

Fashion between empires: African consumers, Japanese industry, and British economic power in the interwar period

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East Africans once dressed in Japanese clothing, and this had myriad global consequences. In the latter 1930s the great majority of finished apparel imported to Uganda, Kenya, and Tanganyika, including items such as shirts, pullovers, cardigans, jerseys, undergarments, hats, hosiery, and shoes, was made in Japan.¹ More important for the economic relationship between Japan and East Africa was the fact that diverse consumers purchased Japanese cotton textiles, which local tailors fashioned into current styles. Across eastern Africa cotton textiles were the most important items of import, and from the late 1920s the demand for Japanese cotton goods increased dramatically. Between 1930 and 1933 the amount of Japanese cottons consumed by Ugandans and Kenyans rose from roughly half of total consumption for both colonies to more than three-quarters. In neighboring Tanganyika the demand for Japanese cloth increased from about one third of the mandate's total cloth consumption to nearly eighty percent. In Somaliland, by 1933 ninety-seven percent of the protectorate's most popular cloth was made in Japan.²

The choices of consumers across the Africa's Indian Ocean basin had reverberations that stretched from the burgeoning towns and cities of the region to the factories of Osaka prefecture and the halls of the British Foreign Office. After the First World War Japanese manufacturers developed methods for responding quickly to emerging fashion trends in markets around the world. In British East Africa, a region that included colonies from Nyasaland (Malawi) in the south to Somaliland in the north, Japanese merchants supplied both cotton cloth and ready-made clothing at unprecedented low prices—sometimes less than half that of their European competitors.³ Though

¹ A.E. Pollard, *Department of Overseas Trade: Report on Economic and Commercial Conditions in British East Africa, July 1937-July 1938* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1939), 35-9.

² National Archives of the United Kingdom and Ireland (hereafter NA) CO852/18/6 A.E. Overton, Board of Trade to Secretary, Manchester Chamber of Commerce, May 13, 1935; Richard Bradshaw and Jim Ransdell, "Japan, Britain and the Yellow Peril in Africa in the 1930s," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, October 2011, <http://japanfocus.org/-Jim-Ransdell/3626/article.html> (accessed November 28, 2014); Andrew Roberts, *The Colonial Moment in Africa*, 11.

³ Christopher Howe, *The Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy: Development and Technology in Asia from 1540 until the Pacific War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 210.

Japanese exports to Africa were often of lower quality than European or Indian goods, their price encouraged East African clothing consumption even when real wages fell amidst the depression. This, along with Japanese efforts to appeal to East African tastes, contributed to one of the greatest successes of Japanese industry and consumer marketing in the interwar period, a success that Japanese representatives framed as ‘economic diplomacy’ with European colonial subjects.⁴ Yet, African demand for Japanese goods caused great consternation in British manufacturing circles, which in turn led to a crisis of inter-empire diplomacy. Metropolitan textiles lost significant market share in the British Empire, leading critics to accuse Japan of ‘dumping’. Some even claimed that Japan had designs on Britain’s African colonies.

Whitehall responded to pressure from multiple quarters by incrementally reversing its policy of free trade in the colonies. The ultimate aim of this directive was to leave consumers with little option but to buy British cloth. To this end policymakers instituted ever more severe forms of restriction on Japanese exports to colonial markets. The success of this policy in many colonial milieus further exacerbated tensions between the two empires, driving them closer to total war. Despite Britain’s ‘renascent imperialism’ in the mid-1930s, the consumption of Japanese cotton goods remained high in British East Africa.⁵ Much to the chagrin of Lancashire, East Africans continued to fashion European and other clothing from Japanese textiles. Demand for Japanese goods in East Africa remained so high that only the Second World War removed Japan’s dominant position in the East African textile trade. Trade restrictions checked Japanese imports and expanded the demand for British goods in much of the colonial world, but in East Africa their greatest consequence was to raise the ire of consumers. Indeed, the new orthodoxy of ‘managed trade’ deepened animosity towards the colonial state and so stimulated political action in the postwar era. Thus, the unabated demand for Japanese cottons demonstrated the limits as well as the perils of Britain’s overbearing imperial economic policy in the years prior to the Second World War.

Introduction: The nexus of fashion, profit, and power

This paper examines the historical intersection of East African consumer interests, structural shifts within Japan’s cotton textile industry, British industrial decline, and the machinations of British imperial economic policy. More precisely, I seek to understand the relationship of African fashion to Japan’s industrialization, how British imperial policy responded to strengthening ties among African consumers and Japanese manufacturers, and the resulting frictions between the Japanese and British empires.⁶ Studies of Japan’s economic growth in the Shōwa period have demonstrated the critical role of external markets—Asian and African markets in particular—in Japan’s industrial expansion. A substantial body of literature has also addressed Anglo-Japanese ‘trade competition’ in the interwar era. Studies of Japanese textile exports to markets such as China, India, Egypt, and Southeast Asia have demonstrated a number of critical points. First, they have shown

⁴ Katsuhiko Kitagawa, “Japanese Competition in the Congo Basin in the 1930s,” in A.J.H. Lantham and Heita Kawakatsu, eds., *Intra-Asian Trade and the World Market* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 164.

⁵ P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 586.

⁶ Michael Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism: The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of Japanese Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

that the ability of Japanese industry to produce low-cost cotton goods for distant and diverse markets contributed immensely to Japan's overall economic growth. Second, the extraordinary demand for Japanese cloth posed the greatest single threat to British commercial interests around the world. In terms of market share, British losses in the field of cotton goods were most evident in the colonies.⁷ Finally, studies of Anglo-Japanese economic rivalry have highlighted the willingness of British policymakers to dispense with trade agreements and flout diplomatic convention in order to restrict Japanese manufacturers. As Antony Best summed up, Britain's aggressive attempts to curtail Japan's export trade drove a deep wedge between the two empires. Since Japanese policymakers viewed British policy as outright discrimination, trade frictions also became a primary stumbling block to rapprochement in the years leading up to World War Two. Just as important, British economic policy encouraged Japanese producers and policymakers alike to focus more intently on securing East Asia markets in the second half of the 1930s.⁸

This paper aims to augment earlier work on Anglo-Japanese competition by developing a more holistic understanding of Japan's relationship with colonial East Africa as well as Britain's multifaceted response. A limitation of research on Japanese exchanges with interwar Africa is that much of this work focuses narrowly on the perspectives of British colonial policymakers. Several analysts of Japanese trade and diplomacy have sought to articulate Japanese perspectives on this era, but since this research has been cursory and addresses the entire African continent, it lacks regional nuance.⁹ Studies of interwar East African consumer culture are also scarce. However, existing works offer key insights into shifting consumer tastes in East Africa, which give context to Anglo-Japanese commercial tensions. In the pages that follow, I bring these diverse literatures into conversation with archival and contemporaneous published material. Specifically, I reappraise the international and transcolonial economic entanglements of the interwar period through a consideration of the interests of three overlapping sets of actors: East African consumers, Japanese manufacturers, and British policymakers.

Central to the economic interface of East Africa, Japan, and Britain was the question of what African consumers would (or could) purchase. Throughout the colonial era imported consumer goods were both elemental to African social relationships and a cornerstone of Africa's global interfaces. As I have argued elsewhere, reflection on consumer interests can therefore enrich our understanding of Africa's position in a world

⁷ Richard Albert Bradshaw, "Japan and European Colonialism in Africa, 1800-1937," PhD Dissertation, Ohio University, 1992, 363.

