

Filipino Immigrants in Canada: A Literature Review and Directions for Further Research on Second-Tier Cities and Rural Areas

Tom Lusi
tlusi@uoguelph.ca

Department of Geography



Introduction

This study provides an overview of the literature on Filipino immigrants in the Canadian context¹. The central argument of the paper is that this body of literature has three distinct characteristics, an urban bias, a focus on the economic integration of immigrants, and a gender bias. Cutting across these topics are two central themes which are the importance of social networks in immigration experiences, and the frequency of transnational ties between communities in Canada and the Philippines. I suggest that an examination of these trends and themes not only exposes the gaps in the literature but also shows how the Filipino-Canadian community is well positioned for a study of immigrants in secondary cities and rural areas. The text is structured as follows. The first section examines the three main trends in the literature. The second section reviews the two themes that are reoccurring throughout the studies on Filipino immigrants. Section three will point out the gaps in the literature and provide directions for further research. Finally, the fourth section presents the concluding arguments.

Trends in the Literature

The urban bias

In recent years the literature on Filipino-Canadians has tended to focus on two cities, Toronto and Vancouver. Of the eighteen sources reviewed for this paper, 50 per cent used data gathered from the Filipino community in these cities. If further comparisons are made, Toronto has received the most attention. For

¹ This study examines the literature where Filipino immigrants were the main topic of investigation. There are other sources which address the Filipino community indirectly, especially in the body of work on the Live-in Caregiver Program, however the focus for this paper was a review of what was written exclusively on this immigrant community.

example, Cusipag and Buenafe (1993) trace the history of Filipino community associations, entrepreneurs, and political activities in Toronto since the late 1960s. More recently, Kelly and Lusi (2005) examine how various forms of capital are valued in the transnational social fields between Toronto and the Philippines, and Lusi (2005) illustrates the class-based contradictions faced by de-skilled Filipino immigrants in Toronto's labour markets. There have also been several studies done on Filipinas working in the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) in Toronto. For example, England and Stiell (1997) examine how Filipina caregivers rank among the social and economic hierarchies among domestic workers in the city, and Cohen (2000) uses data from interviews with Filipina domestic workers in Toronto for her critique of the program.

The Filipino-Canadian community in Vancouver has also received considerable attention. The central focus of researchers in this city has been on Filipina domestic workers. For instance, McKay (2002) studies the social and economic hardships facing Filipina caregivers in Vancouver. Pratt (1997,1999) also examines the working conditions and social experiences of Filipina domestics in two of her studies. However, in a third paper she focuses on a different subgroup within the ethnic community and records how some Canadian born Filipino youths have had feelings of "dislocation" within Canadian society (Pratt, 2002).

In some ways a focus on Toronto and Vancouver is understandable. According to 2001 Census data, Toronto remains the primary destination of Filipino immigrants with approximately 43 per cent of all Filipinos in Canada living in the Greater Toronto Area (Lusi, 2004). It would therefore seem reasonable that most studies focus on the urban centre with the highest concentration of Filipino immigrants. Another factor to consider is the role community or activist organizations play in bridging the gap between researchers and the ethnic community.² Academics often gain access to immigrant networks by working with these groups. However, since these types of social infrastructure generally converge in larger urban centres, research does not extend into more peripheral communities.

Focus on labour market integration

Another second trend of note is the focus on the labour market integration of Filipino immigrants. Earlier works were primarily more general population profiles. For example, Chen's (1977) paper titled "Filipinos in Canada: A Socio-Demographic Profile" examined the labour market integration of immigrants along with a host of other factors including the age and gender distribution of the Filipino-Canadian community. In a later paper titled "Kinship Systems and Chain Migrations: Filipinos in Thunder Bay," Chen (1981) again covered labour market issues but in the context of immigrant social networks rather than an exclusive

² For example, Stiell and England (1997) relied on the International Coalition to End Domestic Workers' Exploitation (INTERCEDE), McKay (2002) and Pratt (1999) both worked with the Philippine Women's Centre in Vancouver, and Grandea and Kerr (1998) were associated with several organizations including the Women's Advisory Committee of the Philippines Canada Human Resources Development Program, and the Coalition for the Defense of Migrant Worker's Rights in Toronto.

economic study. The work of Cusipag and Buenafe (1993) provides similar examples. In their book on the Filipino community in Ontario, the authors examine various economic aspects of the migration experience (e.g. Filipino entrepreneurs in Toronto) but their focus remained on the growth of the community as a whole and included such diverse topics as community organizations and political activities.

