

Robert Fortune

The Tea Thief



- 6. The Medicinal Properties of Tea
- 7. Food and Festivals

BEFORE YOU WATCH

Discuss these general questions:

- What do you think of when you drink tea from china cups?
- How do you and your friends make a cup of tea?
- Make a list of Australian native plants and non-native plants you have in your garden.
- How did the non-native plants get to Australia?
- What images do you associate with *Coca Cola* and *Microsoft*? Why?
- Compare some of the plots of James Bond films. How real are his missions?

ROBERT FORTUNE: SECRET AGENT

BIOGRAPHY

Robert Fortune was born in Scotland in 1813 and is famous for being the horticulturalist responsible for the introduction of about 200 new species of plants into England. He was an avid explorer and adventurer who travelled around Asia and India collecting seedlings and keeping detailed records of everything he saw. He was also one of Britain's most successful secret

CURRICULUM LINKS

ROBERT FORTUNE THE *TEA THIEF* is relevant for students in senior secondary or adult education courses studying History, Studies Of Society and Environment (SOSE), English, English as a Second Language (ESL), Politics, Media Studies and Economics.

This guide is divided into the following areas:

1. Robert Fortune: Biography
2. The East India Company
3. The Opium Wars
4. The Significance of Tea
5. Movement for the Protection of the Right To Taste.



agents. In 1848, the British government commissioned him to bring back from China the best tea seeds, tea plants, implements and tea workers, in order to establish plantations in Northern India. This was a secret mission as the tea plants were heavily protected in China. Disguising himself as a Chinese man he was led into the most remote parts of China where he was able to observe and learn the secrets of tea cultivation and processing. This was an extremely risky mission as, if caught, Fortune would face the death penalty. From 1848 to 1851 he stole over 20,000 tea plants from China and transported them to India where they were grown and cultivated. Fortune was able to learn for himself the best methods and techniques of tea cultivation and production, methods kept secret by the Chinese for centuries. Fortune's remarkable feats made possible for the first time, the intensive cropping and processing of tea in India. In January 1862, Robert Fortune settled in Brompton, London and lived off the sale of his travel books and his collection of Chinese antiques.

DISCUSS

If you had to disguise yourself as an Australian, what are some of the most important things that you would need to know?

AFTER YOU WATCH THE FILM:

1. How would you describe Robert Fortune's character?
2. What qualities did he have?
3. Why did he choose to do this work?
4. What would have been the negative effects of his actions?
5. Why didn't the Chinese guess who or what he was?

SCIENCE

WEB SITES ABOUT ROBERT FORTUNE:

The following sites contain links to information about Robert Fortune and his work.

Make a list of some of the plants he might have found in China that are now growing in your garden.

<http://www.zero35.freereserve.co.uk>

<http://www.users.qwest.net>

<http://www.gardenweb.com>

CHINA

Choose one of the topics below to research for the class.

- Research some of the history and culture of China.
- What products does Australia import from China?
- What are some of the characteristics of Chinese art that you see in everyday objects?
- What other cultures have been influenced by Chinese traditions?
- Who was Confucius and what were his main ideas?
- What other countries have been influenced by Confucianism?
- Do some of the principles of Confucianism still exist in Chinese cultures now? How?

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

In 1601 the English East India Company was founded by a group of merchants. They hoped to attain a monopoly on trade within Asia and overtake Spain, Portugal and Holland, which were the other dominant trading empires at the time. The East India Company dealt in silk, ivory, spices and cotton, it also bought wool, raw silk, chinaware, musk and taffeta all to be sold in England. It had offices in East Asia, India and Sri Lanka.

Fine Chinese porcelain was the first product brought to England at request of Queen Elizabeth 1. Hence the term *Royal China*. Royal China was so popular that, in the early 1700s, the Chinese made tableware and figurines in European-style designs. They also made teapots for the English market to suit the style in which the English made tea.

However, the most famous merchandise attributed to the East India Company was its trade in tea.



THIS PAGE: AUSTRALIAN MORRISON DRESSED AS A CHINAMAN AROUND 1860, ROBERT FORTUNE, FILM CREW IN THE GREAT RED ROBE TEA GARDEN, WUYISHAN, CHINA. FACING PAGE: TEA PICKING, TEA TRANSPORTATION BY BOAT, BLACK TEA MANUFACTURING, TEA TRANSPORTATION BY ROAD.



Contrary to what was popularly believed, tea was unknown in India till the British introduced the crop. China held a monopoly on its tea production and its trade.

