Studies on cotton textiles have inspired many theories on the rise of Industrial Europe and the concomitant underdevelopment of Asian societies. Economic historians working on South Asia are at the forefront in discussing how the English manufacture of fine cotton yarns and textiles using steam-run machinery (and the dumping of these products in India) resulted in the failure of Indian society to advance from proto-industrialization to full mechanization. Along similar lines of argument, Hiroshi Matsuo also explains that the Dutch imitation of English technology and subsequent exports to Java interrupted the development of Javanese cotton textile production in the nineteenth century.¹ Anthony Reid proposes that signs of underdevelopment were already at play in Southeast Asia prior to the Industrial Revolution. In view of the thriving Southeast Asian import trade of Indian cotton cloth in the period from the 1500s to the 1680s, Reid has argued that the drastic fall in the demand for Indian textiles from the late seventeenth century marked the beginnings of poverty, or the end of the “Age of Commerce” in the Southeast Asian region.²

With regard to Matsuo’s theory, more up-to-date research by Alfons van der Kraan and Peter Boomgaard has shown that dwindling domestic production did not necessarily connote deindustrialization. Instead, they consider yarn-spinning and textile-weaving to be laborious, time-consuming tasks. The decline of the industry would thus enable the “restructuring of the island’s economy,” as such releasing labor for other purposes, like producing food and commercial crops for sale.³ Experts on textile history also argue that European cotton imports helped the Javanese batik textile industry to take off. Due to the shorter fiber and climatic conditions, the types
of yarn spun from cotton varieties in Java were coarse in quality. Dutch-produced yarns were much stronger; textiles woven from these yarns were thus smoother in texture. As such, more intricate batik patterns could be drawn. In other words, use of European cotton products enabled batik art to ascend to the prime of its development. Very beautiful north Javanese textiles were created and produced in this period.

This chapter offers an alternative explanation to Reid’s observation of the falling demand for Indian textiles in early modern Southeast Asia. Using Dutch archival materials, it first discusses the development of the Javanese cotton textile industry and intra-Asian trade, and how Indian cloth came to occupy a niche in the Southeast Asian markets. Emphasis is placed on how Chinese merchants and Javanese rulers and lords came to assume key roles in the production and circulation of these commodities. In contrast to Reid’s argument, the essay also shows how the fall in demand for Indian textiles was more a function of switching back to domestic and regional production with the price inflation of the Indian supplies, than it was a sign of poverty on the part of Southeast Asian consumers. Furthermore, it looks at how the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC), which began to participate in the textile trade in Java from the seventeenth century, could only gain a share of the market after collaborating with the existing interest groups in the manufacture and commerce of these commodities.

Javanese Textile Production and Trade: Developments from the Ninth Century to the Eighteenth

Manufacturing cotton textiles involves the following processes: cotton growing, spinning, yarn preparation (washing and dyeing), winding and warping of threads, weaving, and finishing. For the famous Javanese painted cloth or batiks, an additional process is required before the finishing, namely, ornamenting the cloth using the wax-resist method. Patterns are drawn on the plain cloth with wax, and subsequently dipped into dye solutions. Repeated sequences of waxing, dyeing, and drying eventually yield the desired motifs and colors. These multiple processes can generally be divided into three primary categories: yarn-spinning, textile-weaving, and batikking.

In terms of the origins, weaving was probably first introduced to Indonesia by bronze- and iron-using peoples, who brought with them a simple back-tension loom. Through her analysis of the Javanese court kakawin literature and the sima charters, J. Christie has shown that Javanese textile weaving dated back to the first millennium. Although Indian textiles were
exported to central and east Java, most Javanese households appeared to produce the majority of the cloth they consumed, utilizing a type of body-tension loom still in use in some parts of Indonesia in the recent period. By the eleventh century, there were also professional dye processors (mangapus), weavers (acadar), and other textile support industries in most Javanese villages, as well as peddlers (atukel, abasana, amalanten, amananten) who specialized in cotton yarns and other textile products.\(^8\) Materials needed for manufacturing textiles, like cotton, and also various kinds of dyestuffs, such as indigo, mengkudu or Indian mulberry, safflower, and so on, had become taxable trade items as well. In other words, the production of cotton yarn and textile in early Java was not confined to the subsistence sector, but formed a commercial operation as well.\(^9\) Chinese sources from the Sung dynasty (960–1279) have also listed cotton cloth and cotton piece goods among the export items from Java.\(^10\)

