

I FEATURES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY IMPERIALISM

Preparatory Reading

Chapter 1 Section V: Empires and Imperialism

Imperialism — the acquisition of empire — involves both actions and beliefs. The actions are the actual seizure or annexation of territories and peoples. The beliefs are expressed in the theories used to justify those actions. Basic to almost all imperial activity is the belief that the imperial power has a 'duty' or a 'right' to impose its administration, business practices and values upon an 'inferior' society.

It is useful to distinguish, in the various phases of European imperial activity in the nineteenth century, four different sets of motives. The first phase was based on the long-established practice of 'to the victor the spoils'. At the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the victor nations, eager to acquire colonies, confiscated some of the possessions of France and its allies. Britain, for instance, acquired Cape Colony (in South Africa), Mauritius and Malta at this time, from the Dutch and the French. Mercantilist principles still prevailed, and it was generally believed that any colony was worth having if, by owning it, the possessor could prevent its products from falling into the hands of commercial rivals. The empire could then be closed off to all foreign trade.

By the 1830s, however, belief in the benefits of a 'closed Empire' was declining. The loss of the American empires of France and Britain in the eighteenth century led many Europeans to suspect the value of trying to hold colonies. In the years following the Napoleonic Wars most of the remaining European colonies in America — those previously ruled by Spain and Portugal — also shook off European dominance.

Increased commitment to *laissez-faire* principles (freedom from restrictions) also encouraged a change in attitudes towards imperialism by the 1830s. Support for 'free trade' resulted in a further decrease in adherence to the older policy of mercantilism. The 'free traders' argued that trade

should be free from tariff barriers and similar restrictions. The best means of expanding wealth, they believed, was to trade with other nations, buying goods as cheaply as possible, and selling them as profitably as possible in any market.

The 'free traders' believed that colonies were no longer necessary, because there was no need for countries to assure themselves of private sources of supply. Rivalries and jealousies over colonies, moreover, could endanger the friendly relations between nations upon which the 'free trade' world would depend. As a result, there was, for a short period, a temporary cessation in the drive to acquire colonies.

A third school of opinion on the value of empires emerged in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s, largely as a result of the work of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and Lord Durham, the principal personalities in the group which came to be known as the 'Radical Imperialists' or the 'Colonial Reformers'. The loss of the American colonies had diminished interest in colonies of settlement peopled by emigrants from the mother country, but Wakefield argued for a new approach to settlement colonisation. Settlement colonies, he claimed, should not be dumping grounds for convicts and paupers, but should be developed as daughter communities of the mother country, peopled with selected immigrants representing a full cross-section of the society from which they came.

The theories and activities of the Colonial Reformers re-awakened belief in the economic value of empires. It was perceived that settlement colonies for selected emigrants could become potential markets and possible fields for investment. The settlement in South Australia, together with most of those in New Zealand, were based on the Wakefield principles.

The Emergence of the 'New Imperialism'

The fourth of the identifiable phases of imperialist activity in the nineteenth century was that known as the 'New Imperialism', which became evident in the 1870s and peaked in the 1880s. This phase was characterised by a great upsurge in the

annexation of new territories, and was partly a result of the desire of the newly unified nations of Italy and Germany to acquire colonies to validate their 'great power' status. Germany added 2½ million square kilometres and 14 million people to its empire between 1884 and 1900. Italy annexed territories in east Africa in the same period.

Britain and France also expanded their possessions, annexing territory in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Between 1870 and 1900 Britain expanded its already large empire by acquiring an additional 11½ million square kilometres and 88 million people, while France in the same period added 3½ million people to its empire.

The 'New Imperialism' era created many problems. Most of the territory acquired was tropical or sub-tropical land in which it was most unlikely that Europeans would settle with their families. Secondly, most of the acquired lands were peopled by 'backward' societies who had previously lived in tribal communities. There was little likelihood that the new possessions could be quickly or efficiently prepared for responsible self-government. A third feature of the 'New Imperialism' was the intense rivalry it engendered between nations, a rivalry that raised tensions and at times brought great powers close to war.

