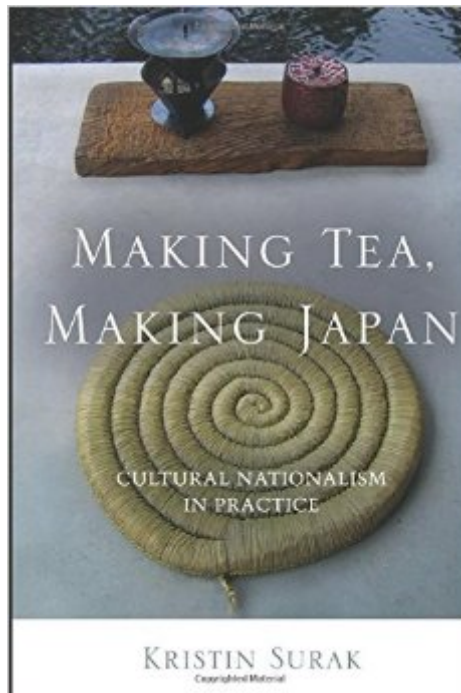


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Making Tea, Making Japan: Cultural Nationalism In Practice



Synopsis

The tea ceremony persists as one of the most evocative symbols of Japan. Originally a pastime of elite warriors in premodern society, it was later recast as an emblem of the modern Japanese state, only to be transformed again into its current incarnation, largely the hobby of middle-class housewives. How does the cultural practice of a few come to represent a nation as a whole? Although few non-Japanese scholars have peered behind the walls of a tea room, sociologist Kristin Surak came to know the inner workings of the tea world over the course of ten years of tea training. Here she offers the first comprehensive analysis of the practice that includes new material on its historical changes, a detailed excavation of its institutional organization, and a careful examination of what she terms "nation-work"; the labor that connects the national meanings of a cultural practice and the actual experience and enactment of it. She concludes by placing tea ceremony in comparative perspective, drawing on other expressions of nation-work, such as gymnastics and music, in Europe and Asia. Taking readers on a rare journey into the elusive world of tea ceremony, Surak offers an insightful account of the fundamental processes of modernity; the work of making nations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kristin Surak's *Making Tea, Making Japan* is one of the most transformative volumes I have read in some time, and deserves a reading beyond those who most obviously must engage it -- those who study Japanese society and those who are interested in nation formation. Surak's

analysis of the tea ceremony suggests something new about cultural power too, and therefore deserves an even broader audience. The tea ceremony has somehow survived radical transformations of Japanese national expression while at the same time ensuring a sense of continuity that phases of isolation, westernization, imperialism, postwar defeat/recovery, and democratic and peaceful internationalism would seem to deny. There is something about this tea ceremony that is remarkably resilient, on the one hand, and generative, on the other. It is resilient because it is reproduced over time. Yes, the experts and principal practitioners may shift from upper class men to housewives, and it may articulate very differently with various kinds of power, from militarists to commercial houses. It remains recognizably the same in practice over time, but it is more than resilient. It is generative. Tea ceremony practitioners are able to use this ceremony to express a kind of power that is not just about the manipulation of force or the distribution of resources. It expresses, in that Durkheimian sense, a kind of collective effervescence that is not only in the moment of ritual, but present in the anticipation of its performance, in the immaterial residues left on its artifacts, in the contemporary aura of its historical endurance. In a seminar at Brown University, Surak explained that resilience and generativity of practice in terms of the contradictions that the tea ceremony embodies.

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