

RHYME & REASON

Making sense of census data

Although it contains not much surprising bit of news, the recent release of relevant 2006 census data on Filipinos in Canada is causing some stir within the community.

If you have not already heard or read about it, 2006 census data again confirmed that Filipinos comprise not only the third largest source of immigrants to Canada but also the third largest group of visible minorities, next to China and India. It has been noted in the past that we are also among the fastest growing group, with a rise of 35% from 1996 to 2001 when the overall population growth of Canada during the same period was only 4%. Various statistical surveys have also shown that Filipinos in Canada are among the most highly educated, with a great majority possessing at least a high school diploma and about a third with a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, only about 15% of the Canadian population have obtained a college or university degree. Census data also reveal that 99% of Filipinos speak at least one official language, mainly English.

Related statistical data however juxtapose the reality that Filipinos are also among the lowest income-earning group and hold jobs mostly in the sales and service sectors, clerical and semi-skilled manual labour. They also note that Filipinos can hardly be found in management positions, whether in the private or public sector. It is well-known that there is a disproportionately high number of Filipinos entering Canada via the Live-in Caregiver Program and are therefore often employed as nannies and domestic workers in affluent Canadian homes. Filipinos are also likely to be employed as night-shift workers in hotels and hospitals, restaurants and manufacturing firms, many of whom are doing it as a second or third job.

There is clearly a disparity here which is understandably disturbing. Highly-educated yet employed in semi-skilled jobs. Fast growing numbers yet slow in gaining upward career mobility. What gives?

Failure to recognize foreign credentials

The accreditation of foreign credentials has long been a thorny issue in Canada. Stories of PhD's driving taxis are legendary. For Filipinos coming to Canada, the great difficulties encountered in finding jobs in their fields of education and experience abound. This had also been a source of great frustration and despair, leaving many to give up hope in ever practicing their original professions and simply accept jobs that seriously underutilize their skills and talents.

The LCP: A 'quicker' alternative to working and gaining PR status in Canada

Many people who will likely qualify under the skilled worker category do not want to wait for five years or so that it currently takes for their permanent resident applications to be processed at the Canadian Embassy in Manila.

Hence, many choose to take the relatively faster route – to apply for temporary work permits under the Live-in Caregiver Program that will allow them to apply for permanent resident status after working fulltime as live-in caregivers for 24 months within 3 years of arrival in Canada. Although the processing period for an LCP work permit takes about one to two years from Manila, many Filipinos entering through the LCP apply from Hong Kong, Israel, Dubai or other foreign countries where the visa processing is much faster (usually takes only a few months).

Regionalism and other forms of factionalism

Among Filipinos, we are also often identified through the regions where we come from: as Tagalogs, Manilenos, Bulakenos, Ilocanos, Visayans, Ilonggos, Batanguenos, etc.. Associations are usually formed based on these regional groupings and the local dialects spoken, celebrating their own ‘fiestas’ and their respective cultural traditions. Consequently, closer ties, loyalties and sometimes even willingness to assist, are based on whether the recipients and providers of assistance are fellow Ilokanos, Visayans, etc..

Serious factionalism can also be based on political beliefs, affiliations or even personal differences. Not a few times have we seen groupings created based on the very same issues, by different people, who refuse to work together or even end up competing against each other for external support and recognition. As a result, public attention is diffused and the issues being raised are often sacrificed in favour of divisive politicking or trivial personal agenda.

Distrust of authorities

Centuries of colonial history, widespread corruption and abuse of power in the Philippines are just some of the factors which contribute to the Filipinos’ general distrust of authorities. This often translates into the refusal to participate in electoral politics or community-building activities which are simply dismissed as futile exercises that will not improve their current situation.

While the above factors could partly explain the disparate reality created by census data, these should not lead to apathy or hopelessness. Filipinos are also known to be extremely resilient and possessing other traits such as close family ties, fierce loyalties, strong religious beliefs, abundant talent and extraordinary diligence. For the most part, these are positive values that should assist in coping with the many setbacks encountered in relocating to a new country. If these values are combined with a balanced perspective and a genuine sense of compassion for others, our strength in numbers should eventually translate into equal (or greater) strength in all other aspects of Canadian life.

May you and your loved ones have a truly blessed Christmas and a wonderful new year!

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