

- Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
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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, xi + 377p.

Julian Go's extended comparison of American colonialism in Puerto Rico and the Philippines is nothing short of groundbreaking. As the first work that simultaneously examines the introduction of American political ideas and institutions to these two island colonies in the first decade and a half of American rule, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning* introduces a fresh and welcome perspective to the in-depth single-country focus that has typified colonial histories to date. As such, it represents an exciting development in this revitalized field of scholarship and makes a seminal contribution to American, Puerto Rican, and Philippine colonial historiographies.

Along with its comparative dimension, the book's approach is likewise innovative. Theoretically and methodologically self-aware, Go draws on new culture sociology to construct an analytical tool that is at once richly interpretive yet empirically grounded. Examining "semiotic systems of meaning in practice," his framework emphasizes the centrality of cultural schemas in shaping the content, meaning, and mode by which American political principles and processes were conveyed by Americans and understood by Puerto Rican and Filipino colonial elites. By locating meaning, not in people's hearts and minds, but in the internal logic derived from their practices, from "patterns of opposition and contrast," he maneuvers the slippery terrain between the essentialism and subjectivity that sometimes bedevil structural functionalism and cultural interpretivism, on one end, and the determinism that befalls more materialist approaches, on the other.

The book crafts its account of American, Puerto Rican, and Filipino colonial paradigms, and the interplay among them, principally from secondary literature, but supplemented with some primary research. Unpacking the American worldview, the first of seven chapters explains how Lamarckian notions of racial difference and Progressivism informed the conviction of American colonial policymakers that "backward" Puerto Ricans and Filipinos were capable of uplift and that tutelage in government would best impart to them the capacity essential for democracy. That this plan seemed compatible with Puerto Rican and Filipino demands lent American colonialism the legitimacy that proponents believed could sustain it in the long-term.

Because colonial elites understood terms like "democracy" differently from their American mentors, Go's second and third chapters contend that they "domesticated" the American program in terms of an intellectual universe that was shaped by their political experience under Spain

and most powerfully by the mutually interdependent patron clientelistic social relations generated in their agricultural export economies. Although Americans had envisioned a progressive training scheme, colonial leaders equated democracy with a high degree of local autonomy akin to that which they had sought from Spain. Having cast the United States as a better patron than Spain for giving them rights and democracy, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos expected to enjoy greater independence through American federalism or an American protectorate, respectively. This autonomy would enable them to infuse public office with their traditional roles as father or head of societies they likened to the family or the body, doling out resources channeled to them by Americans to cultivate clients that formed their voting constituencies.

To Americans, such practices were reminiscent of the bossism that corrupted politics in the mainland and proved that their wards had misapprehended their lessons in good government. Thus in Chapters Four and Five, colonial elite paradigms confront what Go terms “recalcitrance” in the political field, as American officials exerted greater control than anticipated over colonial personnel and resources and thwarted strategies once effective against Spanish colonial officials. Governor General Luke Wright and his administration ignored appeals that the leading Filipino political party, the Partido Federalista, had couched in the language of patronage. When the hegemonic Puerto Rican Federal Party wielded *retramiento*, a strategy of non-cooperation, to prevent Americans from reconfiguring electoral districts and thereby empower opposing parties, they only succeeded in turning over to their Republican rivals control over the House of Delegates. Recalcitrance in the economic field further undermined elite schemas, as crisis and natural disasters impaired the resource base, especially of Puerto Rican elites, that had allowed

them to render assistance to their clients.

In the next three chapters, Go surveys corruption convictions, legislation, and political discussion in Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands before and after major showdowns between Americans and colonial elites and argues that while Filipinos persisted in prior practices and continued to domesticate American forms, Puerto Ricans abandoned old schemas and expanded their cultural repertoire by incorporating American strategies. This was because Filipinos encountered only “limited recalcitrance” in the political field, but Puerto Ricans faced “convergent and recurrent recalcitrance” in both political and economic fields. Indeed, Federal Party communications with the Puerto Rican public, American officials, and fellow elites after they clashed with Americans do indicate a shift towards American rhetorical strategies, but the Filipino elite discourse examined is less conclusive. For rather than track pre- and post-crisis speech acts aimed by the same group of elites towards the same audiences, the book compares earlier communications that Federalistas addressed to multiple audiences with those that Nacionalistas later directed primarily to a Filipino electorate that had vindicated their pro-independence platform by handing them control over the Philippine Assembly. Such an audience would likely have been more receptive to old-style rhetoric. More important, studying contests between Speaker Sergio Osmeña and the Filipino-controlled Assembly, on the one hand, and Governor General W. Cameron Forbes and the American-dominated Philippine Commission, on the other, would reveal, not divergence, but parallels between Filipino and Puerto Rican responses at this stage. For much like their Puerto Rican counterparts, Filipino legislative leaders did not merely domesticate American forms, but Americanized their cultural repertoire: in disputes over appropriations and appointments, the Assembly molded itself in the image of Anglo-

