

## ***Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World***

By Giorgio RIELLO

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Some commodities can be used as a lens through which we can appreciate how the modern economy and our material life have been shaped over the long term. Cotton and cotton textiles provide such as case and have been one of the well-established topics which continue to grab attention among historians. Following on from his co-edited essay collections on cotton textiles, *The Spinning World* (with Prasannan Parthasarathi, Oxford University Press, 2009) and *How India Clothed the World* (with Tirthankar Roy, Brill, 2009), Giorgio Riello's ambitious book *Cotton* has marked an important step in the historiography of global economic history, with three key words that characterise each process of the changes in 'global system': *centrifugal*, *learning*, and *centripetal*.

A classic study on the Lancashire cotton industry is Alfred P. Wadsworth and Julia de Lacy Mann's *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780* (Manchester University Press, 1931). Riello differentiates his *Cotton* from their work in that while Wadsworth and Mann were primarily concerned with how Lancashire transformed the world, Riello himself looks in the opposite direction: how the world transformed Lancashire. Another remarkable work on cotton industry was *Fiber that Changed the World* co-edited by Douglas Farnie and David Jeremy (Oxford University Press, 2004), whose basic focus is the cotton industry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In contrast, Riello's book is marked by greater

interest in the earlier stages of the commodities' history that paved the way for the growth of modern industry that took place in England first and later Europe and USA.

Riello's belief that there was a long process to the industrialization in England makes the time frame stretch back to the eleventh to sixteenth centuries, when India enjoyed the prominent place in the textile production and trade in the world. With rich historiography of cotton and cotton textiles, chapter 2 spells out the overview of the first phase in which India was the prime mover in structuring the global system by diffusing its hand-made textiles and knowledge into the rest of the world through trade and exchange both on land and sea routes. Chapter 3 stresses the relationship between the worldwide spread of Indian cotton textiles and the transmission of knowledge about cotton cultivation and commercial use of cotton in India. Remarkable is the comparison between India and China in use of raw materials and technologies to produce textiles that shows the similarity between both regions, thereby it prevents a naïve assumption that Indian distinctiveness is attributed to cheap labor or/and technologies. Chapter 4 makes further comparisons of the various organizations of textile production across Eurasia that leads Riello to hypothesize that the finishing processes of cloth made India come to the fore in the production and trade in textiles in the pre-industrial world. Thus, by paying attention to the connections between India and other parts of the world Part I clearly illustrates how and why India turned out to be the manufacturing core of cotton textiles in the pre-industrial world. However, part of the argument of this book that "over time its [Indian] position was weakened by processes of osmosis dominated by a centrifugal logic" (p. 6) remains unproven.

Part II focuses more attention on European trading activities with India over the two centuries up to the middle of the eighteenth century. Chapters 5 and 6 regard the East India Companies to have been of fundamental importance in giving the Europeans window from which to learn what and how to buy as well as the techniques of textile production in India, not to mention providing both a desire and a means from which to produce imitation goods to suit con-

sumer preferences. Chapter 7 discusses another dimension in the process of what Riello calls ‘apprenticeship’: what and how to sell in the Atlantic markets, especially the African market, where textiles along with other articles were exchanged for African slaves who were shipped to the Americas to work at plantations. It is this learning process that connected firmly the Indian Ocean world with the Atlantic world and that made Indian cotton textiles truly global in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as represented by the fact that the rise of the Atlantic slavery-based economy was largely based on the re-export of piece-goods of Indian cottons from Europe. Chapter 8 clearly shows that a global setting enabled Europeans to develop their textile production in the early modern period. East India Companies supplied plain textiles and design models to Europe, the Americas became an important supply source of dyestuffs, Armenian artisans diffused useful knowledge of cotton printing, and there were various forms of state support and scientific experiments in order to seek better productions methods within Europe. A series of the discussion throughout Part II give enough reasons that Riello rejects both the strand of ‘exceptionalism of the West’ that sees one particular element as unique to Europe in industrial development and that of ‘contingency’ represented by Kenneth Pomeranz since it does not give a satisfactory explanation of the above-mentioned European learning processes. According to Riello, the European path that was “more *extreme* than *exceptional* on a world scale” was “the result of a ‘layering’ of different factors and circumstances, some of which were peculiar to the continent, some of which she borrowed from elsewhere, and others of which were quite absent altogether” (p. 10).

Part III addresses how the global economy was reconfigured through the industrialization of Europe and North America from the late eighteenth century, especially the inventions of Arkwright’s water frame and of Whitney’s cotton gin. As prevailing wisdom has recognized, this period witnesses the emergence of a new economic order that is based on the core-periphery nexus, or international division of labor. Chapter 9 sheds light on how and why the U.S. South developed the slavery-based plantation system and became the cot-

ton production centre supplying industrializing Europe in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chapter 10 deals with the debate over the origin of the British (and European) industrialization in the historiographical context, and casts doubt on the question of to what extent technological innovation can explain the development of cotton textile industry in Europe. Needless to say, this issue has been one of the dominant strands in the debate. Technological innovation was a necessary, but not by itself sufficient condition as industrialization necessitated raw materials such as cottons and improvement of quality of products. As is revealed in chapter 11, it was cotton, not other fibers, that was suitable to industrialization ecologically speaking, in terms of land and labor. Such factors, along with the incentives that government provided, enable Riello to answer a familiar question: why it was England, not other countries of the world that experienced the first industrial revolution. Chapter 12 describes how what Riello calls a 'centripetal' system emerged on the basis of a new order of international trade in which cotton textiles produced in the West that had become the production centre diffused into and imported raw materials for textile production from the rest of the world. The diffusion process of western cotton textiles in global markets involved standardization of production and consumption, but yet the effect of such a process through the textiles varied from place to place.

To conclude the story of this book Riello introduces a figure that summarizes the changing relationships between Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa between the centrifugal and centripetal systems. Regarding the latter system, another factor should be added to the story. While it is correct that Riello emphasizes the important role of raw cotton provided by North America, it seems that he underestimates the role of nineteenth-century West Africa. In the period West Africa was not only the supply centre of labor to the Americas to produce cottons but also *de facto* the sole supply centre of other raw materials that played crucial roles in using machines and making manufactured goods stiffer: palm oil and Senegal gum. Moreover, it should be noted that Europeans continued to ship Indian textiles and Maldives' cowrie shells in exchange for those tropi-

cal products. Therefore, another two continuous lines should be added in Figure 13.2: one shows the flow of raw materials from Africa to Europe and the other that of manufactured products and cowrie shells from Asia to Africa.

Riello presents a clear and convincing story that gives us an even-handed look at the process of globalization in which cotton and cotton textiles played a crucial role. One of the methodological features in this book is to observe the interactions represented by the long-distance trade between Asia and Europe in the long-term. Another is a plethora of valid comparison. These features make us aware that a global perspective works well in addressing one of the enigmas of human history: the origin and development of the British industrial revolution. Moreover, this book covers major debates of global history such as the origin of globalization, the British industrial revolution, de-industrialization in nineteenth-century India, and others. Therefore, readers will find this book serves as a good introduction to global history studies.

***Igirisu Teikoku no Rekishi–Ajia kara kangaeru***  
**[The History of the British Empire from Asian Perspectives]**

By Shigeru AKITA  
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Akita Shigeru's new book is a good summary of the history of the British Empire from the perspective of Asia. Akita is one of the lead-