

Classical Theories of Diffusionism

Cultural diffusionism refers to anthropological theory explaining cultural similarities by suggesting that ideas, inventions and practices spread (diffuse) from one society or group to another, contending that humans are largely un inventive and borrow more than they create.

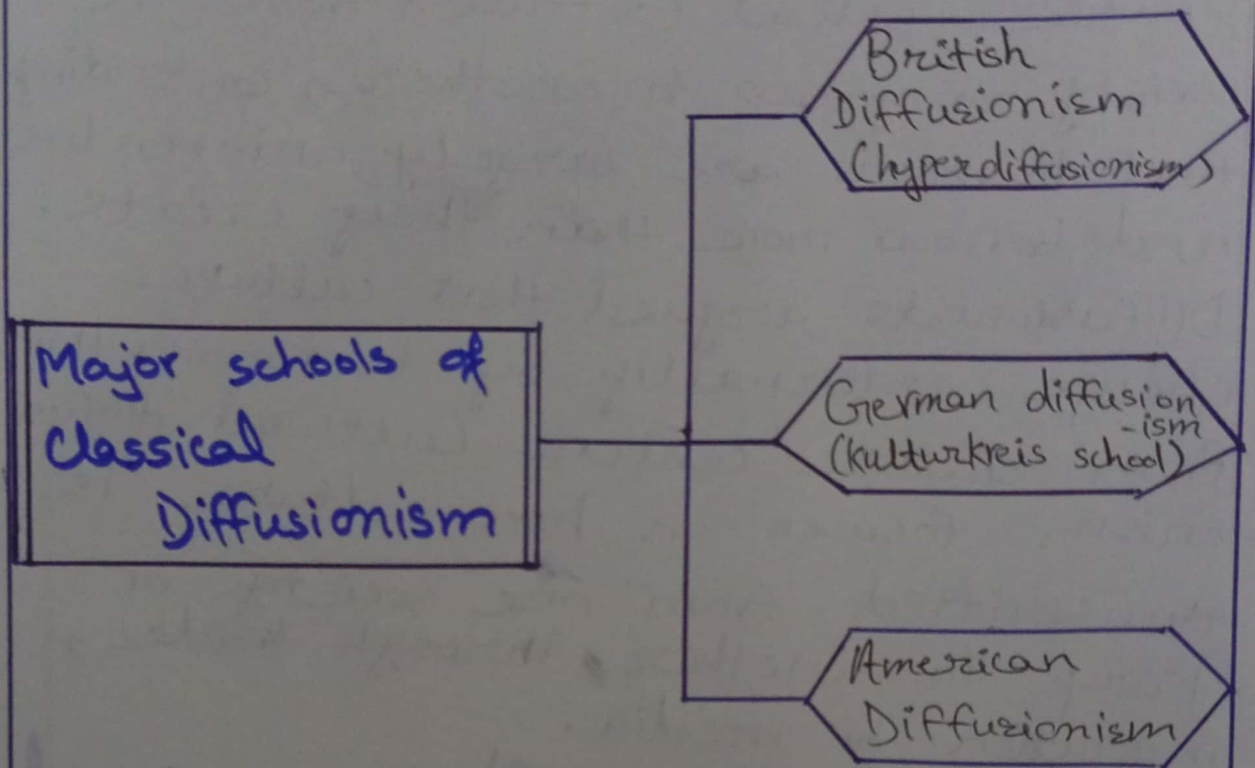
Diffusionists argued that cultures change externally by borrowing traits from culture centers. Cultural diffusionism focuses on how culture is transmitted from one society or group to another, through trade, migration or media.

Explicating the Phenomena of Cultural diffusion

Cultural diffusion is defined as a process involving the spread of cultural traits from one society or group to another, creating cultural similarities as people ~~mi~~ interact through trade, migration and media. For instance, spread of Buddhism from India to Mongolia

through symbols like Lotus.

Fig: Major Schools of Classical Diffusionism



Major Schools of Classical Diffusionism

1- British Diffusionism

This school of classical diffusionism contends that human culture originated from single cradle of civilization (Egypt) and spread to the rest of the world.

Example :-

Pyramids around the world are explained

as originating from Egyptian architectural influence.

