

Economic Ideologies and Transimperialism: Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* (1841) as a Case Study

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Abstract

Owing to the centripetal force of British imperial historiography, historians have paid less attention to how the British embrace of free trade from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries sparked a countermovement of economic nationalism across the imperial world order. Tracing the global influence of a central text, German-American economic theorist Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* (1841), among leading nationalists in both imperial and anti-colonial contexts provides a much-needed corrective: it illustrates the transimperial crossings and formations of knowledge and opinions about economic nationalism in an imperial age.

Keywords: transimperial, Friedrich List, economic thought, imperial and anti-colonial economic nationalism.

“The highest means of development of the manufacturing power, of the internal and external commerce proceeding from it, of any considerable coast and sea navigation, of extensive sea fisheries, and consequently of a respectable naval power, are *colonies*,” German-American theorist Friedrich List (1789-1846) argued in his 1841 book *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie* (*The National System of Political Economy*).¹ He also laid out how Western industrializing powers required not only colonies abroad, but also high tariff walls to protect domestic “infant” industries from the full force of global market competition. List was effectively updating the older zero-sum game of the European mercantilist system to take into account a rapidly globalizing mid-nineteenth-century imperial world system marked by industrialization, nationalism, and technological advancements like the telegraph, steamships, and railways that were connecting markets at an unprecedented level. List’s own travels across the imperial metropolises of Germany, the United States (where he became a citizen), and France, before ending up back in Germany helped inspire

¹ Friedrich List, *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie* (Stuttgart & Tübingen, J. G. Cotta, 1841).

The National System. So, too, did his worries about how “England’s manufacturing, commercial, and naval supremacy” might threaten the manufacturing futures of the less developed imperial powers.² His book thereby enunciated trepidations that struck a chord among the British Empire’s neomercantilist rivals—particularly the United States, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire—as well as among Britain’s own colonies, which sought to become industrial powers in their own right. The transimperial journey of List himself and of his book together illustrate the growing popularity of economic nationalism during this era of imperial globalization from the nineteenth century to the Second World War. *The National System*’s modern advocacy of imperial expansion, economic nationalism, and industrialization made his book the most influential protectionist text across the globalizing imperial world order by the dawn of the twentieth century.

List published *The National System* in Germany in 1841, after many years abroad in the United States and France, where he learned much about US and French protectionist policies and theories. In 1841, Britain was the most industrially advanced nation in the world and was in the middle of liberalizing its trade policy to expand its imports, especially of wheat and cotton. British free traders also hoped that the rest of the mercantilist world would follow its lead and open their markets up to British manufacturers. List did not believe that the time was right for any imperial power to turn to free trade, including Britain, and therefore put forward his theory of infant industrial protectionism. He argued that Britain’s Western imperial rivals required high tariffs and subsidies for domestic industries to develop their national economies to catch up to Britain and counter its free-trade policies.

A transimperial examination of List’s life and *The National System*’s widespread popularity following his 1846 suicide illustrates the growing penchant for economic nationalism over economic cosmopolitanism following the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) and the onset of the Long Depression (1873–1896). The growing transimperial popularity of List’s brand of economic nationalism and imperial expansion contributed not only to the successful industrial rise of the West, but also to global geopolitical rivalries over markets and natural resources that ended with two world wars. List’s argument on behalf of infant industrial protectionism, national consolidation, and colonialism quickly found a receptive audience among Britain’s imperial rivals, most notably in the United States, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire, as well as Britain’s own settler colonies. List believed that western Europe, the United States, and the British “white” settler colonies of Canada and Australia needed to couple their economic nationalist policies with the colonization of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These colonies would then provide

² Emphasis in the original. Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy*, translated by Sampson Samuel Lloyd (1909 (1885, 1841)), 216–17.

the cheap labor and natural resources required to help cultivate the manufacturing power of the Western imperial metropolises. Fascinatingly, the book also garnered a sympathetic readership among anti-colonial nationalists in China, Ireland, and India, where Britain coercively enforced free-trade policies. List's popularity among Chinese, Irish, and Indian anti-colonial nationalists is quite remarkable considering that List himself believed that his theory was only applicable to Britain's Western imperial rivals, not to the colonial world.

