Statistical Methods for Cross-National Research

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This is an advanced seminar devoted to conceptual, statistical, and practical problems entailed in identifying causes in history. A "seminar" is a forum for a collaborative exploration of ideas, and this is what this seminar will be. While the final question is "how to?" which is to say methodological, we will spend at least one half of the course studying explanations of development and underdevelopment of particular countries or regions. Only then will we delve into analytical issues: concepts of causation, problems generated by endogeneity, and finally assumptions required to identify causes. The entire course is just a fishing expedition, which may end up without providing answers. Hence, the course will probably contribute little to further your academic career, which is more safely pursued by using the same methods everyone else does.

Note that we will run into some subtle mathematical and statistical issues. Hence, you will need some statistical background (at the level of Quant II) and some understanding of dynamic difference and differential equations.

Class meetings will combine lectures, student presentations, and discussions. A final paper will be the main basis for grading. The pace of the course will depend on student progress.

If possible, read in the order indicated.

Note: The course will meet twice a week during the first seven weeks of the semester, so that students will have the remainder of the period to write papers. The first class meeting will be on Wednesday, January 18.
1. Introduction


2. The "Mechanics" of Development

The Lucas model as a benchmark. Is this all we can say about international differences of development? Determinism, contingency, probability, and indeterminacy.

Read:

3. "Geography" vs. Institutions: Reversals?

Does "reversal" constitute sufficient evidence for the irrelevance of "geography"? Endogeneity. Were fortunes reversed? Initial conditions, constant conditions, transitory conditions, crucial events.

Read:

4. Why England and not China?

Why did England take off in the 18th century and China did not until recently? Why did the industrial revolution occur in England and not on the Continent? How to identify causes?

Read:

5-6. Why did X "fall behind"?

Is this a right question? What should be the norm? Are causes idiosyncratic to countries or regions?
Read:


7. Back to a General Framework

Patterns of development. Turning points. Growth regimes. Are institutions the cause?

Read:


8. Historical Explanations


Read:


9. Causal Mechanisms

Read:

10. Causality and Counterfactuals

Read:

11. Which Counterfactuals?

Read:

12. Endogeneity and Causality
Hierarchy of causes. Causal primacy. Conditions and actions. Historical trajectories. What if everything is endogenous?

Read:

Skim:

13. Overview
How to evaluate causal explanations? Statistical approaches. "Natural experiments." Analytical narratives. Should we accept idiosyncratic explanations?

Read: