

## **Production, Consumption And Trade Of Javanese Cotton Yarn And Textile In The Late Seventeenth And Eighteenth Century**

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In this study on the early modern trade in Javanese cotton yarn and textile, what should be recognized first and foremost is that these were *not* the key commodities of exchange in the local and regional economy then. Unlike in the case of India, these products were *not* hotly contested among European powers and local interests in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hence the history of the commerce and production of cotton yarn and textile has not quite become a central topic of discussion like in India. This situation also explains why there is very little knowledge about the trade in Javanese cotton yarn and textile, if only because of lack of description from European observers - the main source to reconstruct Javanese and maritime Southeast Asian history in general.

As a result, the subject of cotton yarn and textile is not much of concern to historians working on the Javanese economy, certainly far less than that on sugar, coffee and rice. Instead, Javanese and more generally Southeast Asian textiles are a topic of interest mostly among museum curators, if only because they are swamped by the beautiful textiles dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which are coincidentally fetching high prices among connoisseurs in the world in the post-colonial era.<sup>1</sup> The central question for them is (invariably and inevitably) one of

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<sup>1</sup> Many beautiful coffee table books are published on this topic alone. To only name a few, see M. Gittinger, *Splendid Symbols: textiles and tradition in Indonesia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990; 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1979); R. Heringa and H. Veldhuisen (eds.), *Fabric of*

culture, its preservation and even more importantly, its authenticity. Like many Southeast Asianists, these researchers are caught in the perennial discussion of asserting the region's unique, and as far as possible exclusive, identity, in case the region would be swamped by the overwhelming great civilizations of India and China. If they could not deny that the region's textile-spinning and weaving techniques or even the cloth supplies came from India or China, they would find other ways to assert that Southeast Asians are "in charge". This comes in the varied forms of asserting that Southeast Asians "commissioned" the production to the subcontinent, that the former were the ones who "selected" (if not invented) the designs and so on.<sup>2</sup>

This discussion seems really "besides the point" but crucial for this audience whose aim is to seek global comparatives. Instead of lapsing into the similar discourse of Southeast Asia being a "lesser" civilization (if only because one could not even get basic details of the functionings of cotton textile industry and trade), what we might think about is whether the choice of "subject of comparison" is justified, if we are really interested in "global" history. Cotton textile might be a key topic for India and England, being their main export commodities, but it is not quite the case for Indonesia, and Southeast Asia in general, nor the Netherlands, for that matter. Pertinently, considering how discussion of the subject often leads to the debate on industrialization and its derivatives of "proto-industrialization" or "de-

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*Enchantment: Batik from the North Coast of Java* (Los Angeles: Museum of Art, 1996); M. Gittinger (ed.), *To Speak with Cloth: Studies in Indonesian Textiles* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1989); R. Maxwell, *Sari to Sarong: five hundred years of Indian and Indonesian textile exchange* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Australia, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Most theories argue that Southeast Asians derived their batik technique from India. On the theory that the resist techniques from Chinese, see Heringa, "Background of Batik", p. 31. The whole debate of "Indianization" of Southeast Asia is made most prominent by G. Coedes. Subsequently, scholars from the Cornell School and other experts on Southeast Asia are actively engaged in the project of asserting the autonomy of Southeast Asia.

industrialization”, what happens (again) is how Britain features as the central plot and the success story.

What we know so far from the literature indicates definitively that some important developments in Javanese cotton textile trade occurred in the eighteenth century. In late seventeenth century, the import of Indian textiles to central and east greatly diminished by 90 percent from about 40,000 rix-dollars in the late 1670s to about 4,000 rix-dollars thirty years later.<sup>3</sup> In Palembang, the Dutch sales of the commodity also fell by 50 percent in the late 1710s in comparison to the 1690s.<sup>4</sup>

Writing on the history of *pasisir batik*, that is the painted cotton cloth from the north coast of Java, Heringa shows how by the early nineteenth century, while the textiles were worn mainly on the north coast of Java, they also functioned as a kind of “regional dress” as they were practically used everywhere else in the archipelago. Sumatra was the most important, but the populations of Bali, Kalimantan, and the northern Moluccas also incorporated the textile into their daily and in some cases into their ritual attire. These textiles were also exported beyond the archipelago to Singapore, the coasts of Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, and even the West Indies.<sup>5</sup> Works by Andaya and Hall indicate that Java was a major textile producer and exporter in the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> L. Nagtegaal, *Riding the Dutch Tiger: the Dutch East Indies Company and the northeast coast of Java, 1680-1743* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996), p. 148, table 12.

<sup>4</sup> B. Andaya, “The Cloth Trade in Jambi and Palembang during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, *Indonesia* 48 (1989): 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Heringa, “Batik Pasisir”, p. 48. She quoted from a 1931 source. She went on to discuss about the consumption patterns, cultural meanings of particular motifs, which types were for which peoples, differentiated according to age, gender, social group and place of residence, etc. How these textiles served as property, etc. etc.

<sup>6</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 27-46; Hall, K. “The Textile Industry in Southeast Asia, 1400-1800”, *JESHO* 39, 2 (1996): 87-135.

In his book on the nineteenth-century Javanese socio-economic history, Boomgaard notes that on Java, there was not only production of coarse cloth for home consumption but also, in some areas like Cirebon, Tegal, Bagelen, Yogya and Solo, “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”.<sup>7</sup> The archival information he has collected on early-nineteenth century textile production on Java shows that this industry was big-scale and was ongoing for several decades since the earlier century. 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 two families and one loom for two and a half. In the same year, Bagelen was said to have 10,000 weavers or almost 11 percent of the all families. There were 36,000 weavers in Besuki, a relatively small-sized north-eastern Javanese port-town, in 1836, or 50 percent of all households. Hemmed in by his conception that Java at most had “cottage industry” and moderate textile production, Boomgaard considers these archival figures “extreme” and best to “leave... out of consideration”.<sup>8</sup>

Something must have happened between the decline in popularity of Indian textiles and this great popularity and production of Javanese batiks. The 1970 monograph by Matsuo has touched on this but painted the depressing picture that the Company imports of Indian textiles and imposition of cotton yarn on the Javanese lords as forced deliveries led to

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<sup>7</sup> P. Boomgaard, *Children of the Colonial State: population growth and economic development in Java, 1795-1880* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1989), p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> Boomgaard thinks that all this spinning and weaving could not have been (predominantly) for the market. Thinks that the figures are doubtful - “The best solution seems to be to leave these extreme values out of consideration, at least when dealing with the cottage industry”. (Boomgaard, *Children*, p. 127.)

“played significant roles in suppressing Java’s cotton industry”.<sup>9</sup> In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Company gradually asserted its presence in central and east Java, first acquiring crucial monopolies in various commodities of central and east Java from the Mataram ruler in 1677, and then sought the control over the entire north coast and east Java in 1743 and subsequently large parts of interior Java after 1830. This declining political fortune and “semi-colonial” condition of Mataram-Java set the undertone for most history writings on the region. Reid has argued that the decreasing turnover in Indian textile is a proof that Java was rapidly impoverished as a result of European expansion in the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> Although Nagtegaal shows that very good quality Javanese textiles were produced increased to replace the Indian ones, he still concurs with Reid on the increasing poverty and underdevelopment of the north-coastal Javanese region following the arrival of the Dutch East India Company.<sup>11</sup>

This paper attempts to reconstruct as far as possible the trade in cotton yarn and textile in Java and the Indonesian archipelago from the late seventeenth to eighteenth century. In doing so, the aims are to argue that by the time the Europeans arrived, a form of division of labour was worked out between the economies of South Asia and the Indonesian archipelago such that the former was specialized in production of textile and the latter in spice production and so on. This system of economic exchange and labour division was disrupted with the intensifying European interest in Indian textiles, particularly in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

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<sup>9</sup> H. Matsuo, *The Development of Javanese Cotton Industry* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1970), chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> A. Reid, “The Origins of Poverty in Indonesia”, in *Indonesia: Australian perspectives*, J.J. Fox et al. (Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Pacific Studies, 1980), pp. 441-54.

<sup>11</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 147-51.

Consequently, many Southeast Asian polities began to produce textiles for themselves, with some like Java emerging as the textile exporter in the region. This paper also argues how the mercantile interests in the Indonesian archipelago could conduct a trade against a system which the Dutch Company, who became the paramount politico-economic force in the region by the mid-eighteenth century, tried to impose. The former did not quite run head-on but used various strategies to evade Dutch rules and regulations while the Company had to compromise and play along.

This paper does not discuss what happens to the Javanese cloth trade in the nineteenth century, the critical period when arguments on import of European textiles led to de-industrialization in Asian societies. The author hopes however that the description of the varied and very innovative methods of re-adaptation on the ground in eighteenth-century Javanese textile trade and production will render it more difficult to make easy conclusions about the topic.

