

YSS3333: Topics in Economic History

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Course Description:

Do historical variables matter for modern-day development? This module addresses this question by surveying a broad set of important topics in global economic history. The time frame starts from the Neolithic Revolution to the 20th century, and the geographic coverage is globally wide. This course covers a number of important topics, including the long-run stagnation in the pre-modern world, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Divergence, the persistent impact of slavery, etc. The course will use economic theory and methods to illustrate historical experience and to help students understand the historical determinants of the present day.

Learning Goals:

Students should have acquired, by the end of the module,

- 1) A general understanding of important topics in the world economic history.
- 2) An awareness of how historical variables largely shape/determine modern-day economic development.
- 3) An appreciation of how theoretical approaches and quantitative tools in the economics can be applied to historical settings and data.

Prerequisites:

Econometrics

Assignments & Evaluation:

- Class performance (20%): attendance, class participation and student presentation
- Assignment (20%)
- Mid-term exam (30%)
- Final exam (30%)

Class Performance: Attendance is mandatory, with only University-approved excuses recognized as valid reasons for missing class. Students are expected to attend class, arrive on time, have read all assigned readings, and participate in class discussions. The substance and quality of your verbal (and where appropriate) contributions to seminar discussions will determine the extent to which your grade rises above that minimum.

Assignment: There will be one assignment on the topic 1 and one reading summary based on topic 3. Late submission will be accepted with a penalty of 5 point of the grade deduction for every hour.

Mid-term exam: The course has a midterm exam. Neither laptops nor mobiles are allowed on the exam. To prepare for these exams, students should review the key issues discussed in class, in the readings and in the handouts and etc.

Final exam: The course has a final exam. Neither laptops nor mobiles are allowed on the exam. To prepare for these exams, students should review the key issues discussed in class, in the readings and in the handouts and etc.

Classroom Behavior

Please avoid any and all acts that interfere with class discussion. This includes using your phone for any reason. Your phone should be silenced and put away for the duration of class (i.e. not visible at all). Systematic disruption of class will result in a failing grade.

Academic Integrity

Please adhere to Yale-NUS' [principles of academic integrity](#). The college has a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration. Any evidence of either action will be immediately referred to the Yale-NUS Committee on Integrity and Discipline. *If you are uncertain about whether or not to attribute an idea, just make the reference.* [The College library provides useful guidelines on avoiding plagiarism.](#)

If you have any questions about any aspect of doing honest academic work, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Course Outline:

Topic 1: Intro + why history matters: deep roots of development
Topic 2: The stagnation in the pre-modern world
Topic 3: Industrial Revolution
Topic 4: Great Divergence: why not Asia?
Topic 5: The historical roots of the poverty in Africa (slavery)
Topic 6: The long view on epidemics and disease

Topic 7: Scientific development Week 8: State and society (The Communist Experiment) Week 9: Historical persistence (culture and institution)

Tentative Reading List

Recommended Background Reading:

This module has no textbook. Many of the compulsory readings are articles published in academic journals. The works listed below expand on some of these topics as background readings.

S. Broadberry & K. O'Rourke, Eds. (2010), The Cambridge economic history of modern Europe, 2 volumes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Allen, Robert (2009). The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

G. Clark (2007), A farewell to alms: A brief economic history of the world, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pomeranz, Kenneth(2000). The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Weekly Readings:

All the compulsory readings will be available for download on the Canvas course page. There is no textbook required. For each topic (not each week), you are expected to read 2-4 readings. I will also provide some economic empirical papers as optional readings for students who already are familiar with statistics and econometrics (marked with *).

Introduction + Practical Econometrics

This lecture will summarize the topics that will be covered in the course and outline the course requirements.

- Nathan Nunn, [The Importance of History for Economic Development](#), Annual Review of Economics 1, Nr. 1 2009

The practical econometrics section of this lecture is a bit of a whirlwind tour, and the concepts are too important to let them just fly by. They sit at the core of all of the empirical work we will study. For those of you with limited background in statistics and econometrics, please go through some further readings to familiarize you with some of the tools. For those who are less familiar with econometrics or would like a refresher, in my opinion the three best introductory textbooks are:

- Joshua D. Angrist's (2015) [Mastering Matrics](#)
- Christopher Dougherty's (2007) [Introduction to Econometricis](#)
- I also find Peter Kennedy's (2008) [Guide to Econometrics](#) a great resource. It's not the best source for technical details but earns high marks for intuition.

