Japanese Imperialism

Japanese Imperialism



A propaganda poster ca. 1935 promoting peace and unity between the Japanese, Chinese, and Manchu people. The caption reads: “With the help of Japan, China, and Manchukuo, the world can be in peace.” The flags shown are, left to right: Manchukuo, Japan, and the “Five Races Under One Union” flag.

Source: Excerpt from Takezawa, Yasuko, “Race, Civilisation, and the Japanese: Textbooks during the Meiji Era”, *Politika*, 2021. Takezawa is a Japanese cultural anthropologist who focuses her research on theories of race and ethnicity.

Source: McDonald, K. 2017. The New Territories. In: McDonald, K, Placing Empire. California: University of California Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.34.c>

The nineteenth century was, after all, an era that saw the particularization of civilizing missions in terms of national futures, such as Manifest Destiny in the United States or “Japanification” in Japan, as well as the incorporation of the United States and Japan into the European system of states with its idealization of the territorial nation-state. Intellectuals in Japan and the United States understood that the history of civilization was also a history of national becoming.

European Imperialism

European Imperialism

China

We find that your country is sixty or seventy thousand li from China. Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade for the purpose of making great profit. The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit of the barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit to an extreme, they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience? I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden by your country; that is because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. Since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on the hard of other countries…

Letter from Lin Zexu, a Chinese official, to Queen Victoria, 1839

Two things happened in the eighteenth century that made it difficult for England to balance its trade with the East. First, the British became a nation of tea drinkers and the demand for Chinese tea rose astronomically. It is estimated that the average London worker spent five percent of his or her total household budget on tea. Second, northern Chinese merchants began to ship Chinese cotton from the interior to the south to compete with the Indian cotton that Britain had used to help pay for its tea consumption habits. To prevent a trade imbalance, the British tried to sell more of their own products to China, but there was not much demand for heavy woolen fabrics in a country accustomed to either cotton padding or silk.

The only solution was to increase the amount of Indian goods to pay for these Chinese luxuries, and increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the item provided to China was Bengal opium. With greater opium supplies had naturally come an increase in demand and usage throughout the country, in spite of repeated prohibitions by the Chinese government and officials. The British did all they could to increase the trade: They bribed officials, helped the Chinese work out elaborate smuggling schemes to get the opium into China's interior, and distributed free samples of the drug to innocent victims.

The cost to China was enormous. The drug weakened a large percentage of the population (some estimate that 10 percent of the population regularly used opium by the late nineteenth century), and silver began to flow out of the country to pay for the opium. Many of the economic problems China faced later were either directly or indirectly traced to the opium trade. The government debated about whether to legalize the drug through a government monopoly like that on salt, hoping to barter Chinese goods in return for opium. But since the Chinese were fully aware of the harms of addiction, in 1838 the emperor decided to send one of his most able officials, Lin Tse-hsu (Lin Zexu, 1785-1850), to Canton (Guangzhou) to do whatever necessary to end the traffic forever.

Lin was able to put his first two proposals into effect easily. Addicts were rounded up, forcibly treated, and taken off the habit, and domestic drug dealers were harshly punished. His third objective — to confiscate foreign stores and force foreign merchants to sign pledges of good conduct, agreeing never to trade in opium and to be punished by Chinese law if ever found in violation — eventually brought war. Opinion in England was divided: Some British did indeed feel morally uneasy about the trade, but they were overruled by those who wanted to increase England's China trade and teach the arrogant Chinese a good lesson. Western military weapons, including percussion lock muskets, heavy artillery, and paddlewheel gunboats, were far superior to China's. Britain's troops had recently been toughened in the Napoleonic wars, and Britain could muster garrisons, warships, and provisions from its nearby colonies in Southeast Asia and India. The result was a disaster for the Chinese. By the summer of 1842 British ships were victorious and were even preparing to shell the old capital, Nanking (Nanjing), in central China. The emperor therefore had no choice but to accept the British demands and sign a peace agreement. This agreement, the first of the "unequal treaties," opened China to the West and marked the beginning of Western exploitation of the nation.

Source: “The Opium War and Foreign Encroachment,” from Asia for Educators, Columbia University. Dr. Sue Gronewold, a specialist in Chinese History, was consulted for this piece.

US Imperialism

US Imperialism



Source: Grant Hamilton, “Uncle Sam Watches Over Cuba and the Philippines”, *Judge* Magazine, 1902.



Source: Udo J. Keppler, “Christmas in our New Possession,” *Puck*, December 24, 1902.

Description: Santa, who is holding a fan and his coat, offers a pile of books (“Education”) with a tag that reads “Uncle Sam to the Filipino.”

Caption reads: “Santa Claus- Phew! I’m glad to oblige Uncle Sam, of course. But next time I’ll wear khaki!”

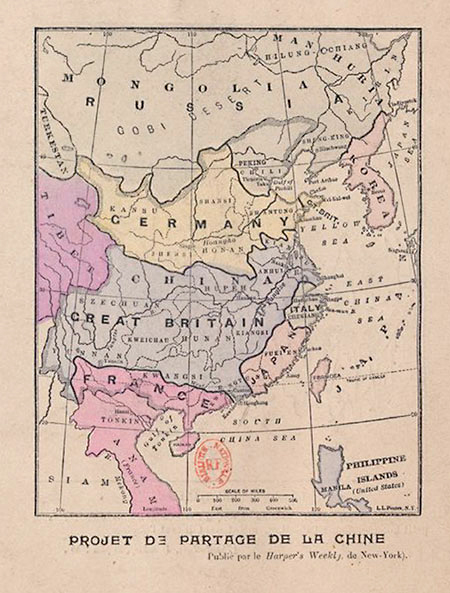
Overall Imperialism of Asia

Overall Imperialism of Asia



French political cartoon from “Le Petit Journal” on January 16, 1898.

Short description: This political cartoon shows the imperial powers cutting up a cake labeled “Chine” (French for China.) The imperial powers represented are, from left to right, Queen Victoria (British), Kaiser Wilhelm II (Germany), Czar Nicholas II (Russia), Marianne (France; she is the personification of the French Republic), and a Samurai (Japan). In the back, a Qing government official attempts to stop them from taking over his land.



“A Forecast of the Partition of China” originally published in *Harper’s Weekly* ca. 1900.