

# Intellectual Imperialism: Definition, Traits, and Problems

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Imperialism is not confined to the political or economic aspects of the historical process. Rather, it is to be considered as a cluster. A phenomenon such as imperialism is a cluster of different aspects of human undertakings. What is usually discussed is economic and political imperialism. In this paper, however, we turn to intellectual imperialism, first describing what it is, and second enumerating the problems connected with it. Intellectual imperialism has, among other things, resulted in a displacement of attention from issues that should be of vital concern to Asian and African societies. The emancipation of the mind from the shackles of intellectual imperialism is the major condition for the development of a creative and autonomous social science tradition in developing societies.

The topic of intellectual imperialism is a serious one even though it gives the impression that it is not a subject for proper and serious consideration. However, as students of the social sciences, we know that there is such a thing as the history of imperialism. We also know that there is such a thing as the sociology of imperialism. The phenomena of imperialism can be divided into the political, economic, and social aspects. In keeping with our analysis and our insight into the historical and sociological process, there is also the need to consider that there is such a thing as intellectual imperialism.

Hence, imperialism is not confined only to the political or economic aspects of the historical process. We have to consider imperialism as a cluster, comprising different aspects of human undertakings. In our discussion of intellectual imperialism in this paper, we shall describe first what it is, and second the problems connected with it. Imperialism in the political and historical sense of the word is the subjugation of one people by another for the advantage of the dominant one. The traits of imperialism are the following: (1) Exploitation: There is exploitation and control by the subjugating power over the people dominated. (2) There is a form of tutelage. The people dominated are considered a kind of ward within a tutelage system. They are taught certain things, they are asked to do certain things, they are organized towards certain ends and purposes laid out by the

subjugating power. (3) Conformity: The subjugating dominant power expects the dominated people to conform to certain aspects of its life, its organization, and its rules. (4) The dominated people will play a secondary role in the set up. (5) The existence of intellectual rationalization, which is an attempt to explain imperialism as a necessary stage in human progress and that the business of the imperialist power is to civilize the people under subjugation.<sup>1</sup> (6) Imperialist rulers: The subjugated country is very often run by inferior talents. If we consider Malaysia and Singapore, we will discover that those British personnel who came here in the past were inferior talents, compared to what was available in Britain. Even British sources have voiced this complaint. I remember a former civil servant, Thomson, remarking that many of those who came from England were not the cream of British society. Those who went to serve in the colonies were people who could not get jobs and people who could not make good in England.

These are the six main traits of imperialism. In addition to political, social and economic imperialism, we are also subjected to intellectual imperialism. Intellectual imperialism is the domination of one people by another in their world of thinking. Intellectual imperialism is usually an effect of actual direct imperialism or is an effect of indirect domination arising from imperialism. The sociology of knowledge studies the forms of knowing which appear at different periods in different societies. What I am suggesting is that the political and economic structure of imperialism generated a parallel structure in the way of thinking of the subjugated people. This, then is the product of intellectual imperialism. I first discussed this theme in a lecture to the History Society, University of Singapore, 26 September 1969.

### Parallels between Political Economic Imperialism and Intellectual Imperialism

Let us discuss the first trait, exploitation. What is the form of exploitation in intellectual imperialism? In political and economic imperialism, the mother country exploited the raw materials of the colonies. They brought the raw materials back to the mother country, manufactured the product in the mother country, and then distributed the products in the colonies. The colonies were regarded as sources for raw materials as well as markets for the industrial products of the mother country. A clear example for us is rubber. Rubber was grown in Malaya, latex was taken to England, tyres were made in England, and then were sold here. Intellectual imperialism also takes this form.

Data is from this region, raw data on certain topics are collected in this region, processed and manufactured in England in the form of books or articles, and then sold here. On the whole, people of this region including their scholars were used mainly as informants. We are continuously bombarded by foreign publications. I am not using the term "foreign" in a judgmental way, but am merely referring to the origin of things. Most of our own history was written by scholars from abroad. They came here, gathered the raw intellectual materials, went back, published their books, and exported the finished product back to the country of fieldwork.

In one of my trips to Kelantan, I met a leading traditional healer who used to supply some British writers with information. He was not able to make the finished product, as he had not been taught to write, he did not know how to use footnotes, and was not able to write essays. The colonial scholars took the data and just published them without any acknowledgement or further analysis. This was then distributed. There is a parallel here between economic exploitation and the exploitation of knowledge.

Let us consider the second trait, tutelage. In the past, education of the population in certain technical areas was considered useful for imperialist governments. The world of learning was also governed by the idea of tutelage. Underdeveloped regions including Malaysia and Singapore were supposed to be dependent on everything abroad. If you wanted to get a good degree you should go to European or American universities. If you wanted a higher degree, you should go there. If you wanted to learn anything, you should read their books. This idea of dependence, through tutelage, for this region intellectually, had been taken for granted. It was assumed that people here know less about practically all subjects than people in the West. Once again a parallel exists. In the past the outlook was that the colonies could not maintain themselves. They could not be granted independence because they would ruin the country if they govern themselves. They could not be relied upon to develop the country because they did not have the technical know-how. Now, the parallel with intellectual imperialism is that they do not have the intellectual know-how. Hence the need for a form of indirect tutelage.

