

SOCIOLOGY OF THE FILIPINO LUZVIMINDA MASON

"Filipino" in this presentation refers to the Filipino Masons of the Lodge

By Bert C Bautista, PM

This article speaks briefly about Filipino values and characteristics. Because the author belongs to this ethnic group, liberty is taken – that of being a social critique and to be then free from contempt of others.

Look at the Filipino-American brother next to you. Chances are, at some point in his life, this brother lived in any of the 7100 islands of the Philippine Archipelago. His pronunciation of words, his accent and his intonation may be totally different from the Filipino-American brother next to him. Besides English or perhaps Spanish, this brother can speak any one or more of the 8 major languages from among the 84 major ethnolinguistic dialects. Except for a few, most Filipino-American brothers came to the United States as an adult. Despite this variety, there are many common characteristics of the Filipino brother and quite a number of shared societal values and behaviors.

What are the major characteristics of a Filipino brother?

1. The **compadre** or **padrino system** initiated the Filipino into the practice of extended families. On a positive note and taken as an advantage for immigrants like us, this value system has enlarged our social network by adopting family friends as virtual relatives, the bonding of which are sometimes more intense than with real blood relatives. This is manifested when one sees a young Filipino respectfully addressing the brother Mason as “Tito” (Uncle) and his wife as “Tita” (Aunt). You have heard many times when Filipino-American brothers are around and call the ladies (wives or girlfriends of the brother) as “sister”. The rationale is simple - because the husband is a brother, it just appropriate to call his wife or lady a sister. The bonding then goes beyond the tyled recesses of the lodge room.

Negatively, however, this has served to strengthen the notorious and negative social practice of **nepotism** and **favoritism**. In other words, this value system has corrupted our sense of fairness and plain dealings with others who are not within our circle. In our fraternity, this is manifested by the existence of leaders of the pack (virtual or real). Unfortunately, this head honchos are the very people who willfully violate the age-old tradition of not recruiting members into our fraternity.

The result of inviting cowans into our fold, manifests another Filipino value that has taken a more negative turn than positive – which we call “**utang na loob**” or debt of gratitude. This is the theory of reciprocity in play: which states that if A gives something to B, it is expected that B will return the favor to A in some future time. If not, the interpersonal relationship between A and B breaks down. In essence, this is parallel to, but not quite the same as to what Americans refer to as “you owe me one” for a favor done to another. To the Filipino, the debt of gratitude goes beyond the grave and its payment is endless, or otherwise, one would be branded as “**walang utang na loob**” or ingrate or ungrateful. I still hear quite a few Filipino-American brothers who are beholden to another brother or head honcho who introduced him to Masonry. I would rather think that all of us became Masons on our own free will and accord, therefore we should maintain our independence of thinking – to be a true freemason, a free thinker and free from ignorance. A brother who was "recruited" misses the point when as an EA candidate, we were asked on whom we put our trust - that is to God and not to the person who influenced us into Masonry.

2. The “**bahala na**” or the “come what may” mentality has led to a lack of foresight - the contentment with the past or the status quo, the indolence, the lack of initiative, the lack of self self-reliance or the lack of pioneering spirit. There is no regard for planning and one leaves the outcome of future events to faith or chance. Related to these value system (lack of initiative, lack of self reliance or lack of pioneering spirit), the Filipino has a “**segurista**” mentality which means that one demands a demonstration of assured success before jumping into the bandwagon.

“**Bahala na**” also leads to the practice of “Filipino time”. When one invites you to a formal dinner at 6:30 AM and you are diabetic, be sure you will have some stash of fast-acting carbohydrates because

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chances are, dinner will be serve an hour or more much later than the appointed time. **"Bahala na"** is a disservice to the guests who is prompt.

The Filipinos cannot be blamed entirely for this value, as our colonial masters for 370 years, the Spaniards have taught us to rationalize our predicament, our poverty, our subjugation - having us believe that we will be rewarded in heaven as it is outlined in the Christian's seven beatitudes (blessed are those who are persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven).

The creation of LuzViMinda was met with resistance because the organizers had not and at that time in 2005, cannot demonstrate assured success. However, its founders believed that taking this pioneering spirit is much better than taking over dying lodges and basking over elderly and older member's hard-earned lodge resources.

3. There is a tendency for Filipinos to meet with contempt and not support a cause, an activity or an idea of another Filipino. It is referred to the **"crab mentality"** evident by a passive or even an active participation in pulling down or wishing failure of a compatriot. It could be motivated by all or any of the following: envy, jealousy, retribution, retaliation, distrust, arrogance or simply ignorance.