⁸ Antony Best, "Economic appeasement or economic nationalism? A political perspective on the British Empire, Japan, and the rise of Intra-Asian Trade, 1933-37," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 30, 2 (2002): 97-8; H. Shimizu, *Anglo-Japanese Trade Rivalry in the Middle East in the Inter-war Period* (London, 1986); Howe, *Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*; P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990* (London, 1993); B. Chatterji, *Trade, Tariffs and Empire: Lancashire and British Policy in India 1919-1939* (Delhi, 1992); Alex J. Robertson, "Lancashire and Rise of Japan, 1910-1937," *Business History* 32, 4 (1990): 87-105; D.S.J. Koh and K. Tanaka, "Japanese Competition in the Trade of Malaya in the 1930s," *Southeast Asian Studies* 21 (1984): 374-99.

⁹ Other detailed studies of Japan-Africa relations in the interwar period have focused on diplomacy and Japanese popular support for Ethiopia. See for instance, Joseph Calvitt Clarke, *Alliance of the Colored Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan Before World War II* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2011).

dominated by the capitalism of empires.¹⁰ Moreover, African demand and Japan's success in eastern African markets was symptomatic of a global trend. Indeed, the height of Japanese piece good exports to East Africa coincided with a historic peak in Japanese textile production and export.¹¹ Eastern Africa was for Japanese manufacturers an export market whose importance increased significantly as governments around the world restricted Japanese textiles. By the middle of the 1930s, one hundred and twenty-two states restricted Japanese cotton goods.¹² British imperial policymakers, under pressure from industrial leaders, introduced quotas and tariffs that curtailed Japanese imports in British colonies. At the same time, the Foreign Office was keen to limit diplomatic tensions with Japan, particularly as many feared Japanese expansionism in Asia and elsewhere. Thus, Whitehall had to perform a delicate balancing act. British efforts to limit African consumer choice and the Japanese trade had a number of unintended consequences. In addition to exacerbating tensions with Japan, restrictions on Japanese cloth alienated African consumers by effectively increasing the price of clothing when wages remained weak. Moreover, protectionism did little to increase demand for British cloth. Lancashire cottons were priced above the budgets of most African consumers, and thus Indian—not British—cotton goods often replaced Japanese varieties.

East African-Japanese-British economic entanglements in the interwar period evidence a nexus of fashion, profit, and power. Through this nexus we can better appreciate the relationship of African cultural imperatives to the global economy and colonial governance. The nexus highlights the economic agency of African consumers as well as the limitations of the empire's ability to shape the demands of its subjects. In the sections that follow I will explore this nexus through its diffuse, constitutive dimensions. I begin with a reflection on changing fashions in East Africa in the early twentieth century and the relationship of Japanese imported goods to regional fashion trends. In the second section I address the question of profits, or Japanese efforts to expand cotton textile production generally and appeal to African consumers specifically. In the final section I explore British responses to increased African consumption of Japanese cotton goods and clothing. More precisely, I outline how Lancashire, Whitehall, and the Foreign Office attempted to wield political and economic power in an effort to address the crisis of Japanese competition and thereby bolster Britain's flagging textile industry.

Fashion

¹⁰ Many analysts have demonstrated that consideration of the cultural logics of demand alongside their distant reverberations can yield new ways of understanding the history of global interdependence. See for instance, Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing Trade and Zambia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Marcy Norton, "Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics," *American Historical Review* 111, 3 (2006): 660–91; Frank Trentmann, "Crossing Divides: Consumption and Globalization in History," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9 (2009): 187–220; Ruth Nielsen, "The History and Development of Wax-Printed Textiles Intended for West Africa and Zaire", in J. Cordwell and R. Schwarz, eds., *The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 467–98.

¹¹ G.C. Allen, *A Short Economic History of Modern Japan* (London: Macmillan, 1981), Table XIII, 260.

¹² Howe, *Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*, 229.

The colonial epoch ushered in new concepts of global relation, local power relations, and belief systems in East Africa, all of which affected consumer choices. In the early colonial era, most East Africans put great emphasis on dress as a mode of social relation. As elsewhere, fashion functioned as a symbolic language shaped by the structures of taste and social aspiration.¹³ Rich and poor consumers alike spent considerable sums on clothing, and textiles ranging from fine silks to cheap cottons were key signs of the considerable social differentiation among coastal residents.¹⁴ In post-slavery coastal East Africa, dress was a primary means of representing social integration into a changing society tempered one's gender, race, and age. On the island of Zanzibar, for instance, imported clothing functioned as a critical sign of what Laura Fair termed "social and economic autonomy" among the ex-slave majority.¹⁵ In the early years of the twentieth century, Muslim Zanzibar was the center of fashion in East Africa. The styles of dress that gained popularity here—referred to in the most general terms as 'Swahili'—were quickly taken up elsewhere in the coast region and well beyond. Most clothing was made of imported cotton textiles tailored into styles influenced by contemporaneous trends of the western Indian Ocean littoral and Europe. At the same time, an increasingly wide range of readymade clothing, from dresses to jackets and shoes entered eastern African markets.

As in earlier decades, many coastal men favored the *kanzu*, or long white shirt made of imported cotton cloth. Yet, they began to cast off items such as sandals and the *kizibao*, or short, sleeveless jacket, favoring in their place European shoes and blazers. Such sartorial choices came to represent men's greater engagement with European concepts of modern attire while reflecting a normalization of Western fashions across the Muslim world. The fez (*tarbush*) also gained popularity at the end of the 1920s, evidencing related pan-Muslim notions of modernity, Egyptian fashion in particular.¹⁶ Among Zanzibari women, the black or deep blue, full body women's covering called the *buibui*—made from a dyed cotton cloth called *kaniki*—signified an increasing trend of veiling in the 1930s. Perhaps more important, as Laura Fair has demonstrated, the two-piece, colorful printed cloth known as *khanga* (*leso* in Kenya) became a primary sign of adherence to post-abolition social norms in Zanzibar.¹⁷ *Khanga* acted as important social commodities as well. They were often given as wedding gifts and they featured a Swahili phrase, riddle, or aphorism that addressed current social concerns.¹⁸ In the early years of the twentieth

¹³ Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, "Introduction: Cotton Textiles and Global History," in *The Spinning World: A Global History of Textiles, 1200-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009), 4; Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: commodification, consumption, and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Hansen, *Salaula*.

¹⁴ Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics in Zanzibar: culture, community, and identity in post-abolition urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Laura Fair, "Veiling, Fashion, and Social Mobility: A Century of Change in Zanzibar," in Elisha P. Renne, ed., *Veiling in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 22-24; Elisabeth Linnebuhr, "Kanga: Popular cloths with messages," in Werner Graebner, ed., *Sokomoko: Popular Culture in East Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 81-90.

¹⁶ Fair, *Pastimes and Politics*, 75-6. On the wider intellectual and political currents of the Muslim Mediterranean and Indian Ocean see James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, eds., *Global Muslims in the age of steam and print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Laura Fair, 'Remaking Fashion in the Paris of the Indian Ocean' in Jean Allman ed., *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ When *khanga* debuted in the 1890s they were made from unbleached American sheeting, called *merikani*, but printed locally. See Fair, *Pastimes and Politics* and David Parkin, "Textile as Commodity, Dress as Text:

century the *khanga* became the primary item of fashion among Muslim women in Zanzibar and along the Kenyan and Tanganyikan coasts. In an effort to capture these markets, Europeans flooded East Africa with increasingly elaborate and brightly colored varieties of *khanga*.¹⁹

An American resident of Zanzibar in the early twentieth century wrote of the “continually changing” *khanga* fashions on the island. Fashion trends, it seems, hardly surpassed three months.²⁰ This volatility of demand persisted until the Second World War. For instance, in the early 1940s Shamsa Muhamed Muhashamy noted that Mombasan women “wanted new clothes every day.”²¹ The rapidity of shifting demand was nowhere more evident than with the *khanga* ‘reserve’ ticket system in Mombasa. Merchants sold tickets for new *khanga* based on received samples. These tickets entitled the holder to purchase a reserved *khanga* in the following week. However, if the purchase was not complete, the reserve ticket (and the money used to buy it) was forfeited. Merchants both recognized and exploited demands for the latest *khanga* by not only selling reserve tickets but also showing newer samples before the end of the reserve period. This practice encouraged many women to forfeit their initial tickets in order to reserve the soon-to-arrive cloth. When merchants habitually engaged in this practice, consumers often forfeited significant sums to ensure that they received the latest style.²²