The third trait mentioned above is conformity. In the past, the dominant power expected conformity in the behaviour of the conquered people. For instance, if you wanted to behave normally and properly you should sit the way they sit, you should not belch in their presence, and you should eat the way they eat. There is an exploitation of conformity. Another very clear instance is sport. To be advanced in sport, one should play the British games. In the past attention was

given to hockey, cricket, golf, football, and polo, which are games popular in the dominant country. There was little or no interest in games indigenous to Southeast Asia. This exploitation of conformity is demonstrated in academic theories and methodology. They expected us to employ without question the methods of analysis that were current abroad. They expected us to be interested in topics of interest to people abroad. In running organizations, they expected us to do the same. We have abundant examples from history.

The fourth trait is the secondary role played by the community in the colonies. In the context of intellectual imperialism, the intellectuals and scholars of the region were very often given secondary roles. For example, international publications and journals very often were not controlled by regional scholars, and at international conferences and congresses, regional scholars were not given prominence. The same is true with regard to assessment and valuation. There is a general attitude that many of the regional scholars are suitable only for secondary roles. Some of the scientists abroad are propagating the idea that scholars in underdeveloped areas should not engage in creative research because it is expensive. They should do applied research. In other words, if you are a dentist do your best to pull out people's teeth or to fill their teeth but do not engage in creative research or theoretical innovations in the fields of dentistry because this would be a luxury. So the emphasis is placed on the performance of a secondary role in the creative development of science.

The fifth trait is the rationalization of the civilizing mission. In the past, imperialists talked about the white men's burden. In intellectual imperialism, there is the talk to develop the sciences in underdeveloped societies, according to the prescribed model. Intellectual imperialism assumes monopoly of, and dominance in, the affairs of science and wisdom. Even knowledge of tropical insects comes under its purview.

The sixth trait is the most painful to discuss, but nevertheless must be mentioned. Just as in the past the imperial bureaucrats running the colonies were inferior talents from the home country, similarly we have an inferior group of interested scholars in this region who make a career of their work here. How many top thinkers of Europe and America have gone to underdeveloped areas to stay and do research? Most of those who went to a Third World country, whether as students on specific projects or ex-colonial servants, had no jobs in their own country, and so they would go to a university. If they had been in Malaysia, they went to a Malay Studies department, learned some Malay, edited some remote and obsolete manuscript, got it published, and then posed as Malay experts. You will find that in other branches of knowledge too. There is a predominance of talent that is not considered the most

advanced in their own country, just as there was a predominance of talent in the colonial bureaucracy that was not considered the most advanced in their own country during their time. We have the same problem here but I think I should not go further because I would then have to show instances.

In the imperialist political order, a significant section of the population accepted the superiority of the imperial power. Those who were affected by this feel that significant knowledge can only come from the West. There is the attitude that good books are only written in the West. Those who study economics never bother to find out the thoughts of Asian economic thinkers. Those who study political science never bother to find out what Asian political thinkers had contributed. Those studying philosophy are not interested in how Asians have pursued wisdom. Those who study history do not bother to know how Asians have conceptualized history. What are the reasons for this? This initial outlook regards Asian intellectual endeavour as irrelevant and outmoded. Useful and genuine knowledge is not to be found there. They have to go abroad for it. This is the extreme position.

### Intellectual Slavery, Bondage and Imitation

Lest I am misunderstood, let me make it clear that I am not suggesting that we should close our minds to genuine knowledge from any part of the world. We should assimilate as much as possible from all sources, from all parts of the world, all useful knowledge. But we need to do this with an independent critical spirit, without turning our backs on our own intellectual heritage. The phenomena of servility and intellectual bondage are not the same as genuine creative assimilation from abroad.

Let me give you a very clear instance. I am ill and I need medicine. This medicine happened to be made in the West and it proved to be effective. I use that medicine. This is not bondage. This is a form of genuine dependence. On the other hand, if I believe that there is nothing of worth in Chinese medicine, without investigation, then I am in intellectual bondage. The moment you adopt that outlook you have come under the sway of intellectual imperialism, which effects a complete mistrust of one's own cultural background.

We should assimilate whatever is necessary for progress. We should be practical and independent, and at the same time tap the maximum from our own tradition. In other words, we possess individuality and a sense of independence, rather than an imitating personality.

I shall give you an example of an extreme case of subjugation by intellectual imperialism. There was a colleague of mine, more than thirty years ago, who was professor in our region for some time. He was an Asian novelist and a born Muslim. One day we were talking about philosophy. I asked him whether he had read the philosophy of people like Jalaludin Rumi from Persia and other Muslim thinkers on the different aspects of philosophy. His reply was that philosophy before Hegel was of no value. Philosophy was valuable only after Hegel. I asked him whether those few thousands of years of thinking in India, in China, in the Near East, were simply useless? Was he not interested in them? He said: "No". He was only interested in philosophy after Hegel. Before I left him, we were talking about his novel. He asked me whether I had read that particular book. In reply I asked whether it was written before Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*. He told me it was written before Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, some time in the early 1950s. Then I told him: "To me there is no literature before Pasternak. The only sensible literature I find worthwhile to read is after Pasternak." He was stunned. I gave him the same answer as he gave me about philosophy. It so happened that it was his own novel that was specified as not worthy of attention. Here you find the profound effect of intellectual imperialism.

Very few students are really interested in what the Asian thinkers of the past had said. Our students would read Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and other contemporary Western thinkers, but they would skip Wang An Shih, Ibn Khaldun, Rizal and Nehru. Why do they do this? Simply because they started with the initial outlook, probably unconsciously, that there is nothing to learn from Asian and other non-western societies. All these things belong to the past — they are the dust of history — although they know nothing about tradition, just a blank judgement influenced by a sense of inadequacy.

