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一件六塊美金T恤的「人生故事」

歷經七個年頭，跟著T恤的製造過程穿越千里、跨過三個大陸。商學教授皮翠拉．瑞沃莉帶領讀者展開一場迷人的環球探險，揭露一件六塊美金T恤的「人生故事」。

從德州西部一座棉花田到中國一家成衣廠，從華府的貿易談判到非洲的二手成衣市場，瑞沃莉透過單單一件商品的故事來綜觀國際貿易。她結合引人入勝的故事和出色的學術成果說明，全球化的擁護者和批評者都太過簡化國際貿易的世界了。瑞沃莉原希望這部T恤的故事能同時呈現出全球自由貿易不可否認的益處，以及反全球化運動屢遭誤解的理念。結果，她反而發現「自由市場」通常不怎麼自由、自由貿易最堅定的盟友常從貿易限制中獲利，還有一般人心目中的全球化「受害者」，往往才是最大的受惠者。當全球化的辯論仍繞著競爭經濟市場的「危險」和「希望」打轉，瑞沃莉卻發現她的T恤不僅打開市場，也引發了權力和政治。

就用一件簡樸的T恤，《一件T恤的全球經濟之旅》呈現出全球化辯論的政治及人性面。每件商品都包含了令人神魂顛倒的生意經、優劣互見的政治手段、予人啟發的歷史，還有真實人物的希望和夢想。這些人的故事——還有與他們息息相關的T恤的故事——讓我們一睹全球化的經濟政治中最微妙的精髓。

關於皮翠拉．瑞沃莉 Pietra Rivoli, PhD.

美國喬治城大學麥當諾商學院（Georgetown University’s McDonough School of Business）助理教授，專攻國際商業、財金及商業社會議題。

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書評推薦

「全球化的主題常被形容為晦澀難解、只值得政策研究人員探究，但瑞沃莉教授賦予它人性的面貌。她充分掌握了形塑美國貿易政策的政治、品格和政策考量，生動描述了特殊利益者是如何左右全球競爭中的勝負。」

——羅諾德．索里尼（Ronald J. Sorini）
前美國大使，現任山德勒-崔維斯-羅森伯格貿易談判及法律事務所總裁

「本書跟國際經濟學教科書完全不同，妙趣橫生，沒有那些枯燥的方程式。《一件T恤的全球經濟之旅》透過真實人物和他們的日常生活，訴說全球化的戲劇性。瑞沃莉細數三個大陸的贏家和輸家所經歷的磨難與考驗。從這場引人入勝的旅行，萃取出深具意義的經濟與政治課題。」

——蓋瑞．哈夫包爾（Gary Clyde Hufbauer）
華盛頓特區雷金納德．瓊斯國際經濟資深研究員機構

「瑞沃莉縝密交織了紡織成衣業中的個人、公司和國家的故事，呈現出一個充權又糾纏的全球化，完全超乎我們想像。」

——理查．福萊曼（Richard Friman） 馬基特大學艾略特．費奇國際研究教授

精彩試閱--

我的T恤來自中國。它可能是在一九九八年底離開上海，幾星期後抵達邁阿密的港口。這件T恤總計花了蓋瑞一點四二美元，包括二毛四的關稅。一九九八年，美國從中國進口的服裝限額為二千五百萬件，我的T恤就是其中一件棉質衫。它的旅程，我們應視為經濟強權排除障礙的事證。為了到達這裡，這件汗衫打敗美國本土的紡織工廠、南方各州的國會議員，以及關稅與配額制度，過程宛如迷宮般錯綜複雜，很難想像竟然有人願意自找麻煩；但蓋瑞．山德勒不怕麻煩。儘管國會、工業領袖和關說人士盡了最大的努力，儘管必須面對限額、關稅和中國官僚體制，中國還是可以用最好的價錢生產最好的汗衫。

可是中國幅員遼闊。我問山德勒，這件汗衫到底來自哪個地方？山德勒在名片盒裡翻找，拿出一張來。「徐兆明（譯註：本書出現之中文姓名皆為音譯。），」卡片上寫：「上海針織公司。」 派屈克．徐和他的妻子接受了我的邀請，下一趟來到美國時會到華盛頓來。

