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Indian Cotton Textiles in West Africa

African Agency, Consumer Demand and the Making of the Global Economy, 1750–1850

Kazuo Kobayashi

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Spring 2019 Kazuo Kobayashi

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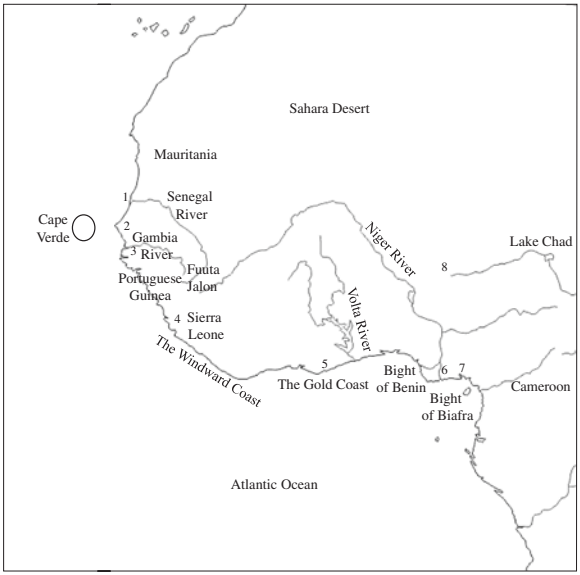


1... Saint Louis
2…Dakar
3… Bathurst
4… Free town
5… Cape Coast Castle
6… Bonny
7… Old Calabar
8… Kano

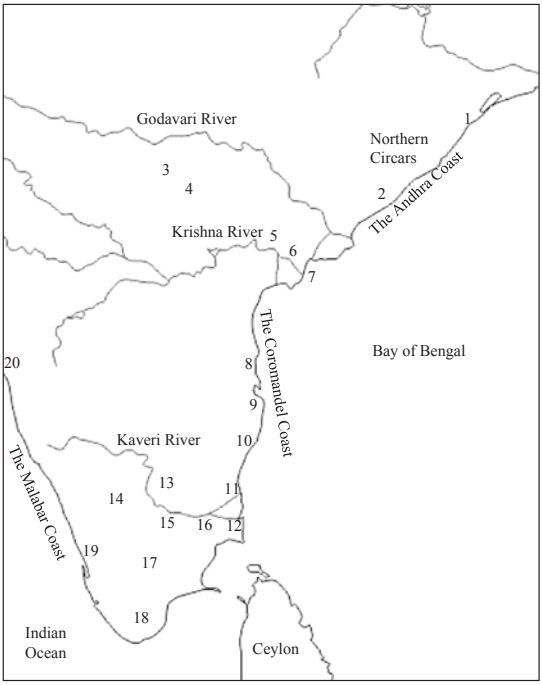
Map 1 West Africa. *Source* Author's original

I…Trarza emirate
II…Brakna emirate
III… Waalo
IV… Fuuta Toro
V… Kajoor
VI… Gajaaga

1… Saint Louis
2… Darmancour (escale)
3… Desert (escale)
4… Coq (escale)
5… Dagana
6… Bakel
7… Portendick
8… Arguin

Map 2 Senegal. *Source* Author's original

Map 3 South Asia. *Source* Author's original



1… Ganjam
2… Vizagapatnam
3… Palvancha
4… Hyderabad
5… Gollapudi
6… Nagulvancha
7… Masulipatnam
8… Nellore
9… Madras
10… Pondicherry
11… Cuddalore
12… Nagore
13… Salem
14… Coimbatore
15… Trichinopoly
16… Tanjore
17… Madurai
18… Tinnervelly
19… Cochin
20… Goa

