

EC120 The World Economy in Historical Perspective

Assignment 1 - Guidance

This assignment must be submitted **no later than 12:00 on Monday 12th December 2011** via the University's *Online Coursework Submission* facility. You are welcome to submit assignments before the deadline but those submitted later will normally attract a mark of **zero**. The submitted file should not be watermarked. No paper copy should be submitted.

Late assignments will not be accepted for assessment — no extensions will be granted. See the *Undergraduate Economics Handbook*: “Coursework: assignments, tests and term papers”.

You are responsible for complying with the *Undergraduate Economics Handbook*: “A Guide to Good Practice in Assessed Work”.

You are strongly advised to read and follow the guidance in the *Undergraduate Economics Handbook*: “Making the best of your essays, term papers and projects”.

EC120-4-FY: If you are a **first year** student answer ONE of the following questions in an essay of at most 3,000 words.

1. Identify the ways in which demographic forces both influenced, and were influenced by, economic conditions in pre-industrial societies. Illustrate your answer with reference to Europe in the three centuries before 1800.

Guidance:

References: items on the reading list for weeks 2 and 7. (Some of these make detailed evaluations of the Malthusian model – use your discretion about how much attention you give these: recommended but not obligatory.)

‘Demographic forces’ can be understood as those factors that affect the level (and hence rate of growth of) population: fertility, mortality, migration.

Notice that the question asks for both the effect of demographic forces on economic conditions and the effect of economic conditions on demographic forces. These are what your research should explore.

You may structure your essay how you wish but be sure to provide examples from Europe to illustrate the main forces: probably you will give most emphasis to Britain but other parts of Europe may be considered too. It would also be permissible to mention Asia – *briefly* – as a way to highlight the European experience.

While a formal statement of the Malthusian model is not required, there is nothing to stop you from discussing it in as much detail as you wish, so long as you are careful to use the model in your answer (not just append it as an extra).

2. Assess the extent to which China enjoyed a technological lead over Europe by the late 15th century. Why does China appear to have lost its lead by the late 18th century?

Guidance:

References: see the readings for weeks 3 and 6. If you wish to delve further, try Mokyr, J. *The Lever of Riches: Technological Creativity and Economic Progress*, especially chapters 4, 7, 9 – Mokyr's book is strictly optional.

Note that this question has two parts: devote the bulk of your essay (say, two thirds) to the *second* part, i.e. changes over the three centuries to c1800.

When organising your answer reflect on what may determine technical advance, emphasising economic aspects where possible. For example: "path dependence" (the advantages of earlier technological advance); motives and incentives (who gains from an invention?); relative input costs; military imperatives (and the capacity to raise the necessary revenue); population density; literacy; commercial contacts with the outside world (for the exchange of ideas). Note the role of society's institutions and customs – "ways of doing things" – in these factors. Try to integrate these principles with evidence (albeit limited) from China and Europe.

EC120-5-FY: If you are a **second year** student answer ONE of the following questions in an essay of at most 3,000 words.

1. Explain, and critically assess, the Malthusian model of population in the context of its application to demographic change in pre-industrial economies. Illustrate your answer with reference to Europe in the three centuries before 1800.

Guidance:

References: items on the reading list for weeks 2 and 7. Your attention is drawn particularly to Clark's statement, and defence, of the Malthusian model, together with the criticisms of R. C. Allen and in the August 2008 issue of the *European Review of Economic History*. These are not essential reading but if you are aiming for a high mark, they could help a lot.

See guidance for EC120-4-FY. Second year students would normally present a more formal statement of the Malthusian model: not essential but recommended.

2. Assess the extent to which China enjoyed a technological lead over Europe by the late 15th century. Use economic principles to analyse why China appears to have lost its lead, compared with Europe by the late 18th century.

Guidance:

See guidance for EC120-4-FY. Second year essays would express the underlying forces for change or stagnation using economic concepts in a more explicit way – mostly microeconomic principles (e.g. involving 'economic rents' generated by invention).
