

Transcending Fibers and Regions:

Global Manufacture and Circulation of “Cheaper” Cloth-Clothing, 17th-20th Centuries

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Presenters

1. Miki Sugiura, Hosei University, Japan
2. Naoko Inoue, Tokyo International University, Japan
3. Izumi Takeda, Wako University, Japan
4. John Styles, University of Hertfordshire, UK

Objective

This workshop aims to describe the global manufacture of “cheaper” cloth and clothing in the 18th and 20th centuries. It takes an object-based approach, and repositions the research on the long-term development of three items: cotton-linen, slave cloth/clothing, and silk spun cloth/clothing. The manufacture and development of these items requires a trans-regional/transnational as well as what we term a “trans-fiber” contextualization. Although recently scholars have increasingly succeeded in considering textile circulation beyond national frameworks, many studies continue to be divided according to the type of fiber used, for example, wool, cotton, linen, or silk. However, simultaneously, we concede that English term “cotton” meant certain fabrics made of wool before the arrival of Indian “cotton” fiber, while the label “linen” involves fabrics made of both linen and cotton fiber throughout the 18th-19th centuries. We argue that thinking not in terms of fibers but in terms of how the specific uses and functions of cloth-clothing were replaced, transferred, and developed using new forms and fiber mixes opens the doors to new interpretations.

Presentations in this workshop focus in particular on how “cheaper” ranges of cloth–clothing were manufactured. The first presentation considers how slave clothing was made in the 18th century in the context of Dutch trading posts, where various ranges of imported products were mingled. The second presentation will demonstrate how the so called consumer revolution in Northwestern Europe can be positioned differently when considered from the perspective of multiple fibers, while the third presentation considers the multifaceted context in which mechanized spun silk was bought, focusing on late 19th and early 20th century Japan. Finally, the fourth presentation bridges over three other presentations and repositions check cotton linens of Lancashire in global contexts.

All presentations assume as their starting point the situation whereby wool, cotton, linen, and silk were mingled and then expand to consider long-term global contextualization, taking North Western Europe, Italy, India, and Japan as reference points.

Presentation 1

Miki Sugiura

Slave Clothing and Early Modern Dutch Textile Circulations in the Indian Ocean World

Abstract

The production and circulation of slave clothing in the 18th century were challenging in two respects: First, they had to meet the constant and collective demand for cloth and clothing in remote areas, and second, the clothing had to be cheap. Clarifying this process is also very challenging as the records are often scarce and, moreover, the contexts of slave cloth and clothing varied entirely according to region. Therefore, even when the same labels of, for example, “Guineas” or “Negro Cloth” were used and applied to slave wares inter-regionally, we should be very careful in connecting them. Nevertheless, their manufacture is a crucial aspect of the global history of clothing.

By examining how slave cloth and clothing were created and circulated in different Dutch trade posts of the Indian Ocean, this presentation clarifies how textiles were circulated and used for dressing in the global context. The presentation focuses on two rather isolated fringe points of circulation, namely Cape Town and Japan. First, by examining the epistemology of labels used for the imported textiles in Japan from the late 15th century onwards, it will be revealed how the cloth, originally intended for slaves in a Portuguese context, had turned into a major populuxe good by the 17th century in other locations. The paper will then demonstrate how slave clothing was actually manufactured to meet the growing demand in Cape Town colonies, using imported cheap textiles from both India and Europe. Finally, the British takeover of the colony will then clarify how the disconnected slave clothing in Dutch circulation came from British circulations.

C. V.

Miki Sugiura is a professor of World Economic History at Hosei University, Japan and is a GHC member. She obtained her PhD in Early Modern Dutch distribution systems 1580-1750 from the University of Tokyo in 2004. She has published articles comparing urban distribution and consumption in the early modern world, particularly in Japan and the Netherlands and their colonies. She is currently writing a book, *A world history from the perspective of secondhand clothing circulation* (University of Tokyo Press, forthcoming 2017). Since 2014, she has been organizing the LCCG (Linking Cloth-Clothing Globally: <http://lccg.tokyo>) and has organized a series of international conferences promoting the global history of dress and textiles. LCCG's latest essay collections will be published as an e-book from Ochanomizu University Press entitled “Use and Value of Cloth-Clothing, 18th-20th centuries.” which will include Sugiura's two articles on slave clothing as well as on the mediator role of the Dutch East India Company in textile circulation observed in Early Modern Japan.

Presentation 2

Izumi Takeda

“Positioning Irish coarse linens in an eighteenth-century global context (tentative)”

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present a framework for discussing textile industries and apply it to the eighteenth-century Irish linen industry. Though it is common in the field of economic history to study textile industries according to their fibers, this paper tries to remove the walls between fibers and focuses on textile names. What consumers/users of textiles value most is their characteristics rather than what they are made of. As names of textiles usually correspond to their characteristics, the consumers/users immediately identify the textile from its name and decide what to buy or what to use.

In addition, we must be aware that each textile name works as a category and often includes more than one fiber. The term “linen”, for example, which is generally defined as a fabric made of flax fiber has a broad meaning including not only flax-cotton mixed fabrics but also pure cotton ones at times. Therefore, the framework applied here automatically requires a “trans-fiber” perspective.

Bearing the above in mind, this paper deals with the term “Irish linen” as a composition of many different kinds of fabrics and discusses how the specific kinds of coarse linens were produced under the mercantile policy of Britain, which was then preparing itself for the Industrial Revolution and producing flax-cotton mixed fabrics such as fustian.

