

Causation in the Imperial Age

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or who have slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

—Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899

Essential Question: What was the relative significance of the effects of imperialism from 1750 to 1900?

Industrial capitalism caused significant developments between 1750 to 1900. The manufacturing capacity of industrialized nations caused an increase in the availability, affordability, and variety of both capital (financial assets) and consumer goods. However, this increased industrial capacity also led to an increased demand for natural resources—“the conquest of the earth”—to use in manufacturing these goods. Additionally, domestic markets soon became saturated, leading industrialized nations to seek out foreign markets to soak up the excess production. Competition for these markets increased among industrialized economies, especially those in the West. To reduce competition and increase profits, Western nations continued to look to empire-building, begun in the previous era, as a solution to these challenges.

Nineteenth-century imperialism also caused significant effects, including increased migration, the rise of independence movements within the colonies, and increased political and economic rivalry among Western European nations that would lead to catastrophic events in the early 20th century.

Changes in Standards of Living

Due to increased automation, the use of interchangeable parts, the division and specialization of labor, and the assembly line, the efficiency of industrial production increased. This efficiency led to greater output, especially of such consumer goods as textiles, home furnishings, clothing, and porcelain. As the supply of consumer goods increased, the availability of goods rose and the prices fell. In addition, increased global industrial production led to greater competition and variety of both consumer and capital goods. For some people, standards of living improved with the proliferation of consumer goods.

One way economists measure standard of living is by tracing patterns in real wages—those adjusted for inflation. Real wages signify the amount



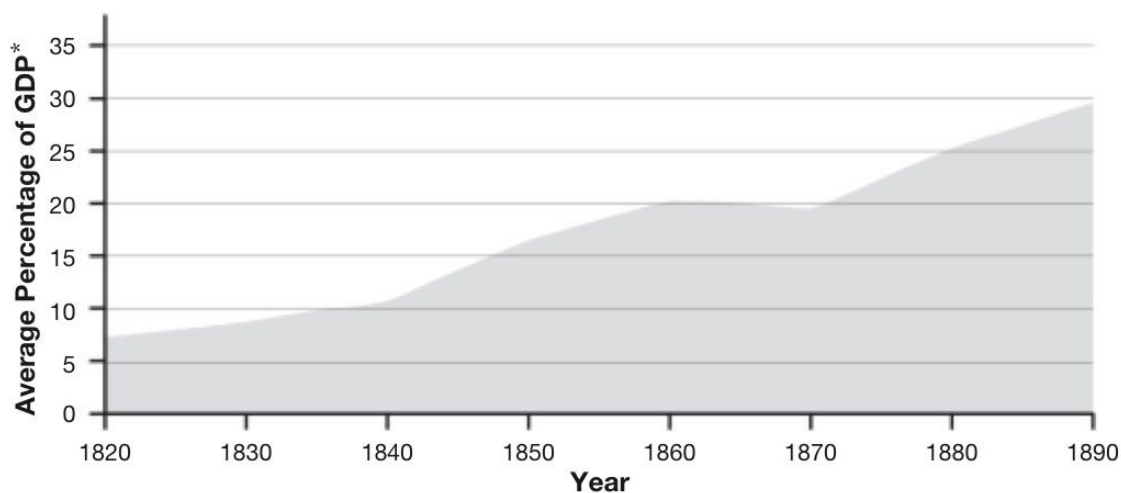
of goods or services that can be bought. In the early years of the Industrial Revolution, some studies show that real wages grew slowly, but after 1819 the pace of growth accelerated, and between 1819 and 1852 they doubled. The growth of real wages paralleled the rise in consumption. By these measures, standards of living increased for people of all income groups.

At the same time, however, the distribution of income (the wealth gap) became more pronounced. Additionally, some of the rise in income was offset by the growing problems in an industrialized society—pollution, crowded cities, and the costs of wars. With these taken into consideration, standards of living may not have risen for many people.

