

The Resurgence of Intra-Asian Trade, 1800-1850¹

Kaoru Sugihara

- very preliminary: do not cite -

1. Introduction

This paper presents a set of trade statistics, mostly taken from British sources, to argue that there was a growth of intra-Asian trade during the first half of the nineteenth century, and that the size of this trade was at least comparable to Asia's long-distance trade (exports and imports) with the West.

The traditional historiography emphasised the central importance of India's exports, particularly of opium, to China for the growth of intra-Asian trade and the opening of East Asia into the international economy. In simplified terms, prime movers of this trade were British private traders and those who wished to create a triangular settlement mechanism (or mechanisms if we think of the role of American merchants) through which remittances of the British in India would be made easier. Merchants engaging in Chinese tea trade and British exporters to India were also among the beneficiaries of this "opium triangle". Furthermore, the two opium wars forced China to open its ports

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to foreign trade, allow the British to develop Hong Kong as an *entrepôt*, and eventually led to the conclusions of a series of commercial treaties between Western powers, and China, Japan and Korea. These treaties not only denied tariff autonomy of East Asian countries but included the most-favoured-nation clause, which proved to be an extremely effective device, when combined with the lack of tariff autonomy, for the purpose of Western powers jointly penetrating into East Asian markets. The treaty port system, under which Western merchants conducted trade with the provision of extraterritorial rights, became the main mechanism of connecting East Asia to international commerce during the second half of the nineteenth century.

In this view, there was a sharp discontinuity in Asian trade history around the middle of the nineteenth century. The first fifty years are characterised as a period of Western, mainly British, expansion of trade and territorial control in South and Southeast Asia with little impact on East Asian commerce, while the next fifty years saw, along with Western colonialism, Asia's full response to Western impact, in the forms of the growth of intra-Asian trade, the integration of Chinese internal commerce into the Asian international economy and Japan's industrialisation (Sugihara 2005). What was happening to intra-Asian trade between 1800 and 1850, apart from the opium triangle, and how it affected the course of Asian trade history, has not been clearly brought into the picture.

Meanwhile, there have been suggestions of the resurgence of Asian trade since the late eighteenth century. Referring to Southeast Asia, Reid argued that, although there had been a tendency to assume that

trade had been relatively inactive between the end of the “age of commerce” in the second half of the seventeenth century and the growth of export economies in the late-nineteenth century, there was in fact an expansion of trade from 1760 to 1840 (Reid 1997, 1998). Individual studies on India’s internal, coastal and regional trade also point to increased activities of regional commerce in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries (Pritchard 1936/1970, 1958; Arasaratnam 1999; Miki 2004). There were also signs of increased junk trade along the Chinese coast and Southeast Asia, stimulated by British trade expansion, especially after the 1820s (Murakami 2003). No one, however, attempted to grasp the size and structure of intra-Asian trade, to understand its significance for the course of Asian economic development on a regional scale.

This paper suggests that there was a broad regime shift from mercantilism to forced free trade in South and Southeast Asia, which allowed the entry of not only Western private traders but Asian merchants to seize trade opportunities. It argues that these opportunities were created by increased demand arising from the growth of long-distance trade and availability of improved ships and ports, and that the growth of intra-Asian trade in this period was a result of Asia’s response to Western expansion.

In illuminating this, we define intra-Asian trade as trade between six major Asian ports or region and their trade with other Asian ports. Figure 1-1 shows major countries and ports involved, while attempting to map out some of the territorial shifts during the late eighteenth and the early

nineteenth centuries at the same time. Figure 1-2 shows the basis of our calculation; intra-Asian trade is a sum of trade indicated in arrows in Figure 1-2. The intention here is not to pick up every recorded statistics, but to select figures likely to represent the magnitude of regional, rather than local, trade, i.e. trade between two distinct local economies. All territorial boundaries, as well as the area covered by the English East India Company, are disregarded for this purpose. Thus the coastal trade between Bengal and Bombay is included, together with trade between Bengal and China, for example. We also use the trade statistics of “Java and Madura”, recorded by the Dutch. Thus each of the six main entities in the main box of the chart has different qualities; while Bengal (effectively Calcutta), Bombay (effectively Bombay), Singapore, China (effectively Canton and later Hong Kong) mostly refer to the trade of the main port, “Madras” and “Java and Madura” include trade of several smaller ports in addition to that of the main port. The trade between Madras and neighbouring ports and inside the “Java and Madura” region is excluded from the calculation, as it is either likely to be mainly local trade or its inclusion would result in severe double counting. Trade between “Java and Madura” and the Outer Islands, internal trade of India, and coastal trade within Indian presidencies, sometimes qualify as regional trade, so, while formerly excluded from the calculation, they are brought into discussion with appropriate qualifications. The China figures are supplemented by the statistics of the other five entities, as figures for Canton recorded by Morse may not be as comprehensive as other statistics.

The coverage of intra-Asian trade thus defined goes a long way towards estimating the total sum, since all the trade between the six main entities and other ports are included in the calculation (except for what Morse omitted for Canton trade with ports other than the main entities here). To do this, while we use only export figures to calculate trade between the main entities, we need to use both export and import figures for obtaining the sum of trade between the main entities and other ports. In using import figures, we need to convert import values to export-price basis, so 7 per cent of import values, as an approximate percentage representing the difference between F.O.B. and C.I.F. values, was subtracted. The only other recorded regional trade that is not included here is trade between other Asian ports, for example, trade between Ceylon and Penang. Since trade of Ceylon (or Penang) with the six main entities is included, the value of trade that is not included is relatively small. A substantial trade India conducted with the Middle East and East Africa is captured in our calculation from the Indian side.

A major omission in this calculation is Chinese junk trade, which is outside the coverage of Morse's statistics. Judging from various British reports, its size, while it has never been estimated in a systematic fashion, is clearly substantial, and it operated within Southeast Asia as well (Reid 2004). While some of them were captured in Singapore and Dutch statistics in our calculation, there is a strong probability that a large proportion of junk trade between Chinese ports, between China and Southeast Asia, and in Southeast Asia (especially centring around Siam and Cochin-china), is not included in our calculation. Of course many

junks engaged in local trade, but a substantial amount of junk trade connected distant ports of China, in the same way as intra-European sea- and river-borne trade did, which is often included in world trade statistics. Junks connecting Chinese ports to Southeast Asian ports or ports of different Southeast Asian countries were clearly intra-Asian trade. We will leave this issue to the third section of this paper, and proceed with describing what we see from the statistics assembled under the framework of Figure 1-2. There is also the question of estimating China's internal (land) trade and India's land trade, some of which surely qualify as intra-regional trade. We will briefly touch on this theme in the fifth section.

The next section reviews well-known country-based statistics, to confirm some of the conventional wisdom. The third section presents the structure and growth of intra-Asian trade as defined in this paper, referring to the years of 1811 and 1840. It is followed by a review of commodity composition, with special attention to cotton cloth trade. The fifth section speculates what is missing from these statistics, and offers some sense of magnitude of Asian and intra-Asian trade around 1840. The final section concludes.

2. Western impact and opium trade

This section summarises what can be understood from country-based statistics. Figures 2-1 and 2-2 are preliminary summaries of available figures of India's exports and imports. They were obtained

from British Parliamentary Papers without an examination of original sources, and they are in need of the more precise interpretation. The series marked as A and B in these figures do not include trade conducted by Western ships other than the British and the Dutch. The series marked as C appears to include both company trade and private trade. It diverges from B widely from the 1780s, but it is difficult to gauge what proportion of private trade was included in these statistics (see Pritchard 1936/1970; Matsumoto 1983 for difficulties of distinguishing smuggling). After 1793 private trade was further distinguished into “privilege trade”, which was carried out by private individuals, and “private trade”, which was conducted by commanders and officers of the East India Company, and we have information on them. We have a reasonably good set of data after 1813,² a period when the Company’s trade became rapidly insignificant. By the end of the 1840s most of the relevant statistics became available in annual publications.

In spite of the problems of interpretation of these data, however, it should be clear that India’s trade substantially increased during the first half of the nineteenth century. There were short-term fluctuations, but the upward trend in value terms continued decade by decade, including the period (especially the 1830s), which is normally regarded as a period of depression (Thomas and Natarajan 1937; Washbrook 1993). There was no evidence of inflationary trend in any case (see Siddiqi 1995), so the increase of trade was most probably a real one.

² Some technical problems relating to the compilation of statistics are discussed in Prinsep 1823/1971. They are taken into account in the figures prepared by Chaudhuri 1971. I have essentially accepted their revisions, with very minor adjustments.

It also seems reasonable to assume that the progressive easing of the English East India Company's monopoly and privileges in 1793, 1813 and 1833 greatly facilitated this increase. The 1793 Act required that the Company provide at least 3,000 tons of cargo space a year in Company ships for private trade. As a result, out of 54,000 tons allotted for the private trade for the nineteen years from 1793 to 1812, 21,806 tons (or goods worth of 24,585,673 pounds sterling) were used by "private merchants for "privilege trade", while commanders and officers of the East India Company engaged in "private trade" to the value of 8,543,027 pound sterling (BPP 1812-13 (78) VIII). Together, they made up a little less than 40 per cent of Britain's imports from India. The 1813 Act basically allowed private individuals to trade freely, except for China trade and that they were not allowed to trade in vessels under 350 tons burden. The 1833 Act terminated all trading privileges enjoyed by the Company (BPP 1847-48 (974), 95-123; Webster 1990).

Figures 2-3 and 2-4 give some sense of the relative importance of India and China in British trade. While imports from China became as significant for Britain as from India at the end of the eighteenth century, India became rather more important during the first half of the nineteenth century. British exports to India were far more important than those to China throughout the period. These figures confirm the conventional story; By the 1800s American and Continental traders were able to conduct trade in India, and British private traders began to demand the more substantial freedom of trade. After the establishment of Singapore in 1819 and the conclusion of the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824, Britain

secured a safe route to China, crossing the Straits of Malacca (Wong 1991; Webster 1998, chapter 4). The Singapore-Canton route became the dominant route for exporting Oriental and Western produce to China (Murakami 2003).

The other side of this British success story was the fate of Dutch trade (for the contrasting trends in the trade of the two companies, see Prakash 1998, chapter 7). After the Dutch East India Company trade ceased at the end of the eighteenth century, the early nineteenth century was marked by the Anglo-Dutch rivalry and wars, especially in Southeast Asia (Tarling 1962; Wong 1991), and it took a while for the Dutch to resume trade (Altes 1991, 12-13). Figures 2-5 and 2-6 show the stagnation of trade of Java and Madura during the 1820s, and the subsequent growth in the 1830s and the 1840s. If we exclude their trade with the Outer Islands, an overwhelming proportion of their trade was conducted with the West, and most of them were with the Netherlands. The country probably became the second largest trading partner of Asia's long-distance trade during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, after Britain, though she remained a distant second.

By contrast, Figure 2-7 shows that India's exports to China were as large, and increased as rapidly, as India's exports to Britain. Most of this trade were carried out by British private (country) traders (Figure 2-8), while American and Continental merchants played relatively little role in the growth of intra-Asian trade after the late 1810s (for their involvement in the earlier period, see BPP 1812-13 (171) VIII, V). Though dominated by opium, cotton and other Oriental produce also took up a significant

proportion of this trade (Figure 2-9; For an earlier period, see Pritchard 1936/1970 and Chung 1974).

The opium triangle thus created is expressed in Figure 2-10, referring to the year 1840. It highlights the most important links between long-distance trade and intra-Asian trade. As is well known, this very large triangular settlement mechanism came about, largely to overcome the lack of remittance facilities from the British point of view. Together with the British encouragement of opium production and trade (Greenberg 1951; Kato 1981), this gave a distinct impression that intra-Asian trade was artificially created by Britain, in an environment where there was little dynamism or force of change within Asian commerce.

This paper argues against such a notion. Figure 2-11 is a matching diagram, created from our statistics, also referring to 1840. It shows that India's exports to China, depicted in the opium triangle, were only a part, though an important part, of the more complex intra-Asian trading network, the majority of which had little to do with opium³ or the settlement mechanism created by the British⁴. We will therefore look at the growth of intra-Asian trade from the regional point of view in the rest of the paper.

³ Trocki 1990 and Rush 1990 remind us that opium was not just a product imposed on Asia by Britain, but became an integral part of Southeast Asian societies during the nineteenth century. It is therefore possible to interpret that at least part of the opium trade in the first half of the nineteenth century as Asia's response, rather than as a direct result of Western impact. If this is the case, however, it should reinforce our basic argument that the majority of intra-Asian trade was generated by the response of Asian merchants and producers.

⁴ Referring to the late 1820s, however, Chaudhuri remarks that the ways in which India's trade surplus with the Middle East and Southeast Asia are poorly understood (Chaudhuri 1966/1995, 360/316).

3. Structure of Intra-Asian trade

In this section we make the more detailed observations of the structure of intra-Asian trade and its links with long-distance trade. Our goal is to reconstruct the structure in 1811 and 1840, and to suggest the ways in which intra-Asian trade grew between these years.⁵

The three main Indian ports exhibit contrasting ways in which long-distance trade and intra-Asian trade came to be linked to each other (see Figures 3-1 to 3-6). By 1811 Bengal was already deeply integrated into long-distance trade, with a substantial volume of exports of indigo and silk to Britain (Nakazato 1981). It produced a very large trade surplus. Bengal also had vigorous trade with other parts of India, Southeast Asia and China, also with trade surplus. The bulk of these surpluses must have been sent to Britain. By 1840 the significance of this structure became paramount not only for Bengal but for the British presence in Asia. With the expansion of British power and a stronger hold of local economies, exports to Britain continued to increase, so did opium exports to China and Singapore. The only major modification of this pattern was increased imports of cotton cloth from Britain. By the mid-century Bengal increasingly became a typical export economy specialising in primary produce.

