

Liberal Political Theory

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‘James Mill’s Utilitarianism and British Imperialism in India’

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Marc Stears and other members of the Nuffield Political Theory Workshop, and the audience of the Nuffield Graduate Students Seminar for their helpful comments on early drafts of this paper and related papers.

List of Abbreviations of the Works Cited

Jeremy Bentham:

RYU = Rid Yourselves of Ultramarina, in P.Schofield (ed), *Colonies Commerce, and Constitutional Law*, Oxford, 1995;

PIL = Principles of International Law, in J.Bowring (ed), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, volume II*, London, 1830;

EYC = Emancipate Your Colonies!, in J.Bowring (ed), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, volume IV*, London, 1830;

PNSW = Panopticon versus New South Wales, in J.Bowring (ed), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, volume IV*, London, 1830.

James Mill:

**HBI = The History of British India*, 1st edition, 3 volumes, London, 1817;

HBI = The History of British India, edited by W.Thomas, Chicago, 1975;

EE = Essay on Education, in *James Mill: Essays*. London, 1992;

EC = Essay on Colony, in *James Mill: Essays*, London, 1992;

ELN = Essay on the Law of Nations, in *James Mill: Essays*, London, 1992.

[1] J.Mill, ‘Emancipation of Spanish America’, *The Edinburgh Review*, 13, 1809, pp.277-311;

[2] J.Mill, ‘Malcolm’s Sketch of the Sikhs’, *The Eclectic Review*, 10, 1813, pp.77-87;

[3] J.Mill, ‘Bruce’s Report on the East-India Negotiation’, *The Monthly Review*, 70, 1813, pp.20-37;

[4] J.Mill, ‘Affairs of India’, *The Edinburgh Review*, 16, 1810, pp.127-57;

[5] J.Mill, ‘Malcolm’s Political History of India’, *The Eclectic Review*, 7, 1811, pp.473-491;

[6] J.Mill, ‘Macpherson’s Commerce with India’, *The Eclectic Review*, 8, 1812, pp.771-782; [7]

J.Mill, ‘War’, *The Philanthropist*, 3/11, 1813, pp.197-214;

[8] J.Mill, ‘A Solemn Review of The Custom of War and The Friend of Peace’, *The Philanthropist*, 6/22, 1816, pp.147-169;

[9] J.Mill, ‘Malcolm’s Political History of India and Waddington’s Oriental Exposition’, *The Monthly Review*, 76, 1815, pp.399-412;

[10] J.Mill, ‘Malcolm on India’, *The Edinburgh Review*, 20, 1812, pp.38-54.

Introduction

Throughout the years of his involvement in the colonial administration of India from 1819-1835 in the East India Company, James Mill persistently held a conviction that India needed enlightenment and progress. The paper attempts to unravel how Mill applied his utilitarianism and theory of progress to justify the British rule in India. This issue has been neglected or taken for granted in the literature on Mill’s view on the

Indians and British India.¹ In section I, I unravel Mill's grand vision in bringing about the global happiness of humankind with particular reference to Asian nations. It shows why Mill believed that if non-European peoples in Asia, including India, were enlightened through interacting with the Europeans, they would progress and the global happiness would be increased. Then I discuss why Mill thought that the Indians would progress more readily if the whole continent of India was brought under British rule.

Before taking up the post in the East India Company in 1819, Mill delineated in sundry journal writings and his massive *History of British India* (hereafter as *History*) a dilemma which the British Indian government had to resolve if they intended to keep British India and extended their rulership to the remaining parts of India. On the one hand, Britain suffered substantial economic loss and political disadvantages in governing India. On the other hand, India would progress and the Indians would be able to have more happiness under British rule than when they were governed by their native kings. Thus, if only the benefits which the Indians would gain from British rule were taken into account, it was desirable for the British to rule the Indians. However, whether the British should take a total control of India depended on whether there would be an overall utility or disutility. Section II examines why Mill believed that from the utilitarian perspective, there would be an overall utility if the British kept British India, which included the provinces of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras, and if the British extended their rule to the remaining parts of India. I attempt to unravel the consistency of Mill's and Bentham's accounts in arguing for an emancipation of the British colonies in America while supporting an extension of British rule to the whole continent of India. In section III, I delineate what Mill thought to be the best means for the British to subjugate the whole continent of India. Basically, there were two ways to extend British rule: either by making conquest over the native states or through inducing the voluntary consent of the Indians. I shall show why Mill thought that it was not justified for the British to wage offensive wars against the independent native states for the purpose of subjugating the Indians, and why the only legitimate way was in Mill's view to induce the consent of the native princes.