Map 4 South India. *Source* Author's original

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The world witnessed a series of political and economic transformations from 1750 to 1850. Historians often describe this dynamic period as the age of revolutions that brought about the modern world.[1] Among them is the Industrial Revolution which, for economic historians, is a matter of utmost importance, as they assume that it was industrialisation that led the British economy to capital-intensive development and thereby triggered the divergence with other regions of the world. With the growing discipline of global history, economic historians have explored industrialisation in a wider context; namely, why this happened first in Britain, not China or India, in the mid-eighteenth century. They examine a variety of factors, including the use of a new energy source, namely coal, useful knowledge, the mechanisation of the cotton industry and the role of global trade.[2] In the following century, industrialisation diffused into continental Europe and North America. It is often argued that these industrialising 'core' regions exported manufactured goods into and imported primary products from the 'periphery' in the global economy, such as Africa, Asia and Latin America. In this view, the core–periphery relationship structured the modern global economy.[3]

In the meantime, from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, similar to other regions of the world, West Africa underwent a series of political movements in the interior savannah. On the coast, there was the transition from the Atlantic slave trade to 'legitimate' commerce, and thus the growth of cash-crop production that stimulated the West

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African economy. This transition overlapped with the increasing colonisation of West Africa. For historians of Africa, West Africa's contribution to the origin and development of Britain's Industrial Revolution has long been the focus of intense debate since Eric Williams's seminal work, *Capitalism and Slavery*, appeared in 1944.[4] In his work, Joseph Inikori highlights that the diaspora from the African continent such as the Atlantic slave trade played a crucial role in the plantation production of commodities in the Americas and in the formation of the Atlantic economy, which, he argues, provided large export markets for British manufactured goods, such as cotton textiles produced in Lancashire. He also argues that West African consumer tastes stimulated the development of modern manufacturing in Britain.[5] So far, historians of Africa have made great efforts to reveal African agency and to unpack the complexity and diversity of the history of the continent, but these valuable findings have yet to be fully incorporated into global history.[6]

This book addresses the significant role of West African consumers in the development of the global economy during this revolutionary period. In particular, it throws fresh light on the fact that their demand for Indian textiles not only determined a part of global trade but also influenced economic development in Western Europe and South Asia from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. It is also a challenge to the prevailing account of the core–periphery model by offering a view on how consumers in a region often regarded as 'periphery' shaped the trajectory of economic globalisation, or the process of integrating different areas into a larger regional or global economy.

The key perspective is a south-south economic history, namely the economic linkage that connected West Africa (south of the Sahara) with South Asia. Yet, it should be noted that, in the period concerned, European merchants mediated this connection through European imperial and commercial expansion. As will be shown in this book, not only does the south-south perspective explore African agency in global history, but it also shows that the performance of Indian weavers played as large a role as the African consumers in the development of a global economy. By doing so, we will illustrate that the south-south economic history played an essential part in some of the key phases in global history, namely the development of the slave-based Atlantic economy, the British Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the modern global economy. This history shows the dimension of entanglement with the early modern European commercial and imperial expansion.[7]

Rethinking African Agency in Global History

This section provides a historiography of (West) African agency to reveal several issues within the literature that are central to this book. Economic historians of Africa have long engaged in exploring the African past since Kenneth Onwuka Dike's 1956 book marked the beginning of the modern research of African economic history.[8] Ayodeji Olukoju points out that the field of research has developed mainly with two different approaches: the mainstream orthodox and the radical political economy. The former, represented by A. G. Hopkins, originated from historical scholarship in Western Europe, and the latter, for example, the Zaria School in Nigeria, was rooted in the dependency and radical Marxist approaches influenced by Walter Rodney and Frantz Fanon.[9]

When postcolonial African countries joined the international community from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, economic historians of Africa stressed the agency of African actors of the past. During this period these historians, A. G. Hopkins and Philip Curtin, in particular, posed challenges to the prevailing paradigm of dualism that had dominated modes of thought in the colonial period.[10] Economic history was expected to respond to the agenda of writing national, decolonised histories and scholarly interests mainly focused on African enterprise, trade and politics.[11] One of the pioneering achievements was that of J. Forbes Munro who published a textbook of modern Africa and the international economy.[12]

