

The Making of Asian America through Political Participation. By Pei-te Lien. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. Pp. 312. \$19.95

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"What is America?" Pei-te Lien asks. This is a question, perhaps *the* question that has haunted the country since its inception. Being inextricably tied to the story of an ever-changing America, the answer has been subject to change. From the beginning, that story should have involved racial and ethnic groups but unfortunately, it did not. These excluded people have sought to be part of the record ever since. And ironically, their struggle for inclusion has itself become an essential issue in the interpretation of America. Among those left out have been Asian Americans. Like other ethnic groups, they, too, seek to make their experience a part of any account of America. Lien's significant study of the political experience of Asians in America will go a long way to achieving this. What makes Lien's work invaluable is its interdisciplinarity, its combination of historical analysis and political science methodol-

ogy. She is one of the few scholars who knows how to do interdisciplinary research and does it well. Synthesizing the existing historical scholarship on Asian Americans (chapters 1 and 2), she provides a coherent chronicle of the many ways that Asian Americans have engaged in political actions in their quest for equality prior to the modern civil rights era. In her absorbing narrative, she describes how, as a result of these activities, the identity of Asians in America has evolved from ethnics – that is, immigrants or foreigners – to ethnic Americans, and from ethnic Americans to panethnics, that is, Asian Americans. She attributes the development of these various identities to the political coalitions that have been formed to protect and promote the interests of a community that is at once both transnational and multiethnic. After reading this portion of Lien's study, one cannot help but wonder what the next stage in the evolution of Asian American identity will be. Is it premature to expect that, like the white ethnic groups before them, Asian Americans will eventually be able to equate their personal identity with their national identity? Can Asian Americans look forward to a day when they will no longer be perceived as the "foreigners within," but rather be considered simply as "Americans"?

Lien's forte is quantitative analyses. Using standard social science methods such as multivariate regression analysis and survey research (chapters 3 to 6), she is able to describe in very precise terms the influence of race, ethnicity, class, and gender on Asian American political attitudes and behavior. This is best exemplified in her chapter on Asian American women. Indeed, Lien's approach is a refreshing change from that of others who claim to be using "race, ethnicity, class, and gender" as a framework for analysis but never really explain how these categories effect change. For those wary of anything having to do with numbers, it should be noted that, given the complexity of the method and the data, Lien is lucid in her presentation of findings. After all is said and done, she makes a persuasive case that

Asian American political participation does matter.

Lien's quantitative approach does suffer from certain limitations, however, as she is at pains to point out in her methodological report in the appendix. Perhaps the most problematic is the lack of nationally representative data. Much of her state and local data, for example, are from the West Coast or southern California. Presumably, as Asian American political participation increases, as it surely will, improved data will be available for future researchers to use. Meanwhile, Lien has shown the way.

Pei-te Lien has written an important book rich in insights and questions for readers to ponder at the dawning of the twenty-first century. Her study challenges the widely held but erroneous belief that Asian Americans are prone to political passivity. On the contrary, she demonstrates that Asian Americans have been politically active and for a multitude of reasons, their political participation continues to have significant implications for the nation as well as for themselves.