

Gary Huang, 2019

Volume 5 Issue 2, pp. 70-76

Date of Publication: 05th August 2019

DOI-<https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2019.52.7076>

This paper can be cited as: Huang, G., (2019). *Dominance of European Culture in Today's Society*.

PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, 5(2), 70-76.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

DOMINANCE OF EUROPEAN CULTURE IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

Gary Huang

Northfield Mount Hermon School, Gill, Massachusetts, United States of America

ghuang21@nmhschool.org

Abstract

Throughout modern history, we can see that Western culture has influenced the life of people all of the world and the way we think. My research is focused on European colonialism and its impact on modern society. My reference materials in the research process include scholarly articles and current news articles. The findings of my research are that almost all of the issues and trends today are somewhat related to colonialism. Even though colonialism has long ended, its legacies remain in today's society and has shaped the way of our thinking today, as it has led to dominance of European culture in the world. This paper examines colonialism's impact in many different areas, including politics, economics, religion, language, clothing, and cuisine, using examples from different parts of the world, including Africa, Asia and South America. Based on the research, I have found the profound influence of European colonialism on today's society and people's way of thinking.

Keywords

Colonialism, European Dominance, Culture, Impact

1. Significance of Topic

European colonialism is not only one of the biggest events that happened in civilization, but still shapes the world today from the clothes we wear to the culture that we have adopted. One of the original purposes of colonialism was to spread Christianity; however, today, most of the people in the former colonies are not Christian. What did not

change is the culture that Europeans spread, especially their languages- most of South America and Africa still speak European languages and English has been spread throughout the world with every continent having English speaking nations. Even in countries like China and Japan, who are both world powers, English is a mandatory subject in school. Following World War II, European countries made up the majority of the veto powers in the United Nations and set the rules for the world to follow. For those who do not conform, it is hard to gain approval by the world and will not likely be successful. Apart from politics, our daily lives are also influenced by European culture. On formal occasions, everyone dresses in coat and tie which started in England in the 19th century and became popular in Europe and later the world. There is rarely anyone wearing their culture's traditional uniforms other than on special holidays. In most fancy restaurants today, people also eat using forks and knives.

2. Background History

As Islam became more popular and European countries did not have anywhere to expand on their own continent, they turned towards the new world to spread Christianity and develop their economy. Starting from 1492, as Columbus discovered the "new" continent, the world has not changed much in terms of the dominating countries and cultures. European countries developed colonies all over the world in America, Asia, Oceania and even took away 97% of Africa's land. Some people argue that it was beneficial to the world as the Europeans introduced new technologies and brought more opportunities to the natives while others say that they stripped out their identity and enslaved them. No definite conclusion can be drawn to that question; however, it cannot be disputed that European colonialization directly leads to globalization today and since they were the rulers before, they still indirectly control how the world operates.

3. Politics

During and after colonialism, the European powers gained so much power that they could change the lives of everyone in the world through a brief meeting between the leaders of these nations. The fate of one of the largest and most populous continents of the world, Africa, was decided in the Berlin conference, which many European nations were involved in. (Fischer, Carving up Africa). It leads to centuries of cultural revolts and genocides that still happens in Africa. When the Europeans decided to split up Africa for colonization, they did not worry much about the different tribes and trade routes that already existed. Instead, they drew borders based on latitudes, longitudes, and rivers as if they were splitting a piece of cake. It is a very inhumane act to do, but no country opposed it.