Beyond the coast, Swahili fashions found a broad audience in the early colonial era. One reason for increased consumption of Swahili styles was that colonial administrations and missionaries encouraged non-Muslims to wear *kanzu* and *khanga*, among other Swahili styles. In the eyes of many Europeans, Swahili clothing was more authentically ‘native’ than European dresses, pants, shirts, and ties. Some European employers even forced their African workers to wear Swahili fashions, and the government of Kenya Colony issued the *kanzu*, *fez*, and *joho* (overcoat) to its newly appointed chiefs. In response to this promotion of Swahili fashions by the colonial elite, many Christian African young people donned Western clothing. This was a symbolic means to reject ‘traditional’ authority and claim equivalence with European residents. This practice, new patterns of labor migration, the increasing number of wage laborers, and the formation of urban identities signaled a remarkable shift in East African consumer interests.²³ Indeed, a self-conscious identification as ‘modern’—a term with multiple and ambiguous meanings in East Africa—was nowhere more evident than in the demand for Western-style clothing, particularly in the burgeoning cities. In the 1920s, rapid urbanization further encouraged the articulation and circulation of new styles. Both Muslim and Christian urbanites

Swahili Kanga and Women’s Statements,” in Ruth Barnes, ed. *Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies* (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁹ Fair, *Pastimes and Politics*, Chapter 2.

²⁰ Consequently, the American consul in Zanzibar suggested that importers consult with a local agent before sending a supply of cotton goods. United States Consulate, Zanzibar, Mitchell to Pierce, May 28, 1904, Roll 5.

²¹ Sarah Mirza and Margaret Strobel, *Three Swahili Women: Life Histories from Mombasa, Kenya* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 104.

²² *Ibid.*, 102-4.

²³ Margaret Jean Hay, “Hoes and Clothes in a Luo Household: Changing Consumption in a Colonial Economy, 1906–1936,” in Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christraud M. Geary and Kris L Hardin, eds., *African Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 243–61; Margaret Jean Hay, ‘Changes in Clothing and Struggles over Identity in Colonial Western Kenya’, in Allman ed., *Fashioning Africa*, 67–83; John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

developed codes of dress that aimed to demonstrate their sophistication. As Maria Suriano has shown for urban Tanganyikan youth in the 1920s and early 1930s, fashions such as the short blazer and larger trousers evidenced a “creative manipulation” of contemporary European styles while maintaining the general template of European dress. Such styles also evidenced the new dynamics of urban consumer identities manifest in various ways across gender, religious, and ethnic lines.²⁴

While perceptions of modernity and the influence of European fashion was readily apparent in urban centers such as Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, and Kampala, many rural people likewise embraced Western clothes—and they often spent a considerable sums to do so. For instance, a late 1930s survey of western Kenya’s majority Luo Kavirondo District found that clothing accounted for about sixty percent of the average consumers’ budget.²⁵ Margaret Jean Hay has demonstrated how the early colonial era’s matrix of social, political, and economic change gained material form among Luo consumers through revolutionary shifts in consumption patterns. Specifically, Hay showed that missionary emphasis on minimal jewelry and maximal body coverage led to greater household investment in cotton clothing, but many young people shunned Swahili styles. By the 1920s, for example, young Luo men wore European fashions exclusively. Only older Luo men continued to wear skins or the Swahili *kanzu* and even they juxtaposed these with new Western styles. For Luo men who earned wages in cities and on plantations, European shirts, jackets, ties, trousers, socks, shorts, felt hats, and other items became prominent symbols of wealth and success.

In western Kenya, European clothing reflected new concepts of self-identity contingent on Christian mores. The colonial labor market exposed young people to new styles and offered access to cash and credit to purchase them.²⁶ European-style clothes connoted sophistication, often glossed as *nanga* (or *lony*) in Luo. Thus, the term *jananga*, or ‘sophisticated dressers,’ was commonly used for those who sported the European-influence styles. Though Luo women were largely excluded from the migrant labor market, increased earnings from the sale of agricultural goods, particularly in the interwar period, offered access to new fashions. Like their male counterparts, they found that Western clothes and Christianity paid dividends. For example, entrance into the community of Christians offered social leverage to challenge elders, notably around the contentious issue of arranged marriage. The most public means for women to represent socio-religious conversion and the rejection of senior authority was to wear European clothes, including shoes, dresses, and headscarves. For Luo women, European styles offered a means of claiming a social identity distinct from the social strictures of the past. In this way, European fashions highlighted and exacerbated social frictions born of the new economy,

²⁴ Maria Suriano, “Clothing and the changing identities of Tanganyikan urban youths, 1920s–1950s,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 20, 1 (2008): 99-100, 110; James R. Brennan, *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), Chapter 3. On analogies in the immediate postcolonial era see Thomas Burgess, “Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts: Struggles Over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, 2 (2002): 287–313, and Andrew M. Ivaska, “‘Anti-Mini Militants Meet Modern Misses’: Urban Style, Gender and the Politics of ‘National Culture’ in 1960s Dar es Salaam, Tanzania,” in Allman, ed., *Fashioning Africa*, 104–21.

²⁵ Robert Ross, *Clothing: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 123.

²⁶ Hay, “Hoes and Clothes in a Luo Household”; Hay, “Changes in Clothing and Struggles over Identity.”

a radically altered political environment, and the appeal of a new religion. By the 1940s, European-style clothing had come to define a new generation of East Africans.²⁷

Colonial administrators and metropolitan manufacturers anticipated that the appeal of Swahili and European styles among East Africans, when combined with greater purchasing power, would ensure a consistent market for British and British Indian textiles. In the first decades of the colonial era, Indian and British cotton cloth indeed dominated East African markets. Moreover, demand for British manufactured porcelain, soap, and other household goods increased with the wider acceptance of many European cultural mores. Exports from Britain to Middle Eastern, African, Asian, and Latin American markets therefore grew substantially, reaching seventy-nine percent of total British exports by the beginning of First World War. Low-priced cotton cloth accounted for the greatest proportion of this trade.²⁸ Nevertheless, Indian textiles offered stiff competition in African markets. For example, in Somaliland, where inexpensive grey sheeting was, according to officials, an “almost universal article of wear,” consumers favored Indian cloth, making it one of the “staple commodities” of the protectorate. Indian-made grey sheeting was so important to Somaliland’s economy that colonial officials lamented its influence. Where grey sheeting “cannot be had cheaply” an official explained in 1934, “produce will not be brought for sale.”²⁹

Though British and Indian textiles maintained an important position in many East African markets before the First World War, competition from German, American, and other Western manufacturers ensured a diverse array of cotton goods. This would all change with the introduction of Japanese goods. When Japanese cottons entered the market in the 1920s, the demand for British, Indian, and other apparel declined rapidly. For example, in the 1930s, Japanese-made grey and bleached sheeting, popular in Somaliland and used to fashion the Swahili *kanzu* among a great many other items, superseded both its Indian and British competitors. Japan broke into the highly volatile and competitive *khanga* market as well. Then, Japanese manufacturers dramatically increased their production of *kaniki* for East Africa, the dark cotton textile used to fashion *buibui* and other women’s clothing. These textiles, along with striped cottons used for *kikoi* (loincloth), found a wide market in eastern Africa. Right across the region, from Nyasaland to Zanzibar and Somaliland, African consumers would favor Japanese goods.