C. V.

TAKEDA Izumi is now a professor of Economic History at Wako University. She obtained her PhD degree in economics from the University of Tokyo in 2010. Her PhD dissertation deals with the cotton and linen industries in 18th-century England and Ireland and analyzes the relation between the two. In 2013 she published a book called “Spinning the British Industrial Revolution from flax and cotton: the Irish Linen Industry and the Atlantic Market: ‹Original Japanese Title is Asa to Men ga tsumugu Igrisu Sangyo Kakumei›” (Minerva Shobo). As one of the organizers of LCCG (Linking Cloth-Clothing globally: <http://lccg.tokyo>) she is investigating the links between and among different textile industries by transcending the boundaries of different fibers.

Presentation 3

Naoko Inoue

“Silk waste, Spun Silk Cloth, and Meisen Kimono: Technological Transfer and Emergence of New Industry and Products in Japan from the late 19th century to the 1930s”

Abstract

Although cotton is considered as king of fibers on the field of the global economic history, the technological transfer in Japan's silk reeling industries in the latter half of the 19th century has distinctive meaning in Asia's 'catch-up' to the West. Where there is sericulture /silk production, there is its by-product; silk waste. Shedding lights on the emergence of the silk-spinning industry, the most efficient way to recycle the silk waste, we can still break new ground in the global history.

The silk waste industry, from the very beginning, was able to use cotton-spinning machinery and develop as a factory-based large-scale industry, and this makes it different from the silk reeling. From the consumer point of view, people of the period sensed spun silk as something between cotton and raw silk and the industry eventually gave way to rayon. Relatively cheap spun-silk kimono, meisen, with vivid colors and global motifs expanded the market in the 1920s Japan, even when sales for cotton products weren't growing. That means people of that time didn't only seek cheap prices, but they were, actually, in need of 'silk-like' cheap and flamboyant kimono. The success of meisen induced the weavers to produce 'cotton /rayon meisen' in the later period.

In other words, from the establishing process, spun silk has trans-fiber attributes in the context of quality, price and use, and it aroused the desire for the Japanese trans-fiber 'fast fashion' through the modern retailing system of department stores and local wholesalers.

C. V.

Naoko INOUE, Lecturer at Tokyo Int'l University specializes in Japanese silk waste industry and the global knowledge transfer of the silk-spinning technology as one of the organizers of LCCG (Linking Cloth-Clothing globally: <http://lccg.tokyo>). Her PhD dissertation examines the Habsburg industrial policy for Österreichisches Küstenland and the growth of the manufacturing sector of the area. She's trying to detect the linkage between the Austrian/Italian industrial heritage and that of Japan. After working at the Embassy of Japan in Rome as a researcher, currently she teaches Economic History and European Economy at Tokyo Int'l University and Josai University.

Presentation 4

John Styles

“Cotton-linen checks and their markets in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic”

Abstract

Check fabrics (*toiles et siamoises à carreaux*) were one of the principal products of the Lancashire cotton industry in the mid-eighteenth century, on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, Joseph Inikori, in his *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England* (2002), has argued that it was the exchange of Lancashire checks for slaves in West Africa that was the crucial stimulus to mechanical innovation in cotton manufacture in the 1760s and 1770s. Yet checks were a novelty in eighteenth-century Britain. Before 1700, they were neither widely manufactured, nor widely used.

The paper identifies the rise of linen and cotton checks in Britain as one element in a much broader trend towards lighter fabrics across early-modern western Europe. Many of these lighter fabrics combined different fibres in new, or unfamiliar mixes. Sometimes they employed cheaper variants of familiar materials. Textiles originating in India were especially prominent here, whether in their own right, or in the form of European copies. The checks woven in Lancashire were imitations of the Indian all-cotton check fabrics, such as *chelloes*, imported to Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, principally to be traded for slaves in Africa. Like their Indian equivalents, they were exported to Africa, though at a lower price point, yet they differed from the Indian originals not only in their price, but also in their fibre content. The Lancashire checks sold in large quantities in Britain and its American colonies, where Indian checks were in less demand than in West Africa. The paper assesses the shape of the market for Lancashire linen and cotton checks in Britain and its American territories – who used them, slave or free, and how they were used. Finally it argues that, contrary to Joseph Inikori’s view, it is unlikely Lancashire checks were a key stimulus to mechanical innovation in the British cotton industry, due to the way they combined different fibres.

C. V.

John Styles is Research Professor in History at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. Previously he was Head of Graduate Studies at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where he remains Senior Honorary Research Fellow. He specializes in the history of early-modern Britain and its empire, especially the study of material life, manufacturing and design. His most recent books are *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (co-edited with Amanda Vickery, 2006), *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (2007), and *Threads of Feeling: The London Foundling Hospital’s Textile Tokens, 1740-1770* (2010). His exhibition, ‘Threads of Feeling’, was displayed at the London Foundling Museum in 2010-11 and at the de Witt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, USA in 2012-13 (www.threadsoffeeeling.com). From 2010 to 2015 he held a European Research Council Advanced Grant for his research project ‘Spinning in the Era of the Spinning Wheel, 1400 to 1800’ (www.spinning-wheel.org). He is currently writing a book on fashion, textiles and the global origins of the British Industrial Revolution.