

# Methods in Historical Research and Exposition:

*A Process-Based Approach to World History*



## *LECTURE II: Systems History*

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September 30, 2009  
Peking University

# Office Hours

Saturday, 9:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. in history department  
first-floor lounge

Come to talk about:

History.

*good books.*

research

studying abroad.

ENGLISH.

*foreign  
languages.*

**job applications.**

life, the universe, and everything



# Response I

- Meaningful and creative title
- Typical header format
- Do not exceed word limit!
- Should have footnotes + bibliography
- The more creative your thesis, the better

# Presentations

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## Presentation Requirements

Content	Response Paper
Style	Research symposium
Length (PPT)	5-15 slides
Length (time)	10-15 minutes
Words	FEW
Media	MANY
Questions for audience?	Yes!
Questions from audience?	Yes!

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# Presentations

Date	Lesson	Topic	Name 1
9/30/2009	I	Dealing with Doubt: The linguistic history of modern English	
10/14/2009	II	Systems History: The asymmetrical rise of civilization	张婧 Zhang Jing
10/21/2009	III	Identifying Bias: Collapse of the Han dynasty	吴爽 Wu Shuang
10/28/2009	IV	Interpreting Imperfect Information: Cortés and the Aztecs	李梦同 Li Mengtong
11/4/2009	V	Might Makes Right: Commoners in the European Renaissance	陈骁 Chen Xiao
11/18/2009	VI	The Nation-State Bias: Pre-Colonization Pacifica	
11/25/2009	VII	No Man Is An Island: The Napoleonic Empire	盛婧婧 Sheng Jiaojiao
12/2/2009	VIII	The Winner's Bias: The American Civil War	许翔云 Xu Xiangyun
12/9/2009	IX	Remember the Ladies: Women in and on the Russian revolution	杞支雅男 Qizhiyanan
12/16/2009	X	Media as Historical Metric: Art in postwar Japan	郭若璐 Guo Ruolu
12/23/2009	XI	Event Orientation: Social changes in modern India	车璐璐 Che Lulu
12/30/2009	XII	Applying History: 20th-century economic collapses and the modern financial crisis	许翔云 Xu Xiangyun





## Vocabulary Quiz!

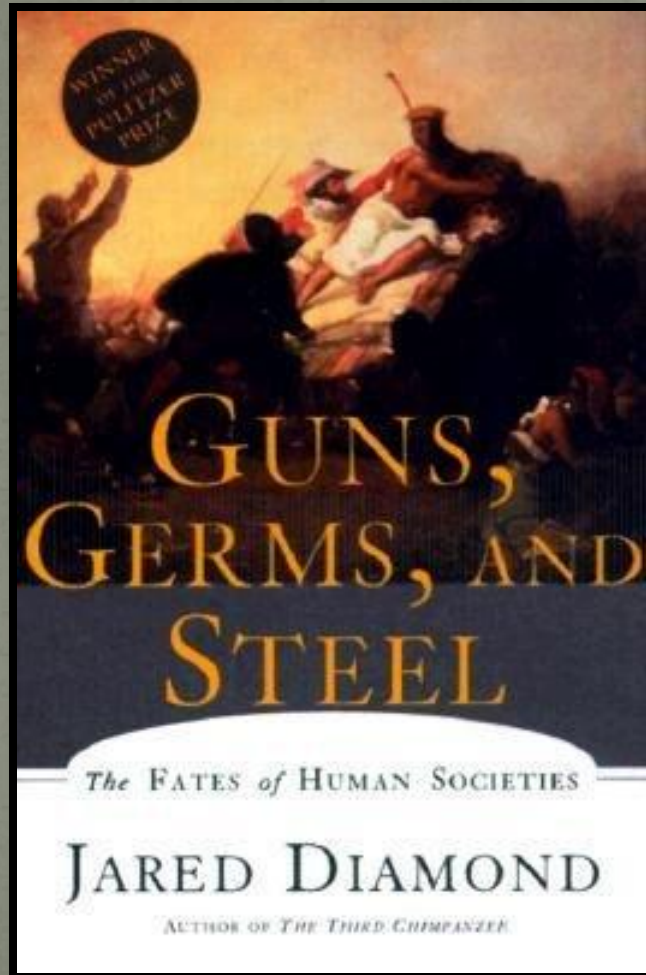
1. Please write the words that I say on a sheet of paper.
2. I will then give you 10 minutes to write their definitions. Time is short, so be concise!

