Today’s world textile and garment trade is valued at a staggering 425 billion dollars. We are told that under the pressure of increasing globalisation, it is India and China that are the new world-manufacturing powerhouses. However, this is not a new phenomenon: until the industrial revolution, Asia manufactured great quantities of colourful printed cottons that were sold to places as far afield as Japan, West Africa and Europe. *Cotton* explores this earlier globalised economy and its transformation after 1750 as cotton led the way in the industrialisation of Europe. By the early nineteenth century, India, China and the Ottoman Empire switched from world producers to buyers of European cotton textiles, a position that they retained for over two hundred years. This is a fascinating and insightful story which ranges from Asian and European technologies and African slavery to cotton plantations in the Americas and consumer desires across the globe.

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COTTON
The Fabric that Made the Modern World

GIORGIO RIELLO
CONTENTS

List of figures and colour plates    vii
List of maps    xxi
List of tables    xxii
Preface    xxiv
Abbreviations    xxviii

1 Introduction: global cotton and global history    1

Part I The first cotton revolution: a centrifugal system, 
    circa 1000–1500

2 Selling to the world: India and the old cotton system    17

3 ‘Wool growing on wild trees’: the global reach of cotton    37

4 The world’s best: cotton manufacturing and the advantage of 
    India    59

Part II Learning and connecting: making cottons global, 
    circa 1500–1750

5 The Indian apprenticeship: Europeans trading in Indian cottons    87

6 New consuming habits: how cottons entered European houses 
    and wardrobes    110

7 From Asia to America: cottons in the Atlantic world    135

8 Learning and substituting: printing cotton textiles in Europe    160
Contents

Part III The second cotton revolution: a centripetal system, circa 1750–2000

9 Cotton, slavery and plantations in the New World 187
10 Competing with India: cotton and European industrialisation 211
11 ‘The wolf in sheep’s clothing’: the potential of cotton 238
12 Global outcomes: the West and the new cotton system 264
13 Conclusion: from system to system; from divergence to convergence 288

Notes 296
Select bibliography 371
Index 395
FIGURES AND COLOUR PLATES

The following list of figures also indicates those illustrations that are reproduced in colour. Colour plates are located between pages 228 and 229.


List of figures


2.2 Cotton cloth, block-printed with resist and mordant-dyed blue, produced in Gujarat c. 1340 (plus or minus forty years) and traded to the Sulawesi Islands in Southeast Asia. Victoria and Albert Museum, purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund, IS.96–1993. (See colour plate.) 19

2.3 Cotton sash (patka) produced in Burhanpur. Printed, painted and dyed cotton, eighteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum, IM.311–1921. 22

2.4 Ceremonial hanging with a hunting scene. Block printed and mordant-dyed cotton. Made in Gujarat for the Indonesian market in the style of a Gujarati silk patola, late seventeenth to eighteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum, IS.97–1990. (See colour plate.) 28

2.5 Jacket (baju). Painted mordant-dyed and resist-dyed cotton cloth produced on the Coromandel coast and tailored into a jacket in Sumatra, late eighteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum, purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund, IS.101–1993. (See colour plate.) 28

2.6 Rai Surjan Hada, the ruler of Ranthambhor, northwest India, submitting to the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) in 1569. This scene from the Akbarnama (Book of Akbar) was designed by the Mughal court artist Mukund and painted by Shankar; it shows the profusion of textiles used by the court. Victoria and Albert Museum, IS.2:75–1896. (See colour plate.) 31

2.7 Page from an album of sketches of costumes of South India. Opaque watercolour with letterpress. Company school, c. 1842. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Asia Department 1951,1006,0.1.7. (See colour plate.) 32

3.1 A cotton tree as depicted by John Mandeville. 38
3.2 (a and b) Two nineteenth-century paintings in Company style representing ginning with a charkha and the bowing of cotton, 1851. 23 × 18.7 cm. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, funded by the Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund 1984.0124.1.1.44 and 1984.0124.1.1.56. (See colour plate.) 51

3.3 Bowing: technological diffusion (numbers are centuries CE of invention and diffusion). Source: see Chapter 3, notes 68–76. 52