Another trait is what we call alienation from one's own tradition. There is a break, there is a lack of interest, and there is a conviction that nothing is worthwhile from the past. Another trait we can mention here as an effect of intellectual imperialism is imitation. This is an insidious trend of intellectual imitation in the style of writing and the choice of themes.

One instance of imitation is the writing of Singapore history. The history of the British occupation of Singapore has been written from the point of view of the British. The history of Raffles, for instance, had been presented from the point of view of Raffles derived from his records in the colonial office administration. Many issues such as whether he fell from favour or not, what intrigues he was involved in, what was his pre-occupation with pepper, and a host of other issues

often dealt with are not necessarily issues of central concern to us. We are interested in what changes Raffles had affected in Bencoolen, how his presence affected those in that area, was his presence in Bencoolen oppressive towards the population, and so on. These are themes that had not interested the colonial scholars of history. Instead of selecting different themes ourselves, that is, using our knowledge of historiography to select new topics that are relevant to the region, we persist in imitating the themes and methods of European scholars. Our method is to hide ourselves in the dark room, viewing one roll of microfilm after another, then document after document. All these things have to be done, but if we consider them as rituals, we do not change our topics, there is no choice of new subjects, and there is no attempt to go beyond the documents into the wider background. Nothing of that sort had been done and the final result of the research is another paper on pepper, firms and intrigues. And where will it be printed but in a foreign historical journal? Who will read it? The same type of historians. There you find the in-breeding. So our colonized scholar has become an out member of the breed. There is perpetual in-breeding. He has become the loyal slave like the slaves of the Roman Empire. A slave of the Roman Empire believed in the glory of Rome; he was happy in his slavery; he found it a natural state of affairs. Similarly, our slave scholars are quite happy.

### Intellectual Compradors and the Need for a Break

The intellectual alienation effected by imperialism had generated a group of intellectual compradors, to borrow a Marxist term. We see again a new parallel between political and intellectual imperialism. In political imperialism you have the collaborators, and you have fighters for freedom, those who want to resist imperialism. In the mother country you have this conflict as well, that is, those who want to maintain imperial rule versus those who suggest reforms or independence for the colonies. We have the same thing in intellectual imperialism.

In the world of intellectual imperialism you have the collaborating local scholars, the collaborators and you have the rebels, who are fighting against this domination. In the home countries in Europe and North America, for instance, you have American scholars, such as Myrdal, who went against this state of domination.

Also, we have a very curious pattern emerging now. In colonial capitalism, economic exploitation was often subcontracted to local firms. In intellectual imperialism we have the same parallel phenomenon.



Scholars abroad may have research grants. They go to places in Asia and get local collaborators, the scholars, to whom they subcontract the research. Here is money; you get me the data. These scholars obtain data for them. They do not write the report. They do not see the finished product. They do not know in what form it will appear. Then they assemble the superstructure and the finished product will appear in a form unrecognizable by the collaborating scholars. This subcontracting is being done in the academic world and parallels economic subcontracting. Apart from research on Asia, they will be bombarding the Asians with materials on Europe and the United States, on their religions, their culture, their politics, their health, their problems, and the way they look at life.

The interesting thing is this: you will not find such subcontracting either in Europe or the United States. You do not find Indian and Japanese scholars subcontracting data collection in Europe or the United States, for research on culture, history, politics and social problems. You do not find Japanese and Indian scholars roaming all over the United States and Europe collecting data, publishing them at home, in their language, and then bombarding Europe and the United States with their published results on Europe and the United States.

We have another instance. A foreign scholar writes a book on, let us say, Singapore. A foreign publisher will publish it. A foreign reviewer will review it in a foreign journal, but it will be sold in Singapore, and used by Singapore students. This is a strange situation. Can you imagine a Japanese writer writing a book on the American national character, published in Japan, reviewed by a Japanese scholar, popularized by the Japanese propaganda machinery and eventually sold in the United States, resulting in thousands of students seeing their own country through Japanese eyes? This does not happen in Europe and the United States. Those who are writing on American history are Americans themselves. Other American scholars will review their works. As a result, the standard of scholarship of their country is high because there are many people really critical of each other's works. In our case, there is more scholarship on our region done abroad, reviewed abroad, assessed abroad and consumed here. Therefore, there is less scholarly debate locally.

Intellectual imperialism conditions the mental attitude of those who have been caught in its web. Apart from encouraging docility, it stifles creativity. As a result of being dominated by intellectual imperialism scholars cannot become creative. They spend their time imitating. They spend their time trying to be acceptable and trying to gain approval from the group whom they look up to. This is a very well known and general trend among Asian scholars. Many of them feel they are not good if they do not publish in Western journals. This is, of

course, not true. A work is good whether it is published in the West or not. It has its own merit. To be a beauty, it is not necessary to be acclaimed as such in a beauty contest by foreign judges. If you have enough self-confidence, you look into the mirror and say to yourself "I am beautiful". On the other hand, if you cannot announce your own beauty but need a panel of judges to do so for you, that means you have no self-confidence.

