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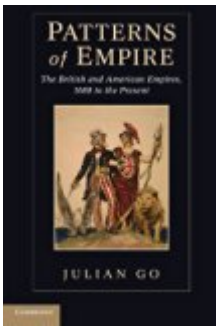

Julian Go. *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present.* New York: Cambridge, 2011. 302 pp. $28.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-107-60078-2.

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America's imperial consciousness has long been characterized by denial. At the nation's founding political thinkers emphasized that the United States inaugurated an entirely new political form premised on liberalism and democracy in sharp contrast to British monarchical rule--a "nation of states," not an empire. Since then, the claim to America's uniqueness in the global order has undergone many transformations, but an assertion of America's incomparability in the world order lies at the core of each iteration. Julian Go argues that ending American exceptionalism demands more than laying claim to the term "empire." It requires submitting the claim that the United States is an empire like none other to rigorous testing.

In *Patterns of Empire*, Go compares the development of, and modes of rule in, the British and American empires. Drawing from quantitative data on British and U.S. colonization, annexations, and military interventions, as well as secondary literature, Go traces the imperial practices of the states from the late seventeenth century to the present. He does this by dividing the history of each empire into three comparable phases, which correlate to respective phases of historical economic development. According to Go, both empires went through "hegemonic ascendancy," "hegemonic maturity," and "hegemonic decline." During the phase of hegemonic ascendancy, which occurred for Britain from 1688 to 1815 and for the United States from 1776 to 1945, the empires expanded their economies and state capacities. Once they achieved hegemonic maturity, from 1816 to 1872 for the British Empire and 1946 to 1973 for the United States, "each state dominated the world's productive capacities" (p. 22). During the subsequent phase of hegemonic decline both empires confronted economic competition from rivals in a more competitive global order.

Go is a sociologist and in the tradition of comparative-historical sociology *Patterns of Empire* is "unabashedly aimed at big comparisons" (p. 13). The comparisons are big indeed. Rather than isolating informal from formal modes of rule or differentiating hegemony or "great power" status

from empire-building, Go embraces the multiple ways that both states deployed imperial power. To do so, he employs the concept of "imperial formations", a capacious term that has been used by other scholars to highlight multiplicity in forms of rule within empires and evolution in forms of power over time.

Over six chapters that move thematically and chronologically, Go systematically dismantles some of American exceptionalism's central claims and one of its enduring methodological restraints: that "comparisons to the British empire or any other empire would be misguided at best, misleading at worst" (p. 14). While there are some older and newer traditions of comparing the two empires, they have typically reified liberal exceptionalist conceptions of the benign nature of the U.S. empire. In contrast, Go engages in a sustained comparative analysis to evaluate the structures and patterns of modern forms of imperial power. [1] The British and American empires shared more than entwined histories; they shared patterns and practices of imperial rule. Both empires had evolving imperial discourses of exceptionalism, built powerful "fiscal-military" states, deployed formal and informal modes of imperial rule dependant on local conditions, and adapted imperial activities to the changing global fields in which they exercised their power.

The empires followed similar paths to hegemonic maturity. Chapter 1, "Imperial Paths to Power," shows that for both empires territorial growth, emigration, and population growth gave rise to a shift in responsibility for expansion from explorers, settlers, and other subjects to the state. Both governments expanded capacities for external intervention, deploying new agencies, administrators, and military officials to their territories. In the process, each empire developed a strong fiscal-military state capable of executing wars of conquest and holding continental and overseas colonies governed through colonial administrators.

Chapter 2, "Colonial Rules," shows that both empires adopted various modes of colonial rule at once. The U.S. government in the Philippines and Puerto Rico took formal control, deploying administrators and colonial officials who established liberal tutelary regimes. In Guam and Samoa, authorities opted for more informal modes of rule which sought to maintain native traditions and to rule through them rather than by displacing them. British authorities had also deployed diverse mechanisms for rule. In the 1850s, Britain adopted liberal policies in India that emphasized the potential for Indians to be self-governing while in Fiji the government sought to preserve and use native institutions.

But the point is not just to note the similarities in modes of rule across the two empires. Go seeks to explain them. He argues that in both empires, colonial rather than metropolitan factors played the greatest role in shaping the application of state power. As officials sought to establish legitimacy to rule among local populations, the "logics of legitimation" made local factors--the demands of local elites, colonial politics, and relationships between local populations, among others--determinative of the nature of colonial rule. Building on challenges to "metropolitan-centered thinking" in imperial history initiated by Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, Go emphasizes that "colonial policies were not shaped by national character, values, or styles but by the very spaces and scenes they aimed to manipulate and manage" (p. 102).[2]

While both the British and American empires mixed forms of rule during their respective phases of hegemonic ascent, only the American empire shifted to a rejection of formal modes of rule when it reached hegemonic maturity. In chapter 3, "Hegemonies and Empires," Go challenges the long-standing narrative of the United States' arrival at hegemonic status. Scholars and commentators emphasize that the post-World War II U.S. government avoided colonization (e.g., the Philip-

pines gained independence), supported national self-determination globally, promoted free trade, and intervened militarily overseas in benign efforts to promote democracy. In contrast, the British state has been portrayed as aggressive during its phase of hegemonic maturity between 1816 and 1872.

