

Indian Cotton Goods in 16th–17th–Century China

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Abstract

In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), most of those Indian textiles reached Chinese hands either came from Southeast Asia (both mainland and islands) as tributes, or through the hands of Ryukyuan and Chinese merchants. The movement of Indian goods to the Chinese was roundabout, and in consequence, it is always difficult to identify the names and origins of a certain cloth recorded in Chinese source materials. Making it even worse, there are very few known relics of such kind of stuffs. Not much research has thus yet done on this subject.

However, written documents are rather easily available. Probably we can sort out from historical sources first, trying to identify as many items as we can, and suggesting some ways for further research. By so doing, we can also get to know the Chinese impression of South and Southeast Asia in the time under discussion, and learn about some aspects of Euro-Asian interactions.

The paper utilizes diverse materials to document the story. It tries to find out how was the Indian cotton goods circulated in China and what was their impact upon Chinese daily life and cultural pursuit. It tries also to suggest a way of identifying names of Indian cottons both in the Chinese and European records. By so doing, it will be possible in the future to make use of Western collections to broaden our knowledge about those Indian textiles ever in the Chinese holdings previously only known by names.

Keywords: Indian cloths; broadcloths; Coromandel; Nagapattinam; Ryukyu