Meanwhile, the first forms of batikking apparently developed in Java in the twelfth century. During this period, this method was known as tulis warna or “decorated with drawings in colour.” The term batik entered the Javanese vocabulary only in the seventeenth century.\(^11\) Whether this method was generated locally or introduced from outside is far less clear. Nevertheless, Indonesian textile experts, citing local myths and legends, are quite convinced that it was foreign, and more specifically, that the method came either from China or India.\(^12\)

Textiles in Java were used for clothing, decorative hangings, screens, cushion covers, covering-cloths for containers, and ritual receptacles, as well as to sit upon.\(^13\) In fact, they did not function only as clothing or accessories but had socio-religious import. By the tenth century, distinctions in terms of types and colors of textiles, as well as who was allowed to wear and use them, had also emerged. Those presented to the royal family and high officials were of a finer weave, like the cadar cloth and bananten cloth, and of much higher value compared to those used by commoners. Furthermore, the latter would normally wear cotton textiles of red (rangga) and blue (angsit), while aristocrats could don a wider range of colors such as pinks, ruby red, vermilion, orange, and saffron pink.\(^14\) Cloth bearing patterns like naga sari flowers, split lotus, yellow seeds, vegetal patterns, and rock motifs in specific colors were also worn during certain ritual occasions such as making offerings (wali) and life-crisis rituals (pras).\(^15\) From fourteenth-century Javanese records, the gringsing design, in particular—which subsequently became an important batik motif—is said to have been used by the king’s entourage in the annual royal procession.\(^16\) This tradition of demarcating social differentia-
tion through colors and patterns of textiles persisted into the early modern period. Dutch company sources recorded that, in 1786, Yogyakarta sultan Hamengkubuwana I confiscated textiles with the larangan motif sold on the market, as these were to be worn only by Javanese courtiers. Under the proprietary decree of 1769, the jelamprang motif—an eight-rayed rosette set in a modified square, circle, or hexagon—was also reserved for the susuhunan of Surakarta and his family.

In early modern Java, high-quality cotton textiles served as a form of property, and luxury textiles conferred prestige and were used as gifts and dowries or at funerals. Javanese rulers would also present gifts to their subordinates and vassals during ceremonial occasions such as the annual Garebeg day, when vassals would travel to the kraton (palace) of their overlord to pay homage. By the sixteenth century, besides locally produced luxury textiles, those produced in the Coromandel coast, Surat, Bengal, and other parts of the subcontinent were also highly sought after in Java and the Indonesian archipelago as a kind of wealth and status symbol. Indian traders would sometimes acquire decorative designs from their Southeast Asian buyers and commission Indian producers to manufacture textiles following these patterns. Thus, for many centuries, these cloth products were among the main commodities brought by South Asian traders to exchange for the fine spices produced in the Indonesian archipelago.

High-quality textiles, whether locally made or imported from India, have been regarded as markers of wealth and status not only in central and east Java, or Mataram Java, but also in many parts of the islands of Borneo, Sulawesi, Sumatra, as well as the eastern Indonesian archipelago. Together with the imports, textiles produced in the region were also traded in different parts of the archipelago. Some specialized regions had also appeared by the seventeenth century. From the little that is known, central and east Java imported raw cotton and cotton yarn from Bali and occasionally also from Palembang, which converted to growing cotton and spinning cotton yarn when pepper prices fell. Moreover, by the early modern period, there was a high degree of market specialization. European merchants found that Malay traders would not buy the Coromandel cottons they brought as these had “a little narrow white edge” when there should be none.

The importation of Indian textiles to maritime Southeast Asia decreased in the late seventeenth century, however. From about 40,000 rijksdaalders (rds) worth of Indian textiles brought to central and east Java in the late 1670s, these imports diminished by a staggering 90 percent to about 4,000.
The re-export of Indian textiles from Batavia to the north coast of Java by private traders also declined substantially, from 41,234 pieces in 1680 to fewer than 10,000 pieces twenty years later (see table 1). This phenomenon was accompanied by a simultaneous increase in cloth production in Java. In the early 1680s, the Batavia high government—the company’s highest administrative body in Asia—noted that the Javanese had begun to prefer the batiks manufactured in their own region to those imported from the Coromandel coast. The Pasisir, or the north coast of Java, exported not only batik textiles, but also plain cloth. Javanese textiles were exported predominantly to Sumatra, Kalimantan, the Melaka Straits, and also China. By 1695, there was a noticeable increase in weaving activities, causing a Dutch resident to comment that there were as many looms as there were households. A similar phenomenon occurred in other polities as well. Palembang and Jambi also drastically reduced their purchase of Indian textiles and turned to those produced locally and also in Cambodia, Siam, and Java instead.