Go argues that the British state was in fact less imperialistic than has been presumed and that the United States after World War II was more so. The Philippines gained independence. However, the United States held on to Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Samoa, whose people remain under federal control without full protection of the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. government continued to support European empires with funds to sustain their colonial holdings, and relied upon old colonial systems for the expansion of its military bases and the extension of informal power across the globe.

In chapter 4, "Imperial Forms, Global Fields," Go shows that the American state's embrace of increasingly informal modes of rule during its period of hegemonic maturity did not reflect national character and institutions as much as the global field in which the United States operated. In contrast to the British Empire, which reached hegemonic maturity in the period of the "new imperialism," the United States emerged as a power at the global height of anticolonial nationalism. This acted as a powerful pushback against the growth of America's formal empire.

For both empires, hegemonic maturity gave way to increasing economic competition in the global order--for the British after 1868 and for the United States in the 1970s. Chapter 5, "Weary Titans: Declining Powers, New Imperialisms," shows that these challenges corresponded with changes in imperial practices. Britain responded with its "new imperialism," in which formal modes of rule increasingly replaced informal modes. It took colonies that it had previously declined to hold formally, such as Fiji, and extended its control in South Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Challenged by rival economic powers, the United States became more aggressive in the 1980s, and while formal imperialism was no longer possible in the late twentieth-century global context, the U.S. state became increasingly aggressive in its use of military intervention and covert operations to topple foreign regimes.

In chapter 6, "The Dynamics of Imperialism," Go argues that the trajectory of the two empires points to a larger historical pattern. Rejecting the cliché of rise, decline, and fall on the Roman model, Go suggests that the British and American empires reveal a different pattern for modern empires, dictated most centrally by global economic competition. He argues that the empires followed a path of "imperial expansion, abatement, and reassertion" (p. 207).

The comparative approach of ***Patterns of*** Empire poses both substantive and methodological challenges to the approaches of U.S. imperial studies. It challenges the fundamental assumptions at the core of America's historic and present imperial consciousness. Go argues that while historians and social scientists are increasingly willing to call a spade a spade, they have yet to dismantle the central logic that sustains exceptionalism: the rejection of comparison. "To say that the United States is an 'exception' is to say that it is an exception to a rule against which American distinctiveness can be measured," Go explains (p. 3). In ***Patterns of Empire***, he asks the comparative questions that strike at the heart of exceptionalist denial of empire and neo-revisionist "liberal exceptionalism."

There are some problems with this approach, and Go admits them at the outset. The comparison rests on disentangling two empires whose developments were connected in time and space. And it cannot account for all causal factors. Further, as he notes, the approach cannot entirely account for transformations in the global political order. By the time the American empire reached hege-

monic maturity in the wake of World War II, decolonization, anticolonial resistance movements, new global institutions, and an emerging international human rights regime had profoundly reshaped the world order. Go argues that the global context in large part explains how the empires behaved, but did the dynamic work in the other direction? One wonders how American and British colonial practices in each phase actually laid the groundwork for the "global fields" in which they sought to deploy their power.

The book covers some serious ground--nearly three and a half centuries and two empires in approximately 250 pages. Go is forthright here: ***Patterns of Empire*** "admittedly runs the risk of overlooking certain complexities, details, and nuances" (p. 13). He argues that the risks are worth the new insights and understanding gained from a macrohistorical comparative approach. Others have taken up the details and nuances--the lives of everyday actors in the empires and new cultural and social histories. Indeed, Go's earlier work should be counted among these.[3] While he admits that "empire is in the details" he suggests that there "might be overarching patterns, modalities, and iterative forms across time and space that warrant investigation too" (p. 13). ***Patterns of Empire*** shows convincingly that they do.

Just as there are nuances and details that a macrohistorical approach will invariably miss, so too there are patterns that we can only see from a distance. The "big comparisons" provide new ways of thinking about empire and new patterns in empire-building that break free from national narratives. ***Patterns of Empire*** offers a methodological and analytical way out of the confines of narratives that have long been more restrictive than illuminating. At a time when "liberal exceptionalism" remains a central paradigm in American imperial studies, Go marshals the comparative data to point out its substantial limitations and obfuscations. And, at a time when comparative method in history has given way to "entangled" and transnational histories, Go makes a strong case for rigorous comparison as a way toward a greater understanding of the dynamics of modern empires. Notes

[1]. See, for example: Robin Winks, "American Imperialism in Comparative Perspective," in ***America Compared***, ed. Carl J. Guarneri (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 139-54.; Niall Ferguson, ***Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*** (New York: Basic Books, 2004); and Charles Maier, ***Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Empires*** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[2]. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, ***Africa and the Victorians*** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961); Ronald Robinson, "The Excentric Idea of Imperialism" in ***Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities***, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jurgen Osterhammel (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 267-89.

[3]. Julian Go, ***American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico during U.S. Colonialism*** (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

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