

# Summary of Trade Goods from East and West carried by Land and Sea *Commodities from the East*

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## From India

- Household slaves
- Pets and arena animals
- Exotic furs
- Cashmere wool
- Raw and finished cotton (cotton plants have been cultivated in India for 4,000 years)
- Spinach (mainly from Nepal)
- Sandalwood and other exotic woods
- Palm-oil
- Cane-sugar
- Perfumes and aromatics
- Gems (rubies, sapphires and emeralds; diamonds, surprisingly, were not prized by the Chinese)

## From China

- Silk
- Skins
- Iron
- Mirrors
- Weapons
- Porcelain (first manufactured around the 8<sup>th</sup> century)
- Lacquerware
- Jade (from Khotan)
- Rhubarb
- Tea
- Paper (traditionally thought to have been invented by the court eunuch Cai Lun in 105 CE)
- Gunpowder (invented in China around the 7<sup>th</sup> century and first used by them for military purposes around the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It reached Europe during the fourteenth century.)
- Medicines – Ephedra (Chinese: Mahuang – used for millennia in China to treat respiratory diseases. Ephedrine was originally made from ephedra.)
- Epsom salts

- Elixirs for immortality (which often shortened, rather than extended, life)
- Ginseng (the best was from Korea)
- Snake bile (collected in Southern China and Indochina; used for whooping cough, rheumatic pain, high fever, infantile convulsion, hemiplegia, hemorrhoids, gum bleeding, and skin infections)
- Seaweed

### From various parts of Asia

- Precious and semi-precious stones (including lapis lazuli mined in Afghanistan, jadeite from Burma, rock crystal, carnelians and other quartzes, rubies from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia and sapphires from India, Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka)
- Jewelry, ivory, tortoiseshell, rhinoceros horn, seashells and pearls
- Ornamental woods, gum resins and aromatics (camphor from China, Japan, Borneo and Indochina was highly coveted)
- Silver and gold (especially from Southern China, Tibet and Indochina, but also imported from many other parts of the world)
- Spices (especially pepper, ginger, cardamom, turmeric, nutmeg and cloves and cinnamon)
- Cochineal and indigo used for dyeing fabrics and cosmetics
- Minerals (sulphur and realgar)
- Ceramics
- Horses (Central Asian breeds were especially prized in China) and camels
- Flowers (including peonies, roses, camellias, chrysanthemums and tulips (tulips from Central Asia and Turkey first arrived in Europe in the 1550s and were so coveted in seventeenth-century Holland that a single bulb could sell for 5,000 guilders, more than the price of a house!))
- Alfalfa and millet for animal feed
- Human beings: acrobats, Central Asian jugglers and musicians, Central Asian grooms, dwarves, household slaves, South Sea Island pearl divers, Southeast Asian dancers, foreign guards

### From Persia and the countries of the Middle East

- Incense (from southern Arabia)
- Dates, pistachios, peaches, walnuts
- Tyrian purple and indigo for dyeing
- Frankincense and myrrh
- Storax (an aromatic resin)
- Muslin cloth
- Wines
- Glassware
- Olive oil
- Silver vessels (especially the work of the Sasanian craftsmen of Persia)

### Commodities from the West

- Merchants on the land routes and Roman ships
- Wool and linen textiles
- Carpets
- Baltic amber

- Mediterranean coral
- Asbestos
- Bronze vessels
- Lamps
- Glass vessels and glass beads
- Wines
- Papyrus
- Huge quantities of coins
- Ambergris (from the sperm whale, used in the manufacture of perfume and collected along the African coast)
- Entertainers
- Exotic animals
- Opium (opium poppies probably originated in the eastern Mediterranean and reached China in about the 7<sup>th</sup> century)

## Religions

- Spread Along the Trade Routes in All Directions
- Buddhism (arose in India and spread in both directions as far east as Japan and as far west as modern day Turkmenistan)
- Islam (founded in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it spread in all directions and now attracts a worldwide following of more than one billion devotees)
- Christianity (arose in the Eastern Mediterranean and spread throughout the Roman world. Nestorian Christianity spread eastwards after the expulsion of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, during the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It reached China by 635)
- Manichaeism (developed in the Middle East during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and reached China by the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century)
- Zoroastrianism (the state religion of Persia until the arrival of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it had spread eastwards to China and India by the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century)

## Technology and Innovations

- Acquired by China from the lands to the west
- Harnesses, saddles and stirrups (from the steppe nomads)
- Construction-methods for bridges and mountain roads
- Knowledge of medicinal plants and poisons
- Cultivation of cotton
- Seafaring techniques

## Acquired by the West from Asia

- Chinese inventions
- Medical techniques (especially from Arab scholars such as Ibn Sina)
- Science and mathematics (algebra, astronomy, and the Arab numerals that we use in the West today; the zero came from India)
- The use of passports (a Mongol innovation)
- Military techniques and strategies
- Architectural styles and devices (the Persian invention of the squinch allowed the addition of a dome and led to the construction of many of the world's great buildings)