In contrast to these older studies, most of the contemporary work on Filipino-Canadians uses labour market issues as their point of entry for their studies of the immigrant community. For instance, Lusi (2005a) focuses on the de-skilling of professional Filipino immigrants in Toronto as a central theoretical contradiction in his study of transnational class identities. Other authors use the LCP program as their point of entry to illustrate the social and economic consequences of working in the program³ (Pratt, 1997, 1999; Cohen, 2000; Grandea and Kerr, 1998; McKay, 2002; Stiell and England 1997). In general then, recent studies have primarily focused on the labour market integration of Filipino immigrants rather than other areas of migration studies, such as settlement trajectories, secondary migration and urban-rural linkages.

Gender bias

A third trend in the contemporary literature is a gendered bias, with Filipino women being the topic for a large percentage of the work produced. For example, of the eighteen sources reviewed, 44 per cent had Filipina immigrants as their main topic of interest. The reason for this bias is that many studies were directly examining the Live-in Caregiver Program, in which Filipino women are heavily represented (McKay, 2002; Pratt, 1999).

Several of these articles examined the discursive construction of the “Filipina,” and how racial stereotypes have material and social consequences. For example, the value assigned by placement agencies to the educational qualifications of British caregivers (e.g. Nursery Nurse Examination Board certificate) in comparison to the educational qualifications of Filipino caregivers, constructs Europeans as professionals and Filipinas as servants (Pratt, 1999). These distinctions then explain the different types of employment assigned to different ethnic groups. European trained nannies are seen as not suitable for housekeeping while Filipinas are considered specialists for this labour market niche (England and Stiell, 1997). It is also interesting to note how the LCP has permeated in to studies unrelated to caregivers. For instance, the Philippine Women Centre of B.C. (2002) published a paper titled “Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides.” One of arguments put forward in this study makes the links between Filipina domestic workers and mail-order brides. The authors suggest that when individuals complete the Live-in Caregiver program they face further hardships (e.g. de-skilling, lack of money because of

³ For example, many academics claim that Filipina domestic workers often experience forms of verbal, emotional and physical abuse, and at times suffer from social stigmatization in the ethnic community (Cohen, 2000; Grandea and Kerr, 1998; McKay, 2002).

the low pay) and at times, marriage to a Canadian man is seen as a way to escape a severely disadvantaged position.

Reoccurring Themes

Social networks

This section examines two themes that could be found in almost all of the studies reviewed for this paper. These themes therefore act as bridges between diverse research topics and demonstrate some of the common features found among the different sub-groups in the Filipino-Canadian population (e.g. independent immigrants, caregivers, those sponsored under the family reunification category). Perhaps the most common theme encountered throughout all of the studies was that social networks were extremely important in the social and economic integration of Filipino immigrants in Canada (Chen, 1981; Cusipag and Buenafe, 1993; Kelly and Lusi, 2005; Lusi, 2005a, 2005c; McKay, 2002; Pratt, 1999). One function of these networks was providing housing to newcomers. For instance, studies conducted by Chen (1981), and Kelly and Lusi (2005) both illustrate how recent arrivals will often stay with members of their social networks upon arrival in Canada⁴. England and Stiehl (1997) give further examples documenting how Filipina domestic workers often share an apartment during their weekends. Finally, Cusipag and Buenafe's (1993) record how in the late 1970s Filipino "pioneers" in Canadian cities would share accommodations after casual meetings. The common bond between these strangers was the fact that they were part of a very small community of Filipino immigrants in a foreign city.

Social networks have also been central in facilitating the economic integration of new immigrants in Canadian labour markets. For example, Chen (1981) argues that 65 per cent of Filipino immigrants in Sudbury found their current employment due to aid from their social contacts. Lusi (2005a) illustrates how these networks be mobilized with an example of a Filipino immigrant who found his current job in an automotive factory with the help of a cousin. It should be noted, that there exists a negative side to these types of connections as social networks can normalize labour market segmentation. De-professionalization may appear to a newcomer as a normal part of immigration to Canada if all of their friends and family are working in different types of employment than in the Philippines (Lusi, 2005a). Moreover, transnational employment searches may actually limit the diversity of work opportunities. Although these types of arrangements can ensure work upon arrival in Canada, new immigrants are funneled in to employment positions and have never been given the opportunity to look for work that may be more suitable to their levels of human capital (Kelly and Lusi, 2005).

