A World History Lexicon

**Diffusion**: the spread of ideas, languages and technologies from one area to another. Trade and human migration often lead to diffusion. The spread of Islam to South Asia or Buddhism to East Asia are examples of diffusion.

**Syncretism**: the blending of two practices, beliefs or ideas in a human society to form a new practice, belief or idea. In terms of religion, Santeria, Vodun, Sikhism and the Catholicism practiced in Latin America are examples of syncretism; in terms of language, Swahili and Urdu are examples of syncretism.

**Imperialism**: The policy of extending a state’s authority through conquest (territorial acquisition) or by the establishment of economic and political control over an area. The spread of the Russian Empire into Central Asia and the spread of the British Empire into South Asia are examples of imperialism.

**Empire**: A large state ruled by a centralized authority. An Empire expands through conquest; it establishes and maintains control with bureaucracies, infrastructure investments, military power, the support of ideological traditions, and the encouragement of trade. After reaching a maximum level of power and territorial acquisition an empire often enters a period of decline leading to a fall. Two general types of empires exist, land and maritime (maritime empire means empires with overseas colonies). Remember the ideas of conquest, control and collapse.

**Core Area**: areas of empires close to the centers of economic and political power.

**Periphery**: areas where empires expand their power—away from the core.

**Bureaucracy**: a group of literate government workers who maintain state control. Bureaucrats often form an elite group within an empire. Confucian bureaucrats formed an elite in Chinese dynasties.

**Infrastructure**: the physical and organizational structures needed for the operation of a society, or the services and facilities necessary for an economy to function. The building of roads in the Roman and Mauryan Empires are examples of infrastructure. The completion of the Grand Canal in the Sui dynasty is another example.

**State-building**: the various activities states engage in to centralize, expand and maintain power. Bureaucratic and military organization, infrastructure development, ideological support, conquest (imperialism) and trade support are examples of state-building activities.

**State**: a geographical area under the political control of an organized structure.

**City-State**: Urban areas that controlled surrounding agricultural regions. City-states are of limited size. In some cases they form alliances with other city-states. Ancient Greece (700 BCE to 300 BCE) and Mayan Civilization (300 CE to 1000 CE) are examples of places and times where city states thrived. Singapore is a contemporary example of a city-state.

**Stateless societies**: term relating to societies like those in sub-Saharan Africa before and after the Bantu migrations that featured decentralized rule through family and kinship groups instead of centralized hierarchies.

**Agricultural societies**: societies that produce food mostly from farming.

**Pastoral societies**: societies that produce food mostly by tending and herding animals (nomadic peoples tend to be pastoralists).

**Nomadic**: societies without a fixed, settled home. Pastoral societies are often nomadic. Mongol society was (in some cases is) both a nomadic and a pastoral society.

**Theater State**: organized practices and rituals developed in states in order to justify and reinforce the power and prestige of the state. Gupta imperial processions, Chinese imperial rituals, Roman Triumphs and the Aztec practice of human sacrifice are all examples of theater state activities.

**Feudalism**: a political system based on relationships. In a feudal political structure power is decentralized and based on land ownership.

**Manorialism**: in many feudal systems the manor is the economic unit, a largely self-sufficient area of land owned by a feudal lord and worked by feudal peasants.

**Law codes**: written legal procedures and practices developed in states to publicize and normalize positive behavior and highlight punishments for anti-social, illegal behaviors. The Code of Hammurabi, Roman legal codes and Justinian's Code are examples of law codes.
Monarchy: a state structure with a monarch serving as the head of state. Monarchs are most often hereditary rulers.

Succession: the process of determining the next monarch or emperor, some empires follow simple rules of succession (the oldest male relative) others follow more complicated forms (election by a group of elites).

Authoritarian: a state with strict and oppressive policies towards subjects. The Russian empire was authoritarian.

Revolutionary: an idea or a person that demands immediate and dramatic change in a society.

Reactionary: an idea or a person that opposes any change or reform in a society, or someone who wants to change the society by re-embracing a tradition. Neo-Confucianism has some reactionary components.

Cultural Hearth: the place an idea or piece of technology develops first. For example South Asia is the cultural hearth of Hinduism, and China is the cultural hearth of printing, the compass and gun powder technology.

Religious Tradition: a belief system concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe; a religious tradition gives agency to supernatural powers.

Ideological Tradition: a belief system without a supernatural component. Confucianism is a major ideological tradition.

Zoroastrianism: developed in the Persian Empire, Islam superseded Zoroastrianism after 700 CE. Small communities of Zoroastrian believers exist today in Iran and India.

Hinduism: developed in South Asia, Hinduism remains the majority religion in India today.

Buddhism: developed in South Asia, Buddhism is the majority religion in countries in both East Asia and Southeast Asia today.

Islam: developed in Arabia at the turn of the 7th Century C.E., Islam is the majority religion in areas of West Africa, North Africa, East Africa, The Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia today (if we consider Albania, Islam is the majority religion in an Eastern European area as well).