Overseas Expansion

As more countries industrialized and the capacity to produce goods increased, overproduction became a serious economic issue. Domestic markets could no longer consume the amount of goods being produced. As a result, international trade transformed industrial economies from mercantilist to capitalist systems. Industrialized economies looked to increase exports of their products. The desire to increase exports, however, caused both economic and political rivalries among industrialized countries as businesses sought out new international customers and enlisted their government's assistance to help open previously closed or inaccessible markets.

Exports as a Percentage of the Output of Industrialized Countries



*GDP, or gross domestic product, is one measure of the total amount of goods and services produced by a country.

Source: Adapted from Federico, Giovanni and Antonio Tena-Junguito (2016 b). 'A tale of two globalizations: gains from trade and openness 1800-2010'. London, Centre for Economic Policy Research. (CEPR WP.11128).

As production increased, new and greater amounts of natural resources were required by industrial economies. In addition, such common industrial resources as coal and iron, tin, bauxite, rubber, and copper were also imported from sources in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. A key effect of industrial capitalism, therefore, was the expansion of imperialism in the 19th

century. Industrialized countries, especially those in Western Europe, the U.S., and Japan, saw the benefits of controlling trade and resources of other areas of the world. This trend was a continuation from the previous era during which European countries created colonies in the Western Hemisphere and in the Indian Ocean.

In contrast, the dependent colonial economies that provided raw material to and markets for the imperial powers often saw little economic development from participation in the world economy. Reliance on the cash crops introduced by imperial powers often left them vulnerable to natural disasters and volatile markets.

In this era, however, states and people in regions that had previously been able to resist European colonization found themselves increasingly dominated by Western powers. Most areas of Africa came under the direct control of European colonizers. Large portions of South Asia and Southeast Asia were colonized, mainly by Great Britain and France, respectively. Even China, the most dynamic civilization in previous eras, succumbed to the domination of Western and Japanese imperialists. Western powers were able to achieve this level of dominance because of the technological advances associated with the Industrial Revolution. Advances in military technology, ship building, and medicine helped Western European nations assert control over these other regions.

Seeds of Revolution and Rebellion

In the late 1700s, the former North American colonies of Great Britain revolted against its colonial rule and declared themselves the independent nation of the United States of America. Shortly after, France threw off the yoke of the monarchy and established a republic. In the early 1800s, former Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South America also became independent states.

As western imperialism took hold in other parts of the world, the seeds of resistance and rebellion that would, in time, lead to new nation-states took root. Westernization (assimilation of Western culture) was often resisted in colonized or dominated areas. In South Asia, for example, Indian soldiers known as sepoy rose up in rebellion against the British East India Company. While the rebellion was brutally suppressed by British soldiers, the effect was the disbandment of the British East India Company and the direct rule of India by the British government, commencing a period now known as the British Raj. Similarly, westernization was opposed in China by the Boxers who attempted to rid China of Western influence, especially from Christian missionaries. These nascent independence movements would lead to the more widespread and successful nationalism of the post-World War II period.

Migration and Discrimination

One of the more significant effects of modern imperialism was the migration from dependent or less industrial areas of the world to the dominant industrial economies. People emigrated from rural areas to urban areas within countries and from less developed areas of Europe to more developed areas of Europe.

Immigrants looking for economic opportunity left many European countries and settled in the United States and Canada, often making up a large proportion of the industrial workforce. Some immigrants signed contracts to travel to areas to work for a prescribed period of time, pay back the cost of their transport, and then either settle in these areas or return to their homelands. These indentured laborers, as they were called, came from China, Japan, South Asia, and Europe and found themselves working and living in the Americas, Southeast Asia, Africa, or Australia. If they chose to settle in their host country, they often formed enclaves, or communities, with others from their home country. Often, these immigrants were faced with discrimination based on race, religion, or other factors. The spread of global capitalism resulted in the accumulation of wealth by the middle and upper classes, while the working classes in the industrial economies, already exploited by the profit motive, found themselves in direct competition for jobs with immigrants from nonindustrial countries.