

# Japanese Civilization (Part 20)

## The West under the Influence of India, c.1680-c.1780

By Kawakatsu Heita

**HOW** did Europeans come upon Indian cotton textiles? Vasco da Gama, on arrival at Calicut in 1498, proclaimed that he had come in search of Christians and spices.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly spices and pepper, which were daily necessities as condiments and preservatives in Medieval Europe, were of primary importance to the West-East trade.<sup>2</sup>

By the time Europeans arrived in the East Indies, Indian cotton textiles had been well established as the principal items to barter with spices in the Malay Archipelago. The trade was three-cornered. Ships, with mostly Arabs on board, left the Red Sea and Persian Gulf with bullion to exchange for textiles in India. The textiles were then carried by the same ships to Malay and bartered there for spices. Returning directly to the Middle East laden with spices, traders bartered spices for bullion.

The Portuguese, who arrived at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, found this barter trade profitable, and succeeded in usurping it in the following century,

diverting its entrepots from the Middle East to Western Europe. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was once again taken over by the English and the Dutch. But the essential triangular trade style remained the same all the time.<sup>3</sup>

It was therefore difficult for merchants of any nations to obtain spices without Indian textiles. The Dutch established factories in India, “first of all due to the need for Indian textiles,” which were “the only marketable commodities in the exchange with the population of spice islands.”<sup>4</sup>

Around the time England founded the East India Company, there existed no strong incentive to buy Indian textiles. Their primary objective was to sell woolen textiles in Asia. However, their attempts in the Spice Islands, India, and in Far Eastern countries, especially China and Japan, where cold winter climates were thought to favor the woolen cloth, proved to be unsuccessful.<sup>5</sup>

The second objective was to compete with Portugal and Holland for spices and pepper from the Malay

Archipelago. As there was little demand for exchanging European commodities for Indian textiles, the European used bullion as their exports.<sup>6</sup> (See Table 1)

In order to acquire spices and drugs, it was necessary to amass cotton goods in the producing markets, because spice producers preferred them; and, in order to obtain sufficient cotton goods, it was necessary to lay down gold or silver in India.<sup>7</sup> After the Portuguese retreated from the endless strife with the Dutch and the English, the trade finally ended in a Dutch victory.

The English setback began after the Amboyna Massacre in 1623, and ended with the English being driven from Bantam in 1682, losing their last foothold in Indonesia. Being compelled to retreat from Malay to the Indian subcontinent, the English East India Company was attracted by the possibility of selling Indian textiles at home. The Directors initiated the new policy, on May 27, 1668, saying: “Encourage the natives and invite them to come thither. We would also have you to put the natives upon the making of such calicoes as they are capable of, and to produce the bringing of it out of the country, or the conveying of it to them by sea... the making of calicoes is that in which people of India are most apt, and a commodity which is most vendible in Europe.”

Imports to England had chiefly consisted of indigo, drugs, spices, saltpeter, calicoes, raw cotton, raw silk, diamonds and other precious stones up until then.<sup>8</sup> Now, the English East India Company’s main interest was shifted from the import of raw materials to manufactured goods in India. (see Table 2) The growing volume of Indian cotton imports brought a revolutionary change in textile fashions in England which had never faced any serious challenge to the supremacy of wool.

The following reasons contributed to the success of Indian textiles:

1) The East India Company devised many attempts to the exploit develop-

Table 1 English Exports to Asia: 1660-1760

Year	A Total	B Treasure	( $\frac{B}{A}$ )
1660	68,388	51,329	75.1%
1670	273,177	189,704	69.4%
1680	461,206	394,464	85.5%
1690	10,239	-	-
1700	579,198	482,219	83.3%
1710	508,907	373,351	73.4%
1720	697,009	571,195	81.9%
1730	756,489	631,066	83.4%
1740	575,332	440,319	76.5%
1750	1,292,589	1,012,921	78.4%
1760	515,144	143,400	27.8%

Source: K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978), Table C.1 & O.4 in Appendix 5, pp.507 & 512

ment in fashions for cotton textiles in England.

