A Heritage of Well-Being: The Connectivity of the Filipino
Felipe M. de Leon, Jr.

Un-Filipino Perspective

The moment we began to view ourselves through Western eyes, what we held sacred suddenly became worthless, our virtues turned into vices, and our strengths began to be seen as weaknesses. Anything indigenous became a source of embarrassment and uneasiness. We would hide whatever is native sounding or native in origin. Centuries of being regarded as backward and inferior by the white colonizers engendered in us this collective self-contempt, a psychic malady that afflicts all of us but most especially the elites.

Filipinos, especially the elite, became afflicted with three social pathologies which are characteristic of colonized psyches. The negative programming of colonial experience resulted in these social neuroses which Filipinos have yet to come to terms with: Cult of smallness, Celebration of Defeat, and the Dona Victorina Syndrome

The Cult of Smallness

Representations of the Filipino seemingly encouraged by the American colonial regime were of the smallest kind. The bahay kubo became “very small”. The little rice bird, the maya, became the national bird. The tiny sampaguita was declared the national flower by American Governor General Frank Murphy in 1934. Could this be an important reason why until recently many Filipino school children were expected to memorize the Latin name of, and even to be proud of having in Bikol, the smallest fish in the world? Most Filipinos then were not aware that we also have the biggest fish in the world in the same province.

Could this also be one of the psychological reasons why many Filipinos think small? Rather than become innovators, entrepreneurs, creative thinkers, producers and manufacturers, Filipinos, including graduates of elite schools, are just too happy to find employment, especially overseas.

In 1954 our government enacted a retail trade nationalization law, which took effect in 1964, preventing the Chinese from doing tingi, so the Chinese simply shifted from retail to the much bigger and more lucrative business of wholesale.

The “Dona Victorina” Syndrome: Low Self-esteem Bordering On Self-Contempt:

Characteristic symptoms of this “syndrome” are doubt in the Filipino capacity for achievement; perverse delight among Filipinos to constantly belittle themselves; serious
lack of respect or contempt for each other; and wallowing in a negative self-image that is tantamount to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Filipinos are perhaps the worst self-bashers in the world. We are blind to our own capacities and idolize those of others, especially Westerners. If something is poorly made it must be Filipino. If it is well made it must be foreign. Even negative qualities that are universal human failings are claimed by Filipinos as distinctly Filipino, e.g. crab mentality, graft and corruption, greed, lack of discipline, etc.

The underdevelopment of Philippine society is fundamentally rooted in this chronic loss of Filipino self-esteem due to centuries of colonization and miseducation. Yet we do not have a monopoly of human faults. Other nations, even those nations Filipinos tend to idolize, are equally, if not more stuck with negative traits that we mistakenly think to be ours alone.

American Crab Mentality

As an instance, among the poor and middle-class suburbs of Boston, like those who live on the narrow streets of Dorchester, hope is a dream, not a goal. The crab mentality pulls back on those who try to climb their way out. Crime is the realm of the Irish, who are much like their Italian counterparts in New York but without the qualms. (From Boston, Massachusetts, “A Drink Before the War” by Dennis Lehane, published by Harper Torch; Reissue edition, April 2003)

Celebration of Defeat

The second social malady of the Filipinos is the tendency to celebrate defeats, like the Fall of Bataan, Fall of Corregidor, Fall of Tirad Pass, Capture of Aguinaldo, and Death of Rizal. Why not celebrate, instead, triumphs like The Siege of Baler, The Bells of Balanginga, Cinco de Noviembre in Bago, and other victories by the Filipino revolutionaries?

A People Can Only Be United By the Things They Love, and Divided By the Things They Hate.

Generations of contempt for Filipinos by the colonizers have been imbibed by many Filipinos themselves, especially by the ruling elites, who were most exposed to Western rule. Actually, as a research of SWS has indicated, it is this class who have the lowest regard for themselves as Filipinos, having been the most conditioned to idolize Western ways. Their low regard for Filipinos is in reality an expression of self-contempt.