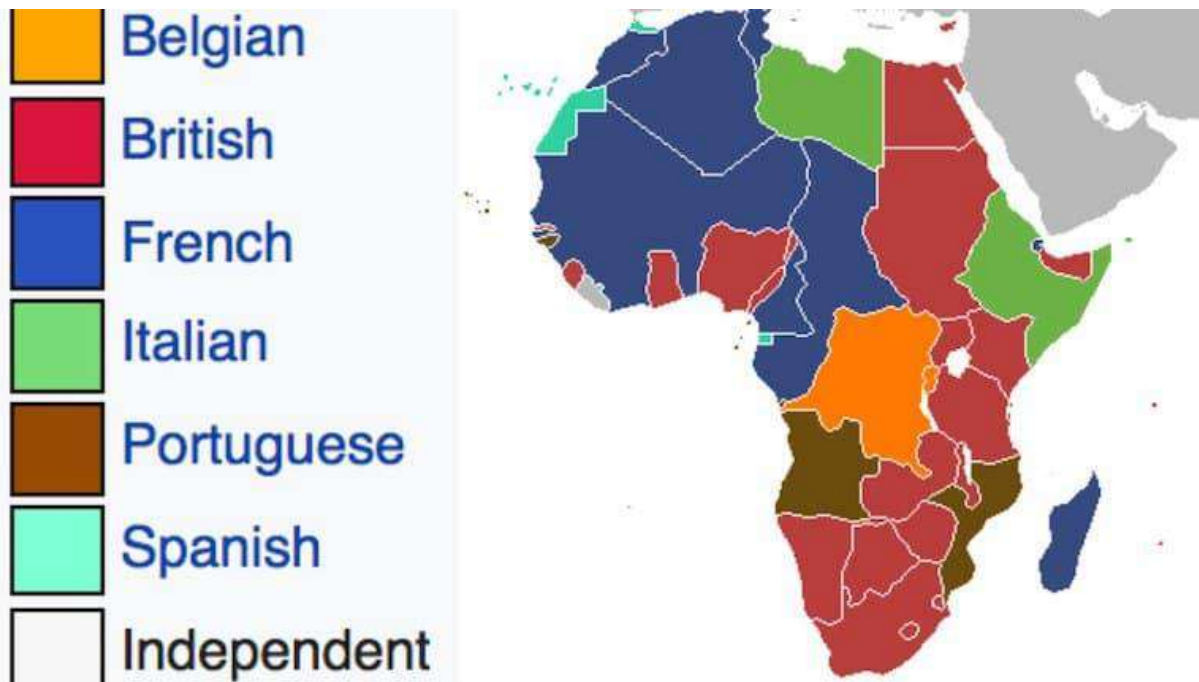


Figure 1: *This Figure Illustrates the Borders that the Europeans Drew for Africa in the Berlin Conference. It also shows that most of Africa was colonized by different European nations*

After World War II, the UN was established to provide peace to the world and it was designed so that every country has a voice in it. However, the headquarters are set in Switzerland and all of the countries that have veto power except for China are Western which means that it is strongly influenced by Europe (Sengupta, The United Nations Explained).

From the 1950s to 1960s, country after country began to gain independence in Africa, but European influence never left them. They gained independence as countries whose borders were drawn by the Europeans; therefore, it led to several civil wars between the tribes. Trying to minimize the amount of force needed to govern their colonies, European leaders gave some tribes the power to rule over others creating a deep-rooted hatred between them. Most notably, the Rwanda genocide which happened in the 1990s of one tribe massacring the other killing up to millions of people (Skok, Impact of Belgian Presence on Rwanda).

4. Language and Culture

Decades after independence, the African tribes still do not have their own official language and speaks the language of their colonist which is a major factor of Europe's continued dominance and is a symbol that the world is adopting their culture. The large number of colonies that England had in the 19th century has contributed to its strong cultural influence of the world today. Even though, all of the colonies are now independent, English

is now the “global language” with 1.5 billion people speaking it, more than 20 times of UK’s population (Mydans, Across Cultures, English is the Word). Even though the numbers of Hindu and Mandarin speakers are rising exponentially, they do not have many speakers outside of Asia and lacks international authority. In China and India, English is also a mandatory subject in school and many people are learning it so it is unlikely that any of these can overtake English.

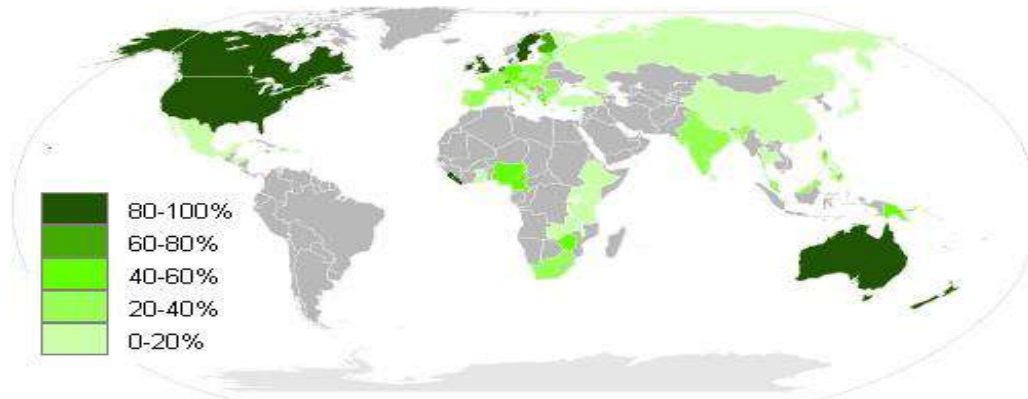


Figure 2: *This Figure Illustrates the Sphere of Influence of English in the World Today*

The other major powers that had many colonies, Spain and France, also have their languages highly influential in the world. In the future, they will continue to prevail Chinese, Hindu and Arabic due to its wide use over the world especially in South America and Africa. On international occasions, French and English are both working languages in the united nations and many other world organizations such as UNICEF and NATO. Apart from these, other events that are more closely related to everyone’s lives such as the World Cup and the Olympics both have French and English as its official languages (Wood, How Many People Speak French).