In the meanwhile, radical national and Black Power movements in the late 1960s, the burst of post-independence euphoria and an increasing influence of neo-colonialism led radical scholars to gain the upper hand in the field.[13] Thus, the 1970s to mid-1990s saw a growing influence of dependency theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney and Samir Amin.[14] For example, Boubacar Barry's monograph of Senegambia in the era of the Atlantic slave trade was first published in French in 1988 and later translated into English to appear as a series in African Studies by Cambridge University Press.[15] Also, Immanuel Wallerstein, a historical sociologist whose original research interest focused on Africa as well as India, developed world-system theory as a variation of dependency theory. Although he did pay attention to the Atlantic slave-based economy in the early modern period, world-system theory primarily focused on European agency in the rise and development of the capitalist world-economy. Hence, it obscured African agency

as well as the contribution of Indian cotton textiles in the emergence of the Atlantic economy.[16] As John Thornton critically noted, despite their sympathetic attitude towards Africa and other Third World countries, there was irony in the fact that dependency theory reinforced the view that Africa was a victim of Atlantic and wider history.[17] This kind of pessimism in the literature partly reflected the harsh world of reality, such as failure of economic growth, poverty, and political and social problems that undermined much of Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s, that marked a sharp contrast with the rapid growth of the East and Southeast Asian economy.[18]

Around the turn of the century, however, there were changes in the field. One of the stimuli was brought by new institutionalists in the 2000s. In the 'reversal of fortune' thesis formulated by Daron Acemoglu and his coauthors, they argued that settler mortality encouraged Europeans to introduce different types of institutions that exercised a lasting impact on economic growth, and as a consequence, sub-Saharan Africa, which was relatively rich as of 1500, had become relatively poor by 1995.[19] Similarly, Nathan Nunn elaborated this argument with reference to the Atlantic slave trade.[20] Their research provoked reactions from A. G. Hopkins and Gareth Austin. In particular, Austin argues that these authors deny African agency under colonial rule and alerts to their methodological problem of what he calls 'compression of history'.[21]

Another impulse is related to the recent economic growth in many countries in Africa from the late 1990s that changed *The Economist*'s view on Africa from 'the hopeless continent' (11 May 2000) to 'a hopeful continent' (2 March 2013). Exploration of the origin of the current economic growth in Africa attracted economic historians of Africa. It is also important to note that the surge in African economic history research, which is also referred to as the renaissance of African economic history, is underpinned by the 'Data Revolution'.[22]

The third impetus that rejuvenated African economic history was the rise of global (economic) history. In the past two decades, global history has developed as an approach to the past which comprises two key styles: comparisons and connections. Although both of these modes are not necessarily new, the reality of our time, partly represented by economic, cultural and intellectual globalisation, gave them a prominent place in the study of history, the reason being that: these styles would enrich our understanding about similarity, difference and diversity in the past; different scales of the local, national, regional and global were entangled

with each other; the processes towards interdependence and integration were on a global scale from past to present. Also, these modes should prevent us from falling into ethnocentric appreciations of what was achieved.[23]

Global approaches to the past came out of at least two contexts. First was a reaction against the increasing fragmentation of the study of history that was the byproduct of specialisation[24]; second was a reaction against Eurocentrism. The economic growth of China and the four Asian tigers in the late twentieth century encouraged economic historians to challenge the prevailing Eurocentric account of modern history.[25] As Gareth Austin emphasises, Eurocentrism is split into that of agency and of concept. The former is the assumption that it was mainly Europeans (or Westerners), rather than other people in the world, who had changed the world since the fifteenth century. The latter is the dominance of concepts in historical and social science research derived from perceptions of European or Western experience.[26] For Africanists, in order to tackle conceptual Eurocentrism, it would be important to follow the principle of 'reciprocal comparison' undertaken by Kenneth Pomeranz. In this principle, we avoid seeing one side of the comparison as the norm, and instead see deviations on both sides of the comparison.[27] While reciprocal comparisons might offer one solution to the problem of Eurocentrism, in order to tackle the Eurocentrism of agency, it is essential to position the African role in the formation of linkages and networks that connected Africa with the world. In particular, as Frederick Cooper stresses, historians should discuss the structures and limits of the connecting mechanisms, namely how Africa and other regions were linked and bounded.[28] However, as Toby Green alerts, existing works of global history tended to focus on 'links created to or from Africa rather than by Africans'. This was particularly the case with the study of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism.[29] Thus, this book pays attention to consumer agency in West Africa that contributed to creating trans-oceanic links that extended from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and shows that locally shaped consumer taste influenced patterns of global trade and production outside Africa during the age of revolutions.