The Great Malthusian Debate

This lecture will focus on the great Malthusian debate. What is the relationship between population size and living standard? What determined economic life before modernity? Why human society has been trapped in the low income level for so long? How and when did Europe escape Malthus?

- Gregory Clark, [A Farewell to Alms](#)
- Hans-Joachim Voth and Nico Voigtländer, “[The Three Horsemen of Growth: Plague, War and Urbanization in Early Modern Europe](#)”, RES, (2008)”
- Kung and Che, [Of Maize and Men: The Effect of a New World Crop on Population and Economic Growth in China](#), JEG, 21(1): 71-99 (MarCH 2016).
- Lee and Feng, [Malthusian Models and Chinese Realities: The Chinese Demographic System 1700](#), Population and Development Review,(Mar., 1999), pp. 33-65
- Review articles by McCloskey, Voth, Grantham, Persson, and response by Clark (2008), in: ‘[Symposium on Gregory Clark's A farewell to alms](#)’, European Review of Economic History 12(2), pp. 137-199.
- Clark & G. Hamilton (2006), ‘[Survival of the richest: The Malthusian mechanism in pre-industrial England](#)’, JEH 66(3), pp. 707-736

Globalization and the Rise of the West

This lecture will consider how globalization and international relations in history have impacted economic development and growth. This lecture examines different theories and evidence about the impacts of globalization and trade integration on economic development and inequality. ^LSEP

- Puga and Trefler ,[International Trade and Institutional Change: Medieval Venice's Response to Globalization](#), Quarterly Journal of Economics, 2014
- Nunn and Qian , [The Impact of Potatoes on Old World Population and Urbanization](#) , Quarterly journal of economics, 2011
- Berger D, Easterly W, Nunn N, Satyanath S. “[Commercial Imperialism? Political Influence and Trade During the Cold War.](#)” American Economic Review. (2013). 103(2). 863- 896.
- Shiue and Keller, [Markets in China and Europe on the Eve of the Industrial Revolution](#), American Economic Review, 2007
- Carol H. Shiue and Wolfgang Keller, [Markets in China and Europe on the Eve of the Industrial Revolution](#), American Economic Review 97, Nr. 4 September 2007

The Turning Point: Industrialization

The first nation that made the break from the pre-modern pattern of “rise and fall” was Britain, an event closely associated with the industrial revolution. The topic focuses on what happened and why Britain diverged from historical development paths. The political and institutional changes that happened in England in the 17th century were followed by the industrial revolution.

- Allen (2009), “[The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective](#)”, Cambridge University Press,
- Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) Chapter 7 “The Turning Point”.
- Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson and James A. Robinson (2005) “[Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change and Economic Growth,](#)” American Economic Review,
- Mokyr (1990) Chapter 5 “[The Years of Miracles](#)” and Chapter 10 “[The Industrial Revolution: Britain and Europe](#)”
- Crafts (1977), “[Why was England first?](#), Economic History Review 30(3), pp. 429-441.
- Allen (2011), ‘[Why the Industrial Revolution was British: Commerce, induced invention, and the scientific revolution](#)’, Economic History Review 64(2), pp. 357-384.
- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson, [The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth](#), American Economic Review 95, Nr. 3 June 2005
- Voth (2013), ‘[Gifts of Mars: Warfare and Europe’s early rise to riches](#)’, Journal of Economic Perspectives 27(4), pp. 165-186.
- Allen, [The High Wage Economy and the Industrial revolution: A Restatement](#), Economic History Review, 2015

- Allen et al, [Wages, Prices and Living Standards in China, 1738-1925: In Comparison, with Europe, Japan, and India](#) Economic History Review, 2011

Great Divergence

This lecture introduces the biggest debate in economic history: the great divergence. How, and when, did Europe diverge from China and Americas to become the world's leading region? This lecture will provide hard evidence to this debate, and summaries popular views on “the causes of the great divergence”.