The directors sent out actual sample-patterns as models for Indian cotton-printers to copy or adapt according to European needs, or sent English craftsmen to teach these patterns directly to local people.<sup>9</sup>

2) The initial impact of cotton on fashion is partly attributable to the fact that the company exploited its connection with the classes that dictated fashion in Restoration society.

3) The success of cotton on the fashion scene is also attributable to the contemporary fashion for “undress,” the expression used for light-weight clothes.<sup>10</sup> The fashion was already popular in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a period of trade expansion. These were so-called “new draperies,” or “fabrics made of combed, long-stapled wool and characterized by their light weight and wide range of patterns.”<sup>11</sup> Cotton was more suited to this type of fashion, and there was a trend for light-weight fabrics. One declared that these were “as light as women and as slight as cobwebs.”<sup>12</sup>

4) The brilliance and fastness of Indian dye-colors produced in combination with mordant appealed to the English.<sup>13</sup>

5) Indian cotton textiles were cheaper than European textiles.<sup>14</sup>

6) Cotton fabrics had potentially wide appeal to consumers through their special utilitarian characteristics such as washability and being easy to dye.

Thus by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Indian cotton manufacture had attained such great popularity that a scholar even called it “unrivalled.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it was characterized as “the Indian Craze.”<sup>16</sup> A pamphlet written in 1699 remarked:<sup>17</sup>

“It was scarce thought about 20 years since that we should ever see Calicoes, the ornaments of our greatest Gallants (for such they are whether we call them Muslins, Shades or any thing else) when they were then rarely used... but now few think themselves well dressed till they are made up in Calicoes, both



Traders of the East India Company and an English Frigate

Table 2 English Imports from Asia: 1664-1760 (£ Thousand)

Period Annual average per decade	A Total	B Textiles	( $\frac{B}{A}$ ) %
1664-1670*	102	64	63
1671-1680	283	194	69
1681-1690	380	282	74
1691-1700	173	119	69
1701-1710	271	167	62
1711-1720	478	349	73
1721-1730	633	415	66
1731-1740	656	429	65
1741-1750	778	522	67
1751-1760	863	419	49

Source: K.N. Chaudhuri, op. cit., Table C.2 & O.24 in Appendix 5, pp.510 & 547

Note : \* Annual average of seven years

men and women, Calico Shirts, Neckcloths, Cuffs, Pocket-handkerchiefs for the former, Head-dresses, Night-roys, Hoods, Sleeves, Aprons, Gowns, Petticoats and what not, for the latter, besides Indian-Stockings for both sexes; and indeed it will be a hard matter to put them out of this Fancy; nothing but an act of Parliament or humour of the Court can do it...”

In 1708, Daniel Defoe wrote “almost

everything that used to be wool or silk, relating either to the dress of the women or the furniture of our houses, was supplied by Indian trade.”<sup>18</sup> A recent work on the emergence of European cotton textile printing by S. D. Chapman and S. Chassagne explains that the introduction of light, gaily-patterned Indian cottons created “a sensation that lasted a century, a consumer craze that overrode the opposition of

Photo: Japan Cotton Promotion Institute



Indian women in a cotton field (late 20<sup>th</sup> century)

governments, vested interests (the existing wool and silk industries) and, above all, the centuries-old vernacular traditions in dress.<sup>19</sup>

England was not only the country in Europe where Indian textiles were used. They were increasingly used all over the continent. French weavers suffered losses as Indian textiles “spread like wild fire.”<sup>20</sup> The increasing imports of Indian textiles provoked opposition from the established textile producers.<sup>21</sup> The Indian cottons were denounced in England as “tawdry, pie-spotted, flabby, ragged, low price, made by a parcel of heathens and pagans that worship the Devil and work for one-half a day.”<sup>22</sup> The sharp conflict of interest between European manufacturers of silk and wool and the East India Company had reached a crisis by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

England introduced the Act of

Parliament in 1700 which prohibited the import of printed calicoes. Muslins and plain calicoes were exempt; cotton yarn was also free to be imported for use in fustian. The Act of 1720 prohibited domestic consumption of any pure cotton fabric, including calicoes, but the Act did not include Indian textiles intended for re-export and muslin. Although smuggling never ceased to exist, the Act had significant effects, both internally and externally, on the development of the English cotton industry.