### **Dutch trade in Indian textiles on Java**

The Dutch East India Company was really following in the trail of the Indian, Chinese and other European traders when it first came to north coast of Java in the late sixteenth century. It was also imitating the Indian and European merchants in an existing trade pattern when it sought to sell Indian opium and textile in exchange for some spices brought to the coast from eastern Indonesian archipelago as well as the locally-produced rice and timber.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> S. Sen, "The Role of Indian Textiles in Southeast Asian Trade in the Seventeenth Century", *JSEAH* 3, 2 (1962): 96-97; Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 115-16.

In Java, Indian textiles served as a form of property and luxury ones conferred prestige and were used as gifts and dowries or at funerals.<sup>13</sup> Javanese rulers would also present gifts to their subordinates and vassals during ceremonial occasions as the annual Garebeg day when vassals would travel to the *kraton* (palace) of their overlord to pay homage.<sup>14</sup> For the normal clothing - in the case of man, a handkerchief-sized cloth for the head and a larger one for the body,<sup>15</sup> in the case of woman, a *kebaya* (sleeved bodice) and *sarung* for the lower body or simply a large cloth wrapped around the body - locally-produced textiles were used. Specific motifs and colours bore specific meanings. Some patterns should only be worn by the courtiers, and were forbidden to common people, like “larangan”. In 1786, Yogyakarta sultan Hamengkubuwana I confiscated textiles with the motif sold on the market.<sup>16</sup>

Unaccustomed to small-scale trading in the seventeenth century, the Dutch company was losing out to these other merchants. The Moors would put canvas on the shore displaying their cloth for some days and move on to the next port-town. The Chinese would conduct peddling trade inland. Other European traders were also adapting to such small-scale transactions. Danish vessels from Banten would sail along the north coast, putting people ashore at each harbour in turn and giving them a few weeks to sell textiles

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<sup>13</sup> See example of susuhunan Pakubuwana II, textiles among cash, gold rings etc. VOC 2767, dagregister of governor on his trip to Surakarta, 1749, ff. 81-82.

<sup>14</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 148-50.

<sup>15</sup> VOC 2767, dagregister of governor on his trip to Surakarta, 1749, f. 102. This was how a prince was dressed too.

<sup>16</sup> VOC 3738, Siberg to Batavia high government, 3 Mar 1786, ff. 49-50. Since the tenth century, textile had been used on Java to distinguish social and ritual status within the state hierarchy. [J. Christie, “Texts and Textiles in ‘Medieval’ Java”, *BEFEO* 80 (1993): p. 182.)

and opium to the local market women before picking them up again on the return journey.<sup>17</sup>

With its provision of military assistance to the Mataram ruler against the uprising by his Madurese vassal Trunajaya in 1677, the Company gained control over the north-coastal port towns of Cirebon, Sumenep, Pamekasan and Semarang, as well as some trade concessions, among which was the monopoly rights over imports of Indian textile on the north coastal ports of Java.<sup>18</sup> With this newly gained political power on the Pasisir, the Dutch also drove out the Indians and other Europeans who conducted similar exchanges of Indian opium and textiles for spice, rice and timber. In turn, they depended on Chinese merchants on the coast to retail the Indian textiles they imported along with other stuff.<sup>19</sup>

If the Dutch had successfully emulated the Indian and other European merchants and then shook these competitors off, they were to lose out in the cloth trade on Java again in the last two decades of the seventeenth century. Problems of war on the Coromandel coast, whose textiles were among the most coveted among Southeast Asian consumers, drove up the prices of the commodity.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, after about 1680, Indian calicoes became very popular not only among Asians but in Europe as well and inflated the prices as the various European companies competed fiercely for the commodity in the subcontinent.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>18</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>20</sup> Arasaratnam, S. "The Coromandel-Southeast Asia Trade 1650-1740", *Journal of Asian History* 18. 1984: 129-31.

<sup>21</sup> K. Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620-1740* (Kopenhagen: Danish Science Press, 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958), chapter 7; E. Jacobs, *Koopman in Azie. De handel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18de eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 2000), "The Competition for Indian Textiles" chapter. Jacobs has described how the English and French East India Companies came to dominate the European market for



These developments had a direct impact on the Southeast Asian market. Consumers of this region gradually lessened their purchase of Indian textiles.<sup>22</sup> From the table below, the private import of Indian textiles from Batavia to the north coast of Java fell tremendously from 41,234 pieces in 1680 to less than 10,000 pieces twenty years later. This figure did not include those imported by the Dutch company, who only did worse as it depended only middlemen traders. The dramatic rise in private import amounts of Indian cloth in 1685 was only because from that year on, the Company was to withdraw from the direct sales of the commodity on the Pasisir and sold cloth to Chinese traders at the Company's auctions in Batavia.<sup>23</sup>

Exports of Indian textiles from Batavia to the Pasisir by private traders, in Dutch rix-dollars

year	quantity (rix-dollars)	year	quantity (rix-dollars)	year	quantity (rix-dollars)
1672	37,893	1695	26,923	1720	14,043
1675	38,857	1700	8,440	1725	8,820
1680	41,234	1705	4,838	1730	7,635
1685	57,970	1710	7,844	1735	3,015
1690	41,143	1716	4,635	1740	1,919

**Source:** Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 148, table 12.

By the 1690s, the cost of Indian textiles in Jambi and Palembang had risen by 8 to 10 percent. In the fiscal year of 1718-1719, the Company sales in Palembang were half those in 1691.<sup>24</sup> It also affected the Dutch company

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Indian textiles in the period from 1730 to 1760. VOC came in third place, because the directors preferred to trade in more profitable commodities such as spices.

<sup>22</sup> Andaya, "Cloth Trade": 38-39.

<sup>23</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 147-48.

<sup>24</sup> Andaya, "Cloth Trade": 39.

trade in the Indonesian archipelago. Around 1750, the Asiatic trading partners of the VOC no longer accepted Indian textiles as means of exchange in the pepper and also tin trade. Only in the trade of fine spices did they retain their function, but the margins were small.<sup>25</sup>

### **Relative Ease in Switching to Textile Manufacture**

Simultaneously, domestic production for home uses increased in many places in the Southeast Asian region. In Java in the early 1680s, the Batavia high government - the Company highest administrative body in Asia - noted that the Javanese had begun to prefer the painted textiles manufactured in their own region to those imported from the Coromandel coast.<sup>26</sup> By 1695, there was a noticeable increase in weaving activities such that a Dutch resident commented that there were as many looms as there were households.<sup>27</sup> Palembang was also gradually developing its textile weaving for home sales at this point.

Regional centres of textile production were appearing at this point. In the course of the eighteenth century, to help fill the gap created by the decline of Indian textiles, Siam and Cambodia were also supplying cloth to Palembang. In 1719, only one *corge* (cloth measurement unit of 20 pieces) of Cambodian cloth was brought in between January and April, but during the same period in 1759, 515 *corge* of Cambodian cloth and 255 of Siamese

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<sup>25</sup> Jacobs, *Koopman in Azie*, p. 210.

<sup>26</sup> T. Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel 1605-1690: a study in the interrelations of European commerce and traditional economies* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 162.

<sup>27</sup> Andaya, "Cloth Trade": 39.

arrived in Palembang.<sup>28</sup> Other regional textile production centres in the eastern Indonesian archipelago - Bali, Makassar etc.<sup>29</sup>

Central and east Java featured most prominently among these regional centres of textile manufacture. It appears that there was some production in the region for domestic and archipelagic consumption in the seventeenth century and probably earlier.<sup>30</sup> Polities in Sumatra and Borneo turned to Java for textile supplies. Palembang had been buying rough cloth from Java since early seventeenth century to cater to the commoners.

In 1683 the cargoes of Javanese cloth arriving in Jambi and Palembang had become so great that there was a short-lived attempt by the Dutch to extend their monopoly of Indian fabrics to cover all cloth. The great attraction of Javanese imports was the price. Whereas the Dutch sold Indian piece goods for an average 1-2 reals, those from Java could cost as little as 0.25 real each and were even said to be of superior quality and more durable than their Indian counterparts. In 1691 when a Dutch envoy visited Palembang he noted that most of the men “from the king to the lowest peddlers” were wearing Javanese and Madurese cloth. (Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 40.)

By 1691, sales of Indian textiles in Palembang declining while there was a marked increase in Javanese imports, as recorded in the Dutch shipping lists at Palembang for the months of September and October, when vessels from Java began to arrive.<sup>31</sup> Not including the “smuggled” cargoes, in 1719 64 corge of Javanese cloth are listed for this period. By 1758 the

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<sup>28</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 41.