Global happiness and the Desirability of a foreign rule

1. The enlightenment of non-European peoples

Throughout his life Mill's ultimate concern was the happiness of humankind as a whole, or as I shall call it, global happiness. Global happiness will be obtained if all races of peoples of the globe are 'civilized' in the utilitarian sense. Mill had a conviction that all non-European peoples would become 'civilized' if the European knowledge, arts, manners, and institutions were diffused to them. Mill was particularly concerned with how to bring enlightenment to what he believed to be 'half-civilized' peoples, such as peoples in India and other Asian nations. Mill believed that India and other Asian nations, such as China and Japan, needed enlightenment and progress. Mill acknowledged that 'even to Voltaire, a keen-eyed and sceptical judge, the Chinese, of almost all nations, are the objects of the loudest and most unqualified praise' (HBI: II, viii, p.227). However, in Mill's view, Voltaire's high praise of the Chinese culture originated from an orientalist bias which was similar to that of Sir William Jones who suggested wrongly that India had been quite advanced in many respects of civilization.² Mill acknowledged that in ancient time, as India developed, the social structure and other institutions progressed accordingly. For instance, the division of castes in India was multiplied at some stage in

ancient India from four basic castes to a number of thirty-six by admitting 'impure' people borne from mixed marriage of the basic castes (HBI: II, ii, p.55; cf. ECA, p.652). Mill thought that the progress of the Indians up to that stage was impressive and it was 'an important era in the history of Hindu society' in that ancient period. But Mill contended that 'having reached this stage, it does not appear that it [India] has made, or that it is capable of making, much further progress' (HBI: II, ii, p.55; underlined).

According to Mill's scale of civilization, the Chinese was at a similar level of progress as that of the Indians, the Persians, and Arabians:

'There can be no doubt that they [The Indians] are in a state of civilization very nearly the same with that of the Chinese, the Persians, and the Arabians; who, together, compose the great branches of the Asian population; and of which the subordinate nations, the Japanese, the Cochin-Chinese, Siamese, Burmans, and even Malays and Tibetans are a number of corresponding and resembling offsets.' (HBI: II, viii, p.248).

And being 'resembling offsets' of the Chinese, the Japanese and other South East Asian peoples were of an even lower level of progress in their civilizations. From Mill's perspective, China, Japan, and other Asian nations needed as much enlightenment as India. Mill was quite certain that just as the Europeans could attain a civilized mode of existence, other peoples of the human race could also attain that level of advancement so that they would have a similar amount of happiness as what the Europeans had been enjoying (EE, p.9). Mill believed that once China had been enlightened, the civilized manners and institutions which the Europeans brought them would in the long run have had spread to other Asian nations. Mill requested his readers to imagine what would happen if the European manners, arts, and institutions were diffused to China, and subsequently to other Asian peoples:

'what glorious results might be expected for the whole of Asia, that vast proportion of the earth, which, even in its most favoured parts, has been in all ages condemned to semi-barbar-ism, and the miseries of despotic power?' ([7] p .284)

From Mill's perspective, the more the Asian peoples would be enlightened, the happier they would be. Of course, the European manners, arts, and institutions were in Mill's view far from perfect when they were assessed from the utilitarian perspective.³ From Mill's perspective, only when the moral and the political ideals and practices of the utilitarian liberal doctrine were implemented in Europe and all over the world could the maximization of global happiness be foreseeable.

Given his concern with India even before taking up the administrative job in the East India Company in 1819, Mill's immediate objective was surely to bring European enlightenment to India. As early as in 1813, Mill denounced in a review article the claim that the Indians could not be enlightened; as he queried: 'Why every thing is unchangeable so long as nothing occurs which is calculated to produce a change' ([8] p.80). Holding firmly a conviction in the malleability of human nature, Mill thought that if the Indians of the independent native states developed an extensive interaction with the Europeans, they would inevitably receive from the Europeans substantial positive impact on their social progress. Mill believed that the extent of progress which the Indians might attain through interacting with the Europeans would be no less than what the Mahomedans had brought them:

'an intercourse with Europeans is not likely to produce effects less considerable, than intercourse with a people so nearly on the same level of civilization with themselves, as the Mahomedans'. ([8] p.80)

In Mill's view, a wide-spread settlement of Englishmen in India would speed up the enlightenment process of the Indians. Mill claimed that the 'formation of an European – of a British – population in India' increased the 'advantages which would accrue to the vast population of India, and the still more vast population of Asia and Africa' ([3], pp.29-30). Mill fervently believed that the enlightenment of India would bring the European civilization close to the 'doors' of other Asian peoples who needed as much enlightenment from the Europeans as India:

'The pace of civilization [in other Asian nations] would be quickened beyond all example. The arts, the knowledge, and the manners of Europe would be brought to their doors, and forced by an irresistible moral pressure on their acceptance. The happiness of the human race would be this prodigiously augmented; and the progress, perhaps, of even the most cultivated nations, greatly accelerated.' ([3] p.30).