# Process Objective

*Avoid tunnel vision within your theses, your topics, your fields, your research, and your lives.*



# Guns, Germs, and Steel



**Simple and presumably *incorrect* argument:** Different societies have advanced at different rates because of genetic differences among the world's peoples.

**Complex and presumably *correct* argument:** Different societies have advanced at different rates because of complex interactions among geography, climate, and biodiversity, which determine different rates of agricultural development, cross-cultural communication, and ultimately technological advancement.



# Plant Domestication

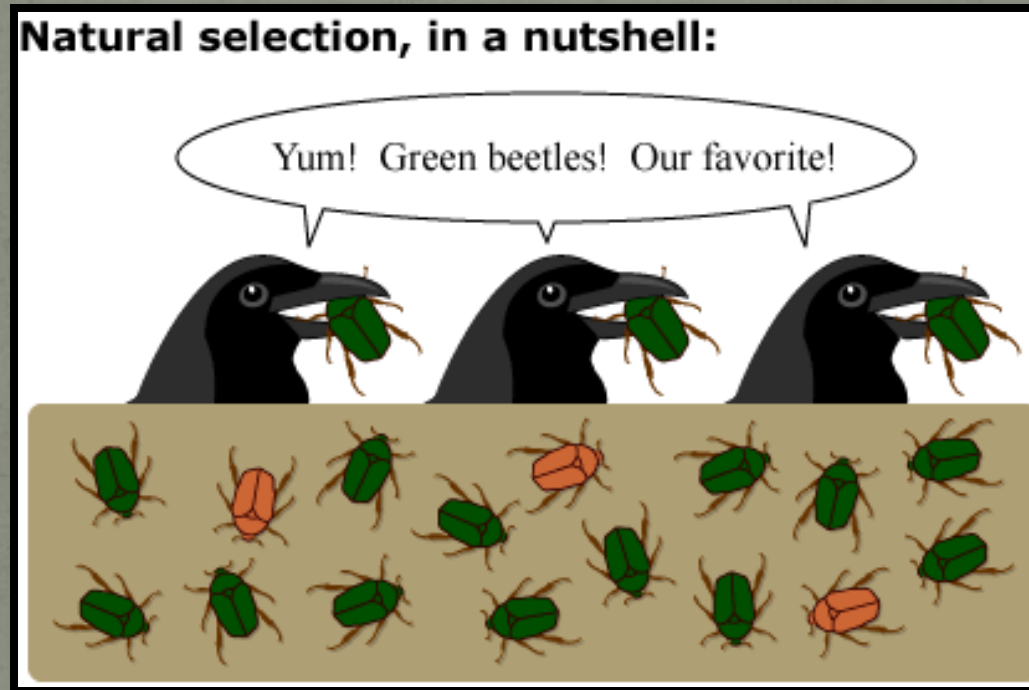
How did humans domesticate the first crops more than 10,000 years ago?



Not through conscious experimentation or even ingenuity

# Plant Domestication

How did humans domesticate the first crops more than 10,000 years ago?



By imposing a selection pressure, just as any animal would.



# Plant Domestication

Hypothesis: The first human “farms”  
were in latrines and spittoons.



# Take-Home Lesson I

**Humans are part of a larger historical system  
rather than always omnipotent actors .**



# Plant Domestication

Agriculture sprang up quickly in Fertile Crescent (by 6000 B.C.) but slowly in Mesoamerica (by 3500 B.C.) and never in Europe, Africa, or Australia

# Plant Domestication

Why did southern but not northern Africa fail to domesticate sorghum?





# Plant Domestication

Why did Europe but not Mesopotamia fail to domesticate wheat?



Ecology

Apples?

Indians?



Ecology

Apples?

Indians?