Marina Bianchi proposed the term 'active consumer' to direct attention to the fact that consumer choice affects the production of commodities.[30] Historical research of consumption shows much about dynamic relationships between consumers in one region and their external

economies. Global trade transformed material culture, whereas consumer demand for particular commodities influenced trade and production elsewhere, and the demand was often rooted in social need and cultural value.[31] As C. A. Bayly argued, 'Trade, like artisan production, was also a "moment in culture"'. Trade goods partly reflect a specific cultural value and use value among consumers.[32] In the literature of precolonial Africa since the pioneering work by David Richardson, historians have illuminated the fact that regional differences in consumption patterns in West and West-Central Africa influenced Europe's economic activities in the continent in the era of the transatlantic slave trade.[33] In other words, the expansion of the trade to meet the American demand for labourers in the production of tobacco, rice, indigo and cotton in North America, and of sugar and coffee in the Caribbean and Brazil for European consumers, hinged on the demand for imported goods in Atlantic Africa. It has been shown that African entrepreneurs and consumers had a strong preference for Indian cotton textiles among the imports from Europe into the continent, and that British manufacturers had to gain a competitive edge for Lancashire cotton goods over rivals, namely production by South Asian weavers. It is important to note that such consumer-led connections with South Asian production was predicated on early modern European imperial and commercial expansion.[34] This fact encourages us to investigate how African consumer demand for Indian goods influenced European trade and procurement of the fabric in Asia.

The chapters that follow will explore what became of the aforementioned linkages in the post-abolition period, especially after 1807, when Britain, the country which conducted the largest slave trade in the northern Atlantic, withdrew from the trade. Because the existing works have focused mainly on the era of the transatlantic slave trade, they paid less attention to the West African contribution to economies outside the region after the decline of the Atlantic slave trade. This book seeks to fill this lacuna in the literature by reconstructing the consumer demand for Indian textiles and, to some extent, the new competitors from Lancashire during the first half of the nineteenth century.

It should be remembered that Africans imported and consumed not only textiles but also alcohol, tobacco, beads, furniture and many other goods through the slave trade and legitimate trade. As Mariana Candido underlines in her recent study of Benguela in West-Central Africa, 'the engagement in the slave trade and, later, in legitimate commerce allowed Africans to become global consumers.'[35] In this book, it is shown that

West African consumers were also fully integrated into the global economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and helped to shape business and production in other parts of the world through highly selective demand preferences.

Indian Cotton Textiles in the Pre-industrial World

Before we proceed into further detail, it is useful to note that Indian cotton textiles were in great demand in a number of world regions—including West Africa—before the British Industrial Revolution. By describing the journey of Indian textiles to West Africa as well as other regions of the world before 1800, this section highlights the fact that West African trade and consumption of Indian textiles in the early nineteenth century is an endless frontier of research.