For Mill, the enlightenment of the Indians would thus conduce to a progressive development of other Asian peoples.

It should be noticed that Mill envisaged a more direct way which facilitated the interaction between the Europeans and the Asian peoples, such as the Chinese and the Japanese. Mill believed that if there existed 'a navigable passage across the isthmus of Panama', the Asian peoples would be enlightened more readily. This is because Asian nations, such as China and Japan, would be subject more effectively to the influence of the European civilization. Mill asked,

'Is it too much to hope, that China and Japan themselves, thus brought so much nearer the influence of European civilization – much more constantly and powerfully subject to its operation – would not be able to resist the salutary impression, but would soon receive important changes in ideas, arts, manners and institutions?' ([1] p.284)

In Mill's view, if this navigable passage existed, the fulfillment of the hope in enlightening China and Japan seemed 'to rise even to certainty'; and Britain would be able to influence these Asian nations effectively: 'the connexion thus formed between the two countries [Britain and China], would still further tend to accelerate the acquisition of enlightened views and civilized manners in China herself' ([1], pp.284,5).

It seemed that Mill envisaged an enlightenment of China, Japan, and other Asian nations

through building up commercial and other interactions with them. This required merely constant and frequent peaceful commercial interaction between the Europeans and the Chinese and the Japanese. But I shall show that from Mill's perspective, it would benefit these Asian nations more if they were brought directly under British rule. To see why Mill would have thought so, we should now turn to see why Mill believed that it was desirable for the Indians to be directly governed by a more advanced civilization.

2. *The desirability of a foreign rule in India*

The desirability for the Indians to be ruled by a more advanced civilization was revealed in Mill's opinion on Mogul rule in India. With regard to Mogul rule in India, Mill found it significant to examine:

'Whether by a government, moulded and conducted agreeably to the properties of Persian civilization, instead of a government moulded and conducted agreeably to the properties of Hindu civilization, the Hindu population of India lost or gained'. (HBI: III, v, p.303).

For Mill, before the Moguls ruled India, the individual progress and the societal progress of the Hindu Indians had been retarded by their superstitions in Hinduism. But as I now show, Mill believed that the Indians gained progress both at the individual level and at the social level under the Mogul sovereigns. Consider individual progress first. Gain or loss in individual progress of the Indians was measured in terms of the extent of the improvement of human nature which the Hindu Indians received from the Moguls. In speaking of the advantages to the Indians as they were governed by the Moguls, Mill asserted that it would 'not admit of any long dispute, that human nature in India gained, and gained very considerably, by passing from a Hindu to a Mogul government' (HBI: III, v, p.304). And the improvement of human nature was assessed with reference to the cultivation of the four qualities of mind, namely, intelligence, temperance, justice, and generosity (EE, PP 32,34). A progressive development of these four qualities would be conducive to the individual happiness and the total happiness of the Indian society (EE, p. 37). Thus, what Mill meant was that the Indians got the four qualities cultivated more progressively when they were under Mogul rule than when they were governed by the Hindu despots. According to Mill, since these four qualities of the Indians were better cultivated under the Mogul sovereigns, it could be inferred that the Indians who were under the Mogul sovereigns had more happiness than those who were under the Hindu rulers.

Now let us turn to the societal progress of the Indians who were under Mogul rule, Mill thought that the Moguls were in nearly all respects of civilization, including the world-view, political arrangement, legal system, and other attainments, superior to the Hindus. It was to the benefits of the Hindu Indians when they were under the Mogul rule because they were brought with the more advanced Persian civilization:

'The Persian language was the language they [the Moguls] used; the Persian laws, and the Persian religion, were the laws and religion they had expoused; it was the Persian literature to which they were devoted; and they carried along with them the full benefit of the Persian arts and knowledge, when they established themselves in Hindustan.' (HBI: III, v, p.303).

Mill believed that in bringing with them all important respects of the Persian civilization to the Hindus, the Moguls brought substantial social progress in India. Mill rejected the

claim that the Hindus were very advanced before their being conquered by the Moguls but had declined since then. Mill argued that

‘those, who affirm the high state of civilization among the Hindus previous to their subjugation to foreigners, held fast their opinion, that wherever the Hindu have been found in a situation always except from the dominion of foreigners, they appear, and with an uniformity which admits of no exception, in a state of civilization inferior to those who have long been the subjects of a Mahomedan throne’. (HBI: II, viii, p.241).

