

For All the Tea in China - Reading Group Guide

1. “The greatest service that can be rendered to any country is to add a useful plant to its culture,” Thomas Jefferson said. Discuss how the movement of plant life changed the colonial British Empire.
2. What is the importance of tea in the book? What does tea reveal about the British and Chinese Empires? What does it reveal about the British and Chinese people?
3. Robert Fortune has been called the “Indiana Jones” of tea. What does he learn or gain by traveling in China? Does he give anything back to China?
4. Fortune continually runs into trouble created by his Chinese guides. How does this affect his perception of the Chinese people? Do you agree with him?
5. Was there any point during the book when you wanted to tell a character something? Words of advice, warning, or reassurance, for example? When?
6. What did you expect to happen when the tea seeds arrived in India? Were you surprised? Disappointed?
7. Tea is the most popular drink on earth, next to water. How did Robert Fortune’s trips change the Western world’s perception of tea?
8. The East India Company was one of the first multinational corporations. How is the company’s story echoed in today’s business news headlines?
9. Today, Chinese intellectual property theft is in the news, but the British Empire enacted the largest theft of trade secrets in history when it stole tea seeds, plants and recipes from Imperial China. Why didn’t this create a scandal in Fortune’s day? What has changed?

I enjoy speaking to book groups and would be eager to participate in yours, please ask! I can visit, or call in. Contact me at Sarah [at] sarahrose [dot] com