Bombay in 1811 was far less connected to London. It had a sizable export trade in the Indian Ocean and with other parts of India, and

⁵ The choice of these dates is an arbitrary one, and is mainly based on the ready access to statistics across countries and regions. The year 1811 refers to June 1811 to April 1812, due to administrative change, but the value of trade in this year does not appear to have been smaller than usual (twelve-months) years.

remained a major trading centre of the Indian Ocean with limited contacts with Britain. By 1840, this picture changed dramatically. Bombay now became closely integrated into the international economy, through its exports to and imports from Britain, and through opium exports to China. Nevertheless, Bombay's position in Indian Ocean trade, especially in its western part, was well maintained. There was relatively little change in the composition of trade, and we see no sign of decline of regional trade here.

In 1811, Madras too was very much a centre of intra-Asian trade, with links to Bengal, Southeast Asia and China, in addition to Britain. Its connections with Southeast Asia and Ceylon were stronger than Bombay's. Significantly, this local- and regional-trade oriented character remained in Madras throughout the period. Long-distance trade was an additional, rather than the main, contributor to Madras trade in 1840 (for a useful background, see Raju 1941).

Until the 1820s Penang acted as a centre of long-distance and regional trade in the Bay of Bengal.⁶ Figure 3-7, however, suggests that the rise of Singapore took over much of long-distance trade and China trade. Even so, in 1828 Penang remained more important than Singapore in its trade with Southeast Asia and Madras. More important, Singapore did not become a port of long-distance trade for quite a long time. Figures 3-8, 3-9 and 3-10 suggest that trade within Southeast Asia and with China

⁶ For a story of Penang up to 1819, see Tregonning 1965, chapter 8, although Penang's role in the 1820s is not made clear.

were large and on the increase, while Europe's share remained relatively small.

Finally, the Dutch East Indies were largely isolated from this emerging network of intra-Asian trade. Figure 3-11 shows that Java and Madura had limited trade contact with other Asian ports, including Singapore. In fact there must have been local and regional trade between British and Dutch spheres of influence that are not included in our statistics, but the size of regional trade is unlikely to have been very large, as the reading of readily accessible reports and statistics of Penang and Singapore suggest that in general the authorities appear to have had a good knowledge on regional trade (Cowan 1950; Wong 1960).

The above observations of statistics, when combined with information on Chinese junk trade, point to the following two broad conclusions. First of all, the analysis of Asia's share in major Asian ports in Table 3-1 suggests that the size of intra-Asian trade recorded in statistics in 1840 matched, and probably exceeded, that of long-distance export trade. Here we not only take into account of a large proportion of internal and coastal trade, which can be regarded as intra-Asian trade, but consider the fact that China conducted a sizable junk trade with Siam and Cochin-China. If we are to believe John Crawford, the tonnage of Chinese junk trade around 1830 was around 80,000 tons (BPP 1830 (644) V, 299), while the total tonnage of EEIC ships entered into Canton was 28,513 tons. Total value of imports and exports carried by the latter amounted to 52 million dollars, or approximately 11 million pounds sterling (Morse 1926, IV). It is likely that junk trade carried commodities of

a lower value, but, even if its value per tonnage was worth a third of that of the Canton trade, it would still imply that the value of junk trade amounted to as large a figure as 10 million pounds, a figure comparable to the sum of our calculation in Figure 3-1.

The junk trade with Singapore and the Dutch East Indies, some of which are likely to be included in our calculation, took up a very small proportion of this trade (see Figure 3-2). On the other hand, there were other junk trades, conducted by Chinese residents in Southeast Asia (Mazumdar 1998, 112). Bangkok remained an important provider of junks (Viraphol 1977).

If junk trade not captured in our statistics amounted to 10 million, it follows that the size of intra-Asian trade may well have exceeded that of total long-distance export trade by a wide margin.

The second broad conclusion is that intra-Asian trade is most likely to have grown between 1811 and 1840, and have shown a steady trend of growth throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. To recapitulate, Figures 2-1 and 2-2 show the growth trend of India's trade, while Asia's share in India's "foreign" sea-borne trade (a rough equivalent to foreign trade of British India, excluding coastal trade and land-frontier trade: see Chaudhuri 1971) was sustained at around 50 per cent; Singapore and "Java and Madura" both showed an increase of Asia's share for the period for which statistics were presented; Canton's imports from India increased faster than its trade with Britain. There is no reason to assume that the size of Chinese junk trade decreased during the period either; Although its rate of growth is unknown (Junk trade in

Southeast Asia showed a clear upward trend. See Reid 2004, 30), the vigorous entry of Western traders are likely to have stimulated, rather than competed with, junk trade.

4. Commodity composition

Although it is not easy to compile the amount of trade of each commodity, as the classification of goods traded was not always made uniform in this period, it is certainly possible to isolate opium trade and gauge its relative importance in intra-Asian trade. In 1840 total exports of opium from India were 2.28 million pounds sterling, while exports (largely re-exports) from Singapore to China amounted to 0.46 million. This compares with the recorded total value of intra-Asian trade of approximately 9 million, which also includes some re-exports. Thus opium trade consisted of about 30 per cent of recorded intra-Asian trade in 1840. The percentage for this particular year was probably below average, and should be regarded as such. Even so, it should be clear that opium trade hardly constituted the bulk of intra-Asian trade.

In addition, the flow of precious metals, especially of silver, in connection with intra-Asian trade and settlement were quite substantial, and its significance has been discussed in some detail (Lin 1995), although this is outside the scope of this paper.

Apart from opium and silver, main commodities included grain, raw cotton, cotton cloth, raw silk, silk cloth, sugar, salt and spices. The value of each item, especially if we break down grain trade by the type of grains,

was much smaller than that of opium. At one extreme, we have a wide variety of local trade, consisting of necessities of ordinary people, as can be seen from Table 4-1. Much the same kind of items appear in local and regional trade if we look at the composition of trade of minor ports, and they were mostly handled by Asian merchants. At the other end of the spectrum, there was a rapid increase of re-exports of imported European goods from major ports. The commodity composition of Singapore's trade in 1840 in Table 4-2 shows relatively high shares of European produce and opium in major port trade. The share of various grains and other local produce tended to be smaller in these ports. The case of Bengal in Table 4-3 is perhaps the most extreme case of Western domination; Local trade hardly featured in this table, although it certainly did not mean the lack of growth of local and regional trade centring around the lesser ports and cities in Bengal Presidency (see Figure 3-1 for a large size of internal trade).

In general terms, therefore, there were two kinds of forces operating in the growth of intra-Asian trade, an autonomous force linking local trades through improved trading opportunities, and the direct impact of long-distance trade. In relation to conventional wisdom, an interesting aspect of this conclusion is that the majority of intra-Asian trade consisted of goods (mostly necessities) relating to food and clothing of Asian population.

However, it would be wrong to emphasise the autonomy of this trade, as traditional goods trade was also indirectly related to long-distance trade. For example, the impact of long-distance trade

induced the rise of purchasing power of both European and Europeanised population in the cities and indigenous population in the countryside, and the final demand of these people tended to induce local and regional trade. Thus European cloth and liquor were frequently redistributed from ports to ports for the consumption of the former, while the increase of exports of primary produce in one region tended to induce imports of grains, India cotton cloth and other necessities to that region from other regions. The Company's ban on trade with ships below 350 tons helped Indian traders and shippers under these circumstances (Benjamin 1974, 298-300, 303; Arasaratnam 1990, 327-28). On the other hand, British and other Western merchants conducted trade, assuming that local merchants would redistribute certain commodities and procure locally produced food and other necessities for them. Although Southeast Asia's trade was severely disrupted during the period of Anglo-Dutch rivalry and there were changes in the careers of local and regional trade, especially from local Southeast Asian traders to Chinese, these complementary relationships between long-distance trade and intra-regional trade were to be found in most Asian waters. In fact they became the basic structure of Asian trade, as long-distance trade expanded in volume as well as geographically to the Far East.

Finally, let us have a close look at cotton trade, since the influx of British cotton textiles to India and other parts of Asia have featured largely in the historiography (Bagchi 1976; Roy 2005, chapter 5). In 1811 Bengal was a major exporter of cotton cloth to both American continents and the Indian Ocean, and imports from Britain was not important. By 1840 the

situation changed dramatically, with a great influx of Lancashire goods and the well-noted decline of cotton textile industry in Bengal Presidency. A similar change occurred in Bombay between 1811 and 1840, although here there were still some imports of Indian cotton cloth from the hinterland to Bombay in 1840. By contrast, Madras cotton trade was much less affected by the imports of British cotton cloth. Indeed, if we include all kinds of cotton cloth, including printed cloth, Madras exports to Britain were much greater than its imports from Britain, even in 1840. Clearly Madras imported a very large quantity of Indian cotton cloth from both other parts of the Presidency and outside it through land trade, and exported a sizable amount to Bombay, which is not recorded in the Bombay side of the statistics. Figures 4-6 to 4-8 confirm the dominance of Madras cotton cloth in both India's export trade and coastal trade.

Turning to Southeast Asia, Table 4-4 shows that British cotton cloth imports dominated Singapore trade in 1840, although Indian, Chinese and Malay cloths were also traded. The proportion of British cotton cloth in the Asian cotton cloth market was clearly on the rise. At the same time, both India and Singaporean figures suggest a relatively modest decline of Asian cotton cloth trade in absolute terms during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In other words, the shift in the demand from Asian to British cotton cloth did occur, but it did not result in the dominance of long-distance trade over regional trade. The increase of British cloth imports was compensated for by both the rapid increase of opium trade and re-exports of Western goods within Asia, so that the rate of growth of intra-Asian

trade remained comparable to that of long-distance trade. Meanwhile, the bulk of other necessities trade, not directly linked to long-distance trade, grew more steadily.

5. Size of Asian and intra-Asian trade

How important were Asian and intra-Asian trade in world trade? In this section an attempt is made to collect relevant information for speculation to approach these questions, referring to 1840. First, the best attempt to calculate Asia's share in world trade made so far is Hanson's work, which suggests that Asia's exports amounted to 29 million pounds sterling in 1840. According to his data, Asia's share in world exports was about 12 per cent (Hanson 1980, 20, 138, 141). Our calculation suggests that Asia's trade was 36.2 million, mainly because we included some coastal trade and also trade of smaller Asian countries. Table 5-2 summarises the result. We further noted the large size of Chinese junk trade of the order of 10 million.

In addition, Table 5-1 shows a very large size of China's internal trade of the order of a little more than 100 million, some of which surely qualify as intra-Asian trade defined in this paper. This is consistent with some British commercial reports, which record the very large size of intra-regional trade in inland Chinese ports, including substantial long-distance trade. Thus, even if we take 10 per cent of the total figure in Table 5-1 as intra-regional trade, we arrive at the total intra-Asian trade figure of 56.2 million, which implies that Asia took up more than 20 per

cent of world trade. It is worth noting that, at this point of speculation, intra-Asian trade would have consisted of over two-thirds of Asia's trade, i.e. it would have been comparable to Asia's long-distance (exports and imports) trade.

Set against Maddison's estimate that Asia's share in world GDP was 59 per cent in 1820 and went down to 38 per cent by 1870 (see Table 5-3), however, the suggestion that over 20 per cent of world trade was conducted in Asia in 1840, and that intra-Asian trade consisted of over two-thirds of Asia's trade, still seems conservative. The chances are that intra-Asian trade figures would go up further, if we could revise upward the size of China's internal trade (especially of grains), include India's internal (land) trade (which suffered from the impositions of transit and town duties but must have increased as these barriers were gradually withdrawn in the 1830s and the 1840s. see Borpujari 1973/1995; Banerjee 1992, 2), include land-frontier trade, and further refine the categories of regional trade to include the figures we have disregarded in this paper.⁷ If research makes a progress in this direction and this sort of speculation is turned into an estimate on the basis of the more solid evidence, the share of intra-Asian trade in Asia's trade is likely to increase further, and become much more than two-thirds, making long-distance trade with the West a relatively minor component of Asia's trade.

On the other hand, a further investigation on regional trade in other parts of the world, especially in the non-European world, is likely to

⁷ We have little information on the trend of China's internal trade. If there was a significant decline of this trade during the first half of the nineteenth century, which I think is unlikely, part of the general conclusion of this paper must be qualified.

increase the total value of world trade, thus decreasing Asia's share to some extent.

A speculation of this kind without further evidence does not amount to anything particularly useful in the way of deepening our understanding of the region, but it serves as a reminder that global trade historians should not ignore intra-regional trade in Asia and other parts of the non-European world, in discussing the evolution of world trade.⁸ An important implication of this statement is that the growth of world trade cannot simply be interpreted as one emanating from the West and spreading to the rest of the world, even at a time of the industrial revolution in England and Western expansion to Asia. The growth of intra-Asian trade came as much from the opening up of trading opportunities for Asian merchants as from the direct impact of the West. And the former vitally depended on Asia's response, which required increased economic activities of producers (farmers and artisans) as well as merchants. Furthermore, intra-Asian trade not recorded in our statistics is likely to have been even less directly connected to Western impact. In the sense that these activities were of a traditional kind, largely unaffected by Western technology and organisations, the Asian (East, Southeast and South Asian) paths of economic development continued to underpin the

⁸ Frequently cited world trade statistics, since the days of Mulhall, tend to give the impression that the nineteenth century world trade was dominated by the West. Rostow does not seem to care too much about non-European trade (his estimate of Asia's share in world trade in 1840 is 3 per cent), while Maddison makes limited attempts to acknowledge its existence (Rostow 1978, 71, Appendix B; Maddison 2001, 77, 361). These figures represent the value of "international trade" recognised by the customs officials. They do not represent, and usually do not claim to represent, how long-distance trade and regional trade actually developed around the world.

growth of trade, even under the presence of powerful Western impact and colonialism.