II MOTIVES DRIVING THE 'NEW IMPERIALISM'

It is of interest to historians to discover that the word 'imperialism' was coined in the late nineteenth century. It is likely that the activities we would now describe as 'imperialist' were probably called 'colonial ventures' or perhaps 'colonialism' prior to this period. Lord Carnarvon, a member of the British cabinet, said in a speech in 1878:

Reading 4.2

We have of late been much perplexed by a new word, 'Imperialism', which has crept in among us ... we may very well give a few minutes consideration to the meaning of the term. it is not free from perplexity. I have heard of Imperial policy and Imperial interests but Imperialism, as such, is a

newly coined word to me. In the world today we can distinguish between two types of imperialism, We can see examples of 'true imperialism', which involves the fulfilling of obligations to the colonial peoples and the fostering of a common unity among the subject peoples based on Christian and moral principles. On the other hand we are now also witnessing cases of 'false imperialism', which is characterised by the acquisition of mere bulk of territory and the multiplication of subjects. This latter type of imperialism is all too similar to the continental despotism practised in Europe for generations.

Lord Carnarvon, in a speech made in Edinburgh, 5 November 1878

Questions

- 1 Lord Carnarvon makes a distinction between 'true imperialism' and false imperialism'. Draw two columns. List the alleged features of 'true imperialism' in one, and those of the 'false imperialism' in the other.
- 2 Which nations might Lord Carnarvon have had in mind as practitioners of 'true imperialism', and which as practitioners of 'false imperialism'?
- 3 On what grounds might he have made this distinction?

Historians have frequently sought explanations for the renewed rush for territory in the late nineteenth century. Both as a series of events and a network of beliefs, imperialism was a product of a multiplicity of factors. Identifying its causes has often been made difficult because at times national leaders disguised their motives by stating false reasons for their actions.

Spreading Christianity and Civilisation

The oldest and most repeated justification for imperial activity was the Christian mission to go into the world and preach the Gospel, bringing salvation to the 'heathen'. Early imperial activities by the Spanish and Portuguese carried the pope's blessing for this endeavour.

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would provide a 'liberating' or 'civilising' influence was also prominent among the stated justifications for the 'New Imperialism'. An Australian newspaper, for example, wrote of British imperial expansion as 'work in the interests of civilisation' (*The Argus*, Melbourne, 26 September 1898); French parliamentarians extolled the 'humanitarian and civilising aspect of imperialism' (in a debate in the Chamber of Deputies, 28 July 1885); and the Germans proclaimed that their new nation had a *Kulturmission* in the more 'backward' parts of the world. A US senator, Henry Cabot Lodge, speaking in March 1900, described the American annexation of the Philippine Islands as a means whereby the USA could provide for 'the entrance of the light of Western civilisation' to east Asia.

Imperialism as a Responsibility

The concepts of 'responsibility' and 'duty' figured prominently in statements used to justify the establishment of empires. This responsibility was widely referred to as the 'White Man's burden': it was the duty of the white man to lift the 'backward' races to civilised standards, and to endure criticism and lack of gratitude as he did so. This feeling was most memorably expressed in the English poet Rudyard Kipling's poem of the same name:

Reading 4.3

*Take up the White Man's burden —
Send forth the best ye breed —
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captive's need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild —
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.*

*Take up the White Man's burden —
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard—
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light: —
The cry of hosts ye humour
'Why brought he us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?'*

R. Kipling, *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*. Inclusive edn, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1919, pp. 371-2