For Mill, it was evident that the Hindu Indians who were not subject to the Mogul rule were at a lower stage of societal progress than that of those who had been subjected to the Mogul rule. The message which Mill in effect attempted to convey was that it was justifiable for a people of an advanced civilization to govern a people of a retarded progress in civilization. Nevertheless, Mill seemed to have anticipated a nationalist argument from the perspective of the Indians. According to this argument, the Hindu Indians were justified to reject Mogul rule or other foreign rule because the ruling people were foreigners. Against this argument, Mill stressed the unreasonableness of the intention to reject a government simply because it was formed by foreigners:

‘For the aversion to a government, because in the hands of foreigners; that is, of men who are called by one rather than some other name, without regard to the qualities of the government, whether better or worse; is a prejudice which reason disclaims.’ (HBI: III, v, p.303).

What mattered was in Mill’s view whether the government governed benevolently so as to bring progress and happiness to the Indians.

Mill believed that the European civilization was surely a better candidate for the Indians than that of the Moguls. Given the collapse and the gradual disintegration of the Mogul Empire, there were two alternatives available to the Indians: either to revert to the Hindu despotism, or to accept European rule, French or British in particular.⁴ According to Mill’s logic, it was justifiable for the Europeans to take over the government of India from the degenerating Mogul Empire. The fact that the British had attained a much higher progress suggested that it was unreasonable for the Indians to object to the British governance simply because the British were foreigners. Now, it is not implausible to draw out an implication for other Asian nations. As Mill believed that it was desirable for not only the Indians but also other non-Europeans to have their institutions transformed in accordance with the utilitarian liberal doctrine, it seemed natural to imagine that for Mill, the case of India presented a model for China and other Asian nations. If China and Japan were at a similar level of progress as India, it was justified from Mill’s perspective for China, Japan, and other even more backward Asian nations to be governed by the European nations so that they might be enlightened more readily.

With regard to India, it seems plausible to suggest further that from Mill’s perspective, it was desirable for the British to subjugate the whole continent of India because it was to the benefit of the Indians if they were governed by the British. But what should also be taken into account was the utility to Britain. Around the period when Mill finished the *History*, a substantial portion of India had already been subjected to the dominion of the East India Company. The immediate concern of Mill and Bentham was whether British India should be kept under British rule or whether they should be emancipated.⁵

British India and the extension of British rule

1. *Utility and the emancipation of colonies*

To assess Mill's view on whether it was desirable for Britain to keep British India, we should bear in mind that there was a distinction between two kinds of colonies with which Mill was mostly concerned.⁶ On the one hand, there were colonies, such as those in America, which originated from the widespread settlement of English, French, Spanish and other Europeans. Given the substantial extermination of the indigenous Amerindians, the majority of the population in these settler colonies was of European origin. On the other hand, there were colonies such as British India and Egypt where the native people constituted the majority of the population (cf. EC, p.4). Mill's attitude towards these two kinds of colonies was, as I shall demonstrate, very much in agreement with that of Bentham.⁷ With regard to these two kinds of colonies, the issue which concerned Mill and Bentham was whether the European nations 'ought to have them' (EYC, p.408). From the utilitarian perspective, it was necessary to weigh the utility or disutility in keeping colonies against the utility or disutility in emancipating them in order to determine whether it was desirable for the mother nations to retain their colonies. If there was an overall disutility in keeping the colonies, it would not be desirable for the mother nations to retain them. But if there was an overall utility in keeping the colonies, it would be desirable for the mother nations to retain them despite the fact that the mother nations suffered in keeping them.

For Bentham and Mill, keeping colonies brought neither economic nor political advantages to the mother nations. In Bentham's words, colonies 'in general yield no advantage to the mother country' (PNSW, p.206). From the financial point of view, as Mill argued in his *Essay on Colony* which appeared in 1820, it was a matter of fact that colonies yielded no tribute to the mother country,

'a government always spend as much as it finds it possible or safe to extract from the people. ... If the government of the mother country is sure to spend up to the resources of the country; and if a still stronger necessity operates upon the government of the colony to produce this effect, how can it possibly afford any tribute?' (EC, p.18)

More important, Mill contended that 'there is, if not an absolute, at least, a moral impossibility, that a colony should ever benefit the mother country, by yielding it a permanent tribute', because even if it might happen that colonies yielded tributes, the tributes should be retained for the governance of the colonies (EC, p.18).

Mill and Bentham thought that Britain suffered economic disadvantages in keeping British India as its colony. Mill had been repetitively complaining about the financial deficits of the East India Company for many years even before the publication of his *History* and his subsequent appointment in the East India Company in 1819. The deficits were due to the costs involved in the administration its Indian dominion and in wars designed to extend its sovereignty ([6] p.487).