- Allen et al, [The colonial origins of the divergence in the Americas: a labor market approach](#) , The Journal of Economic History, 2012
- Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) , Chapter 1 “[So Close and Yet so Different](#)”
- K. Pomeranz (2002), ‘[Political economy and ecology on the eve of industrialization: Europe, China, and the global conjuncture](#)’, American Historical Review 107(2), pp. 425-446.
- Allen, J.-P. Bassino, D. Ma, C. Moll-Murata & J. L. van Zanden (2011), ‘[Wages, prices, and living standards in China, 1738-1925: In comparison with Europe, Japan, and India](#)’, Economic History Review 64(S1), pp. 8-38.

7. Slavery and aftermath

Slavery and other coercive labor institution are common practice in history, and they present long-lasting negative impact on economic development. This lecture tries to understand the rise of slavery institution, in Africa in particular; and explore the economic consequence of such bad institution in Africa and also in US (the receipt county of slaves).

- Bateman, Fred and Thomas Weiss (1981) [A Deplorable Scarcity: The Failure of Industrialization in the Slave Economy](#), Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Chapter 1.
- N. Nunn, “[The Long Term Effects of Africa’s Slave Trades](#),” QJE 2008;
- N. Nunn, “[Slavery, Inequality and Economic Development in the Americas](#)”, Institutional Change and Development, 2008 •
- N. Nunn, L. Wantchekon, “[The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa](#)”, AER 2011;
- S. Naidu, N. Yuchtman, “[Coercive Contract Enforcement: Law and the Labor Market in 19th Century Industrial Britain](#),” AER 2013
- Card, D. and A. Krueger. “[School Quality and Black-White Relative Earnings: A Direct Assessment](#),” QJE 107 (Feb. 1992), pp. 151-200.

- Bertrand, M. and S. Mullainathan. “[Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment in Labor Market Discrimination](#),” AER 94 (Sept. 2004), pp. 991- 1013.
- Fogel, R. [Without Consent or Contract](#) (Norton, 1989), chaps. 1, 2, 3
- R. H. Steckel (1986), ‘[A peculiar population: The nutrition, health, and mortality of American slaves from childhood to maturity](#)’, Journal of Economic History 46(3), pp. 721-741.

Demographic transition and Health in history

This lecture will focus on the great demographic transition in history. Why do certain groups limit population growth by reducing fertility first after 19th century? What accounts for the extremely high initial fertility in the U.S., its long-run decline, and the “cycles” of the latter 20th century? What does gender play a role in the long-run demographic history? When did mortality and morbidity decrease? What have been the roles of personal nutrition, medical knowledge, environmental factors and public interventions?

- Lee, R. “[The Demographic Transition: Three Centuries of Fundamental Change](#),” JEP 17 (Aut. 2003), pp. 167-90.
- Roderick Floud, Robert W. Fogel, “[The Changing Body- Health, Nutrition, and Human Development in the Western World since 1700](#)”
- Guinnane, T. “[The Historical Fertility Transition: A Guide for Economists](#),” JEL 49 (2011), pp. 589-614.
- Murphy, K., C. Simon and R. Tamura. “[Fertility Decline, Baby Boom and Economic Growth](#).” MPRA Working Paper (March 2008).
- Alsan, M. and C. Goldin. “[Watersheds in Infant Mortality: The Role of Effective Water and Sewerage Infrastructure, 1880 to 1915](#).” NBER WP No. 21263, June 2015.
- Acemoglu, D. and S. Johnson. “[Disease and Development: The Effect of Life Expectancy on Economic Growth](#),” JPE 115 (Dec. 2007), pp. 925-85.
- Bleakley, Costa, D. “[Health and the Economy in the United States from 1750 to the Present](#).” JEL 2015, 53(3), pp. 503-70.

Technology and Growth

Technology and innovation has been believed the most important source for economic growth. In history, many important innovations boosted human societies to higher equilibrium. This lecture summaries recent empirical studies that provide sound evidence on how technology contribute to economic development in history.