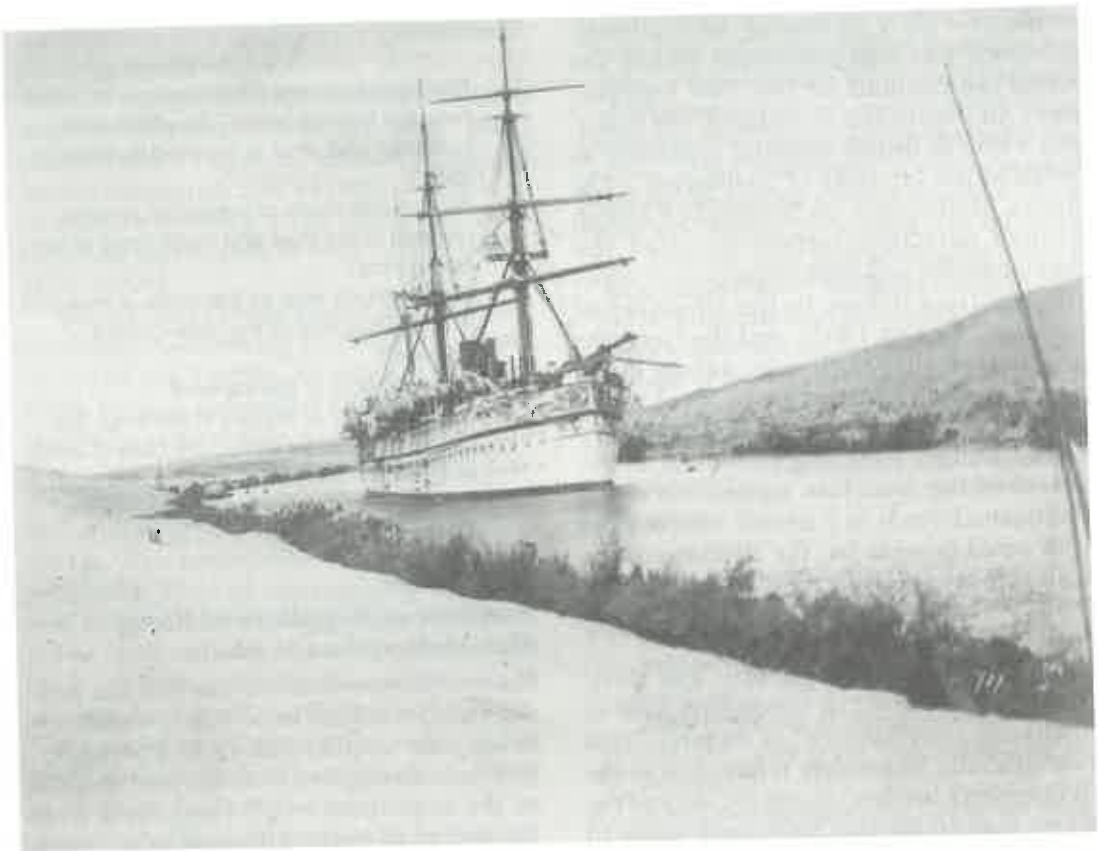
Questions

- 1 Kipling exhorts the British people to 'send forth the best ye breed'. To whom is he referring, and what is involved in 'sending forth'?
- 2 What noble mode of behaviour is being claimed in the third and fourth lines of the first stanza?
- 3 What attitude held by the writer is revealed in his description of the 'new-caught' peoples?
- 4 What aspects of the imperial 'responsibility' is implied in the lines 'the blame of those ye better, the hate of those ye guard'?
- 5 Explain the full meaning of what Kipling meant by the 'White Man's burden'.

Empires as Suppliers of Raw Materials and as Markets

Many observers would claim that the principal motive behind imperialism was always profit and wealth. The early Portuguese and Spanish empires were devoted as much to the acquisition of gold and silver as to the saving of souls. Although in the early nineteenth century the 'free trade' theorists had argued that nations could prosper best by trading with one another, the desire to possess private sources of supply re-emerged in the 1880s. It was realised that the 'gold' of the industrial era would be minerals (and later oil), and that any territory, be it desert or jungle swamp, was worth possessing in terms of its potential — vast mineral treasures might lie undiscovered beneath its land surface.

All nations producing a surplus of goods, particularly manufactured goods, needed markets in which to sell them. Markets require people, not just territory. In the middle of the nineteenth century the 'free traders' had proposed that all nations would prosper if all had open access to world markets. In the late nineteenth century, however, the era of the 'New Imperialism' witnessed a return by governments to the practice of possessing assured markets within an empire. Many annexations were made in the expectation that profitable markets could be developed in those territories.



A British troop-ship passing through the Suez Canal on its way to India, *circa* 1900. The expense involved in a nation maintaining its imperial possessions was enormous, but the belief prevailed that an empire was indispensable to the status of a great power. Thousands of voyages were made between Britain and India, and the word 'posh' is a relic of these times. It is derived from the request written on cabin tickets for this voyage. POSH meant 'port (side) out, starboard (side) home', these being the shady sides of the ship for the passage through the tropics on the journeys respectively to and from India. (Mansell Collection)

The most obvious success stories of this principle were British India and the Dutch East Indies. Other colonial powers hoped that their colonies could be similarly profitable. Most, however, cost the imperial powers more in expenses than they returned in profit.

Empires as Power-bases and Status Symbols

The late nineteenth-century scramble for imperial possessions displayed a belief in the value of colonies as means of both acquiring and exercising political power. In that era international influence largely depended on naval power. For the maintenance of navies of steam-powered ships, coaling stations and ports of call were

required. Defence bases were also needed for the protection of sea routes and communications lines, particularly of expensive and vital international waterways such as the Suez and Panama canals.