The popularity of Japanese cottons was largely a consequence of limitations on African purchasing power, Japanese manufacturers’ attentiveness to local markets (a point to which I will return in the next section), and other manufacturers’ disinterest in researching African markets.³⁰ Increases in the production of coffee, sisal, tobacco, cotton, and other colonial commodities buffeted African consumer demand in the early 1920s. However, with the onset of the depression, the falling prices of African exports, declining

²⁷ Hay, “Changes in Clothing and Struggles over Identity.”

²⁸ Howe, *Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*, 202-3.

²⁹ NA CO852/18/6 “Memorandum: Grey Sheeting and the British Somaliland Trade,” December 17, 1934.

³⁰ The East African clothing market remained complex and variegated, facts that Japanese manufacturers understood well. For instance, at the height of Japan’s dominance in late 1930s *khanga* were the single largest category of Zanzibar’s import market. But even while British *khanga* were more expensive than Japanese varieties, they continued to hold one third of the *khanga* market. These and other examples suggest that East African consumers were more discriminating and the market more complicated than many contemporaries recognized. NA CO690/28 *Zanzibar Protectorate Blue Book for the Year ended 31st December 1940*.

wages, and increased unemployment constrained the resources of East African consumers.³¹ British textiles, for instance, were now simply too expensive for many consumers. Japanese manufacturers were able to step into the breach as they could sell appropriate goods at a fraction of the price of their competitors. As a result, even at the height of the depression, most East Africans had the means to buy new clothing. In Tanganyika, for instance, wages dropped during the depression but the amount of imported cotton goods and footwear that Tanganyikans consumed remained constant.³² Given these circumstances, by 1930 East Africans were buying more Japanese cotton piece goods than British and Indian varieties combined. This new relationship between Japanese producers and African consumers significantly altered the economic landscape of colonial East Africa. Since low priced cotton textiles were the largest sector of colonial import markets, Japanese textiles became the most important category of imports to British East Africa.³³ And by 1938 ninety-three percent of the cotton goods purchased by East Africans were manufactured in Japan.³⁴ Japanese concerns, not their British counterparts, reaped the benefits of African buying power (even if limited) and the perennial demand for low-priced cotton apparel.³⁵

Profit

Japan's rapid industrial expansion was one of the most remarkable developments of the interwar period. Japan recovered from the global depression faster than any other industrial economy, and its extraordinary growth was to a great degree a consequence of investment in production for export as well as marketing to low-income consumers around the world. The importance of cotton textile production to this process can hardly be overestimated. As Giorgio Riello noted, cotton textiles were the "springboard towards modern industry" in Japan, and by 1933 Japan produced more cotton textiles than any other nation, Britain included.³⁶ More remarkably, while global demand for textiles decreased substantially in the interwar period, Japan's textile export trade increased dramatically. Indeed, between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the 1930s, textiles made up nearly half of Japan's total exports.³⁷

³¹ See for example, Iliffe, *Modern History of Tanganyika*, Chapter 11.

³² Andrew Coulson, *Tanzania: A Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982 [2013]), 77.

³³ NA CO852/23/5 JNO Chaplin, "Memorandum respecting Japanese Trade in Neutral Markets," September 10, 1935.

³⁴ At the height of Japan's dominance of the East African market, even most European-style felt hats, which acted as consummate symbols of modernity and urban sophistication, were Japanese in origin. Andrew Roberts, "Introduction," in in A.D. Roberts, *The Cambridge History of Africa, vol. 7* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11; A.E. Pollard, *Department of Overseas Trade: Report on Economic and Commercial Conditions in British East Africa, April 1936-June 1937* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1937), 32. In contrast, most imported fezzes were made in Czechoslovakia.

³⁵ Kweku Ampiah, 'British Commercial Policies against Japanese Expansionism in East and West Africa, 1932-1935,' *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23/4 (1990), 619-41.

³⁶ Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 294; NA CO852/23/5 "Memorandum respecting Japanese Trade in Neutral Markets," September 10, 1935.

³⁷ Howe, *Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*, 216. NA CO852/23/5 "Notes on Economic Conditions in Japan, 1933-34 [1935]," 19-22. This number would increase such that cloth exports alone accounted for fifty-six percent of Japan's domestic output in 1937. Howe, *Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*, 201. In 1929 fifty-five percent of factory employees worked in the textile sector. With greater investments in heavy

Before the First World War Japanese manufacturers had limited familiarity with markets beyond East Asia. Yet, in the years after the war Japan expanded its cotton textile export trade significantly by appealing to consumers in European colonies. Japanese advances in cotton thread production as well as innovations in textile manufacturing and industrial management led to dramatically increased capacity. Japanese industry also tapped a vast, inexpensive labor force constituted primarily by young women. Responsiveness to changing tastes was key to production for diverse overseas markets, and the size of Japanese textile factories ensured maximum flexibility in this regard. Clustered in Osaka, Hyōgo, Ehime, and Wakayama prefectures, the factories that produced cotton goods for export to low-income markets were often small, many with less than thirty looms. Distinct from Japan's largest firms, the size of these concerns ensured greater adaptability to the oscillations of niche markets.³⁸ Moreover, companies engaged in foreign trade were willing to share market data and collaborate in opening new markets for Japanese-made products.³⁹ Japanese manufacturers willingness to research the changing tastes of diverse consumers, share data, and respond to their findings allowed Japanese goods to quickly supersede those of less agile competitors.

The Japanese government assisted the textile industry as well. The Export Subsidy Law of 1930 offered financial assistance to Japanese companies seeking to open new markets in Africa, South America, Russia, and elsewhere. The state even subsidized shipping.⁴⁰ The devaluation of the Yen in late 1931 effectively lowered the price of Japanese exports even further, opening Japanese goods to even wider markets. Just as important, Japanese manufacturers reduced costs by developing relations with a great number of cotton producers in India, the United States, and Uganda. These relationships were particularly important to manufacturers as they ensured fewer interruptions of supplies.⁴¹ Much of the cotton produced in East Africa in the 1920s was exported to Japan, not Britain. In this way, Japanese industry benefited significantly from post-World War One colonial emphasis on cotton cultivation in East Africa.⁴²

In the early 1920s, Japanese manufacturers focused their collective efforts on producing cotton goods for low-income consumers in China, the Dutch East Indies, and India. Asia would remain the most important regional market for Japanese cottons in the interwar period, but to sustain its phenomenal rate of growth Japan increasingly looked to other low-income markets, especially those in the Middle East and Africa.⁴³ With the exception of Egypt and South Africa, Japanese goods were new to both regional markets and thus Japanese firms faced challenges such as limited knowledge of markets and a lack

industry—armaments in particular—this percentage had decreased by 1937. Ian Inkster, *Japanese Industrialisation: historical and cultural perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 100.

³⁸ NA FO 371/16241 "Report of the Committee for the improvement of the export striped cotton cloth industry [translation from Japanese]," 1930. On labor see Toshiaki Chokki, "Labor Management in the Cotton Spinning Industry," in Michael Smitka, ed., *The Textile Industry and the Rise of the Japanese Economy* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 1-23.

³⁹ Howe, *Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*, 428-9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴¹ Inkster, *Japanese Industrialisation*, 98; Katsuhiko Kitagawa, "Japan's Economic Relations with Africa between the Wars: A Study of Japanese Consular Reports", *African Study Monographs* 11, 3 (1990): 135.

⁴² "Dumping of Japanese Goods, Yorkshire Designs Copied," *The Times* January 31, 1934; K. K. Kawakami, "Britain's Trade War with Japan" *Foreign Affairs* 12, 3 (1934): 483-494; Ampiah, "British Commercial Policies," 625-6.