Core tenets of Hyperdiffusionism

i- Egypt as primary culture centre

Gr. Eliot and W.J. Perry argued that Egypt was the primary culture centre because complex cultural traits developed in Egypt earlier than other regions such as state organization and kingship, monumental architecture such as pyramids, irrigation agriculture along the Nile, priesthood and solar worship, and metal technology and craft specialization.

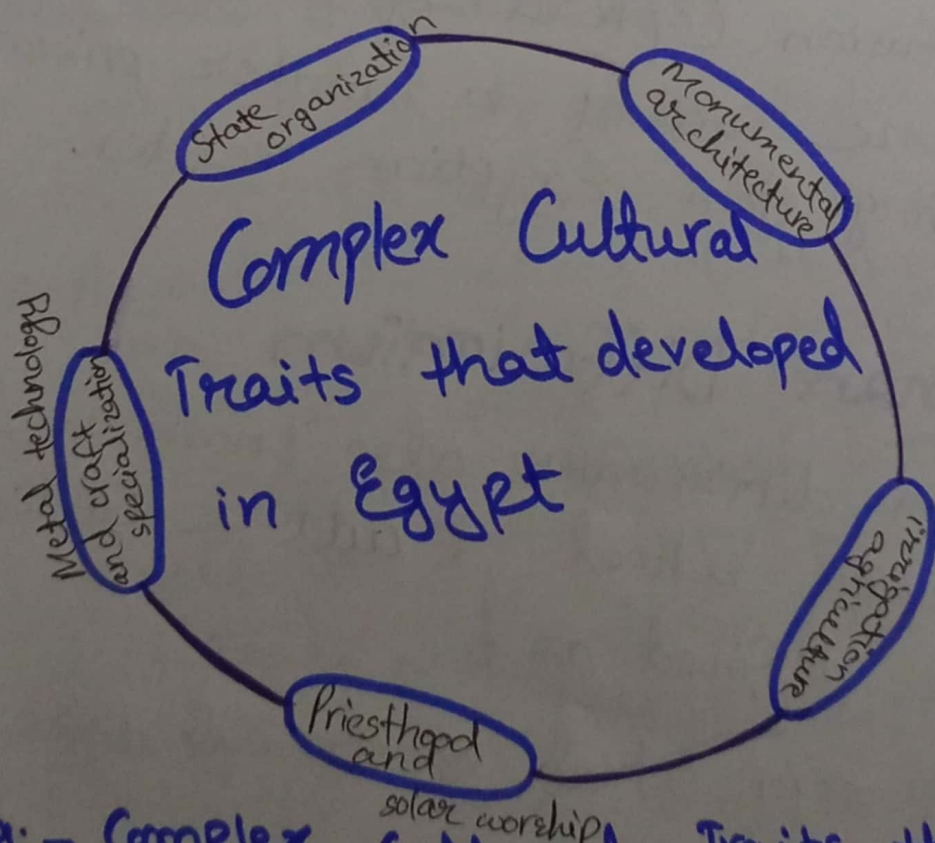


Fig:- Complex Cultural Traits that developed in Egypt

ii- Heliolithic Culture

Gr. Eliot and W.J. Perry argued that Egypt was the hub of heliolithic culture (combination of solar worship and megalithic stone structures) that spread globally. British diffusionists argued that appearance of megaliths from Asia to Polynesia to Europe had one origin i.e. Egypt.

iii- Human Uninventiveness

British diffusionists believed that humans are largely un inventive. Therefore, cultural similarities could ^{only} be the result of diffusion (spread) of cultural traits from one society to another primarily originating from Egyptian center.

2- German Diffusionism

German diffusionism also known as Kulturkreis school (culture circles) can be defined as :

“ A major school of classical diffusionism

which contends that cultures originated from limited number of independent centers (culture circles) and spread outward through migration and borrowing rather than independent invention. German diffusionism emphasizes on tracing cultural traits back to their geographic centers of origin."

Example :

Fritz Graebner and his father traced Polynesian Patrilineal culture back to original Malayo-Indonesian culture circle.