<sup>29</sup> Bali as exporter of cloth in second half of eighteenth century, see G. Knaap, *Shallow Waters, Rising Tide* (Leiden: KITLV press, 1996), pp. 89, p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> Note that when Batavia demanded its residents on the Pasisir to acquire indigo from 1693, it is noted that, “Virtually every coastal regency grew the [indigo] plant in modest quantities for the local textiles industry, but this cultivation was only of any importance in a few places, namely the areas surrounding Semarang and Kudus, and - most notably - Kartasura”. - Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 33, 40.

amount has reached 728 corge. Over 400 corge are given for October of that year. The pattern continues through the century so that, in September-October 1793, 2,745 corge of Javanese cloth are listed as reaching Palembang.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1690s, Jambi was also importing more Javanese cloth.<sup>33</sup> At times, ruler of Jambi did order people appearing before him to wear Javanese dress as part of “Javanization” campaign, like in 1642 when he wanted to win Mataram’s favour.<sup>34</sup> But in late seventeenth century, it mainly depended on Java for textiles.<sup>35</sup> So did Banjarmasin, where the court was promoting the use of Javanese textiles against the Chinese, Indian and even Makassarese ones in the late seventeenth century.<sup>36</sup>

By the 1760s, it was common for vessels, be they manned by Chinese, Bugis, Javanese, Malays or Dutch burgers, leaving from the Pasisir to Melaka straits, Borneo, Sumatra and Batavia to carry some Javanese textiles with them, ranging from less than 10 to as many as 100 corges.<sup>37</sup> Those ships going to the eastern Indonesian archipelago also carried some of the commodity.<sup>38</sup>

... [Javanese] textile exports greatly increased in the course of the eighteenth century. In the first nine and a half months of

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<sup>32</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 40-41. The dramatic increase in Javanese imports in the latter half of the eighteenth century is also due to the fact that, after 1770, all private trade to destinations north to Melaka was forbidden, thus depriving the Palembang market of cloth from Siam and Cambodia which had helped fill the gap created by the decline of Indian textiles. - Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 41.

<sup>33</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 33, 40.

<sup>34</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 40.

<sup>35</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 40.

<sup>36</sup> Hall, “Textile Industry”: 126-28.

<sup>37</sup> see for instance VOC 3247, copie lijst der van Semarang na elders vertrokkene particuliere vaartuigen van 1 Sep 1767 tot ultimo Aug 1768

<sup>38</sup> VOC 2706, Semarang commandership to Batavia high government, 20 May 1747, ff. 123-25.

1720, 16,360 pieces of cloth were exported from Semarang to Borneo and the areas surrounding the Melaka straits. By 1774-1777, during the same period, the average quantity had risen to a staggering 75,853 pieces of cloth. This was largely owing to an explosive increase in exports to Palembang. - Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 136.

It would be wrong to assume that these textiles were not of comparable quality to the Indian ones. Reporting to their superiors in the Netherlands in the early 1680s, Company administrators on 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.<sup>39</sup>

In Palembang, court ladies began to take up weaving very high-quality luxury fabrics as they were unhappy that from 1680s onwards, for the same price, textiles from India were of poorer quality textiles than in earlier decades. Here, weaving skills by noble women were not a novelty but in fact considered a female accomplishment.<sup>40</sup> Unlike its neighbouring polity Jambi, Palembang was prosperous in the eighteenth century and fostered a wealthy court that could “well afford to buy raw silk and gold thread with which to create its own alternatives to the declining Indian trade in luxury goods”.<sup>41</sup> The imports of these items to Palembang expanded through the eighteenth century from negligible amounts in 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 f. 9,940, and 75 containers and 25 packs of gold thread worth more than f. 583 were also imported.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> W.Ph. Coolhaas and J. van Goor (eds.), *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1997) [from now on referred to as “GM”], vol. 4: 621.

<sup>40</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 41.

<sup>41</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 42.

<sup>42</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 42-43.

These noble women and women within the court circles developed very high-quality textiles, especially in terms of their techniques in dyeing.<sup>43</sup> By nineteenth century, textiles made by these ladies became a league of their own:

In India the textile industry was dying under pressure from cheaper English manufactures, and as middle-class Indian women showed an increasing preference for Chinese silk. But in Palembang high-quality local cloth gradually came to be seen as superior to imports and indeed an appropriate gift at life-crisis ceremonies.

Although Palembang sultanate came to an end in 1824, Palembang textiles were still highly prized in south Sumatran region and even exported to Java.<sup>44</sup>

The apparent ability of indigenous manufacturers in Java and Palembang to produce equivalent and even better quality textiles than South Asia makes the poverty thesis questionable. What seems more likely was how the Southeast Asian consumers were unhappy with “not getting value for money” and began to weave their own or get their textile supplies from within the region.

To apply a modern-day analogy, if the Japanese could produce reasonably good quality cars so cheaply, why should we reject them and make our own? But should the Japanese cars suddenly become too expensive to be worth the quality, we know the technology and can produce our own. This seems to be what happened with the Southeast Asian textile industry, and it took place almost overnight, showing that they were well-equipped with the skills to handle their own cloth production. Compared to

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<sup>43</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 43.

<sup>44</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 45.

car production today, there was greater ease to undertake textile production at that time because it made use more of skills than (capital-intensive) technology. What was needed for weaving was only a simple and cheap handloom.<sup>45</sup>

A division of labour was probably at work in the Asian world at the advent of the European arrival: in Palembang, Jambi, Borneo etc. - pepper production, Java - rice production, India - textile production, etc. The Southeast Asians might import textile from India but were well capable of producing high-quality cloth themselves in times of shortage or dissatisfaction. It was not the Indian designs that they coveted, considering how often it is seen that particular regions in the subcontinent produce specific designs and motifs commissioned by specific polities in Southeast Asia and destined for that market only.<sup>46</sup>

In the course of the eighteenth century, some Indian cloth was still marketable in Southeast Asia though for variety reasons. Despite the rising popularity of Javanese cloth and an increase in local cotton weaving, some ladies in the Palembang court still preferred the bright colours, the gold embroidery and the fine silk typical of Indian textiles.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Organization of Textile Production and Trade on Java**

Until around 1690, the Pasisir only exported batik textiles. After that period, plain cloth became popular in other parts of the archipelago.<sup>48</sup> By the 1680s, Demak, Kudus, Kendal and Kaliwungu were the textile markets

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<sup>45</sup> Gittinger, *Splendid Symbols*, p. 230.

<sup>46</sup> J. Guy, "Indian Textiles for the Thai Market - a royal prerogative", *The Textile Museum Journal* (1992): 82-96.

<sup>47</sup> Andaya, "Cloth Trade": 41.

<sup>48</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 135-36.

where local traders sold textiles to traders at the markets. In these towns, “peasant women sold small quantities of cloth at the local markets. The traders who purchased them exported them to Borneo and the areas surrounding the Melaka straits”.<sup>49</sup> A century later, Cirebon, Semarang, Gresik and Surabaya were pre-eminent in the maritime trade of Javanese textiles, exporting mostly to the Indonesian archipelago region.<sup>50</sup>

		pieces	%
Cirebon	total	9,685	100
	Java	1,715	17
	Melaka straits	7,925	82
	Kalimantan	45	1
	other	-	-
Semarang	total	90,800	100
	Java	8,465	9
	Melaka straits	57,160	63
	Kalimantan	24,735	27
	other	440	1
Gresik	total	9,250	100
	Java	905	10
	Melaka straits	4,755	51
	Kalimantan	3,075	33
	other	515	6
Surabaya	total	32,100	100
	Java	1,930	6
	Melaka straits	20,445	64
	Kalimantan	7,885	24
	other	1,840	6

**Source:** Knaap, *Shallow Waters*, p. 132, table 20

<sup>49</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> Knaap, *Shallow Waters*, p. 131.



Tegal, Pekalongan and Sumenep had small export surpluses of about 1,500 to 2,000 pieces annually.<sup>51</sup> Notably, even in these towns of middle-range production, the export value could be big. In Pekalongan in the late 1740s and early 1750s, the average annual export value of Javanese textile was 20,000 Spanish rials.<sup>52</sup>

These port-towns served as choke-points rather than centres of textile manufacture. Goods exported from Gresik and Tegal likely to be from the Mataram realm. The former was connected by Solo river with the heartland of the Mataram realm<sup>53</sup> while the latter two places were easily accessible with the south-central region of Java via land routes.

While every Javanese town apparently had weaving villages that produce cloth for domestic consumption, it is difficult however to discern the precise centres of textile production for export. One main centre of the textile industry was Kartasura, where the susuhunan and other courtly nobles set thousands of women to work in their various *dalem* - residence and compound of a Javanese lord, producing textiles in relatively large weaving mills.<sup>54</sup> With the shift of the susuhunan's court from Kartasura to Surakarta in the late 1740s, the textile manufacture centre duly relocated. Surakarta and Bagelen were big textile production centres in the early nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Sumenep was another place where weaving was done for export

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<sup>51</sup> Knaap, *Shallow Waters*, p. 131.

<sup>52</sup> VOC 2886, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 26 Feb 1756, f. 66; 25 Nov 1751, J.A. van der Chijs (ed.), *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek 1602-1811*, 17 vols. (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1885-1900) [from now on referred as "*Plakaatboek*"], vol. 6: 95-100.