# Ecology

Domestication = Lifestyle shift

*People won't change if:*

Yields from  
hunting and  
gathering



Yields from  
farming



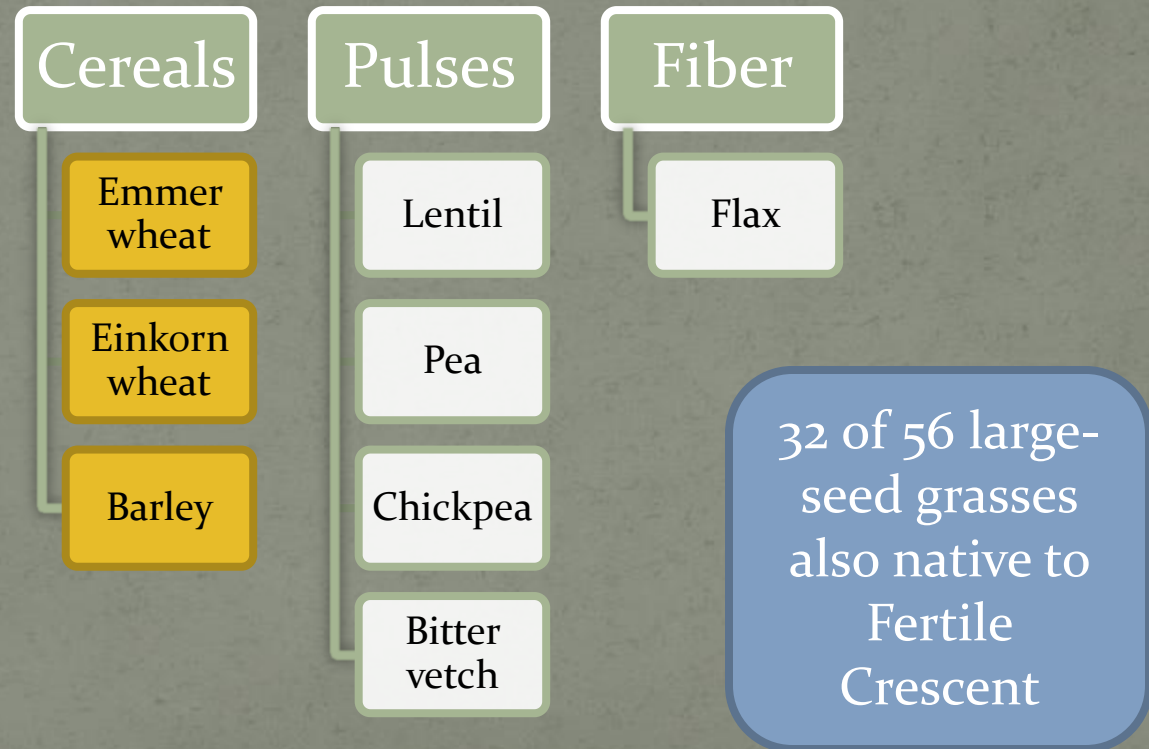
# Ecology: The Odds are Stacked Against Us

Only 12 crops  
represent 80%  
of all  
agricultural  
production  
today

Wheat  
Corn  
Rice  
Barley  
Manioc  
Sorghum  
Soybean  
Potato  
Sweet potato  
Sugarcane  
Sugar beet  
Banana



Ecology: High variety of domesticateable species  
2 of these (wheat, barley) natively inhabit the Fertile Crescent.





Ecology: High variety of domestictable species

Why? (5 factors)

Ecology: High variety of domestictable species

Mediterranean climate



Ecology: High variety of domestictable species

## Greatest climatic variation

Between seasons

Between years

Ecology: High variety of domesticable species

Altitude variation



Ecology: High variety of domesticatable species

4 important domesticatable animals native to Fertile Crescent  
(goat, sheep, pig, cow)

vs.

2 in Mesoamerica  
(turkey, dog)

Ecology: High variety of domesticable species

Poorer prospects for hunter-gatherers?

# Take-Home Message II

Always look at the factors of the whole system together (it's not the apples *or* the Indians, but the whole spread of plants available)



# Geography



**American major axis north-south; Eurasian east-west**

# Geography

Similar climatic conditions across latitude =  
Easy transfer of crops and animals

Different climatic conditions across longitude=  
Difficult transfer of crops and animals

# Geography

Example: Fertile Crescent cereals found in both Europe and Japan by 1 C.E. (about 6000 years after production)

