



## Study about Imperialism, its Origins and Consequences

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**Abstract :** The word impérialiste was originally coined in France in the 1830s to denote a partisan of the one-time Napoleonic empire (Koebner & Schmidt 1964). “Imperialism” soon developed into a term of abuse employed before 1848 to castigate the Caesar-istic pretensions of Louis Napoleon. It was later used in a similar way both by French opponents of Napoleon III and by British adversaries of French rule and expansionism. In the 1870s British antagonists of Disraeli began to use the word as a domestic invective. But other British writers and politicians sought to rehabilitate the term. They applied it first to the policy of establishing a “Greater Britain” (Dilke 1869), through “the expansion of England” (Seeley 1883) into an “imperial federation” of Britain, its overseas settlements, and India. The acquisition of a large colonial empire in Asia and Africa led to the view that it was the “white man’s burden” (Kipling) to assume a “dual mandate” (Lugard 1922) for offering civilization to “backward” peoples and for opening their territories for the benefit of the world. Thus the term became increasingly identified with British colonialism.

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The need for colonies was often argued in economic terms, both by British advocates of colonial expansion, who saw in an enlarged empire a means of preserving markets in an increasingly protectionist world, and by writers on the European continent who ascribed Britain’s wealth to her possession of colonies and hence demanded colonies to increase their nations’ wealth. While some identified “imperialism” with British world politics, others used the term to include the widespread desire for expansion on the part of European states generally.

### Causes

The explanation for the change in this relationship during the nineteenth century remains complex. Initial explanations for the development of nineteenth-century imperialism located the causes as lying within Europe and focused in particular on economic factors. Such a view, derived ultimately from J.A. Hobson's seminal *Imperialism: A Study*, and which was taken up by



Lenin and Marxist writers, saw imperialism as driven by the exploitation of the economic resources of the wider world, with financiers pressing governments to annex colonies in order to protect their overseas investments. However, because of the limited returns from imperial conquest in this period and because colonial expansion did not, in practice, follow overseas investments, this view has been criticized. Alternative explanations have emphasized the importance of chauvinist ideas in the origins of European expansion, stressing how deep-rooted militaristic values in nineteenth century European society, alongside racist and nationalist theories, and reinforced in turn by ideas of social Darwinism and of Europe's "civilizing mission" overseas, led to the assumption that colonies were essential for national prestige.

### **Impact of Imperialism on Europe**

The overall economic profit and loss from empire is complex. While European economies no doubt benefited from cheaper access to raw materials and markets, that has to be weighed against the increased taxation to pay for defense. In the British case, to take one example, the positive economic impact of empire on the British economy in the period 1870 to 1914 has been calculated as marginal at best, while historians have suggested that reliance on imperial markets diverted Britain from the more difficult but more productive road of modernizing her economy.

Perhaps the most significant impact of empire on Europe was cultural. By the 1920s and 1930s there could have been few Europeans, in the cities of Europe at least, whose lives would not have been influenced in some way by empire. This was of course a process that went back several centuries, but in the nineteenth century this influence took on more profound forms. One can see this most obviously in language, as in the way Hindi words such as bungalow, pajamas, and thug, to name but a few, entered English, or in the way cheap tropical foodstuffs enriched the European diet. Empire also had an important impact in art and design, with the various colonial exhibitions set up by European governments, such as in London (1924) and Paris (1931), prompting new interest in colonial and African and Asian motifs. Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954), famously, were deeply influenced by their encounter with collections of African art in the 1900s, while colonial topics became the subject of interest to



novelists, poets, filmmakers, and artists such as Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897), and Julien Viaud (1850–1923).

### **Changing Attitudes to Empire**

There were many in Europe who responded to the newly acquired possessions with enthusiasm and propagandized about their potential benefits. The German Kolonialverein, a society set up in 1882 to campaign in support of Germany's colonial expansion, was one such example, while the French Union Coloniale Française, an association of business leaders with colonial interests established in 1893, was another. Many politicians enthusiastically supported imperial causes, Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) and Leo Amery (1873–1955) in Britain and Jules Ferry (1832–1893) and Albert Sarraut (1872–1962) in France being the most prominent. Supporters justified empire on the grounds of economic self-interest and the alleged moral good—the "civilizing mission"—that Europe brought to the conquered populations of Africa and Asia.

### **Decline of Empire**

One striking aspect of the European empires was how quickly they disappeared. In 1947 the British withdrew from India, and after 1956, from their African colonies; in 1962, the French left Algeria. With the Portuguese withdrawal from their African colonies in 1975, the colonial empires were virtually over. The reasons for this withdrawal are manifold. The increasing criticism from nationalists was undoubtedly significant; the pressure exerted by the Indian National Congress, skillfully shaped by Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) in a series of major civil disobedience campaigns between the 1920s and 1940s, for example, succeeded in forcing major concessions from the British. After 1945, nationalist unrest throughout the colonial empires showed colonial rulers just how costly maintaining colonial rule would be.

### **Conclusion :**

Although the age of formal imperialism was relatively short, the impact of Europe on the wider world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and vice versa, was immense. European society and culture was deeply influenced by its colonies. This process of interaction between metropole and the wider world continued after independence, and the development of immigration from



former colonies into the former metropolises has contributed immensely to the development of multicultural societies in Europe through the turn of the twenty-first century.

Equally, the impact of Europe on the wider world has been significant. On a cultural level, this can be seen in the way European languages such as English and French are spoken, European education systems are widely copied, and European sports like cricket or football (soccer) are widely played across much of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. Europe also has profoundly shaped the economic sphere, where the legacy of imperialism can be seen in the economic structures, communication networks, and ties to metropolitan economies that typify the former colonies. Imperialism in this sense was the precursor of the globalization that characterizes the contemporary world. This legacy is by no means entirely benign. The consequence of this process of structuring of the economies of former colonies has been dependency: on exports, on a monoculture economy, and on the fluctuations of the world market; ultimately this has been a dependency on the economies of the metropolises. This has proved difficult to remove.

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