<sup>53</sup> instructions by governor-general Van Imhoff to Semarang commandership during his visit to and departure from Java's Northeast Coast, 9 Jun 1746, *De opkomst van het Nederlandsche gezag in Oost-Indië: verzamelingen van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*, ed. J.K.J. de Jonge and M.L. van Deventer (Amsterdam's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1862-1909) [from now on referred to as "*Opkomst*"], vol. 10: 90; Siberg's MvO, *Opkomst* 12: 109-110.

<sup>54</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 135.

<sup>55</sup> Boomgaard, *Children*, p. 127-28.

purposes.<sup>56</sup> The “Madurese cloth” brought to Palembang was probably from this port-town.<sup>57</sup>

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.<sup>58</sup> More discussion on this subject is made at a later section.

In the last years of the seventeenth century and early decades of the eighteenth century, the textile industry in Semarang also developed along more professional lines. While they had previously purchased whatever textiles which happened to be available on the market, at the turn of the eighteenth century, Chinese traders began to adopt a system of supplying credit to peasant households in exchange for guaranteed deliveries of textiles at a later date.<sup>59</sup> Those Chinese merchants with greater capital would also win the tax farm on “branding” (*tjap, sjap*) the textiles. What this means was that they could collect tax on the textiles brought from interior Java to the coast for sales and export. When this tax farm came into being was unclear but it was abolished when the abuses were exposed in the late 1740s. By winning the tax farm, many merchants would use the toll-gates as choke points to buy up all kinds of textiles. Whether to gain more profits or coerce the traders to sell the textiles to them, instead of setting up one toll-gate as permitted, they would also set up ten to twelve toll-gates such that the trader would end up paying 60 percent instead of 5 percent of taxes.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Batavia ordered Semarang to send forth some samples of this “Banda-type” textile in 1752. (VOC 2804, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 Sep 1752, ff. 73-74.)

<sup>57</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 40-41.

<sup>58</sup> Hartingh’s MvO, *Opkomst* 10: 354-55.

<sup>59</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 135. Nagtegaal did not quite spell out the exact years but his citations, dated 1698 and 1713, point to the turn of the eighteenth century.

<sup>60</sup> VOC 2681, Semarang commandership to Batavia high government, 24 Sep 1746, ff. 149-50; VOC 2706, Semarang commandership to Batavia high government, 28 Feb 1747, ff. 40-41.

By the mid-eighteenth century, specific types of textile were developed for specific markets. In Sumenep, a so-called “Banda-type” of textiles was produced, presumably for sales in that town.<sup>61</sup>

### **Company’s Reaction**

The Company considered the development of Javanese cotton textile industry a threat. The 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 were not only 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.<sup>62</sup>

By 1683, the Company warehouses in Batavia lay overstocked with unsold Coromandel cloth. Hopes that the demand would again improve were not given up and, accordingly, the orders to Coromandel were not refused for a few years. But by 1687, the high government lost its optimism and instructed the Coromandel personnel not to send any cloth above the

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<sup>61</sup> Batavia ordered Semarang to send forth some samples of this “Banda-type” textile in 1752. (VOC 2804, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 Sep 1752, ff. 73-74.)

<sup>62</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 136. Note the Company contingent of indigo did not quite interfere because Company wanted dry indigo which is prepared very differently from wet ones, which were the ones used for dyeing Javanese textiles. Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 168.

quantity specifically ordered.<sup>63</sup> In fact, after 1685, the Company was to withdraw from the direct sales of Indian textile on the Pasisir and sold cloth to Chinese traders at the Company's auctions in Batavia.<sup>64</sup>

The Javanese textile trade was largely left to develop on its own. In the first nine and a half months of 1720, 16,360 pieces of cloth were exported from Semarang to Borneo and the Melaka straits region. By 1774-1777, during the same period, the annual quantity on average had risen to a staggering 75,853 pieces of cloth.<sup>65</sup> Javanese textiles were also allowed into the Company headquarters at Batavia. Annual imports of Javanese cloth to Batavia in the 1770s were between 5,000 to 7,000 pieces, of which some were distributed in Batavia while others re-exported to other places, among which was Banten.<sup>66</sup>

The laissez-faire situation did not change significantly after the Company gained the rule over the north coast and eastern part of Java, a region the Dutch termed "Java's Northeast Coast", in 1743. The Dutch personnel at Semarang, headquarters of the Company administration over the Java's Northeast Coast, imposed a high export tax of 25 percent, compared to the usual 8 percent on most goods, on Javanese fabric. The measure was taken more as a means to discourage the use of cotton yarn which it was trying to procure than to protect the Indian textile market though.

In fact, the popularity of Javanese cotton textile tempted the Company administrators to dabbling in it. In 1750, Batavia ordered its Semarang

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<sup>63</sup> Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company*, p. 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. Andaya, "Cloth Trade": 43.

<sup>64</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, pp. 147-48.

<sup>65</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 136.

<sup>66</sup> Knaap, *Shallow Waters*, p. 131, appendix 11.

subordinates to purchase 400 corges of Javanese textiles for sales in Banda.<sup>67</sup> In 1752, it also used the service of an European textile trader on the Pasisir, Christiaen Mente, to buy 40 pieces of Javanese textiles and 20 pieces of Balinese ones - for sale in the Company trading office at Basra, as well as a corge of Sumenep textile.<sup>68</sup> In the following year, Batavia again ordered Semarang to buy Javanese textiles for the Banda and Basra offices.<sup>69</sup> Yet a year later, the high government wanted 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 ones and also in the fastest way possible. This time the destined market was not only Basra but also the Netherlands.<sup>70</sup> The plan did not work out however, as these textiles were not equally of the same quality nor were they of uniform size.<sup>71</sup>

Batavia again ordered Semarang to purchase large stocks of textiles in central and east Java in 1758, hoping that the attempt would be more successful since there were some years of peace and rest following the 1755 and 1757 treaties with Mangkubumi and Mangkunegara. The Semarang government was to report in August 1758 that it was extremely difficult to get textiles of the same length and width, "because it is not easy to convince the Javanese to change their ways of doing things".<sup>72</sup> Two months later, Governor Hartingh wrote that "despite all efforts", the Javanese remained "reluctant" to alter their style of working. As such, he asked to be

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<sup>67</sup> VOC 2766, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 28 Dec 1750, f. 34; VOC 2766, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 16 Jan 1751, ff. 57-58; VOC 2787, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 29 Feb 1752, f. 4.

<sup>68</sup> VOC 2804, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 Sep 1752, ff. 73-74.

<sup>69</sup> VOC 2824, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 31 Jan 1753, ff. 11-12.

<sup>70</sup> VOC 2843, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 13 Jul 1754, ff. 148-49.

<sup>71</sup> VOC 2864, Tegal resident Falk to Batavia high government, 4 Apr 1755, f. 48.

<sup>72</sup> VOC 2938, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 15 Aug 1758, ff. 80-81.

excused from the procurement of the commodity.<sup>73</sup> Tegal resident Falk, who managed to obtain some textiles, bought them at very high prices and these were also in a “bad condition”.<sup>74</sup>

Some sense of success to buy up Javanese textiles was finally achieved thirty years later in the late 1780s, and with the help of Chinese towkays. In 1787 and 1788, the Company signed a contract with the Yogyakarta bandar, 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 by every July.<sup>75</sup>

What happened to the Company’s trade in Indian textiles in central and east Java in the meantime? The Company did not give up monopoly over Indian textile in the eighteenth century. In 1771, probably after having lost the hold over Indian textile market to the English, the Dutch company decided to limit its monopoly on the trade in Indian textiles to the most profitable sorts, leaving the lesser qualities free for trade by Company employees on their personal account and by the inhabitants of Batavia.<sup>76</sup>

On the Pasisir, the Company earned a little from Indian textiles by trading through Chinese merchants who would buy at the Company warehouses in Semarang or Batavia and do retail trade in central and east Java. In the eighteenth century, Indian textiles no longer formed the dominant import of the Company to the Pasisir though, not even when the Company assumed the control over the region. When peace finally settled on Java in late 1750s, Batavia wanted the Java’s Northeast Coast

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<sup>73</sup> VOC 2938, Hartingh to Batavia high government, 20 Oct 1758, ff. 20-21.

<sup>74</sup> VOC 2968, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 28 Dec 1758, ff. 6-7.

<sup>75</sup> VOC 3763, Siberg to Batavia high government, 13 Jul 1787, ff. 387-88; VOC 3861, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 22 Dec 1788, §448; VOC 3861, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 14 Mar 1789, §17.

