1 Course Details

Academic units: 3
Meeting time: Thursdays, 9:30am–12:30pm
Venue: LHS-TR+110
Instructor: Dr Lin Qi Feng
Email: qflin@ntu.edu.sg
Office hours: by appointment

2 Course Description

In this class, students will encounter the field of world environmental history through a variety of theoretical and methodological frameworks. We will begin by examining “Big History,” which contextualizes the human past within broader biological, geological, and even astronomical processes. We will then contemplate how the exchange of pathogens has connected human populations and shaped world history through plagues and epidemics. Next, we will examine the role of the environment in European colonization of America and Australasia, a theme environmental historians have dubbed “Ecological Imperialism.” We will subsequently draw on world systems analysis and dependency theory to explore how the spread of capitalism has transformed societies and environments the world over. We will conclude with a discussion of the theories of space and place that underlie our understandings of the globe and its human history.

3 Learning Objectives

1. Learn the extent to which the environment has shaped human history and vice versa.
2. Contextualize historical human interactions with the environment within broader global processes.
3. Ponder the spatial models we use to make sense of human and natural geography.
4. Develop a more nuanced understanding of the division between nature and artifice.

4 Course Components

1. Active Participation (10%) Classes will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. The students are required to attend each class session and are
responsible for taking notes on the lecture. The students are expected to come to class having done the readings for the day and ready to participate.

2. Leading Discussion (10%). This assessment gives students the opportunity to lead the class in a discussion of a specific reading. Students will be able to direct the discussion by providing specific questions for the lecturer and fellow students, and giving their insights into the reading.

3. Presentation (20%) The presentation assessment component is designed to teach students the skill of synthesizing academic ideas and presenting them in a cogent manner. Students are assessed based on their research into the topic, their organization of ideas, and the clarity of their presentation. A type-written outline and a PowerPoint presentation is compulsory for the presentation.

4. Response to Movies/Documentaries (20%): The class will include 3 viewing sessions of three historical movies/documentaries. The students are required to write two short essays to relate the movies/documentaries to at least one piece of the readings assigned in class.

5. Final Research Paper (40%) The final research paper assessment is based on research into the topic of their choice which may overlap with the presentation topic. Students will craft a research question centred on their topic, conduct research and present their arguments concerning key aspects of world environmental history.

5 Required Texts


6 Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (Jan 9): Introduction


**Week 2 (Jan 19): Western Attitudes Towards Nature**


**Week 3 (Jan 26): Big History and the Anthropocene, and How to Do Environmental History**


Cronon, William. “Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others.” http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/.


**Week 4 (Feb 2): Ecological Imperialism**

**Week 5 (Feb 9):**
McNeill, Something New Under the Sun (selection)

**Week 6 (Feb 16): Agriculture**
McNeill, Something New Under the Sun (selection)

Film: Black Gold

**Week 7 (Feb 23): Cities**
McNeill, Something New Under the Sun, chapter 3, 9

March 2 RECESS WEEK

**Week 8 (March 9): Climate and Air**
McNeill, Something New Under the Sun (selection)


**Week 9 (March 16): The Roots of Environmentalism**
Guha, Environmentalism, Part 1


**Week 10 (March 23): Environmentalism**
Guha, Environmentalism, Part 2

McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, chapter 11

**Week 11 (March 30): China I**


Grumbine, pp.3–82.

**Week 12 (April 6): China II**

Grumbine, pp.83–159.

Film: Manufactured Landscapes

**Week 13 (April 13): Environmental futures**