Reid has interpreted this late-seventeenth-century phenomenon as a sign of impoverishment of the island Southeast Asians during this period. More specifically, he has argued that indigenous traders gradually lost out in the economic competition against the Europeans who had appeared in the region in the sixteenth century. By the late seventeenth century, the local

Table 1 Exports of Indian Textiles from Batavia to Java’s Northeast Coast by Private Traders, in Dutch Rijksdaalders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>quantity (rds)</th>
<th>year</th>
<th>quantity (rds)</th>
<th>year</th>
<th>quantity (rds)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1672</td>
<td>37,893</td>
<td>1695</td>
<td>26,923</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>14,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1675</td>
<td>38,857</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>8,440</td>
<td>1725</td>
<td>8,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1680</td>
<td>41,234</td>
<td>1705</td>
<td>4,838</td>
<td>1730</td>
<td>7,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>57,970</td>
<td>1710</td>
<td>7,844</td>
<td>1735</td>
<td>3,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1690</td>
<td>41,143</td>
<td>1716</td>
<td>4,635</td>
<td>1740</td>
<td>1,919</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i. The rise in private import amounts of Indian cloth in 1685 reflects the fact that from that year on, the company withdrew from the direct sales of the commodity on the Pasisir and sold cloth to Chinese traders at the company’s auctions in Batavia (Nagtegaal, Dutch Tiger, 147–48).

peoples had become so impoverished that they could afford only cloth made in the region instead of the luxurious ones manufactured in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere.30

However, Reid’s explanation is questionable since the textiles produced in the region were of comparable quality to those of Indian origin and included very luxurious ones too. Reporting to their superiors in the Netherlands in the early 1680s, company administrators for Java wrote that Javanese batik was scarcely inferior in its dyeing to that of the Coromandel cloth, and in terms of durability it was actually superior.31 In her study of the cloth trade in the southeastern part of Sumatra, B. Andaya also shows that, from the late seventeenth century, Palembang court ladies began to import much raw silk and gold thread to weave high-quality luxury fabrics.32 The reason was that these court ladies were unhappy that for the same price, Indian textiles were poorer in quality compared to those produced in the earlier decades.33

Furthermore, the prices of Indian textiles had markedly increased in the last two decades of the seventeenth century. War on the Coromandel coast, whose textiles were among the most coveted among Southeast Asian consumers, drove up the prices of the commodity.34 More importantly, after about 1680, Indian calicoes became very popular not only among Asians, but in Europe as well. As the various European companies competed fiercely for the textiles on the subcontinent, the prices of the commodities became inflated.35 The cost of Indian textiles in Jambi and Palembang, for instance, rose by 8 to 10 percent in the 1690s.36

In contrast to Reid’s impoverishment thesis, it seems more probable that the consumers of the Indonesian archipelago, who had the technology to manufacture textiles, including very fine ones, had considered it more cost-effective to undertake the production themselves. Unhappy that they were not getting value for money in the purchase of Indian products, Southeast Asians began to weave their own or get textile supplies from within the region. Figures from Dutch shipping lists show that regional centers of textile production began to increase their output and their manufactures were widely traded in the Indonesian archipelago in the eighteenth century. In 1719, only one _corge_—cloth measurement unit of twenty pieces—of Cambodian cloth was exported to Palembang between January and April. However, during the same period in 1759, 515 corge of Cambodian cloth and 255 corge of Siamese ones arrived in Sumatran port towns.37 In the 1720s, an annual average of 5,100 pieces of the cloth produced in the Bugis, Selayar, and other Sulawesian areas were exported to the archipelago, a figure that climbed steadily to about 130,000 pieces in the 1770s.38 The actual numbers
were possibly greater, since smuggling activities were rife in the Indonesian archipelago as traders sought to evade the customs at the ports controlled by the Dutch East India Company in the eighteenth century.39

Central and east Java featured most prominently among these centers of textile manufacture. There had been production prior to the seventeenth century, with Madura and Tuban as two of the better-known production areas since the early sixteenth century.40 When Batavia demanded its residents on the Pasisir acquire indigo from 1693, it was noted that virtually every coastal regency grew the indigo plant in modest quantities for the local textile industry.41 Javanese textiles were sold to neighboring polities in Sumatra and Borneo as well.42 Palembang, for example, had been buying rough cloth from Java since the early seventeenth century to cater to the commoners, but increased its imports of Javanese textiles in the eighteenth century. In 1719, 64 corge of Javanese cloth are listed. By 1758, the amount had reached 728 corge. Over 400 corge were registered for the October shipments of that year. The pattern continues through the century so that, from September to October 1793, it was noted in the Dutch shipping lists that 2,745 corge of Javanese cloth had reached Palembang.43