Anything Positive About Themselves Always Unites a People

If we are to become one nation, we have to begin deconstructing the very negative self-images that have been ingrained in us by centuries of colonial misrule and miseducation, especially among the elites who are the power wielders and thus have the
greatest responsibility to serve and be one with our people. We can never erect a viable nation if we continue to denigrate ourselves, even in the presence of foreigners.

Root cause of Philippine underdevelopment

We may state that the root cause of Philippine underdevelopment is our failure to tap our greatest asset for sustainable development - our cultural strengths and resources – because of our pernicious tendency towards self-bashing stemming from a colonized psyche, esp. among the Westernized elite,

A Filipino Perspective

If we are the develop as a nation, we must adopt a Filipino perspective, which entails three important guideposts: building on Filipino cultural strengths; working for the good of the nation as a whole (acting locally but thinking globally), and developing pride in being Filipino. Inevitably, pride in being Filipino will deepen a sense of commitment to the nation and manifest in excellence in many aspects of Filipino life.

Cultural Identity (core culture or ethnicity): The human resource for development

Cultural identity is a sine qua non for becoming active in the world. It is the fundamental source of social empowerment and thus the basis of sustainable development. It is the unique totality of the world view and values, core principles and ideas, beliefs systems, knowledge, skills and practices, shared by a people. Rob a people of this identity and they become passive, lost, indolent, uncreative and unproductive, prone to depression and substance abuse, and plagued by a pervasive feeling of malaise and powerlessness. To suppress and weaken this identity and successfully impose an alien culture on a people is to reduce them into a passive, docile mass subservient to the power wielders of the alien culture.

The Filipino subservience to anything Western began when the Spaniards, and more so when the Americans, forced their ethnicity or cultural values on us. As a result, we lost faith in our native intelligence and skills, treasure troves of knowledge, accumulated wisdom, original ideas and creativity and began to neglect or ignore these assets.

The Five Cultures

Most people, even in the academe, do not realize that in any society, at least five types of culture exist.

Two are fear-based or premised upon a deep sense of insecurity generated by the perception that every person has a separate being, or is an isolated self (individualism). These are the Culture of Power, a culture attached to power and privilege, control and
domination and the Culture of Wealth, a culture attached to wealth and material goods, possessions, pleasure and comfort.

Another two are trust-based cultures, the trust coming from the perception that all being is one (kapwa) or a strong sense of community. One is the Culture of Shared Being (Culture of the Higher Self; Pagpapakatao). This is the culture devoted to the search for wisdom, creativity, strength of character, love and sharing - the culture of devotion to a higher cause. The other is the Culture of Simple Needs (The Practical Life), where people are mainly concerned with satisfying basic needs.

Developing the Higher Self

How many perceptions, values and skills of the culture of the higher self (the truly human level) are we able to impart thru the school system? The Filipino saying “Madaling maging tao, mahirap magpakatao” refers to the difficulty of developing a higher, spiritual self. (pagpapakatao). Bringing out the truly human (higher self) in us means developing strength of character, wellness, self-control, loving kindness, wisdom, and creative intelligence.

Different value-orientations promote different indigenous skills

Fear-based cultures develop manipulative, aggressive attitudes and excel in fighting, military, and security skills. Trust-based cultures develop harmonious, cooperative attitudes and excel in sharing, collaboration and partnerships, including respect for ecological balance.

As long as our education remains lopsided towards narrow technological or vocational specialization, psychological insecurity and the cultures of power and wealth will prevail. We will meet very few people capable of devotion to a higher cause or serving others. What everyone needs is a thorough grounding in the humanities to inculcate reverence for human life, harmony with the ecology and a profound social concern. Narrow technocratic or vocational training alone can never promote social and ecological consciousness! We should be wary of the trend in most of our universities and colleges today to turn their institutions into merely on-the-job training schools. The dire consequence of this could be a next generation of self-centered, moral morons.

