

A COMPARISON OF THE CONCEPTS, MOTIVES AND EFFECTS OF WESTERN IMPERIALISM ON NIGERIA AND CHINA

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Abstract

Imperialism is a modernizing instrument of history which helps uncivilized and culturally-bound societies to adopt western civilization and move into modernity. Imperialism is experienced by people who are influenced, invaded or colonized by the European powers in one way or the other. Western imperialism has economic, political and cultural effects on different societies based on the extent of western influence. The researcher focuses on the effects of western imperialism in China and Nigeria in the late Modern Period. The reason for the comparison is based on the influence and activities of the West in the 18th and 19th centuries. Also, the researcher points out how western imperialism has affected these societies in different ways. Western imperialism in China and Nigeria are of different forms which created different historical effects, backgrounds and perceptions. Slave trade business, British colonial rule and internal conflicts are the main features that characterize western imperialism in Nigeria, while foreign influence and control, opium trade, radical changes and internal conflicts characterize western imperialism in China. The researcher also finds out that there are psychological and cultural impacts of western imperialism as a result of changes and quest for modernity. Also, their reactions to the aftermath of imperialism are different because of many factors such as cultural backgrounds, system of government and different experiences of imperialism. Therefore, this paper explores the effects and impacts of western imperialism in China and Nigeria in the late modern period. It also discusses the cultural and psychological impacts of imperialism, consequences and effects in the social, economic and political lives of these societies.

Keywords: Western Imperialism, late Modern Period, Civilization, Effects, Impacts

Introduction

Imperialism has been one of the most powerful forces in the late modern period, exploring every continent while oppressing the indigenous natives and enforcing technological development and civilization. "Imperialism" simply means the process whereby the dominant political and economic interests of a country propel them to enrich their society with the labor, raw materials, and markets of another existing society. Africans and Asia are among the earliest victims of Western European imperialism.

Currently, looking at the world today through an economic, political and social lens; it is very clear to see both the great successes and enormous disasters that emerged from the impacts of western imperialism. Supposedly, many underdeveloped and uncivilized nations received the necessary infrastructure for development and growth, as seen in some societies in East Asia, while some nations are negatively affected by the economic and social exploitation, as portrayed in the African nations. However, it is also very important to note that western imperialism's most effective tools for dominating other countries and cultures have been very political and economic in nature. It is from this point of view that this research work compares the late modern period of western imperialism in China and Nigeria as well as its impacts, reactions and the after effects on the politics, culture and economy of these countries. In this context, we are saddled with the chief responsibility of bringing to light its merits and demerits. The various chapters of this work will serve as a missing link towards the actualization of this great task and dream.

Definition of Imperialism

Imperialism is the creation or maintenance of unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relationships, usually between states and often in the form of an empire, based on domination and subordination.¹ It can also be defined as the process of conquering different societies and ruling them with economic and political influence. The word imperialism has its root from the Latin verb *imperare* which means “to command”, as perceived in the Roman concept of imperium. 'Imperialism' was coined in the 16th century, which reflects the imperial policies of the west (Europeans) such as, Britain or France, in Africa and Asia.² This concept does not only describe colonial and territorial policies, but also economic, military dominance and influence.

Many people perceive imperialism as an imposition of power and influence of civilized nations on less civilized nations; while others see it as an indirect political and economic influence or control of weak states by more powerful ones. In this view, Edward Said states that imperialism involves the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory.³ This implies that imperialism functions for political, ideological as well as financial reasons.' Karl Marx defines 'Imperialism' as the unconscious tool of history and also a necessary historical force in breaking apart stagnant and tradition-bound societies seemingly incapable of moving into modern history on their own.⁴

The term 'Imperialism', defines how powerful nations exercise power over weaker nations through sovereignty, settlement, or indirect mechanisms of control. It is also a form of conquest or ideology that benefited the Europe economically, politically and strategically. However, it is very important to note that imperialism is a form of influence which involves indirect forms of domination and not direct as seen in colonization. There have been difficulties in distinguishing western imperialism from colonialism. These two concepts are treated as synonyms and sometimes used interchangeably. Unlike imperialism; colonialism involves a political and economic control over a dependent nation by military force and subjugation against the will of the people. Imperialism simply defines the way a country exercises power on another country through indirect ways. One major fact about imperialism is that it is not restricted to any specific time or place; it still continues.