By the 1760s, it was common for vessels, be they manned by Chinese, Bugis, Javanese, Malays, or Dutch burghers, leaving from the Pasisir to other ports to carry some Javanese textiles with them. The quantity each brought along ranged from fewer than ten to as many as one hundred corges.44 In general, from the 1720s to the 1770s, exports had increased by about five times. For example, in the first nine-and-a-half months of 1720, 16,360 pieces of cloth were exported from Semarang to Borneo and the areas surrounding the Melaka Straits. From 1774 to 1777, during the same period, the average quantity of Javanese textile exports to these places had risen to 75,853 pieces of cloth.45

**Dutch Intervention in Javanese Cotton Textile and Yarn Production**

The Dutch East India Company considered the development of the Javanese cotton textile industry a threat. In the seventeenth century, it had been imitating South Asian and other regional traders in importing Indian textiles and opium to exchange for fine spices and other commodities from the Indonesian archipelago. Following their treaties with the rulers of the north coast of Java, as well as south Sulawesi in the 1670s and 1680s, the Dutch company administrators could quite successfully drive away all the Indian and Arab traders from the Indonesian archipelago region.46 However, almost simultaneously, the Javanese cloth practically priced the company imports of
Indian textiles out of the market in Sumatra, Borneo, and the Melaka Straits region. Company administrators tried to stop this trend. In 1684, they commissioned weavers on the Coromandel coast to make batik cloth in the Javanese style so as to undercut the Javanese producers. Much to their dismay, however, the Coromandel batik textiles not only were five times as expensive as the Javanese ones, but also proved to be less durable. In 1686, the high government in Batavia even considered prohibiting imports of beeswax into Java, as this product was indispensable to the production of batik cloth. It gave up the idea when the coastal personnel reported that the strategy was impossible to implement.  

By 1683, the company warehouses in Batavia lay overstocked with unsold Coromandel textiles. Hopes that the demand would again improve were not given up. In fact, the Batavia high government continued to import Coromandel cloth to Java in the next few years. However, by 1687, the high government had lost its optimism and instructed the personnel at the South Asian port town not to send any cloth above the specified quantity. By 1685, the Batavia high government also decided to withdraw from the direct sales of Indian textiles on the Pasisir. It did not give up the monopoly on Indian textiles, however. Instead, the high government sold these imported cotton goods to private traders, most of whom were Chinese, at the company’s auctions in Batavia.  

Javanese textile production was largely left to develop on its own after the 1690s, but only for a few decades. By the 1740s, the Dutch company had begun to interfere in the Javanese textile trade again, this time because of its interest in acquiring cotton yarn from the region. From this period on, there was a reasonable market for the commodity in India and the Netherlands. Factories in the Netherlands kept up their demand for cotton yarn from the Indies through the rest of the eighteenth century. In 1761, the governor-general noted that the popularity of the product there had generated a 237 percent profit for the company, and that the supplies thus far were insufficient to satisfy demand.  

Hence, it is no wonder that when the Dutch East India Company administrators gained governance over the north coast and eastern part of Java in 1743, a region they called “Java’s Northeast Coast,” they lost no time in utilizing their political supremacy to acquire the desired commodities. In the contract signed with the Batavia high government that year, besides cession of his rule over the Pasisir, the Mataram ruler was also obliged to deliver some products yearly to the company. Among them were 300 piculs of cotton yarn. In more concrete terms, the Javanese ruler had to arrange for his bupatis, or
his vassal lords on the north coast, to deliver annually to the company the first, second, third, fourth, and “dispense” (dispens-soort) qualities of cotton yarn at the fixed prices of 40, 30, 20, 16 and 10 rds per picul respectively.\(^53\) These prices were certainly much cheaper than what the company had to pay in the Batavia market, namely, 45, 35, 24, 18 and 12 rds per picul for the respective grades of yarn.\(^54\) Furthermore, to discourage the use of cotton yarn among the Javanese, Java’s Northeast Coast government also imposed a high export tax of 25 percent, compared to the usual 8 percent on most goods, on the Javanese textiles.\(^55\)