American lower houses and deployed tactics devised by the British House of Commons and the colonial assemblies of British North America against their royal antagonists.¹⁾

Similarly, analyzing how proponents of American colonialism justified colonial rule before U.S. and international audiences, one is reluctant to concede that American colonialism's exceptional character was "due to the exceptional demands of the local elite than to the exceptional character of America's deep traditions and beliefs." Before these communities, American colonial architects took care to demonstrate that their program cohered with an American democratic tradition portrayed as exceptional.²⁾ That the program enjoyed some support from the governed offered one kind of proof, but so, too, did establishing its consistency with constitutional principles embodying this tradition.³⁾

Finally, the primacy of schemas in this work raises intriguing questions about factors other than patron clientelism that might likewise have influenced their structure, content, and operation. When Apolinario Mabini analogized between the aborted Philippine Republic's legislative, executive,

and judicial departments and society's intellect, will, and conscience, he also evoked the soul's faculties [Majul 1998: 182] to which these latter categories exactly correspond and which he would have encountered through scholastic philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas. Perhaps a richer, more complete conceptual universe would have emerged had it reckoned with whether and how exposure to European intellectual traditions — notably, Aquinas theology and Spanish liberalism — informed Filipino elite understandings of social roles and obligations and the relationships between individual, society, and government.

The above issues notwithstanding, this book makes a significant contribution to the literatures it engages and will help define the terms of this emerging comparative colonial conversation.

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1) See Golay [[1997] 1998: 140]. See particularly Conference Committee of the Philippine Commission, *Election of Resident Commissioners to the United States: Record of the Discussions between the Conference Committees of the Philippine Commission and the Philippine Assembly, with a Brief Account of the Facts Preceding the Appointment of Said Committees, and an Excerpt from the Journal of the Assembly Giving an Idea of What Occurred after the Report of Disagreement*, Philippine Assembly, Second Legislature, 1st Session, 1911.

2) See generally Kramer [2003].

3) See, for example, leading legal debates in five seminal *Harvard Law Review* articles published during Senate ratification debates over the 1898 Treaty of Paris: Baldwin [1899], Langdell [1899], Lowell [1899], Randolph [1898], and Thayer [1899].

Majul, Cesar Adib. 1998. *Apolinario Mabini- Revolutionary: The Great Role He Played in the Malolos Congress, the Birth of the Philippine Republic, and the Filipino-American War*. The Centennial Collection of Filipino Heroes. Manila: Trademark Publishing Corporation

Randolph, Carman. 1898. Constitutional Aspects of Annexation. *Harvard Law Review* 12 (5).

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Anne L. Foster. *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, xii + 241p.

Much has already been written about the colonial experiences in Southeast Asian countries in the first half of the twentieth century. While Thailand kept its political independence throughout this period, all other countries in this region were colonized by Western powers, mostly by European nations, except for the Philippines, which was placed under the United States as its second colonial master at the turn of the century. Due to the *de facto* predominant presence and influence of European powers in Southeast Asia, discussions on this period largely focused on European powers, while the role of the United States was considered as minor or auxiliary.

In light of the historical experiences in Europe, the period between World War I and World War II has been termed as the “interwar period.” It was during this period that the historical paths of European nations changed drastically, while Europe finally saw its position decline as the political and economic center of the world, a position that it had maintained since the nineteenth century. Arguments on the “interwar period” of Southeast Asian history might make sense when attempting to explain reconfigurations in Southeast

Asia from a European point of view. However, this approach does not explain what role the United States played in Southeast Asia during this period and how it related to the process that played out as the United States gained superpower position in the region after World War II.

Through painstaking archival research, *Projections of Power* illustrates the positionality of the United States in Southeast Asia in the fields of politics, economy and culture between 1919-41 or what we can call the “interwar period.” However, it is interesting to note here that the author does not use the term “interwar period” in this book. Although she does not explain the reason explicitly, this may be due to Foster’s aim to reexamine this period in the light of American modern history.

As is widely known, the United States experienced a period of progressivism in the early twentieth century and it was during this period that the United States established its systematic administration and governance as a nation-state as well as an empire. As Foster discusses, this process unfolded within the United States and in the Philippines simultaneously (pp.81-86). In this context, we might see that the author understands the period of 1919-41 not as the “interwar period,” but as the paradoxical period for rising American hegemony in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world. Herein lie the distinctive features of this book: it offers a new framework for understanding the foreign relations among European and American powers in colonial Southeast Asia.

Focusing on the United States as the crucial actor in the discussion, the book explains how European and American powers connected with each other for sustaining their interests in the region, while respectively taking different positions on internal matters in regards to their colonies. To this end, I find that the discussions in the first three chapters relating to the politics, economy and culture are unique, while the latter two chapters which discuss the changing scenes after the 1929