With regard to the political advantage and disadvantage in keeping British India, Bentham listed out several reasons in his *Principles of International Law* as early as in 1786-9 to explain why it was in the political interest of the British to give up British India:

1. Saving the danger of war;

2. Getting rid of the means of corruption resulting from the patronage, civil and military;
3. Simplifying the government;
4. Getting rid of prosecutions that consume the time of parliament, and beget suspicion of injustice (PIL, p.548n).

In discussing the emancipation of Spanish colonies in America Bentham elaborated these advantages which he thought Spain would enjoy if they grant independence to their colonies in America (RYU, p.24). The most important one which the mother nations suffered was the wars which were waged to contest for colonies; as Mill believed, colonies were a 'grand source of wars' (EC, p.32), or as Bentham claimed, colonies increased 'the chances of war' (PIL, p.547). Having shown that keeping colonies brought no advantages but only disadvantages, political or economic, to the mother country, we may proceed to discuss the utility that the colonies and the whole humankind would have obtained if they were retained or relinquished.

From the utilitarian perspective, far from being economically disadvantageous to the well-established colonies in America, their emancipation brought economic benefits to the mother nations and the colonies. Mill claimed that the independence of the British colonies of the United States had been commercially 'far more profitable to' the British than its subjection ([1] p.280).⁸ Furthermore, Mill contended that instead of hindering global trade, granting independence to well-established Europeanized colonies, such as the case of the United States, had enhanced it. Mill was convinced that the independence of the United States presented an evidence to affirm that newly independent nations offered valuable chances for enhancement of commercial connections and free trade among nations which in turn increased the economic prosperity of all involved nations. In supporting the emancipation of Spanish America, Mill argued that the independence of Spanish America would not only enhance trade between Spain and its colonies but also present a commercial opportunity for other nations and hence increase the global trade ([1], pp.280-2). Of course, it would happen only if the newly formed government in the Spanish America was 'a just and beneficent government' which acknowledged the utility of the freedom of trade ([1] p.277).

With regard to British India, given the economic backwardness of the Indians, granting self-governance would in Mill's view not bring much enhancement of trade to other nations. And more important, given their strict adherence to the traditional economic practices and laws which were prescribed in the Hindu sacred texts, it was not very likely that a just and beneficent government, which would enhance trade, might be established. What should be done was rather to terminate the monopoly of the East India Company in the Indian trade so that not only other English merchants but also merchants from all other nations could join the Indian trade.⁹ If the monopoly of the East India Company was terminated, competition and freedom of trade would increase the prosperity of all involved nations.

With regard to the political advantages and disadvantages, Bentham contended in his *Principles of International Law* that in the case of all those distant well-established colonies in America, it would be impossible for the mother nations in Europe 'to govern them so well as they would govern themselves, on account of the distance' (PIL, p.548). Bentham believed that it was not in the interest of the well-established Europeanized colonies to be governed by the people of the mother nations who never knew, nor could

ever know, either their inclinations or their wants (EYU, p.408). Thus, there was a great disutility to the distant well-established colonies if they were kept governed by their mother nations.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there was in Mill's and Bentham's view an important difference between the well-established Europeanized colonies and the British India, namely, that the European well-established colonies in America were all ready for self-government, whereas British India was not. In his *Emancipate Your Colonies!* written early around 1792-3, Bentham advised the French to grant their colonies in the West Indies independence because they were 'ripe for self-government' but not to give their colonies in India back to the Indians themselves:

'whatever applies to the West Indies, applies to the East with double force. The islands present no difficulty: the population there is French: they are ripe for self-government. There remains the continent: you know how things are changed there: – the power of Tippoo is no more. Would the tree of liberty grow there, if planted? Would the declaration of rights translate into Shanscrit? Would *Bramin, Chetree, Bice, Sooder, and Hallachore* meet on equal ground? If not, you may find some difficulty in giving them to themselves.' (EYU, p.417; underlined).

In Bentham's view, if the Indians were left to their own native princes, they would inevitably be ruled by despots. In contrast to the situation in the well-established Europeanized colonies, it was not in the interest of the Indians if they governed themselves. As Mill asserted:

'whatever may be our sense of the difficulties into which we have brought ourselves, by the improvident assumption of such a dominion, we earnestly hope, for the sake of the natives, that it will not be found necessary to leave them to their own direction'. ([4] p.154).