This was not to say that the company employees managed to acquire the products as they had planned. Though the regents were obliged to send 300 piculs of cotton yarns to the company yearly, they continued to be deficient in the deliveries.\(^56\) As Batavia saw it, these regents were unhappy with the low price and would do the deliveries “more out of pressure than willingness.”\(^57\) Faced with the unsatisfactory deliveries, the Batavia high government resorted to ordering their residents to buy the yarn from market.\(^58\)

When the Batavia authorities tried to use bans in the trade in cotton yarn to ensure that they could acquire the product, they also noted that private traders resorted to chicanery to beat the rule. For example, in the early 1740s, the high export toll of 25 percent was imposed only on white cotton textiles. What some Chinese traders did was to dye the cloth and wash the dye out after exporting them, such that the Batavia high government had to impose a similar heavy tax on colored fabrics.\(^59\) Despite the placards announcing the bans in cotton-yarn trade in 1761 and 1766, the high government observed that cotton yarn was imported from Palembang to Batavia in 1768.\(^60\)

Organization of Textile Production and Trade in Java

It is thanks to the Dutch company’s keenness in competing against the Javanese textile trade, and subsequently in the yarn trade, that we can gain some insight into the organization of trade and production of these cotton goods. By comparison, the Javanese babads are silent about these details, as is often the case with regard to the economic workings of the society. From Dutch documents, it appears that various ports on the northeast coast of Java had become key export centers of Javanese textiles by the 1770s. The most prominent among them were Semarang, Gresik, and Surabaya, where exports were mostly sent to the Borneo and Melaka Straits regions (see table 2). Tegal, Pekalongan, and Sumenep could each export about 1,500 to 2,000 pieces annually.\(^61\) Notably, even in these towns of middle-range production, the export value could be substantial. In Pekalongan in the late 1740s and
early 1750s, the average annual export value of Javanese textile was 20,000 Spanish reales. Notably, these port towns served not only as centers of textile manufacture, but also as points of collection of textiles from smaller port towns and more inland areas. Goods exported from Gresik and Tegal were mostly from the core Mataram realm, located at the south central part of the island of Java. The former was connected by the Solo River with the heartland of the Mataram realm, while the latter was easily accessible to the south-central region of Java via land routes.

While every Javanese town apparently had weaving villages that produced cloth for domestic consumption, it is difficult to discern from the Dutch documents the precise centers of textile production for export purposes. One main center of the textile industry was Kartasura, where company employees had noted since the mid-seventeenth century that the susuhunan and other courtly nobles set thousands of women to do spinning, weaving, embroidery, sewing, and “painting”—probably batikking—in their various dalem, or residence and compound of a Javanese lord, producing textiles in relatively large weaving mills. With the shift of the susuhunan’s court from Kartasura to Surakarta in the late 1740s, the textile manufacture center was duly relocated. Surakarta and Bagelen were big textile production centers.

Table 2

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pieces</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90,800</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Java</td>
<td>8,465</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melaka straits</td>
<td>57,160</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalimantan</td>
<td>24,735</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gresik</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,250</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Java</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melaka straits</td>
<td>4,755</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalimantan</td>
<td>3,075</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surabaya</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32,100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Java</td>
<td>1,930</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melaka straits</td>
<td>20,445</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalimantan</td>
<td>7,885</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,840</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in the early nineteenth century. Sumenep was another place where weaving was done for export purposes. It was in this port town that the so-called Banda type of textile was produced, presumably for sales in Banda in the eastern Indonesian archipelago. The “Madurese cloth” brought to Palembang was probably from Sumenep, which was located on the eastern end of the island of Madura.

Production of yarn was also concentrated in the interior of Java until the 1760s, when the Dutch company encouraged spinning activities in the coastal region.

While the higher-quality textiles were manufactured in the dalems, coarser types of textiles were made through household production, or “cottage industry.” That is, commoners did the spinning and weaving in the off-peak seasons of agricultural activities and sold the surplus textiles to peddling traders. From nineteenth-century reports, it appears that there also existed a “putting-out system,” wherein although the work was done at home, spinners and weavers produced cotton goods for the market. Their materials and equipment were often provided by an engrosser (bakul), who would also decide on the size and quality of the product, and paid the producers wages. This indicates that there were professional weavers in the Javanese cotton industry during this period.