After nearly a decade of internal free-trade agitation, Britain's unilateral decision in 1846 to overturn the protectionist Corn Laws—to abandon mercantilism—marked a momentous point in the transimperial history of modern globalization. It ushered in the beginning of what some refer to as the first age of globalization. This economic revolution of trade liberalization was a milestone that is readily recognized, not least as kickstarting Britain's "imperialism of free trade."³ But owing to the centripetal force of British imperial historiography, historians have paid far less attention to how this same British free-trade movement sparked a counter-movement of economic nationalism—what in 1944 Hungarian economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi famously dubbed as a "double-movement"—across the imperial world order.⁴ Adding to the historiographical problem, in some cases, like that of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century US empire, these very same protectionist movements have even been misleadingly reinterpreted as free trade in character.⁵ Tracing the transimperial influence of German-American economic theorist Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* (1841, hereafter *The National System*) among leading nationalists in both the imperial and the anti-colonial world provides a much-needed corrective to the common but misleading narrative that the decades leading up to the First World War were exclusively free trade in character.⁶ Rather, the transimperial case study of List's

³ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* 6 (1953), 1–15.

⁴ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944).

⁵ For criticisms of this free-trade or "open door" characterization of the American Empire, see Mary Speck, "Closed-Door Imperialism: The Politics of Cuban-U.S. Trade, 1902–1933," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85 (2005), 449–83; Marc-William Palen, "The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism, 1890–1913," *Diplomatic History* 39 (Jan. 2015), 157–85; Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalisation, 1846–1896* (Cambridge, 2016); Benjamin Fordham, "Protectionist Empire: Trade, Tariffs, and United States Foreign Policy, 1890–1914," *Studies in American Political Development* 31 (Oct. 2017), 170–92; Palen, "The Open Door Empire," in Christopher Dietrich, ed., *A Companion to U.S. Foreign Relations: Colonial Era to the Present* (2 Vols., Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), Vol. 1, 271–87.

⁶ Scholars have begun connecting these various transimperial economic nationalist strands together. See, for instance, Mauro Boianovsky, "Friedrich List and the Economic Fate of Tropical Countries," *History of Political Economy* 45 (2013), 647–91; Onur Ulas Ince, "Friedrich List and the

ideas demonstrates that the market interconnectivity and geopolitical conflicts arising across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries owed far more to the imperialism of economic nationalism than to the imperialism of free trade.⁷ Starting with the imperial world, the reception of List's *National System* provides a useful way to explore the growing transimperial economic nationalist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

List played a prominent role as a transimperial knowledge creator first through his personal transimperial knowledge exchanges between Germany, the USA, and France, and then through *The National System*'s translation and dissemination in numerous nationalist settings. The book's message tapped into a burgeoning late-nineteenth-century nationalistic trepidation of British free trade. List's *National System* was a direct reply to the British turn to free trade in the 1840s, but the book's protectionist and Anglophobic message became far more transimperially popular following the onset of the Long Depression in 1873 among Britain's less industrially advanced rivals, who laid most of the blame for the economic crisis upon the era's main financial hub, the City of London. List's text was eventually translated into around a dozen languages. Most translations were undertaken between the Long Depression and the Great Depression, whereupon *The National System* often became bedside reading for nationalist politicians and industrialists across the globe. Along Listian lines laid out in *The National System*, high tariffs to protect "infant" domestic industries, subsidies for internal improvements, and colonial expansion became the rule for industrializing imperial powers like the USA, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan; British free-trade imperialism was the exception.⁸ List's economic nationalist creed for the industrializing world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to thwart Britain's attempt to "kick away the ladder" played a foundational part in kickstarting the transimperial growth of imperialism and economic nationalism from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War.⁹

Imperial Origins of the National Economy," *New Political Economy* 21 (2016), 380–400; Eric Helleiner, *The Neomercantilists: A Global Intellectual History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021); Marc-William Palen, "Economic Nationalism in an Imperial Age, c. 1846–1946," in the *Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism*, edited by Aviel Roshwald, Matthew D'Auria, and Cathie Carmichael (2 Vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), II, 538–58. Conversely, on trans-anti-imperial free-trade networks, see Marc-William Palen, *Pax Economica: Left-Wing Visions of a Free Trade World* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2024); Palen, "Transimperial Roots of American Anti-Imperialism: The Transatlantic Radicalism of Free Trade, 1846–1920," in Jay Sexton and Kristin Hoganson, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Duke University Press, 2020), 159–82.

⁷ Palen, *Pax Economica*.

⁸ Palen, *Pax Economica*, chap. 1.

⁹ For more contemporary resonances of List, see, for instance, James Fallows, "How the World Works," *Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 1993); Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London: Anthem, 2002); and Henryk Szlajfer, *Economic Nationalism and Globalization: Lessons from Latin America and Central Europe*, trans. by Maria Chmielewska-Szlajfer (Leiden, Brill, 2012).

The widespread influence of List's ideas upon the industrializing imperial world order proffers numerous examples upon which to draw. List himself lived a transimperial life. He was born in Germany in 1789, became a US citizen in the 1820s, and directly influenced French and German imperial projects in the 1830s and 1840s. Following his 1846 suicide, his ideas, encapsulated in *The National System*, would continue to resonate among Britain's imperial contenders, first in the United States, France, and Germany, followed later by the Russians, Japanese, and the Ottomans. List's ideas would also leave an indelible mark upon British imperial debates in Britain, Canada, and Australia, as well among Chinese, Irish, and Indian anti-colonial nationalists.