穩固的客戶，卻不認為上海針織的白汗衫會有光明的未來。競爭實在太激烈！對手包括工資更低的國家和中國其他地方，這使他相信，很快他辛辛苦苦爭取來的顧客不會再委託上海製造汗衫。派屈克正努力朝價值較高的產品發展，比如毛衣。

「到中國來嘛，」派屈克說：「我會把所有一切事情都告訴你。」

我說，我想要完整的故事。他能帶我去看汗衫縫製的地方嗎？沒問題。編織衣料的地方呢？當然可以。我得寸進尺：可以去看衣料是哪種紗線做成的嗎？紡織工廠？好的，他可以安排。但這還不是真正的開頭。棉花呢？要述說我T恤的故事，必須從它的出生地開始。我知道中國是世紀最大的棉花產地之一。我可以去棉田看看棉花是怎麼生產的嗎？

派屈克看看T恤。「這個嘛，可能有點困難。我想棉花栽種的地方離上海很遠很遠。可能在德可薩（Teksa）。」

「德可薩？德可薩在哪裡？很遠嗎？」我問。我辦公桌上有個地球儀，我把它轉到中國。可以指給我看德可薩在哪裡嗎？

派屈克笑了。他接過地球儀，轉到另外一面。「這裡，我想它是在這裡種的。」我的目光跟著他的手指走。

派屈克指的是德克薩斯（Texas），美國德州。

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PART I

KING COTTON

HOW AMERICA HAS DOMINATED THE GLOBAL COTTON INDUSTRY FOR 200 YEARS

Nelson and Ruth Reinsch at Their Farm in Smyer, Texas. (Photo courtesy of Dwade Reinsch and Colleen Phillips.)

1

Reinsch Cotton Farm, Smyer, Texas

Unlike French wine or Florida oranges, Texas cotton doesn't brag about where it was born and raised. Desolate, hardscrabble, and alternately baked to death, shredded by windstorms, or pummeled by rocky hail, West Texas will never have much of a tourist trade. Flying into the cotton country near Lubbock on a clear fall day, I had a view of almost lunar nothingness: no hills, no trees. No grass, no cars. No people, no houses. The huge and flat emptiness is jarring and intimidating at first, since one can't help but feel small and exposed in this landscape. Though I have traveled to dozens of countries and to almost every continent, Lubbock, Texas, was one of the most foreign places I had ever been. There is a very good chance that my T-shirt—and yours—was born near Lubbock, the self-proclaimed "cottonest city" in the world.

The people of this forbidding yet harshly beautiful place are well suited to the landscape. Indeed, they are the product of it. The land has humbled them with its unpredictable temperament and its sheer scale, yet made them proud of each small success in taming and coaxing from it the fluffy white gold of the cotton plant. According to local legend, when God created West Texas, He made a mistake and forgot to fashion hills, valleys, rivers, and trees. Looking at His desolate and barren mistake, He considered starting over, but then had another idea. "I know what I'll do," He said. "I'll just create some people who like it this way."

And so He did.

Nelson Reinsch, cotton farmer, stands tall and handsome at the age of 81. He laughs easily but speaks carefully. He calls his wife, Ruth, "Sugar" and every other woman "ma'am." Nelson is a gentleman in the older sense of the word, well mannered and considerate from the inside. In his 81 years, Nelson has missed four cotton harvests, all of them during his Navy service in World War II. Nelson and Ruth are happy enough (or perhaps just polite enough) to talk about the past if that is what their guests want to hear about. But they wallow not one bit in "the good old days," and their minds are opening rather than closing as they approach the ends of their lives. The world is still very interesting to Nelson and Ruth Reinsch.

Producing cotton is no longer the backbreaking physical process it once was, but every year Nelson and Ruth still battle both the whims of nature and the vagaries of markets. Each summer they take on the wind, sand, heat, and insects; and each fall, at harvest, they take on the world markets, in which they compete with cotton farmers from over 70 countries. The Reinsches' 1,000 acres can produce about 500,000 pounds of cotton lint if fully planted, enough for about 1.3 million T-shirts. That Nelson is ending his life in the same occupation in which he began tells us much about him. It also tells us much about the U.S. cotton industry.