But llamas domesticated in the Andes never spread to Mexico

Turkeys domesticated in Mexico never spread to the Andes



# Take-Home Message III

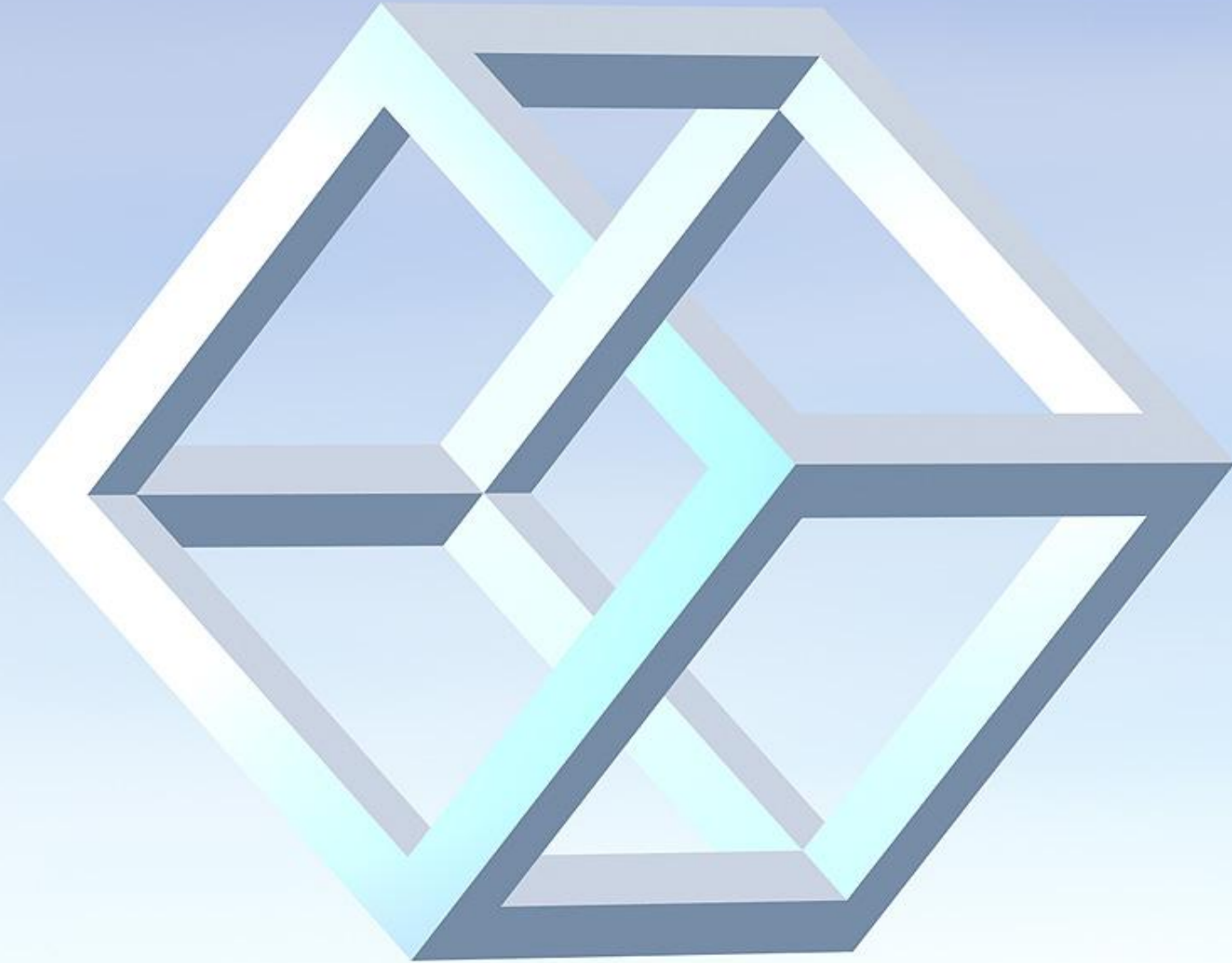
Sometimes the unconventional angle makes the most sense (geography to answer an anthropological problem)

# Take-Home Points

Humans are part of a larger historical system rather than always omnipotent actors (early domestication)

Always look at the factors of the whole system together (it's not the apples or the Indians, but the whole spread of plants available)

Sometimes the unconventional angle makes the most sense (geography to answer an anthropological problem)



**Don't just think outside the box; throw the box away!**



Questions?

## Debate

*“The most dramatic and lasting influences on the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation of the English language spawned from invasions and acts of war instead of peaceful cultural exchange and advancement.”*