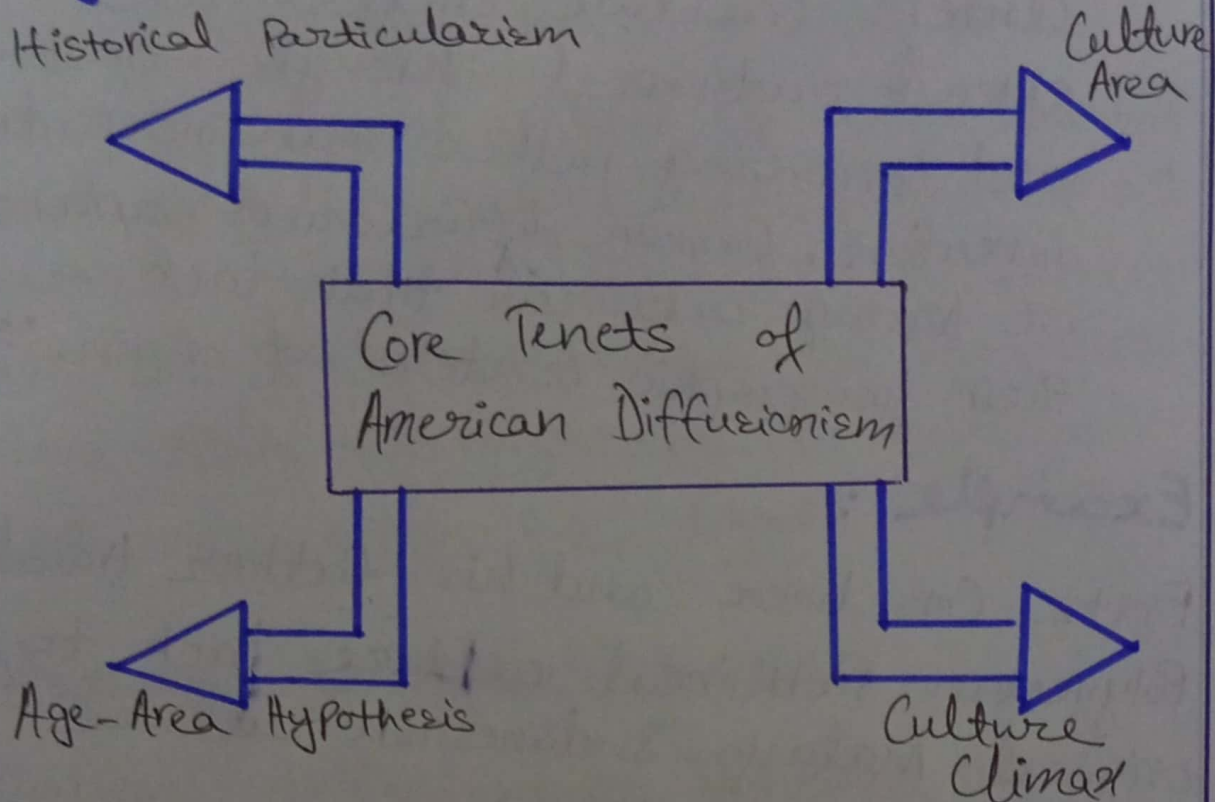
3. American Diffusionism

This major school of classical diffusionism can be defined as :

cc A moderate school of thought which accepts that cultural similarities could result from both cultural diffusion (borrowing of cultural traits from other cultures), and independent invention (developing a cultural trait internally especially in response to

similar needs and environments)?

Fig: Core Tenets of American Diffusionism



Core Tenets of American Diffusionism

i- Historical Particularism

Franz Boas contends that each culture has a unique historical context, rejecting universal evolutionary stages. In American diffusionism, historical particularism refers to analyzing cultural diffusion and independent invention in specific historical context of a culture.

ii- Culture Area

It is defined as a geographical region where two or more independent

cultures share significant number of similar cultural traits.

iii. Age-Area Hypothesis

Clark Wissler suggested that the cultural traits with the widest geographical distribution around culture center were likely the oldest.

iv. Culture Climax

This concept introduced by Alfred Kroeber is defined as the geographical area within culture area where cultural traits were the most highly developed and complex, the presumed point of origin from where cultural traits spread (diffuse) outwards.

Concluding Thoughts

Classical theories of diffusionism refers to anthropological theory analyzing cultural similarities by proposing that ideas, inventions and practices spread (diffuse) from one society to another suggesting that humans are uninventive and borrow more than they create.

There are three major schools of classical diffusionism : British diffusionism which gave the concept of heliolithic culture ; German diffusionism (kulturkreis school) and American diffusionism which is moderate school of thought.