The problem of lack of creativity is a very serious one because it will increase our dependence. The lack of creativity is not an unavoidable state. We can learn from the well-known anthropologist Malinowsky. Malinowsky spent a couple of years in the Trobriand Islands in the Pacific. From his stay there he succeeded in evolving a theory of human behaviour. It is a landmark in the history of cultural anthropology. My big question is why he succeeded and not our own scholars who have spent more than a few decades in this region? Is it necessary to have expensive instruments for theorizing in the social and historical sciences? The library in the campus is adequate and even better than many libraries abroad for that purpose. Our materials are here. Unlike the physical sciences, we do not need expensive instruments, for the materials are around us, the laboratories are around us, and a man like Malinowsky could do it. Why can we not do it? The reason is simple. Malinowsky went to the Trobriand Islands as an independent individual. He had no complexes. He did not feel compelled to imitate. He was not interested whether his writing would be accepted by this or that journal. He spent his time thinking and evolving his theory. Subsequently it became very interesting for many people. We are in a position to do that. The reason why there were not many Asian scholars despite the numbers who reached this stage is primarily because of intellectual imperialism. They believe that they cannot do anything outside the domination of the group. They are incessantly being pushed in the direction of applied research. They will be patted on the back if they write a good paper or a good book provided it is not a challenge.

Another instance is Karl Wittfogel. He wrote an interesting theoretical work on China called *Oriental Despotism* (1957). There is no reason why an Asian could not have written a comparable work. Once the book was published, it was read and assimilated here. But why was it not produced here? It is not an impossible task. The reason is because there is an absence of spirit; the initial impulse is not there. To develop this initial impulse, one has to perform a break. First we have to be critical of writers in general including foreign writers. Second, we have to redirect our attention to individual topics of research. Third, we have to avoid assessing ourselves in terms of foreign yardsticks. Fourth, we

have to cultivate a sense of individuality and independence, and not merely imitate and to please others in our works and research. At the moment, this is a complex problem that is outside the preview of scientific discussion. It is a question of how to create a thinker. Nobody knows how to create a thinker. You cannot ask people how to create a poet. A poet is born and not created. Similarly, we cannot create dictators. All you can do is to awaken consciousness amongst as many people as possible and perhaps a few will evolve themselves in the direction you want them to evolve. Once they have this individuality and outlook, what they need is just further experience, training, and reliance on their own capacity. We will at least be able to avoid the danger of slipping into imitation again.<sup>2</sup>

## The Continuity of Intellectual Imperialism

Thirty-two years ago, when I had received my postgraduate degree (*doctorandus*) from the University of Amsterdam, I attempted to raise interest in the issue of the continuity of intellectual imperialism in the various domains of human activity. The following was suggested, in a London publication:

Under colonialism, education was largely directed towards the creation of intellectuals who formed the ruling group. Following the attainment of independence these intellectuals rose to the helm of affairs, replacing the former regimes. What is partially a serious problem with this group is the fact that to begin with their attitude, their modes of thought, their values, have become Westernised at least in so far as political action is concerned. Secondly, this group lacks a well-integrated system of thought and beliefs, since a synthesis between their own cultural heritage and modern Western thought has not been achieved. A feeling of inferiority implicit in their behaviour is certainly due to the more general historical setting, since it is recognised that if one country is dominated by another for a considerable length of time, a section of the populace feel that their weakness is inherent in their way of life, and regard that of the dominating one as the cause of their superiority and strength. To get rid of this feeling of inequality they adopt the way of imitation. The classification of this group is not based on political concepts. They are to be found amongst those who are progressive or reactionary, for or against independence, the high and the low economic classes, officials and civilians alike (Alatas, 1956).

The economic system, method of government, law, ideas of democracy, procedure of election, conception of welfare, and a host of

many other issues, had been uncritically adopted and advocated by the ruling elite without first checking their validity and feasibility in their own societies. The following conclusion was drawn:

This whole phenomenon of uncritical transmission of thought can be regarded as unconscious continuation of colonialism not in the political but in the cultural sense. Thus colonialism in its more fundamental aspects is by far from becoming a moribund force. The forces which it has released and nurtured in the course of centuries are still actively moving towards crises and disturbances (Alatas, 1956).

I do not have the time and space to give factual documentation here on the comprehensive impact of intellectual imperialism. I shall have to restrict myself to a few instances.

The continuation of imperialism despite the dismantling of that political edifice following the independence of Asian and African countries after the Second World War is another attempt to control and dominate, but not in the earlier political form. The imperialist trend in the West at the moment operates within a pluralist setting. It has other forces to contend with in the West, forces that do not wish to revive imperialism. I do not suggest here that the entire Western civilization is reviving intellectual imperialism to replace the imperialism that was dismantled after the Second World War.

The present intellectual imperialism is a dimension of Western civilization that has proven itself to be the most developed, the most dominant, and the most powerful today. It has the most crucial role in the destiny of mankind at this point in time. The rest of the world has a high degree of dependence on assistance from the West. It is therefore crucial that the rest of the world be apprehensive of certain negative elements that might perpetuate certain ill effects of the former political form of imperialism. One of these negative elements is intellectual imperialism. As in political imperialism, the first strategy is to destroy the self-confidence of the subjugated people. Thereafter the conditioning prepares them to accept the subjugation. Intellectual imperialism does the same thing. Just as the acceptance of imperialism may derive from unconscious conditioning, so the attempt at domination may not be perceived as imperialism.