Concepts and Motives of Western Imperialism

Western Imperialism has different motives and aims. These motives are based on the factors that motivated western Imperialism. The concepts of western imperialism are diversified and are ideological, political, religious and economic in nature. These concepts are categorized into two namely: civilization, religion, politics, economy.

Western Imperialism in China: A Brief History

Europe's scramble for countries did not leave the East Asia at peace. However, the surprising thing about the effect of imperialism in China is that modern Chinese society is not totally transformed into the form of western political world and civilization; but still retains its traditional cultures and values. In history, China has been known to be fairly strong during her ancient periods and its leaders were not ready for any alteration of their Confucian beliefs or tradition. As a result of this, the Chinese conservative officials declined the offer of accepting any form of minor reforms which prevented the old imperial order from attaining western modernization like their Japanese counterpart.¹⁵

In the 1800s, China simultaneously experienced major internal strains and Western imperialist pressure, backed by strong military strength which China could not withstand. Early in the 19th century, serious internal conflicts developed in the Qing dynasty as a result of foreign invasion,

wars and trade in the 18th century which left China vulnerable to the Western, Japanese, and Russian imperialism. ¹⁷ The 19th century of China experienced a lot of pressure as a result of foreign invasion and influence from Britain, America, and Japan etc. This century is very remarkable because it was characterized by an uncertainty and a searching everywhere in the writings of intellectuals. It is also a period when the Chinese people and scholars could no longer deny their sense of shame and helplessness for the humiliation meted on their country by foreigners. However, it is believed that the decline of the late Qing dynasty in the early 1900's is unique because it is the last dynasty that marked the origin of modern China.

Many of the economic problems that China experienced had been traced to the opium trade. Opium destroyed many families and industries which lead to violence and corruption between the smugglers and officials. In 1839, Emperor Daoguang sent his incorrupt imperial commissioner, Lin Zexu to stop the opium trade; Lin's action toward the stopping of opium trade led to the 1839-1842 opium war which was won by the British. The British and Chinese leaders later signed a peace treaty of Nanjing in August, 1842 and to appease the British, the Qing government gave them the land of Hong Kong to open their first treaty ports. And the trade of opium trade continued between India and China for many years. The treaty was rather unequal which opened up China to foreign imperialism and exploitation.

The Christian missionaries were the major ideological arms of foreign aggression that Europeans used to penetrate China. The missionaries and the Chinese traditional gentry-elite were rivals; the missionaries believed that the Chinese gentry-elite were cunning, ignorant, rude and full of hatred for everything foreign. While the Chinese elite believed that the missionaries were foreign subversives whose immoral conduct and teaching were supported by gunboats.

The Boxer Rebellion was known to be a proto-nationalist movement in China between 1898 and 1901, which was targeted at opposing foreign imperialism and Christianity. The uprising was in response to foreign "monopoly of influence" in China, such as the opium trade, political influence, economic disposition or destabilization, unequal treaties and missionary activities. There was a great concern by the Chinese citizens that the missionaries and Chinese Christians could use the declining government of Qing to their advantage, acquiring lands and property of unwilling Chinese peasants to give to the missionaries. All these resulted in violent revolts against foreigners and their interests.

In June 1900, foreigners were threatened to seek for safety in the legation Quarter in Beijing; which was followed by the declaration of war on foreign powers by the empress, Dowager Cixi. Many Diplomats, foreign civilians, soldiers, and Chinese Christians in the Legation Quarter were under siege by the Imperial Army of China and the Boxers for 55 days. The rebellion was put to an end when the Eight-Nation Alliance of Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States deployed 20,000 armed troops to China, defeated the Qing Imperial Army, and captured Beijing.

Effects and Impacts of Western Imperialism on China

One thing is very clear; western imperialism has its good and evil as well as its advantages and disadvantages. The impacts of western imperialism on China have different sides; many people argue that western imperialism brought western development and civilization like, technology, communication, education, sciences, railways and improved health care systems; while many argue that it is totally exploitative and selfish in nature. The effects of western imperialism on China could be discussed under these sub-headings (1) political effects, (2) cultural effects, (3) economic effects, and (4) psychological effects.

Political Effects

Western imperialism is responsible for the introduction of western political ideologies like nationalism, capitalism, democracy, constitutionalism and other forms of political ideas in China. There is no doubt that western imperialism led to the rise of Chinese nationalism as seen in the emergence of the Chinese Communist government. No country was undergoing a complex economic and political transformation like China in the year 1839-40. It is very important to note that western influence in China's politics and leadership threw the country into a period of political instability; the war between the Nationalist and the Chinese Communist Party is a good example of China's political disunity and western political influence on China.