The Transimperial Impact of List and *The National System*

List was born in Reutlingen, a town within the German Kingdom of Württemberg, in 1789. Following a short career as a clerk, in his late twenties, List lobbied the Württemberg imperial government of King Wilhelm I to establish an economics department at the University of Tübingen, after which Wilhelm appointed List to a professorship within it. List's subsequent creation of a trade association got him removed from his professorship. As head of the new association, List worked to economically unify Germany, which won him an election to the Württemberg Parliament. His vocal criticisms of the imperial government, however, soon sent him fleeing to Paris in 1824. There he met the Marquis de Lafayette, who asked him to join him on a trip to the USA. In 1825, after a six-month stint in a Württemberg prison, List was more than amenable to joining Lafayette for the transatlantic voyage. List's years of exile between 1825 and 1832 in Pennsylvania, the heartland of US protectionist theorizing, proved formative when later formulating *The National System*. He kept himself busy in Pennsylvania as a farmer, editor of a local German-language newspaper, and co-founder of a local railway company. He did all this while immersing himself in US protectionist thought, culminating in the publication of a series of letters on the subject, *Outlines of American Political Economy* (1827). He became a US citizen in 1830, after which President Andrew Jackson appointed him to be US consul to the Kingdom of Saxony, which allowed him to return to his homeland as a US citizen, interspersed with long stopovers in France, where Anglophobic French mercantilist politics also helped shape his critique of British free trade.¹⁰

Building upon earlier US protectionist theorists like Alexander Hamilton, List updated mercantilism for a rapidly globalizing world system, what some have since dubbed as "neomercantilism."¹¹ Seeing the close connection between

¹⁰ Eugen Wendler, *Friedrich List's Exile in the United States: New Findings* (Heidelberg, Springer, 2016), 1–4.

¹¹ See especially Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*.

US Westward expansion and state-sponsored internal improvements and infant industrial protectionism informed his evolving economic nationalist outlook, as would his friendship with the prominent French politician, Adolph Thiers. Thanks in part to his own US and French experiences, List's calls for a strong nation state, protectionism, and colonial expansion played a pivotal part in shaping the economic nationalist makeup of the US, French, and German empires, and, later, those of the Russians, Japanese, and Ottomans. List's influence on the British Empire was also quite transformative, owing to how *The National System* helped shape both imperial and anti-colonial debates in Britain, Canada, Australia, China, Ireland, and India. List's first-hand witnessing of the overturning of the protectionist Corn Laws in the British Upper House in 1846, in turn, contributed to his ill mental health; he committed suicide later that year.¹²

The initial impact of *The National System* in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s was notable, even if it paled in comparison to List's influence upon the global protectionist turn after 1870. While in France in the 1830s, List had the ear of Adolph Thiers, an influential French politician that helped oversee the protectionist maintenance of "Fortress France" for years to come.¹³ German imperial expansionists like Alexander von Bülow quoted List to support colonial designs upon Latin America in the late 1840s and early 1850s, and *The National System* was even rumored to have been Otto von Bismarck's bedside reading.¹⁴ The first English language translation was published in 1856 in the United States. The translator, a French-American lawyer named G. A. Matile, drew upon List's biography written by the translator of the 1851 French edition to supplement his American translation. Matile's translation from the German edition was undertaken at the instigation and editorial direction of Philadelphia's Stephen Colwell, a close friend of Henry Charles Carey, who crafted the Republican Party's protectionist platform upon its founding in the late 1850s. As justification, in a preliminary essay to the 1856 translation, Colwell described how "List's School" in Germany "at the present moment" was "the most influential and respectable in every point of view." It therefore seemed only fitting to Colwell that List's work now be "given to the American public," considering how closely *The National System* aligned with and built upon US protectionist theories.¹⁵

List's ideas began making greater headway within the nationalistic intellectual and political circles of Euro-American imperial metropolises thanks to widespread

¹² Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade*, 2–3.

¹³ Todd, *Free Trade and its Enemies*, ch. 3; W. O. Henderson, "Friedrich List and the French Protectionists," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 138 (1982), 262–75.

¹⁴ Wendler, *Friedrich List*, 214; Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany*, 61–65.