⁴³ NA CO852/23/5 "Notes on Economic Conditions in Japan, 1933-34 [ca.1935]," 19-22.

of direct trade routes. In the case of eastern Africa, Japanese goods arrived through a circuitous route from Bombay and Aden. To establish a more direct connection with East Africa, in 1926 Osaka Shosen Kaisha initiated a monthly route from Kobe to Mombasa. The route, which included the ports of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Colombo, quickly expanded south to Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, Beira, Delagoa Bay, and Durban.⁴⁴

Japanese manufacturers recognized that favorable trade agreements with European powers opened a range of economic possibilities in the colonial world. At the end of the First World War, Japan, Britain, and other wartime allies signed the Treaty of Saint Germain-en-Laye, which included a convention, often referred to as the Congo Basin Treaty that guaranteed free trade in Central Africa. The convention, which encompassed the Belgian Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Nyasaland, and other European colonies, ensured that no preference was given to metropolitan products and that imperial powers could not place unequal tariffs on imported goods. As a signatory to the treaty, Japan was entitled to trade with British East Africa without restriction.⁴⁵ Moreover, the other major regional market, Tanganyika, became a mandated territory after the war. Since affordable clothing was a measurable benefit to Tanganyikans, Britain could not restrict Japanese imports without violating the spirit of its mandate.⁴⁶ Given this relative freedom of commerce, Japan's economic interest in East Africa was multifaceted. First, Japanese manufacturing firms, including Nihon Menka, Toyo Menka, and Gosho Co. Ltd., were keen to export East African cotton. More precisely, they organized a system of conveyance that delivered ginned cotton from Uganda and Tanganyika to spinning operations in China and Japan. Second, Japanese manufacturers saw in Africa a market similar to low-income East Asian markets where Japan gained significant market share.

As noted in the previous section, almost immediately after the introduction of Japanese cottons in East Africa they began to attract a considerable audience. By 1922 Japan commanded half of the Kenyan and Ugandan unbleached cotton textile market, which was by far the largest of the cotton goods sectors. Two years later, Japanese goods had gained a full seventy percent of that market.⁴⁷ In the second half of the 1920s, Japanese success in the Dutch East Indies and British India as well as British East Africa was just as impressive. "In the last few years especially," a committee tasked with expanding Japanese exports noted, "remarkable progress has been made in Africa..."⁴⁸ Indeed, factories making striped cotton cloth for regional markets—cloth used as *kikoi* in East Africa—increased production by more than fifty percent between 1926 and 1929. In East Africa, as elsewhere, the study of regional markets was key to Japanese manufacturers' success. This research took multiple forms. In 1927-28, for instance, a Japanese research team

⁴⁴ After 1932 vessels owned by Kawasaki, Kokusai, and the Yamashita Steamship Co. were also dispatched to eastern Africa. Kitagawa, "Japan's Economic Relations with Africa," 134; Jun Morikawa, "Myth and Reality of Japan's Relations with Colonial Africa—1885-1960," *Journal of African Studies* 12, 1 (1985), 40-3.

⁴⁵ Kitagawa, "Japanese Competition in the Congo Basin"; NA CO852/23/5 Committee on Japanese Competition, "Modification or Abrogation of St. Germain Congo Basin Convention." May 16, 1934.

⁴⁶ Best, "Economic appeasement or economic nationalism?," 85.

⁴⁷ W.H. Franklin, *Department of Overseas Trade: Report on the Trade and Commerce of East Africa, For the year ended 30th September, 1924* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1924), Appendix II, 38.

⁴⁸ NA FO371/16241 "Report of the Committee for the improvement of the export striped cotton cloth industry," (translation from Japanese), 1930.

visited East Africa and drafted an exhaustive, three volume report on the regional market.⁴⁹ In part as a consequence of this attention to local demands, between 1928 and 1929, Japanese exports to East Africa doubled in value. In the early 1930s, Japanese manufacturers introduced yet other varieties of textiles, including printed cloths such as the *khanga*. Demand for these would also rise dramatically.⁵⁰ The story of Japanese ascendancy was repeated across eastern Africa. In British Somaliland, for example, Manchester white shirtings traded through Aden had dominated the market in bleach cloth since the nineteenth century. The trade was once so profitable that multiple Manchester firms opened branches in Aden. However, by 1930 similar Japanese textiles were attracting local consumers, and soon the offices of Manchester firms were shuttered.⁵¹

Japanese market research in East Africa was continual, and manufacturers often acted quickly on their findings. For instance, when Dutch *khanga* manufacturers introduced a popular new variety of *khanga* in the autumn of 1932, Japanese suppliers took note. Soon thereafter, Japanese manufacturers copied the design, printed similar fabric, and delivered it to the East African market.⁵² Though many considered the Japanese *khangas* to be inferior to the Dutch and British varieties, low price points and Japanese manufacturers' responsiveness to new tastes nonetheless earned Japanese-made goods a wide consumer base. To facilitate this trade further, the Japanese government opened a consulate in Mombasa in 1932. Thereafter, Kenya would be the nucleus of Japan's commercial enterprise in East Africa. The Japanese government sent an agent of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to Nairobi and even established 'sample rooms' in the Kenyan capital. These investments in East Africa paid handsome dividends. In Tanganyika, for instance, Japan's share of imported cotton goods rose from fifty percent in 1931 to seventy-four percent in 1933.⁵³

Japanese commercial efforts in Kenya opened the door to the vast Central African market as well. Through agents in Mombasa, Nagoya-based Sugimoto & Co. delivered Japanese cloth to the Belgian Congo. In Stanleyville tailors made European-style trousers, shorts, and other fashions popular amongst urbanites in the 1930s. By 1936, Japan held a very strong position in the Belgian Congo market, delivering sixty-six percent of the colony's total textile imports.⁵⁴ While textiles were Japan's most important export to Africa, even Japanese shoes found new markets on the continent. In Cape Town, for instance, Japanese rubber-sole shoes sold at nearly half the price of locally made leather shoes and so became widely popular among the city's poorer residents.⁵⁵ As remarkable as such regional successes were, the exponential rise in Japan's trade with Africa was more

⁴⁹ Kitagawa, "Japan's Economic Relations with Africa," 131; Kitagawa, "Japanese Competition," 160-1.

⁵⁰ Kitagawa, "Japanese Competition," 159.

⁵¹ NA CO852/18/6 Mason Scheidler & Co. to the Department of Overseas Trade, January 23, 1935.

⁵² C. Kemp, *Department of Overseas Trade: Economic Conditions in British East Africa, April, 1934—March, 1936* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1936), 47-8.

⁵³ Morikawa, "Myth and Reality," 40-3; Bradshaw, "Japan and European Colonialism in Africa," 374; Kitagawa, "Japan's Economic Relations with Africa"; A.E. Pollard, *Department of Overseas Trade: Report on Economic and Commercial Conditions in British East Africa, July 1937-July 1938* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1939), 35-9.6; NA DO35/294/1 "Japan: Commercial Relations," November 16, 1933.

⁵⁴ Kitagawa, "Japanese competition in the Congo Basin," 161-2.

