SPECIAL FEATURE INTRODUCTION

The following contributions are based on interviews conducted by freshmen student authors with Asian American immigrants who are family members or close friends of the writer. The narratives describe the experiences and opinions of six Asian Americans and their motivation to leave their home country.

There has been some debate in academia over the value of oral history. Questions often arise how personal biases as well as memory affect these accounts. The ability to verify the information in personal recollections is also an issue that historians face. However, the historical developments discussed in these pieces – Japanese internment camps, communism, the war in Vietnam and the subsequent refugee crisis – are well documented and can be easily researched. These experiences provide invaluable evidence of the impact that historical events have on individuals that stands in stark contrast to the detached accounts often presented in textbooks.

The first story follows Masao Yamashita, who was raised in an American interment camp during World War II. The author relates Yamashita's experience in America as he struggled with his Japanese and American heritage. Kyaw Lin Tun's mother faced hardships as an upper class adolescent during the socialist reform in Myanmar and her subsequent immigration to the United States. Following this are three stories about the lives of Thomas Tran, To Phan and Su and Mai Thai that fled South Vietnam in the aftermath of the war in Vietnam. In each case, the interviewees express their determination to maintain traditions while attempting to adjust to American culture. The experiences of Chinese Americans are the focus of the final narrative. Yuchang Huang also articulates the common theme of continued love for his country of birth and heritage, but acknowledges that he is just as American now as anyone born here.

According to 2000 Census data, Asian Americans accounted for 4.2 percent of the U.S. population, and 12.3 percent of Californians. These six oral histories highlight the influence that immigration has had on American history. *Perspectives* would like to thank Professor Ping Yao for providing the essays selected for this special feature from her course on Asian American History (HIST 150).