Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

ECU44131 — The World Economy

Module Information	
Module Code	ECU44131
Module Title	The World Economy
Department	Economics
Year Group	Senior Sophister
Module Personnel	Ronan Lyons
Academic Year	2026–27
Credit Weighting	10 credits
Semester	Semester 1
Contact Hours	One two-hour lecture per week; flipped classroom (videos to watch before class)

Module Content	
Module Description	This module examines the historical development of the global economy over the very long run, from the earliest civilisations to the present day. Its central concern is twofold: the recurring rhythm of integration and disintegration; and the alternation between two great channels – overland across Eurasia and maritime across the oceans. It traces the goods, peoples and money that moved across the world as a result: cotton and spices west, silver east, and people in every direction. To make sense of so vast a story, the module views it from a single vantage point: the Indian Ocean. For most of history, this has been the world's most important long-distance trading arena, bound together by the predictable rhythm of the monsoon. With the centre of economic gravity in Asia for the great majority of recorded history, the era of European dominance appears as a remarkable but relatively brief interlude, and the resurgence of Asia in the late twentieth century looks less like a novelty than a return to a long-standing pattern.

Module Content	
Module Learning Aims	The aim of this module is to describe the historical development of the world economy from the fourth millennium BCE to the present day. It will examine the major phases in that development – in particular its recurring waves of integration and disintegration – and the role played by underlying factors such as climate, geography, disease and technology. The module will give students a sense of the long-run movement of the world's economic centre of gravity, and of the alternation between the overland and maritime channels along which goods, peoples and money have moved. To hold so broad a story together, the module views it throughout from a single vantage point, the Indian Ocean, and compares the world economy's major episodes as seen from there. No prior knowledge of econometrics is required for this module but a willingness to learn how to read, understand and critique academic papers is. As with any module of this scope, success also depends on a willingness to read voraciously.
Learning Outcomes	Upon successful completion, students will be able to: • Outline the major phases in the development of the world economy from earliest times to the present day, and trace the long-run movement of its economic centre of gravity. • Explain the role of underlying factors such as climate, geography, disease and technology, and the role of the alternation between overland and maritime channels of exchange, in the integration and disintegration of the world economy. • Explain the causes and consequences of the flows of peoples, goods, money and ideas across successive episodes of the world economy, including recurring patterns such as the long-run flow of silver toward Asia. • Compare key features of different episodes of the world economy – including the Roman–Han, Abbasid–Tang, Mongol and European-led episodes – and assess competing explanations of major transitions such as the Great Divergence. • Critically read and synthesise relevant academic scholarship, and construct clear, evidence-based written arguments about the development of the world economy.
Indicative Reading / Resources	The module is supported by a free, online open-access textbook written specifically for it and published on the web

Module Content	
	with a downloadable PDF: Ronan Lyons, *The World Economy over the Very Long Run: A History in Data and Debates*. Organised around the same ten topics and the module's four-questions framework, and built around reproducible data exercises, it is the main reading for the module; the link will be circulated at the start of term and posted on the module's Blackboard page. The works listed below are key supplementary texts, and each topic points to further, more specialised reading. For the post-1000 CE world economy, the best single overview remains Findlay and O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton, 2007); for the deeper past and for the overland–maritime framing, Barry Cunliffe, *By Steppe, Desert, and Ocean: The Birth of Eurasia* (Oxford, 2015). For the Indian Ocean spine of the module, the key overview is K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge, 1985), with a partner for advanced reading: *Asia Before Europe* (Cambridge, 1990). Useful entry points are Edward Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Oxford, 2014) and Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (Routledge, 2003). Each topic will bring further and more specialised reading; examples include: • *Deep origins and the channels of exchange*: David Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*; James C. Scott, *Against the Grain*; and Eric Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*. • *The medieval world system*: Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*, and Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (for the later period). • *The Great Divergence debate*: Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*; Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*; and Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. • *Signature goods and money*: Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, and Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World*, for the cotton story; Richard von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune*, for silver and money in China.

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	• *Regional deep-dives*: Tirthankar Roy, *India in the World Economy: From Antiquity to the Present*; Richard von Glahn, *The Economic History of China*; and Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells* (West Africa).

Assessment	
Assessment Components	Group project ("Claim on Trial"): 35% Written exam (invigilated): 65%
Assessment Details	**Group project – "Claim on Trial" (35%, during term).** Working in groups of three, students each prompt an AI model to answer an assigned cross-cutting question, then together put its most important (empirical) claim "on trial" against a real dataset and return a reasoned verdict on what the evidence actually allows. This is an AI-open exercise: AI use is permitted and expected – your assessment of the AI's answer is the object of study – and full AI transcripts and data provenance must be submitted. It is designed to assess the judgment that AI cannot reliably supply, and is marked on evaluation, data and source handling, and use of the module's framework. **Written exam (65%, end of semester, invigilated).** Students answer a set number of cross-cutting questions drawn from a pool published in advance. Each question deliberately spans several topics and rewards synthesis and argument across the whole module rather than recall. Full briefs for both components, the published question pool, and the group sign-up and submission dates will be provided at the start of the module.

Additional Information	
Prerequisites	ECU22011/ECU22012 Intermediate Economics, or equivalent.
Co-requisites	None
Any other information	2026/27 notes: This module is very different, in assessment pattern and content, to previous years. The 5-ECTS version is no longer being offered.