⁴ In contemporary migration streams sometimes these housing arrangements are arranged transnationally. Upon hearing of their successful immigration application to Canada, individuals in the Philippines get in touch with their social contacts in Canada to see if they can arrange a place to stay (Lusi, 2005a).

Having outlined the functions performed by immigrant's social networks, I feel it is important to make distinctions between the "formal" and "informal" networks in the Filipino Canadian community.⁵ For example, a "formal" social network could consist of the family networks and kinship ties and that play a central role in immigration and settlement choices (Chen, 1981; Kelly and Lasis, 2005; Lasis, 2005a, 2005c). In contrast, "informal" networks are based on "looser" social ties (e.g. co-workers, acquaintances). These networks are important when immigrants lack an existing "formal" social network, such as in the case of Filipina domestic workers who have migrated without family or friends or the first group of Filipino immigrants in a Canadian city (Cusipag and Buenafe, 1993; England and Stiell, 1997; McKay, 2002; Pratt, 1997). Between these networks exist hierarchies. For example, Lasis (2005a) points out that the social networks of his respondents in Toronto held different levels of importance,⁶ while Pratt (1999) and McKay (2002) document how landed immigrants within the Filipino community in Vancouver look down upon Filipina domestic workers. Such tensions suggest that the Filipino-Canadian community is fractured along different class, regional and cultural lines. And although there may be various degrees of overlap between immigrants' social networks, the notion of a homogeneous ethnic community which newcomers simply have access to is far too simplistic in contemporary times.⁷

Transnationalism in the form of economic and social remittances

The second most common theme in the literature related to transnational activities in the form of social and economic remittances. For many Filipino immigrants, the opportunity to work in Canada and send remittances back home is the central motivation for traveling overseas in the first place. Thus, remittances from Canada can bring higher standards of living for families in the Philippines (Pratt, 1999; McKay, 2002; Kelly and Lasis, 2005; Lasis, 2005a). In some cases, the expectations placed upon immigrants to send remittances had negative consequences for those working in Canada. For example, Pratt (1997) has pointed out how some domestic workers become chained to the Live-in-Caregiver program in part due to the fact that they must continue to economically support their families in the Philippines.

The flows of information and images that are circulating between Canada and the Philippines are a second example of transnational activities. Immigrants in Canada are often a source of information for their family and friends in the Philippines. For example, Chen (1981) argues that many of the newcomers to

⁵ This is not to suggest that there can be no overlap between these two categories. Social networks will often consist of a people with a variety of backgrounds but the composition can affect how important they are during the immigration processes. For example, an individual in the Philippines would be able to call upon their "formal" social networks in Canada to give them advice and information about life in a foreign city since these ties already exist. In contrast, "informal" networks are created during the immigration experience and cannot be utilized during the pre-migration stage.

⁶ According to Lasis (2005a), first were family and kinship ties, then friendship networks, and finally those networks originating from community organizations, such as the Bohol Association.

⁷ This may be a function of time and the size of an immigrant community. For example, the work of Cusipag and Buenafe (1993) suggests that in the first years of the immigrant community, social networks between strangers were more easily formed since they were the only Filipinos in the city. These experiences can be contrasted with the work of Pratt (1999) and McKay (2002) which suggests that the Filipino community is more fractured along class lines.

Sudbury had previously been in contact with their social networks in the city and who had already told them what to expect in Canada. Lusia (2005) argues that technology has made global communication easier, cheaper and faster, and illustrates how would-be immigrants in the Philippines were already preparing to be de-skilled in Canadian labour markets. These types of information flows can also be found among those participating in the Live-in Caregiver program. Caregivers in Canada can become important sources of information for relatives in the Philippines who want to enter the program, at times even locating employers (McKay, 2002).

Gaps in the Literature and Directions for Further Research

Perhaps the most obvious gap in the contemporary literature is a lack of recent studies on a Filipino-Canadian community outside of Toronto or Vancouver. There have been a few such studies in the past, yet they are dated and need revision. For example, Buduhan (1972) focuses on Filipino garment workers living in Winnipeg, Manitoba while Chen (1981) examines the Filipino community in Thunder Bay, Ontario. A third work is Cusipag and Buenafe's (1993) "Portrait of Filipino Canadians in Ontario (1960-1990)," which provides a historical overview of the Filipino communities in Windsor and Ottawa. All of these studies are over ten years old and need to be updated.