Cultural Effects

Historically, China has been perceived as a land of strong cultural values because of their strong resistance to western invasion. Many people believe that China's rejection of western civilization was as a result of their conservative attachment to the traditional Confucian social and cultural values. The Chinese wanted to remain aloof from Western civilization and its imperialism, which they regarded as inferior to their own civilization but was forced to open up because of her military weakness to withstand the European powers. However, the effects of Imperialism on the Chinese Culture could be discussed under the following points namely; Tribute system, language, Female subjectivity, Dressing code, marriages, Religion and Food etc

Economic Effects

There has been a debate on the effect of western imperialism on China's economy especially on the direct effect foreign trade and investment had on China's economy. However, many people believe that foreign trade and investment played an important role in China's economy; while others think that it was harmful to it. Though imperialism helped to expose China to foreign influence, it played an important role of bringing economic development and modernization to China. The good benefits of imperialism to China's economy are that it brought new forms of development, technology and skills. Some people might argue that imperialism has no positive effect on China's economy since China was forced to open up to the west against their wish. Although China lost a lot from its economy, especially in the 18th century when Chinese people valued treasures were used to purchase opium from the British; there some positive influence of western imperialism on China's economy. The open door policy has a positive effect because it allowed China to trade other countries which later expanded its economy. Another side to this positive effect is that imperialism introduced modern facilities and technologies to China.

Psychological Effects

Imperialism brought some phenomena such as identity loss, cultural friction and hatred towards European exploitation. There is no doubt that imperialism brought about Chinese nationalism; but this was triggered by the psychological impacts of western influence and exploitation of China. The mental and physical struggle against imperialism brought about rebellion and revolution.

Western Imperialism in Nigerian: A Brief History

Foreign imperialism in Nigeria is quite different from that of the Chinese society. Nigeria had a unique and painful colonial history; the missionaries were the colonial tools that were used effectively to penetrate into the social circles, regions and tribes of Nigeria. Many Nigerian scholars believe that the role played by western missionaries in Nigeria was very explicit and must be a major concern to those who were colonized. It was a wide spread belief that the missionaries' penetration into the Nigerian soil was instrumental in setting the scene for the colonialist invasion of Nigeria. They were the first Europeans that the Nigerians came in contact with; this was also the experiences of many regions and countries in Africa. The British administration in Nigeria had been seen by many Nigerians as the real cause of the political,

religious cultural and tribal conflicts in the contemporary Nigeria. Although the British colonized Nigeria for sixty years, there had been series of blame on the British government for exploiting the Nigeria's natural resources. Many Nigerians thought that they left Nigeria in poverty by stripping them of their raw materials. The British influence had both positive and negative effects on the Nigeria. Many Nigerian scholars believe that the future of Nigeria is problematic because of the influence of British colonization and exploitation. Nigeria has over "two hundred" ethnic groups but the three largest and most influential ethnic groups were Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. Religious wise, Nigeria has a greater percentage of Muslims and Christians while small minority practiced the traditional religion.

The years 1900 – 1960 mark the years of British colonial rule in Nigeria. The name Nigeria did not exist before because the regions were never one. They had their own defined and distinguished territories that were marked by their different cultures, unique languages, kingdoms and systems of rural leadership. However, the intrusion of the British as a result of their interest in slave trade and palm oil business, made them to bring these regions with no common features together as a nation. This very act by the British Government has been seen by many Nigerians as the real cause of the political, religious and cultural tension in the contemporary Nigerian society. The British colonized Nigeria for sixty years (1900-1960) but the colonial rule was characterized by frequent reclassifying of different regions in Nigeria for their own reason and administrative purposes. This very act had been the factor of uniting these different regions as a one nation. In the early 1900s the Emir of Kano and the Sultan of Sokoto refused to accept the British rule; because of their strong cultural and Muslim belief.