Joel Mokyr, [A Culture of Growth](#) Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2016. Chapter 9, 16 & 17

Jeremiah Dittmar, 2011. “[Information Technology and Economic Change: The Impact of the Printing Press.](#)” QJE

Junichi Yamasaki ,2017, “[Railroads, Technology Adoption, and Modern Economic Development- Evidence from Japan](#)

Donaldson, Dave, and Richard Hornbeck. “[Railroads and American Economic Growth: A Market Access Approach.](#)”

Squicciarini and Voigtländer 2015, [Human Capital and Industrialization: Evidence from the Age of Enlightenment](#), QJE

Hornung 2014, [Immigration and the diffusion of technology: the Huguenot diaspora in Prussia](#), AER

Moser and Voena 2014, [Compulsory Licensing: Evidence from the Trading with the Enemy Act](#), ARE

The Growing Public

The “brawn” economy eventually became the “brain” or knowledge economy, and the returns to formal, general education increased relative to those for informal, specific training. The impact of these transitions on the world’s people has depended greatly on the role of the state. But what role has it had? When and why government began to provide education and other public infrastructure to the mass?

- Lindert, P, [Growing Public](#), chaps 5,6
- Goldin, C. and L. Katz. “[Mass Education and the State: The Role of State Compulsion in the High School Movement.](#)” In D. Costa and N. Lamoreaux, eds., *Understanding Long Run Economic Growth* (Chicago, 2011), pp. 275-311.
- Goldin, C. and L. Katz. RBET, [chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7](#)
- Becker, G. and K. Murphy. “[Family and the State](#),” JLE 31 (Apr. 1988), pp. 1-18.
- Hoxby, C. “[Are Efficiency and Equity in School Finance Substitutes or Complements?](#)” JEP 10 (Autumn 1996), 51-72.
- Cutler, D., A. Deaton and A. Lleras-Muney. “[The Determinants of Mortality](#),” JEP 20 (2006), pp. 97-120.

The rise of modern state

The role that the state should play in the economy changed dramatically in history. This lecture will focus on the rise of state capacity, modern welfare state and democracy in particular.

- Peer Vries, [Public Finance in China and Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century](#), Working Paper 167/12 LSE, August 2012
- Lindert, P, [Growing Public- Social Spending and Economic Growth since the 18th Century](#), OUP 2004; “Private Welfare and the Welfare State”, in *The Cambridge History of Capitalism*, Neal, J. Williamson, CUP 2014
- Noel D. Johnson and Mark Koyama, “[Tax Farming and the Origins of State Capacity in England and France](#),” *Exploration in Economic history* 2013
- Gelderblom & J. Jonker (2011), ‘[Public finance and economic growth: The case of Holland in the seventeenth century](#)’, *JEH*
- Lizzeri and N. Persico, “[Why Did the Elites Extend the Suffrage? Democracy and the Scope of Government, with an Application to Britain’s ‘Age of Reform’](#).” *QJE* 2004
- S. Engerman, K. Sokoloff, “[The Evolution of suffrage institutions in the New World](#)”, *JEH* 2005

History matters: the historical persistence

There is a growing body of empirical evidence that points toward the important long-term effects that historic events can have on economic development. The most recent studies have moved beyond testing whether history matters and attempt to identify exactly why history matters. The most commonly examined channels include institutions, culture, knowledge and technology, and movements between multiple equilibria.

Enrico Spolaore and Enrico Spolaore, “[How Deep Are the Roots of Economic Development?](#)” *Journal of Economic Literature* · May 2012

- Hans-Joachim Voth and Nico Voigtländer, “[Persecution Perpetuated: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Semitic Violence in Nazi Germany](#),” *QJE*, 2012
- Bleakley and Lin, [Portage and path dependence](#), *QJE*, 2012
- Alberto Alesina, Paola Giuliano and Nathan Nunn, “[On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough](#),” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* May 2013, pp. 469-530.
- Acemoglu D, Johnson S, Robinson JA, [The colonial origins of comparative development: an empirical investigation](#). *AER*. 2001.
- Banerjee A, Iyer L. 2005. [History, institutions and economic performance: the legacy of colonial land tenure systems in India](#). *Am. Econ. Rev.* 95:1190–213