South Asia, similar to West Africa and Meso-America, had a long-established history of cotton textile production. Cotton textiles manufactured in India had long been sought after in the Indian Ocean world well before Europeans entered the Asian seas to participate in maritime trade. In the Indian subcontinent, there were four core production regions of cotton textiles for foreign and overseas markets: Punjab, Gujarat, the Coromandel Coast and Bengal. Skilled weavers efficiently responded to changing consumer tastes in various local markets throughout the Indian and Atlantic Ocean worlds.[36] Indeed, as Giorgio Riello notes, their finishing processes such as printings, paintings and pencilling placed South Asia at the fore of production of cotton textiles in the pre-industrial world.[37]

Indian cotton textiles played a crucial role in connecting different regions in the early modern world, shaped patterns of global trade, transformed material culture and influenced textile production outside South Asia.[38] Textiles produced in the Punjab were transported by land to Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia, or by river to the ports of Sind.[39] Armenian merchants played a large role in the overland trade that transported manufactured items from Northern India, via Persia, to the Ottoman market. With their colours and designs, Indian cotton textiles initially attracted wealthy consumers in the Ottoman Empire and became a model for imitation among manufacturers.[40]

The Indian Ocean was a major theatre of maritime textile trade during the early modern period.[41] According to Kirti Chaudhuri, up to the eighteenth century, the Indian Ocean had been divided into three

sub-regions: the Chinese Seas, the eastern Indian Ocean and the western Indian Ocean.[42] In the intra-Asian trade that connected the eastern Indian Ocean with the Chinese Seas, cotton textiles were exported from India into Southeast Asia, especially the Malay Archipelago, in exchange for pepper, spices, birds of paradise, aromatic woods and resins, tin and gold; some of these goods were also carried to China and Japan. Before the sixteenth century, the textiles and spice trade between India and Southeast Asia had been mainly in the hands of Arabs who sailed from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. However, after the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived in India at the end of the fifteenth century, the Europeans replaced the Arabs as the major traders in the eastern Indian Ocean. With American silver, they purchased cotton and silk textiles in Asia. The interactions with Europe through the East India Companies caused a shift of the main markets for Bengal textiles from Upper India to Europe.[43] On the other hand, in the western Indian Ocean, Gujarati merchants played a leading role in the monsoon-based regional trade through their extensive commercial networks that connected western India with the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and East Africa. They exported cotton textiles produced in Gujarat to East Africa, from where they obtained ivory and gold. Their predominance in the dhow trade across the western Indian Ocean persisted throughout the early modern period.[44]

As for the early modern Europe-Asian trade, it was mainly the European East India Companies who imported a large number of Indian cotton textiles as well as spice, pepper, tea, coffee, silk, porcelain and cowries (as ballast) into their home countries.[45] North-western Europe offered a huge market for these luxury goods from Asia, which provided European consumers with new tastes and transformed material cultures from the elite to plebeians. The long-distance trade expanded the range of marketed items that created commercial incentives to drive households to reallocate their productive resources (such as the time of family members) to market-oriented activities. This choice was made in order to expand household earnings, subsequently used to purchase marketed goods.[46] Maxine Berg has elaborated how the desire for, and ability to consume, luxuries among British consumers was stimulated by a global trade in Asian products such as textiles and porcelain. This propelled the invention of a 'new luxury' and economic growth in early modern Britain.[47]

In the Atlantic world, North America also imported increasing number of textiles made both in Asia and in Europe since the colonial

period.[48] In terms of value, woollen textiles accounted for the highest proportion in the import from Britain until the American Revolution, while in terms of volume the pre-independence period witnessed the growth of the import of linens and fustians made in England, Scotland and Ireland. Moreover, North America offered an important market for re-exported Indian calicoes and muslins banned from the European mother countries such as England and France.[49] The newly independent United States established direct trade with Bengal, and thereafter American merchants dominated the trade in Indian textiles into the North American country. The trade continued to flourish until the late 1810s when the US Congress imposed a tariff to protect the domestic industry.[50]