History shows that almost all dominance in world markets is temporary and that even the most impressive stories of national industrial victories typically end with sobering postscripts of shifting comparative advantage. Within the baby boomers' lifetime, preeminence in consumer electronics has shifted from the United States to Japan to Hong Kong to Taiwan to China. Apparel production has moved from the American South to Southeast Asia to the Caribbean and back to Asia. Advantages in steel have moved from the U.S. Rust Belt to Japan to South Korea. But for over 200 years, the United States has been the undisputed leader in the global cotton industry in almost any way that can be measured, and other countries, particularly poor ones, have little chance of catching up. The United States has historically occupied first place in cotton production (though recently second to China), cotton exports (though occasionally second to Uzbekistan), farm size, and yields per acre.[1]

On the surface, cotton is an unlikely candidate for economic success in the United States. Typically, American industries compete with those in "like" countries. American firms compete with Japanese automakers, German chemical companies, and Swiss pharmaceuticals. But for climatic reasons, few advanced industrial economies produce cotton. Instead, American cotton growers compete with producers in some of the world's poorest and least developed regions. If our labor costs—among the world's highest—have toppled or relocated industries as diverse as apparel, steel, and shipbuilding, how has U.S. cotton maintained its world dominance?

More broadly, how can an industry so basic and "downstream" as cotton production continue to thrive in an advanced, service-oriented economy? There would appear to be little sustainable advantage in an industry such as cotton. Models of business strategy would predict that dominance in such an industry can only be fleeting and stressful: The lack of product differentiation, the intense price competition, and the low barriers to entry make it scarcely worth the trouble. Business professor and strategist Michael Porter notes that

> advantages [are] often exceedingly fleeting [in these industries]. . . . Those industries in which labor costs or natural resources are important to competitive advantage also often have . . . only low average returns on investment. Since such industries are accessible to many nations . . . because of relatively low barriers to entry, they are prone to too many competitors. . . . Rapidly shifting factor advantage continually attracts new entrants who bid down profits and hold down wages. . . . Developing nations are frequently trapped in such industries. . . . Nations in this situation will face a continual threat of losing competitive position. . . .[2]

While this description of life on the economic precipice rings true for poor cotton farmers in South Asia and Africa, it does not describe the cotton industry around Lubbock. Year in and year out, American cotton farmers, as a group, are on top. What explains American cotton's success as an export commodity in a country that has experienced a merchandise trade deficit in each year since 1975? And what explains U.S. cotton producers' ability to export such a basic commodity to much poorer countries? Why here? Why was my Chinese T-shirt born in Texas?

Oxfam, the British charity, believes it has the answer. According to *Cultivating Poverty*, a scathing report released in 2002, the comparative advantage enjoyed by U.S. cotton farmers lies in their skill at collecting government subsidies. In the fall of 2003, bolstered by Oxfam's research and resources, the poorest countries in the world cried foul against the richest at the opening of the World Trade Organization (WTO) trade talks in Cancun, Mexico. Tiny, desperately poor countries such as Benin and Burkina Faso stood firm and stared down U.S. negotiators: They charged that U.S. cotton subsidies were blocking their route out of poverty, and that it was impossible to compete with Uncle Sam's largesse to U.S. cotton farmers. In a sound bite that carried considerable punch, the poor countries pointed out that U.S. cotton subsidies exceeded the entire GDP of a number of poor cotton-producing countries in Africa. If the United States was going to champion the case for free trade, Americans needed to walk the walk as well as talk the talk. The stare-down continued for several tortured days until the talks collapsed and both rich and poor gave up and went home.[3] The point, however, had been made, and several months later the WTO ruled that U.S. cotton subsidies violated global trade rules and unfairly tilted the playing field toward American producers. In the summer of 2004, with the huge subsidies in the public spotlight, U.S. trade negotiators agreed not only to put cotton subsidies on the table, but to tackle the cotton issue "ambitiously, expeditiously and specifically" during the Doha Round of trade negotiations.[4]

There is no doubt that the subsidies are big, and little doubt that they are unfair to poor countries. But anyone who believes that America's competitive power in the global cotton industry reduces to government subsidies should spend some time near Lubbock, Texas. While the subsidies are, of course, a boon to U.S. producers, the success of cotton growers such as Nelson Reinsch is a much more complex phenomenon.