At home, English textile interests were encouraged to manufacture similar sorts of goods to Indian calicoes. One of the earliest results of imitations was

the development of color printing on Indian calicoes. Printing in England could match the good quality for Indian chintz by 1744, although the quality was limited only to the finest work.<sup>23</sup>

In overseas trade, the prohibition acts forced the English East India Company to engage in the re-export business of Indian textiles. There can be little doubt that it was Europe’s greatest importer of Oriental textiles. The Dutch East India Company ranked second. (See Table 3 & 4)

Table 3 Imports of Oriental Textiles by the English East India Company (10-year Totals): 1664-1760

Period	Pieces (£ Thousand)
1664-1670*	1,988
1671-1680	5,781
1681-1690	7,068
1691-1700	2,958
1701-1710	2,775
1711-1720	5,521
1721-1730	7,827
1731-1740	7,652
1741-1750	7,718
1751-1760	5,275

Source: K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760*, op. cit., pp.547-8

Note : \*Seven-year total

Table 4 The Dutch Sales of Asiatic Cotton Textiles at Kamer Amsterdam (10-year Totals): 1650-1729

Period	Pieces (£ Thousand)
1650-59	449
1660-69	439
1670-79	686
1680-89	1,738
1690-99	1,388
1700-09	1,749
1710-19	2,048
1720-29	2,449

Source: K. Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620-1740*, op. cit., p.143

References

1. J. H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1966), p.19.
2. These tropical ‘drugs’ seem to have been believed by the Medieval Europeans to be efficacious for treating diseases.
3. The fact that the triangular structure of the intra-Asiatic trade remained the same until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is a well accepted fact.
4. K. Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620-1740*, (Copenhagen, 1958), p.132.
5. John Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century, (1) Western India,” *Journal of Indian Textile History*, No.1, (1955), pp.6-8; F. J. Fisher, “London’s Export Trade in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *The Growth of English Overseas Trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. W. E. Minchinton, (London, 1969), p.72.
6. The Dutch East India Company also regularly paid for 80 to 90% of their purchases with gold and silver coins. Jan de Vries, *Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis*, (Cambridge, 1976), p.135.
7. W. H. Moreland, op.cit., p.225.
8. Quoted in S. A. Khan, op.cit., p.153 & pp.7 & 154.
9. J. Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century (4) Foreign Influences,” *Journal of Indian Textile History*, No.4, (1959), pp.57-8. These methods, however, did not work well. (P. J. Thomas, op.cit., pp.40-41.)
10. A. W. Douglas, “Cotton Textiles in England: the East India Company’s Attempt to Exploit Developments in Fashion 1660-1721,” *Journal of British Studies*, vol.VIII (1969), pp.29-30 & p.33
11. F. J. Fisher, op.cit., p.68.
12. Quoted in P.J.Thomas, op.cit., p.36.

Table 5

(i) Re-exports of Calicoes from England 1699-1774 (£ Thousand)

	Northwest Europe	Northern Europe	Southern Europe	British Islands	America	Total
1699-1701	239	2	36	18	45	340
1722-1724	419	–	14	6	45	484
1752-1754	434	4	24	5	32	499
1772-1774	478	7	116	15	85	701

(ii) Exports of English Cotton 1699-1774 (£ Thousand)

1699-1701	2	1	1	–	16	20
1722-1724	–	–	–	3	15	18
1752-1754	–	1	–	4	78	83
1772-1774	1	1	6	37	176	221