As for the main players involved in the organization of production and trade of cotton textiles in eighteenth-century Java, while the Javanese ruling class and nobility were involved in providing and organizing the labor, Chinese merchants appeared to be the main dealers of the cotton goods. When the Dutch company gave up competing against the Javanese textiles, it sold its imports of Indian textiles to Chinese traders. On the north coast of Java, Chinese merchants were also dominating the export trade in locally produced cotton goods. Since the seventeenth century, Chinese commercial operators were also the ones who usually become the tax farmers on “branding” (tjap, sjap) the textiles in the Mataram realm. Only with these authorized labels could the textiles be released for trade circulation.

Chinese merchants also tended to win the bids to gain privileges as syahbandar, who had rights to collect taxes at the port areas, and as toll-gate keepers, who collected taxes at various points in the main land and riverine routes of transportation. In effect, this meant that they could collect taxes on the textiles brought from interior Java to the coast for sales and export. By winning these revenue farms, merchants could also have access to the commodities before the latter reached their final port of destination. Some tax collectors would also coerce traders to sell the textiles to them, as noted in the complaints of various Javanese bupatis to the Dutch residents.
Besides buying up textiles available in the markets and using tax farms to gain earlier access to these goods, some Chinese traders also began to supply credit to peasant households in exchange for guaranteed deliveries of textiles at a later date. The first signs that this credit system was at work appeared in the last years of the seventeenth century, when Javanese cotton textiles became increasingly popular in the Indonesian archipelago.72

Hence, when the Dutch East India Company employees sought to participate in the Javanese textile trade, they had to depend on the mediation of both the Javanese ruling elite and Chinese merchants to acquire cotton textiles. This happened in the early 1750s, when the Batavia high government, having observed the popularity of Javanese cotton textiles for some years, ordered its Semarang subordinates to purchase Javanese textiles for sales in the company’s trading offices at Banda, Basra, and also back in the Netherlands.73 In 1752, it also used the service of a European textile trader on the Pasisir, Christiaen Mente, to buy textiles made in Java and other parts of the region.74 In July 1754, the high government also ordered the Semarang authorities to seek out inhabitants of Banyumas, Bagelen, and Kedu and arrange with them to produce textiles for the company in order to get the best textiles in the fastest way possible.75

The plan did not work out well. Supplies were not readily available, which the company employees saw as a factor of the state of unrest in the early 1750s, when the Javanese princes Mangkubumi and Mangkunegara were rebelling against the Mataram susuhunan.76 Having signed reconciliation treaties with both princes in 1755 and 1757, the company administrators were hopeful that peace would be restored and more commodities could be acquired. Although it did become easier to acquire Javanese textiles, the purchase could only be made at very high prices and many were “not well-made.”77 There was also another problem: as a result of household production, those that were bought up were of varying lengths and widths. Hartingh, the governor of Java’s Northeast Coast, reported in August 1758 that it was extremely difficult to get textiles of the same length and width, because of the method of household production.78 Governor Hartingh also reported that, “despite all efforts,” the Javanese remained “reluctant” to alter their style of working. As such, he asked to be excused from the procurement of the commodity.79

Some success in buying up Javanese textiles in large quantities was finally achieved thirty years later, in the late 1780s. Notably, this was accomplished only with the help of Chinese towkays. In 1787 and 1788, the Company signed
a contract with the toll-gate keeper (bandar) in Yogyakarta, Que Tjinsing, and the Chinese captain of Surakarta, Sie Sokliang, who promised to deliver 350 corges of Javanese textiles and 30 corges of bunting of the sizes and quality stipulated by the company every year.80

Concluding Remarks
At this point in history, the Dutch mainly contented themselves with the amounts they could buy from the market or collect through obligatory deliveries from the Javanese bupatis. In the latter case, the company residents generally cared that the quota had been met. Since Javanese cotton yarn and textiles were not key items of trade for the Dutch company, especially in comparison to rice, their superiors also generally kept an eye closed. The Javanese bupatis could mostly get away with deficient deliveries of cotton yarn if they claimed that pressuring the commoners too much would affect rice yields. As the Dutch did not attempt to organize manufacture of the cotton products themselves in the eighteenth century, we cannot get a clear sense from the Dutch sources of what went on in Javanese textile production at the village level.81

It is evident however that Chinese merchants played a prominent role in the trade of Javanese cotton goods. Yet, although the names of the individual merchants are made available at times, we do not know how far the Chinese merchants who gave credit to local producers as advance payment for the cotton textiles were linked with those who sold Indian textiles in the local markets. From the Dutch company materials, it is also not possible to discern the relationship between the Chinese merchants and the Javanese rulers and lords. Both groups must have cooperated, given the way in which the former provided credit to the producers while the latter controlled the production labor.