First, the dominance of the U.S. industry predates by well over a century the implementation of national farm subsidies. As Chapter 2 describes, the U.S. cotton industry passed its competitors over 200 years ago. Therefore, while subsidies may account for some cost advantages today, they cannot be the longer-run explanation for the industry's dominance.

Second, the subsidy explanation for America's dominance gives short shrift to the astounding entrepreneurial creativity of the American growers. In many ways, the American cotton farmers are MBA case studies in adaptability and entrepreneurship. American cotton growers have adapted their production methods, their marketing, their technology, and their organizational forms to respond to shifts in supply and demand in the global marketplace. The shifts in demand and supply that reveal cotton's story as a business were sometimes gentle and predictable trends of ascendancy and decline, and the farmers could see what was ahead; but times also came when changes were sudden and cataclysmic, reshaping the world in front of them. In each case, the cotton farmers responded with a creative maneuver—a new idea, a new technology, a new policy. Whether it occurs by design or necessity, the open-mindedness and forward orientation that struck me within minutes of meeting Nelson and Ruth Reinsch is a regional trait as well as a comparative advantage, because farmers in poor countries who are tradition bound—for whatever reason—rather than innovation bound, lose. The American growers' remarkable adaptability and entrepreneurial resourcefulness have their roots in character but also in the institutions and governance mechanisms taken for granted in the United States, which are lacking in many poor countries. In the United States, the farms work, the market works, the government works, the science works, and the universities work; and all of these elements work together in a type of virtuous circle that is decades away for the poorest countries in the world. In much of West Africa, with or without U.S. cotton subsidies, these institutional foundations for global competitiveness are weak. In addition, the institutions that are in place in many poor countries serve to funnel resources and power away from farmers rather than toward them.

While subsidies alone cannot explain U.S. dominance in this industry, the subsidies are but one example of a much broader phenomenon that has contributed to the U.S. farmers' seemingly immutable spot at the top. For 200 years, U.S. farmers have had in place an evolving set of public policies that allow them to mitigate the important competitive risks inherent in the business of growing and selling cotton. They have figured out how to compete in markets but also—and at least as important—how to avoid competing when the risks are too high. Put another way, U.S. cotton growers have since the beginning been embedded in a set of institutions that insulate them from the full strength of a variety of market forces.

When we consider the risks that a cotton boll faces on its way to becoming a T-shirt, it is a wonder we have clothes at all. The cotton can't be too hot, and it can't be too cold; it is susceptible to both too much water and too little; and it is too delicate to survive hail or even heavy wind and rain. Cotton plants are easily overtaken by weeds; there are dozens of varieties of pests that can take out a cotton crop; and crop prices are highly volatile. There is labor market risk as well, as workers must be available at a reasonable price when the cotton is ready to be picked. Every cotton farmer in the world faces these risks. And of course there are the normal business risks associated with falling prices and rising costs, foreign competition, and access to financing. As explained in Chapters 2 and 3, however, American cotton's story, and its success, have been about excellence in avoiding—or at least cushioning the impact of—these risks.

Today's proponents of markets and globalization can find much to like in the story of American cotton's victory, but the backlash can find support as well. For every noble victory in this industry, and for every case in which the Americans were smarter, faster, and better than the competition, there is a shameful victory as well. The most shameful of all was the cotton slave plantation, where the U.S. cotton industry was born, and where the Americans first trounced their foreign competition. Less shameful but still embarrassing are today's high subsidies. But to understand American cotton's long-run dominance, we should begin by agreeing to neither demonize nor romanticize American cotton farmers. During the 200 years in which the United States has dominated this industry, sometimes it was possible to win on the high road and sometimes it wasn't. My T-shirt's parentage in the fields of the American South has many things to be proud of, but some things to hide.

