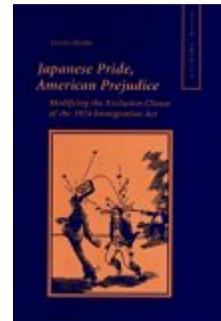


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Izumi Hirobe. *Japanese Pride, American Prejudice: Modifying the Exclusion Clause of the 1924 Immigration Act*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. xiii + 327 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-3813-2.

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Repealing Japanese Exclusion

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For a decade or so after 1907, the issue of Japanese immigration into the United States had been defused by the Gentlemen's Agreement negotiated by Teddy Roosevelt under which the Japanese government simply cut way back on the number of passports it issued. Then in 1924 Congress took up a bill designed to favor the "old immigration" from northern Europe. To it a clause was attached by California Senator Samuel Shortridge which would totally exclude Japanese. The State Department, President Coolidge and the Japanese Foreign Office were all opposed. They regarded the move as in no way national policy, but rather the latest skirmish in the California-Japanese War. But Coolidge had the 1924 election to think about and the State Department's backstairs maneuver to remove the clause dramatically backfired. To the Japanese mind the clause was certainly humiliating and was roundly denounced. The subsequent efforts to remove it are the subject of Izumi Hirobe's *Japanese Pride, American Prejudice*, a well-researched, well-reasoned, and well-written book.

Hirobe, who teaches at Nagoya University, has touched all the bases. He covers the efforts of the missionaries to Japan and of American businessmen interested in trade. He details the attitude of the Japanese colonies in Hawaii and the United States, and the stand of American labor organizations. As an epilogue he recounts how in the aftermath of World War II the exclusion was finally lifted. The author's expertise goes back to

a master's thesis he wrote in the early nineties. Since exclusion has been covered abundantly by writers on both sides of the Pacific, Hirobe is able to write entertainingly and with confidence. More than a hundred newspapers and periodicals are listed in his impressive bibliography, and he has visited not only the government archives but the papers of the principal actors in the story.

Beyond barring Japanese in the United States from bringing in family members, the exclusion clause had practically no effect on actual immigration. Even had the 1924 Act treated Japan on the same basis as the European countries no more than a couple of a hundred of its nationals could have entered the U.S. But a gratuitous insult it certainly was. Any number of observers have since damned it as a major contribution to the final breakdown of Japanese-American relations. But Hirobe's sophisticated narrative fails to bear this out. After the initial outrage at the passage of the bill, which inspired one instance of hara-kiri, the Japanese public lost interest. The Foreign Ministry admitted that its protest was mainly for home consumption. It nevertheless took the issue seriously and analyzed it critically in its semi-official magazine. But since the State Department had deplored the clause, the Foreign Ministry avoided visiting its displeasure on its opposite number. The grievance was filed away, but could be brought up at a future date. And the State Department, understandably leery of Hiram Johnson, Henry Cabot Lodge and their colleagues, was loath to tickle the tiger. With their program now the law of the land, exclusionists on the West Coast became

quiescent.

It was left to the conscience of American clergy and intellectuals and to the perceived interest of American businessmen involved in trade with Japan to try to eliminate the offending clause, and to secure a small quota. Sidney Gulick, a former missionary to Japan, put down by one of his associates as a “dear old thing,” led the charge; he succeeded only in reenergizing V.S. McClatchy’s anti-Japanese California Joint Immigration Committee, and cutting across the efforts of businessmen on the West Coast. Still, in September 1931, Secretary of State Stimson told Ambassador Debuchi that Americans felt “so kindly” toward Japan that some accommodation might be reached.

Prominent among the voices advocating some gesture toward Japan were representatives of Hawaii’s Big Five such as Wallace Alexander and William R. Castle, who left the State Department in 1933 and became a behind-the-scenes adviser to the Japanese government. American support for a quota for Japan survived the unfavorable impression left by the Manchurian Incident and the fighting at Shanghai in 1932, but neither the State Department nor the Foreign Office felt that any useful purpose would be served by reopening the question. Franklin Roosevelt declined to break a lance for it. Roy Howard, the newspaper magnate, after a personal campaign to repeal the clause, eventually became convinced that repeal would have no influence on Japanese expansionism in Asia. The issues were separate.

The Japanese colonies in Hawaii and on the West Coast, which were increasingly composed of Nisei born as American citizens and whose lot was cast with their new homeland, looked at the controversy soberly: how would they be impacted? According to Hirobe, the businessmen, clergy, and intellectuals who spearheaded the agitation for a quota generally ignored Japanese already within the gates, and never managed to form a united effort among themselves. Nor did they worry much about Chinese exclusion.

As the thirties drew on, amid the widening Sino-Japanese war, American opinion became increasingly

pro-Chinese, and once the United States entered the conflict Franklin Roosevelt moved to end discrimination against China as a way of encouraging Chiang Kai-shek’s government. After the end of the war when Japanese exclusion was at length abolished, it was thanks to the efforts of Japanese in the United States and the official realization that American anti-Asian measures were handicaps in the struggle with Communist forces in Asia.

Hirobe writes a clear, temperate English, free of academic buzzwords, and exhibits nice judgement and occasional humor in narrating fairly diverse events. He tells how Bill Castle escorted a bishop to the State Department, then disappeared lest he jeopardize the bishop’s reception by being seen with a Republican. Roosevelt was annoyed by Castle’s continuing influence in the State Department, after the Hoover appointee had departed. No more than Coolidge was Roosevelt willing to irritate vote-rich California: he delayed releasing the Japanese Americans from their camps until he had won the 1944 election.[1]

Historians and political scientists should find much to ponder in this book. Following the evidence, Hirobe concludes that the exclusion issue had no direct connection with the Japanese decision to wage war on the western nations. It did not cause Pearl Harbor. Nor would its repeal have prevented it.

The book’s dust cover displays a cartoon from an Afro-American newspaper showing that blacks could be affected by measures similar to the Japanese exclusion clause. The cartoon had been drawn earlier, at the time of a California anti-Japanese land law, but Hirobe has little to say about Afro-American and antiexclusionist collaboration because there wasn’t much. On the other hand, Senator Shortridge, proud of his exclusion clause, apparently was an opponent of lynching.[2]

[1]. “Personal Justice Denied”, U.S. Congress, Report of the U. S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, Washington D.C., GPO, 1982, 227ff.

[2]. Shortridge to William E. Jenner, n.d., in files of Senate Historical Office.

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