<sup>76</sup> Knaap, *Shallow Waters*, p. 89.

government to sell more Indian textiles, to which the government replied that it would be difficult “as Java is only a stone’s throw away from Batavia” and traders could easily get their supplies from the latter town.<sup>77</sup>

Nonetheless, with moderate supplies of about 3,000 to 5,000 pieces to Semarang yearly,<sup>78</sup> the warehouses here could make a profit of 9 percent by selling in auctions to Chinese merchants, in the worst times when the textiles offered by the Company were simply not in demand on the Javanese market.<sup>79</sup> In good times, the Company would acquire a considerable profit of between 55 to 80 percent from Indian textile sales.<sup>80</sup>

In the 1770s, among Java’s Northeast Coast port-towns, Sumenep imported the most number of pieces of Indian textiles, that is, 200 on average per year, followed by Pekalongan at 160 and Cirebon at 130. Although Semarang imported about 2000 pieces, these were mostly for re-export purposes. For the other districts, the import ranged between zero to 40 pieces.<sup>81</sup>

These numbers should not be taken as the exact imports though. The situation of Java’s Northeast Coast was probably not much different from how that in Palembang and Jambi. In the latter places, when the Dutch company imposed a monopoly on Indian textile imports in the 1680s, royal women in the courts began sending their own ships out secretly to ports such as Riau, Melaka, Batavia and Macao to buy up supplies of textiles

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<sup>77</sup> VOC 2968, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 11 Oct 1759, f. 48.

<sup>78</sup> VOC 3064, Semarang government to Batavia high government, Nov 1762, ff. 15-21; VOC 3362, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 6 Dec 1771, pp. 23-31; VOC 3362, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 31 Dec 1772.

<sup>79</sup> VOC 3247, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 28 Apr 1768; VOC 3247, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 22 Jun 1768, pp. 73-74.

<sup>80</sup> VOC 3468, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 24 Dec 1776, pp. 6-7; VOC 3526, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 21 Nov 1778, pp. 68-69; VOC 3813, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 4 Oct 1787, §263.

<sup>81</sup> Knaap, *Shallow Waters*, appendix 13.

which suited their taste.<sup>82</sup> The likelihood is only bigger considering how Chulia merchants had continued to bring textiles to the Melaka straits and Siam, where these could in turn be brought to Java by Malay, Javanese, Makassarese, Bugis, Mandarese traders who traversed the Indonesian archipelago and had what the Dutch called “smuggling nests” in islands like Bawean and Nusa Barung off the Java island.<sup>83</sup>

### **The Yarn Story**

The above formed a chapter but not the whole story of the developments of Indian and Javanese textile trade in the Indonesian archipelago. Related to these is the trade and production of cotton yarn. The Company had bought up cotton yarn in central and east Java in the late seventeenth century as a means to frustrate local textile production. But it did so in the early eighteenth century as there was a reasonable market in India and the Netherlands.<sup>84</sup> Factories in the Netherlands kept up their demand for cotton yarn from the Indies through the eighteenth century.<sup>85</sup>

A product the Company wanted. For other products like sugar and coffee, it could get enough supplies from Batavia and surrounding lands. But not cotton yarn. Tried to get more from central and east Java.

Following the contract with the susuhunan on 11 Nov 1743, along with rice, kacangs, beans, pepper and indigo, the Mataram ruler should also deliver 300 picols of cotton yarn to the Company yearly at the fixed prices of 40, 30, 20, 16 and 10 rix-dollars per picol respectively for the first, second,

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<sup>82</sup> Andaya, “Cloth Trade”: 38.

<sup>83</sup> Kwee H.K., *The Political Economy of Java’s Northeast Coast, c. 1740-1800: Elite Synergy* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 73-75.

<sup>84</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 5 Mar 1750, *GM* 11: 849; Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 136; Jacobs, *Koopman*, p. 187.

<sup>85</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 5 Mar 1750, *GM* 11: 849.



third, fourth and “dispense” (*dispens-soort*) qualities.<sup>86</sup> These prices were cheaper than in Batavia, where they were purchased at 45, 35, 24, 18 and 12 rix-dollars respectively.<sup>87</sup> While the average prices for every lb of cotton yarn of all comptoirs were f.  $\text{₡}18 \frac{3}{4}$ , f.  $\text{₡}14 \frac{1}{2}$ , f.  $\text{₡}10$  and f.  $\text{₡}7 \frac{3}{5}$  respectively for the first, second, third and fourth grades;<sup>88</sup> on Java’s Northeast Coast the prices for equivalent grades of yarn were only f.  $\text{₡}15.6$ , f.  $\text{₡}11.8$ , f.  $\text{₡}7.11$  and f.  $\text{₡}6.2$ .<sup>89</sup>

Up to the early 1740s, the inhabitants in central and east Java did not produce sufficient amount of the product to fill its own needs for textile-weaving. Depended much on Palembang for the supply of cotton yarns. The Dutch sought to turn the situation around, especially since they considered that raw cotton was easily produced in the Javanese regions and unrefined cotton could be bought at a relatively low price of 5 1/2 Spanish rials per picol.<sup>90</sup> The Batavia high government made plans to expand cotton cultivation in central and east Java since the product “would always be a desirable return goods for the Netherlands” and with more cotton cultivated, the prices would also fall.<sup>91</sup>

So keen were the Company administrators to acquire more cotton yarn that in the early 1740s, they even tried to refine raw cotton on their own from the cotton obtained from Kartasura when they could not find

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<sup>86</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1744, *GM* 11: 191; See articles 14 to 18 in 11-13 Nov 1743 contract between the Company and susuhunan (*Corpus* 5: 370-71). The quantities were fixed by 1744 (VOC 2633, Sterrenberg to Batavia high government, 5 Oct 1744, ff. 558-61). “Dispense” quality refers to the lowest grade of cotton yarns. The high government mainly bought these yarns as provisions for the Company personnel.

<sup>87</sup> 15 Aug 1747, *Plakaatboek* 5: 471-72.

<sup>88</sup> 21 May 1761, *Plakaatboek* 7: 475.

<sup>89</sup> 9 May/5 Jun 1755, *Plakaatboek* 7: 35.

<sup>90</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1745, *GM* 11: 315-16.

<sup>91</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1745, *GM* 11: 316.

enthusiasts on Java to do so.<sup>92</sup> However, they abandoned the idea as the process was too costly. They reverted again in 1745 to the dependence on the regents in the *bovenlanden* to deliver the product to them.

Not smooth-sailing as well. Though the regents were obliged to send 300 to 400 picols of cotton yarns to the Company yearly, they continued to be deficient in the deliveries.<sup>93</sup> As Batavia saw it, these regents were unhappy with the low price and would do the deliveries “more out of pressure than willingness”.<sup>94</sup> As such, the high government also enquired the Gentlemen Seventeen in 1750 if it might be possible to spin cotton yarns in the Netherlands in a cheap way, “as a livelihood for the (Dutch) commoners”.<sup>95</sup> It reported that the prices for refined cotton yarns on the Java island were comparable and even higher than those in the Netherlands at this point in time, “because the *inlanders* also purchased fine or refined cotton among themselves”.<sup>96</sup>

To ensure that all available yarn fell into their hands, what the Indies personnel did was to impose high taxes on the export of yarns. Twenty-five percent export tolls were imposed on the Javanese cotton yarns compared to the regular 8 percent on most commodities.<sup>97</sup> Cotton textiles were also similarly taxed since they were woven from the yarn, as a means to reduce the demand for the latter.<sup>98</sup> From 1754, the Semarang government imposed a flat rate of 10 rix-dollars per picol of cotton yarn, all grades alike. That is, 25, 33, 50, 62.5, and 100 per cent export tolls were for the first, second,

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<sup>92</sup> Details see VOC 2655, Semarang commandership to Batavia high government, 28 Jul 1745, ff. 306-307.

<sup>93</sup> VOC 2655, Tegal resident Breekpot to Batavia high government, 13 Oct 1745, ff. 383-85.

<sup>94</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1745, *GM* 11: 316.

<sup>95</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 5 Mar 1750, *GM* 11: 849.

<sup>96</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 5 Mar 1750, *GM* 11: 849.

<sup>97</sup> 25 Nov 1751, *Plakaatboek* 6: 97.

<sup>98</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1748, *GM* 11: 713.

third, fourth, and “dispense” qualities of the yarns respectively. This effectively raised the tariffs of the coarser yarns.<sup>99</sup> Beginning on 1 January 1761, the Batavia high government also further restricted the export in cotton yarns: no one was permitted to trade in this item until the Company acquired its full contingent.<sup>100</sup>

In the first decade of the Company rule on the Pasisir, the energies of the Batavia and Semarang authorities were largely absorbed by attempts to re-establish peace on central and east Java, or in the organization of the procurement of rice, the most important commodity from the north coast. After more stable arrangements were made for rice deliveries in 1754 followed by the peace agreement with the leading Mataram rebels in 1755 and 1757, Company administrators were also more encouraged to acquire more of different types of products on the Pasisir by the late 1750s. Cotton yarn was one of them.

What they did firstly was to make the product part of the contingent for coastal Javanese regents. Until late 1750s, the Company acquired cotton yarns largely from the Mataram realm, either via Tegal (via land route, generally from Banyumas, Panjerlan and Dayaluhur since 1772)<sup>101</sup> or Gresik (through the Solo river).<sup>102</sup> In 1760, the Semarang government exempted Sumenep and Pamekasan deliveries of dried fish, venison and corn sugar, demanding for the increase from 20 to 25 picols of cotton yarns from the former regency, and from 10 to 12 picols from the latter.<sup>103</sup> In 1761, it also obliged the Kaliwungu and Semarang regents to deliver, as yearly

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<sup>99</sup> 3 Sep 1754, *Plakaatboek* 6: 707.