¹⁵ Stephen Colwell, "Preliminary Essay," in Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1856), lx.

national consolidation. The US Civil War (1861–1865), Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), and the Long Depression (c. 1873–1896) all played a big part here. So, too, did the propagandizing of the List-inspired German Historical School (GHS), a pro-imperial economic nationalist school that dominated late-nineteenth-century German universities that included prominent protectionist academic theorists like Gustav Schmoller and Adolf Wagner.¹⁶ Many young Americans undertook “Atlantic crossings” to study with the GHS professors. Following their studies abroad, these US disciples of the GHS returned to the United States to preach their nationalistic critiques of laissez faire to a new generation of intellectuals and policymakers, ushering in a new wave of Listian politics and economics in the United States from the late 1870s.¹⁷ The transatlantic Listian currents were such that in 1893, Italian economist, Luigi Cossa, called it “the German-American school of economics.”¹⁸

US and German imperial expansion bore the mark of List’s *The National System*. Republican economic nationalists would oversee the construction of ever higher tariff walls, as well as the acquisition and protectionist maintenance of the US colonial empire following Spain’s 1898 defeat.¹⁹ The German navalist and imperialist Friedrich Naumann, influenced by the GHS, worked to establish his *Mitteleuropa* from the turn of the century. Naumann’s influential vision of German-dominated railway networks, industrialization, and colonialism were, according to Henry

¹⁶ For the latter, see Keith Tribe, *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995); Yuichi Shionoya, ed., *The German Historical School: The Historical and Ethical Approach to Economics* (London, Routledge, 2001); Shionoya, *The Soul of the German Historical School: Methodological Essays on Schmoller, Weber and Schumpeter* (New York, Springer, 2005); Peter Koslowski, ed., *The Theory of Ethical Economy in the Historical School: Wilhelm Roscher, Lorenz von Stein, Gustav Schmoller, Wilhelm Dilthey and Contemporary Theory* (Berlin, Springer, 1997); Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864–1894* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Iva Lambi, *Free Trade and Protectionism in Germany 1868–1879* (Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1963).

¹⁷ See Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 3; Palen, *The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade*, chap. 7; Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1965), chap. 6; Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009), chap. 9; Axel R. Schafer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920* (Stuttgart, F. Steiner, 2000), 37–40; Sidney Fine, “Richard T. Ely, Forerunner of Progressivism, 1880–1901,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 37 (March 1951), 599–624; Jack C. Myles, “German Historicism and American Economics: A Study of the Influence of the German Historical School on Economic Thought” (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 1956); Carl Diehl, *Americans and German Scholarship, 1770–1870* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978); James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Luigi Cossa, *An Introduction to the Study of Political Economy* (New York: Macmillan, 1893), 477.

¹⁹ Palen, “The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism.”

Meyer, but “following in the footsteps of Friedrich List.”²⁰ Naumann’s efforts also laid an expansionist path for economic nationalists of the Nazi Empire to follow in Eastern Europe and Latin America.²¹

The Russian Empire’s “Friedrich List,” Count Sergei Witte (1849–1915)—as, variously, director of railway affairs, minister of ways and communications, finance minister, and prime minister—vividly illustrates the empire’s Listian turn beginning around 1890. Witte’s domestically popular 1889 pamphlet *The National Economy and Friedrich List* made the connection explicit.²² A trans-Siberian railway, high tariff walls, and Russian industrialization topped Witte’s nationalistic agenda amid his efforts to get the Russian Empire caught up to the other imperial powers. Witte’s colonial designs upon the agrarian lands of Manchuria stemmed directly from the imperial prescription contained within List’s *The National System*.²³ According to Roman Szporluk, Lenin thereafter “translated List into a Marxist language and adapted him to the Russian political tradition.”²⁴

Prominent Meiji-era nationalists within the Japanese Empire, inspired by List and other US protectionist theorists, began implementing protectionist and imperial policies by around 1900.²⁵ Ernest Fenollosa, a US professor based in Tokyo in the 1880s and 1890s, taught List to a new generation of Japanese students. A Japanese translation of *The National System* was published in 1889. Tomita Tesunosuke, the

²⁰ Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action 1815–1945* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1955), 96. See also Bo Strath, “Mitteleuropa: From List to Naumann,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 11 (2008), 171–83.

²¹ C. W. Guillebaud, “Hitler’s New Economic Order for Europe,” *Economic Journal* 50 (Dec. 1940), 449–60; Salvatore Prisco, “Vampire Diplomacy: Nazi Economic Nationalism in Latin America, 1934–40,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 2 (1991), 173–81; Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 8–9, 28–29, 88, 113–14, 174–75.

²² Sergei Witte, *Po povodu nacionalizma: Nacional’naja ekonomija I Fridrikh List* (2nd edition, St. Petersburg, Brokgaus-Efron, 1912 [1889]).