In 1951, Nigeria was divided into three different regions namely; Northern, Eastern, a Western; each of these regions had its own house of Assembly. There was also a separate house of chiefs for the Northern Province so that their strong traditions and culture would be reflected using their tribal authorities. But this was not enough to solve the problem of administration because of the diversity in cultural backgrounds, languages and large regions of Nigeria. In 1954, the British government created a new constitution which was the third in eight years. It also created the Federation of Nigeria making Lagos the Federal Territory. In 1950s, an African political structure was gradually achieved. Also in 1957 there was a federal Prime Minister; the western and eastern regions were allowed to govern themselves internally, that is, they had an internal government. In 1959, the northern region was given autonomy. Nigeria got full independence in October 1, 1960. The issues and tensions concerning different communities became Nigeria's own business and major concern. However, AD 1960 -1970 marked a period of political struggles, tensions, regional hostilities and conflicts among different regions in Nigeria. The Igbo people sought for autonomy from the amalgamated regions called 'Nigeria'.

Nigeria witnessed a civil war in 1967 to 1970. Many scholars believe that imperialism was the remote cause the war. In January 1970, the communities of the eastern region were almost starving and that was when Biafra surrendered to the federal government of Nigeria. The leader of the Biafran Republic, Ojukwu, went into exile in Ivory Coast. In 1970-1999 Nigeria experienced another phase of oil wealth which was followed by a great disaster. Nigeria became one of the wealthiest countries in Africa because of its richness in crude oil, petroleum rather than the palm oil business of the past centuries. In the late 1970, Nigeria's output was more than two million barrels a day; the value which was boosted by the high prices achieved during the oil crisis of 1973 -1974. However, there were cases of corruption in controlling the wealth of the nation because many people became interested in sharing the oil income.

The future of Nigeria is problematic as a result of the problem of amalgamation caused by the British colonial rulers. Many Nigerian scholars still blame the British for merging different tribes

or ethnic groups with no common characteristics or features together; as a result of this, there had been constant tension, rivalries, political struggles between political parties and regions over who will rule the country. Nigeria till date is still practicing the democratic system of government; but the presidential election is characterized by corruption which is tainted in election rigging, killings, political tension, religious and regional conflicts. However, the future of Nigeria is still problematic even with the 2011 election which brought President Good luck Jonathan to power; the fate of Nigeria is still undecided as a result of various political, religious and regional tensions in the leadership of the country.

Effects of Western Imperialism on Nigeria

Imperialism has been a major force in shaping the modern Nigerian society in its present situation. The major imperialism occurred during the 19th and the early 20th century. British imperialism affected Nigeria both positively and negatively; the positive side of the British colonization is that they built roads, canals, railways, schools and hospitals for the natives. Many Nigerians resented the British because of their horrible treatment to Nigerians, especially on the issue of slave trade and amalgamation of different region with no common characteristics. It is widely believed that the British imperialist activities in Nigeria were for their selfish reasons which were aimed at benefiting them rather than the Nigerian people. However, the British imperialism in Nigeria was motivated by economic as well as political influence. It was good for the British because raw materials from Nigeria boosted the British economy and added to her influence. Imperialism created injustice to Nigeria; the British ignored the tribal traditional system of leadership that existed in Nigeria and imposed western political administration on its people.

Political Effects

Politically, British colonization of Nigeria is synonymous with political disunity, conflicts and civil wars. British colonization brought many western ideologies such as constitutionalism, nationalism, democracy and other forms of ideas; but one thing is very clear, all these ideas are not suitable for Nigeria because of the differences in culture, language and religion of different regions in Nigeria. Imperialism led to political conflicts and tribal wars in Nigeria as different regions tried to control the leadership of Nigeria. The effect of British colonial rule is that it altered the political and traditional structures of the Nigerian society. The amalgamation of the northern and southern regions of Nigeria in 1914 as a nation is the core cause of Nigeria's big problem; the power struggle between different tribes in Nigeria led to civil war in 1967.

Cultural Effects

Culturally, imperialism caused more harm than good to the Nigerian society. Many religions and traditional beliefs of the Nigeria people were destroyed as a result of the influence of Christianity. The role played by the Christian missionaries in blackmailing the native culture and traditions of Nigeria is enormous. Nigerians were meant to believe that their religion and culture are dirty, barbaric and false. Schools and colleges such as CMS were built to further brain wash then into believing the Christian ideologies and also accept western culture. However, imperialism helped to eliminate some bad customs such killing of twins, slave trade, and human sacrifice etc.