After the Renaissance, more and more people have become atheist and religion plays a smaller role in people’s daily lives. Language along with clothing and cuisine has been the main source of cultural influence. Other than the predominance of European languages, the world’s main clothing and cuisine style has also been Western. In a formal meeting anywhere in the world, the first thing to think of is to dress in suit and tie, and it would be foolish to wear one’s own traditional clothing. Suits originally came from England when kings there wore it; later it spread to the world through its colonies. Notably, in 1921, the prince of Japan was getting his suits tailored in London before his grand wedding and he was more or less dress identically as the prince of England (Ferguson, Consumerism). After centuries of following traditional customs, the Japanese prince decided to completely change the style of his wedding just to be accepted by the Western world. However, it worked out well and Japan soon became the most powerful nation in Asia with a booming economy. After that,

every country has been assimilating to Western dressing standards until even Kim Jong-Un, the leader of North Korea, wears a suit. It has gotten to the point where leaders wore suits during the China-Africa culture week. They wore clothing that is not native to any of these two places when the purpose of the event was to exchange their cultures.

As Niall Ferguson states, “Are they dressing like us because they want to be like us? Because after all this is about much more than just clothes. It’s about a whole popular culture that extends through music and movies and that culture carries with it a subtle message.” Clothing is just a small part of the bigger image of Europeanization when the world has been adopting many European features. It is a thinking that the West is a place where everyone could be successful and has been causing millions of immigrants each year to Europe. Although the population that want to immigrate is not the majority in most countries, their lives have become more European. Even in China, a country with a 5000-year history and many cultural traditions, the youth has been incorporating Western culture into their lives (Why China’s Youth Find Western Culture Attractive). Studies have shown that many Chinese have chosen to drink coffee instead of tea and it is likely that coffee will overtake tea in a few years and become China’s most popular drink. It is mortifying that China’s 5000-year old drink that was once longed by the whole world is gradually getting replaced by a crop developed by the Europeans during colonialization (China Millennial Swop Tea for Coffee). The wealthy neighborhoods of China also have names resembling famous European places such as Edinburgh, Venice, and Berlin which symbolizes people’s wish to become Europeanized.

5. Conclusion

While self-identity, freedom, and culturalism has been at its peak in the 20th and 21th century, most people do not realize that their lives have been more or less influenced by European culture. Even though China and India are both world powers that have the potential to take over the world, people there look highly upon European culture and are desperate for English classes which they think will lead them to success. Europe remains as the top destination for travel as everyone want learn from them and also a hot spot for immigration. European countries today cannot be compared to the U.S or China in terms of political, military, and economical power, but their influence on the modern society will not be gone in a few centuries.

References

- Bullard, G. (2016, April 22). The World's Newest Major Religion: No Religion. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from National Geographic website:
<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/04/160422-atheism-agnostic-secular-nones-rising-religion/>
- China millennials swop tea for coffee as Starbucks pushes east. (2017, August 8). Retrieved May 29, 2019, from The Straits Times website:
<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-millennials-swap-tea-for-coffee-as-starbucks-pushes-east>
- Fassbender, B. (2004). The Better Peoples of the United Nations? Europe's Practice and the United Nations. *The European Journal of International Law*, 15. Retrieved from
<http://www.ejil.org/pdfs/15/5/395.pdf>
- Ferguson, N. (n.d.). Consumerism. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from PBS website:
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/civilization-west-and-rest/killer-apps/consumerism/excerpt-turning-western/>
- Fischer, H. (2012, February 25). 130 years ago: Carving up Africa in Berlin. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from DW website: <https://www.dw.com/en/130-years-ago-carving-up-africa-in-berlin/a-18278894>
- Mydans, S. (2007, April 9). Across cultures, English is the word. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from The New York Times website:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/world/asia/09iht-englede.1.5198685.html>
- Sengupta, S. (Ed.). (2016, September 18). The United Nations Explained: Its Purpose, Power and Problems. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from The New York Times website:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/19/world/what-is-united-nations-un-explained.html>
- Skok, S. (n.d.). What Impact Did the Belgian Presence in Rwanda Have to Spark Further Conflict? Retrieved May 29, 2019, from Seattlepi website:
<https://education.seattlepi.com/impact-did-belgian-presence-rwanda-spark-further-conflict-5558.html>
- The way forward on immigration to the West. (2018, August 25). Retrieved May 29, 2019, from The Economist website: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/08/25/the-way-forward-on-immigration-to-the-west>
- Wood, E. M. (2019, April 28). How Many People Speak French, and Where Is It Spoken? Retrieved May 29, 2019, from Babel Magazine website:

<https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/how-many-people-speak-french-and-where-is-french-spoken/>