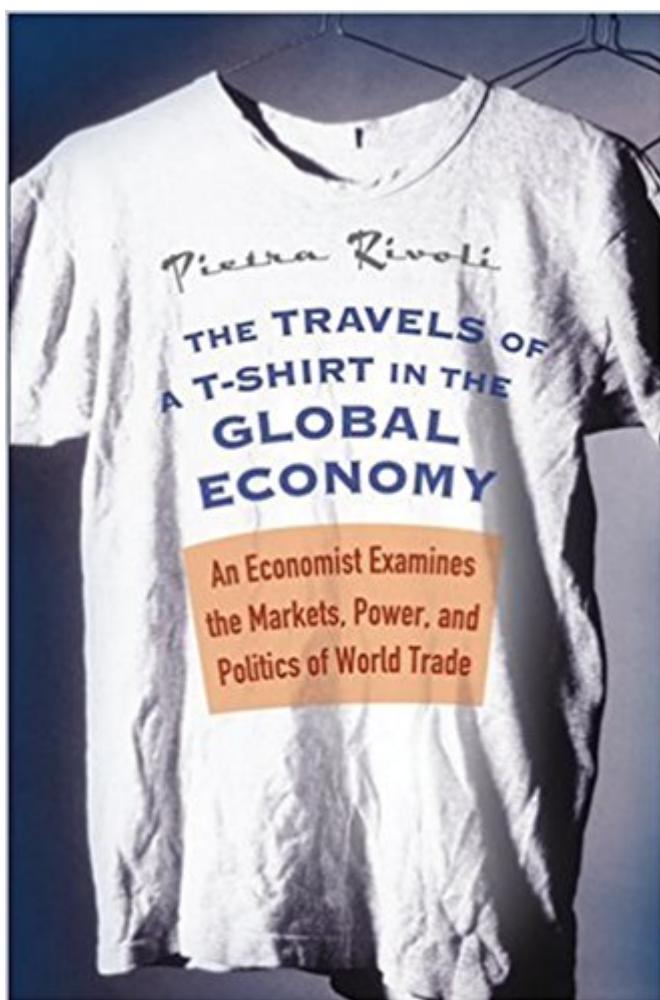


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# The Travels Of A T-Shirt In The Global Economy: An Economist Examines The Markets, Power, And Politics Of World Trade



## Synopsis

Praise for THE TRAVELS OF A T-SHIRT IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY "Engrossing . . . (Rivoli) goes wherever the T-shirt goes, and there are surprises around every corner . . . full of memorable characters and vivid scenes." â "Time "An engaging and illuminating saga. . . . Rivoli follows her T-shirt along its route, but that is like saying that Melville follows his whale. . . . Her nuanced and fair-minded approach is all the more powerful for eschewing the pretense of ideological absolutism, and her telescopic look through a single industry has all the makings of an economics classic." â "The New York Times "Rarely is a business book so well written that one would gladly stay up all night to finish it. Pietra Rivoli's The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy is just such a page-turner." â "CIO magazine "Succeeds admirably . . . T-shirts may not have changed the world, but their story is a useful account of how free trade and protectionism certainly have." â "Financial Times "[A] fascinating exploration of the history, economics, and politics of world trade . . . The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy is a thought-provoking yarn that exhibits the ugly, the bad, and the good of globalization, and points to the unintended positive consequences of the clash between proponents and opponents of free trade." â "Star-Telegram (Fort Worth) "Part travelogue, part history, and part economics, The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy is ALL storytelling, and in the grand style. A must-read." â "Peter J. Dougherty, Senior Economics Editor, Princeton University Press author of Who's Afraid of Adam Smith? "A readable and evenhanded treatment of the complexities of free trade . . . As Rivoli repeatedly makes clear, there is absolutely nothing free about free trade except the slogan." â "San Francisco Chronicle

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

During a 1999 protest of the World Trade Organization, Rivoli, an economics professor at Georgetown, looked on as an activist seized the microphone and demanded, "Who made your T-shirt?" Rivoli determined to find out. She interviewed cotton farmers in Texas, factory workers in China, labor champions in the American South and used-clothing vendors in Tanzania. Problems, Rivoli concludes, arise not with the market, but with the suppression of the market. Subsidized farmers, and manufacturers and importers with tax breaks, she argues, succeed because they avoid the risks and competition of unprotected global trade, which in turn forces poorer countries to lower their prices to below subsistence levels in order to compete. Rivoli seems surprised by her own conclusions, and while some chapters lapse into academic prose and tedious descriptions of bureaucratic maneuvering, her writing is at its best when it considers the social dimensions of a global economy, as in chapters on the social networks of African used-clothing entrepreneurs.

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"It brings history and economics in an enjoyable way..." (Financial Times, 21st September 2005)  
"a fine account of how the countervailing forces of the market and protectionism conflict in combining in a single product" (Financial Times, 30 July 2005) "Rarely is a business book so well written that one would gladly stay up all night to finish it..." (CIO: Chief Information Officer Magazine, June 15, 2005) "Globalization is a hot-button topic that generates strong feelings along with images of boarded-up, independent businesses in America and exploitative sweatshops overseas. But what exactly is it? In *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*, Georgetown University business professor Pietra Rivoli chronicles the round-the-world odyssey of a T-shirt, from Texas cotton-growers to an African used-clothing bazaar, to reveal how the planetary economy really works. Along the way, we see how entrepreneurial U.S. farmers team with government-sponsored researchers--and take advantage of subsidies and trade barriers--to dominate world cotton production. Migrant workers from Chinese family farms tell why they regard low-wage jobs in Shanghai sewing factories as golden opportunities. And only in that African used-clothing bazaar do we encounter a truly free market where entrepreneurs--perhaps including some future tycoons of the 21st century--utterly rely on pure business skills and instinct. Whether you feel hurt or helped by globalization, you'll certainly understand it better after reading this fascinating account." (Entrepreneur Magazine, May 2005) "...full of memorable characters and vivid scenes..." [and that] "Rivoli excels at making connections." (Time Magazine, March 28, 2005)  
"T-shirts may not have changed the world; but this story is a useful account of how free trade and

