

4.4 Patricia Clavin and Sunil Amrith – Feeding the World: connecting Europe and Asia, 1930–1945 Room 203

Chair: Margreet van der Burg

In the first half of the twentieth century, economic and social theory was critical to the development of international and trans-national relations. But this economic and social focus was subsequently lost in the search for the origins of world wars and the cold war. The paper seeks to recover these lost connections between the ideas and practice of economic and social development, and the actors who sought to enshrine their ideas into a new architecture of international relations in 1945. Through the biography of a pioneering League of Nations agency in the history of international nutrition, health and economic development, *The Mixed Committee on the Problem of Nutrition* appointed in 1935 and the subsequent 1937 conference on Rural Hygiene Southeast Asia and the 1939 conference on European Rural Life, the paper will explore the personalities and networks which were, in many respects, institutionalised in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Health Organisation and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development during and after the Second World War. It will demonstrate the imbricated history of economic, health and environmental history in Europe and Asia. Commodity biographies will also feature as these trans-national networks, and the international institutions of which they formed at least a part, codified and promoted the production of particular varieties of rice and dairy production for the good of local economy, health and the environment. The paper will explore the origins and implications of this global vision for these regions, for the connections between them, and for the meanings attached to a ‘healthy environment’ in the twentieth century.

The paper is motivated by two broader considerations. First, to restore ‘rural life’ to our discussions of trans-national history, which have hitherto focused on cosmopolitan cities and urban elites. Secondly, we hope to suggest ways of building out, from a microscopic study of particular connections and encounters in the 1930s, towards new ways of thinking about global environmental history in the ‘long’ twentieth century, linking European and Asian experiences.

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