<sup>100</sup> 1760 (exact date unknown), *Plakaatboek* 7: 450.

<sup>101</sup> Van der Burgh's MvO, *Opkomst* 11: 420; Siberg's MVO to Greeve, 18 Sep 1787, *Opkomst* 12: 92-93.

<sup>102</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1746, *GM* 11: 454.

<sup>103</sup> VOC 2996, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 Dec 1760, f. 17.

contingent, 16 picols and 12 picols of cotton yarns respectively.<sup>104</sup> By 1761, the total amount of cotton yarn the Company obtained through contingent was 105 picols.<sup>105</sup> There was also concern to get the Mataram courts and the coastal regents to deliver finer yarns at this point in time.<sup>106</sup>

Coastal residents were also drawn into the fervour to procure more of the product. From 1761, they were ordered to buy up cotton yarn in their residencies and were obliged to submit a fixed quantity of cotton yarns annually, namely,

gezaghebber in Oosthoek	16 picols
Gresik resident	40 picols
Rembang resident	4 picols
Juwana resident	4 picols
Jepara resident	12 picols
Demak resident	4 picols
Pekalongan resident	4 picols
Tegal resident	16 picols. <sup>107</sup>

Governor Vos also adjured the Mataram rulers to increase their deliveries of cotton yarn when he visited both of them in 1765.<sup>108</sup>

The intensified activities to increase yields of cotton yarn in the early 1760s was a response to the market. Cotton yarn had become even more marketable in the Netherlands in the 1760s. In 1761, the governor-general noted that the popularity of the product there had generated a 237 per cent

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<sup>104</sup> VOC 3027, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 31 Dec 1761, f. 3.

<sup>105</sup> Hartingh's MvO, *Opkomst* 10: 336, 339, 343, 349-50.

<sup>106</sup> VOC 3027, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 15 Aug 1761, ff. 69-70.

<sup>107</sup> VOC 2996, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 Dec 1760, ff. 16-17; 17 Nov 1761, *Plakaatboek* 7: 526; Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1761, *Opkomst* 10: 380.

<sup>108</sup> VOC 3157, Vos to Batavia high government, 15 Nov 1765, ff. 172-73, 178. Note that in their treaties with the Company, the Mataram rulers were obliged to expand agriculture as much as the Company wanted. See for instance, treaty of reconciliation, friendship and alliance between the sultan and Company, 13 Feb 1755, *Opkomst* 10: 302.

profit for the Company, but that the supplies so far were insufficient to satisfy the demands.<sup>109</sup> Hence he proposed to increase the purchase price to facilitate acquisition, particularly for that from the Pasisir and Cirebon where the prices for cotton yarn were lowest so far.<sup>110</sup> To increase yields, the Batavia authorities also sent the Semarang government cotton seeds from Coromandel and Makassar to experiment planting them on Java's Northeast Coast in 1763.<sup>111</sup> The outcome did not seem successful though. In late 1770s, the cotton was still from the local types of cotton trees (*boomwolle*).<sup>112</sup>

In 1766, the Batavia high government completely banned the trade in cotton yarns in Cirebon and Java's Northeast Coast. This would be reserved for the Company only.<sup>113</sup> When the Java's Northeast Coast ministers assumed greater control over some areas on the Java's Northeast Coast, they would also impose cotton yarns as part of contingent where possible. For instance, when the Semarang ministers became aware that the the Sumenep regent had control over the Kangean islands, they stipulated that the yearly contingent from these islands should include a picol of cotton yarns, among others.<sup>114</sup>

### **Give-And-Take Necessary**

Bully tactics did not really work. Private traders resorted to chicanery to beat the Company taxation. Despite the placards announcing the bans in

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<sup>109</sup> 21 May 1761, *Plakaatboek* 7: 475.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> VOC 3093, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 24 Mar 1763, ff. 19-20.

<sup>112</sup> Van der Burgh's MvO, *Opkomst* 11: 470.

<sup>113</sup> 21 Nov 1766, *Plakaatboek* 8: 173; VOC 3247, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 22 Jun 1768, pp. 74-75; VOC 3362, Semarang political resolution, 22 Oct 1771, ff. 10-12. Repeated the ban in the end of 1772, see *Plakaatboek* 8: 779-81.

<sup>114</sup> 3 Oct 1766, *Plakaatboek* 8: 161.

cotton yarn trade in 1761 and 1766, the Batavia authorities observed that cotton yarn was imported from Palembang to Batavia in 1768.<sup>115</sup> In the early 1740s, the high export toll of 25 per cent was only imposed on white cotton textiles.<sup>116</sup> What some Chinese traders did was to dye the cloth and wash the dye out after exporting them. When the Company personnel discovered this trick, they also imposed a similar heavy tax on coloured fabrics.<sup>117</sup>

Deliveries might be made obligatory but the coastal regents were less than satisfactory in delivering their contingents of cotton yarn, not only in the quantity but also the quality.<sup>118</sup> Rather than forced the regents to deliver all, the Company administrators would order their subordinates to buy the yarn from market.<sup>119</sup> Company administrators also conceded and paid a higher price to entice the Javanese lords to submit the required amounts of yarn, as has happened in 1761 under the suggestion of ex-governor in Semarang, Hartingh.<sup>120</sup> The latter also advised his superiors in Batavia to keep one eye closed about the fineness of the yarns.<sup>121</sup>

The Batavia high government avoided increasing the burden of regents unnecessarily. It rejected Governor van Ossenberch's 1763 proposal to increase the contingents on indigo and cotton yarn when the supplies were sufficient to cover Company's needs.<sup>122</sup> Instead, care was taken to balance the demands for products from the regents. When

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<sup>115</sup> 20 May/15 Jun 1768, *Plakaatboek* 8: 449-50.

<sup>116</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1748, *GM* 11: 713.

<sup>117</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1748, *GM* 11: 713.

<sup>118</sup> Hartingh's MvO, *Opkomst* 10: 354-55.

<sup>119</sup> note that in VOC 3247, Semarang resolution, 31 Aug 1768, pp. 88-89, Semarang transported 100 picols cotton yarns to Batavia. NB: These are the ordinary contingents from Semarang, Kaliwungu, Surakarta en Jogjakarta "waaronder egter 39 picols die hier particulier zijn ingekogt en des dit product in de jongste 3 jaren van hier 99 picols vermeedert, en weder in 't laaste boven het vorige 7 picols".

<sup>120</sup> Hartingh's MvO, *Opkomst* 10: 354-55.

<sup>121</sup> Hartingh's MvO, *Opkomst* 10: 354-55.

<sup>122</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1763, *Opkomst* 10: 392-93.

Company administrators wanted more indigo or cotton yarn from Sumenep, Pamekasan, Kaliwungu, Semarang, Wiradesa, Kudus, Pati, and Pasuruan in the early 1760s and 1770s, they reduced the contingent of such other products as from the regencies as rice, wood and other foodstuffs.<sup>123</sup>

Although the Semarang authorities were aware that some districts could yield more than the stipulated contingent, they did not demand more deliveries unless the bupati were willing to take them on, as did the Madura regent Setiadinigrat who voluntarily offered to deliver 20 picols of cotton yarn yearly at the Company's fixed price in 1760 while Kudus regent, Wiryadinigrat, undertook more deliveries of wood, cotton yarn and indigo in 1777.<sup>124</sup>

Company administrators also adopted an unassuming posture towards the Mataram rulers. Despite the treaty conditions, Batavia and Semarang did not make a fuss despite the deficiency in deliveries by these rulers. The latter were not really pushed to send the stated amounts of cotton yarn and other products as pepper and cardamom. Furthermore, although the Semarang government was aware that the rulers were involved in smuggling, it did not make too big a fuss.<sup>125</sup>

The Batavia and Semarang authorities had made some compromises by acknowledging the political positions to Mangkubumi and Mangkunegara in 1755 and 1757. From this period, the general approach adopted by

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<sup>123</sup> VOC 2996, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 Dec 1760, f. 17; VOC 3027, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 21 Dec 1761, f. 37; VOC 3027, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 31 Dec 1761, f. 3; VOC 3027, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 31 Dec 1761, f. 3; Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1761, *Opkomst* 10: 379; VOC 3094, dagregister of governor to Oosthoek, in 1763, f. 269; governor to Batavia high government, 5 Feb 1774, *Opkomst* 11: 257-58.

<sup>124</sup> VOC 2996, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 18 Dec 1760, f. 17; VOC 3497, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 22 Dec 1777, pp. 59-60.

<sup>125</sup> See chapter 3.

Batavia and the Semarang governor towards the rulers was to preserve their goodwill and minimize any sense of resentment on their part. The only “demand” the Company administrators stipulated was that the Mataram rulers should send their patih and other important courtiers to pay homage in Batavia whenever a new governor-general was installed.<sup>126</sup> This ritual would serve to remind the rulers of their vassalship and their “duties” in ensuring the product deliveries to which they were committed to the Company as stated in the treaties.<sup>127</sup> In other matters however, the Batavia high government was most accommodating towards the susuhunan and sultan.<sup>128</sup>

### **Changing Arena**

From 1778 onwards, the Gentlemen Seventeen was especially keen to procure cotton yarns. War broke out between the English and French in 1778. It triggered a mini-boom in the Netherlands market for indigo, cotton yarn, pepper, cardamom, and sugar from that very year. Batavia demanded more yarn from central and east Java in that year 1778. If the Company administrators on the coast had not obtained enough of the product since earlier decades, they now had a bigger problem.

To acquire more cotton yarn, Java’s Northeast Coast governor van der Burgh reduced the restrictions on the exports of Javanese cotton textiles. Since 1754, the Batavia high government had stipulated high export tolls of 15 per cent on Javanese cloth as a means to stem possible sales competition from the commodity for the Company imports of Indian textiles

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<sup>126</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1762, *Opkomst* 10: 389.

<sup>127</sup> VOC 3556, Van der Burgh to Batavia high government, 10 Aug 1779, f. 429.

<sup>128</sup> For more details, see Kwee, *Elite Synergy*, chapter 6.



into the Indonesian Archipelago.<sup>129</sup> Van der Burgh suggested decreasing the export tolls to 10 per cent. “If Javanese textiles are popular, the inlanders would try to plant more cotton trees and spin more yarn, which would in turn assist the Company in obtaining more cotton yarn”.<sup>130</sup> At this point, the Company administrators were willing to forego their profits from Indian textile imports to foster the production of cotton yarn in central and east Java. Nonetheless, the Semarang governor suggested that the Company should still try to earn back the loss in export tolls on the Pasisir from the import tolls at the destined ports, namely, Palembang, Borneo, Pasir and other ports in the eastern Indonesian archipelago.<sup>131</sup>

The governor also decreed that syahbandars should begin delivering cotton yarn as part of the payment for the tax farms. They could either arrange for the yarn to be spun by villagers under their charge or buy it up at the *pasars* and villages under their lease.<sup>132</sup> In Van der Burgh’s plan, a total of 81 picols should be delivered yearly by the syahbandars for rix-dollars 45.10, 35.10, and 25.10 for a picol of grades A, B, and C cotton yarn respectively.<sup>133</sup>

Both the governor’s proposals were taken up. From 1779, the Batavia authorities sent *kapas* (cotton) seeds from Coromandel, which they considered to be of better quality than the Javanese ones, to the ministers of

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<sup>129</sup> 3 Sep 1754, *Plakaatboek* 6: 707. Note that the export tolls for most products were 8 per cent. The export toll on Javanese cotton textiles was even higher at 25 per cent in the earlier years. See 25 Nov 1751, *Plakaatboek* 6: 97. Note that traders were only allowed to export the textiles to Palembang, Borneo, Pasir and other ports in the eastern part of the Indonesian Archipelago when the competition between Javanese and Indian textiles was less intense. The Company still wanted to protect its sales of Indian textiles in the Melaka Straits region.

<sup>130</sup> 21/29 Sep 1778, *Plakaatboek* 10: 318.

<sup>131</sup> 21/29 Sep 1778, *Plakaatboek* 10: 318.

<sup>132</sup> 21/29 Sep 1778, *Plakaatboek* 10: 318-19.

<sup>133</sup> For division of who delivered how much to make up the 81 picols, see *Plakaatboek* 10: 319-20. Some syahbandars were excused from the deliveries after they complained about the impossibility of providing these. (3 Aug 1787, *Plakaatboek* 10: 931.)

Java's Northeast Coast and Makassar and ordered them to experiment growing them.<sup>134</sup> Partial success was registered on the Pasisir but not in the case of Makassar.<sup>135</sup> Oosthoek gezaghebber Van der Niepoort even threatened the regents that if the commissioners sent to survey the cotton cultivation found Javanese kapas trees instead of Coromandel ones, they would destroy them.<sup>136</sup>

The Batavia high government, seeing the poor yields of raw cotton (*kapas*) in the Batavia and Priangan lands, also ordered the Semarang ministers to buy up the produce on the Pasisir at 3½ rix-dollars a picol to send to the former places so that the inhabitants there could spin yarns and fulfil their contingent.<sup>137</sup> The Semarang government also began to buy raw cotton from Bali and spin this into yarn on the Pasisir.<sup>138</sup>

England declared war on the Netherlands in 1780 when the Dutch supported the Americans in their uprising against the English. This war, designated the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, was to last till 1784.<sup>139</sup> Inevitably, the transportation of products back to the Netherlands was hindered. Although some products could still be exported for intra-Asian trade, like sugar to Ceylon and Japan, most products were left behind.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Van der Burgh's MvO, *Opkomst* 11: 469-70; VOC 3600, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 15 Mar 1781, §35; VOC 3600, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 17 Sep 1781, §188; VOC 3600, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 19 Dec 1781, §315; VOC 3627, Siberg to Batavia high government, 9 Feb 1782, ff. 234-35.

<sup>135</sup> VOC 3627, Siberg to Batavia high government, 9 Feb 1782, ff. 234-35; VOC 3736, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 30 Oct 1786, §283.

<sup>136</sup> Van der Niepoort's MvO, *Opkomst* 12: 62-63.

<sup>137</sup> VOC 3526, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 28 May 1778, p. 63; 31 Dec 1778, *Plakaatboek* 10: 349. This arrangement sustained for four consecutive years. VOC 3627, Siberg to Batavia high government, 9 Feb 1782, f. 235.

<sup>138</sup> Van der Burgh's MvO, *Opkomst* 11: 469-70.

<sup>139</sup> J. Steur, *Herstel of ondergang. De voorstellen to redres van de V.O.C. 1740-1795* (Utrecht: Hes), 1984.

<sup>140</sup> VOC 3738, Siberg to Batavia high government, 28 Jan 1786, ff. 20-21

There was a narrow edging of silver lining because during the war, the Batavia authorities began to sell pepper, sugar, coffee and other products to merchants of neutral powers as Americans, Danes, Swedes, and Portuguese.<sup>141</sup> Thinking strategically, the Gentlemen Seventeen also chartered some Prussian ships and sent them to Batavia to fetch goods.<sup>142</sup> In this way, sales were maintained and the demand for various products sustained despite the obstruction of transportation to Europe. After the war, Batavia continued to sell these commodities to the various European merchants as the Company authorities in the Netherlands were suffering financial problems and could not send the necessary cash relief to the staff in the Indies.<sup>143</sup> In short, the Company expansion of production of cotton yarn on the Pasisir was not actually held up despite the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.

In 1792, the Gentlemen Seventeen ordered the Batavia authorities to increase the deliveries of cotton yarn, even if it meant a price increase to 25 from 20 rix-dollars per picol.<sup>144</sup> This was the price offered for yarn delivered above the amount of contingent. Indeed, as the demands for cotton yarns increased in the Netherlands, the Batavia high government largely turned to Java's Northeast Coast to meet the demands from their superiors.

By the fiscal year of 1795/1796, Java's Northeast Coast was yielding most of the cotton yarn which the Batavia high government obtained from Java.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> 21 Apr 1785, *Plakaatboek* 10: 769-70; Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, Batavia, 29 Dec 1781, *Opkomst* 12: 8-9.

<sup>142</sup> Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, Batavia, 31 Dec 1783, *Opkomst* 12: 38.

<sup>143</sup> Batavia high government to the Comité, 20 Dec 1799, *Opkomst* 13: 5-7.

<sup>144</sup> 14 Jun 1792, *Plakaatboek* 11: 438-39.

<sup>145</sup> For the figures, see appendix on the various cash crops, 1795-1801, compiled from *Opkomst* 13: 234-40.

While the Company had exported f. 4,456 of cotton yarn from the Pasisir yearly in the 1701-1741 period,<sup>146</sup> by the mid-1790s, this rose to about f. 60,000, or 13 times more in value.<sup>147</sup> In terms of quantity in volume, a total of 264177 13/16 lb or 2113 169/400 picols, or on average, that is since 1 Sep 1791 to 31 Aug 1796, every year 422 1369/2000 picols are delivered.<sup>148</sup>

Amount of cotton yarn acquired by the Company from 1791 to 1796 on the Pasisir

place	1791	1792	1793	1794	1795	1796	total
Surabaya and sub-offices	2,250	11,750	11,000	14,386 1/16	12,625	562 1/2	52,573 9/16
Gresik	9,000	5,500	11,250	31,375	14,967	6,812 1/2	78,904 1/2
Sumenep	1,250	500	1,437 1/2	1,875	625	-	5,687 1/2
Rembang	645	1,875	-	6,625	7,500	250	16,895
Juwana	531 1/4	1,500 1/4	1,406 1/4	875	1,731	-	6,043 3/4
Jepara	1,000	7,625	6,260	14,260	4,875	-	34,020
Pekalongan	1,500	-	1,500	2,750	2,125	2,625	10,500
Tegal	3,000	7,750	4,625	5,125	4,000	-	24,500
Semarang	-	4,145 1/2	7,137 1/4	12,546 3/4	6,231	4,993	35,053 1/2

all figures in lb

**Source:** memorie of indigo, cardamom Javasch, coffeebonen Javasch, ronde pepper, zwavel ongerafineerd, cotton yarns en sappanwood which the regents and hoofden along Java's Northeast Coast delivered yearly since primo Sep 1791, ult Aug 1796, *Opkomst* 12: 422-24.

