Another broad generalization is that the trade is rather uneven in its composition by products and in its distribution by both exporting and importing countries. By product, textiles and clothing make up a particularly large share of the total, though some other light manufactures have recently been rising more rapidly. Among the countries of origin, Hong Kong holds an extraordinary position, and, all together, the less developed countries of the Far East are paramount over other areas as suppliers of labor-intensive manufactures to developed countries. Among the latter, the United States, the United Kingdom, and West Germany account for by far the greater part of these imports, and they also take the greater part of imports of labor-intensive manufactures from Japan and other low-wage countries.

Relative Size of Imports

A noteworthy feature of this trade is the small size of U.S. imports of labor-intensive manufactures from the less developed countries in relation to U.S. production of similar goods. The value of U.S. output (or "value of shipments") in 1965 of the items selected as labor-intensive was $138 billion. Imports of these items from all sources in 1965 were equal to only about 4.1 percent, and those from less developed countries only 0.7 percent, of that amount. These ratios were particularly low for certain items which may be described as "marginally labor-intensive." Exclusive of these items, total imports were about 4.2 percent, and import from the less developed countries about 1.1 percent, of domestic output. A similar comparison, if it could be made, would probably yield a slightly higher ratio of imports from the less developed countries to the domestic production of other developed countries considered as an entity, but with sharp contrasts among the members of the group.

Looked at in relation to total imports of labor-intensive manufactures, the share supplied by the less developed countries is much larger in this country than in other developed countries—about 18 percent for the United States in 1965 versus 6 percent for other developed countries taken as a whole, or 25.8 and 10.5 percent, respectively, exclusive of the "marginal" items. This observation has to be set against the much more limited role which imports in general play in the U.S. economy than in most other countries. Even so, the ratios (again exclusive of the marginal items) seem very small in most cases—between 3 and 8 percent in all of the smaller European countries and Canada. In France, despite its longstanding economic ties with African countries and the tariff preferences extended to them, the 1965 ratio is only 12.3 percent, or slightly larger than in West Germany with 11.1 percent and much less than in the United Kingdom with 19.2 percent.

As a final comparison, on the basis of the 1965 trade returns, labor-intensive manufactures make up less than one-tenth of total imports of the developed countries from less developed countries. Coffee, cocoa, and tea alone bulk larger in the total, and crude petroleum 2.7 times larger. Labor-intensive manufactures are less than half as large as other products classed as "manufactures," the latter being more capital-intensive and generally having an evident natural-resource orientation (major examples being petroleum products and nonferrous metals). The only items of which the latter is not true are of negligible consequence in the trade.