3.4 A nineteenth-century painting in Company style representing the spinning and weaving of cotton yarn, 1851. 23 × 18.7 cm. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, funded by Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund 1984.0124.1.1.35. (See colour plate.) 53

3.5 The spinning wheel: technological diffusion (numbers are centuries AD of invention/adoptions). Sources: see Chapter 3 notes 77–84. 53


3.8 ‘Weaver Seated at a Loom’. Painting on mica, Company school, c. 1800–50. © The Trustees of the British Museum 1989,1225,0.18, In Memory of Mrs Dick. (See colour plate.) 57

4.1 Brush drawing of the weaver-saint Kabir. Colour wash on paper made in Panjab (Pakistan), late nineteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum IM.2:59–1917. (See colour plate.) 60
4.2 Two Indian women winding cotton. Watercolour on paper, early nineteenth century. © The Trustees of the British Museum, 1880.0.2107. (See colour plate.) 61

4.3 ‘Weavers’ house at Santipore, the Tantie at his Loom’. Stipple engraving by P. W. Tomkins after a painting by Arthur William Devis. British school, 1797. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Department of Prints and Drawings 1856,1011.104. 62


4.5 Blue and white linen and cotton towel, Italy, c. fifteenth century. © Museum of Fine Arts Boston 06.102. Gift of Miss Louise M. Nathurst. (See colour plate.) 74

4.6 ‘Cloth Printer’ from an album of Kashmiri trades, c. 1850–60. © The British Library Add.Or.1735 (left) and Add. Or.1714 (right). (See colour plate.) 81

5.1 Painting of selling cloth. Company school, c. 1860. Watercolour on paper, 26.9 × 31.6 cm. Reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Ontario Museum, Gift of Peter Brock 998.126.6. (See colour plate.) 88

5.2 Cotton coverlet, made in India, c. 1600, embroidered with Tussar thread and produced for the Portuguese market. Victoria and Albert Museum 616.1886. (See colour plate.) 91


5.4 Cotton textiles as a percentage of the value of all commodities traded to Europe by the VOC (1700–89) and EIC (1665–1834). Source: present volume, figure 5.3. VOC (1760–89): quantities have been calculated from auction sales (in value) by using an average value per piece calculated for the period 1665–1760. 95

5.5 Types of cotton textiles imported into Europe by the EEIC, 1660–1759. Source: Sergio Aiolfi, Calicos und gedrucktes Zeug: die Entwicklung der englischen Textilveredelung und der Tuchhandel der East India Company, 1650–1750 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1987), pp. 424–8. 97

5.6 An Indian cotton cloth with dark background. Longcloth, block-printed, mordant-dyed and painted cotton, produced in Gujarat, c. 1680–1760. Victoria and Albert Museum, IS.100–1993. Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund. 101


5.10 Block-printed mezzaro inspired by Indian palampores. Produced in Genoa, Italy, early nineteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum, IS.146–1950. (See colour plate.) 105


499–502; Carole Shammas, ‘The Decline of Textile Prices in England and British America prior to Industrialization’, *EHR* 47/3 (1994): 483–507. Prices in Beveridge and Shammas are taken from the purchase of cloth by the Greenwich hospital in London and therefore are less subject to price variations than market prices as they were set by long-term contracts. 114

6.3 ‘The weavers triumphp or an abstract, of the callicoe-act, of parliament’. Broadsheet, 1722. Reproduced courtesy of Senate House Library, University of London. 120

6.4 ‘Plombs’ used to identify white cottons and muslin cloth legally imported into France. Archives Nationales de France, Paris, F12 1405A. 122


6.6 ‘Homme en robe de chambre’. Etching on paper by Jean Lepautre, Paris, c. 1675. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Prints & Drawings Department, I, 7.160. 128

6.7 Back lining of a stomacher, possibly printed fustian. English, 1740s. © Manchester Art Gallery, Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, 2008.23. (See colour plate.) 129


6.10 ‘Silk Fringe’ and ‘Flowered Cotton’ from the Foundling Entry Books. London Metropolitan Archive, Foundling 2584 (27 October 1756) and 14093 (4 October 1759). Reproduced from John Styles, *Threads of*
xiv / List of figures