It was these Asian paths that were eventually to underpin Asia's very large share in world trade in the long nineteenth century. The survival and the revitalisation of regional trade in Asia suggest the need for a fundamental rethinking of our understanding of the prime movers of world trade.

6. Conclusion

During the first half of the nineteenth century intra-Asian trade grew under the regime of forced free trade. The restrictions imposed by Dutch and English East India Companies and the Qing Government were gradually removed. This in turn provided both country traders and Asian merchants with great opportunities for local and regional trade, first in and around India, then gradually encompassing Southeast Asia and China. The growth of intra-regional trade became at least partly self-generating and created a new Asian international market of necessities, going well beyond the intent of colonial rule and the need for long-distance trade settlement.

Two further observations can be made to place this growth in a wider and longer-term perspective. First, this growth, probably starting in the late eighteenth century, can be viewed as a "resurgence" of the intra-Asian trade, which flourished during the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries. The first wave, the "age of commerce" (Reid 1993), fully encompassed most Asian regions, from

Japan to the Middle East, with Southeast Asia acting as vital connecting points between the East Asian trading network and that of the Indian Ocean trade. This, however, was followed by a long period of shrinkage of trade in East Asia, which continued from the late seventeenth to the first half of the nineteenth century.

Although the more recent works have found the continued vigour both in the trade of South and Southeast Asia, and in the internal trade of China during the eighteenth century, Japan adhered to the strictly controlled system of trade with no navigational initiatives of her own, while the vital links connecting East Asia to South Asia, centring around Southeast Asia, remained weak, before British, European and American private traders started to appear with a greater frequency and power to penetrate into Asian commerce at the end of the eighteenth century.⁹

Secondly, the resurgence had major implications on the growth of the Asian international economy from the late nineteenth century onwards. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the two great regional networks began to make deeper connections through the competition and cooperation of European and Asian merchants. The Singapore – Canton route developed into a major route for both intra-Asian trade and long-distance trade with British traders cooperating with Chinese merchants and local junks for the redistribution of goods. By the 1860s

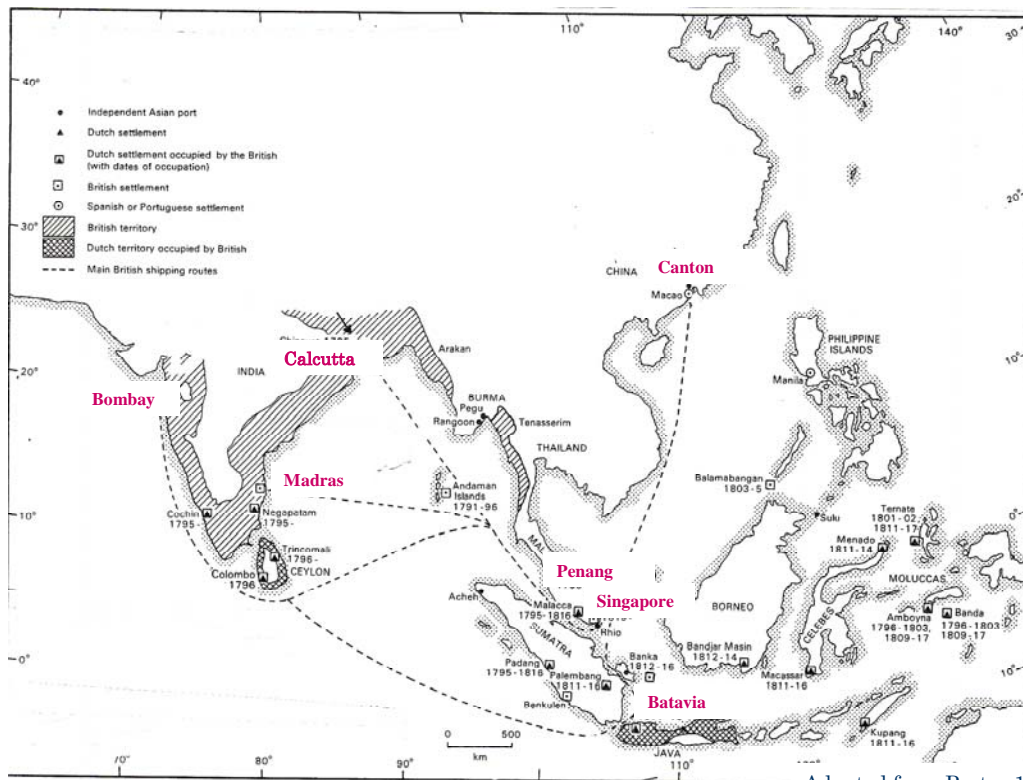
⁹ Bayly argues that there was a general decline of trade across southern India and outwards to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, to support his thesis of the “world crisis” from 1780 to 1820, and goes on to suggest that it was the British who benefited most from the widespread disruption of trade (Bayly 1989, 186-87). This does not tally with my observation of statistics, at least after 1800. It seems to me that intra-Asian trade grew, in spite of (and partly as a result of) the severe disruptions Bayly refers to, and Asian merchants eventually managed to take advantage of British presence.

some India-based merchants were prominent in Japanese ports and active in Manchuria, a phenomenon unimaginable in the first half of the century. By the late nineteenth century, the East Asian treaty port system fused with the colonial system in South and Southeast Asia, and the growth of intra-Asian trade, especially of cotton (raw cotton, cotton yarn and cotton cloth), induced China's integration into the international economy and Japan's industrialisation (Sugihara 1996; for an English summary, see Sugihara 1986/1996).¹⁰

While the significance of East Asia's institutional change induced by Western powers around the middle of the nineteenth century should not be underestimated, it was the growth of intra-Asian trade during the first half that started the process of Asia's integration into the international economy by releasing the energy of Asian-wide merchant networks. And it was the regime of forced free trade in the "long nineteenth century" (from the end of the eighteenth century to 1914), rather than the impact of transportation and communication revolutions during the second half of the nineteenth century, that embraced different developmental paths, and fundamentally transformed the nature of Asia's trade. Asia's response, in turn, characterised the nature of international commerce of the nineteenth century as a whole.

¹⁰ My own work on intra-Asian trade from the second half of the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries is essentially based on country-based statistics. Therefore the definition of intra-Asian trade is different from the one adopted in this paper. However, some attempts have been made to appreciate the significance of the port-based trade statistics and the interpretation drawn from them, with regard to the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. See Sugihara 2002, Furuta 2005, and Kose 2005.

Fig.1-1 India, Southeast Asia and China, 1784-1826



Adapted from Porter 1991, p.56.

Fig.1-2 Intra-Asian trade

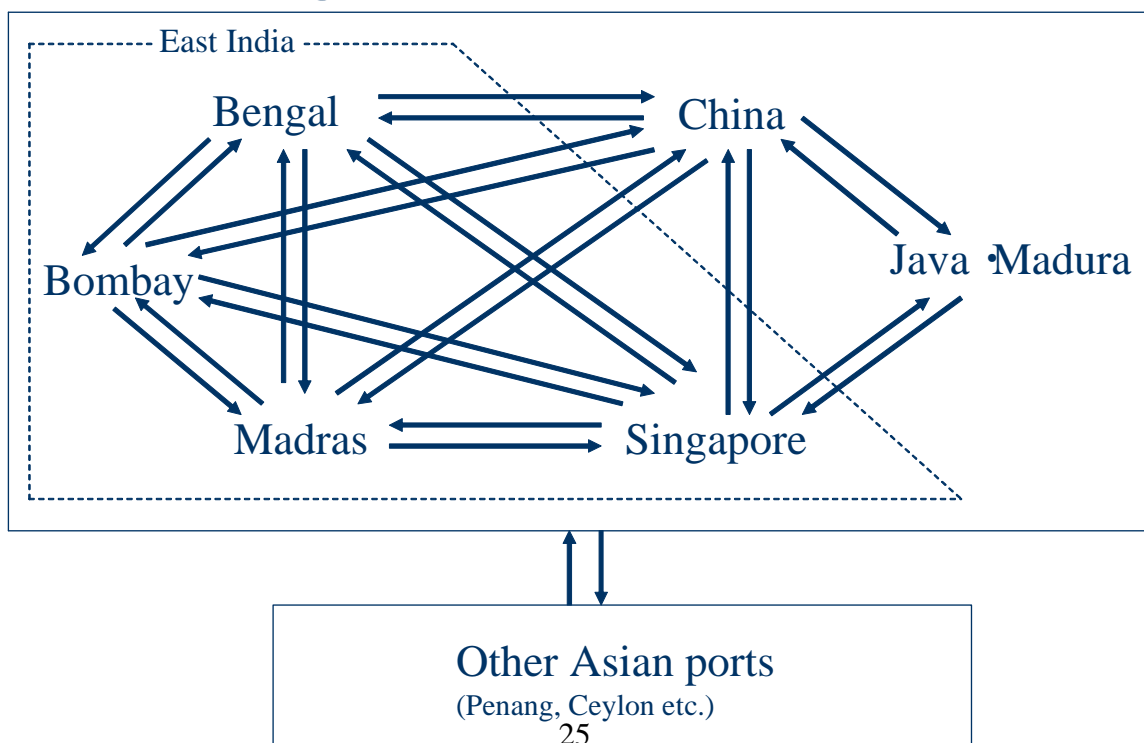


Fig.2-1 India's exports,1750-1850 (£ million)

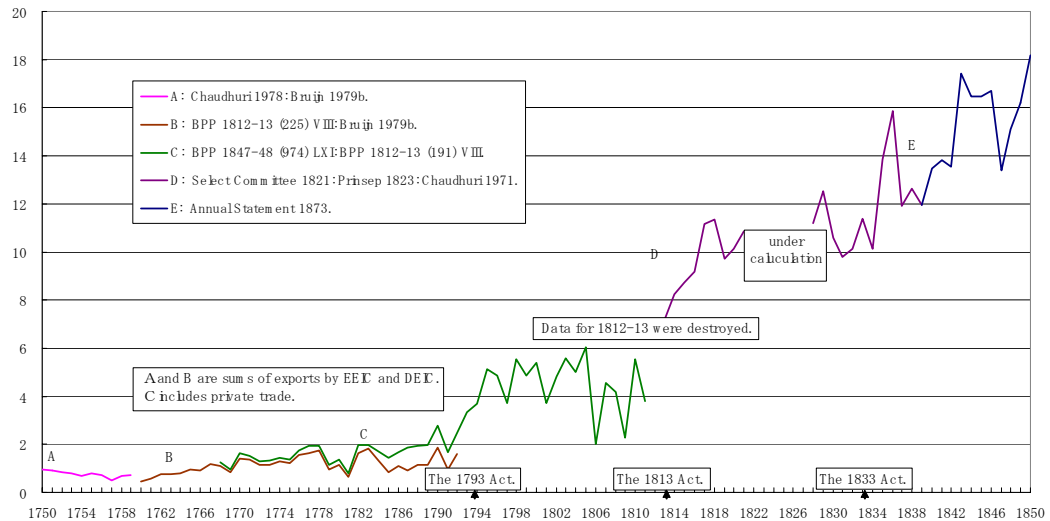


Fig.2-2 India's imports,1750-1850 (£ million)

