

Additional definitions and concepts for "empire"

These are drawn from question #7 on the surveys you answered yesterday. I will exclude ideas we already talked about yesterday.

-Some answers emphasized the military powers of empire. This is an important concept... it is difficult to conceive of an empire being able to retain power without an effective military. Consider the U.S. military!

-Some answers emphasized that empires are wealthy and seek to increase their wealth.

-Some answers emphasized the complexity and size of empires

-Some answers emphasized that empires are dynamic, in other words they are *always* seeking to expand their power or influence further.

-Some answers emphasized restrictions of public speech in empires, specifically anti-government speech... this was a complaint often cited by the American revolutionaries against the British empire in the 1770s. But it is a challenge to the definition of the U.S. itself as an empire. There have been *some* legal restrictions on speech at certain times in U.S. history which we will discuss, but it is also fair to say that it has the most open policy for political speech of any nation/empire of comparable size in the history of the world. An objection to that point would be that there can be *informal* or social restrictions on speech instead of just *formal* or legal ones. Certain things "shouldn't be said," or even thought... the idea that the U.S. is an empire is one such socially prohibited idea!

-On a related point, some answers argued that a democratic state cannot be an empire, since power is not centralized and speech is not formally restricted. But couldn't a state be democratic for *itself* and imperial over other peoples? The classical examples are Athens and Rome... Rome became imperial in its form of internal organization *after* it gained foreign territories... indeed this is why European & American anti-imperialists often cite the example of Rome as a warning of the effects of imperial policies.

-Empires mentioned were Britain in the 1700s and 1800s, China from the Tang Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty, the United States now, Microsoft Corporation now, and China (PRC) now

-The Taiwanese educational system was cited as imperial... it is certainly an apparatus for creating unequal distributions of power. We will talk more about how education relates to empire.

-Fashion was cited as a non-imperial concept because it varies so much from place to place... it is intensely local we might say. Maybe so, but then again, what do I see when I go to "Sogo" except the same glittering objects and sexy pictures of European supermodels that I would see in any high-end retail store in the world?

-Taiwan was mentioned as a non-empire. Also Morocco, Tanzania, Ukraine, and Poland.

-Australia was also mentioned as a non-empire... this is an interesting thought because Australia is similar to the U.S. in some ways... most citizens are settlers formerly from England who displaced aboriginals living on their continent. The main difference is that Australia does not have the same global influence as the U.S. today.

-One answer mentioned Japan today as a non-empire, but another mentioned Japan from 1900-1945 as a *model* empire.

-Some mentioned aboriginal tribes as non-empires. This is worth discussing further. Is it because of their small size or small material wealth that you say this? Or do you think these social/political forms are less complex or more egalitarian?

-The Red Cross humanitarian organization was cited as a non-empire... this is a fascinating point because it clearly exists *because of* problems attributable to empire (like large wars, economic collapses in "underdeveloped" economies due to previous imperial manipulation of those economies) and because it makes use of imperial routes or networks of power. So it depends whether you look at this as an alternative to empire or as a supplement or "good side" to empire, no?