

دورك

In this module we've seen just how central a role tea plays in modern Arab cultures. But, as you might also recall from the article about tea in Morocco, it has not always been a part of the culture. Where did tea come from? How did it get to the Arab world?

To understand this history, we actually need to travel far from the Arab world – all the way across the ocean to China. **Let's browse the following article** and dive deeper into the question of where tea came from:

TEA IF BY SEA, CHA IF BY LAND: WHY THE WORLD ONLY HAS TWO WORDS FOR TEA



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[Source link](#)

With a few minor exceptions, there are really only two ways to say “tea” in the world. One is like the English term—*té* in Spanish and *tee* in Afrikaans are two examples. The other is some variation of *cha*, like *chay* in Hindi.

Both versions come from China. How they spread around the world offers a clear picture of how globalization worked before “globalization” was a term anybody used. The words that sound like “cha” spread across land, along the Silk Road. The “tea”-like phrasings spread over water, by Dutch traders bringing the novel leaves back to Europe.

The term *cha* (茶) is “Sinitic,” meaning it is common to many varieties of Chinese. It began in China and made its way through central Asia, eventually becoming “chay” (چای) in Persian. That is no doubt due to the trade routes of the Silk Road, along which, according to a recent discovery, tea was traded over 2,000 years ago. This form spread beyond Persia, becoming *chay* in Urdu, *shay* in Arabic, and *chay* in Russian, among others. It even made its way to sub-Saharan Africa, where it became *chai* in Swahili. The Japanese and Korean terms for tea are also based on the Chinese *cha*, though those languages likely adopted the word even before its westward spread into Persian.



But that doesn't account for "tea." The Chinese character for tea, 茶, is pronounced differently by different varieties of Chinese, though it is written the same in them all. In today's Mandarin, it is *chá*. But in the Min Nan variety of Chinese, spoken in the coastal province of Fujian, the character is pronounced *te*. The key word here is "coastal." The *te* form used in coastal-Chinese languages spread to Europe via the Dutch, who became the primary traders of tea between Europe and Asia in the 17th century, as explained in the World Atlas of Language Structures. The main Dutch ports in east Asia were in Fujian and Taiwan, both places where people used the *te* pronunciation. The Dutch East India Company's expansive tea importation into Europe gave us the French *thé*, the German *Tee*, and the English *tea*.

Yet the Dutch were not the first to Asia. That

honor belongs to the Portuguese, who are responsible for the island of Taiwan's colonial European name, Formosa. And the Portuguese traded not through Fujian but Macao, where *chá* is used. That's why, on the map above, Portugal is a pink dot in a sea of blue. A few languages have their own way of talking about tea. These languages are generally in places where tea grows naturally, which led locals to develop their own way to refer to it. In Burmese, for example, tea leaves are *lakphak*.

The map demonstrates two different eras of globalization in action: the millenia-old overland spread of goods and ideas westward from ancient China, and the 400-year-old influence of Asian culture on the seafaring Europeans of the age of exploration. Also, you just learned a new word in nearly every language on the planet.

Now you know how tea got to the Arab world. But is it the only trade good that made its way across the world and through various countries? Not at all!

It's now your turn to do some research. **Pick one or more of the following common goods** and use the Internet to delve into its history and etymology in the same way. Be sure to look up the names in both English and Arabic. What do you find?

sugar	coffee	potatoes
cotton	tomatoes	tangerines