The Fifth Culture: Ethnicity or Culture as Creative Construct

The fifth culture is a society’s core culture. This is Culture as a Creative Construct. Through time a society constructs a unifying vision of life, which includes an object of devotion and a map of reality. From this arise a people’s ethnicity or core values, which in turn promote the cultivation (or culturing) of skills that realize these values. UNESCO has given us the components of ethnicity, which is essentially in the realm of intangible cultural heritage, the wellspring of local genius.
Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as the Wellspring of Local Genius

According to the UNESCO 2003 convention, ICH is the mainspring of cultural diversity and its maintenance a guarantee for continuing cultural diversity. ICH is manifested in the ff. domains:

• Oral traditions and expressions including languages as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage
• Performing arts (such as traditional music, dance and theatre)
• Social Practices, rituals and festive events
• Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
• Traditional craftsmanship

Kapwa-based Culture

It is important to note that the core principles of our ethnicity (which are kapwa-based) are built upon the culture of the spirit rather than the culture of power or the culture of wealth. Kapwa is defined as shared identity. “The other person is also yourself” (Virgilio Enriquez). Thus, relationships are generally given more importance than economic power by Filipinos.

The concept of a shared identity, where “the other person is also yourself” is said to be the core of Filipino psychology. It is humaneness at the highest level. For it implies a unique moral obligation to treat one another as equal fellow human beings. Treat the other person as you treat yourself because the other person is also yourself. This a Filipino core idea that could very well be the basis of the Golden Rule in the world’s great religions. Kapwa is an awareness of the rootedness of each one of us in the One Divine Essence within. Among the ancient Yucatan Mayans of Mexico, there is a strikingly similar notion of being, as expressed in the Yucatan Mayan Code of Honor: "I am another yourself"

“If there is no other there is no war”

In Filipino psychology, there is no concept of the “other” in the other person. The “other” (kapwa) is also yourself. This makes Filipinos a highly relational and essentially non-confrontational people, as monumentally demonstrated in the peaceful “EDSA Revolution”. A Croatian philosopher, Ivana Milojevic, categorically said that “if there is no ‘other’ there is no war”.

An Affirmation of the Ultimate Oneness of Humanity

Unlike pakikisama, pakikipagkapwa has no negative connotation. The more one engages in it, the more the goodness in the persons involved is evoked from within. Thus kapwa is
an inner principle of shared goodness. Through the revelation of our potential for shared goodness, the process of *kapwa* affirms and recognizes the ultimate oneness of humankind.

**Principle of Integration**

*Pakikipagkapwa*, in principle, excludes any action that may be detrimental or harmful to other human beings. It is “definitely inconsistent with exploitative human transactions.” It is the capacity to recognize the good in every human being and integrate oneself within the widest social fabric.

**Barking at the wrong tree**

When we blame Filipino ethnicity or core culture for its so-called deficiencies and negative qualities - like crab-mentality, abusive family dynasties and endemic corruption - these are actually manifestations of the deep-seated, universal addiction or greed for power and wealth. Indeed, according to Walden Bello, corruption is worse in many other countries. But why is it that we do not blame their (ethnic) culture for this?

**Neglect of culture in government policy-making**

We even go so far as to fault our culture for the seemingly perennial state of Philippine underdevelopment. Yet it is actually the neglect or ignorance of our (ethnic) culture that is the problem. The core principles of Filipino indigenous psychology are built on the highly spiritual concept of pakikipagkapwa, pagpapakatao, humaneness, delicadeza, and transcending narrow self-interest (kagandahang loob).

**Philippine social ills rooted in culture of power and culture of wealth**

We may be guilty of inaccurate observation and analysis if we ostracize Filipino (ethnic) culture for the ills of Philippine society, which are rooted more in our elites’ (upper classes’) intervention in the development process. These are the elites, who, since the Spanish period, have been addicted to the culture of power and culture of wealth. Just forty elite families are alleged to be in control of 76 percent of our nation’s wealth.

