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New Book Shows How New Immigration Policies are Changing Face of Asian American Communities

Recent changes in American immigration law have resulted in a significant shift in migration from Asia, according to the authors of a new book entitled "Probationary Americans: Contemporary Immigration Policies and the Shaping of Asian American Communities."

The authors, John S.W. Park, assistant professor of Asian American Studies at UC Santa Barbara, and his brother, Edward J.W. Park, director and associate professor of the Asian Pacific American Studies Program at Loyola Marymount University, will discuss their book at a symposium April 19 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the McCune Conference Room, 6th floor of the Humanities and Social Sciences Building at UCSB.

The symposium is free and open to the public.

The authors explain that migrants coming to the U.S. as skilled workers or as investors have in the past 15 years dominated legal migration from Asia.

Since 1990, as many as 300,000 Asian migrants have come to the United States every year under employment categories, and Asian migrants have also invested in major urban regions.

However, during the same period, admissions for family reunification, which had once been the most prominent route for migration from Asia, declined by about a third.

Poorer immigrants are in general less likely to arrive in the United States today, largely because of a complex set of immigration rules that have discouraged their migration.

Overall, the new immigration rules have heightened divisions by class and immigration status.

For example, "poorer, undocumented Asians still come to the United States, but because the new federal rules make them immediately deportable, they have little incentive to ask for help or to attract state attention, even though they are likely to suffer discrimination and exploitation in the labor market and elsewhere," says John Park.

Because of these trends, the make-up of Asian immigrant communities has changed dramatically.

Lawful migrants from Asia are now much more likely to have professional backgrounds, with college educations and technical training.

"In fact, Asians now dominate migration in employment and investment categories," Park says.

"On the other hand, there is also a growing shadow population of Asian workers who are poor and very vulnerable."

All new immigrants are now presumptively ineligible for most forms of public assistance, and they are much more likely to be deported for a single criminal conviction, Park explains.

"Indeed, the United States now forcibly deports more people per year---over 150,000 every year since 1998---than ever before in its history," he says.

The authors suggest that by admitting many more people based on employment and wealth, federal immigration rules have strengthened the perception that Asian immigrant communities are affluent.

However, they write, by formally discouraging the migration of the poor, and by criminalizing a larger segment of the immigrant population, these same rules have moved American law away from humanitarian concerns and have effectively consigned many poorer migrants to the bottom of American society.

Next week's symposium is the first in a series of Social Science Public Policy Briefings, sponsored by Melvin L. Oliver, Dean of the Division of Social Sciences at UCSB.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.