²³ Steven Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850–1917* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); T. H. von Laue, “The Industrialization of Russia in the Writings of Sergej Witte,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 10 (Oct. 1951), 177–90; von Laue, “A Secret Memorandum of Sergei Witte on the Industrialization of Imperial Russia,” *Journal of Modern History* 26 (March 1954), 60–74; Sidney Harcave, *Count Sergei Witte and the Twilight of Imperial Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 49–57; Chia Yin Hsu, “A Tale of Two Railroads: ‘Yellow Labor,’ Agrarian Colonization, and the Making of Russianness at the Far Eastern Frontier, 1890s–1910s,” *Ab Imperio* 3 (2006), 221–25.

²⁴ Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 224, 219–20.

²⁵ Palen, *Pax Economica*, 54–56; Mark Metzler, “The Cosmopolitanism of National Economics: Friedrich List in a Japanese Mirror,” *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local*, edited by A. G. Hopkins (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 85–89, 173–80.

governor of the Bank of Japan and an acquaintance of Henry Carey, requisitioned it. Another Carey acquaintance, Oshima Sadamusu, “the Friedrich List of Japan,” was the translator. Still other Japanese nationalists returned from their studies in Germany imbued with the teachings of the GHS. Two such students, Kuwata Kumazō and Kanai Noburu, joined Fenollosa at Tokyo’s Imperial University. Takahashi Korekiyo helped oversee the creation of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in 1925 to protect Japan’s infant industries; the inspiration was derived in part from his interpretation of List.²⁶ Interwar right-wing politician, Mōri Hideoto, of the Foreign Ministry’s Asian Development Board thereafter borrowed explicitly from List in justifying his imperial economic nationalist vision for a Japanese-dominated Asia.²⁷

The Ottoman Empire joined the Listian imperial double-movement comparatively late, owing to continued Western European free-trade imperial control over Ottoman fiscal policies.²⁸ Strong intellectual affinities grew between the List-inspired GHS and economic nationalists such as the Ottoman economist, Akyiğitzade Musa, and Young Turks such as Ömer Seyfeddin, Mehmed Ziya Gökalp, and Yusuf Akçura. As Vedit Inal puts it, “[t]he German Historical School found fertile ground in Turkey.”²⁹ Before the First World War, however, economic nationalist developmentalists had to make do with boycotts, building railways and telegraphs, and colonizing land for agricultural exploitation.³⁰ During the Great War, the empire began its more formal Listian turn, a protectionist drift that was thereafter maintained and expanded upon under the auspices of Turkish nationalists in the decades that followed.³¹

But, considering List’s critique of British free-trade policy, *The National System*, rather ironically, most ably informs controversies within the British Empire. List himself had provided a scathing critique of Britain’s precipitate embrace of

²⁶ Metzler, “The Cosmopolitanism of National Economics”; Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 85–89, 173–80; Yanaga, *Japan since Perry*, 73–75; Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 29, 96–98.

²⁷ Aaron Stephen Moore, “The Technological Imaginary of Imperial Japan, 1931–1945” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2006), 49–54, 56 n. 48.

²⁸ Cyrus Schayegh, “Imperial and Transnational Developmentalisms: Middle Eastern Interplays, 1880s–1960s,” in Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 65–66.

²⁹ Deniz T. Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 47–57, 65–67, 134; Vedit Inal, “Evolution of Economic Thought in the Ottoman Empire and Early Republican Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 57 (2021), 22–26, quote on 29.

³⁰ Schayegh, “Imperial and Transnational Developmentalisms,” 67.

³¹ On List’s ideas in the Ottoman Empire, see Deniz T. Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2015). On Ottoman development, see especially Cyrus Schayegh, “Imperial and Transnational Developmentalisms: Middle Eastern Interplays, 1880s–1960s,” in Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

economic cosmopolitanism and its transimperial attempts to spread free trade to an ever more nationalistic world order. The most widely disseminated and common English-language translation of *The National System*, from 1885, provides numerous avenues for exploring British colonial and anti-colonial developments, from the 1880s to Britain's abandonment of free trade in 1932.

List's *The National System* made early headway in the British "white" settler colonies of Canada and Australia, but found few subscribers in Britain itself, which was still riding high on its newfound free-trade principles. Protectionists in Canada began citing List to support their developmentalist efforts from the late 1850s. Their efforts culminated in the Conservative Party's protectionist National Policy in 1879 and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s.³² At the same time that economic liberals circled their free-trade wagons in the Australian colony of New South Wales, economic nationalists in Australia's protectionist colony of Victoria drew upon List and other US protectionist theorists to advocate for higher tariffs in the 1860s.³³