⁵⁵ Bradshaw and Ransdell, "Japan, Britain and the Yellow Peril in Africa"; Richard Bradshaw and Jim Ransdell, "Anti-Asian Agitation in South Africa in the 1930s: Reactions to the 'Japanese Treaty' and 'Honorary White' Status," *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 32 (2010): 3-21.

striking in aggregate. In 1929, less than three percent of Japan's total export trade was with Africa. Five years later that percentage had nearly tripled. According to a report by the Yokohama and Tokyo Foreign Board of Trade, in 1933 Japan's exports to Africa were already double that of its exports to its own East Asian colonies.⁵⁶

In the early 1930s, Japanese firms began to face significant resistance to Japanese goods around the world. For example, in June 1931, Chinese consumers began a boycott of Japanese cloth in protest of the deaths of Chinese in Korea. The annexation of Manchuria three months later fortified the boycott.⁵⁷ Anti-Japan sentiment was also building in Europe, North America, and elsewhere. South Africa, for instance, took extreme measures to diminish the number of Japanese imports. Efforts to limit the trade included high tariffs and barring Japanese citizens from even entering South Africa. By categorizing all Japanese as 'prohibited immigrants' under the 1913 Immigration Act, South African authorities used racially discriminatory legislation to effectively deny Japanese firms access to South Africa.⁵⁸ France and Portugal also introduced severe quotas and tariffs to restrict Japanese imports into their African colonies.⁵⁹ Similarly, in the mid-1930s, Holland and the United States forced Japan to negotiate new trade agreements that limited Japanese imports.⁶⁰

As East Asian and many colonial markets shunned their goods, Japanese firms focused more intently on British India and Africa, among other markets. However, Britain was keen to renegotiate trade relations with Japan as a means to protect colonial markets, India in particular. Pressure from the India Office led to the government's abrogation of the 1904 Indo-Japan Treaty and thus the protection of Indian markets against Japanese imports. In 1934 Japan agreed to quotas in India, but subsequent negotiations between Japanese and British industry leaders that aimed to create distinct global spheres of trade failed.⁶¹ Britain also aimed to reduce Japanese trade with its African subjects. From 1933 British East African colonies prohibited Japanese agents from managing local cotton ginneries or selling ginned cotton abroad. As a result, Japanese firms had no choice but to

⁵⁶ NA CO852/23/5 JNO Chaplin, "Memorandum respecting Japanese Trade in Neutral Markets," September 10, 1935; NA CO852/23/5 Yokohama & Tokyo Foreign Board of Trade, *Annual Report for the Year 1933*, Appendix. By 1934, the total value of Japanese exports to East Africa reached ¥37.4 million.

⁵⁷ "Memorandum on the Chinese Boycott," *Memorandum 2*, 5 (1933): 1-3.

⁵⁸ Ultimately, a decline in wool prices, followed by Japanese overtures to purchase South Africa wool, encouraged South Africa to lift these restrictions. Japanese traders were now deemed 'honorary whites,' but the revival of trade occasioned a flurry of racist invectives. The voice of protectionists and race-baiters grew in the early 1930s, as did popular paranoia of Japanese economic power and geopolitical strategy. Though Japan's willingness to buy large quantities of South African wool kept the door to trade open in the mid-1930s, increases in Japanese exports to South Africa fueled popular xenophobia and extreme anti-Japanese sentiment among whites. Bradshaw and Ransdell, "Japan, Britain and the Yellow Peril in Africa"; Morikawa, "Myth and Reality", 40-43; Bradshaw, "Japan and European Colonialism in Africa"; Katsuhiko Kitagawa, "Japan's Trade with South Africa in the Inter-War Period: A Study of Japanese Consular Reports," in Chris Alden and Katsumi Hirano, *Japan and South Africa in a Globalising World: A Distant Mirror* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 25-44; Eric Rosenthal, *Japan's Bid for Africa, Including the Story of the Madagascar Campaign* (Johannesburg: Central News Agency, Ltd, 1944).

⁵⁹ NA CO852/23/5 JNO Chaplin, "Memorandum respecting Japanese Trade in Neutral Markets," September 10, 1935. Egypt likewise increased tariffs on Japanese imports.

⁶⁰ N. Kagotani, "Japanese Cotton Textile Diplomacy in the First Half of the 1930s: The Case of the Dutch-Japanese Trade Negotiations in 1934," *Bulletin of Asia-Pacific Studies*, VII (1997).

⁶¹ Best, "Economic appeasement or economic nationalism?," 84.

export raw cotton to be ginned elsewhere.⁶² Fearing the entrance of Japanese cotton goods into yet other markets, Britain removed its West African colonies—including Sierra Leone, Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Cameroon—from a prewar Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty that ensured free access. Though British policymakers wished to appear non-aggressive, such moves were powerfully symbolic gestures that demonstrated the lengths to which Britain was willing to go in order to restrict Japanese exports.⁶³

Impediments to Japanese trade in the colonial world, exacerbated in 1937 by the Sino-Japanese war and additional limits on exports to India, encouraged Japanese firms to concentrate on those markets where they still could operate freely, including East Africa. As a result, between 1934 and 1939 the value of Japanese exports to East Africa reached unprecedented heights.⁶⁴ The case of Kenya, Japan's regional commercial nucleus, was telling. In 1937 Japan was the single most important supplier of nearly all consumer goods to Kenya: cotton goods, shoes, glassware, enamelware, and even cement. Japan's trade with Kenya had mushroomed and exports to Kenya were now nearly double that of British exports.⁶⁵ From Kenya to Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Somaliland, the Belgian Congo, and Uganda, in the second half of the 1930s most African consumers chose to buy Japanese textiles. As war loomed, East Africans were wearing new styles fashioned out of Japanese-made cotton goods, which included textiles manufactured from African cotton. Thus, Japanese manufacturers profited both from East African cotton production and African consumers' demand for cotton goods.

Power

The early 1930s was a golden age for Japan's textile industry. In 1932, Japanese cotton piece goods held more than fifty percent of markets as diverse as the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, Ceylon, and Tanganyika. But Japanese manufacturers' gain was often European industry's loss. In and beyond the colonial world demand for European cotton piece goods declined steadily in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁶ In its sober analysis of Japanese cotton textile exports in 1935, Britain's Colonial Office concluded that, "where they compete on level terms with those of other countries, Japanese manufacturers...largely capture the market." Though the Colonial Office recognized that Japanese and British goods were frequently "non-competitive," in instances of direct competition, British goods, the Colonial Office noted, "have usually suffered."⁶⁷

British policymakers' primary concern was that Japan's textile trade was decimating the British cotton goods industry. But the Colonial Office harbored other concerns as well. For instance, the advances of Japanese textiles raised alarm over "potential competition" from a range of other products such as bicycles, woolen textiles,

⁶² Kitagawa, "Japan's Economic Relations with Africa," 136.

⁶³ Ann Trotter, *Britain and East Asia, 1933-1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 29-30.

⁶⁴ In 1937 Japanese trade with sub-Saharan Africa reached an all time high of ¥209.8 million. Kitagawa, "Japan's Economic Relations with Africa".

⁶⁵ In 1935 Japan even shipped more than three hundred and fifty tons of beer to Mombasa. Bradshaw, "Japan and European Colonialism in Africa," 237. Nicola Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, 1918-1977* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 43-4.

⁶⁶ NA DO35/294/1 "Japan: Commercial Relations," November 16, 1933.

⁶⁷ NA CO852/23/5 JNO Chaplin, "Memorandum respecting Japanese Trade in Neutral Markets," September 10, 1935.

cement, and electric machinery. The cotton goods that caused much consternation were therefore perceived to be a harbinger of future losses. The 1935 Colonial Office analysis and other papers therefore concluded that “artificial barriers” to the import of Japanese goods was the only way for Britain to retain market share in its colonies.⁶⁸ The reality was more complex. For example, as the sale of Japanese cotton goods increased in British East Africa, consumers continued to buy British cloth at consistent levels. Yet, right across the region Japanese cottons dramatically reduced Indian manufacturers’ share of the market. For instance, between 1931 and 1933 Indian cotton textile imports in Tanganyika declined by nearly two-thirds.⁶⁹

British cotton textile manufacturing was in crisis, so such fine points were lost on Lancashire’s industrial leaders. In the 1920s Lancashire had lost many important markets to manufacturers in India and China. In the depression era, Japan emerged as an even more formidable competitor. Thus, as Ann Trotter has argued, the preservation of remaining colonial markets for British-manufactured cotton cloth became a top priority for Lancashire. Regional representatives in parliament, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and the Cotton Board put great pressure on the government to act against Japanese goods.⁷⁰ Indeed, they demanded a range of restrictions on Japanese exports to British colonies, regardless of the political cost.⁷¹ Throughout the 1930s Lancashire’s demands dogged Whitehall. Yet, many in official circles were wary of unilateral action. As tension rose with Germany, some in the Foreign Office saw Japan as a needed ally that it did not wish to alienate. Moreover, the Colonial Office recognized that low-priced goods benefited colonial subjects, particularly during the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the demands of the textile industry proved triumphant and became a driving force of imperial economic policy in the 1930s.⁷²

As we saw in the previous section, in the early 1930s Whitehall looked for ways to effectively restrict Japanese cotton goods where their presence was yet limited. Trade talks between Japan and Britain in this regard bore little fruit since Japan had no obligation to accept arbitrary restrictions. Thus, British policymakers turned to unilateral means, including tariffs and quotas. Though the government explained to the Japanese ambassador in London that such measures were “not be taken in any unfriendly spirit,” British representatives stated in no uncertain terms that these efforts were intended “to protect the vital commercial interests” of Britain. Throughout most of the British Empire, a quota system was instated from 1934.⁷³ The effects of this system were in many cases dramatic. Though Japanese exports to non-quota dependencies grew, in the first year of quotas Japanese cloth aggregate exports to other British colonial dependencies fell from fifty

⁶⁸ Ibid, 15-6.

