Her search for the greatest Chinese restaurant in the world reveals all the different forms that Chinese food takes. In many countries that immigrants have moved to, they then adapted Chinese cuisine for local tastes. Lee tells a fascinating story that jumps from dish to dish, leaving us more knowledgeable and more appreciative of the stir fry in front of us.

Ms. Lee's book is a well-researched history, ostensibly of fortune cookies and Chinese food, but more importantly, of how Chinese food around the world and particularly in America is a reflection of the Chinese diaspora experience. If you've ever wondered about anything having to do with Chinese-American culture and even if you haven't, you should read this book. If you take your

delivery man or the woman at the takeout counter or the chef churning out General Gao's chicken for granted, I promise that you won't after reading this book.

This morning, I had the pleasure of finishing Jennifer Lee's enchanting book The Fortune Cookie Chronicles. What a book! It takes the reader literally around the world to answer the perennial question of where fortune cookies truly come from. (I won't spoil it.) But it's not just about fortune cookies, oh no - it's an examination of the history of Chinese restaurants (of which there are more in the United States than there are McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King combined); Powerball winners (one year, there were ~110 Powerball winners who got their lucky five-of-six numbers from fortune cookies); and more. Well-written and engaging, the book pulled me in from the beginning. I was hooked - couldn't wait to go back for more. I will say that it was a little longer than I expected, coming in at 291 pages - but I flagged only briefly about 2/3 of the way in. There was enough new and different material to keep me engaged, and Lee did a good job at circling back to the initial premises of the book, notably the fortune-cookie origin dilemma and the Powerball numbers. 4/5 stars.

Ms. Lee is an excellent writer and can make the most improbable subjects enjoyable to read about. Seemed to stretch out some topics longer than needed, but the human interest portions were a pleasant surprise. An enjoyable read. I'd seen her TED talk and was inspired to buy the book.

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