But the most popular English-language translation of *The National System* was first published in Britain in 1885. Conservative politician and Birmingham manufacturer, Sampson Samuel Lloyd (of Lloyd's Bank fame), undertook the translation along with a preface explaining why. As he described it, the inspiration came following his globe-trotting tour of the British settler colonies. From his travels, he realized how List's ideas had "directly inspired the commercial policy of two of the greatest nations of the world, Germany and the United States of America." But, importantly, List's work was also influencing "our English-speaking colonies" and "some commercial economists in this country [Britain]." List's forty-year-old economic nationalist creed was "applicable at one time as at another," not least "the present moment" in Britain, amid the Long Depression and as it found itself encircled by protectionist imperial rivals.³⁴ Lloyd's preface thus provides a window into the growing rumblings within the British Conservative Party and its settler colonial counterparts in their protesting the hands-off imperial governance of British free traders.³⁵ Lloyd helped create the National Fair Trade League in the 1880s. It proved to be the first among many coordinated attempts to replace the British free-trade system with one of tariff retaliation and imperial preference,

³² Craufurd D. W. Goodwin, *Economic Inquiry in Australia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1966), 45–51.

³³ Edmund Rogers, "Free Trade versus Protectionism: New South Wales, Victoria, and the Tariff Debate in Britain, 1881–1900," *Australian Studies* 1 (2009), 1–16.

³⁴ Sampson Samuel Lloyd, translator's preface to Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy*, translated by Sampson Samuel Lloyd (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904 [1885]), v–vii.

³⁵ Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade*, 212.

especially after the Republican passage of the extreme McKinley Tariff in 1890 in the United States.³⁶

Listian organizations like the Fair Trade League became the forerunners of the most concerted attempt to overturn British free trade: Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform movement (1903–1913). The Birmingham-manufacturer-turned-politician Chamberlain and his Tariff Reformers sought to “take back control” by curbing immigration, by retaliating against rival powers with high tariffs, and by cultivating a system of imperial trade preferences. And here again List's *The National System* made its reappearance. A new edition of Lloyd's translation was published in 1904 to provide intellectual support to the Tariff Reformers. This was the same year that Benjamin Hoare, the secretary of Melbourne, Victoria's Protectionists' Association, published *Preferential Trade*, which drew explicitly on List and “the profounder reasonings of the German school of economics” in support of the Tariff Reform movement. The famous British political economist, Joseph Shield Nicholson, agreed to write a new introduction to *The National System* to explain the book's continued resonance for Edwardians. Nicholson would go on to pen *A Project of Empire* in 1909, which sought to transform Adam Smith—the intellectual father of the Manchester School of economic liberalism—into a protectionist and an imperialist.³⁷ In 1906, Conservative journalist and politician, Leo Amery, probably Chamberlain's strongest supporter, explicitly drew upon List in *The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade*. It represented a full-on assault upon the Edwardian disciples of Adam Smith. As Colonial Secretary (1924–1929), Amery continued to push for “Buy British” and Empire Shopping campaigns through the Empire Marketing Board (1926–1933).³⁸ With the aid of Chamberlain's sons, Amery would help oversee Britain's abandonment of free trade in 1932, when it joined the empire's trade preference system, thereby bringing an end to nearly a century of British free-trade imperial policies.

³⁶ Marc-William Palen, “Protection, Federation and Union: The Global Impact of the McKinley Tariff upon the British Empire, 1890–94,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38 (Sept. 2010), 395–418.

³⁷ Benjamin Hoare, *Preference Trade* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1904), v–vi; Marc-William Palen, “Adam Smith as Advocate of Empire, c. 1870–1932,” *Historical Journal* 57 (March 2014), 197.

³⁸ L. S. Amery, *The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade* (London: National Review Office, 1906); Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231.

The National System's Trans-Anti-Imperial Impact

Imperialists did not have a monopoly upon List's ideas. Elements of *The National System* found their way into numerous nationalist movements, but while largely overlooking its calls for Western colonialism toward "the rest." Owing to the European continental drift of the GHS, for example, List's book was translated into a wide array of nationalist contexts, including Romania (1887), Sweden (1888), Bulgaria (1926), and Finland (1846, 1935), albeit without the same passion that it inspired among the previously discussed imperial expansionists. Some mid-nineteenth-century Swedish nationalists, for example, encountered French and German versions of the text, but List's influence dropped off in a big way after 1860, when French-style economic liberalism became more fashionable following the signing of the Cobden–Chevalier treaty, which freed up western European trade for about a decade.³⁹ But in keeping with the wider Listian turn after 1870, it is probably more than coincidence that a Swedish translation appeared in 1888, the same year that Sweden began substantially raising its tariffs to foster its infant industries.⁴⁰

The National System made more headway in a variety of anti-colonial settings within the British Empire in which free trade was coercively enforced. As counterintuitive as it might at first appear, *The National System* provides numerous opportunities to explore the British Empire's anti-colonial nationalist movements, which moved across imperial boundaries. Listian anti-colonial nationalists focused narrowly on List's critique of British free-trade imperialism. They also drew inspiration from the apparent economic successes of Listian nationalist states like the United States and Germany, and conveniently overlooked List's support for European imperial expansion into areas like China and India. Britain's "white" settler colonies had been given greater control over their fiscal policies beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and had been deemed ripe for infant industrial protectionism by List himself. But this was not the case for China, India, or Ireland, colonial spaces that List and British imperialists considered too "uncivilized" for self-rule or tariff autonomy.