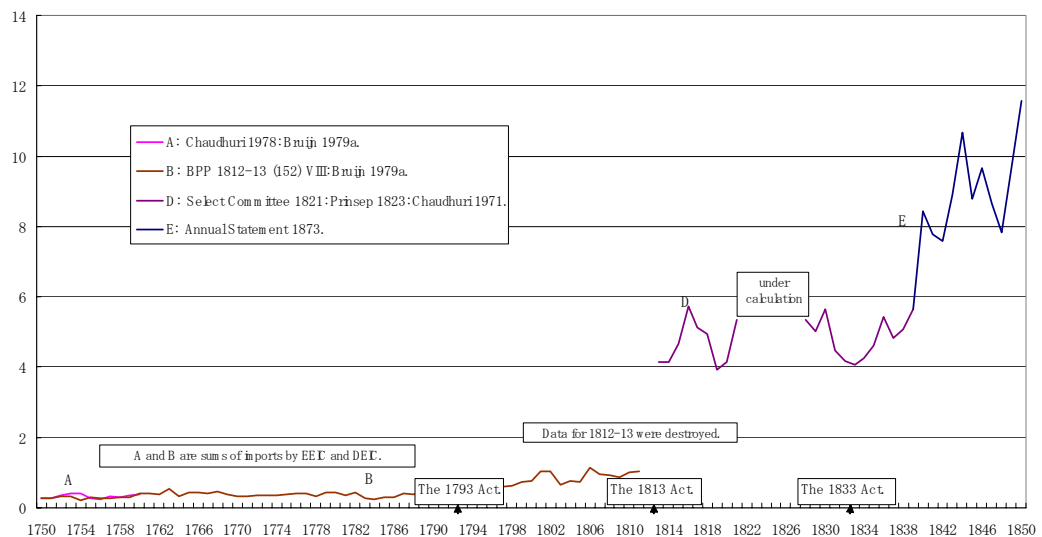
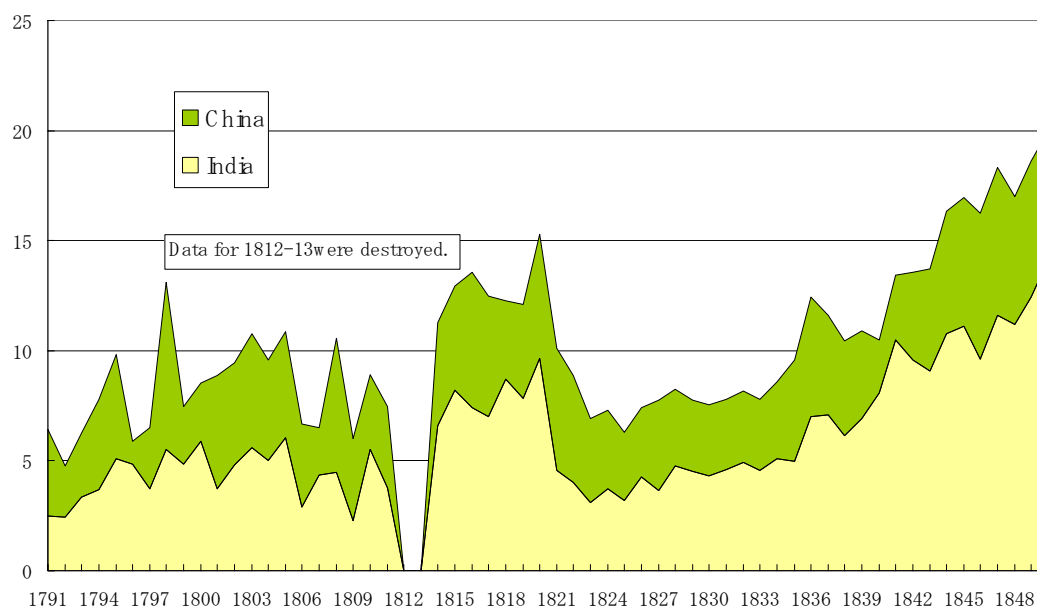
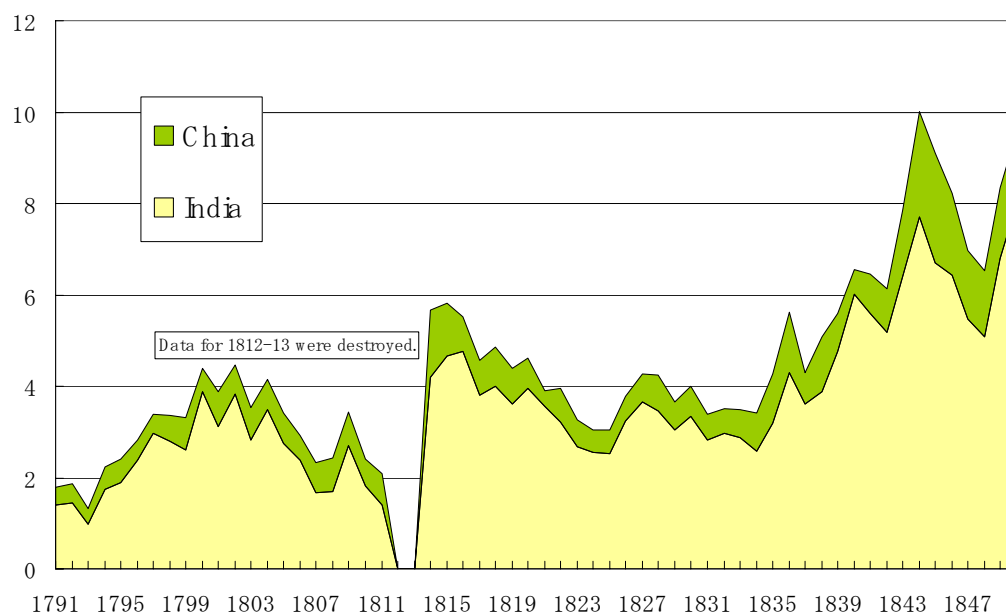


Fig.2-3 U.K. imports from China, 1791-1850
(£ million)



Sources BPP 1847-48 (974) LXI:BPP 1859 (38 Sess.2) XXIII Figures for 1823-24 are estimates.

Fig.2-4 U.K. exports to China, 1791-1850
(£ million)



Sources BPP 1847-48 (974) LXI:BPP 1859 (38, Sess.2) XXIII Figures for 1823-26 are estimates.

Fig.2-5 Java & Madura's exports, 1822-1850

(100,000 Netherlands Frolin = £ 10,000)

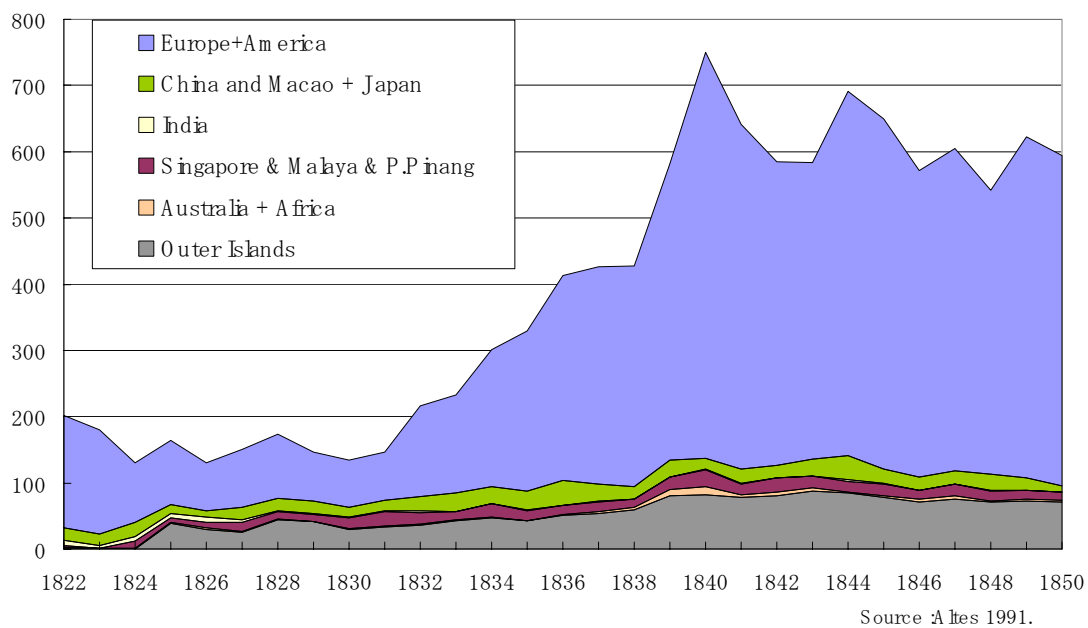


Fig.2-6 Java & Madura's imports, 1822-1850

(100,000 Netherlands Frolin = £ 10,000)

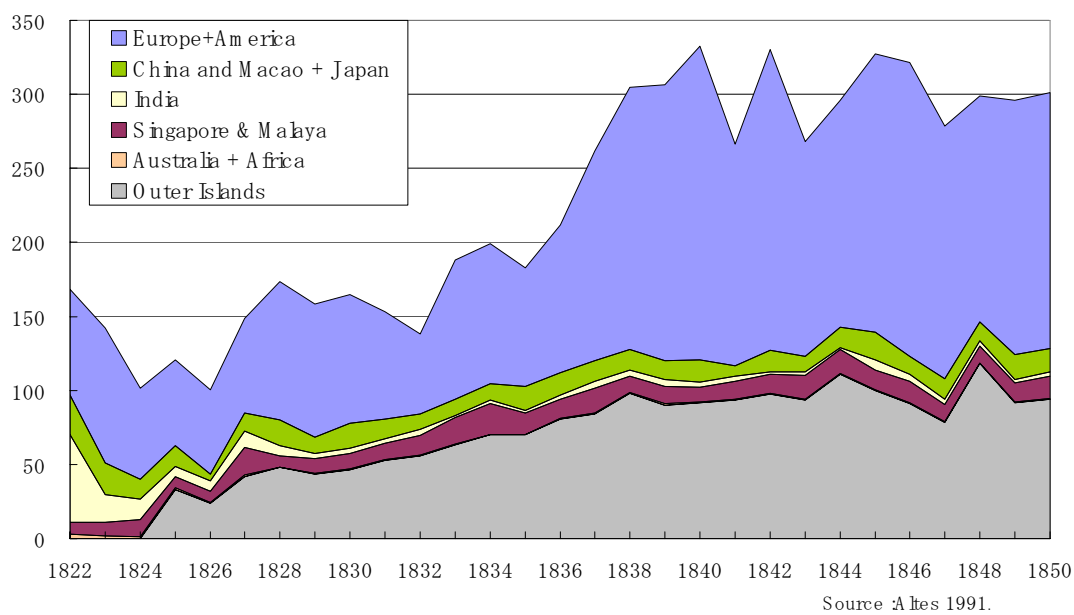
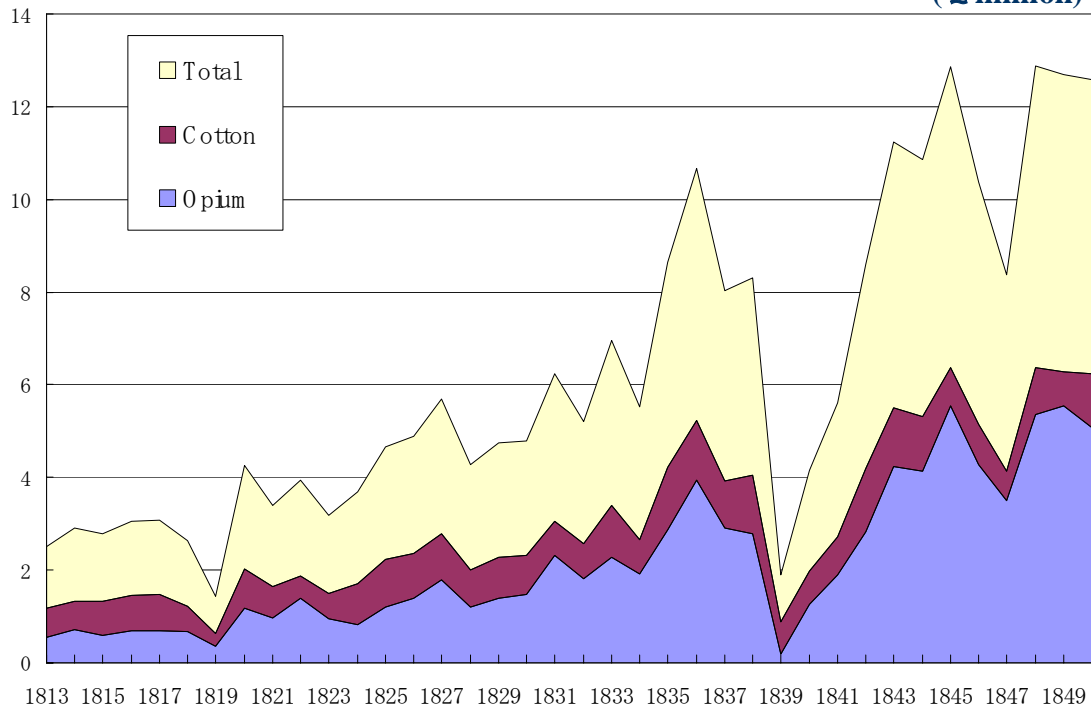


Fig.2-7 India's exports to China, 1813-1850

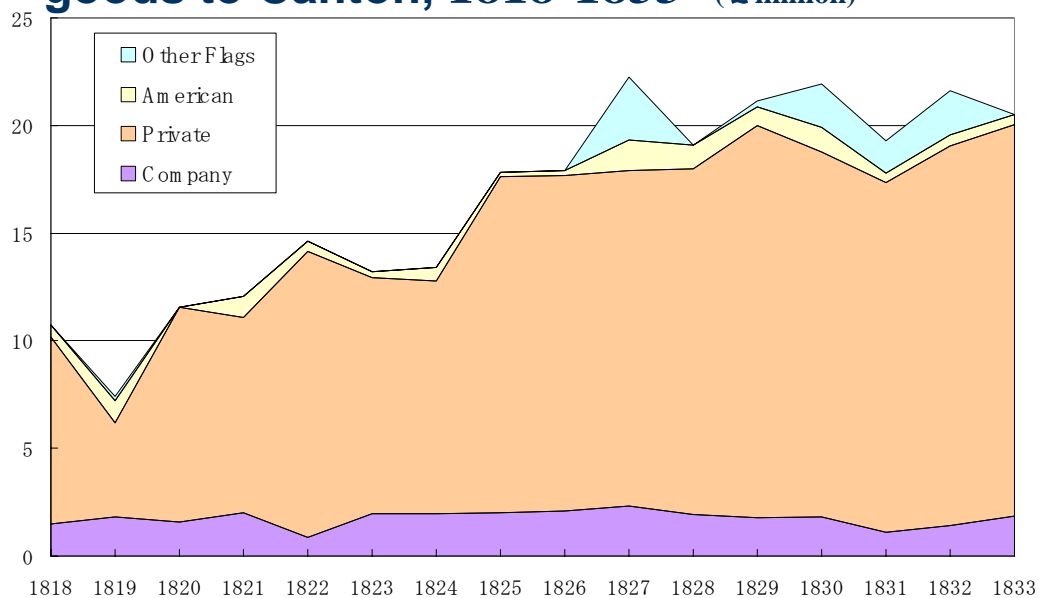
(£ million)



Source BPP 1859 XXIII

Fig.2-8 Imports (by merchants) of Asian goods to Canton, 1818-1833

(£ million)



Source Morse 1926, Vols III and IV.

Fig.2-9 Imports (by commodity) of Asian goods to Canton, 1818-1833 (£ million)

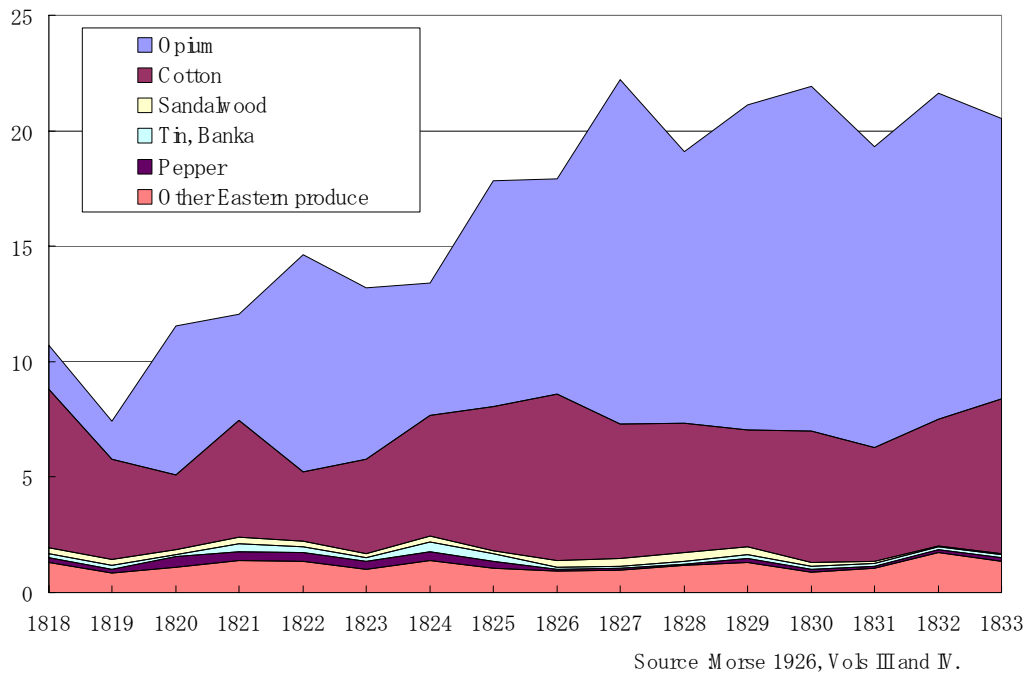


Fig.2-10 The opium triangle, 1840 (£ 10,000)

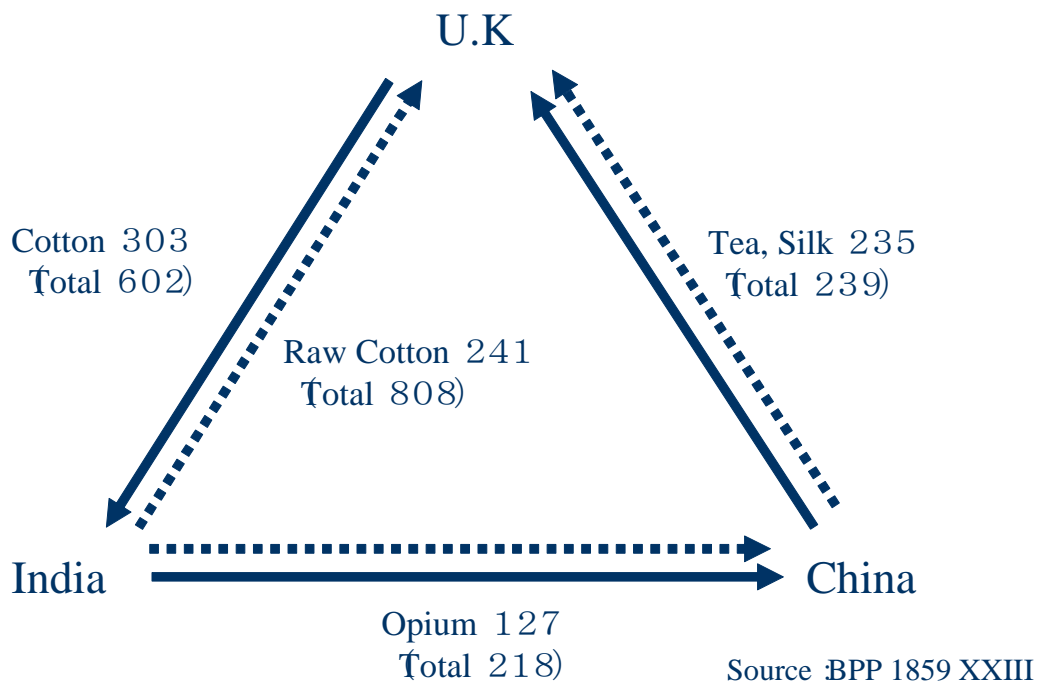


Fig.2-11 Intra-Asian trade, 1840

(100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)

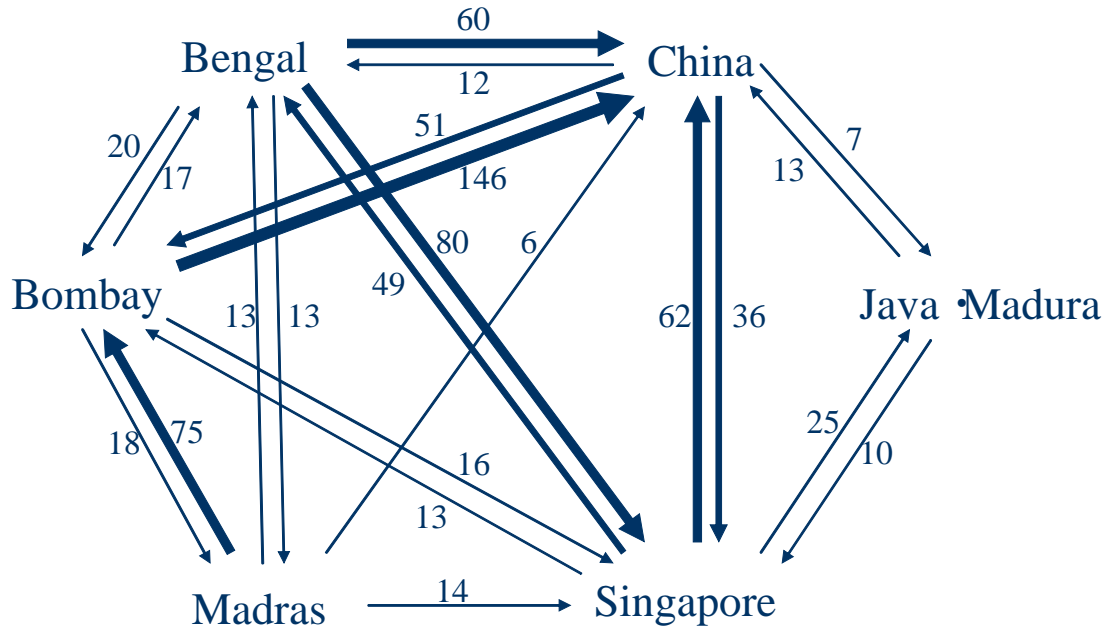
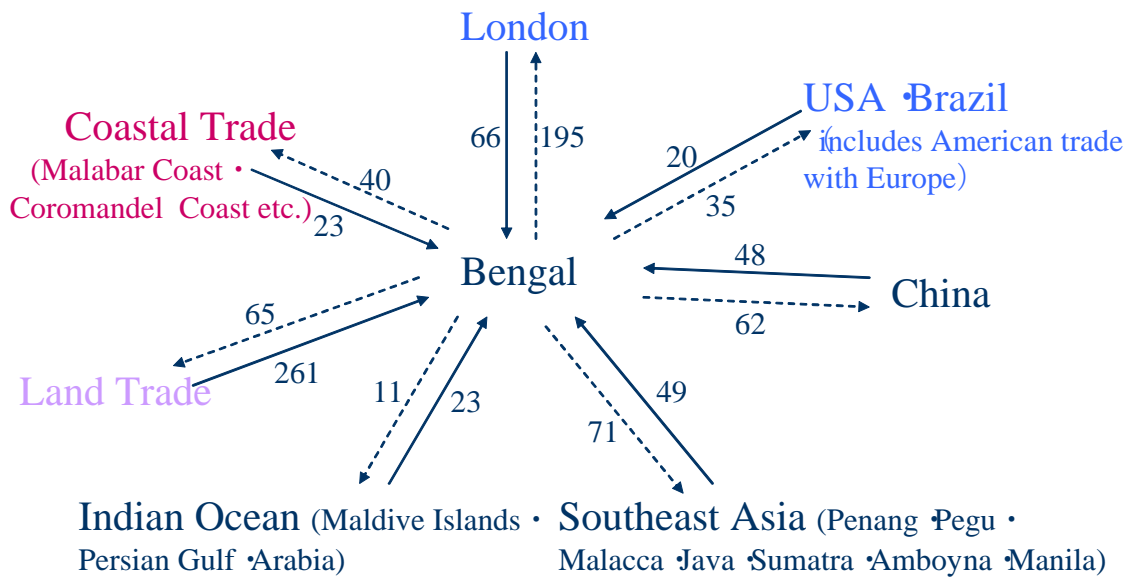


Fig.3-1 Trade of Bengal, 1811

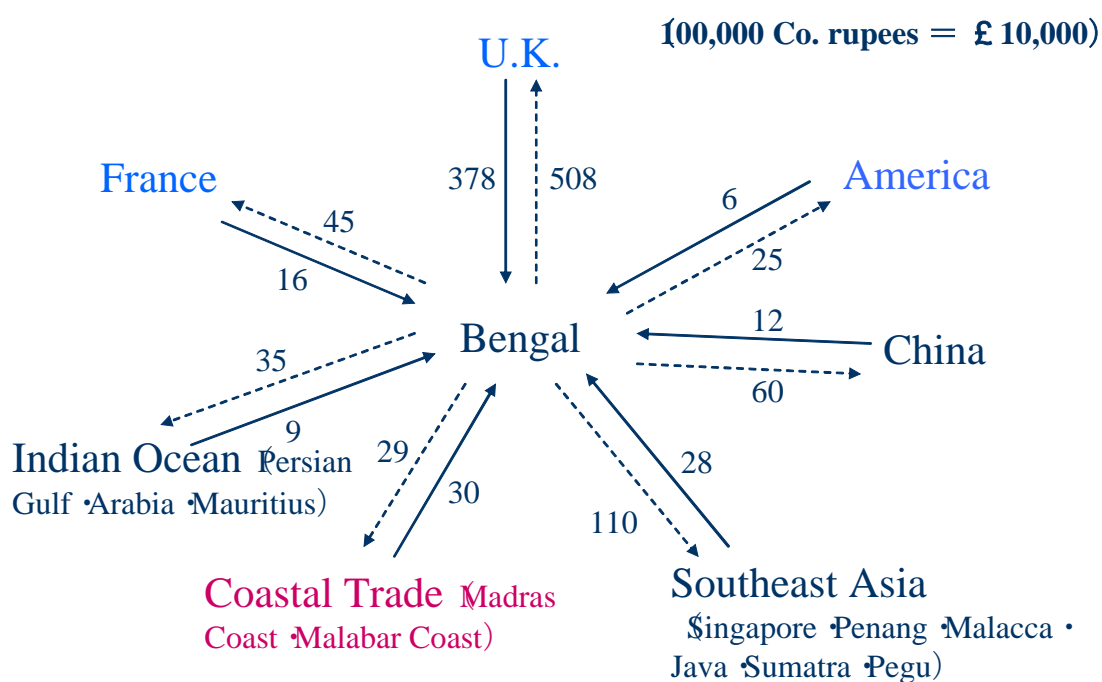
(100,000 Sicca Rupees = £ 12,500)



Source :BPP 1813-14 IX.

Note :Includes East India Company trade.

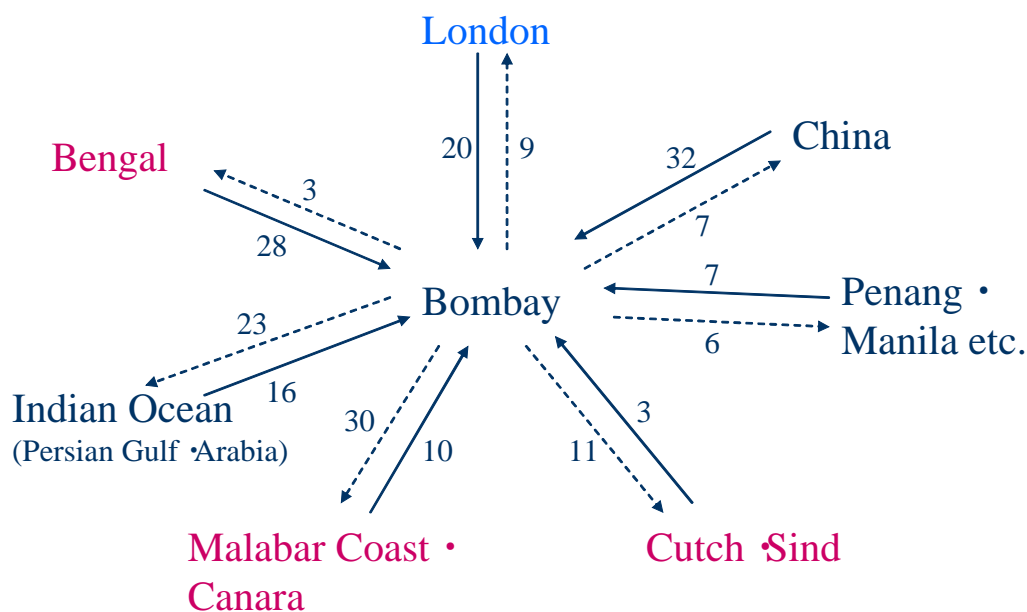
Fig.3-2 Trade of Bengal, 1840



Source :Bengal Commercial Annual 1840-41 and 1841-42.