In great-power negotiations colonial possessions were additionally important as bargaining factors. Colonies with large native populations were also important as a source of military manpower; Britain and France used large numbers of Indian and North African soldiers respectively in many of their wars, including World War I.

Every great power was seen to possess an empire. Other nations aspiring to become great powers therefore sought empires themselves. It was perhaps not realised at the time that the possession of

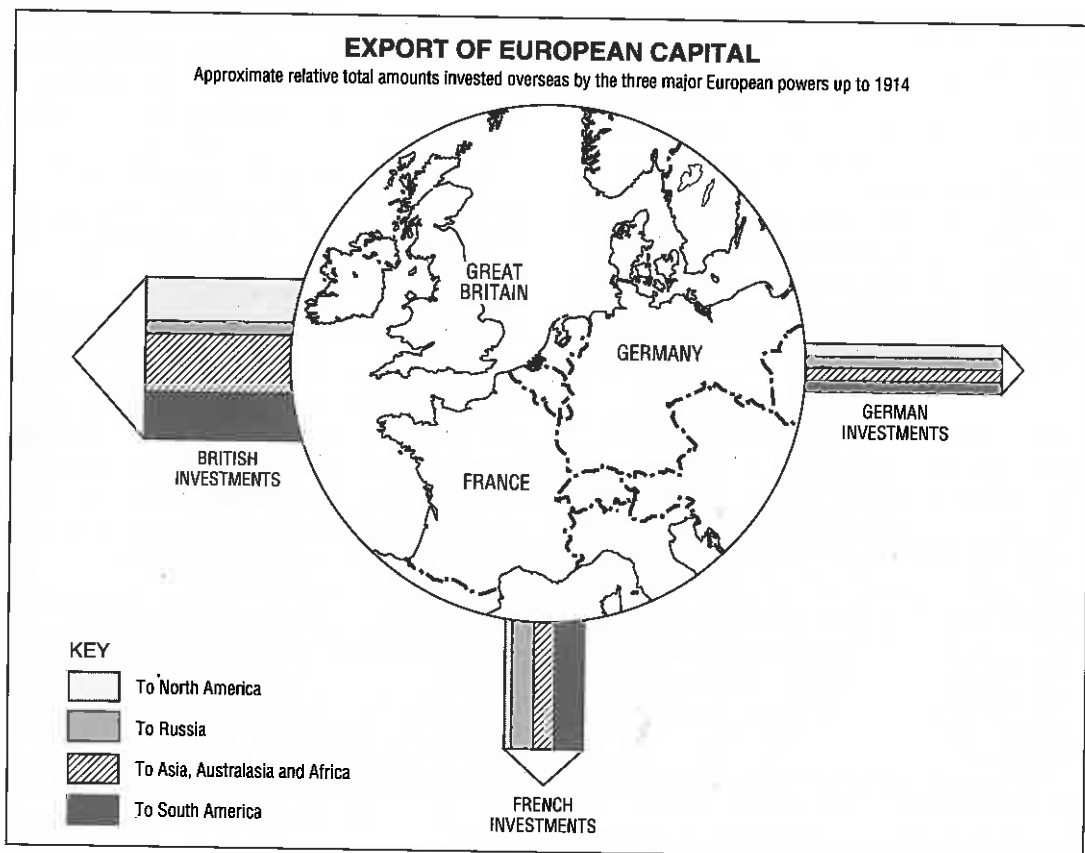


Diagram 4.1 Export of European capital

According to the Hobson theory, the 'New Imperialism' was primarily a consequence of the search for opportunities to invest surplus capital generated in Britain and the rest of Europe by the Economic Revolution. This very approximate representation indicates that Britain, having been the leader in the great economic changes, also had the most capital to export. It had also enjoyed an advantage of several decades in the opportunities to place investment capital overseas. By 1914 Germany's industrial capacity was overtaking that of Britain, but as a nation it had had fewer years in which to place investments. Special relationships sometimes change the proportions: note, for example, that France dominated the Russian investment market, and also specialised in South American investments. All capitalist investments in Russia were lost as a consequence of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. After 1914, the USA, a recipient of investment capital in this diagram, became a creditor nation itself, and reversed the flow.

an empire did not necessarily make a nation great, and that in the case of Britain, for example, its empire was a consequence of British power rather than the source of that power.