Feeling the full coercive force of British free-trade imperialism following the two Opium Wars and the subsequent divvying up of Chinese markets between the British and the other imperial powers, the Chinese nationalist, Liang Qichao (1873–1929) helped lead the way. However, Liang's endorsement of economic nationalism as both an imperial weapon and an anti-colonial tool were an unusual

³⁹ Eli F. Heckscher, "A Survey of Economic Thought in Sweden, 1875–1950," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 1 (1953), 106–10.

⁴⁰ Viktor Persarvet, "Tariffs, Trade, and Economic Growth in Sweden 1858–1913" (Ph.D. thesis, Uppsala University, 2019), 18, 27.

departure from the defensive position taken by other Chinese, Irish, Indian, and Egyptian anti-colonial nationalists. In 1898, Liang made a transimperial landing in Meiji imperial Japan, where he first encountered the Listian ideas of the GHS. For Liang, these complemented an older tradition of Chinese mercantilist thinking, and he became a self-described disciple of “national economics” thereafter. In Listian fashion, he saw geopolitics as a zero-sum game, of perpetual warfare, and thus believed that China’s future depended upon winning a trade war with the Western empires. China’s European-controlled treaty ports were clear examples of free-trade imperial coercion. His Listian worldview led him to ask rhetorically “if the whole country becomes a free-trade zone, then is that not equivalent to making the whole country a colony?” Liang therefore wanted to fashion for China the economic nationalist policies that had worked so well for the United States, Europe, and Japan; this included carving out corporate monopolies alongside Chinese imperial expansion. When he returned to China in 1911, Liang threw himself into the nationalist political scene. Liang next demonstrated his “national economics” at the 1919 Paris Peace conference, when he requested that China be granted control over its own tariffs.⁴¹

Other leading Chinese nationalists instead focused squarely on the anti-colonial developmentalist context of List’s *The National System*. In the early 1920s, Ma Yinchu, who would later become president of Peking University, made his return to China after studying in the United States. He gave a speech in Peking wherein he argued that China required Listian policies to counteract decades of European colonial exploitation. In 1925, Liu Binglin (1891–1956) wrote a Chinese biography of List after studying at the University of Berlin and the University of London. Two years later, Wang Kaihua published a Chinese translation of List’s *The National System*, which he began working on while a PhD student at the University of Tübingen. Wei Chenzu, China’s minister to the German Legation, wrote the preface to the 1929 edition. In it, he observed that List’s ideas remained relevant to China because it “has been deprived of the right to set its tariffs. . . . It is highly proper that List’s theory should be adopted in China.”⁴²

Irish nationalists also began embracing List by the early twentieth century. Irish anti-imperialist, Arthur Griffith (1871–1922) drew explicitly upon List when he started the Sinn Féin Party in 1905. In his Dublin speech (and subsequently a popular pamphlet), Griffith critiqued British free-trade imperialism: “I am in economics largely a follower of the man who thwarted England’s dream of the commercial

⁴¹ Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 262–68.

⁴² Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 263–66; Mei Junjie, “Friedrich List in China’s Quest for Development,” in Harald Hagemann, Stephan Selter, and Eugen Wendler, eds., *The Economic Thought of Friedrich List* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 213–22; Palen, *Pax Economica*, 58–59.

conquest of the world . . . Frederick [sic] List.” Griffith “wish[ed] to see” the *National System* “in the hands of every Irishman” and thus brush “aside the fallacies of Adam Smith and his tribe.”⁴³

