

LA COMPAGNIE DES TAXI-BROUSSE & ARTE PRESENT

RELEASE 2016 - HISTORY

# TEA WAR

## HOW CHINA'S TEA WAS STOLEN

90 AND 52 MINUTES

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MAIN BROADCASTER: ARTE FRANCE

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF RSI - ČESKA TELEVIZE - RADIO TELEVIZIJA SLOVENIJA - NC+ POLAND

Nowadays we associate tea with calm and well-being. But this incredibly popular and drink has a violent and turbulent history.

It's been a bedfellow of opium, a catalyst for several wars and was the trigger for the world's first case of industrial espionage. Its murky ascent mirrors the story of colonial expansion and the industrial revolution in the 19th century.

It was the lynchpin between two empires – one in decline, the other booming. Its central character – Robert Fortune – was the precursor to James Bond.

His incredible journey is history in the making. His weapon is a humble leaf. His life is a tangled web of mystery and subterfuge that sees a dynasty brought to its knees.

How could Robert Fortune travel through China unrecognised and unchallenged, while carrying thousands of tea plants?

How did he manage to outwit the Emperor's soldiers and spies and export not only their valuable tea, but also their expert horticulturalists? Why did his wife reduce all his notes to ashes, after his death?







## PRESENTATION

*In the 19th century, China, protectionist and mistrustful, held the monopoly on tea, which was much-prized and fashionable in the West. Meanwhile, the British Empire - through the East India Company - brokered a business system that was entirely to its own advantage. It exchanged lethal opium - produced in its Indian colonies - for Chinese tea. Inundated by the drug, China was fatally weakened and forced to open up to the British.*

*In 1839, the Middle Empire decided to make opium illegal. The Opium War was declared... Great Britain emerged as the winner, but the warning was heeded: it could no longer depend on Chinese tea. There was only one solution: it had to produce its own. The East India Company entrusted one man with finding the secrets of the precious beverage. His mission was to develop the first plantations in Britain's Indian colonies.*

*This latter-day James Bond was called Robert Fortune. Far from being a license-to-kill Don Juan, Fortune was a botanist. After overcoming innumerable ordeals in the heart of imperial China, he brought back the plants and techniques that gave rise to Darjeeling tea.*

*« The tea war » recounts the foundations of capitalism and globalisation, the development of monopolies, the migration of new labour forces and the consequences of the abolition of slavery. This film also explores China during its last imperial dynasty - the dying throes of a great empire weakened by internal strife, widespread drug abuse and international pressures.*

*Behind the swashbuckling story of a business success, this tale of industrial espionage presents an uncomfortable truth. Is the real story of Great Britain's theft of Chinese tea a shameful, unmentionable stain on the Empire's reputation? Is it the greatest business theft in the history of mankind?*



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