Mill thought that even though Britain suffered in keeping British India, it was in the interest of the Indians. Furthermore, Mill believed that instead of leaving the Indians to govern themselves, if the British governed them directly would enlighten India, and this would in turn facilitate a rapid diffusion of European knowledge, arts, manners, and institutions to other Asian nations, and would thereby enhance the happiness of the humankind. So far I believe I have shown that it was desirable in Mill's view for the British to keep their dominion in India. Let us proceed to discuss: to what extent Mill committed himself to an extension of British rule to the whole continent of India, and by what means Mill thought it to be legitimate for the British Indian government to extend its sovereignty to the independent and semi-independent native states.

2. *Conquest, consent, and the extension of British rule*

There were basically two ways for the British Indian government to bring enlightenment to the Indians in various independent native states through extending British rule to these states: either by conquest or by inducing voluntary subjection. I shall discuss first whether Mill thought that it was legitimate for the British to extend their sovereignty to and thereby impose their institutions upon the Indians of the independent native states by conquest. To examine this issue, we should begin by examining Mill's account of just war and then study how he applied it to the situation in India. Throughout his life, Mill never attempted to conceal his passionate contempt against war. In Mill's eyes, wars

inevitably produce evils:

‘Nobody is now so profligate as to vindicate war on the ground of its being a positive good. It is spoken of as at best a necessary evil. It is a painful means, only to be endured for the sake of the end; namely, protection against the injuries of other nations.’ ([8] p.168).

War can never be justified unless it is used to prevent more evils, ‘that of repelling actual and unprovoked invasion’ ([8] p.152). Generally speaking, war may be justly waged against other nations only if ‘some right of the nation is violated’ (ELN, p.19). A war is just if the objective of this war is to seek for a ‘compensation for an injury received’ and for the ‘security that a fresh injury shall not be committed’ (ELN, p.21). However, even if some injury is done, a recourse to war is in Mill’s view not always justified. For example, if a compensation has been made to the injured nation by the offending nation, no war is justified (ELN, p.20).¹¹ More important, even in the cases when compensation could not be gained except through revenge, it does not necessarily justify war. Mill claimed:

‘When it has suffered real injury, and when there is no doubt about the matter, the principle of utility says, Consider whether the evil which you have suffered is likely to be compensated by war. If the evils of the war are likely to outweigh the gains, it is better to abstain from war, and to pass by the injury. When the happiness of the people is the object in pursuit, this is the rule which will be followed.’ ([7] p.212).

Thus, even if it is just for the injured nation to wage war against offensive nations, it is not desirable to do so if more evils than gains would be done to itself. Waging offensive wars against other nations cannot in Mill’s view be justified by appealing to the principle of utility. Even if it may be conducive to the overall happiness of humankind for a nation to conquer another nation, such a conquest cannot be justified because of the injustice involved. Mill summarized: ‘To pursue what is useful to itself, and to avoid injustice towards other nations, is the grand concern of every community’ ([7] p.212). To see how Mill applied these considerations in the context of India, let us begin with the system of neutrality firstly prescribed in the Pitt’s Indian Act in 1784.

Since the enactment of the Pitt’s Act, a system of neutrality had been the official British international policy in India and was declared repeatedly in the Act of 1793. The two acts prohibited the Governor-Generals of British India from making any attempt to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India. In order to comply with the Acts, the British Indian government should adopt a policy of neutrality in the sense that the British Indian government ‘should stand aloof from all connection with native princes, should form no alliances with them, should take no part in their quarrels, and should never draw the sword for any purpose but that of self defence, when its territory is actually invaded’ ([5] p.475). Mill agreed with the basic principle that the British government should abstain from making any conquest in India and from waging any wars except those which were launched for defensive purposes. Mill praised the fundamental rationale behind the policy of neutrality, namely, the prevention of war ([9] p.402). But Mill did not quite agree with an unconditional submission to the policy of neutrality because he believed that the system of neutrality was in many occasions impracticable in India.

Since Mill’s ultimate concern was peace, any policy which tended to produce peace instead of war should in Mill’s view be chosen. Accordingly, how the number and the

extent of wars could be minimized in India involved a pragmatic consideration of the actual situation in India. Mill believed that to adopt a policy which departed from the policy of neutrality did not inevitably render wars more frequently. Mill claimed that, in some cases, a 'system of vigilant interference', instead of a system of neutrality, should be adopted. Mill contended that the 'system of vigilant interference' was not offensive in nature but as defensive as the system of neutrality 'in spirit':

'By keeping a watchful eye upon the princes of the country marking the individual from whom danger is most imminent, and hedging him round, by contracting alliances with his neighbours, so that he must force his way to you through a rampart of foes, you are obviously both repressing the desire to attack, and lessening the danger, should war be inevitable.' ([5] p.485).