A contemporary study on the Filipino-Canadian community in second-tier cities and in rural areas would therefore not only bring new a renewed focus on Filipino immigrants in smaller centres, it would also contribute to the growing body of literature that examines immigration outside of "gateway" cities (e.g. Walton-Roberts, 2005; Di Biase, 2004; Di Biase and Bauder, 2005). It is also important to note that the concentrations of Filipino immigrants in major urban centres, such as Toronto, create an interesting context in which to examine immigrant communities in second-tier cities and rural areas.⁸ Researchers need to gather detailed information on settlement histories and the role of social networks to uncover why these immigrants have by-passed larger centres. For example, how old are these communities? Are they based on extended networks resulting from chain migrations? What type of "ethnic" infrastructure exists in these areas? These are all important questions that need to be examined through future research.

A second gap in the literature is the lack of recent studies which provide a detailed examination of how the social networks of Filipino-Canadians operate outside of Toronto or Vancouver. In light of the many recent technological changes, maintaining transnational linkages has become more affordable and

⁸ The relative proximity between Toronto and small-town and rural study sites creates an interesting context through which to examine the importance of networks between a "gateway" city and smaller centres. For example, studies by Henin and Bennett (2002), and Hyndman and Schuurman (2004) show that newcomers feel that larger centres are attractive because of their larger ethnic communities. One can question why some immigrants nevertheless settle in smaller places, resisting the appeal of a gateway city with a larger Filipino-Canadian community.

easier (Kelly, 2003; Vertovec, 2004). Yet what affect does this technology have on the social and economic integration of Filipino immigrants in second-tier cities and rural areas? For instance, how do technology and networks influence settlement decisions? How do transnational family units utilize them? What images and information about life in rural and small-town Canada circulate back to the Philippines and how do these influence the destination choices of future immigrants? Some of these questions have been touched upon in the Toronto context (e.g. Kelly and Lusic, 2005; Lusic 2004), but there are no studies which uncover how recent technological advances have affected transnational social networks in smaller centres and rural areas.

A third gap is the lack of studies upon Filipina domestic workers in second-tier cities and rural areas. This would be an interesting area of research because, in the case of the Live-in Caregiver program, governmental legislation dictates the destination choices of Filipina newcomers. As part of their contracts, caregivers must live with their employers for a term of three years. After the successful completion of the contract, caregivers receive landed-immigrant status, can apply for Canadian citizenship and eventually sponsor their family through the family re-unification category of immigration legislation (Pratt, 1997; McKay, 2002). One can therefore ask if caregivers remain in a second-tier city or rural areas upon completion of their contracts, or do they leave for the Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver? If they stay, how do social networks in Canada influence this destination choice and what is the appeal of living in a smaller community? Furthermore, this type of study would compliment the emerging migration studies literature on refugee communities in smaller centres (e.g. Derwing and Mulder, 2003; Sherrell et al., 2004), as the destination choices of both groups are dictated by government legislation.

Conclusions

The literature on Filipino-Canadians exhibits three broad trends, an urban bias in favor of Toronto and Vancouver, a focus on issues related to labour market integration, and a gender bias towards Filipina domestic workers. Cutting across these trends are two themes: the importance of social networks and the prevalence of transnational linkages. This body of work however, has several large gaps that provide opportunities for future research, with one area being a renewed focus on Filipino-Canadian communities in second-tier cities and rural areas. These settlement contexts have been understudied for many years. The early works conducted by Cusipag and Buenafe (1993), and Chen (1981) can provide a “baseline” for future studies. For example, we can use some information contained in these older studies to compare how transnational activities have changed over time. If future studies are conducted in second-tier cities and rural areas, they will not only compliment the literature on Filipino-Canadians by expanding the scope of inquiry beyond Canada’s gateway cities, they will also contribute to an important area of research in migration studies,

which examines the social and economic experiences of immigrants in smaller places.

References

Buduhan, C.M. (1972) *An Urban Village: The Effect of Migration on the Filipino Garment Workers in a Canadian City*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba.

Chen, A.B. (1998) *From Sunbelt to Snowbelt: Filipinos in Canada*. Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, University of Calgary.

Chen, A.B. (1981) Kinship System and Chain Migrations: Filipinos in Thunder Bay. in Ujimoto, K.V. and Hirabayashi, G. (eds.) *Asian Canadians Regional Perspectives. Selections From The Proceedings, Asian Canadian Symposium V Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia 23-26 May, 1981*.