The views of many thinkers and scholars of great reputation are instances of such intellectual imperialism. The West is held high while the rest of the world is denigrated. Some views are subtly expressed while others are crudely presented. Basic to intellectual imperialism is the underlying racism or ethnocentrism. Even prominent intellectual giants like Marx and Engels were not free of ethnocentrism of the aggressive and denigrating type (Alatas,

1977:234–35). The same may be said of the Russian revolutionary thinkers such as Belinsky and Herzen. Belinsky attributed the degradation of Russia to Asiaticism engrafted upon it by the Tartars. Among others, the dominant traits of this Asiaticism were corruption, mental sloth, ignorance and self-despising, compared to Europeanism, its direct opposite (Belinsky, 1956:127).

This view of the inferior non-European world was dominant before the Second World War. It was not inferiority in science and technology that was stressed but culture, religion, morality, and the intellect. The current trend of intellectual imperialism, though no longer expressed in terms of political control, continues to survive in highly influential circles. One example was the greatly acclaimed humanitarian and Nobel Prize winner, Albert Schweitzer. Many of his works on colonialism and the inferior spirituality of the non-western world were published before the Second World War but they were translated and distributed world-wide in several languages with his blessing. He died in 1965. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1952, and several other top awards from different governments.

Schweitzer was the most sophisticated defender of colonialism. Nineteenth century European colonial expansion was to him a choice of alternatives, colonialism being the superior moral choice. According to him, the primitive or semi-primitive peoples did not lose their independence when a Protectorate or a colonial government was formed. Independence was lost when the first white man's boat arrived with powder and rum. Turmoil and injustice wrought havoc. The chiefs started selling their human subjects for goods. Schweitzer then concluded: "From that point the political work of a state in colonising is to correct, by its action, the evils developed though unrestrained economic advance." (Schweitzer, 1928:65)

Though freedom is a human right, it required, however, a stable society to secure it. Schweitzer concluded: "In a disordered society the very well-being of man himself often demands that his fundamental rights should be abridged." (Schweitzer, 1928:65) The purpose is to carry out a colonization that would improve the general well-being of the conquered, that is to attain true civilization. The people should not be drawn into the global industrial capitalist network but should instead develop their agriculture and manage without the lure of profit and manufactured goods (Schweitzer, 1948a:223).

He recognized the cruelty and injustice committed against the colonized people, but to give them independence was not the solution for it would lead to enslavement by their own people. Twenty years later in 1948 when independence was in the air, he was not in favour of colonialism if it was for material advantage but he found it desirable to help the colonized Africans to attain a condition of well-being

(Schweitzer, 1948a:222).

There were two significant reasons why the European man should impose upon himself this civilizing burden. One was the fact that the African was a child. He said: "The Negro is a child, and with children nothing can be done without the use of authority. We must, therefore, so arrange the circumstances of daily life that my natural authority can find expression. With regard to the Negroes, then, I have coined the formula: 'I am your brother, it is true, but your elder brother'". (Schweitzer, 1948b:130)

The second reason was the innate ability of the African to recognize goodness and rationality, but this noble sentiment in him had hitherto been dumb and tightly bound up. The release of this suppressed inner sentiment could only be accomplished through the higher moral ideas of the religion of Jesus (Schweitzer, 1948b:155).

We shall now enquire what Schweitzer thought of the rest of the world, the non-western and non-African. Was he also an elder brother or a school master? Definitely he was a master, the epitome of Truth and Wisdom, the pinnacle of Humanity. Let us hear his opinion on Islam. He dissuaded us from comparing the spiritual values of Islam with Christianity. He reasons thus:

It lacks spiritual originality and is not a religion with profound thoughts on God and the world. Its power in the world is based on the fact that, while it is a monotheistic and also to some extent an ethical religion, it has preserved all the instincts of the primitive religious mind and is thus able to offer itself to the uncivilised and the half civilised peoples of Asia and Africa as the form of monotheism most easily accessible to them (Schweitzer, 1939:22).

He regarded Buddhism and Hinduism as similarly inferior to Christianity. The intellectualism of the Indian mind was like a cloud that did not give rain but consumed in a sultry atmosphere. Brahmanism and Buddhism attained to an ethic in words only but not in deed. Schweitzer conceded that Buddhism and Hinduism were unified, logical, consistent, monistic and pessimistic, but their ethical content were meagre and their god was dead. In his words:

They present a logical, monistic-pessimistic view of the work and life. But it is a poverty-stricken religion. Its God is mere empty spirituality. Its last word to man is absolute negation of life and of the world. Its ethical content is meagre. It is a mysticism which makes man lose his individual existence in a god that is dead (Schweitzer, 1939:38,43).



Schweitzer admitted that the Buddha originated the ethic of compassion though the commandment not to kill and not to hurt did not begin with him. Nevertheless, his ethic of compassion was incomplete. He deduced that:

No where does the Master demand that because all life is suffering man should strive, in so far as is possible, to bring help to every human being and to every living thing. He only commands the avoidance of pitiless actions. Of sympathetic helping he takes no account. It is excluded by the principle of non-activity which derives from world- and life-negation (Schweitzer, 1936:102).

One cannot avoid the impression that Schweitzer had made a caricature of Buddhism under the garb of a penetrating analysis. How can we say that those Buddhist monks and laymen who burnt themselves to death for the cause of truth and justice, as happened in Vietnam during the Vietnam War, did not act for the good of others? Was their action non-activity? Millions of Buddhists have been involved in intense political conflicts in pursuit of correct political and social order, which indicates their serious concern for the welfare of society and signals an affirmation, not a negation, of life.