Economic Effects

Economically, imperialism led to the development of industries in Nigeria .They established industries to make profits and thus paved way for trade and commerce in Nigeria. They also constructed railways, roads, banking houses and buildings to fully exploit Nigeria's natural resources. Industries were set up to make profits; however, all these led to the industrialization of Nigeria. It is important to note that the British imperialism negatively affected Nigeria by exploiting and importing Nigeria's natural resources at cheap rates into Britain and exported the manufactured products into Nigeria at expensive rates. Again, local industries, trade and

commerce were crippled by taxing them heavily; however, this system of taxation and exploitation affected the Nigerian economy negatively. Backwardness, poverty, starvation and corruption became very eminent.

Psychological Effects

There are always psychological effects to western imperialism on any colonized or semi colonized society. The psychological effects of western imperialism could only be expressed by the colonized society. Also, the social effects and consequences of colonial education, religion and political administration (control) could only be expressed by the formerly colonized people. African countries like South Africa and Nigeria could not easily break away from the continuous mental and physical struggle created by western imperialism since their historical past was hinged on colonialism, slavery and the name "Nigeria" which was coined by the colonial masters. Many African novelists and poets like, Chinua Achebe, Dennis Brutus, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Linda Tuhiwai Smith had written to find solutions to this psychological effect but there was no easy way out. They wrote many poems and novels to re-define, re-interpret and project the unique features of African culture; while at the same time pointing out that African culture was very superior and not inferior to the western culture. It was widely acknowledged that imperialism labeled many Nigerian indigenous cultures and people inhuman or sub-human which left the Africans with a sense of inferiority toward the Europeans.

Conclusion

By analyzing the impacts and influence of western imperialism on Nigeria and China, one can see that trade was a key factor in these two cases. In the case of Nigeria, western imperialism began with trade and commerce especially in the palm oil business; as the trade festered internationally, the British campaign sought for measures to protect their economic interest which led to the colonization of Nigeria. In China, the Western powers were satisfied to exploit the spoils of trade and commerce, without full political claim as Britain did in Nigeria. There are positive and negative impacts of imperialism to the Nigerian and Chinese societies. The Europeans brought modernization, western education and infrastructural development to many countries which at the same time were at the expense of the cultural traditions of these societies. In the case of China, they obstructed their political culture and Confucian codes in the late 19th century by introducing western education, trade, technology and western culture in the Chinese traditional society. As a result of these influences and failures in the leadership system of the Qing dynasty, many forms of rebellions erupted. In Nigeria, the case is relatively the same, the Nigerian traditional system of leadership was altered due to the 1914 amalgamation of different regions; this led to civil wars and political instability as one region fights to monopolize the leadership of the country. Some of these problems that Nigeria experiences now come from the British colonization of Nigeria; their influence in the political, social and economic lives of the Nigerians affected the social and political circles of the society. However, this problem of political instability is deeply rooted in the way the British ruled and colonized Nigeria.

China and Nigeria have different political backgrounds but have one common factor which is 'western imperialism' which occurred in the late modern period. The influence of western imperialism in China and Nigeria during the 19th century was actually unique and different; while Nigeria was struggling with colonial conquest, slave trade, tribal conflicts and unstable political system, China was going through a series of revolution in the quest to attain modernity as well as finding a balance between their culture and western culture.

The 1960s and 1970s of China and Nigeria are almost related as a result of the social instability, destruction and political struggles that engulfed these societies. During the 1967 to 1970, people of the southeast (Igbo region of Nigeria) attempted to secede from Nigerian by forming the

Republic of Biafra; while in the Chinese society, 1966 to 1976 encountered a lot of class struggles, political instability (evidenced by the civil war between the CCP and KMT) and anti-rightist campaigns as a result of the cultural revolution which was directed at destroying foreign influences. This cultural practice between 1966 and 1976 had deep roots in the Chinese experiences not simply after 1949 but since China's 19th century encounter with western power and culture.

Furthermore, by analyzing the impacts and reasons of Western imperialism on China and Nigeria, one can easily see that economic values, trade and political influence were the main key factors that propelled the late modern period western imperialism in these two countries. In the case of Nigeria, Western imperialism began with commerce (slave trade, oil, cotton, dyes, cocoa etc), which led to the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorate in 1914 to become one country called "Nigeria" thus Nigeria was fully colonized by the British. In China, the case was different Western powers were only satisfied with their gains of commerce in China occupying some major cities like Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou. It is also important to note that without these political claims, the economic motive of the west would not have been more apparent. In summary, economics and political values appear to have played a vital role in both the influence and impact of Western imperialism in Africa and Asia, as evidenced in the experiences of China and Nigeria.

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