Chen, A.B. (1977) Filipinos in Canada: A Socio-Demographic Profile. in Ujimoto, K.V. and Hirabayashi, G. (eds.) *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada*. Butterworth, Toronto.

Cohen, R. (2000) "Mom is a Stranger": The Negative Impact of Immigration Policies on the Family Life of Filipina Domestic Workers. *Canadian Ethnic Studies/ Etudes Ethniques Au Canada*. XXXII.

Cusipag, R.J. and Buenafe, M.C. (1993). *Portrait of Filipino Canadians in Ontario (1960-1990)*.

Derwing, T and Mulder, M. (2003) *The Kosovar Sponsoring Experience in Northern Alberta*. Working Paper Series No. WP05-03. Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration. University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Di Biase, S. (2004) *Immigrants In Ontario: Linking Spatial Settlement Patterns and Labour Force Characteristics*. Unpublished Masters Thesis. University of Guelph.

Di Biase, S. and Bauder, H. (2005) "Immigrant Settlement in Ontario: Location and Local Labour Markets." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*. Forthcoming

England, K. and Stiell, B. (1997) They think you're as stupid as your English is: constructing foreign domestic workers in Toronto. *Environment and Planning A* 29, 195-215.

- Grande, N. and Kerr, J. (1998) 'Frustrated and displaced': Filipina domestic workers in Canada. *Gender and Development* 6 (1), 7-14.
- Guarnizo, L.E. (1997) The Emergence of a Transnational Social Formation and The Mirage of Return Migration Among Dominican Transmigrants. *Identities* 4 (2), 281-322.
- Kelly, P.F. (2003) Canadian-Asian transnationalism. *Canadian Geographer* 47 (3), 209-219.
- Kelly, P. (2005) *Filipinos in Canada: Economic Dimensions of Immigrant and Settlement*. Manuscript, Department of Geography, York University.
- Kelly, P.F., Lusi, T. Migration and the Transnational Habitus: Evidence From Canada And The Philippines. *Environment and Planning A*, 2005. (Forthcoming)
- Lusi, T. (2005a). Class Identity and Filipino Transnationalism: The Toronto-Tagbilaran Connection. Unpublished Masters Thesis. Department of Geography, York University.
- Lusi, T. (2005b) Mabuhay Balik Bayan: The Role of Overseas Workers in the Social Class Hierarchies of Tagbilaran City in the Philippines. Paper presented at the Canadian Council of Southeast Asian Studies Biennial Conference, York University.
- Lusi, T. (2004) The impacts of Technology on Filipino Immigration to Canada: New Implications for Alternative Destinations. Paper presented at the Rural Immigration Seminar, University of Guelph Department of Geography.
- McKay, D. (2002) *Filipina Identities: Geographies of Social Integration/Exclusion in the Canadian Metropolis*. Working Paper Series, Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis.
- Pertierra, R. (1992) *Remittances and Returnees: The Cultural Economy of Migration in Ilocos*. New Day Publishers, Quezon City.
- Philippine Women Centre of B.C. (2000). *Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides*. Status of Women Canada.
- Pratt, G. (2002). "Between Homes: Displacement and Belonging for Second Generation Filipino-Canadian Youth". Working Paper Series No.02-13, Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis, Vancouver, Simon Fraser University.

- Pratt, G. (1999) From registered nurse to registered nanny: discursive geographies of Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, B.C. *Economic Geography* 75 (3), 215-234.
- Pratt, G. and the Philippine Women Centre (1998) Inscribing Domestic Work On Filipina Bodies. In Nast, H. and Pile, S. (eds) *Places Through The Body*. London: Routledge.
- Pratt, G. (1997) Stereotypes and Ambivalence: the construction of domestic workers in Vancouver, British Columbia. *Gender, Place and Culture* 4 (2), 159-177.
- Sherrell, K., Hyndman, J. and Preniqi, F. (2004) Sharing the Wealth, Spreading the "Burden"? The Settlement of Kosovar Refugees in Smaller B.C. Cities. Working Paper Series No 04-06. Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis. Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.
- Walton-Roberts, M. (2004) Regional Immigration and Dispersal: Lessons from Small- and Medium- Sized Urban Centres in British Columbia. Working Paper Series No 04-03. Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis. Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.
- Vertovec, S. (2004). Cheap Calls: the social glue of migrant transnationalism. *Global Networks* 4 (2), 219-224.