Mill believed that this system was in principle no more than 'the policy of foresight and prevention' ([5] p.485). Nevertheless, Mill admitted that 'by opening a door to defensive policy on this ground, we open a door to offensive policy also' ([5] p.486). Let us discuss further the abuses which Mill had in mind.

For almost a decade before his appointment in the East India Company in 1819, Mill had been condemning the aggressive British policy and the subsequent violent conquest over the native princes in a series of review articles. Mill thought that the 'system of vigilant interference' was open to abuse in the hands of the governors-general:

'the power of interfering in the affairs of the princes of India, might be made use of by Governors General, not for the purpose of maintaining the security and tranquillity of the Anglo-Indian dominions, but for the gratification of private ambition, or private revenge, or private avarice, or private partiality and favour'. ([5] p.486).

Mill persistently discredited the contemptible personal ambitions of the governors-general, especially Lord Wellesley who was the governor-general from 1786 to 1805. It is worth pursuing further to see to what extent Mill thought that it was not reasonable for Lord Wellesley to depart from the system of neutrality. Mill contended that if Lord Wellesley's intention to extend the British influence could be used as a justification for his aggressive policy, the political ambition of his enemy, Dowlut Rao Scindia, could also be used to claim justice for himself.

With regard to Lord Wellesley's unnecessary departure from the policy of neutrality, Mill held:

'in proportion as we recede from a system of neutrality, we shall find daily more causes for interference, fresh claims for protection, and new wrongs to revenge. Who is there so blind as not to perceive that it leads, by a natural but inevitable progression, to the entire subjugation of all India?' ([10] p.48)

The formation of the alliance with the Peshwa under the Governor-General-ship of Lord Wellesley finally gave rise to the second Mahratta war. What was wrong was not the alliance which Lord Wellesley formed with the Peshwa but his private ambitions which were hidden behind the apparent intention of bring benevolent rule in India. Mill compared Lord Wellesley's apparent intention to govern India benevolently with that of the French Bonaparte to govern the world beneveolently:

'The truth is, that independent states are generally extremely ungrateful to the great men in their neighbourhood, who take the trouble of forming plans for their future welfare. They have an unlucky propensity to being happy in their

own way, and to managing their own affairs themselves. The benevolent plans of the French emperor for the improvement and happiness of the human race, are perversely counteracted by every nation who can, and who dare counteract them. The administration of Lord Wellesley was a period of uninterrupted warfare. We are perfectly aware of the millennium which was intended to succeed to all this disturbance; but we never could tell exactly when this millennium was to begin.' ([10] p.52).

For Mill, even though it might be granted that the intentions of the French emperor and Lord Wellesley in bringing about benevolent governance by establishing European institutions over the whole world and in India respectively were sincere, it should not be done through offensive conquest.

In Mill's view, the only legitimate means to subjugate the independent native princes and thereby extend appropriate British institutions to their states was to induce their consent:

'One thing, indeed, is to be considered, that in a great part of all that is said by the Governor-General, it is pretty distinctly implied, that to render these Indian princes dependent upon the British government was not an injury to them, but a benefit. If this were allowed to be true; and if it were possible, in other indulgences, to make up to a prince for the loss of his independence; yet, in such cases, the consent of the prince in question would seem a requisite, even were his subject people, may proceed to impose force of this kind of benefit upon any other ruler at his pleasure, this allegation would prove to be neither more nor less than another of the pretexts, under which the weak are always exposed to become the prey of the strong (*HBI: VI, xi, p.606; underlined).

For Mill, the sovereignty of the independent native princes should be respected. And only when the Indians attacked British India or had become aggressive and were ready to attack British India might the British justifiably wage war against them and thereby subjugate them. Otherwise, to induce their consent to the British governance was the only legitimate means to extend British rule to the independent native states.

Conclusion

Inspired by the utilitarian mentality, Mill committed himself to an agenda of creating a global liberal order in which the happiness of the humankind would be maximized. Such an order is attainable only if every nation progressed to a maximal extent. From Mill's perspective, it was desirable for those who were at a higher level of progress to help those which were at a relatively lower level of progress. However, this agenda was at Mill's time imperialist in nature. It involved an imposition of European institutions upon non-European peoples through an extension of sovereignty. In the case of India, after a thorough consideration of the advantages and disadvantages in taking the total control of India was made, Mill realized that the utility gained by the Indians who were not capable of civilized self-governance outweighed the disutility to the British if they were governed by the British benevolently. Mill thought that it was desirable for the British to keep British India. Mill believed that it was to the benefit of the Indians in the independent states if they were benevolently governed by the British. But he objected to imposing beneficent British institutions over them through extending the British governance to India by offensive war. The only legitimate means was to induce the consent of the native princes.