Source: Ralph Davis, "English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774" *Economic History Review* (2<sup>nd</sup> series), vol. XV (1962), pp. 302-3

A limited quantity of Indian textiles was also imported by La Grande Compagnie des Indes Orientales.<sup>24</sup> The English imports of Indian commodities were exported to present Germany in exchange for German linens at the expense of English woolen goods. Another good customer was Spain where the textiles were also re-shipped to the Spanish colonies.<sup>25</sup>

The English colonies of America and Africa were also important markets for such goods. Along with the growth of the great triangular trade between the African slavers, the planters of America and the West Indies and the merchants of Liverpool, Bristol and London, these markets greatly expanded. This was, of course, the symbol of the "Commercial Empire of the Atlantic." English-made cotton goods were also exported to these regions, but as the Governor of Cape Coast Castle reported only East Indian goods were saleable; "the box of cloths in imitation of those... are far from being approved of by the natives being so heavy." The Governor thought that if the cotton had been finer, they would have had more chance

of success.

Exports of English-made cottons to Africa formed less than 10% of the total English exports of cottons in 1751, and 20 years later, even though total cotton exports to Africa had risen three-fold, the share of English cottons was still a little more than 10%, while Indian goods took the lion's share of the markets.<sup>26</sup>

The quantities imported into the American colonies were also considerable. A great deal was re-shipped from England, but the great bulk used in the colonies was conveyed by smuggling. For example, in 1714, the New Englanders, who paid little respect to the monopoly right of the East India Company, imported prohibited goods to the value of £10,523. This was a fraction of the total imports. The clandestine trade is said to have continued throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> According to Ralph Davis, the official value of re-exports of calicoes which including pure cotton was £0.48 million between 1722 and 1724, rising to £0.7 million between 1722 and 1724, and further to £0.44 million between

1804 and 1806.<sup>28</sup>

As indicated in Table 5 (i) & (ii), which shows the overseas markets for English-made cottons and Indian calicoes during the period 1699-1744, Indian textiles constituted a greater share than English cottons. Taking into account the import of Indian textiles by other European nations, together with contraband trade, Indian textiles dominated the Atlantic trading world throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the task for entrepreneurs in England's nascent cotton industry was to make cotton goods of as good quality as those of their Indian competitors and take over markets hitherto supplied by Indian products. **J.S**

(Continued in Part 21)

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13. J. Irwin & M. Hall, (1971), op.cit., p.36.

14. Ralph Davis, "English Foreign Trade, 1660-1700," *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, vol.III, No.2 (1954), p.153.

15. S. A. Khan, op.cit., p.257.

16. V. Slomann, *Bizarre Designs in Silks - Trade and Tradition* (Copenhagen, 1953).

17. J. Carry, *Discourse Concerning the East India Trade*, (1699), p.4, quoted in V. Slomann, op.cit., p.104.

18. Defoe's Review, Jan. 3, 1713, quoted in R. Davis, "English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774," *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, vol.XV (1962), p.294.

19. S. D. Chapman & S. Chassagne, *European Textile Printers in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1981), pp.5 & 6.

20. P. J. Thomas, op.cit., p.30.

21. A. P. Wadsworth & Julia de L. Mann, op.cit., p.117.

22. Quoted in H. Heaton, *Economic History of Europe*, (revised ed., New York, 1948), p.316.

23. This imitation by printing began almost simultaneously in France, Holland and England. Switzerland and Germany also became leading printing countries. (J. de L. Mann & A. P. Wadsworth, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780*, op.cit., pp.131 & 141. See also S. D. Chapman & S. Chassagne, op.cit., p. 143

24. V. Slomann, op.cit., p.102.

25. S. A. Khan, op.cit., p.277-8.

26. Quoted in A. P. Wadsworth & J. de L. Mann, op.cit., pp.151-2, p.160.

27. P. J. Thomas, op.cit., pp.44-45.

28. R. Davis, (1962), op.cit., pp.302-3.