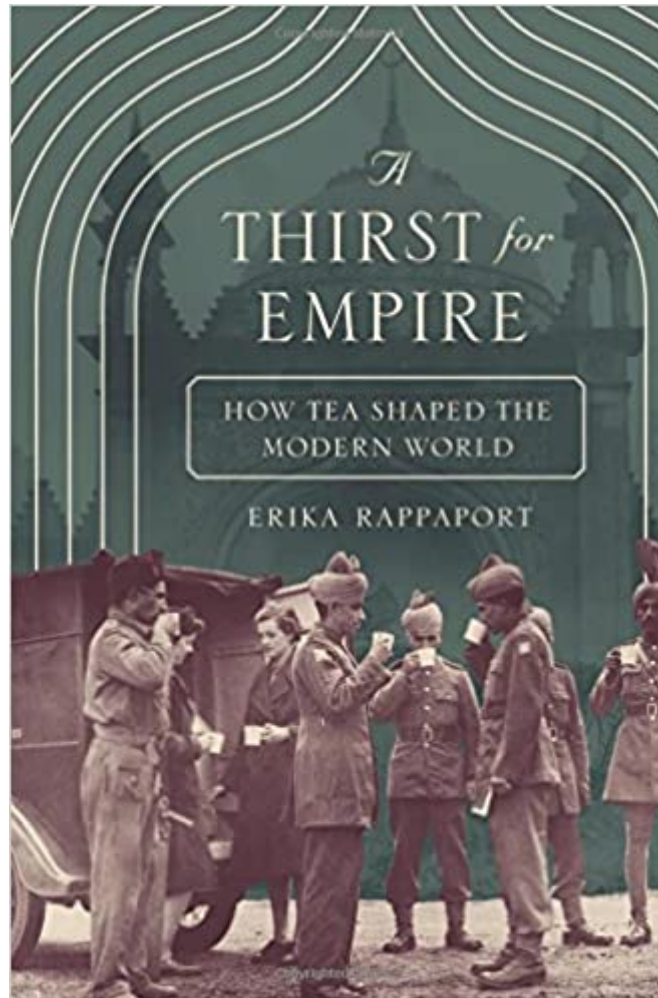




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A Thirst For Empire: How Tea Shaped The Modern World



Synopsis

How the global tea industry influenced the international economy and the rise of mass consumerism

Tea has been one of the most popular commodities in the world. Over centuries, profits from its growth and sales funded wars and fueled colonization, and its cultivation brought about massive changes in land use, labor systems, market practices, and social hierarchies—the effects of which are with us even today. *A Thirst for Empire* takes a vast and in depth historical look at how men and women through the tea industry in Europe, Asia, North America, and Africa transformed global tastes and habits and in the process created our modern consumer society. As Erika Rappaport shows, between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries the boundaries of the tea industry and the British Empire overlapped but were never identical, and she highlights the economic, political, and cultural forces that enabled the British Empire to dominate—but never entirely control—the worldwide production, trade, and consumption of tea. Rappaport delves into how Europeans adopted, appropriated, and altered Chinese tea culture to build a widespread demand for tea in Britain and other global markets and a plantation-based economy in South Asia and Africa. Tea was among the earliest colonial industries in which merchants, planters, promoters, and retailers used imperial resources to pay for global advertising and political lobbying. The commercial model that tea inspired still exists and is vital for understanding how politics and publicity influence the international economy. An expansive and original global history of imperial tea, *A Thirst for Empire* demonstrates the ways that this fluid and powerful enterprise helped shape the contemporary world.

Book Information

Hardcover: 568 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press (September 5, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0691167117

ISBN-13: 978-0691167114

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.9 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #211,798 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #90 in Books > Cookbooks,

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Customer Reviews

"The book moves from the coffeehouses of London to the muggy plantations of Assam to the advertising firms of Madison Avenue, revealing the technologies and marketing techniques that were instrumental in achieving tea's global popularity. Along the way, Rappaport touches on the temperance movement, commodity chains, Americans' famous dislike of tea, and the sociocultural sphere inhabited by the planter class in Southeast Asia, among many other topics. Exhaustively researched and winningly recounted."--Publishers Weekly

"The result of prodigious research and full of flavoursome detail, *A Thirst for Empire* will certainly stimulate."--John Keay, *Literary Review*

"Lively, thoughtful and highly engaging. . . . Elegant and authoritative. Rappaport's command of scholarship and eye for detail are formidable. She is a subtle and scrupulously attentive user of sources. Yet she also knows how to make these academic qualities and requirements serve the broader demands of informative and vibrant storytelling. On almost every page there is an arresting detail, a surprising observation, a fascinating anecdote, a collectible nugget of trivia."--Matthew Adams, *The National*

"A sweeping and richly detailed history of tea. . . . *A Thirst for Empire* is an authoritative and exhaustive work of scholarship. . . . A rich trove of paintings, engravings and photographs beautifully illustrate her themes. Rappaport's treatment of her subject is refreshingly apolitical. . . . Rappaport is clearly motivated by truth-telling rather than case-making."--Pietra Rivoli, *Financial Times*

"In Erika Rappaport's big, beautifully illustrated book, we have the first global history of how tea became a universal beverage. Rappaport accomplishes this feat by circling the world created by British imperialism, connecting tea pickers, plantation owners, traders, retail shop owners, chain stores, teetotalers, workers on their breaks, and ladies that lunch. Exploring the tea leaf's transformation from plant to drink, Rappaport tells a rigorous, vivid story of the workings of modern capitalism."--Victoria de Grazia, *Columbia University*

"In this remarkable book covering several centuries and reaching across many continents, Erika Rappaport explores the production, marketing, and consumption of a simple plant and familiar commodity, one that people had to be taught to want. She demonstrates tea's key role shaping colonial and postcolonial worlds, consumerism, politics, and, above all, the cultural, trading, and power relations that made and unmade the British Empire. Ambitious analytical breadth, meticulously researched case studies, and evocative images combine to make this essential and compelling reading."--Geoffrey Crossick, *University of London*

"This is commodity history at its best. Tea provides a window into a global economy that flourished for many centuries--long before the globalization of our own age. We meet

the producers, workers, marketers, and consumers connected to the tea that underpinned empire and postcolonial societies. Rappaport ambitiously takes us from the tea plantation to the metropole and back, capturing a big story in a teacup."--Lizabeth Cohen, author of *A Consumers' Republic*"A Thirst for Empire is an appealing and wide-ranging new history of tea in the modern world, with a particular emphasis on imperial networks and the role played by marketing and advertising. Sitting at the intersection of imperial history, consumer culture, and the processes of globalization, this book speaks to readers interested in world history as well as those who love their tea."--Frank Trentmann, author of *Empire of Things*"Positioning tea as the commodity at the heart of this compelling story, *A Thirst for Empire* demonstrates the ways in which a mass consumer culture emerged between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries in dynamic relations to the rise and fall of the British Empire. This book is monumental in its reach across time and space, and focused in its investigation of how tea was produced, sold, and consumed."--Nadja Durbach, University of Utah"There are lots of histories of tea out there—none, however, offer a similarly sophisticated interpretation and skilled weaving together of such diverse themes, actors, and places. Relying on enormous archival work at sites around the globe, this ambitious book offers an important contribution to understandings of empire, globalization, the rise of consumer culture, and consumer desires."--Abigail McGowan, University of Vermont

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