



Commentary on New Immigrants to Canada

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Despite the fact that many negative comments and jokes about Canada and Canadians circulate among Canadians, Canada is still an attractive country chosen by many immigrants to be their new home.

Canada is a vast country with stable economic and political systems. Even with the threat of separation of Quebec, sovereignty of the indigenous peoples and inter-provincial bickering, and compared to many countries in strife and turmoil, these political issues are mild by miles.

Many immigrants have chosen Canada as their new home for various reasons. However they can be summed up as one major reason; that is, the hope for a better life. If not a better life for themselves now, they hope that life will be better for their children in the future. The pattern of immigration, in terms of countries of origin, the occupations and the social-economic backgrounds of the immigrants, has changed over the past century. However the purpose of immigration remains the same. With hopes for a better lifestyle and future in their minds, they come to Canada.

Many of the recent immigrants are prepared for some degree of setback from their previous lifestyles. Some recent immigrants from Hong Kong were prepared to not find a job for up to three years and to spend those three years immersing themselves in Canadian living by attending schools (adult education and ESL classes) and volunteering for various organizations to gain Canadian experience. However, the adjustment to a new life in Canada is a harsh one for all immigrants. The process of trying to fit in, getting a feeling of belonging to Canada, and finding one's place in a vast country, is a difficult one. The more liberal and tolerant political views of the past twenty years have elevated the esteem and confidence of immigrants to feel comfortable with being themselves in their new home land. But they have also served as barriers for the new immigrants who want to assimilate and be immersed into the "Canadian" culture.

New immigrants, anxious to learn about the Canadian way of life often receive the message that to continue to do your own thing is fine. They experience the positive feeling of having the freedom to carry on their own traditions and values, and yet, at the same time feel alienated and "shut out" of Canadian traditions and values they have heard of and learned about in their old countries.

These policies often become the barriers for new immigrants, preventing them from

participating in the Canadian customs and traditions which motivated them to emigrate in the first place. The practice of such policies also serves to ghettoize different ethnic communities which sometimes creates conflicts between host citizens and new citizens as well as among the different ethnic groups.

Another factor that affects the adjustment process of new immigrants is the barrier of language. Without the appropriate usage of the language of the community, new immigrants find it difficult to fit in and hard to gain a foot-hold in the community-at-large. Many ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, both public and private, are well attended by new immigrants. The more expensive accent reduction classes are sought by many professionals and their employers.

With the latest shift of the immigration demography, many new immigrants are from the Asia Pacific-Rim which has been quite prosperous in recent years. Many of these immigrants are middle-aged, middle-class professionals or business investors with already well established social and economic ties in their countries of origin. When they arrive in this vast new country with little or no social and economic ties and a lack of Canadian experience within a different business climate, they face the harsh reality of not getting the jobs they qualify for and desire or are not able to survive in this new business environment.

Many choose to return to their country of origin or stay to take any odd job available, including factory jobs and manual labour. Many professionals such as engineers, teachers, journalists, bureaucrats, and executives have to face this dilemma of returning to the 'old' country or working at any menial job. These situations represent serious setbacks including loss of status and income.

If they take these situations seriously and let the situations get the upper-hand over their emotions, the effects are detrimental. The excitement and enthusiasm of coming to a new country to start a new life become disappointment and disparagement. However, the interpretation of the situations and the mindset of the individual are very important factors in helping that person get off the disabled list and stop feeling like a victim.

Specifically the use of humour could be very effective in helping to ease the adjustment process. For example, many new immigrants in these situations could see the lighter side of the situation, such as, no more stress of meeting the deadline, no more projects to plan and implement, sales projections and meeting sales quota, relief from managerial responsibilities, etc. All these could represent a better new life. Followed by new friendships, meeting old acquaintances to share the woes, engaging in educational programs and recreational activities organized by the social services of their ethnic communities, the new immigrants gradually adjust to their new lives.

In time, they would find that they are really more Canadian than they think they are, often marked by the event of going back to the old country for a visit and missing home here in Canada. Indeed, Canada is also changing and adjusting to the new immigrants' desires. One obvious change in recent years is the on Sundays shopping rule. Shopping

is a leisure activity for many new immigrants which has increased the demand for stores to be open Sunday and led to changes by the government to accommodate such activity.

Canada will continue to change and grow with the new immigrants, mutually influencing each other. In the age of globalization, Canada has become a global village where many of the cultures of the World meet.

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