**Feeling: The London Foundling Hospital’s Textile Token, 1740–1770**
(See colour plate.) 132

6.1 Hooded cape, southern France, c. 1790. © Manchester Art Gallery, Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, 1992.9. (See colour plate.) 134

7.1 Albert Eckhout, *African Woman* (Brazil, 1641). Oil on canvas, 261 × 178 cm. Nationalmuseet, Etnografisk Samling, Copenhagen. (See colour plate.) 136


7.3 Francisco Clapera, *De Chino, e India, Genizara* (Mexico, c. 1780). Denver Art Museum, Gift of Frederick and Jan Mayer, 2011.482.14. Photography Denver Art Museum. (See colour plate.) 143

7.4 José de Alcíbar (attributed), *De Español y Negra, Mulato* (c. 1760). Denver Art Museum: Collection of Frederick and Jan Mayer TL-29337. Photo © James O. Milmoe. (See colour plate.) 145


7.8 Indiennes produced at Dieppe, 1783. Archives Nationales des France, Paris, F12 1404B. (See colour plate.) 155
7.9 Typical checks traded to Africa that were seized in Rouen; they were produced by a Tocqueville manufacturer in 1785. Archives Nationales de France, Paris, F12 1412 (See colour plate.) 156


8.1 ‘Les Travaux de la manufacture’. Toile by Oberkampf, 1783. © Musée de l’Impression sur Étoffes, Mulhouse, n. 219. (See colour plate.) 161

8.2 The patterning of textiles in Eurasia. 163


8.6 Fragment of a European printed cotton, c. 1660–1700. © Manchester Art Gallery, Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, 2004.93. (See colour plate.) 166


List of figures

1736. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Richelieu, LH-45 (1)-FOL, fo. 28. (See colour plate.) 171


8.10 Jean-Baptiste Huet, The Factory at Jouy (1807). © Le Musée Municipal de la Toile de Jouy, Jouy, France. (See colour plate.) 175

8.11 ‘Indigotoire’. French coloured print, second half of the eighteenth century. Private collection. 177


9.1 ‘A Pholey Town & Plantation’, from Francis Moore, Travels into the inland parts of Africa: containing a description of the several nations . . . up the River Gambia (London: Edward Cave, 1738), vol. II, p. 359. 188


9.5 Augustin Brunias, At the Linen Market in Santo Domingo. Oil painting, c. 1775. Museo Thyssen-Bornenisza, Madrid, INV. Nr. CTB. 1986.22. 49.6 x 64.8 cm. © Christie’s Images Ltd – ARTOTHEK. (See colour plate.) 202

xvii / List of figures


9.9 ‘Scene of the Levee, at New Orleans’. Print from *Ballou’s Pictorial* 1855. Private collection. 209


10.2 Explanations of changes in cotton production during the Industrial Revolution. 215


10.5 European ‘industrious revolution’ and Chinese ‘commercial involution’. 220


10.7 Indian weaver from Pierre Sonnerat’s *Voyage aux Indes Orientales et à Chine* (1782). Private collection. 230

Plate illustrating sections of Strutt’s cotton mill at Belper in Derbyshire, from Rees’s Cyclopaedia (1819). © Science Museum, London, Science and Society Picture Library no. 10418825. 232


‘The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing’, engraved in 1687 by Francis Barlow, from Aesop’s Fables, 2nd edn, 1703. Private collection. 239


11.6 ‘Cotton Bales Lying at the Bombay Terminus of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway ready for Shipment to England’. Print from *History of Indian Railways*, 1862. Private collection.