Christianity: developed in the Middle East in the First Century C.E., Christianity is the majority religion in areas of North America, South America, Southern Africa, East Africa (Ethiopia), Western Europe, Eastern Europe and The Middle East (Armenia), Southeast Asia (Philippines), and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand).

Confucianism: an ideological tradition with a big influence in China. Confucian ideas diffused to Japan, Korea and Vietnam as well.

Animism: a type of religious belief in which believers contend that both animate and inanimate objects possess spirits. In Animistic beliefs a Shaman is someone able to communicate with spirits.

Secular: non-religious or relating to the physical world

Hellenism/Hellenistic: the term given to areas that adopted Greek cultural practices after the period of Greek migration and the conquests of Alexander the Great. Hellenic traditions spread from Western Europe to South Asia.

Social Hierarchy: the arrangement of individuals into divisions in a society. Wealth, kinship group or warrior prowess often determines social position: in Confucian society Bureaucrats held elite positions; in Aztec society warriors.

Gender: The social constructions of sex roles, in patriarchal societies women have little economic, political or social power. Today we live in a society professing the value of gender equality, meaning men and women both have access to economic, political and social power.

Patriarchy: the practice of males monopolizing political, economic, and social power. Patriarchy was a norm for settled societies until the late twentieth century. Many religious and ideological traditions reinforced patriarchal values.

Elites: the group in a society who hold political, economic and social power.

Peasants: a farmer of low social status who rents or owns a piece of land (usually small).

Aristocracy/Nobility: a hereditary group that dominates political power in agrarian societies largely because they own the land.

Proletariat: people of low social and economic status who live in cities.
Urbanization: the creation and growth of cities. In our course urbanization is the major continuity. Cities are centers of political, economic, and religious power.

Matrilineal or Patrilineal Kinship groupings: the practice of married males and females joining either the male’s family/kinship group (patrilineal) or the female’s kinship group (matrilineal).

Clan groups: a feature of many societies (Mongols, Athenians, and the Scottish come to mind) wherein a number of kinship groups form a bond. Usually the clan has a leader, often someone who is elite because of wealth or military prowess.

Caste/Caste system: a rigid category within a social hierarchy. In caste based societies individuals cannot move among the castes.

Diaspora: a group migration away from a country or region, often done to flee social instability or poor treatment, examples include the Jewish diaspora after the Babylonian conquest of Judea in 586 BCE or the African diaspora after the instability of both the colonial and post-colonial societies (occurred during much of the twentieth century).

Migration: The movement of peoples from one area to another. Migrations spark the diffusions of languages, cultural practices, and technology. Among the migrations we need to know are the Bantu, Polynesian, Turkic, Aztec, Viking, and the early human migrations that put human communities on every continent barring Antarctica.

Regional trade: trade taking place within a single region, for instance trade within China or Western Europe.

Inter-regional trade: trade taking place across regions (sometimes also called long distance trade), Silk Route, trans-Saharan, and Indian Ocean trade are examples of inter-regional trade.

Entrepot/Trade entrepot: a trade cite dedicated to the exchange of goods (in other words the import and export of goods) more than the production of goods. Malaka, Samarkand, and Goa (Malabar Coast) are examples of trade entrepots. [Silent t in entrepot]

Luxury Goods: Goods produced and traded in societies for consumption by elites. Silks, gems, gold, and jade have been major luxury trade goods.

Commodities: A raw material or primary agricultural product. Cotton, coal, copper, gold, coffee and whale oil have all been important commodities.

Bullion and specie: Bullion is raw gold or silver and specie is a term designating gold or silver coins.

Coercive Labor: The labor system in which a laborer cannot freely leave the job and/or a system in which the laborer receives no compensation. Enslavement, serfdom and mit’a are examples of coercive labor.

Slavery: a form of coercive labor wherein the laborer cannot leave the job nor is the laborer compensated for work. In a chattel slave system humans become commodities who are openly bought and sold. Enslaved people have no recourse for inhuman, cruel treatment.

Serf: an agricultural worker controlled by a landowner. Much like a feudal peasant, however landowners in some instances can sell serfs. We identify serfdom with the social system that develops in the Russian Empire.

Technology: The application of knowledge for practical purposes. Writing, windmills, irrigation machines, pottery, sailboats, the steam engine, guns, airplanes and the computer are examples of technology. Technology is a major catalyst for historical change.

Irrigation: using Rivers, lakes, aquifers, wells or streams to water plants. Irrigation makes the water supply predictable and leads to increased food supplies in many societies. Don’t forget the Qanat.

Maritime: related to the seas and oceans, maritime trade crosses oceans and seas, maritime empire means seas or oceans separate the core of the empire from the colonial possessions or the periphery.

Raw materials/manufactured goods: raw materials are unprocessed, for instance agricultural products or things people mine. People process manufactured goods in some way, for instance textiles, jewelry, tools or weapons.

Metallurgy: the ability to isolate metals from ores and use the metals for practical purposes, in other words technology relating to the use of metals.