Update on Trade Developments for Readers of *Travels of a T-Shirt*

Pietra Rivoli
August 10, 2005

There have been a number of developments in textile and apparel trade and trade policy in the months since the book was published. Virtually all of these developments, however, conform to the broad patterns discussed in *Travels*.

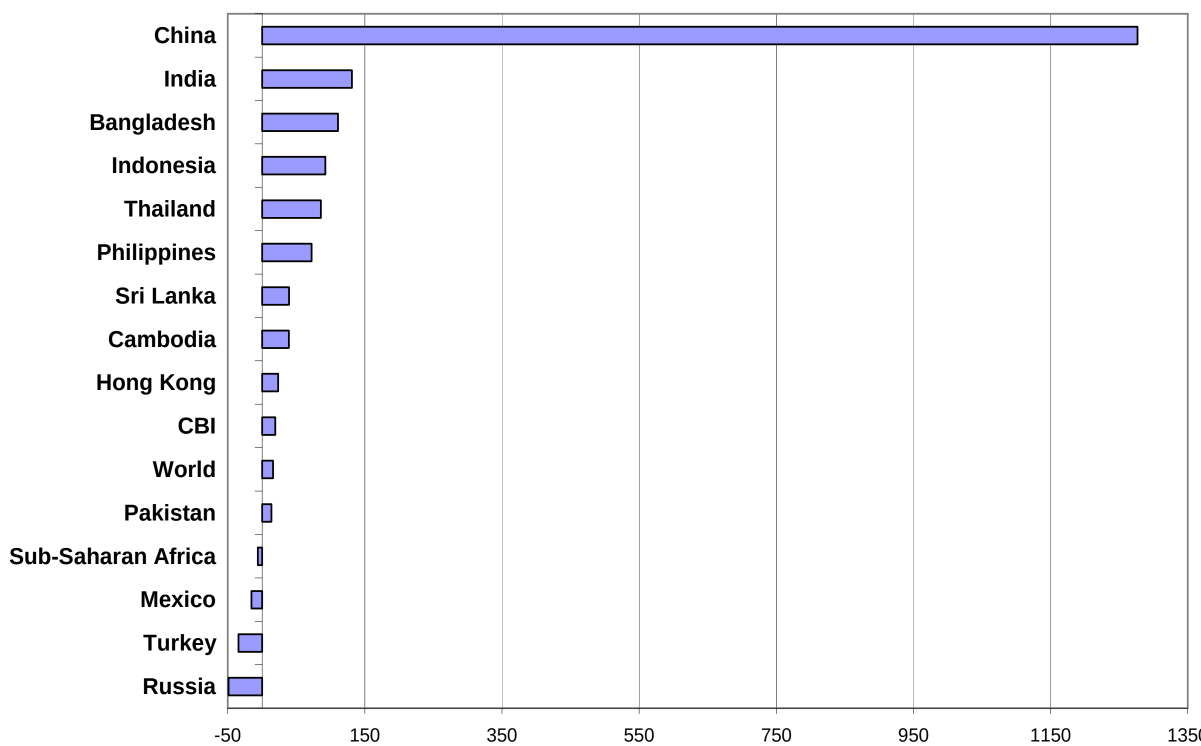
In particular, 2005 has been characterized by 3 broad continuing historical patterns: (1) significant political clout and activity of America's domestic textile industry for the reasons discussed in the book, (2) trade deals that continue to be almost numbingly complex because of the multiple interests at work, and (3) trade protection for the textile industry that continues to be a "price" of broader trade liberalization.

On January 1, 2005, most textile and apparel quotas were removed. Quotas remained in place, however, for several important exporting countries that were not WTO members, such as Vietnam, and quotas were also in place on a number of categories of Chinese exports. The China Safeguard mechanism, negotiated as part of China's entry into the WTO, has a provision for countries to limit textile and apparel imports from China through 2008.