**Need for culturally-rooted governance**

Precisely, it is the glaring absence in governance of the noble or even sublime principles of our core culture (ethnicity) that is at the very root of our nation’s ills. What we sorely need is culturally-rooted governance, which is practiced only in exceptional cases, as in the much-appreciated term of the late Sec. Jesse Robredo as mayor of Naga city.

**Culture the “genius of a people”**
Every culture is unique. No two cultures are identical. Every culture, being unique has a strength no other culture has, this is its gift or genius. Having distinctive strengths, cultures cannot be considered superior or inferior, just different. For instance, Japanese culture’s “genius” is skill in precision-work down to the micro level; the Chinese have always been good in the practical arts (or skills for practical living); the Germans have been geniuses in fitting parts together in a harmonious order resulting in great strength and durability

The Filipino Genius

If the core culture of our people assumes that we are all one, that all things are interconnected (The concept of *kapwa*), then our highest values will be *connectedness*, *sharing*, *spirituality*, *pakikipagkapwa*, *kagandahang-loob* and *pakiyamdam*. Realizing these values makes us highly skilled or “geniuses” in genuine connectivity, expressiveness, communicativeness, balancing opposites, flexibility, creativity and wellness.

We can draw upon the outstanding cultural strengths of our ethnicity to formulate a vision for the nation. Essentially, we can tap our *kapwa*-based genius for human connectivity and soulfulness as a people. We are perhaps the most highly relational in the world, with superb skills in healing and balancing polar energies, and passion for creative, participatory processes.

Clueless on Filipino cultural gifts

But many of our government officials and media practitioners are almost clueless about Filipino cultural gifts. We find our culture trivialized in such frivolous phrases as “its more fun in the Philippines” and anthropologically empty conjectures that our culture is a “mixture or hodgepodge of Malay, Chinese, Spanish and American influences”.

Philippine ethnicity is a unified, coherent whole

On the contrary, our shared cultural heritage is a set of philosophically and ideological coherent set of premises and corresponding value-orientations, resulting in well-defined skills and patterns of behaviour that can make us truly proud of ourselves.

Indigenous Filipino skills/intelligence

Among these are our superior linguistic and communication skills, expressiveness, prowess in the performing arts, high degree of gender equality, psychic health, strong sense of humour, ability to rebound after trying times, nurturing qualities, interpersonal intelligence, social networking skills, excellence in service industries, strong family ties, passion for education, and creative versatility.
FILIPINOS LOVE TO CONNECT, ESPECIALLY TO PEOPLE

Among the most highly relational in the world, Filipinos are hardly alone. They are happy being together - when they eat, sleep, work, travel, pray, create or celebrate. They feel connected to the world, God and nature, but most of all to people. “Walang gustong maiwanan sa kodakan”

Togetherness is happiness

Filipinos hardly eat alone. Invite a person to your party, how many will come? Our hospital wards always have an extra bed because our sick relatives always have a bantay. We smile most of the time, often for no reason at all but just to connect to others. Eagerness for connections makes us number one in social networking in the world. For sometime now, we have been the texting, facebook, and selfie capital of the world.

Loners More Prone to Heart Disease

Our core culture of human connectivity gives us an edge over other peoples in matters of health and well-being. Medical science has observed that people with lots of friends are usually the healthiest in the world. Lack of friends and close social ties are the hidden cause of heart disease. As social ties increase, mortality rates decrease. Married people, members of religious groups and the like often live longer. Social isolation breeds depression, which may lead to lower immunity to disease and even suicide.

Love = Survival

Also, creative, unselfish love enhances vitality, increases longevity. Thus, the lives of highly spiritual people are much longer than the average. Selfless love is absolutely necessary for the survival of newborn babies and for their healthy growth. For human immune systems function well only when basic emotional needs such as acceptance and love are met. Communities which preach love and where the members are united by a genuine feeling of kapatiran yield the lowest quota of delinquents, mentally sick persons and drug addicts.