Thanks in part to trans-anti-imperial connections with Irish anti-colonial nationalists, Indian anti-colonial nationalists numbered among the strongest adherents of List from the turn of the century onwards. Decades of coercive free-trade policies had undermined India’s ancient industries. The Swadeshi Movement arose in 1905 as an anti-colonial protest through the boycotting of British-made goods and through the purchase of Indian-made goods. Metropolitan meccas in the United States and Germany became what Kris Manjapra describes as “the most important centers for Indian anti-colonial internationalism.” They cultivated and worked within trans-imperial networks to help create, after 1905, “a highly articulated international imagination . . . by which Bengali thinkers saw their own experiences mirrored back in political events that had occurred, or were occurring,” in the United States, Japan, China, and Germany.⁴⁴ Arthur Griffith’s 1905 Listian pamphlet *The Sinn Féin Policy* was circulated in Hindi translation the following year in various nationalist newspapers because, according to one newspaper, it provided a “great service” as “*Sinn Féin*” was “only another name for our ‘Swadeshi’ policy.”⁴⁵ Manu Goswami explores how at this time, List’s *The National System* became a “foundational text” for South Asian anti-colonial nationalists such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Vaman Govind Kale, Subramania Aiyer, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Radhakamal Mukherjee, and Benoy Kumar Sarkar.⁴⁶ Sarkar himself, after a decade of travels spanning from Japan to Berlin, returned to interwar Calcutta, where he described *The National System* as “the Bible of a people seeking a rapid transformation of the country from the agricultural to the industrial stage.”⁴⁷ Sarkar also took it upon himself to translate *The National System* into Bengali between 1912 and 1916.

⁴³ Arthur Griffith, *The Sinn Féin Policy* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., 1906), 11.

⁴⁴ Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 42.

⁴⁵ Seán Ó Lúing, “Arthur Griffith, 1871–1922: Thoughts on a Centenary,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 60 (Summer 1971), 127–28.

⁴⁶ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 215–24, 336n14.

⁴⁷ Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 150; Andrew Sartori, “Beyond Culture-Contact and Colonial Discourse: ‘Germanism’ in Colonial Bengal,” in *An Intellectual History of India*, edited by Shruti Kapila (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81–82.

Conclusion

The transimperial and trans-anti-colonial crossings of Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* provide a rich tapestry for exploring the global history of economic nationalism within a variety of imperial and anti-colonial contexts since the book's original 1841 German publication. The spread and translation of List's ideas highlight the economic nationalist makeup of the imperial world system from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War, challenging longstanding free-trade misrepresentations of the era. List as a case study thus provides a novel transimperial lens for revolutionizing economic intellectual history and for rethinking the entwined histories of economic globalization and imperial expansion.

Nor are the examples included here far from exhaustive. Perhaps with further investigation, the impact and translation of *The National System* might also be connected to imperial debates within Hungary, Romania, Sweden, Bulgaria, Finland, and Spain. Examining to what extent translators of List relied upon the original German text or upon subsequent translations in other languages might also uncover further transnational and transimperial intellectual networks. The widespread demand for Listian infant industrial policies across much of the decolonizing world after the Second World War in turn illustrates how *The National System's* developmentalist message resonated far more strongly among anti-colonial nationalists after 1945 than during the preceding century.

Decolonizing states increasingly looked to Friedrich List for guidance. They, too, were seemingly able to sidestep List's arguments against industrialization for the underdeveloped colonial world as well as his arguments in support of Euro-American colonialism.⁴⁸ Theodore Von Laue observed as much in 1969, when he noted that "List's recent disciples" included "Sukarno and Nkrumah, as well as Mao."⁴⁹ Biographer, W. O. Henderson, similarly depicts List as a "prophet of the ambitions of all underdeveloped countries."⁵⁰ Leonard Gomes has also observed that, "whether they are conscious of the fact or not, development economists the world over owe a great debt to the memory of Friedrich List."⁵¹ In this vein, Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang has looked to List in order to advocate for

⁴⁸ Mauro Boianovsky, "Friedrich List and the Economic Fate of Tropical Countries," *History of Political Economy* 45 (2013), 647–91.

⁴⁹ Theodore H. von Laue, *The Global City: Freedom, Power and Necessity in the Age of World Revolutions* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1969), 147–8n.

⁵⁰ W. O. Henderson, *Friedrich List: Economist and Visionary, 1789–1846* (Frank Cass and Company, 1983), 163.

⁵¹ Leonard Gomes, *The Economics and Ideology of Free Trade: A Historical Review* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003), 66, 83–89.

infant industrial protectionism for underdeveloped states in his popular 2002 book *Kicking Away the Ladder*, which is itself a paraphrasing of a famous line from List's *The National System*.⁵²

List became a knowledge creator thanks to his own personal travels between the German, US, and French empires, as well as to *The National System*'s seemingly timeless developmentalist message. The book's myriad nationalist iterations, reinterpretations, and translations across empires and aspiring nation states since its original 1841 publication when examined together, highlight a transimperial history dominated by longstanding grievances and criticisms of free trade that still resonate among today's nationalist opponents of "neoliberalism." Tracing *The National System*'s past transimperial travels therefore also provides much needed historical context for understanding the resurgence of economic nationalism, imperial designs, and geopolitical conflict across much of the globe following the presidential election of the protectionist Donald Trump in the United States in 2016 and 2024, and Russia's most recent imperial invasion of Ukraine.

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⁵² Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*.

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