Crab mentality describes a way of thinking best described by the phrase "if I can't have it, neither can I allow you." The metaphor refers to a pot of crabs in which one tries to escape over the side, but is relentlessly pulled down by the others inside the pot.

4. **"Amor propio"** is the superhigh self-esteem and is manifested in extreme sensitivity to hurt feeling and insults - real or imagined. It is the Filipino's sensitivity to criticism; his inability to accept criticism; and his interpretation of criticism as a personal insult. Some Filipinos still thinks that Manila is the cleanest city. A Hollywood celebrity, as honest and as up an front all-American, described the streets of Manila as dirty. The celebrity was banned from coming back to perform.
5. The society in its social structure is described as paternalistic just because it is the male that dominates the nuclear family. However, the Filipinos has had two female presidents. Their election has nothing to do with gender. It has more to do with the socio-econo-political status of people that places them in elected offices . It is also feudalistic in its practices - people assume roles of leadership in social groups based on socio-economic status.
6. The Filipino has an **obsession to title**, real or made up. Education has become a status symbol; an announcement to the community that one is different, one is above the rest. Growing up in the Philippines, my grandfather used to castigate my brothers and I, when we misbehave, by sarcastically asking "are you *hijos mal educado*?" *All herein present*, I ask: Do you know that our PGM Sat has a PhD in nuclear science? If he is a Filipino and in the Philippines, he would demand to be addressed as "Dr. Tashiro" or "Doc" and will most likely sign his name with a "PhD" at the end. Engineers, doctors, architects, physician, lawyers, retired military expect to be addressed by their professional titles and not otherwise.
7. The Filipino has a **"balimbing"** attitude alluding to a behavior that he will easily change horse in the middle of a race. Balimbing in English is "*starfruit*" named as such because when cut crosswise, the fruit will have the shape of a star. It is multi-faced as opposed to multi-faceted. Such as was evident when a few blue lodges under the Grand Oriente de Espana and Sovereign Grand Lodge of the Philippine Archipelago pledged allegiance to the Grand Lodge of California in the 1900's. The Spanish Empire then, was loosing its status as a world power at the turn of the century, while the United States was then emerging as world super power. While this speaks of the survivalistic attitude of the Filipino, it shouts of a certain disloyalty to a cause or even to friendship, and again operationally this defines the **"segurista"** attitude (assured success).

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8. Over enthusiasm with no follow up or provision for continuity and maintenance of an endeavor describes the Filipino behavior of **"ningas-kugon"**. It is grassfire in summer, easy come easy goes. There is the lack of planning and leaves the course of events to faith tied up to the **"bahala na"** attitude. It is anathema to the **"segurista"** attitude previously described. This is one which the LVM organizers have successfully hurdled.
9. The Filipino is **"gaya-gaya"** or imitative – especially in the performing arts. Hence, you can hear of the Elvis Presley of the Philippines, the Frank Sinatra of the Philippines, etc. However, no one has heard of the Albert Einstein of the Philippines or a Benjamin Franklin of the Philippines. Such **"gaya-gaya"** attitude is evident when a few Filipino-American Masons perform the rituals and degree work to perform for visitors rather than for the candidate of our mysteries - who we should bear in mind, is the focal point of all our degree works.
10. The Filipino has an obsession to serving meals even to strangers. A parish priest where I used to belong many years ago, made a comment that the Filipinos have an ostentatious display of resources. This he made reference to what he observed during Filipino celebrations in the parish – where of course, food abounds; the cornucopia does not appear to be emptying. Serving food is the way by which Filipinos express gratitude to the Creator – that is by sharing the produce of the earth with others. The colonizing masters reinforced this by having Filipinos celebrate with a Christian flare - various town fiestas (usually during the tropical summer) after a bountiful harvest. This celebration is also to honor the patron saint - the namesake of the town. Rich or poor, this annual festivities bring community folk on the level serving invited guests or passing through strangers.

With these thoughts, my brothers, I hope that you will have an understanding of the sociology of the Filipino LuzViMinda Masons of our lodge. Too many obstacles, as in the rough and rugged journey of the celebrated Master, have been hurdled by the founders. Unlike his faith, though, LuzViMinda has survived more than three ruffians. Having an awareness of what is adaptive and maladaptive in these characteristics and value sets, continue to guide the path to the survival of the lodge.

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