12.3 ‘King Cotton of Manchester’. Nazi propaganda, 1943. Private collection.
xx / List of figures

12.4 Tie-dyed cotton cloth for a turban, Delhi, c. 1880. Victoria and Albert Museum, IS.493–1883. 279


13.2 The relationship between continents in the old and the new cotton systems. 291
MAPS


2.2 The trading world of the Indian Ocean in the early modern period. 24

2.3 Systems of exchange in thirteenth-century Eurasia. 26

3.1 The spread of cotton cultivation in Afro-Eurasia. 40

3.2 Long-distance trade of cotton fibres to Jiangnan in the Ming period. 45

3.3 Regions of India. 47

4.1 Main areas of cotton manufacturing in the Levant, Middle East and Europe. (Numbers are centuries AD when the industry developed.) 71

9.1 Cotton cultivation: from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. 189

9.2 Cotton-producing islands in the British Caribbean (and percentage of total production in 1800). 201

TABLES

3.1 Import of raw cotton into southern Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. 48

3.2 Spinning in medieval and early modern India, China, the Middle East and Europe. 56

4.1 Hours’ work to produce a cotton cloth in seventeenth-century India and China. 76

4.2 Producing, cleaning, ginning and spinning cotton in South India and Thessaly. 77

4.3 Comparing cotton manufacturing across the early modern world. 78

11.1 British ‘ghost acreages’ for replacing cotton with wool, 1780–1850. 241

11.2 Decennial increase in raw material production: cotton and wool, 1800–1900. 243

11.3 European ‘ghost acreages’ for replacing cotton with linen, 1830–80. 244

11.4 Labour and land impact of the cotton imported into Britain, 1780–1850. 247

11.5 Estimated value of the production of woollen and linens in France and Britain, c. 1790. 249
List of tables

12.1 Estimates of the number of cotton weavers and cloth output in four areas of the world in the 1820s and 1840s. 276

13.1 The old and the new cotton systems. 290
PREFACE

Today the world textile and garment trade amounts to a staggering 425 billion US dollars in value. We are told that under the pressure of increasing globalisation, it is Asia – India and China in particular – that is the new world-manufacturing powerhouse. However the recent growth of Asia into the world’s leading textile manufacturer is not a new phenomenon. Until the industrial revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, both India and China were leading economic areas and their skills in cotton textile manufacturing were superior to those of Europe. Asia manufactured great quantities of colourful printed and painted cottons that were sold across the Indian Ocean and reached faraway places such as Japan and Europe where they were craved as exotic fashionable goods.

Historians have argued that this ensured for Asia – and in particular India – widespread prosperity, as well as high rates of economic growth and technological development, but that sometime after 1750 Europe experienced a sudden and radical economic transformation: the continent industrialised. Mechanisation was first experienced in the textile sector. The spinning machine allowed one late eighteenth-century European woman to produce as much yarn as three hundred women in India. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, India, China and the Ottoman Empire switched from being world producers to being buyers of European cotton textiles, a position that they retained for the following two centuries.

This book is the first global analysis of cotton textiles. It argues that Europe’s engagement with cotton textiles changed the shape of the world we still live in. It brings together the history of European industrialisation and the global significance of cotton textiles. Key to this book is the explanation of when, how and why Europe replaced Asia as the main area of production and trade of cotton textiles and the profound effects that this generated. Cotton was central to the creation of a ‘new global system’ increasingly presided over by Europe,
not Asia. But technological development was just one among the many factors explaining this transition. The importance of raw materials, markets for products and consumers’ preferences, and the increasing power of European nations over vast areas of the globe are in this book seen as critical in explaining the divergent paths of Europe and Asia.

This book was researched and written over a period of several years. Its original idea and formulation emerged from the activities of the Leverhulme-funded Global Economic History Network (GEHN) based at the London School of Economics and coordinated by Patrick O’Brien between 2003 and 2007. The network constituted the first truly collaborative platform for research and discussion in the field of global economic history. Over the years, I learned a great deal about global history and about the challenges posed by this relatively new field of historical enquiry. I also learned from Patrick what historians should aim for, a lesson that is more important than any other. Several members of GEHN provided much needed support. I would like to thank in particular Kent Deng, Kenneth Pomeranz, Om Prakash, Kaoru Sugihara and Peer Vries. I have also a considerable debt to the late Larry Epstein.