Fig.3-3 Trade of Bombay, 1811

(100,000 Sicca rupees = £ 12,500)



Source :BPP 1813-14 IX.
Note private trade only.

Fig.3-4 Trade of Bombay, 1840

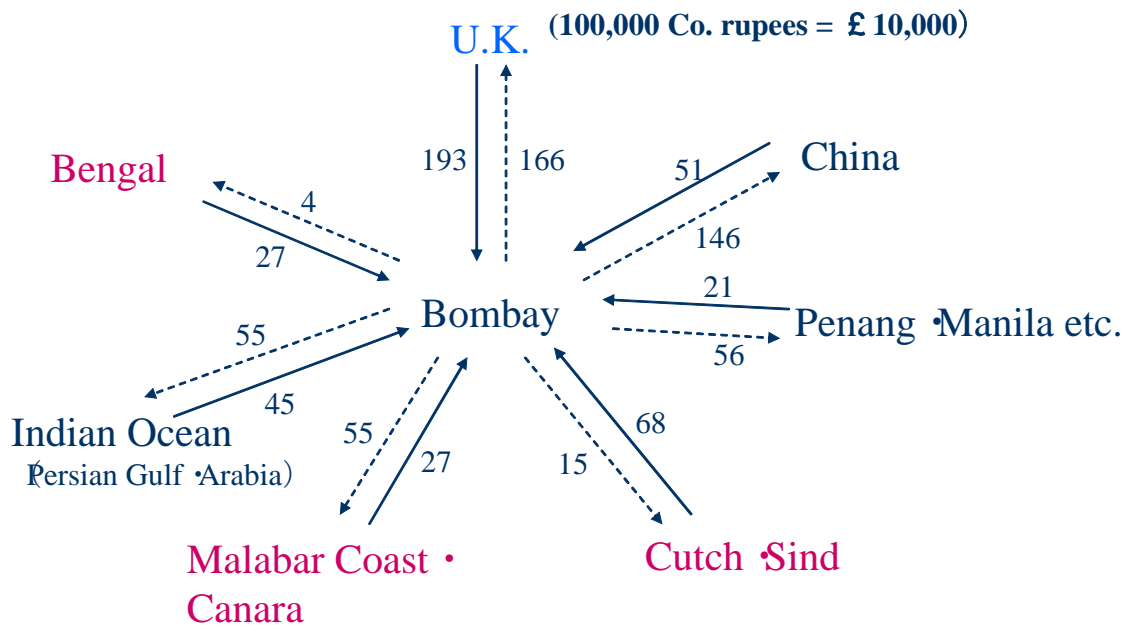
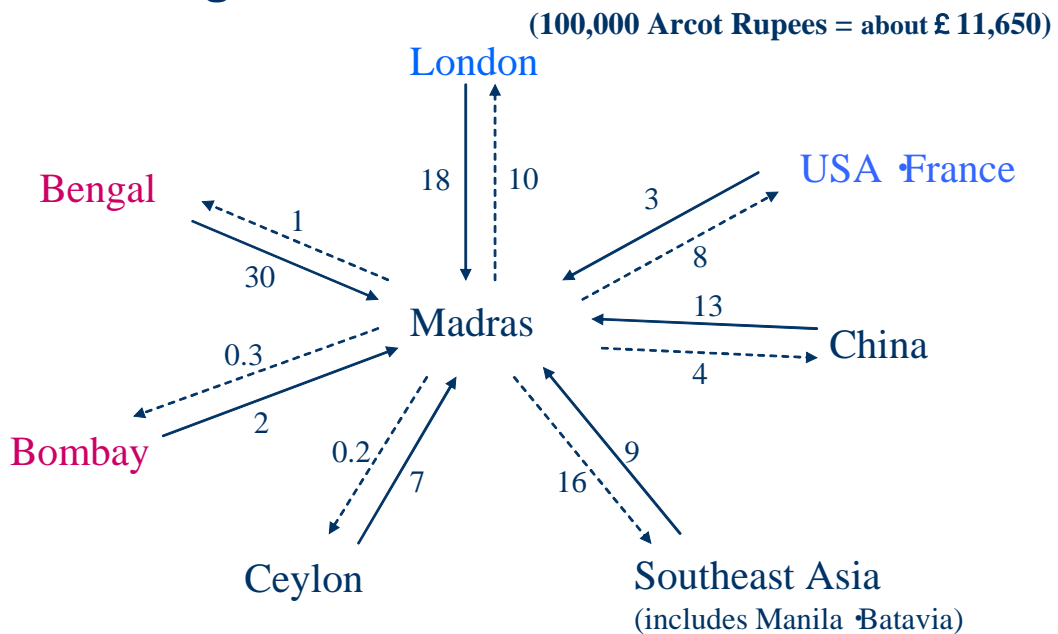


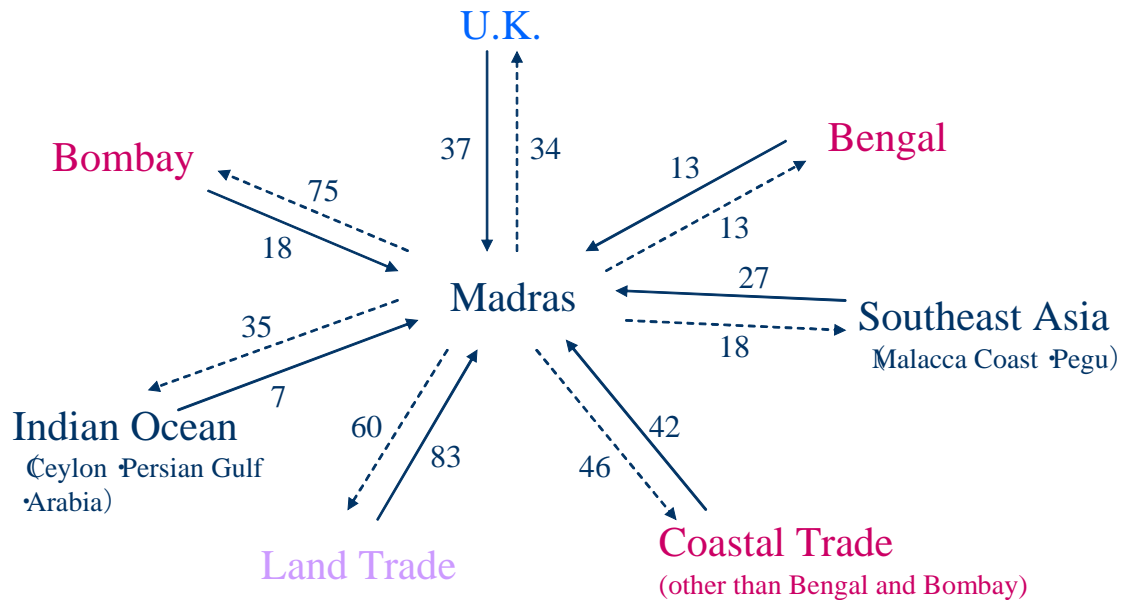
Fig.3-5 Trade of Madras, 1811



Source :BPP 1813-14 IX. Notes :Refers to trade of Fort St. George. Other ports engaged mainly in non-European trade. Covers private trade only.

Fig.3-6 Trade of Madras, 1840

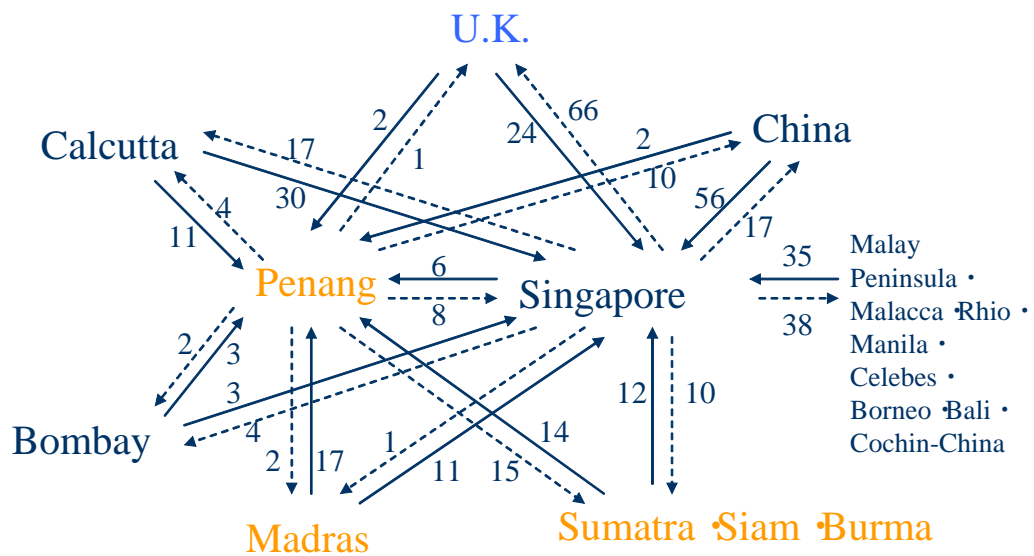
(100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)



Source :Madras Tabular Statement 1841-42.

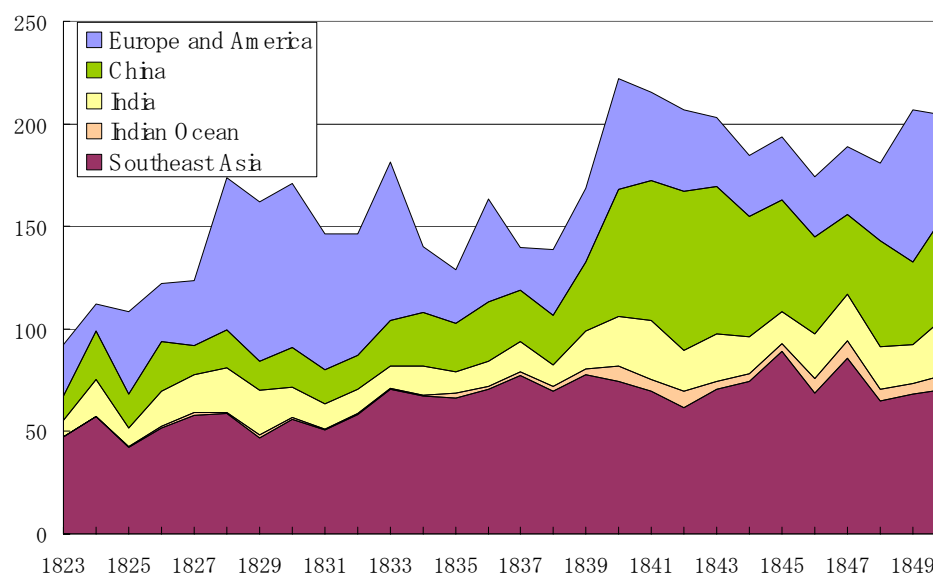
Fig.3-7 Trade of Penang •Singapore, 1828

(100,000 Sicca rupees = £ 12,500)



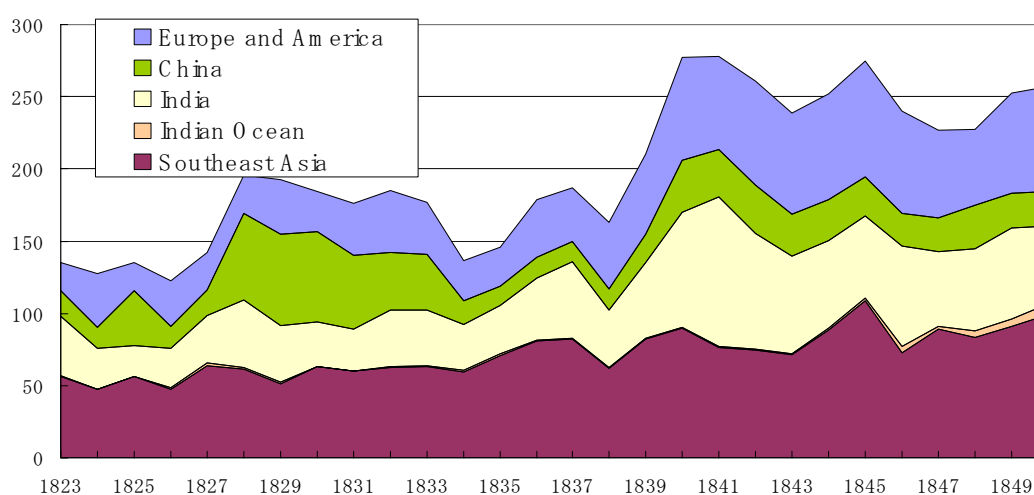
Sources :BPP 1847-48 LXI: Wong 1961: Singapore Tabular Statement

Fig.3-8 Singapore's exports, 1823-1850
 (100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)



Source : Wong 1961: Singapore Tabular Statements.