The lifting of most quotas had the effects that many had been anticipating: China does indeed appear to be the main winner thus far. In 2004, China's import share of goods that had been released from quota was 70% (the next highest share was Thailand, with 3%). Overall, US imports of Chinese textile and apparel in 2005 (through June) increased by approximately 90% over the same period in 2004.

However, this aggregate figure disguises more dramatic "surges" in US imports from China in some categories that were released from quota, where increases in imports from China were 1000-2000%. Imports of t-shirts and other cotton knit shirts from China surged approximately 1200% in the first quarter of the year, as the figure below shows:

Percentage Change in Quantity of U.S. Imports of Cotton Knit Shirts, Q1 2005 vs. Q1 2004



source: OTEXA

The response to the rapid increase in imports from China has been an aggressive pursuit of "safeguards" by the US industry. As of summer 2005, the industry had filed for safeguard import limits in approximately 15 categories of goods from China, including, for example, underwear, socks, cotton and wool pants, and filament yarns. Most of these petitions have been granted, including that for cotton knit shirts. The limits called for in the safeguard petitions were quickly reached in some categories, and no further imports from China will be allowed in these categories during 2005. For cotton knit shirts, China reached its 2005 limit in July.

US importers and retailers had some success in fighting the wave of safeguard petitions. In particular, they were successful in limiting safeguard actions to those categories of goods where actual imports surges from China had occurred, rather than – as the domestic industry had demanded – to categories where there was a potential threat of import surges.

As the political battles over Chinese imports continued, there was at the same time a push by the Bush administration for passage of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, or CAFTA. CAFTA would liberalize trade flows between 5 Central American countries and the US, and would replace the CBTPA described in *Travels*, which was due to expire in 2008.

As of early 2005, the US textile industry was united in its opposition to CAFTA. However, through a series of complex negotiations some major players from the industry were won over to the CAFTA side. The price to get (some) of the industry players on board was high, and indeed, various observers were quoted in the press as saying that, at least in textiles, CAFTA was a step backwards, not forward, for free trade.

The National Council of Textile Organizations (NCTO) agreed to support CAFTA in May when it was promised aggressive use of the China safeguards (though accounts differ somewhat regarding the safeguard-CAFTA link), and was also promised a change to the language of the agreement wherein certain fabric components ("certain invisible linings and pocketings") would be required to come from within the Agreement countries. In addition, CAFTA requires that all textile and apparel imports must be regional "yarn forward," that is, the use of Asian yarns and fabrics disqualifies apparel for trade benefits. Finally, CAFTA contains an import safeguard provision for textiles and apparel; indeed the textile/apparel safeguard is the only safeguard provision in the CAFTA.

Even with these concessions, however, in late July it appeared that enough textile state Republicans remained opposed to CAFTA to block its passage. CAFTA "squeaked by" with a 217-215 vote after two additional textile promises. One of the last votes to switch to CAFTA's side was that of Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL), who requested and received special assurances about Chinese socks.

CAFTA finally passed only after Rep. Robin Hayes of North Carolina agreed to switch his no vote to a yes. Before switching, Hayes wrote to the NCTO asking for their "top priority". The textile organization responded that its priority was a comprehensive agreement that would limit Chinese textile and apparel imports through 2008. This comprehensive agreement would provide an overarching agreement and would free the industry from the burden of the case by case (and year by year) petitions.

The administration agreed, leading Gary Hufbauer of the Institute for International Economics to wonder whether "the trade liberalization we got with CAFTA could actually be less than what we gave up" for the textile industry.

The broad historical pattern, then, of trade liberalization progressing through compensation for the domestic industry, seemed as evident in the summer of 2005 as it had during the rest of the post-war period.

Note: All data in this update are from OTEXA. I also relied on conversations with lobbyists and trade association officials from both sides. The Hufbauer quote and the account of the CAFTA negotiations is drawn largely from "US to Consider Broad Accord in China Textile Trade," By Mark Drajem (Bloomberg Newswire, August 1, 2005). I welcome comments and questions from readers of ***Travels*** (rivolip@georgetown.edu). A further update will be posted in January 2006.