<sup>146</sup> Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 134.

<sup>147</sup> Report of the commissioners-general to Gentlemen Seventeen on the prospects of the Company in Indië, Batavia, 4 Jul 1795, *Opkomst* 12: 343; "Indication of the places where the cultivation of the main products are found on the island of Java", 19 Aug 1803, Batavia, by F. van Braam. *Opkomst* 13: 234-40.

<sup>148</sup> memorie of indigo, cardamom Javasch, coffeebonen Javasch, ronde pepper, zwavel ongerafineerd, cotton yarns en sappanwood which the regents and hoofden along Java's Northeast Coast delivered yearly since primo Sep 1791, ult Aug 1796, *Opkomst* 12: 424.

Partially as a result of the Dutch efforts, the north-central and east coast of Java, which only spun coarser grades of cotton yarn prior to the 1760s,<sup>149</sup> became one of the fine cotton yarn-spinning centres in the region. Yarn production such that Java transformed from a net importer to exporter of yarn in the region. Banten<sup>150</sup> and Palembang<sup>151</sup> was supplying yarn to Java from the late seventeenth century onwards. However, by the 1760s, the trade was reversed.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Hartingh's MvO, *Opkomst* 10: 354-55. Hartingh reported in 1761 that cotton yarns had always been a product from the interior and now is also purchased by residents outside Semarang and Kaliwungu. that if we closed one eye about the fineness, could also buy some in Surabaya and Gresik, and that the fineness will gradually increase, because "everything is difficult at the beginning".

<sup>150</sup> Following the Company's treaty with the Banten sultan of the port-town in 1682, Bantenese traders who came to east Java, having no Indian textiles nor opium to sell after the European and Indian traders were banned from the port-town as stipulated in the agreement, also brought cotton yarn to sell in exchange for rice on the Pasisir. (Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 117.)

<sup>151</sup> Andaya, "Cloth Trade": 39. wrong assumption by van der Kraan about self-subsistence production of cotton, cotton yarn and textiles (van der Kraan, 1998, p. 7. he continued with the story as if the British imports of cotton textile marked the first instance, aside from import of Indian textiles) my notes on the import of Palembang yarn. apparent Chinese involvement in exporting the textile. In Palembang, where the rise in the price of Indian textile in late seventeenth century coincided with a drop in that of pepper - the main export item of the polity then, the pepper-growers turned to cultivate cotton. The latter was a cash crop which was grown and abandoned when pepper fetched good prices. Probably with the imports of cotton from Palembang and other places in the archipelago, the price of cotton on the north coastal Javanese market was virtually halved around 1690.

(Nagtegaal, *Dutch Tiger*, p. 135.) By mid-1740s, Palembang as one of the main importers of cotton yarn to central and east Java. (Batavia high government to Gentlemen Seventeen, 31 Dec 1745, *GM* 11: 315.)

<sup>152</sup> Company tried to keep the yarn to itself but had to share for some diplomatic reasons: with the Banten sultan, a contract with Batavia to sell a fixed amount of 155,000 strings (*strengen*) of cotton yarn on the Java's Northeast Coast, along with some other products like timber, to him. [VOC 3247, Semarang resolution, 31 Aug 1768, pp. 84-85; VOC 3247, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 31 Aug 1768 - that Semarang will observe Batavian approval for Banten king to export cotton yarn from Java's Northeast Coast. VOC 3362, Semarang political resolution, 23 Jun 1772; VOC 3651, Semarang government to Batavia high government, 22 Feb 1783, §29.] with the Palembang, otherwise disturb private trade flow which ultimately meant less income for the Company coffers. The Palembang sultan bought supplies of rice, cotton yarn and other commodities from north coastal Java using these coins, which he had received from the Company in payment for tin and pepper. The Pasisir trading interests would then use these Spanish

Cotton yarn for Company contingent was mainly produced through servitude and involved so much work that Company administrators would not easily advise increasing the amounts of obligatory deliveries among the Javanese regents.<sup>153</sup> From nineteenth century descriptions, Javanese cultivators would grow cotton in irrigated padi fields after rice harvests and could acquire raw cotton after 100 days. The harvesting process took about a month and the yields were approximately 100 kg of cotton per hectare.<sup>154</sup>

The spinning process also needed much labour. To separate cotton from the seeds, raw cotton picked from the field was put into a gin called *gilingan*, consisting of two wooden cylinders between which raw cotton was inserted. This required long hours of work: to get 1 *kati* (1.25 lb) of ginned cotton, one had to work two full days.

After ginning, the cotton was loosened and torn by being beaten... so that it could be easily fed into a spinning wheel.... Then, cotton fibers were wound around poles and silver spools were made. To get 1 *kati* of cotton through these preparatory processes for spinning, one worker had to work for two full days. For the spinning of three raps of thread, 10 days of labor were needed.<sup>155</sup>

In this regard, Burger's hypothesis that a process of "feudalization" took place in Java in tandem with the entrenchment of the Dutch presence in

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rials to supplement their purchases of opium, cotton, and silk materials, passementerie, Chinese wares and the like in Batavia since the merchandise they brought for sale could only cover half the cost of the goods bought. [Van der Burgh's MvO, *Opkomst* 11: 482-83.]

<sup>153</sup> Vos's MvO, *Opkomst* 11: 165 - "concerning the cotton yarns we cannot demand more than was delivered, because in most places, this is produced through servitude, and the regents could not produce more than they have delivered to the Company, so long as these were not below the first sort. however, the regents are contented as it is now, and in such respect, I will try to get Semarang to deliver beyond its contingent of 30-40 picols good cotton yarns a year."

<sup>154</sup> See Matsuo, *Cotton Industry*, pp. 4-5. He cited B. Poerels, "Katoen", in *De Landbouw in de Indisch Archipel*, ed. C. van Hall and C. van de Koppel, vol. 3 and Raffles, *History of Java*, p. 133; de Haan, *Priangan*, III: 845.

<sup>155</sup> Matsuo, *Cotton Industry*, p. 4.

Java might be right. In his words, the indigenous rulers and lords could demand deliveries of produce and other services more effectively from the ordinary people, when the Dutch needed various agricultural commodities and supported the ruling elites in acquiring them from the commoners. This feudalization process in turn lent force to the indigenous elite and made room for some form of state centralization.<sup>156</sup> To yield more cotton yarn, Company would have helped Javanese regents maintain peaceful conditions and suppress uprising in their districts.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the aim of this paper is not so much to hype up the Southeast Asian ingenuity and resourcefulness again or to suggest that Indian textile imports might have caused “de-industrialization” in Southeast Asian textile production. Rather it is to point out the relevant skills and resources they had at hand and also suggest that a kind of division of labour was worked out in the Indian ocean and Indonesian archipelago in the advent of the European arrival: in Palembang, Jambi, Borneo etc. - pepper production, Java - rice production, India - textile production, etc. If the Indians could produce cheap and nice textiles, why should we try to compete against them? Cost-efficiency is a keyword here. When the quality no longer matched the price in the late seventeenth century, centres of textile production emerged within Southeast Asia to service regional needs. And

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<sup>156</sup> D. Burger, *Sociologisch-economische geschiedenis van Indonesia*. vol. 1 (Amsterdam: KIT, 1975), see especially pp. 32-48. The two volumes published in 1975 were heavily based on Burger’s published thesis, *De ontsluiting van Java’s binnenland voor het wereldverkeer* (Wageningen: Veenman, 1939). However, Burger did not propose this thesis on the feudalization in the earlier publication.

this took place within an amazing short time of a few years or at most two decades.

Central and east Java might be subjected to a semi-colonial situation in the second half of the eighteenth century but the Dutch company administrators did not quite dare to force the rulers or Javanese lords. Persuasion, negotiation and discussion with these indigenous lords, rather than coercion and violence, was the chief mode of operation in their quest for more products from central and east Java. At times, the high government increased purchase prices to induce more deliveries. At other times, it also bought from market and made the coastal residents do the job of collecting the product.

The Company's interests in the growing Javanese textile trade seemed to have the potential of expanding its market to as far as Basra and Europe. One would need to study in greater detail the overseas sales pattern of the Javanese textiles acquired by the Dutch in the 1780s to be sure. What is known for certain is how in its attempt to acquire more yarn in the late 1770s, the Dutch company in turn helped boost the Javanese textile export trade and production and probably helped foster the phenomenon of big textile production centres dotting the Javanese landscape that befuddled historians.