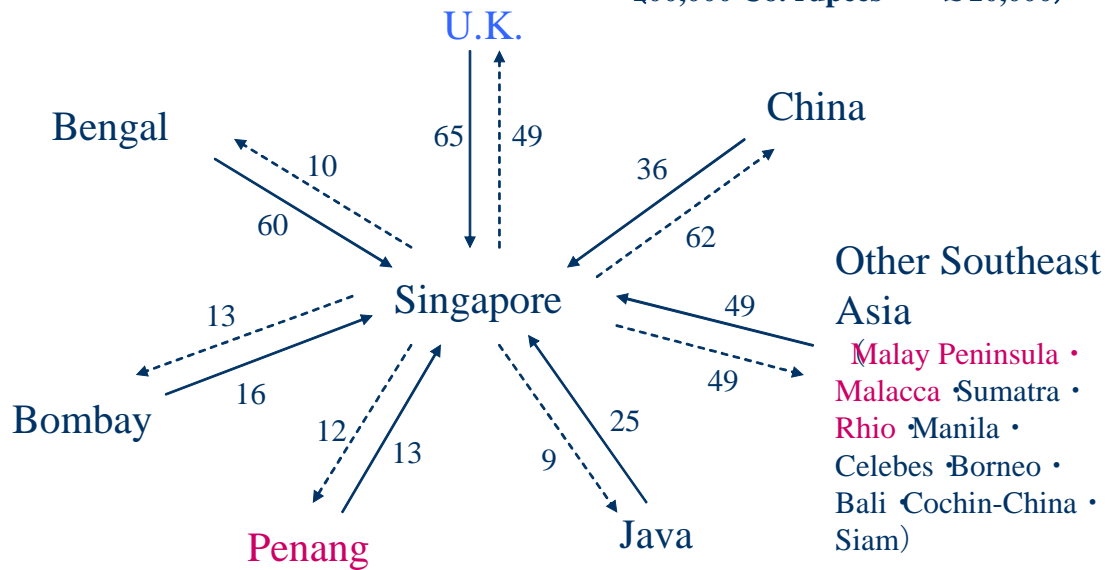
Fig.3-9 Singapore's imports, 1823-1850
 (100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)



The Source : Wong 1961: Singapore Tabular Statements.

Fig.3-10 Trade of Singapore, 1840

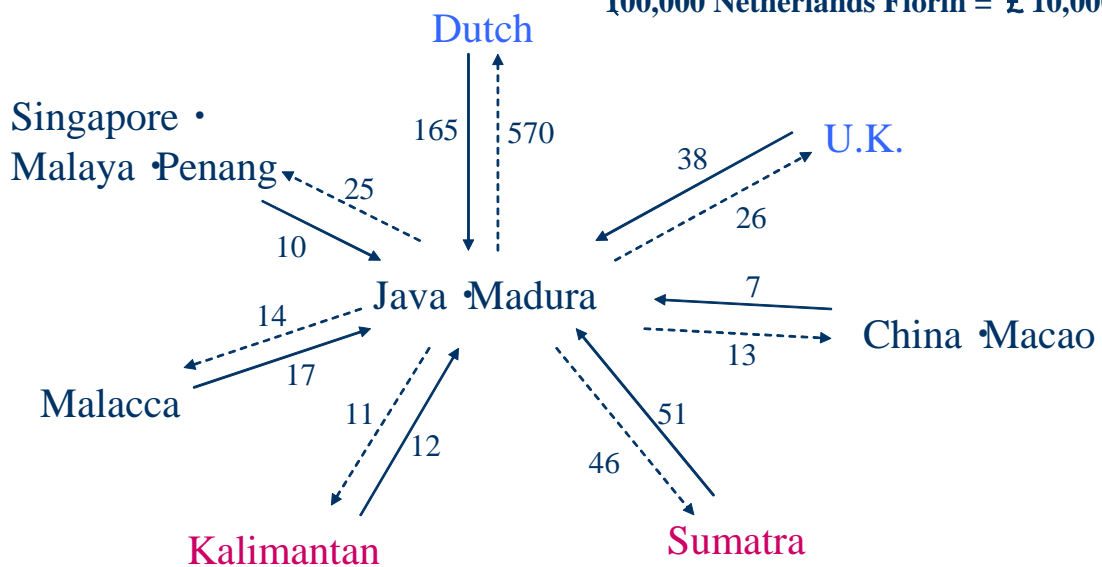
100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)



Source :Wong 1961: Singapore Tabular Statement.

Fig.3-11 Trade of Java Madura, 1840

100,000 Netherlands Florin = £ 10,000)



Source :Altes 1991.

Table 3-1 Regional composition of exports of major Asian ports, 1840 (£ million)

	the West	Asia	neighbouring countries
Bengal	5.76	2.23	0.30 _(coastal trade)
Bombay	1.69	2.65	0.81 _(coastal trade)
Madras	0.36	0.68	0.94 _(coastal trade)
Singapore	0.60	1.45	n.a.
Java Madura	6.52	0.46	0.82 _(outer islands)
China (Guangdong)	2.39	0.98	_(see Table 4-2)
Total	17.44	8.89	2.87
Bangkok		a sizable junk trade)	

Sources :BPP 1847-48 LXI: Singapore Tabular Statement: Altes 1991: BPP 1859 XXIII.

Table 3-2 China's junk trade, c.1830

	number of ships	
Japan (10 ships 2 voyages)	20	
Philippine Islands	13	Source :Select Committee 1830,
Zoorow Islands	4	pp.298-99.
Celebes	2	Notes: evidence by John Crawford.
Java	13	Figures in bracket are small
Sumatra	7	junks from Hainan Islands.
Singapore	8	Average tonnage was
Rhio	1	120 to 900 tons including
East of Malaya peninsula	6	small junks, with the total of
Siam	89 (+ 50)	c.80,000 tons.
Cochin-China	20 (+ 43)	
Cambodia	9	
Tongking	20	
Total	222 (+ 93)	

Table 4-1 Goods for internal trade of Madras, 1811

Cotton cloth (moories, handkerchiefs, chintzes, camboys, muslins, clouts, salampores, dowlies, turbands)
 grains (rice, paddy, wheat)
 liquors (rum, spirit)
 horse gum, sonnegaloo, oil seeds, long pepper-root, shins, sticklac, turmeric, chillies, firewood, coriander seeds, coffee, betelnut, cocoa nuts, lamp oil, cotton, tortoise shells, arrack, Trincomalee wood, hing, chay-root, dry ginger, cardamoms, coir cordage, iron hoops, camphor.
 European goods (glass ware, stationary, tea, copper, steel hardware)
 Southeast Asian and Chinese goods (betelnut, alum, cloves, benjamin, pepper, tin, dammer, borax, raw silk)

Source :BPP 1813-14 IX.

Table 4-2 Commodity composition of Singapore's trade, 1840

	Imports	Exports	(£ 10,000)
Opium	55.3	45.9	
European Cotton Cloth	43.3	16.5	
Asian Cotton Cloth	17.0	10.4	
Tea	11.0	15.2	
Tin	12.5	12.1	
Raw Cotton	12.4	9.0	
Sugar	7.9	11.2	
Raw Silk	9.6	7.7	
Pepper	6.5	10.1	
Coffee	9.0	6.5	
Rice	8.1	4.7	
Cotton Yarn	5.5	4.7	
Total	220.7	181.7	

Source :Singapore Tabular Statement.

Note: Items in red were mainly produced and consumed in Asia.

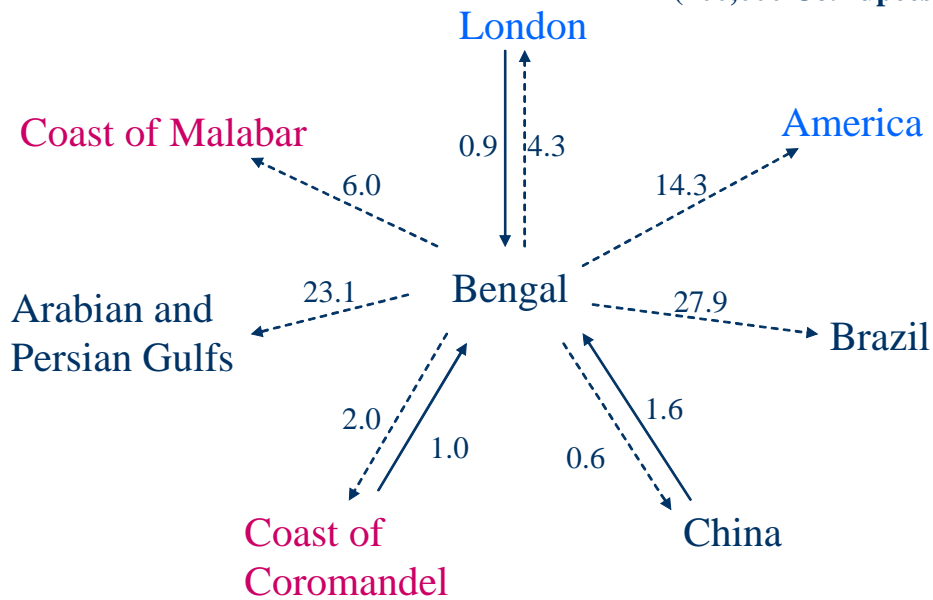
Table 4-3 Commodity composition of the trade of Bengal, 1840 (100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)

Imports		Exports	
Cotton Yarn	80	Indigo	227
Cotton Cloth	148	Opium	114
Woolen Fabrics	18	Sugar	165
Apparel and sundries	13	Silk Fabrics	35
Copper	25	Raw Silk	71
Iron	18	Leather	19
Total	489	Total	784

Re-exports	
British cotton cloth	16
Total	45

Sources :Bengal Commercial Annual 1840-41 and 1841-42.

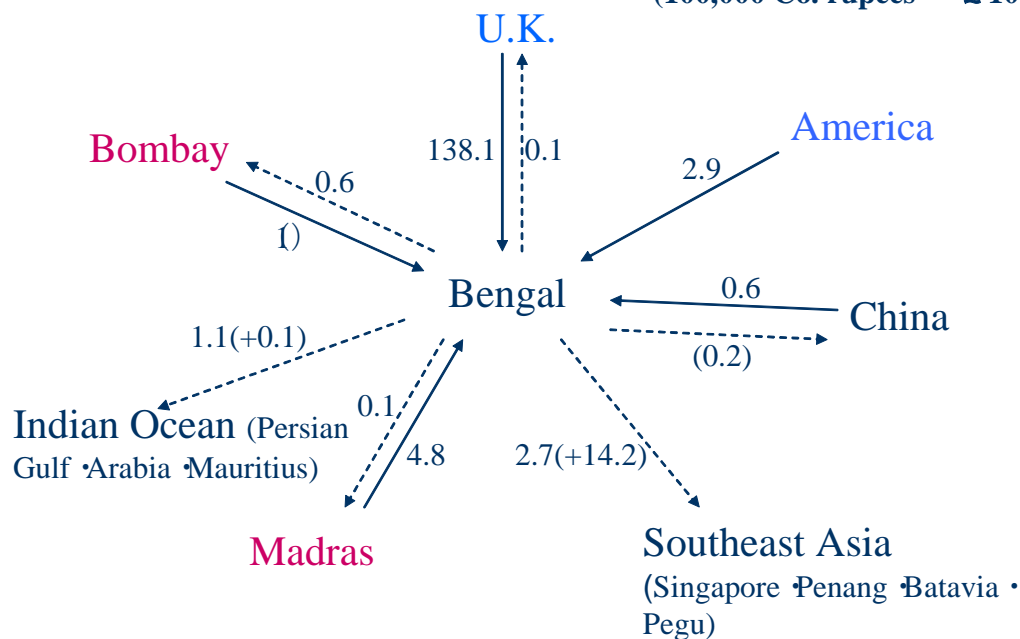
Fig.4-1 Bengal cotton cloth trade, 1811 (100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)



Source :Bengal Commercial Report 1811.

Fig.4-2 Bengal cotton cloth trade, 1840

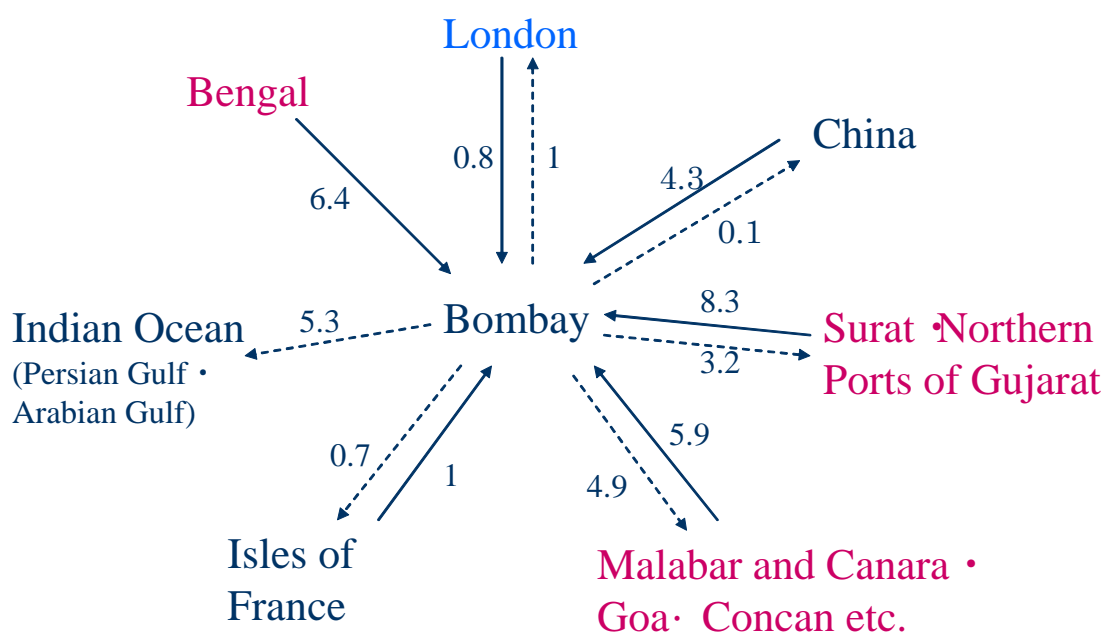
(100,000 Co. rupees = £ 10,000)



Source and Note :Bengal Commercial Annual 1840-41 and 1841-42.
Figures in Brackets refer to foreign cloth.