Chinese tea became the most sought after product in Britain. By 1750, the East India Company was importing 2.5 million pounds of Chinese tea annually and was auctioning it in London for five shillings a pound—twice what it paid in Canton. By 1800, the importation of Chinese tea would generate more revenue than the company's entire trade with India.

The English East India Company expanded its commercial activities over 250 years and controlled half the world's trade. It also acted as a proxy colonial government but in 1858, the company had grown inefficient, and the Crown revoked its charter and took over the management of its own colonies.

Source: <http://www.discovery.com>
<http://encarta.msn.com>

DISCUSS

- What are the biggest corporations

in the world today?

- How do you know they're so big?
- What influence do they have over your lifestyle?
- In what way are they involved in politics?

MEDIA STUDIES: FOLLOW-UP TASK

Robert Fortune The Tea Thief uses poetry, folklore, art and interviews to portray how the connection between a multinational corporation and government, was integral in the reshaping of cultures and societies.

QUESTIONS

- What images do the paintings portray of tea drinkers?
- Are there any parallels between the East India Company and modern day multinational corporations?

TASK

- Choose a species or product that has been introduced into Australia from overseas. (For example: Animals such as cattle, sheep or rabbits, plants such as tobacco, or substances such



as alcohol or fast food.)

- Use the questions below as a guide, or think of some questions of your own, to explore the effects this new product or species has had on our society.

1. Where did the product come from?
2. How was it brought here?
3. What effect did it have on the population?
4. What effect did it have on the native flora and fauna?

- Develop a screenplay for a documentary that presents your findings to these questions. Use examples of art in your screenplay.
- What imagery would you use to express what you want to say?

THE OPIUM WARS

Where does this phrase come from?

I wouldn't do it, not for all the tea in China

The tea trade was a source of tension between the English and the Chinese during the 1700s. The Chinese controlled the tea market and were able to set extremely high prices. The tea trade in China became economically untenable for the West because the Chinese demanded payment in silver. Shipping such large amounts of silver around the world was risky and took a heavy toll on Britain's finances.

The English East India Company's first solution was to grow opium poppies - an inexpensive crop - in Britain's Indian colonies.

The British sold opium to the Chinese for silver, which they needed to buy China's tea.

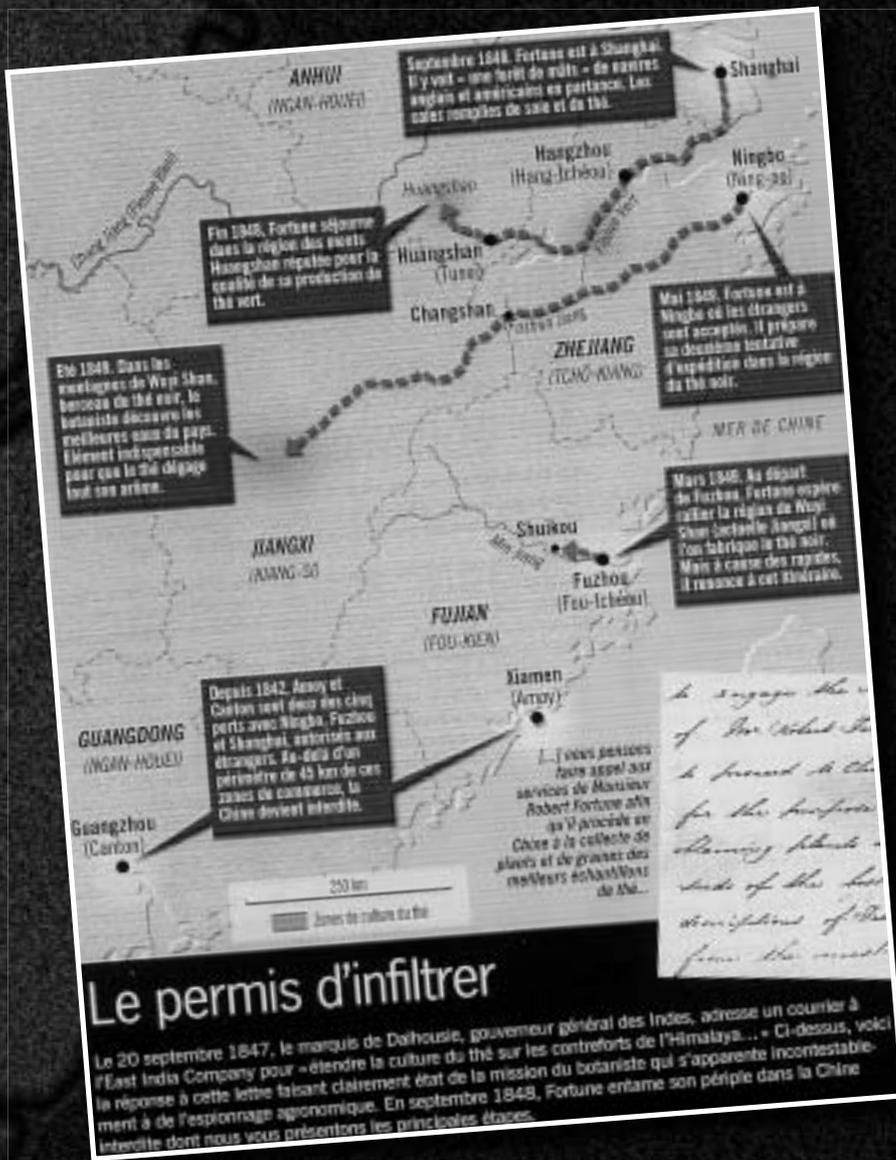
As a result of the opium trade, nearly one quarter of the Chinese population became addicted to opium. In 1729 the Chinese emperor banned opium, but the East India Company continued to trade in it.

