

# **Issues for Asians in America**

**by Katherine Kam**

In the U.S., where diverse Asian cultures exist, it is difficult to generalize about the issues that Asian youths will face as they grow into adulthood. For example, the problems confronting a young Southeast Asian refugee child whose parents suffer from the effects of war trauma and adjustment to a new country will differ dramatically from those faced, perhaps, by a fourth-generation Japanese American youngster or a child adopted from an Asian country. But in general, these common themes might appear in Asian children's lives:

## **Ethnic Identity**

The challenge of intertwining one's "Asian-ness" with one's "American-ness" is a common facet in many Asian Americans' lives. For Asian children, as with other children of color, the dawning of racial awareness can bring about changes - positive or negative. For Asian children who grow up with little exposure to other Asians and who are also teased about their ethnicity, embarrassment about being "different" can take root. Without positive input about his or her ethnic culture, the Asian child can consciously or subconsciously begin to deny, rather than embrace, his Asian heritage.

But for Asian children fortunate enough to be exposed to the riches of their culture, as well as to Asian role models, the groundwork is laid for a healthy cultural identity. In developing this identity, it is helpful for an Asian child to grow up in a

community with other Asians, as well as a large extended family that connects him to his roots. But even without these benefits, some Asians become interested in learning more about their culture as they grow older. In their twenties, these young people might express a desire to travel to ancestral lands or to learn more about the family's history. They might also begin to express appreciation of values and perspectives found in their ethnic culture.

## **Independence Vs. Obedience to Parental Wishes**

Traditional Asian views see the proper parental role as one that involves the active guiding and shaping of a child. Any defiance on the young person's part can appear threatening and confusing. A cultural rift can occur when a U.S.-reared child wants to act independently in making major decisions. The child might hold a more Westernized view of himself, in which his wishes as an individual take priority over

*Katherine Kam is a free-lance writer in Corte Madera, California.*