



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.

ISSN 2454-308X



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