In 1839 the Chinese went to war with Britain over the sale of opium. Britain believed that it had the right to free trade, whereas China sought to

maintain isolation from the West by closing their ports in the hope of discouraging further imports of opium. In the early 1840s the British Army defeated the Chinese and were granted the island of Hong Kong under the treaty of Nanking. China was forced to open up five of its major ports to British traders. Opium continued to be sold to China until 1908.

Despite the now free opium trade, the tea trade continued to deplete the Empire's coffers. China produced and sold to the West, teas of increasing mediocre quality, and was unable to keep up with the increase in demand.

It was then that the British decided to set up tea plantations in India to be able to control tea production and above all the commodity price. The aim was to ensure a constant supply



THIS PAGE: MONK PREPARING TEA, CHINESE TEA MANUFACTURERS ROLLING TEA LEAVES, FILMING IN TUKDAH TEA MANUFACTURE, DARJEELING, INDIA. FACING PAGE: ROCK TEA PICKING WUYISHAN CHINA, TEA GARDEN, HUANGSHANG CHINA.



in the future.

The British government then hired Robert Fortune to steal tea from China and ship it to India to be cultivated. The subsequent intensive cropping and processing of tea in India led to a worldwide proliferation of tea drinking. This soon turned India into the world's largest tea exporter, overtaking the Chinese tea market, which did not recover until the 1950s.

Source:

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~boxes/boxweb/teaand.htm> <http://www.bell.lib.umn.edu/Products/tea.html>

Discuss the meaning of this quote:

...It is a curious circumstance that we grow a poppy in our Indian territories to poison the people of China in return for a wholesome beverage which they prepare almost exclusively for us

John Barrow; Quarterly Magazine of 1836

DISCUSSION: WHAT DO THESE TERMS MEAN?

- Free Trade agreement
- The GAT treaty
- Globalisation

1. Does the right to free trade extend to trading in products that could have a detrimental health effect on people?
2. What products are being traded today that might have negative effects on the health of the local population?
3. What damages did opium addiction cause to Chinese society?
4. What would some of the personal consequences of opium addiction have been?
5. What are some of the causes of drug addiction today?
6. What damages does drug addiction cause to our society?

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEA

Read this story from the film:

In the Dragon well area lived an old woman. She planted trees and made tea. One day a stranger came to the area. It was a fortune hunter.

He saw a stone ball in the old woman's house and he asked the old woman if he could buy it. She thought it was just a stone ball so she was happy to sell it to him.

In the evening the old woman washed the stone ball thoroughly. She washed it very clean, then used the water and poured it onto the tea trees. The next day the fortune hunter returned to buy it. When he saw the stone ball, as clean as new, he didn't want it. He said that the good part had been washed away. The good part had gone onto the tea. After that the tea grew well and had a unique flavour.

READ THESE COMMENTS BY AUTHOR GEORGE ORWELL ON THE SUBJECT OF TEA:

If you look up 'tea' in the first cookery book that comes to hand you will probably find that it is unmentioned; or at most you will find a few lines of sketchy instructions which give no ruling on several of the most important points. This is curious, not only because tea is one of the mainstays of civilization in this country, as well as in Eire, Australia and New Zealand, but because the best manner of making it is the subject of violent disputes. When I look through my own recipe for the perfect cup of tea, I find no fewer than eleven outstanding points. On perhaps two of them there would be pretty general agreement, but at least four others are acutely controversial. Here are my own eleven rules, every one of which I regard as golden...