However, it is not our intention to critically review what Schweitzer wrote about non-western civilizations. We are concerned with the thought structure of intellectual imperialism. This architectonic structure is common among intellectual imperialists. The following are the foundations of this structure: (1) The non-western world has a limited degree of competence and creativity; (2) It needs the guiding hands of the West to unfold this limited ability; (3) It is receptive to compassion from the West as a younger man is willing to accept advice from an older and more experienced person; (4) It should not be left on its own to experiment with things unknown or alien to the West; (5) Whatever it has achieved in the past was incomplete and seriously defective; (6) The standards of the non-western world cannot be applied to measure the West. Only the West can measure itself and it is the West that can measure other civilizations than its own.

The above are some of the main pillars of the thought foundation of intellectual imperialism. This foundation has been in existence for centuries, harbouring different generational occupants, at least from the eighteenth century onwards. Reading Schweitzer reminded me of Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), who was basically a colonial administrator and not a philosopher like Schweitzer. But the similarities in their thought are amazing. Except for the acquisition of material gains for the colonial power, the other constituents in Raffles' philosophy of

colonialism were similar to Schweitzer's (Alatas, 1971:2–5). This continuity reveals the ideological substratum of colonialism which transcends the individuals in different periods who advocated it. To repeat, with the political edifice of the colonial state gone, the thought structure continues to operate but in a different form outside the area of obvious political control.

## Intellectual Imperialism and the Captive Mind

Intellectual imperialism, however, has to be distinguished from intellectual bondage although the latter is generally the object of intellectual imperialism. There is a kind of intellectual bondage that is not directly brought about by intellectual imperialism. This is the phenomenon of the captive mind in the non-western world. The captivity is self-induced. This intellectual captivity is fertile ground for the implantation of intellectual imperialism. In brief, a captive mind is one that is imitative and uncreative and whose thinking is based on Western categories and modes of thought.

This self-induced captivity is the result of the overwhelming preponderance of Western intellectual influence on the rest of the world. It has generated the captive mind, which has significantly multiplied throughout the non-western world and occupied various positions in society. Their influence is strong and pervasive. I raised this issue in relation to development planning during the Eleventh World Conference of the Society for International Development, New Delhi, 14–17 November 1969 (Alatas, 1969).<sup>3</sup> The impact on development thinking was analysed.

What is a captive mind?

1. It is a product of higher institutions of learning, at home or abroad, whose way of thinking imitates, and is dominated by, Western thought in an uncritical manner.
2. It is uncreative and incapable of raising original problems.
3. Its method of thinking depends on current stereotypes.
4. It is incapable of separating the particular from the universal, and consequently fails to adapt the universally valid corpus of knowledge to the particular local situations.
5. It is fragmented in outlook.
6. It is alienated from the major issues of society.
7. It is separated from its own intellectual pursuit.
8. It is unconscious of its own captivity and its conditioning factors.
9. It cannot be studied in a quantitative manner but can be studied through empirical observation.



10. It is the result of Western dominance upon the rest of the world (Alatas, 1974:691).

Among the negative effects of the captive mind is the absence of creativity in the domain of new understanding, explanation, problem raising, concept creation, depth of analysis and unification of the sciences for specific enquiries (Alatas, 1981). Hence, the pervasive influence of the captive mind has obstructed the emergence of an autonomous social science tradition in Asia, if not other parts of the non-western world as well.<sup>4</sup>

As noted earlier, the captive mentality facilitates the intrusion of intellectual imperialism when an outside intellectual power manipulated the thinking of the group targeted for domination. Let us take a recent example from India, and thereafter, from an earlier period during colonial times. N.K. Singhi refers to the structural-functional approach that dominated conventional sociology for a long time as arising from the historicity of American society. Parsons' theory of action dominated many Indian sociologists for some time. In the explanatory model, action is the attainment of gratification and avoidance of deprivation. The situational complex of action suggested by Parson does not include transcendental spiritual motivation as a prime mover and action in Indian society with its own specific nature.

This dominance of conceptual categories and theoretical orientations emanating from some Western scholars has led to, as Singhi puts it, intellectual colonialism and trained incapacity to construct cognitive alternatives and to examine India's intellectual traditions as revealed in classical text. (Singhi, 1987:2-5). Singhi also points out the existence of certain parallels in the attributes of action between the works of Parsons and the rich classical Indian texts, and they are more comprehensive, precise, and logically adequate than those suggested by contemporary Western thinkers. However, this issue has been neglected by contemporary Indian social scientists. Singhi clearly points to the influence of the captive mind. He suggests a mental liberation by academically de-socializing oneself to undo the academic socialization along Western cognitive structures. (Singhi, 1987:7)

That was about India after independence. Before independence, intellectual imperialism operated along political power lines. Ideas were politically introduced and manipulated to influence and control events. A very interesting example concerned the concept of minority introduced by the British colonial power, which attained operational vigour in the whirlpool of Indian politics. The emotional overtones and the conditioning of the mind brought about by this concept figured prominently in the causal matrix of Indian politics concerned with the partition of India. The then President of the Congress Party, Maulana

Abul Kalam Azad, rebelled against this concept. Azad's rebellion is valid even today. The problem still exists, and we are still dominated by such concepts.

Azad, with great intellectual vigour and insight worthy of a fine sociologist, critically questioned and analysed the concept of minority as applied to the Muslims of India. He considered this an attempt to divide the Hindus and the Muslims of India. He fought against this concept from 1912, in his weekly *al-Hilal*, and revived it during his Presidential address at the Ramgarh congress of the Congress Party in 1940. He explained:

Politically speaking, the word minority does not mean just a group that is numerically smaller, and therefore entitled to special protection. It means a group that is so small in number and so lacking in other qualities that give strength that it has no confidence in its own capacity to protect itself from the much larger group that surrounds it. It is not enough that the group should be relatively the smaller, but that it should be absolutely so small as to be incapable of protecting its interests. Thus, this is not merely a question of numbers; other factors count also. If a country has two major groups numbering one million and two millions respectively, it does not necessarily follow that because one is half the other, therefore it must call itself politically a minority and consider itself weak (Desai, 1946:115).

Azad argued further. If Hinduism had been the religion of India for several thousand years, Islam had been in India for a thousand years. Christianity should also be considered a religion of India (Desai, 1946:115) It would be wrong to attach the word "minority" to Islam and Christianity in India, merely on account of their numbers. Nevertheless, the force of the word introduced by British circles involved with Indian politics overpowered the resistance offered by leaders such as Azad. Ironically, it was Jinnah who finally believed that the Muslims of India were not a minority but a nation in itself. On 26 March 1940, as President of the Muslim League, Jinnah declared the idea of Pakistan as a separate Muslim state.

The examples above demonstrate the significant role of intellectual imperialism as a force in moulding opinions in the direction chosen by the imperial power. The latter were able to manipulate the dissension between certain groups of Hindus and Muslims by using the intellectual weapons of ideas, concepts, and interpretation of history. This was a sociological reality generally ignored by subsequent historians, particularly those from abroad. Some who are aware, shy away from the subject for fear of being accused of writing cheap propagandistic history against imperialism. It is also difficult to obtain data easily and

efficiently since much of it were the products of covert motivations and disguised actions difficult to accept as clear-cut historical materials.

Apart from intellectual imperialism with direct political policy implications, we have those with social and cultural implications that eventually may lead to political actions once the ideas take root. In her excellent analysis of the historical perceptions of Ancient India by European and Indian scholars, Romila Thapar revealed that it was James Mills, in his *History of British India*, who laid the foundation of the communal interpretation of Indian history, thereby providing the justification for the two-nation theory. He was the first to divide Indian history into three periods: the Hindu, Muslim, and British civilizations. (Thapar, 1977:4)

The book had a great influence in nineteenth century India. Mills was severely critical of Hindu culture and was more sympathetic to the Muslim civilization. This, said Romila Thapar, caused the Orientalists and later Indian historians to defend Hindu civilization even to the point of over-glorifying the ancient past. The Muslim period was regarded as one of decline. It was argued that during this so-called Muslim period, the evolution of two nations, Hindu and Muslim, began (Thapar, 1977:7). Thus, the partition of India was the logical outcome.

The scholarly intrusion into the world of Indian history, which then was not fervently developed, by the colonial scholars, effected a falsification of Indian history. The same periodization, the same glorification of the pre-Islamic past, and the same falsification, took place in the field of Indonesian history, presented by Dutch colonial historians.

Among the falsifications noted by Thapar was the exaggerated emphasis of spirituality in Indian culture. This idea, a comparatively recent one, was propounded by those looking for utopia in Ancient India and by those who considered it an effective way of keeping the minds of Indians from industrialization, technological development, and foreign rule. Thapar then draws attention to our captive mind, observing that "The notion was eagerly taken up by Indian scholars who found in it an ideal counterpoise to their humiliation at being subservient to a foreign power." (Thapar, 1977:13) The ancient Indian, or visitors such as the Greeks and the Arabs, never noticed any significant sense of spirituality, different than any other society. This was one of those intellectual creations of imperialism.

Similarly the avoidance of certain themes: the nature of conflicts in ancient India was rarely studied by Indian historians. References to tension were toned down. However, the enthusiastic focus on conflict was directed to the Hindu-Muslim period, which began in the thirteenth century (Thapar, 1977:21,22).

The depiction of only Muslim rulers as conflict mongers was another distortion of history. Another problem was the lack of a consistent approach in historical writing. Thapar drew the following to our attention:

Mahmud of Ghazni is primarily associated in most standard histories as the despoiler of temples and the breaker of idols. The explanation for this activity is readily provided by the fact that he was a Muslim – the assumption being that only a Muslim would despoil temples and break idols since the Islamic religion is opposed to idol worship. There is the further assumption in this that all Muslim rulers could be potential idol-breakers unless some other factors prevented them from doing so. Little attempt is made to search for further explanations regarding Mahmud's behaviour. Other reasons can be found when one turns to the tradition of Hindu kings and enquires whether any of them were despoilers of temples and idol-breakers. Here we come across the case of Harsha, an eleventh century king of Kashmir, for whom the despoiling of temples was an organized, institutionalized activity (Thapar, 1977:15, 16).

Finally, a significant point raised by Thapar concerns the conception of the Muslim period. There was no such clear-cut homogenous entity within the horizontal time context as the Muslim period. She explained:

The basic problem in accepting this periodisation, even at a superficial level, is that the coming of Muslim dynasties varies in time from region to region of the India subcontinent. Thus, the Arabs conquered Sind and established their rule there in the eighth century A.D. The Turks held a part of the Punjab in the eleventh century. They extended their control over a large part of northern India in the thirteenth century. Muslim dynasties first established their power in the Deccan in the fourteenth century. In the far south Muslim dynasties did not rule until much later. Thus, there is no uniform date for the establishment of Muslim rule (Thapar, 1977:10).