protection certainly have." (Financial Times) "The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy is an excellent piece of work - a thorough, lucid and (best of all) honest examination of how politics and economics intertwine in the real world." (The Philadelphia Inquirer) "Engrossing." (Rivoli) goes wherever the t-shirt goes and there are surprises around every corner full of memorable characters and vivid scenes. (TIME) "Her nuanced and fair-minded approach is all the more powerful for eschewing the pretense of ideological absolutism, and her telescopic look through a single industry has all the makings of an economics classic." (New York Times) "Succeeds admirably." T-shirts may not have changed the world, but this story is a useful account of how free trade and protectionism certainly have. (Financial Times) "a fascinating exploration of the history, economics and politics of world trade." The Travels of a T-Shirt is a thought-provoking yarn that exhibits the ugly, the bad and the good of globalization, and points to the unintended positive consequences of the clash between the proponents and opponents of free trade. (Dallas-Fort Worth Star-Telegram) "a readable and evenhanded treatment of the complexities of world trade." As Rivoli repeatedly makes clear, there is absolutely nothing free about free trade except the slogan. (San Francisco Chronicle)

This book was amazing! I had to buy this for an international economics class, and as such, was unsure of what it would be like. I mean, it was a book about t-shirts, what could possibly be so interesting, right? Well, as it turns out, a lot of things. You have no idea what kinds of crazy regulations, politics, social stigmas and drama can go into making a t-shirt. I think the most interesting thing was learning about the cotton industry in Texas and how the politics and innovation behind it makes Texas the number one cotton producer in the world. Considering the climate in the region where it's grown, it would seem highly unlikely for that to be true. But that's where the science and innovation comes through. It's so fascinating. Being able to see just how complex making a shirt in the international market can be; from growing cotton to when you purchase and even what happens after you donate, shows (on a small scale), just how complicated the international economy is. This book is a wonderful read and recommend it for anyone who has any interest in the global economy.

The strongest tool in the novel, is choosing a T-shirt to drive the narrative which made it possible to learn about Texas Cotton, the Chinese hukou system, and African clothing markets all at once; the book flows entertainingly well while retaining pertinent facts and points. One area of improvement could have been a clearer stance on whether globalization is better or worse for the general

well-being of the world. However, the thorough nature of exploring all the counter arguments and points makes for a compelling economic and political profile of a commodity that few people will ever think about. Keeping it as neutral as possible helps readers feel like learners and not indoctrinates. In the end though, I think it is pretty clear from the conclusion and epilogue that Pietra Rivoli seems to believe growing interdependence with more open communication would be a strength, not a weakness. In the conclusion as she meditates on her past experience as a global labor activist, she ponders Libanius' words over trade as a source of bonding and sharing; although you can tell she may have her reservations about some injustices in the world due to globalization, she also sees the potential. Ultimately, I think she believes that a rising tide does not have to sink any boats as long as the process of globalization is handled ethically and gradually, with more consumer appreciation and education. The strongest tool in the novel, is choosing a T-shirt to drive the narrative which made it possible to learn about Texas Cotton, the Chinese hukou system, and African clothing markets all at once; the book flows entertainingly well while retaining pertinent facts and points. One area of improvement could have been a clearer stance on whether globalization is better or worse for the general well-being of the world. However, the thorough nature of exploring all the counter arguments and points makes for a compelling economic and political profile of a commodity that few people will ever think about. Keeping it as neutral as possible helps readers feel like learners and not indoctrinates. In the end though, I think it is pretty clear from the conclusion and epilogue that Pietra Rivoli seems to believe growing interdependence with more open communication would be a strength, not a weakness. In the conclusion as she meditates on her past experience as a global labor activist, she ponders Libanius' words over trade as a source of bonding and sharing; although you can tell she may have her reservations about some injustices in the world due to globalization, she also sees the potential. Ultimately, I think she believes that a rising tide does not have to sink any boats as long as the process of globalization is handled ethically and gradually, with more consumer appreciation and education.

Having read, studied, and written on many sides of the trade debates, I've never before encountered such a non-ideological, open-minded account of the human effects of today's international trade regime. As a student of economics, I appreciated her focus on the important technical details of land tenure, payment, collective organization, and the other systems that make all the difference in how markets function--or don't. My only complaint was that, from an academic standpoint, Rivoli's book occasionally lacked diverse sources or relied overly much on a single author (Landes' wonderful book, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, comes to mind) to the

exclusion of other sources. However, given her extensive travel and interviews, it's hard to fault Rivoli with shoddy research and, overall, I'd say this book fills the notable gap between neoliberal absolutists and those who overlook the prosperity that free markets can provide. Not to mention it's a fantastic read. I'd recommend this book to a wide range of readers, from those who are curious about what this whole "globalization" thing is really all about, to those studying international affairs and economics who want a methodical, and generally rigorous, explanation of the mechanisms and effects behind world trade today.

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