It seems that according to the same logic which Mill had in mind in justifying British rule

in India, it would be entirely legitimate for the Indians to govern the British if the Indians had attained a higher level of progress of civilization. In my view, it is plausible to suggest this as a theoretical possibility from Mill's and Bentham's perspective, though historically speaking, it was impossible. Mill was concerned with the greatest happiness of the humankind. If the Indians were of a higher stage of civilization in terms of the utilitarian criteria, it would be in the benefits to the British if they were governed by the Indians because more happiness would be brought to the British. It would be unreasonable for the British to oppose it merely because the Indians were foreigners. But it should be noticed that given that Mill's assessment the progress of India and other Asian cultures was based on a European perspective, it could hardly be the case that the non-European civilizations would have been judged more advanced than the European one. And, when writing his *History* Mill did not intend to understand the Indian culture and other Asian cultures in person and he did not attempt to learn their languages either. Though Mill believed that he was impartial in constructing the 'scale of civilization' in his *History*, his account is open to the charge of being ethnocentric and no more than an exercise of intellectual self-indulgence and an attempt to rationalize British imperialism in India.

Footnotes

- 1 The literature includes: J.Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism*, Clarendon Press, 1992); E.Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Clarendon Press, 1959); W.Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals*, Clarendon Press, 1979), chapter 3; L.Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India*, Stanford University Press, 1994.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of Sir William Jones's view on India, see Majeed, *op cit*, chapter 1. And for a brief examination of Mill's disagreement with the orientalist praise of India, see Majeed, *op cit*, pp.143-4; Zastoupil, *op cit*, pp.12-13.
- 3 The most important defect of the British institutions is its legal system. Majeed correctly points out that in criticizing the Indian law and legal system, Mill was also criticizing the English one. See Majeed, *op cit*, p.131.
- 4 With regard to the chaos after the collapse of the Mogul Empire, Mill asked: 'Are the government, and the people, to go on, for ever, in their present deplorable situation; the people suffering all the evils of a state of anarchy; the government struggling, with eagerness, to help them, but in vain?' (HBI: VI, vi, p.548) Mill believed that the establishment of the British government in some part of India had at least ensured a certain level of order and stability.
- 5 It seems to me that Mill simply took for granted the justification of British rule which had already been maintained. This could not be clearer than when he stressed the importance of his study in the *History* (HBI: II, x, p.225).
- 6 In the case of British colonialism, there was another kind of colony, namely, the penal colony, such as Australia. Since it is not an important concern in Mill's account, I shall not discuss it in any detail.
- 7 For a general discussion of Bentham's view on the emancipation of the British colonies see L.Campos Boralevi, *Bentham and the Oppressed*, Walter de Gruyter, 1984, chapter 6. Though Bentham's account of colony has attracted brief attention, Mill's account has been commonly neglected.
- 8 On another occasion, Mill appraised the economic benefits of the independence of the United States to Britain: 'North America eagerly consumes 12,000,000L of our goods per annum; – and gives us money for them!'. See Mill, 'Macpherson's Commerce with India', *The Eclectic Review*, 8, 1812, p.782.
- 9 During the several years before the charter of the East India Company was renewed in 1813, Mill was deeply engaged in the debate on whether to retain the monopoly of the East India Company. Mill criticized people, such as John Bruce and David Macpherson, who defended the monopoly of the East India company. Inspired by Adam Smith's conviction in the benefit of free trade, Mill argued in a series of review articles that it was in the benefit of Britain to deprive the East India Company of the right of monopoly. Later in his *Elements of Political Economy* written in 1821, Mill argued that 'if there be any peculiar advantage, ..., to the mother country, it must be derived from the cheapness of the goods, with which the colony supplies her. ... This advantage, if drawn by the mother country, would be drawn at the expense of the colony. In free trade, both parties gain' (EPE, p.318).

- 10 Both Mill and Bentham supported the independence of United States of America. However, Bentham did not think that the independence of United States was justified because of the alleged existence of 'natural rights' to which the Anglo-American rebels appealed. Showing deep contempt towards the American Declaration of Human Rights, Bentham, followed by Mill, believed that granting self-governing independence to the Anglo-Americans was justified only in terms of the overall utility thus obtained. Cf. H.L.A.Hart, 'Bentham and the United States', *Journal of Law and Economics*, 19, 1976, reprinted in *Essays on Bentham*, Clarendon Press, 1982.
- 11 In his *Essay on the Law of Nations*, Mill contended that '[b]efore recourse is had to war, for any violations of rights, compensation ought first to be demanded; and no war, except in cases fit for exception, should be regarded as just, which this demand had not preceded' (ELN, p.20).