

Vocabulary

give (something) a twist

change or alter something in a creative way to make something new and exciting

exotic

unusual and exciting because of coming from far away

at one point or another

at some unspecified time in the past

tweak

change or alter something slightly to improve it

evolve

develop and change gradually

push the boundaries

(idiom) do things which challenge normal acceptable behaviour

TRANSCRIPT

Note: This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello, this is 1 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth.

Neil

Do you enjoy eating noodles, Beth?

Beth

I love noodles, yes. I think my favourite are udon – the big thick ones. Mmm, they're so good! Well, some people buy them dried in a packet, others make them fresh from wheat or rice, but there is little doubt that noodles are popular around the world. From their origins, probably somewhere in China, noodle recipes were spread by traders on the ancient Silk Road. At each destination along the road, people **gave** noodles a **twist**, adding different flavours and ingredients to create a new dish.

Neil

In this programme, we'll visit the United States and Japan, two countries which have taken noodles and created exciting new varieties. As usual, we'll learn some useful new vocabulary, and remember – you can read along with the transcript of this programme, available now on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Beth

But first, Neil, I have a question for you. As well as different shapes and ingredients, noodles come in many different flavours. So which region of China is famous for its spicy flavours? Is it:

- a) Shanghai,
- b) Sichuan, or
- c) Guangzhou?

Neil

Well, I think actually, Beth, I know the answer to this. I've been lucky enough to have been to this place. I think it's b) Sichuan.

Beth

OK. Well, you sound confident. I will reveal the answer later in the programme. BBC World Service programme, The Food Chain, investigated how noodles spread from Asia through Europe to America. They uncovered a surprising story: that pasta comes from noodles brought back to Italy by Marco Polo in the 13th century. Jen Lin-Liu, author of the book 'On the Noodle Road', doesn't believe this story.

Jen Lin-Liu

So, noodles were very **exotic** in the 1920s and 30s in the United States, and there was a new pasta association in America that wanted to promote the manufacturing of dried pasta. And so they **came up with a** story about how Marco Polo went to China and found the noodle there, and brought it all the way to Italy.

Neil

In the 1920s, noodles were popular because they were **exotic**, meaning foreign, unusual and exciting. At that time pasta companies were promoting a new invention, dried pasta, so they **came up with a** story about Marco Polo to sell more pasta. If you **come up with** something, you suggest or think up an idea. And it worked – sales of pasta jumped as a result!

Beth

Now, our second destination, Japan, also has a history of eating noodles. One of the most famous Japanese noodle dishes is ramen, and Frank Striegl, a blogger living in Tokyo, knows all about it. He eats over 300 bowls of ramen a year! He explained to BBC World Service's The Food Chain how Chinese immigrants to Japan in the late 1800s influenced this Japanese dish.

Frank Striegl

And **at one point or another**, different chefs decided to localise these dishes. They said, "We love these Chinese noodle dishes. However, why don't we **tweak** them? Why don't we make them a little bit more Japanese?"

Neil

Frank says that **at one point or another**, chefs started to make noodle dishes more Japanese. Here, the phrase **at one point or another** means at some unspecified time in the past.

Beth

They did this by **tweaking** Chinese noodles – in other words, by changing them slightly to make them better, different or, in this case, more Japanese.

Neil

By making these **tweaks**, adding new toppings and slices of beef or chicken, Japanese chefs created the noodle dish we know today as ramen. Here's Frank Striegl again, talking with BBC World Service's The Food Chain.

Frank Striegl

And what I find fascinating about ramen, compared to perhaps other wonderful noodle dishes around the world, is that ramen continues to **evolve**. Unlike other Japanese foods, it's OK to **push the boundaries**.

Beth

Frank thinks that Japanese ramen continues to **evolve** – to develop and change gradually in response to new developments and ideas. Unlike other traditional food such as sushi, modern versions of ramen **push the boundaries**. If you **push the boundaries**, you act in a way which challenges normal acceptable behaviour.

Neil

Yes, noodles have changed so much since ancient times that today you can buy them dried in a packet and simply add hot water. But the flavours and the noodles themselves maintain a link to the past. Now, speaking of flavours, what was the answer to your question, Beth?

Beth

Well, I asked you which region of China is famous for its spicy flavours. You were very confident with saying Sichuan and that is the correct answer. Sichuan is a place that is famous for spicy food, such as the Sichuan pepper and Sichuan hotpot. OK. It's time to recap the vocabulary we've learnt. If you **give something a twist**, you change it in some small way to create something new and exciting.

Neil

The adjective **exotic** means unusual and exciting because of coming from far away.

Beth

The phrase, **at one point or another** means at some unspecified time in the past.

Neil

If you **tweak** something, you alter it slightly in order to improve it.

Beth

Something which **evolves**, develops and changes gradually.

Neil

And finally, the idiom to **push the boundaries** means to do things which challenge normal acceptable behaviour. Once again, our six minutes are up. If you enjoyed the programme, why not visit our website and check out all of the different podcasts that we have at BBC Learning English. There's something there for everyone. Thanks for joining us and goodbye.

Beth

Bye!