Empires as Expressions of Nationalism

A passionate devotion to the cause of 'the Empire' became an essential ingredient in national pride in the late nineteenth century. When the Great War broke out in 1914 this emotional appeal was a major influence in encouraging men to volunteer for service. Significant groups in the commu-

nity also encouraged loyalty to 'the Empire'. Zealous missionaries, career diplomats, ambitious soldiers and eager traders all regarded empires as justifiable fields for their respective endeavours.

The masses were also enthusiastic (despite the fact that they were the likely battlefield casualties in any imperial war), because they believed that the possession of colonies would assure them of employment and guarantee cheap food supplies. When the German naval building programme of the early twentieth century appeared to threaten British naval supremacy, the British working classes, in demand-

ing the construction of additional battle-ships, chanted 'We want eight [new battle-ships] and we won't wait'. In promoting this slogan, the people were in effect inviting the government to levy extra taxes to fund re-armament.

The possession of empires and of large grandiose navies contributed to the cocksure and aggressive expressions of nationalism that characterised the period. This bellicose aspect of nationalism was sometimes called jingoism.

▼
Glossary

Empires as Fields for Investment

However much the advocates of imperialism talked or wrote about civilising missions, duties and moral obligations, the critics of imperialism regarded it as primarily a profit-making enterprise. Supporters of socialism, in particular, branded imperialism as a conspiracy by which the capitalist classes of the already wealthy nations exploited the under-privileged for further gain.

The most supportive analysis of the 'exploitation' interpretation of the 'New Imperialism' was provided by J. A. Hobson, an English historian of socialist inclinations, who published *Imperialism: A Study* in 1902. Hobson rejected both the idealistic claim of 'missions of civilisation' and the argument that growing industrial nations needed colonies for markets and trading partners. Most of Britain's trade, said Hobson, was with its industrial rivals rather than its colonies. The major motive force behind the 'New Imperialism', he claimed, was the pressure from capitalists to invest their surplus capital abroad:

Reading 4.4

It has indeed been proved that recent annexation of tropical countries, procured at great expense, have furnished poor and precarious markets, that our aggregate trade with our colonial possessions is virtually stationary, and that our most profitable and progressive trade is with rival industrial nations, whose territories we have no desire to annex, whose markets we cannot force, and whose active antagonism we are provoking by our expansive policy.

... Over-production in the sense of an excessive manufacturing plant, and surplus capital which could not find sound investments within the country, forced Great Britain, Germany, Holland and France to place larger and larger portions of their economic resources outside the area of their present political domain, and then stimulate a policy of political expansion so as to take in the new areas.

As one nation after another enters the machine economy and adopts advanced industrial methods, it becomes more difficult for its manufacturers, merchants, and financiers to dispose profitably of their economic resources, and they are tempted more and more to use their Governments in order to secure for their particular use some distant undeveloped country by annexation and protection.

... The fallacy of the supposed inevitability of imperial expansion as a necessary outlet for progressive industry is now manifest. It is not industrial progress that demands the opening up of new markets and areas of investment, but mal-distribution of consuming power which prevents the absorption of commodities and capital within the country.

... It is idle to attack imperialism or militarism as political expedients or policies unless the axe is laid at the economic root of the tree, and the classes for whose interest imperialism works are shorn of the surplus revenues which seek this outlet.

J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1902, pp. 71, 80-1, 85, 93

Questions

- 1 What description does Hobson use to describe the markets acquired through the 'recent annexations'?
- 2 Hobson claims that the British 'expansive policy' of seeking colonies has had an effect on its trading partners. What is that effect?
- 3 According to Hobson, what is the cause of the 'policy of political expansion' (that is annexing colonies) being practised by the nations he lists in the second paragraph?
- 4 What development, in Hobson's opinion (see the third paragraph), will lead to further imperialist activities?

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Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, known as 'Lenin', leader of the Russian Bolshevik Party and first ruler of the USSR is shown here campaigning for the Bolshevik policies during the period of inter-party rivalries in 1917. Lenin played a significant part in the intellectual attack against the practices of imperialism. In 1917 he published *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* in which he claimed that the capitalist imperialist nations would destroy themselves in wars, and that the colonial peoples would achieve independence as the capitalist system collapsed. (The Photo Library, Sydney/Hulton-Deutsch)

- 5 Hobson (in the fourth paragraph) claims that it is not simply 'industrial progress' that has produced the demand for colonies as fields for investment, but 'mal-distribution' of consuming power. What does he have in mind?
- 6 Reminding yourself that Hobson was 'of socialist inclination', what do you think he had in mind as a remedy for this 'mal-distribution'?