Alienation from Our Sources of Cultural Energy: Thinking in Borrowed Forms and the Economics of Dependency

Up to the present time, our educational system remains colonial rather than culturally appropriate, causing a great loss of cultural energy. As a result, many of our schools do not produce people who are highly resourceful, creative and adaptable to a fast changing and extremely complex contemporary world. They encourage dependency, a job-seeking, employability mentality rather than originality of thought, entrepreneurial qualities and self-reliance on native skills, knowledge and strengths.

The Power of Indigenous Thought
Harnessing our own minds, understandings, definitions, categories and concepts is certainly to have confidence, power and control over our own lives. Economic power naturally follows from this. For instance, if we worship alien ideas of beauty - whose art works, music, fashion models and beauty products do we glorify and spend for? If we do not develop our indigenous pharmacology and healing modalities, how much do we spend for imported drugs and medicines?

**Cultural strengths that we can promote and use as a resource for nation-building and sustainable development**

What are the specific cultural strengths that we can promote and use as a resource for nation-building and sustainable development? Being number one in expressiveness makes us excellent performing artists. Our genius in human connectivity gives us a great advantage in communication. We have superior facility for languages. We can be very adept in all forms of social media and ICT skills. Our curiosity about people is the basis of our wanderlust and passion for travel and mobility – the driver of tourism.

Filipinos, at their best, are a highly nurturing, caring, sharing people, with a strong maternal orientation, and definitely not loners. Because of our prowess in interpersonal communication and a nurturing, caring attitude, we excel in the service professions or industry

**Devotion to the Home and Family**

Filipino popular culture is the *culture of devotion to the family and sanctity of the home*, the family being our source of happiness because connectedness to one another is strongest within the family, especially in the mother-child connection. Perhaps the reason for the Philippines’ having the longest Christmas celebration in the world (from Sept to Jan) is the appropriation of the Mother Mary-Baby Jesus bond as mythical symbol of the sacred mother-child relationship in Filipino popular culture. In the same vein, we revere ancestors and the ancestral house has become a symbol of family continuity and stability.

**Identifying Filipino Strengths**

If Filipinos love to connect to people, then they will enjoy and excel in activities and making things that bring people together. The more an object, activity, or idea connects people to one another, the more Filipinos delight in it. Filipinos are very creative in things that bring people together, like furniture. Filipino furniture design is recognized internationally.

*The Philippines is the world’s most emotional country.* According to an international study, “the heavily Catholic, Southeast Asian nation, a former colony of Spain and the U.S., scores well above second-ranked El Salvador, which is not even close.” *Singapore is the least emotional country in the world.* "Singaporeans recognize they have a
problem,” Bloomberg Businessweek writes of the country’s “emotional deficit,” citing a culture in which schools “discourage students from thinking of themselves as individuals.”

Countries where people feel the most loved

In another study to find out where the people feel most loved, the three countries with the very highest scores are, in this order, the Philippines (93 percent), Rwanda (92 percent) and Puerto Rico (90 percent). The region that appears to experience the most love is Latin America, followed by Southeast Asia and Western Europe.

Countries where people feel the least loved

Countries where the people feel the least loved, according to the study, are mostly former Soviet republics: Russia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the Caucuses region all consistently scored poorly. Interestingly, those countries also tend to have very high smoking rates. Other low-scoring countries included Burma/Myanmar, Yemen, and three African states: Ethiopia, Chad and Morocco.

FILIPINOS LIKE TO EXPERIENCE THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL WHOLENESS OF LIFE

Filipinos do not like a partial, fragmented view of life. We respond to life synergistically, that is, a cooperative action of all the senses, faculties, or levels of being. That is why a Filipino is not happy just knowing another person’s name. He would also inquire about his work, hometown, relatives, marital status, even his salary!