My move to the University of Warwick in 2007 and the foundation of the Global History and Culture Centre was a second and no less important stage in the shaping of this book. It allowed me to engage with a new agenda in cultural and social history that has greatly enriched my analysis. I also found the best colleagues that one can hope for, in particular Maxine Berg, Anne Gerritsen and Luca Molà. The four of us developed courses and organised sometimeslogistically complicated events and trips that entailed cooking dyes in a famous London museum, broken arms, and getting lost in Beijing. The Warwick Global History and Culture Centre has provided the perfect setting for completing the research included in this book.

Adventure and friendship mix together. Beverly Lemire, Peter McNeil and John Styles were great companions in several trips to archives, museums and artisans’ workshops in Europe, North America and Asia. We risked our lives on at least a couple of motorways and got lost in dodgy neighbourhoods, all in the name of research. Tirthankar Roy and Prasannan Parthasarathi rescued me from the maze of editing books. My collaboration with both of them has been essential for the writing of this book as has been the intellectual input of over thirty contributors to these edited projects. I would like to thank in particular Prasannan for checking on me every week during the writing of this book, making sure that it was completed.

Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson, Beverly Lemire, Patrick O’Brien, Prasannan Parthasarathi and John Styles read closely the entire manuscript, commenting, questioning and correcting it. Needless to say that any remaining errors
are entirely their fault! Shengfang Chou, Amy Evans and Sara van Dijk provided much needed research and practical assistance. Glenn Adamson, Alain and Michèle Bresson, Barbara Canepa, Giovanni Luigi Fontana, Kayoko Fujita, Sakis Gekas, Regina Grafe, Hannah Greig, Philippe Minard, Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, Liliane Pérez, Jeannie Siegman and the late Tony Siegman, Claudia Stein, Sarah Teasley, Elisa Tosi Brandi and Amanda Vickery have been great friends and have supported this project in different and extraordinary ways. Richard Butler read every single word with enormous patience and care. Finally, my mother, brother, sister-in-law and nieces Eleonora and Anastasia hope that the book will be soon translated into Italian so that they can find out what it is about.

Any heartless economic historian like me should point out that love and friendship do not pay bills. The research and writing of this book has been possible thanks to the financial support and hospitality of the following institutions: Australian National University, Canberra; British Academy; Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Sciences Sociales, Paris; European University Institute; Leverhulme-funded Global Economic History Network, LSE; Fondation Les Treilles, France; Leverhulme Trust; Stanford Humanities Center, Stanford University; University of Technology Sydney; and Warwick Global History and Culture Centre.


Several institutions kindly invited me to present my research. The list over the years has become so long that I will mention only the cities where my research brought me: Aix-en-Provence, Beijing, Bilbao, Binghamton, Boston, Cambridge, Catania, Coventry, Dublin, Edinburgh, Exeter, Florence, Konstanz, Helsinki, Istanbul, Leicester, London, Madrid, Melbourne, Norwich, Osaka, Padua, Paris, Pune, Reading, Santa Cruz, Stanford, Stockholm, Sydney, Uppsala, Utrecht, Wilmington – Delaware, York and Wolverhampton.
I am particularly grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for the Leverhulme Research Fellowship (RF/3/RFG/2010/0089) and the Stanford Humanities Center for the External Fellowship (2010-11) that enabled me to complete this book. This publication has been made possible by a grant from the Scouloudi Foundation in association with the Institute of Historical Research and the financial assistance of the Humanities Research Fund at the University of Warwick.

The majority of this book was written in Palo Alto while a fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center. I was surrounded by a group of absorbing scholars who made me often forget the throbbing toothache that accompanied the slow writing of this work.

To Anastasia and Eleonora
Christmas 2012
ABBREVIATIONS

AHR  American Historical Review
ANF  Archives Nationales de France, Paris
BNF  Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
BPP  British Parliamentary Papers
EEIC  English East India Company
EHR  Economic History Review
FEIC  French East India Company
IESHR  Indian Economic and Social History Review
JAS  Journal of Asian Studies
JEEH  Journal of European Economic History
JEH  Journal of Economic History
JESHO  Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
JGH  Journal of Global History
JWH  Journal of World History
NA  National Archives, Kew, London
P& P  Past & Present
TH  Textile History
VOC  Dutch East India Company