

# **Cotton Research Project Conference: 'Global Histories of Economic Development: Cotton Textiles and Other Global Industries in the Early Modern Period', Fondation Les Treilles, 20-25 March 2006**

Global history challenges and transcends the history of regions, countries, and even continents by deploying approaches that are unconfined by space and extend over long chronologies. Its leading methodologies, based upon comparisons and connections, have been adopted to study a wide range of economic, political, social and cultural phenomena in an attempt to comprehend world history through webs of inter-connexions and by way of comparisons of different trajectories for evolution and change.

Macro economic histories have proved more popular and possibly easier to construct than the making of micro foundations for the analysis of individual sectors, industries and firms. In 2003 the Global Economic History Network (GEHN) based at the London School of Economics launched a research project designed to produce 'A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1800'. This industry has long been a central attraction for historians interested in explaining the dynamics of economic development and technological change. Most of the research on the cotton industry has, however, been confined to demarcated geographic areas (European and Indian counties and regions) and has been mainly concerned with the period beginning with the British Industrial Revolution. Histories of commerce and connections between the producers and consumers of cotton textiles in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe remain under researched and the evolving relationships between cottons and other textiles, the cultivation of cotton fibres, and the manufacture of cottons, woollens, silks and linens are not fully understood.

This conference aims to explore the main problems that any truly 'global history of cotton textiles' should consider. Our discussions will focus on the sources, methodologies, approaches, problems and accessible and relevant examples of how to write a global history of an industry. Contributions are welcome from historiographers of global economic history who can provide experience and advice in drawing templates for analyses or who possess recognised experience on the history of other goods manufactured and traded internationally before the era of industrialisation such as silks, woollens, or linens, porcelain, ship armaments etc.

Modern problems of manufacturing for global markets based upon theories of shifting comparative advantages across the frontiers of national economies and from East to West and back again had their antecedents in the centuries well before the rise of multinational industries and corporations. Cotton textiles is the explanatory case and a historical explanation of when and why the locus of production shifted from India, China and Japan to Western Europe. This could be a foundational building block for metanarratives of the Great Divergence.

**Programme (forthcoming)**