PART II PAPER 20:
World population, development and environment since 1750: comparative history and policy

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Problems of population, development and the environment have been major preoccupations of governments and the humanities throughout the last two centuries. There is a wealth of historical research and knowledge available, yet these topics are often considered to be the exclusive province of the contemporary social sciences. Students taking this paper will be able to develop their historical and comparative understanding of these problems as a critical perspective on today’s urgent public policy issues.

Comparative study will focus on the modern history of four major contrasting regions, Britain, India, China, and South and East Africa. The selection comprises a set of countries whose economic and demographic fortunes have been closely linked with that of Britain’s and its empire throughout the modern era, but representing very different degrees and kinds of relationship. The principal comparative topics studied in these regions’ histories will be: famines, epidemics, endemic diseases, health and nutrition, welfare, social security, civil society and government, fertility, marriage and reproduction, migration, urbanisation and the environment as well as questions of how populations are constructed through state activities of census and registration.

The regions selected deliberately break with the conventional subject-area divisions of the Faculty, offering students the chance to engage in comparative studies, which are not available elsewhere in the Tripos. The paper will seek to relate the diverse population histories of all four areas studied across both their pre-industrial and post-industrial periods. It will also seek to examine the way in which the fates of these different countries’ populations and economies have been inter-linked both before and during the contemporary era of ‘globalisation’.

The course comprises a set of 24 lectures from an inter-Faculty team of experts in the history of each of the four regions, supplemented by comparative discussion classes and individual comparative essays, with supervisions given by Prof Simon Szreter (St John’s) and Dr Paul Warde (Pembroke). The first 2 lectures introduce students to the intellectual history of the field, focusing especially on the dominant models and policy debates from the mid-twentieth to the present day. There are 22 further lectures covering each of the 4 regions studied, addressing population and economic change, mortality, health and welfare, reproduction, marriage, sexuality and fertility, migration, urbanisation and the environment. Through classes and their supervised essays students will be encouraged to explore the comparative histories of these 4 regions and to reflect critically on the relationship between social science, policy and history. It is strongly recommended that all students taking this course undertake their comparative supervised essays in the Lent Term.

24 lectures, 3 Revision Classes, 5 Supervisions.

Cap: 14.