

*Opening the Gates to Asia: A Transpacific History of How America Repealed Asian Exclusion.* Grace H. Hong. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019. ISBN 9781469653365.

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, is often celebrated for repealing the national-origins quotas and establishing the preferences for family reunification and professional skills that are fundamental to the U.S.'s current immigration system. Contrary to lawmakers' initial expectations, the landmarking law in U.S. immigration history failed to preserve the nation's whiteness and unintentionally opened America's gate to Asian immigrants. "How did the United States go from excluding Asians for more than half a century to admitting more immigrants from Asia than from anywhere else in the world?" This is the question that historian Jane Hong set out to answer in her book *Opening the Gates to Asia: A Transpacific History of How America Repealed Asian Exclusion*.

In this book, Hong tracks the movements of Asian Americans, Asians, white American elites, and others who lobbied the U.S. Congress to repeal Asian exclusion. Whereas previous studies have focused on the U.S.'s repeal of a specific exclusion law in response to geopolitical circumstances of WWII and the early Cold War era, *Opening the Gates to Asia* connects and theorizes the seemingly separated immigration laws regarding Asian immigrants from 1943 to 1965 into a comprehensive and coherent repeal movement. In this critical period when the U.S. sought to present itself as a racially inclusive state and establish what Hong calls an "informal U.S. empire" that would lead Asia based on Asian people's consent and cooperation rather than the U.S.'s coercion, and Asians, Asian Americans, and their allies seized the opportunity to repeal the Asian exclusion. Focusing on the entanglement between U.S. immigration and its empire projects in Asia, Hong uncovers the Asian exclusion repeal as "a tool of U.S. empire

building in postwar Asia” (2-3). She shows that “the history of repeal was marked more by continuity than by change” (16).

The book is organized chronologically, with each of the five chapters focusing on a distinct campaign of repeal. Chapter 1 examines the enactment of the 1943 Magnuson Act, which abolished the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. While the role of wartime geopolitics and white elite lobbyists to repeal the Chinese exclusion has been well-documented, Hong situates the repeal in the long history of Chinese American activism. She draws our attention to the Chinese American community-based advocacy for family reunification and the interplay between those who hoped to address community concerns and those who saw immigration policy as a foreign policy tool. Although the Magnuson Act ended up as a diplomatic gesture that failed to attend to Chinese American communities’ needs, it inspired other Asian immigrants to fight for their citizenship rights. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 chart the efforts of Indians and Filipino/as for the passage of the 1946 Luce-Celler Act, which granted naturalization rights to these two groups. Foregrounding anti-colonial politics in Asia, Hong illuminates Asians’ and Asian Americans’ varied motives in their repeal campaigns. Chapter 2 shows how Indian Americans and Indians sought to use the repeal to improve their economic prospects and, more importantly, as anti-colonial tools for Indian independence. Chapter 3 highlights the role of the Philippines Commonwealth Government (the transitional administration from 1935 to 1946 prior to the Philippines’ formal independence) in the legislative victory. Manila campaigned for Filipino/as’ U.S. citizenship rights because the Commonwealth officials saw Filipino/as American communities as important for the nation’s independence and state-building process, especially with remittances they sent back.

The last two chapters respectively trace the campaigns for the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act and the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. The former legislation abolished the category of “aliens ineligible for citizenship” and allowed for an 100 annual immigration quota for each Asian nation, thus formally ending Asian exclusion. Chapter 4 documents how the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) adopted the Cold War and other foreign policy arguments to lobby for the repeal of Asian exclusion. However, their success was at the cost of black immigrants; while the McCarran-Walter Act nominally opened America’s door to Asia, it shut the gate to the black Caribbean. Chapter 5 shows how Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans lobbied for Asian refugee admission. It also highlights the overlooked significance of Hawaii’s statehood and the state’s two Asian American lawmakers in the passage of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. The epilogue focuses on the “brain drain” issue, which showcases the changing relationship between Asian migration and the U.S. empire. In the post-1965 era, the U.S.’s dominance in competition for the most educated from Asia replaced its power of exclusion, yet its antipathy towards refugees and nonwhite immigrants remains.

*Opening the Gates to Asia* is an important addition to the scholarly literature on U.S. immigration history and Asian American history. The author’s astute and meticulous examination of a wide array of archival sources across the Pacific, including U.S. government publications, official sources in the Philippines, India, and Hawaii, archives of white American elites, and those of ethnic communities, makes the book an enriching read. Particularly impressive is the book’s transpacific scope. By foregrounding the hitherto overlooked roles of diverse Asians and Asian Americans, such as the Indian and Philippine colonial government officials and the Asian American lawmakers from Hawaii in the repeal movement, Hong recasts the narrative of the Asian exclusion repeal from a U.S.-centric history focusing on U.S. foreign

policy and its Cold War internationalism to a transpacific history that actually involved a myriad of U.S. and non-U.S. actors.

Equally commendable is the author's sensitivity to cross-racial relations that played out in the repeal movements. Hong skillfully weaves the dynamic cross-racial interactions into the history of the repeal movement. For example, whereas the elite and anti-colonial Indian League of America, a New York-based Indian American organization, gained support from leaders of the NAACP and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porter in their campaign for the Luce-Celler bill in 1944, the 1952 repeal of Asian exclusion was nonetheless featured with an intergroup competition between Japanese Americans and black immigrants. For another example, Hawaii's Chinese American senator Hiram Fong cast a critical vote in passing a version of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act that would benefit Europeans and Asians at the expense of Latino/as. These instances of interracial interaction revealed the limit of the official racial liberalism that often pit one racial group against another while leaving white supremacy intact in the immigration system.

Hong succeeds in making the case that the repeal of Asian exclusion was the cost of the U.S.'s empire building in Asia while illuminating the convoluted agendas of various parties in the long repeal movement. The author's prose is clear, precise, and accessible. Historians of U.S. immigration, the United States in the world, civil rights movements, and Asian American history would find the book's new sources and its transpacific framework useful and inspiring.

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