In *Opening the Gates to Asia*, Jane H. Hong opens our eyes to the untold history of the Asian repeal movement, a loose coalition of Asian activists and white American influencers that persuaded US lawmakers to dismantle the legal pillars of Asian exclusion between 1943 and 1965. Their collective efforts transformed the United States from a country that once barred Asians from immigrating and naturalizing to one that received more immigrants from Asia than anywhere else in the world.

Hong explains the legal underpinnings of this dramatic transformation. *Opening the Gates to Asia* is organized chronologically as a series of case studies of the legislative battles to extend naturalization and immigration opportunities to Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, and Japanese migrants. As Hong pointedly notes, repeal efforts only gained traction in policy circles when yoked to US diplomatic interests in geopolitically sensitive regions. Beginning in World War II, the US strategy in Asia shifted, from a colonial empire based on coercion to an informal empire based on consent. America’s thirst for global influence required policymakers to be responsive to criticism of US power, which marginalized people instrumentalized to challenge exclusionary policies, one by one.

*Opening the Gates to Asia* shows the remarkable power of this convergence, which gave non-state actors outsized influence in US foreign policy with Asia. Take, for example, Mubarak Ali Khan, an Indian Muslim sailor who jumped ship in New York in 1920. Khan did not have legal status in the United States; even if he had, he still could not have been naturalized. Khan formed the India Welfare League to establish the legal right of Asian Indians to be politically and economically incorporated. His dogged efforts galvanized J. J. Singh, a rival and president of India League of America, to carry on the legislative battle for naturalization rights of Asian Indians. Though Singh—not Khan—watched President Harry Truman sign the Luce-Celler Act (1946) into law, the undocumented agitator had articulated the principals on which it was based.

The United States needed Asian allies to fight the Axis powers in World War II and to repel the spread of communism during the Cold War. Hong’s discoveries in the archives of Manilla and Delhi reinforce Meredith Oyen’s insight in *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War* (2015)—how migrants became objects in high stakes negotiations and how migrants inserted their agenda in diplomatic exchanges. The Luce-Celler Act extend-
ed naturalization rights to both Asian Indians and Filipinos. For President Truman and legislative sponsors Claire Boothe Luce and Emanuel Celler, the act promised to disentangle the United States from the Philippines financially, by enabling overseas Filipinos to naturalize and revive the economy through remittances, and to enhance US influence on the Indian subcontinent without straining its strategic alliance with Great Britain.

Hong’s transnational framing of the repeal movement is even more compelling when considered alongside the outsized dividends for the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924 predicated the ability to immigrate on one’s eligibility to naturalize, which channeled Asian activism toward securing naturalization rights as the primary goal. Challenging the restrictive nationality quotas—which capped immigration from Asian countries at 100 to 185 per year—was deferred to the future (p. 185). The racial inclusion of Asians through largely symbolic gestures bound South Koreans, South Vietnamese, Taiwanese, and Filipinos to America’s narrow vision of decolonization, as Simeon Man has shown in Soldiering through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific (2018). The “price of empire,” as Hong calls the repeal measures, pales in comparison to the global carnage, political instability, and environmental destruction waged in the name of liberal democracy across Asia (p. 3).

The repeal movement had racial costs in the US context as well. Hong reveals that Asian activists not only traded on the US imperial agenda but also profited from the anti-black tenants of postwar racial reform. She mines the records of US legislative committees, immigrant organizations, and colonial offices to triangulate Asian activism with decolonization efforts in Asia and the civil rights movement in the United States. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, for example, won naturalization rights for the Japanese but slashed immigration from Afro-Caribbean colonies. Black migrants had been using unfiled slots of their European colonizers and their numbers dropped from several thousand to several hundred. Tracing how black allies splintered from their alliances with repeal actors, Hong sustains our awareness of the persistence of racism and the structural limits of the repeal movement.

*Opening the Gates to Asia* is expansive in its framing and impressive in the depth and breadth of archival research, though limited by the organizational choices. Hong calls the legislative victories as moments in “a longer repeal movement,” yet her treatment of Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, and Japanese migrants separately makes it hard to see these connections. She points out the role of Representative Celler (D-NY) in several legislative measures, most notably, the Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished the symbolic nationality quotas that curtailed Asian immigration for decades following repeal. White American elites were “the most consistent throughline bridging the various efforts that together made up the repeal movement,” Hong writes (p. 17). Her claim suggests a greater ideological coherence of repeal legislation, one that calibrated a postwar racial vision of the United States that invited Asians into the fold but excluded blacks. Centering her story more on these connective individuals might have revealed the making of whiteness, as it was being negotiated between repeal advocates like Celler and repeal opponents, who mostly represented southern states. While Asians certainly profited from the repeal struggles, the white beneficiaries of racial containment remained unnamed and shielded from scrutiny.

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