What was clear is that, by the early nineteenth century, Javanese cotton textile production had developed both in magnitude and specialization. Boomgaard notes that in nineteenth-century Java, not only was there production of coarse cloth for home consumption, but also, in areas like Cirebon, Tegal, Bagelen, Yogyakarta, and Surakarta, “specialization in one or several stages of cotton processing had occurred,” “whence considerable quantities of cloth were exported to other Residencies or even outside Java.” In 1808, there were 22,628 spinning wheels and 17,641 weaving looms in a total of 45,093 families in Surabaya and Gresik, or one spinning wheel for every two families and one loom for every two-and-a-half. In the same
year, Bagelen was said to have 10,000 weavers, or almost 11 percent of all the families. There were 36,000 weavers in Besuki, a relatively small northeastern Javanese port town, in 1836, or 50 percent of all households. However, hemmed in by his conception that Java had, at most, “cottage industry” and moderate textile production, Boomgaard judges the archival figures to be “extreme” and best left “out of consideration.”82 Yet, these figures were probably accurate, considering the expansion in exports of Javanese cotton textiles in the eighteenth century.

Although textile manufacture went into decline with the arrival of European imports after the mid-nineteenth century, the Javanese batik industry took off and reached one of its peaks of development in its long history. The development of Javanese cotton textile production witnessed another interesting twist of fate in the early 1930s, when the dying industry experienced an upswing as the Dutch textile export trade to Southeast Asian markets faced competition from the Japanese. To compete against the Japanese, the colonial government decided to conduct weaving in Java, using Dutch cotton yarns. In this historical context, Majalaya, where the bupatis and residents had maintained a small weaving industry, emerged as the center of textile production, accounting for almost 90 percent of all weaving enterprises in Java by 1938. Two groups of people, in particular, jumped on the opportunity and set up textile-weaving industries in the town. The first were members of a landowning class among the Muslim Sundanese in Majalaya, who also had a commercial background, particularly in the trade of textiles. The second group was the Hokchia (pinyin: Fuqing) Chinese, who came from the Fuqing region in the northeastern part of Fujian, China. The Hokchia Chinese, who had specialized in money-lending services, decided to invest in the weaving business when the colonial state imposed an anti-usury ruling in 1936.83 These two groups of people continue to dominate the industry in the region up to the present day.

Notes

I thank the Asia Research Institute and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies for the fellowships that supported me during the period of writing and revising this essay. I also thank Heather Sutherland, Nola Cooke, and the editors for their comments on an earlier version of the essay.


6. Gittinger, Splendid Symbols, 13. Gittinger has also convincingly argued against scholars who suggest that the weaving technique was introduced by migrants from China, India, and the Middle East. For details, see ibid., 13–15.


8. The dye processors were subjected to taxation, which indicates that their products were considered commodities.

9. The roots from the mengkudu shrub are used to produce a bright red dye often used on Pasir batik.

10. Information in this paragraph is obtained from Christie, “Texts and Textiles in ‘Medieval’ Java.”


12. R. Heringa is inclined to believe that the origins of the batikking method came from the Chinese, and she rejects a Javanese myth that dates the origin of batik on Java to A.D. 700, when a princess from Coromandel and her retinue were credited for teaching weaving, batik, and dyeing to the Javanese on the northeast coast of Java (“The Historical Background of Batik on Java,” Fabric of Enchantment: Batik from the North Coast of Java, ed. R. Heringa and H. Veldhuisen [Los Angeles: Museum of Art, 1996], 31–34). For other theories of the origins of batikking, see Gittinger’s introduction to Splendid Symbols (13–16).


14. For a good ethnographic account on the traditional method of dyeing, see R. Heringa, “Dye Process and Life Sequence: The Coloring of Textiles in an East Javanese Village,”

15. Unless otherwise stated, the information in this paragraph is from Christie, “Texts and Textiles in ‘Medieval’ Java.”


17. VOC 3738, Siberg to Batavia high government, 3 March 1786, 49–50. Larangan is the Malay word for “prohibition,” and the motif mentioned here was probably that of the parang rusak, or “broken knife.” Refer to Gittinger, Splendid Symbols, 125–26 for the design.


19. See example of susuhunan Pakubuwana II, textiles among cash, gold rings, and so on. VOC 2767, dagregister of governor on his trip to Surakarta, 1749, 81–82.


