

Call for Papers
to Session 79
on the XVth World Economic History Congress, Stellenbosch, 9-13 July, 2012:

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORICAL COMPARISONS OF LEVELS OF WELFARE AND PRODUCTIVITY

Ever since the days of Samuel Pepys, Sir William Petty, and Gregory King the study of international comparisons of living standards and economic performance across nations has been a serious research activity. In our days understanding of historical comparisons of levels of welfare and productivity is based on the extensive work of scholars like Angus Maddison.

This session aims to quantify and explain comparative levels of income and productivity for major economies until the early 20th century. The comparative analysis of economic performance of nations for the pre-1950 period is either based on direct comparisons of physical units of product or on backward projections of national series of product and income from a recent benchmark. Both kinds of studies, however, suffer from major shortcomings. Direct physical comparisons usually cover only a part of the economy and are therefore not always representative. Backward projections, on the other hand, hide much of the detail that is needed to disentangle the forces that can explain why some countries become rich and others stay poor. Second, the further one moves away from the benchmark year, the less representative is the basket of goods on which the original comparison was based. This has prompted economic historians to construct new, more detailed, comparisons of welfare and productivity for earlier periods. Lately, new methodologies have been presented using historical price information and they suggest more precision over methods that are based on the measurement of physical quantities of output only.

The explorations in this session will center on such issues as the decomposition of relative income gaps into their components, structural differences, and relative prices of factor inputs, commodities and services for various comparison years across economies worldwide. The new findings will supplement, and, in some cases may even challenge the work of Maddison, who's *Historical Statistics* are currently the main source of long-run economic development of the world economy.

The session encourages authors to make further progress in this area of research, also in terms of methodological innovations. We welcome proposals and hope to present 6-8 relevant papers. A preconference will be held in Tokyo, May 2012, for selected papers, and limited financial support will be available for authors.

Organizers: Harry X. Wu (Hitotsubashi University), Herman J. de Jong (Groningen University), Kyoji Fukao (Hitotsubashi University)

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