'A Nice Cup of Tea' by George Orwell *Evening Standard*, 12 January 1946. As quoted in *soc.culture.british* 5/28/94

For Full extract click onto: <http://www.ansto.gov.au/natfac/ANBF/tea.html>

DISCUSSION

- What do the Chinese tale and George Orwell's comments on tea, reveal about the process of drinking tea?

- At the beginning of the film, there is a woman performing a tea ceremony. Why would people savour the experience of tea making?

At the start of the film, this text appears:

One summer day, while visiting a distant part of his realm, Shen Nung, an early Chinese emperor, stopped to rest under a bush. Some tea leaves accidentally blew into the pot of boiling water that he was drinking. Seduced by the subtle aroma, the emperor ordered that this crop be grown on its lands.

This according to Chinese tale was how tea was first discovered in 2737 BC:

- How was the emperor viewed by the Chinese and why would this story be important?
- Consider the significance of tea in Chinese society. What would have been their reaction to the introduction of intensive cultivation and production of tea in India?
- Describe tea drinking in Australia and its role in socialising.

THE CLASSIC OF TEA

The Classic of Tea, written by Lu Yu in the 8th century was the world's first comprehensive treatise on tea. Lu Yu was raised in the rank of 'God of Tea'. His work made an essential contribution to the development of the symbolism of tea. It describes nine ways for the rite of tea.

They are:

1. Prepare
2. Discern
3. Instruments
4. Fire
5. Water
6. Roast
7. Crush
8. Boil
9. Drink

READ THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEA MAKING:

POSSIBLE CAPTIONS TOP TO BOTTOM: : BLABLA BLA BLA LABLA BLA BLA LABLA BLA BLA LABLA BLA BLALABLA BLA BLA-LABLA BLA BLA LABLA

1. Get a tea bag out of a box of generic teabags.
2. Put it in a big chipped mug.
3. Add cold water from the tap.
4. Place it in a Microwave for one minute.
5. Add a dollop of UHT milk.
6. Add two saccharine tablets.
7. Stir vigorously.
8. Dunk a chocolate *Tim Tam* into it.
9. Drink.

- Compare these two differing attitudes towards tea.
- What is the fundamental difference between them?

MOVEMENT FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO TASTE

SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT

The following is an extract from the Slow Food Movement web site:

The international movement was founded in Paris in 1989. The definition contained in its Manifesto conveys a very clear message: a movement for the protection of the right to taste. If Slow Food has grown into a large-scale international movement, with over 60,000 members in all five continents (of whom about half in Italy), it is precisely because the concept of 'pleasure' is a complex one encompassing many meanings and involving many aspects of our existence.

- What is this movement about?
- What are the parallels of the Chinese treatment of tea and the ideals of the slow food movement?
- Click onto the following web site of the slow food movement. Make a list of some of their activities. What would be the benefits of their philosophy? <http://www.slowfood.com>
- In what ways has the introduction of fast food changed our attitudes towards food and eating?
- How important is it to maintain a connection to the way in which food is cultivated, produced and prepared?

THE MEDICINAL PROPERTIES OF TEA

In the film, the medicinal properties of tea are widely discussed. Sung Lo tea

is recorded in the books of herbs for its medicinal qualities for heart disease, high blood pressure and chilblains.

Read the following extract from the Nutrition Australia web site on the effects of tea on heart disease:

TEA AND HEART DISEASE

For several years it has been suspected that drinking tea might help protect against heart disease. One way in which tea could be protective is through the effects of 'antioxidants' – chemicals in tea that help protect blood cholesterol (among other blood components) from being oxidised. Oxidation of cholesterol turns it into a form that is strongly associated with increased risk of heart disease. This antioxidant effect of tea may also be helpful in reducing the risk of some cancers. There are other ways in which tea may be beneficial to health, too. For example, the same chemicals that appear to protect blood cholesterol also reduce the likelihood that blood will clot in the arteries of the heart (the immediate cause of most heart attacks).

For more information, go to: <http://www.nutritionaustralia.org>

DISCUSS

- What other foods are known for their medicinal qualities?
- Do you believe in alternative medicine?
- Are there any particular foods from your cultural background that are eaten for medicinal purposes? Have you tested the theory?

FOOD AND FESTIVALS

Research the reasons why these foods are eaten at certain celebrations and times of the year. Think of some other foods from different cultures and research why they are eaten.

- Easter eggs
- Marzipan eggs at weddings
- Hot cross buns
- Turkey at Christmas
- Turkish Apple tea
- Rice cakes at Chinese New Year ■

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