⁶⁹ NA DO35/294/1 “Japan: Commercial Relations,” November 16, 1933.

⁷⁰ Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, 23, 28; David Clayton, “Inter-Asian competition for the British market in cotton textiles: the political economy of Anglo-Asian cartels, c.1932-60,” in Lantham and Kawakatsu, eds., *Intra-Asian Trade*, 186-208; Lars G. Sandberg, *Lancashire in Decline: A Study in Entrepreneurship, Technology, and International Trade* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974).

⁷¹ See, for instance, NA BT11/1375 E.R. Streat, The Cotton Board, to R.J. Shackle, Board of Trade, November 7, 1940.

⁷² Best, “Economic appeasement or economic nationalism?,” 91-3.

⁷³ NA CAB/24/249 “Memorandum Handed to the Japanese Ambassador,” May 3, 1934; C.C. Wrigley, “Aspects of Economic History,” in Roberts, *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 7, 113-4.

million linear yards to just ten million.⁷⁴ Moreover, in its first years the quota system contributed to a sixty percent increase in British textile exports to the colonies. The effect was more fantastic in places such as Ceylon where quotas on Japanese goods effectively tripled British textile imports. An early memorandum on the subject of quotas therefore concluded that they had not only prevented a decline in British exports but had contributed to an increase in demand.⁷⁵

Policymakers touted the success of the quotas, but the effects of the new system were more uneven than analysts were often willing to admit. For instance, quotas instituted in the Somaliland Protectorate had deleterious effects on the economy and were of marginal benefit to British industry. Restricting Japanese cotton goods to slightly over half the total imports did not spell victory for Lancashire. British textile manufacturers had paid scant attention to the market in recent years and Lancashire cotton goods were far more expensive than their Japanese competitors. Thus, as Japanese goods were restricted, consumers simply stopped buying grey sheeting. Since this variety of cloth was so important to the Protectorate's economy (see above), consumer abstention had wider economic repercussions. In the words of one official, the shortages of grey sheeting had, "adverse effects upon trading conditions generally."⁷⁶ Consumers in Somaliland soon found ways around the quota system. Rather than buying Japanese cloth and tailoring it in Somaliland, Somalis simply purchased garments sewn of Japanese cloth in neighboring Aden. By shipping readymade clothes across the Red Sea, Somalis continued to buy Japanese goods above the quotas.⁷⁷

Under ever increasing pressure from Lancashire, Whitehall instituted more severe quotas as the decade wore on.⁷⁸ Yet, this was only one dimension of British imperial economic policy towards Japan. British policymakers were keen to identify additional ways to increase the consumption of British cotton goods. To this end, they lowered tariffs on Empire imports into colonial possessions. In the case of Somaliland, this reduction of tariffs effectively lowered the price of Manchester grey sheeting. But since British Indian-produced cloth also benefited from the reduced tariff scheme, Lancashire goods faced stiff

⁷⁴ NA CO852/52/1 "Extract from official report of 20th December 1935."

⁷⁵ The quotas, however, were not the only factor in increasing British textile exports. The increased purchasing power of British colonial subjects in the mid-1930s also contributed to rising demand. NA CO852/52/1 "Memorandum of the effect and working of the Textile Quotas in the Colonial Empire," n.d. ca. 1936. Richard Bradshaw has argued that had European empires not severely restricted colonial trade with Japan, "it appears almost certain that African markets would have soon become more crucial to Japan's export industries than to those of most, if not all, of those colonial powers." Bradshaw, "Japan and European Colonialism in Africa," 369.

⁷⁶ NA CO852/18/6 "Somaliland Protectorate. Report on the Quota system for Foreign Textile goods for 1934" [1935]; NA CO852/18/6 A.E. Overton, Board of Trade to Secretary, Manchester Chamber of Commerce, May 13, 1935; NA CO535/105 Malcolm MacDonald to Sir Arthur Lawrence, July 24, 1935. In mid-1930s Somaliland, Colonial Office analysts argued that import duties on Japanese cloth were "so arranged that they will take the place largely and by indirect means, of the taxation of the native population which is otherwise absent." When tariffs were increased, traders simply crossed the border into Ethiopia to buy food and clothes, including grey sheeting. This frontier commerce, a 1934 report noted, was "difficult to control and impossible to stop." NA CO852/18/6 "Memorandum: Grey Sheeting and the British Somaliland Trade," December 17, 1934.

⁷⁷ NA CO852/109/9 "Somaliland Protectorate. Report on the Quota system for Regulated Textiles for 1936," September 4, 1937.

⁷⁸ NA CAB/24/248 "Committee on Japanese Trade Competition: Report," April 12, 1934; Best, "Economic appeasement or economic nationalism?," 84

competition from Indian cottons.⁷⁹ When Japan indicated that it would withdraw from the League of Nations in 1933, Britain was presented with another opportunity to restrict Japanese imports in East Africa. Once Japan withdrew from the League, Britain was no longer obligated to maintain free trade privileges with regards to its mandates, Tanganyika included. Thus, Whitehall erected new barriers to Japanese exports to Tanganyika.

The greatest remaining impediment to Britain's ability to restrict Japanese trade in East African markets was the treaty of Saint Germain-en-Laye. British legal and diplomatic experts agreed that the government could not act unilaterally, and therefore quotas were out of the question. If Britain did erect barriers, the experts warned, it would directly violate the terms of the treaty and further compromise relations with Japan.⁸⁰ At the same time, Lancashire demanded that the government tighten restrictions on Japanese trade with British East Africa.⁸¹ In consequence of the political pressure brought to bear by the home textile industry, the British government denounced the Saint Germain-en-Laye treaty in its entirety. It was an extreme act that further strained British-Japanese relationships.⁸² Yet, the denunciation had limited effects on East African demand for Japanese cotton goods, and Japanese imports continued to dominate in the region. As a result, in 1937 the Manchester Chamber of Commerce demanded yet more restrictions in East Africa.⁸³ As war loomed in late 1940, Lancashire even demanded trade restrictions against Indian cotton goods exports to East Africa.⁸⁴ The British government attempted to placate Lancashire, but only war stemmed the flow of Japanese cotton goods into East Africa. Right up until the Japanese attacks on British possessions in late 1941, Japanese piece goods held a strong position in East African markets. Japan's export trade to Zanzibar, for example, continued into 1941, though Japanese cotton piece goods and *khangas* had declined by more than half in the previous year.⁸⁵ By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan's dominance of eastern African markets was over. Lancashire and Whitehall may have triumphed, but far greater concerns overshadowed the 'trade competition' that had so occupied both for more a decade. Trade war had given way to total war.