So far we have discussed the influence of intellectual imperialism in moulding the mind of a nation towards its own past, together with the resultant outcome: the emergence of the captive mind. Outside the colonial political context, in the world of today, intellectual imperialism, as noted earlier, persists as a cluster in different forms. One of these was discussed by Johan Galtung as scientific colonialism, "a process whereby the centre of gravity for the acquisition of knowledge is located outside the nation itself." Galtung also referred to economic colonialism

with the same characteristic. He mentioned the parallel phenomenon of extracting raw materials from the colonies and sending them back as manufactured goods, as suggested by the Argentinean sociologist, Jorge Graciarena (Galtung, 1967).

In Latin America, the much discussed intellectual colonialism was the actual attempt to fund and control research for the U.S. military or other purposes. There is substantial literature on this. As noted earlier, our interest is in the domination of the mind, of thought structures, of conceptualization unrelated to the phenomenon of research and information control from outside a country.

A factor of great consequence in the conditioning of intellectual captivity, mentioned earlier, is the inability of the captive mind to separate the particular from the universal. There is a tremendous amount of literature from the Western world that may induce a captive orientation if the non-western reader is not careful. The authors of these contributions might not consciously intend to colonize the minds of Asian or African scholars, but the imperious tone of some of their works, judging and deciding on African and Asian societies, some even without visiting them, such as those of Max Weber who covered the Muslim world, China and India in his global intellectual flight, might nevertheless act as a powerful conditioning process.

During my years at the University of Amsterdam in Holland (1948–88), I was aware of this as a problem but it took time to disentangle the particular from the universal, which was lumped together by authors such as Max Weber. In his sociological writings, Weber created many such concepts. One instance may be given here: the concept of charismatic personality, and the ensuing concept of charismatic authority. He defined charisma as “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber, 1968:241). Charismatic authority, according to Weber, is sharply opposed to bureaucratic authority. He explained:

Bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analysable rules; while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules (Weber, 1968:244).

This generalization is not valid. Had Weber taken the trouble to study the Prophet of Islam and Islamic history, he would have discovered that Muhammad’s charismatic authority was neither specifically irrational nor anti-bureaucratic. The Prophet of Islam laid the foundation of a system of law adhered to by billions in the course of one and a half

millennium, together with numerous rules of living, rationally organized. Thus, in his case, the charisma, the law, and the rules are found in one combination. They are not antithetical.

In addition, the logical status of the concept can be questioned. It is true that charismatic qualities are often regarded as derived from divine origin or as exemplary and not accessible to the ordinary person. Weber, however, lumped together under charismatic leaders different types of human beings including the berserk, the epileptic, and the prophet of revelation. From the phenomenological point of view, such conceptualization is problematic (Alatas, 1991:244–50).

## Intellectual Emancipation

From the nature of the problem generated by intellectual imperialism, it is obvious that an intellectual emancipation movement should take place. Here also exist the parallel forms of conditions between our present situation and the colonial past. Akinsola Akiwowo, well-known Nigerian sociologist, lamented African sociologists’ dependence on, and mental captivity by, their North American colleagues. They showed more respect and admiration to North American and European sociologists than towards their own colleagues. They were also ignorant of the excellent work done by their own colleagues inside and outside their own countries (Akiwowo, 1980:62–63).

Akiwowo found that African sociologists were not alienated from their respective homelands. They were very much involved in politics, social criticism and trade unionism. “However,” Akiwowo inferred, “African social scientists differ essentially from their European counterparts in their ability to demonstrate a capacity to construct African modes of explanation, relevant to their daily preoccupation as social scientists in their homelands, as sociologists in Europe and North America have done for their own countries” (Akiwowo, 1980:66).

The phenomenon of the captive mind, though not identical in particularities, is widespread. At the Tenth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, New Delhi, 10–21 December 1970, I pleaded for the establishment of an Asian social science tradition. One of the essential conditions for a tradition to flourish is to possess the combative element ready to refute erroneous generalizations, interpretations, problem raising, conceptualizations, methodologies, and inadequate mastery of data and understanding of the historical socio-cultural context (Alatas, 1979). When this has been accomplished, a creative reconstruction of the social sciences in the direction of an autonomous and independent tradition can occur.



Last but not least, intellectual imperialism and bondage have brought about a displacement of attention from certain issues that are significantly relevant to Asian and African societies if not to the rest of the world. For example, the issue of ethnicity was raised to prominence by anthropologists during colonial times. I can think of at least eight aspects of ethnicity that should be seriously studied in the Third World. They are: (1) ethnicity and corporate crime; (2) ethnicity and bureaucratic nepotism; (3) ethnicity and cronyism; (4) ethnicity and political misdemeanour; (5) ethnicity and corruption; (6) ethnicity and decadence; (7) ethnicity and operational idealism; and (8) ethnicity and the suppression of the individual.

The emancipation of the mind from the shackles of intellectual imperialism is the major condition for the development of a creative and autonomous social science tradition in developing societies. Those who hesitate to accept the prevalence of intellectual imperialism are welcome to an intellectual combat. The intellectual imperialist will not protect them, but will abandon them the moment they are no longer useful in their scheme of things.

## Notes

1. This is most pronounced in the writings of Raffles. See Alatas (1971).
2. The preceding sections constituted a lecture I delivered to the History Society, University of Singapore, on 26 September 1969, entitled "Academic Imperialism".
3. This paper was subsequently published. See Alatas (1972).
4. The problem of an autonomous tradition in the social sciences is discussed in Alatas (1979).

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