22. R. Maxwell, Textiles of Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990). Historically speaking, the western part of Java is not considered to be under the rule of Javanese, but under that of the Sundanese and Bantenese people. The early Mataram, Singasari, and Majapahit empires, which held sway from the eighth century to the fifteenth, were basically composed of areas in central and east Java. As a result of lesser interaction, the Javanese people also speak a different language from the Sundanese and Bantenese people.


29. Ibid., 27–46.

32. The imports of these items to Palembang expanded through the eighteenth century, from negligible amounts in the late seventeenth century to 275 tubs of gold thread and 35 tubs of raw Chinese silk in 1759. In 1821, the trade in Chinese raw silk was valued at around 9,940 guilders, and 75 containers and 25 packs of gold thread worth more than 583 guilders were also imported.
35. K. Glamann, Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620–1740 (Copenhagen: Danish Science Press / ‘s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958), chap. 7; E. Jacobs, Koopman in Azië: De Handel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie Tijdens de 18de Eeuw (Zutphen: Walburg, 2000), chap. on “The Competition for Indian Textiles.” Jacobs has described how the English and French East India Companies came to dominate the European market for Indian textiles in the period from 1730 to 1760. The VOC came in third place, because the directors preferred to trade in more profitable commodities such as spices.
37. Ibid., 41.
39. In the eighteenth century, besides being a trading company, the Dutch East India Company had also gained much income by acting as a territorial power, that is, by earning through taxation at the ports it controlled in the eastern seas. For more details, see J. van Goor, “Introduction,” Trading Companies in Asia 1600–1830, ed. J. van Goor (Utrecht: HES Uitgevers, 1986); and “A Hybrid State: The Dutch Economic and Political Network in Asia,” From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes, ed. C. Guillot, D. Lombard, and R. Ptak (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 193–214.
44. See, for instance, VOC 3247, list of private vessels leaving Semarang from 1 September 1767 to 31 August 1768; VOC 2706, Semarang authorities to Batavia high government, 20 May 1747, 123–25.
47. Nagtegaal has not explained why the company personnel at the coast found it impossible to ban the imports.
48. Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel 1605–1690*, 162. His comment was probably right. Note in 1691, a Dutch observer in Palembang who described the varieties of Javanese cloth had remarked that these were rarely washed; Andaya commented that this was probably because of the tendency of dyes to fade (“The Cloth Trade in Jambi and Palembang during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” 43).
56. *VOC* 2655, Tegal resident Breepot to Batavia high government, 13 October 1745, 383–85.
63. Instructions by Governor-General Van Imhoff to Semarang authorities during his visit to and departure from Java’s northeast coast, 9 June 1746, *Opkomst* 10:90; Siberg’s memorandum of transfer, *Opkomst* 12:109–10.
66. Batavia ordered Semarang to send forth some samples of this Banda-type textile in 1752 (VOC 2804, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 September 1752, 73–74). See also Andaya, “The Cloth Trade in Jambi and Palembang during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” 40–41.
71. VOC 2681, Semarang commandanship to Batavia high government, 24 September 1746, 149–50; VOC 2706, Semarang commandanship to Batavia high government, 28 February 1747, 40–41.
72. Nagtegaal, Riding the Dutch Tiger, 135. Nagtegaal did not quite spell out the exact years, but his citations, dated 1698 and 1713, point to the beginning of the eighteenth century.
73. VOC 2766, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 28 December 1750, 34; VOC 2766, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 16 January 1751, 57–58; VOC 2787, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 29 February 1752, 4; VOC 2824, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 31 January 1753, 11–12; VOC 2843, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 13 July 1754, 148–49.
74. VOC 2804, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 September 1752, 73–74.
75. VOC 2843, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 13 July 1754, 148–49.
76. VOC 2864, Tegal resident Falk to Batavia high government, 4 April 1755, 48.
77. VOC 2968, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 28 December 1758, 6–7.
78. VOC 2938, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 15 August 1758, 80–81.
79. VOC 2938, Hartingh to Batavia high government, 20 October 1758, 20–21.
80. VOC 3763, Siberg to Batavia high government, 13 July 1787, 387–88; VOC 3861, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 22 December 1788, §448; VOC 3861, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 14 March 1789, §17.
81. In the early 1800s, company employees set up two textile factories with hundreds
of looms in Semarang. The looms were not for commercial purposes but to produce coarse cottons for the army. At this point in time, the supply of military clothes from the Netherlands had ceased as a result of the Napoleonic Wars. Boomgaard, "The Non-Agricultural Side of an Agricultural Economy: Java, 1500–1900," 22.