In reply to the capitalists' claim that continued growth of the economy made overseas market development and investment necessary, Hobson argued that profits from business could be successfully re-invested in the home economy if workers' wages were permitted to increase. The workers in a capitalist economy, however, were being denied a fair share in the

nation's wealth. Unequal distribution of purchasing power thus placed limits on the returns that could be obtained from home investments, forcing the investment capital overseas and generating imperialist policies.

Empires and Monopoly Capitalism

Supporters of Marxian socialism agreed with Hobson's theories. They could see that Hobson's arguments confirmed Marx's prediction that the capitalist world would develop in a particular way and would eventually destroy itself.

Vladimir I. Lenin, the leader of the pro-Marxian Bolshevik Party of Russia, added further fuel to the debate by the publication of his book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), in which he argued that the capitalist nations, which were at that

time destroying one another in World War I, had reached the last (highest) stage in their development, and would shortly be destroyed by the world communist revolution.

Lenin asserted that although capitalists preached the virtues of competition, in practice capital and production were actually gathered into the hands of a few monopolies. The owners of these monopolies then pressured their governments to annex as many colonies as possible in order to seize control of all sources of raw materials and all fields for investment. This drive towards 'monopoly capitalism' resulted in a territorial division of the world between the major capitalist powers, highlighted by international tensions and imperialist wars, of which World War I, then raging, was the culmination:

Reading 4.5

The principal feature of the latest stage of capitalism is the domination of monopolist combines of the big capitalists. These monopolies are most firmly established when all the sources of raw materials are captured by one group, and we have seen with what zeal the international capitalist combines exert every effort to make it impossible for their rivals to compete with them by buying up, for example, iron ore fields, oil fields, etc. Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle with competitors... The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate is the struggle for the acquisition of colonies.

V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, 1950 (first published 1917), pp. 132-3

Questions

- 1 Lenin states that the international capitalist monopolies exert great effort towards a particular objective. What is that objective?
- 2 What was needed by the monopolies to ensure the 'complete guarantee' of their position?
- 3 Lenin attributes the 'desperate struggle for the acquisition of colonies' to a characteristic of capitalist practice. What is that feature?

Other Explanations for the 'New Imperialism'

In more recent times historians have tended to claim that, although the Hobson and Lenin theories at first appear to be convincing, imperialism resulted from diverse factors and beliefs rather than from economic forces alone.

All of the major imperial powers directed only small proportions of their investments into their colonies. Most of their investments were actually in other industrialised nations. Nor were large percentages of their trading activities conducted with the new colonies. The capitalist powers still found that their best markets were with one another and with the European-settled areas of the Americas and Australasia.

Such facts, of course, do not necessarily prove that the capitalist powers did not intend the new possessions to become in time both valuable fields for investment and important markets. But they do call into question whether or not the motives as outlined by Hobson and Lenin were really as sweeping in their influence as has been supposed.

The emotional and power-seeking motivations behind imperialism were strongly validated by Joseph Schumpeter (1893-1950), an Austrian economist who became a professor of history at Harvard. Schumpeter claimed in his work *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1950) that social and psychological factors were more dominant reasons for imperialist expansion than were economic motives. Prominent among these was the basic human tendency to model behaviour on primitive examples (the 'atavistic' character of behaviour), in particular the desire to dominate others, derived from the primitive struggle for survival. Imperialism, Schumpeter argued, was a result of a multiplicity of causes, in which aggressiveness, this desire to dominate, and emotional nationalism were as important

as cold calculation.

In similar vein British historian, history was more a product of international situations in the nature of simple and unitary (The Theory of Capitalism, Longmans, London).

III THE EFFECTS OF IMPERIALISM ON THE SUN

The Western imperialist empire-builders, the hitherto unknown, hitherto unforeseen, spread their belief in progress by materialism of the globe. They mined to replace their version of the economic practice.

Responses of the

In their own minds Americans came as liberators. The native lower races and intellectual elite of God and the individual.

Perhaps these times attained. Europeans brought wiped out thousands of Africans and Pacific social influences life that had prevailed.

Additionally, Western nations, many as the European states. They also acquired as a motivating force of destroying the tribe or feudal bound and static societies, with the which taught stoicism, were exposed in change and progress.