The early modern period, the eighteenth century in particular, witnessed rapid development of the Atlantic economy. It was characterised by slave-based plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean Islands that produced commodities such as sugar and tobacco for European consumers. A constant supply of labour from the African continent, mostly from West and West-Central Africa, was thus key to maintaining production. In order to purchase African captives as well as tropical products along the Atlantic coast, the goods offered by Europeans had to reflect African preferences, because African merchants were known to reject goods that did not appeal to their local customers. Throughout the eighteenth century, textiles were predominant in the commodities carried by the European ships into Atlantic Africa.[51]

West and West-Central Africa, similar to North America, imported a variety of textiles from overseas. Figure 1.1 shows that among all the textiles Indian fabrics were the single largest textile among the imports from Britain from the second quarter of the century. Similar patterns can be found in the imports from France and the Netherlands during the eighteenth century.[52] The list made by Stanley Alpern names more than three dozen different types of Indian textiles imported into Atlantic Africa, including bafts (blue or white cotton textiles), calicoes, chellow (striped or checked textiles woven with coloured threads rather than dyed after weaving), chintz (cotton textiles block-printed with floral and other motifs, often in one colour), long cloth (cotton textiles distinguished by its length, around 37 yards, see Chapter 4) and nicanees (blue and white striped cotton textiles woven with dyed thread).[53] Indian textiles and cowries were shipped from Europe into these coastal regions and, as discussed in Chapter 3, these goods from the Indian Ocean served as

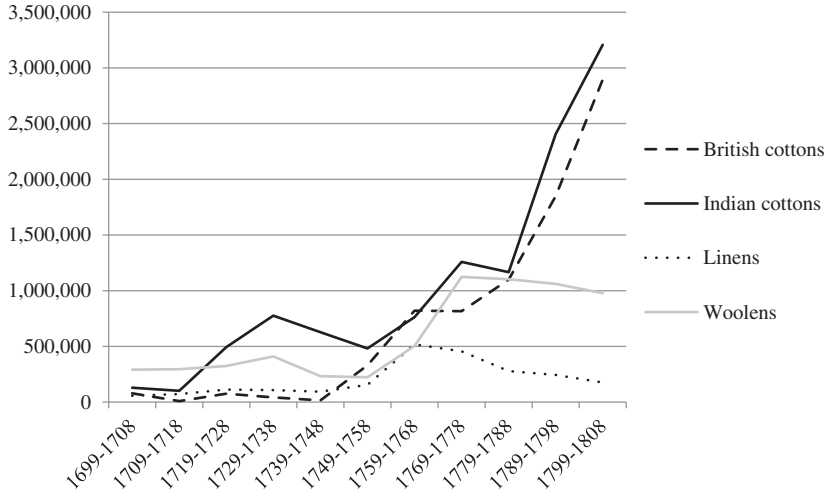

Fig. 1.1 Textiles imported from Britain to West Africa, 1699–1808 (pounds sterling) (*Source* Marion Johnson, *Anglo-African Trade in the Eighteenth Century: English Statistics on African Trade 1699–1808* [Leiden: Centre for the History of European Expansion, 1990], pp. 54–5)

currencies in market exchanges in West Africa.[54] Such south-south economic linkages were initially established by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and intensified by merchants from North-western Europe in the following two centuries. The demand for Indian cotton textiles in West Africa was so large that European manufacturers sought to produce and sell imitations there in the eighteenth century. Figure 1.1 also suggests that the second half of the century witnessed a rapid increase in the import of British 'cotton' goods to West Africa. These were British-made imitations of Indian piece goods as illustrated in Image 1.1.[55]

While the existing studies, notably ones by Inikori, highlight the increasing amount of Lancashire goods imported into West Africa, evidence suggests that Senegal demanded more Indian textiles than European products at least until the mid-nineteenth century.[56] Philip Curtin, Roger Pasquier, James Webb and Richard Roberts have shown that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Senegal remained a major market for Indian dark-blue cotton textiles, called *guinées* in French, rather than European copies and counterfeits, and that *guinées* served as an important exchange medium in the trade in gum arabic