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## A Korean's view

**Lowdown**

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LAST weekend's visit by South Korean Prime Minister Lee Hae Chan would have been unremarkable for most Filipinos, except probably for those old enough to remember that time — not so long ago — when most Filipinos fared infinitely better than the average Korean.

Now South Korea seems light years away in nearly all respects compared to the Philippines. Just like most of our other neighbors who have outstripped us — we who were once next only to Japanese in the entire continent in terms of affluence and economic progress — most Koreans look at the Philippines as a land of lost opportunity, where politics and everything else that's wrong have irreparably gummed up the works.

It must give the Koreans great satisfaction to see a neighbor they once envied come to them hat in hand to beg for aid and investments — neighbors who once viewed them as a perennially war-torn, economically depressed peninsula good only for supplying conscripted labor and soldiers to Japan and China.

But not all of them view the reversal of roles as a good thing. There are Koreans, like many Filipinos, who wonder what went wrong with the Philippines and what might still happen, if some long-festering problems are solved. This is the subject of an essay by a Korean visitor to the Philippines, a certain Jaeyoun Kim, which I recently received in an e-mail.

Sometimes, it takes a total outsider to see us for what really are — especially an outsider who went to similar hard times and emerged stronger because (not in spite) of them. The essay has been going around since late 2003, I understand, but the truths it contains still ring true. With minor revisions, here's Kim's essay:

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Filipinos always complain about the corruption in the Philippines. Do you really think the corruption is the problem of the Philippines? I do not think so. I strongly believe that the problem is the lack of love for the Philippines.

Let me first talk about my country, Korea. It might help you understand my point. After the Korean War, South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world. Koreans had to start from scratch because entire country was destroyed completely after the Korean War, and we had no natural resources.

Koreans used to talk about the Philippines, for Filipinos were very rich in Asia. We envy Filipinos. Koreans really wanted to be well off like Filipinos. Many Koreans died of famine. My father's brother also died because of famine.

Korean government was awfully corrupt and is still very corrupt beyond your imagination, but Korea was able to develop dramatically because Koreans really did their best for the economic good with their heart burning with motivation.

aid their best for the common good with their heart burning with patriotism. Koreans did not work just for themselves but also for their neighbor and country. Education inspired young men with the spirit of patriotism.

Forty years ago, President Park took over the government to reform Korea. He tried to borrow money from other countries, but it was not possible to get a loan and attract a foreign investment because the economy situation of South Korea was so bad. Korea had only three factories. So, President Park sent many mine workers and nurses to Germany so that they could send money to Korea to build a factory. They had to go through a horrible experience.

In 1964, President Park visited Germany to borrow money. Hundreds of Koreans in Germany came to the airport to welcome him and cried there as they saw President Park. They asked him, "Mr. President, when can we be well off?" That was the only question everyone asked him. President Park cried with them and promised them that Korea would be well off if everyone works hard for Korea, and the President of Germany got the strong impression on them and lent money to Korea. So, President Park was able to build many factories in Korea.

He always asked Koreans to love their country from their heart. Many Korean scientists and engineers in the USA came back to Korea to help develop the country because they wanted their country to be well off. Though they received very small salary, they did their best for Korea. They always hoped that their children would live in well off country.

My parents always brought me to the places where poor and physically handicapped people live. They wanted me to understand their life and help them. I also worked for Catholic Church when I was in the army. The only thing I learned from Catholic Church was that we have to love our neighbor. And I have loved my neighbor.

Have you cried for the Philippines? I have cried for my country several times. I also cried for the Philippines because of so many poor people. I have been to the New Bilibid prison. What made me sad in the prison were the prisoners who do not have any love for their country.

They go to mass and work for Church. They pray everyday. However, they do not love the Philippines. I talked to two prisoners at the maximum security compound, and both of them said that they would leave the Philippines right after they are released from the prison. They said that they would start a new life in other countries and never come back to the Philippines.

Many Koreans have a great love for Korea so that we were able to share our wealth with our neighbor. The owners of factory and company were distributed their profit to their employees fairly so that employees could buy what they needed and saved money for the future and their children.

When I was in Korea, I had a very strong faith and wanted to be a priest. However, when I came to the Philippines, I completely lost my faith. I was very confused when I saw many unbelievable situations in the Philippines. Street kids always make me sad, and I see them everyday. The Philippines is the only Catholic country in Asia, but there are too many poor people here.

People go to church everyday, Sunday to pray, but nothing has been changed. My parents came to the Philippines last week as a tourist and saw this situation. They told me that Korea was much poorer than the present Philippines when they were young. They are so sorry that there are so many beggars and street kids...

My mother who has been working for Catholic Church since I was very young told me that if we just go to mass without changing ourselves, we are not Catholic indeed. Faith should come with action. She added that I have to love Filipinos and do good things for them because all of us are same and have received a great love from God.

I want Filipinos to love their neighbor and country as much as they love God so that the Philippines will be well off. I am sure that love is the keyword that Filipinos should remember. We cannot change the sinful structure at once. It should start from person. Love must start in everybody in a small scale and have to grow. A lot of things happen if we open up to love.

Let's put away our prejudices and look at our worries with our new eyes. I discover that every person is worthy to be loved. Trust in love, because it makes changes possible. Love changes you and me. It changes people, contexts and relationships. It changes the world.

Please love your neighbor and country. Jesus Christ said that whatever we do to others we do to Him. In the Philippines, there is God who are abused and abandoned. There is God who is crying for love. If you have a child, teach them how to love the Philippines. Teach them why they have to love their neighbor and country.

You already know that God also will be very happy if you love others. That's all I really want to ask you Filipinos.

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