We do not like to belong to only one side of a relationship because it is incomplete. Our kinship system is bilateral. For most parents, having two kids is enough as long as they are a boy and a girl. If not, the number of children may multiply indefinitely until the desired balance is attained.

In hosting shows, Filipinos traditionally pair a man and a woman rather than just have one or the other as in Western countries. The West is beginning to catch on but mixed gender hosting is still a novelty in the U.S.

Our desire for wholeness is very much reflected in gender equality in Filipino society, which is the highest in Asia and one of the highest in the world. In the World Ranking of Women in Managerial Positions, we are always in the top ten.

Our holistic logic makes us psychologically healthy, relatively stress-free and not prone to depression and neurosis. We know how to balance the opposites of animus and anima, as strongly embodied in our myth of the first man and woman, Si Ka Lak and Si Ka Bay, emerging from a bamboo tube fully grown and absolutely equal, at least in principle.
FILIPINOS ARE HIGHLY PARTICIPATORY

Filipinos demand collective, equal participation in decision-making and self-determination. No one must have a monopoly of the decision-making process. In Filipino society, everybody is a participant or performer. Nobody likes to be a mere spectator. Thus, we prefer consensus as a mode of reaching decisions or settling conflicts. In this participatory culture, the norm is *pantay-pantay, walang lamangan*, *pagbibigayan* or sharing, interdependence, equitable distribution of resources. Violate this norm and pandemonium will ensue. Discipline in Philippine society is premised on fairness and justice. The privilege of one must be the privilege of all. Equal application of the law is a must.

Development as the Proliferation of Options

The deepest social aspirations of the Filipino are freedom, justice, and dignity. Monopoly, dictatorship and the curtailment of choices are anathema. Decision-making is participatory.

Arrogance is a No-no

The Filipino concept of kapwa (shared identity/goodness) and non-duality of life make people absolutely equal in principle and nobody has a right to regard himself as above or more important than others. Humility is highly-prized, at least outwardly. Even Manny Pacquiao is very modest about his skills. *After his world title victory over Briton Rick Hatton, he said, "I'm just lucky … I hit first. A right hook."*

A Healing Culture: Life As a Celebration

- We are highly relational – Social interconnectedness leads to longevity
- Expressiveness, especially through music and dance, releases harmful emotions
- Everyday creativity promotes well-being
- Touching as a way of life increases immunity to disease
- Deep belief in God makes Filipinos optimistic and provides meaning to life
- Strong sense of humor and joy of life enable us to rebound easily from any tragedy

Promoting the Local But Thinking National or Global: Human Communities, not the State, are the Ultimate Actors in the Development Process

We have to encourage celebration of the unique cultural identities of our cultural communities through various activities and expressive forms to provide for communication and sustainable development. Failure to do this may lead to violence, deviant behavior, depression, and suicide. Positive programs can encourage harmony and
engagement in society. Underlying these programs is the attitude of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. A nation’s development, then, can be viewed as proceeding along apparently divergent directions, one, towards a shared cultural universe at the national level and two, towards the greatest possible intra-cultural diversity at the local level.

Social Self-Images As Self-Fulfilling: The Need to Develop a Strong Shared Vision

It is the image a people create of themselves that is the psycho-cultural basis of their strengths and weaknesses, triumphs and failures. For a nation’s self-image tends to be self-fulfilling (Kenneth Boulding, The Image). If in our minds we think we will be defeated, we have already lost. If we think we are an inferior people, we will tend to lower our standards and be satisfied with good enough. Negative self-images, whether individual or collective, can cause untold social and cultural damage.

Social Self-Images As Self-Fulfilling: The Need to Develop a Strong Shared Vision

We have nothing to lose by creating and working for the most exalted and inspiring images of ourselves, especially because we are a highly relational, holistic, participatory and creative people with a strong nurturing and caring orientation.

WAKAS
Daghang Salamat!