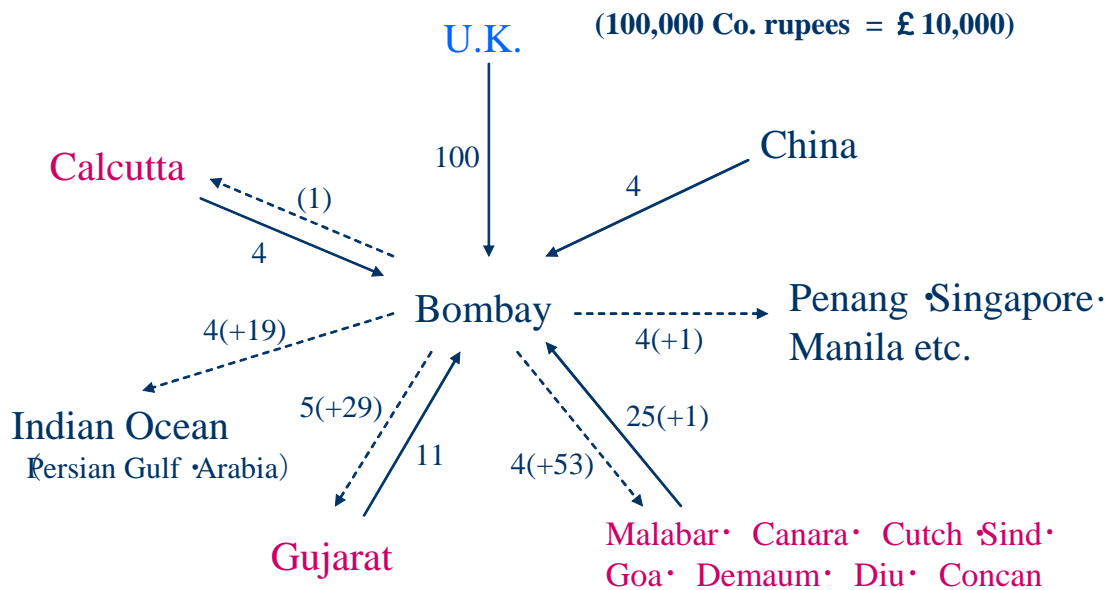
Fig.4-3 Bombay cotton cloth trade, 1811

(100,000 Sicca rupees = £ 12,500)



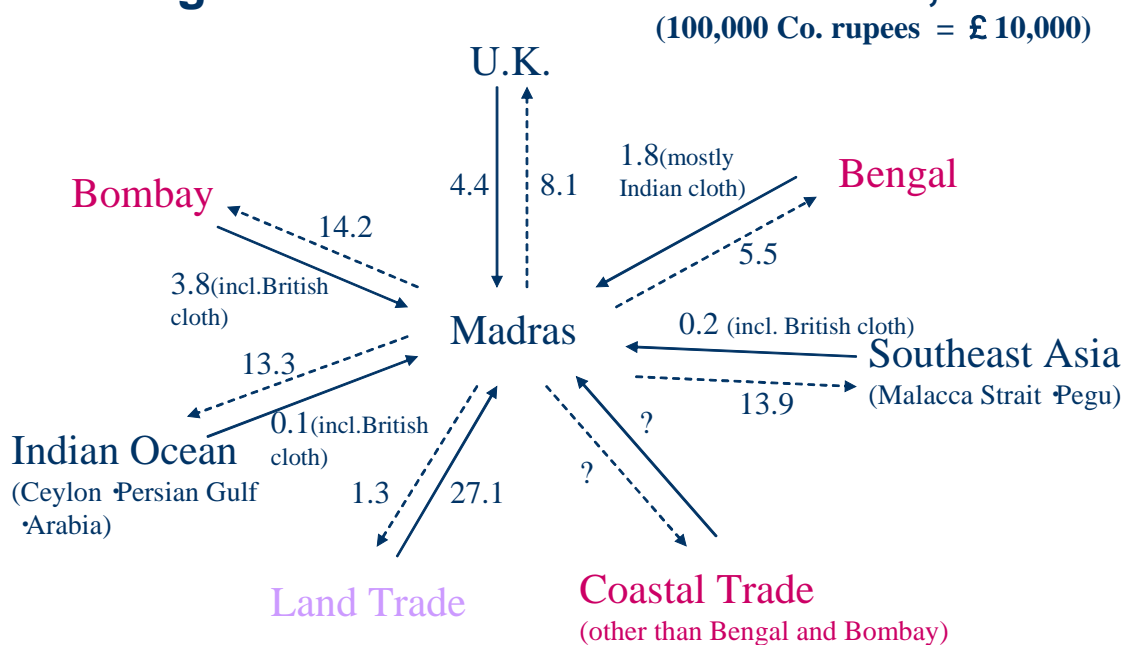
Source :Bombay Commercial Report 1811.

Fig.4-4 Bombay cotton cloth trade, 1840



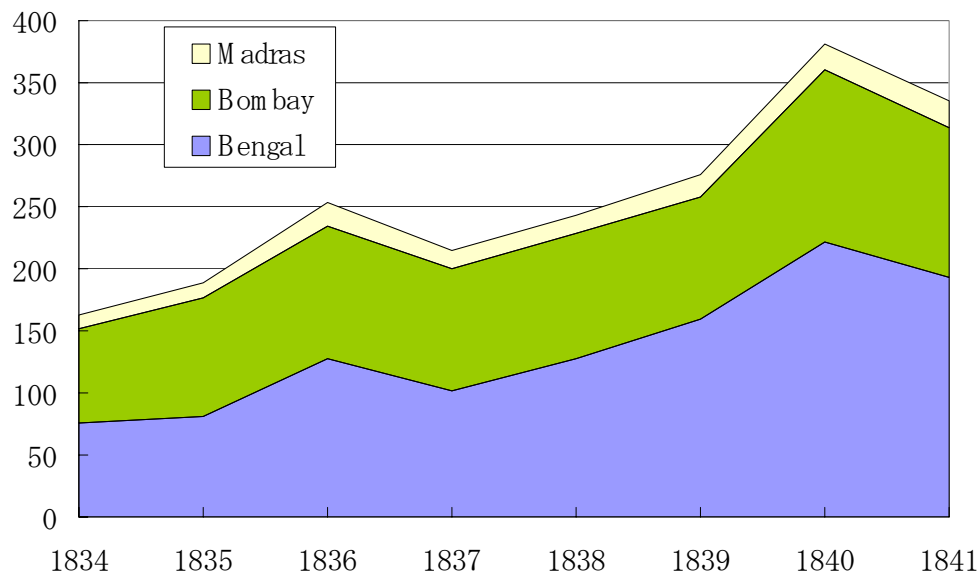
Source : Bombay Commercial Report 1840.

Fig.4-5 Madras cotton cloth trade, 1840



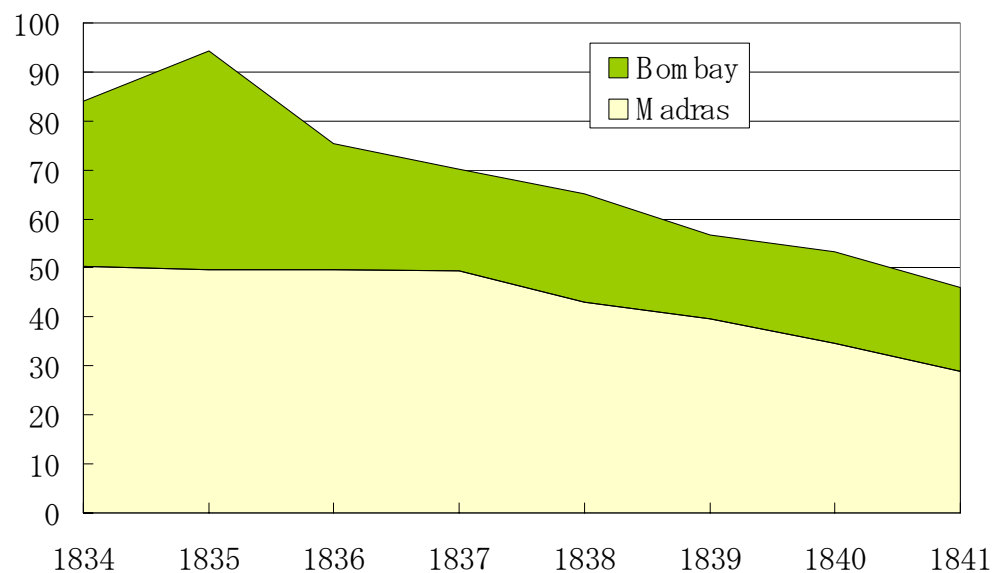
Source : Madras Tabular Statement 1841-42.

Fig.4-6 Imports of cotton goods to India, 1834-1841 (100,000 Co. rupees)



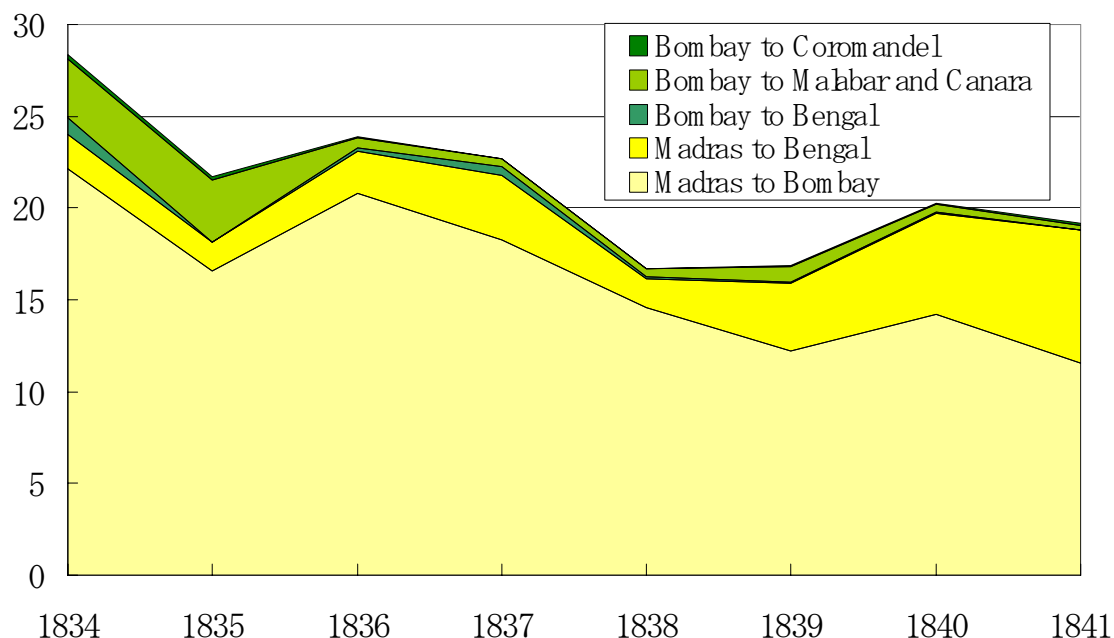
Source: BPP 1847-48 LXI.

Fig.4-7 Exports of cotton goods from India, 1834-1841 (100,000 Co. rupees)



Source: BPP 1847-48 LXI.

Fig.4-8 India's coastal trade of cotton goods, 1834-1841 (100,000 Co. rupees)



Source: BPP 1847-48 LXI.

Table.4-4 Singapore's cotton cloth trade, 1840 (£ 1,000)

	Imports		Exports	
British Cotton Cloth	U.K.	396	Southeast Asia	139
	Continental Europe	13	China	22
	Southeast Asia	8		
	Total	433	Total	176
Indian Cotton Cloth	Calcutta	31	Southeast Asia	69
	Madras	36		
	Total	93	Total	69
Chinese Cotton Cloth	China	24	Southeast Asia	5
	Total	24	Total	10
Malay Cotton Cloth	Celebes	29	Southeast Asia	24
	Java	14		
	Total	46	Total	25

Source: Singapore Tabular Statement.

**Table 5-1 An estimate of
China's internal trade, 1840**

	quantity	value (10,000 tael)	ratio of commoditisation
grain	24.5 billion (jin)	16,333.3 (42)	11
raw cotton	1.56 million (dan)	1,277.5 (3)	26
cotton cloth	315.18 million (pi)	9,455.3 (24)	53
raw silk	70,000 (dan)	1,202.3 (3)	92
silk cloth	50,000 (dan)	1,455.0 (4)	
tea	2.61 million (dan)	3,186.1 (8)	
salt	3.2 billion (jin)	5,852.4 (15)	
Total		38,762.4 (100)	

= a little over 100 million pounds sterling

Source: Wu 1985, p.251.

Table 5-2 Asia's share in world exports, 1840
(£ million)

	Hanson	Sugihara
India	11.6	15.5
Ceylon	0.4	0.4
China	7.8	3.4
Dutch East Indies	6.3	7.8
Persia	0.4	0.4
Philippines	0.9	0.9
Straits Settlements	1.6	2.5
others		5.3
total	29.0	36.2
share in world exports	12%	

Source: Hanson 1980 pp. 20,141.

Table 5-3 Asia's share in world population and world GDP, 1820, 1870 (million/ billion 1990 dollars)

	population1820	GDP1820	GDP1870
Japan	31 (3)	21 (3)	25 (2)
China	381 (37)	229 (33)	190 (17)
India	209 (20)	111 (16)	135 (12)
Other Asia	90 (9)	52 (8)	77 (7)
Asia total	710 (68)	413 (59)	427 (38)
World total	1,042(100)	695(100)	1,112(100)

Source : Maddison 2003.

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