Conclusion

In the years before the Second World War, East Africa was a theater in a global, inter-empire struggle for low-income consumers of cotton goods. In this contest East African consumers were keen social actors, objects of Japanese economic interest, and colonial subjects whose choices British policymakers sought to affect using every means at their

⁷⁹ NA CO852/52/1 "Memorandum of the effect and working of the Textile Quotas in the Colonial Empire," n.d. ca. 1936.

⁸⁰ NA CO 852/23/5 "Congo Basin Treaties. Memorandum." October 18, 1935.

⁸¹ NA CO852/18/6 Sidney Wilke, Secretary of the Cotton Trade League to A.G. Overton, Board of Trade, "British Trade with East Africa," May 2, 1935.

⁸² Bradshaw, "Japan and European Colonialism in Africa." Increasing tensions had political dimensions as well. Kweku Ampiah has argued that the new tariff structure was an indirect means of checking Japan's expanding economy at a time of growing rivalry in Asia and the Pacific.

⁸³ Best, "Economic appeasement or economic nationalism?," 95. For a complete analysis of Lancashire perceptions of Japan and attempts to limit Japan's exports see Robertson, "Lancashire and Rise of Japan."

⁸⁴ NA BT11/1375 R.J. Shackle, Board of Trade to E.R. Streat, The Cotton Board, December 5, 1940.

⁸⁵ NA CO690/29 Zanzibar Protectorate Blue Book for the Year ended 31st December 1941.

disposal. Popular notions of modernity, fashion trends of the Western Indian Ocean basin, and an emergent wage sector fuelled a phenomenal increase in African demand for Japanese imports. Moreover, as the real wages of East Africans fell, the low price of Japanese goods enabled consumers to continue to dress well despite economic hardship. East African demand for cotton goods was a boon to Japanese industry at time when anti-Japanese sentiment and a new era of European colonial 'managed trade' limited outlets for Japan's all-important export trade.⁸⁶ Severely restricted from exporting cotton goods to West Africa, South Africa, India, and China, Japanese manufacturers placed even greater emphasis on British East Africa in the 1930s. With its combination of postwar treaties and a sizeable mandate state, East Africa was one of the few global markets where Japanese goods were largely unrestricted. This combination of demand and access reoriented British East African economies in ways that caused great consternation in British industrial circles. These in turn forced policymakers to act against Japanese commercial interests in the region.⁸⁷

From the late 1920s until the early 1940s the central question that occupied all parties interested in the British East African economy was what African consumers would purchase and who would benefit from their choices. Japanese business and political actors approached this question from a position determined by the need for outlets for Japan's burgeoning textile industry. As a result, Japanese firms attempted to understand what precisely African consumers wanted. The British textile industry approached the question rather differently. They believed that the restriction of Japanese goods would necessarily lead to a rise in demand for British goods, and this, they argued, was good for both Britain and the Empire. Many other British analysts were wary of unilateral action against Japan, fearing that restricting access to markets and raw materials could strain relations with Britain's wartime ally. As another war with Germany loomed and British concerns about its Southeast Asian possessions increased, the stakes of alienating Japan rose exponentially.⁸⁸ Indeed, restrictions on imports by Britain and other European colonial powers did not go down well in Japan. From the perspective of Japanese policymakers, European efforts to block Japanese exports to Middle East, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Caribbean, and African markets struck at the heart of Japan's industrial progress. This perception had two effects. First, it led to great tension between Britain and Japan in the 1930s. Second, it encouraged Japanese industry and imperial policymakers to fortify Japan's position in East Asian markets. Japan's desire to ensure access to East Asian markets, when combined with its powerful military-industrial complex and the rise of a more aggressive form of nationalism, set Japan on a course for war.⁸⁹ The power to control trade also had limits that the anti-Japanese lobby in Britain did not fully appreciate. In some instances, measures to restrict Japanese imports were ineffective. In East Africa,

⁸⁶ Howe, *The Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy*, 218.

⁸⁷ Best, "'Economic appeasement or economic nationalism?'" 97-8.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 90, 93; On concerns about antagonizing Japan see, for instance, NA CAB 27/596 "The Future of Anglo-Japanese Relations, Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs," October 16, 1934.

⁸⁹ Bradshaw, "Japan and European Colonialism in Africa," 363, 369, 413. See also Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific* (New York: Longman, 1987); Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1969).

increased tariffs did not diminish the appeal of Japanese cotton goods. Despite draconian trade restrictions, East Africans still purchased Japanese goods, often to the greatest degree possible.

Though the Second World War displaced Japanese cotton goods from East African markets, the consumer choices of African subjects remained a concern of colonial officials. During the war, shortages of goods and a general increase in the cost of living deepened anti-government sentiment. Among the greatest concerns of East Africans was the continued rise in the price of clothing. In Dar es Salaam, between 1939 and 1942 the price of *khanga* rose by over sixty percent. As a district officer reported in 1945, “the end of the war and a lavish supply of cotton piece goods were expected to be synonymous.” But without the return of Japanese textiles, cotton goods were severely limited after the war. In 1947 when the colonial government advertised the sale of *kaniki* (used for *buibui* and other clothing) in Dar es Salaam, the queue to buy the cloth was nearly a half-mile long.⁹⁰ Japanese trade with Africa ultimately did recover.⁹¹ In the 1950s it reached unprecedented heights when Africa absorbed nearly twenty percent of Japan’s total exports, or roughly double the percentage of Japan’s exports to Africa in the mid-1930s.⁹² However, the postwar trade was more varied than that of the interwar period, and East Africans would never again clothe themselves in Japanese cotton goods to the degree that they had in the 1930s.

British imperial policymakers mediated Africa’s global economic relationships, but East African consumer demands affected colonial economies in important ways. Specifically, the mixed results of the British imperial restriction schemes in East Africa suggest that Britain could not easily affect consumer trends. When it did, such efforts could have deleterious effects on colonial economies. Thus, East African consumption patterns were in some ways less constricted by government directives than were other aspects of Africans’ economic lives under colonial rule. Moreover, as the case of Japanese textiles suggests, East African demand for Japanese cotton goods influenced global networks of exchange and production. Perhaps most important, these demands, driven by a thriving market in European- and Swahili-style clothing, helped expand the industrial capacity of Britain’s imperial rival in East Asia, a rival that by the late 1930s had become a formidable economic and military opponent.

Severe measures to restrict Japanese goods in colonial markets also had long term reverberations that few in the interwar period could foresee. What John Iliffe referred to as the “accelerating trend towards managerial government” raised political tensions in Tanganyika and other East African colonies. State control over the minutia of economic activity, including forcing East Africans to pay more for clothing by raising artificial barriers to trade, stoked popular animosity towards the colonial state. “As government

⁹⁰ Quoted in Iliffe, *Modern History of Tanganyika*, 372, 353.

⁹¹ In the postwar years Japan and Britain faced stiff competition from manufacturing centers such as Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan. Young-il Park and Kym Anderson, *The Rise and Demise of Textiles and Clothing in Economic Development: The Case of Japan*, Pacific Economic Papers, No. 163 (Canberra: Australia-Japan Research Centre, Australian National University, 1988).

⁹² Bradshaw, “Japan and European Colonialism in Africa,” 429-30; William Nester, “Japanese Neomercantilism toward Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Africa Today* 38, 3 (1991): 31-51; Jun Morikawa, *Japan and Africa: Big Business and Diplomacy* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1997); Kweku Ampiah, *The Dynamics of Japan’s Relations with Africa: South Africa, Tanzania and Nigeria* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

took control of the economy,” Iliffe concluded, “so Africans directed their grievances and misfortunes towards government.”⁹³ In short, the managed economies of the mid-twentieth century helped to stimulate political action, including nationalism. The consumer demands of East Africans thus affected global economic relationships and colonial rule in ways that imperial policymakers could neither entirely control nor predict.

⁹³ Iliffe, *Modern History of Tanganyika*, 372.