

## A Year of Sadness...

*...the deaths of former president of Korea, Mr. DJ Kim and the king of pop, Michael Jackson*

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From time to time, a deceased person's life is overly beautified, but there are also some exceptions



Source: [www.sports.chosun.com](http://www.sports.chosun.com)

To most Korean people, it's not entirely unfamiliar to see pictures of the interaction between Mr. DJ (Dae-Jung) Kim (a former president of Korea, 1998-2002) and Mr. Michael Jackson. The death of Mr. Kim a couple of weeks ago has resulted in these images becoming even more frequent. Whilst in Korea, both of these individuals are infamous, for those who are not familiar with Korea, Mr. Jackson has the ability to open the window into the life of Mr. Kim.

In 1997, DJ, then- presidential candidate of the opposition party (liberal/left wing), met Michael who visited Korea for business purposes (Michael was known to visit a ski resort called "Muju Resort" for tapping investment where the influence from the opposition party was great). Thus, in a sense, it's quite natural to meet with each other for different reasons. The meeting with Michael was to be used for marketing DJ during his presidential campaign.

Ever since then, the two gentlemen met on several occasions, including the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony and at the Blue House (president's office). Michael has performed his second concert at DJ's regime and showed his wish to have another round of concerts at the JSA (Joint Security Area) in DMZ (de-militarized zone) as and when the South and North Koreas are re-unified. It's not certain how deeply Michael understood the re-unification of the Korean Peninsula, however, his remark on the subject was sufficient enough to get applauded by the Korean people, including DJ.

## What would these two friends have in common, apart from the fact that they left us simultaneously?

Obviously, the biggest commonality was their desire to enhance the quality of lives of the people who loved them; Michael, by sharing his musical talent, touched and moved hearts and souls of the people around the world, and DJ, by contributing to the progress in democracy, made people in Korea enjoy democracy and learn its importance. Certainly both are quite true to Michael's fans in Korea. The other common feature is Michael has received great applause, support and love from people around the world, in exchange for his continuous efforts. As too has DJ from the Korean people.

They are the winners of their lives in a sense that Michael stood at the top amongst pop singers and DJ contributed greatly to the progress of Korean democracy, overcoming poverty and studying continuously throughout his life. Set the goals and make them happen!

## 2009 has been a sad year

We lost a popular leader in Korean politics and the king in pop entertainment. It is especially sad to the Korean people who had to cope with the loss of two leaders; in addition to DJ's departure, Mr. Roh Moo-Hyun (a former president, 2003-2007), who was the successor and a political comrade of DJ, committed suicide in May. It wasn't long before DJ followed his successor in August.

Throughout the Korean War and under the regime of military power back in the 1970's and 1980's, DJ has experienced four different threats of being killed. This compares with the four times he was a presidential candidate. Presumably, the latter caused the former! Tracing his life backwards provides a sketch of the history of democracy in Korea. He has been loved by many Korean people and his death has made people sorrow deeply.

The first threat of being killed was when he was captured as prisoner of war at the time of the Korean War, the second was a doubtful traffic accident during his campaign for National Assembly, the third was an assassination trial by Mr. Park Chung-Hee (a former president of Korea, 1963-1979) for political reasons, and the final was by Mr. Chun Doo-Hwan (a former president, 1981-1988) - DJ was sentenced to death for conspiracy of a rebellion in the early 1980's after Mr. Chun's military coup.

He spent six years in prison, ten years under house arrest, and experienced two political exiles all in the 40+ years of his political life.

His political philosophy is summarised as harmony, pardon, and win-win leadership, thus, future-oriented and a focus on the re-unification of Korea. A typical example was to pardon Mr. Chun Doo-Hwan (fore-mentioned). Ironically, Mr. Chun offered flowers to the departed soul of DJ. His winning Nobel Prize (Peace) is the outcome of all his political efforts.

His presidency started with a nearly bankrupt nation, but ended with a full recovery. IMF experience from a decade ago has enabled the Korean economy to recover from the current economic shocks relatively faster than other countries. At the IMF crisis, many companies were bankrupted, dismantled, restructured, and some even vanished during this hard time, which seemed to be more bitter than the current slowdown. An example is that Ssangyong Group, a then-large conglomerate in Korea and a (possible) counter party of Mr. Jackson's investment, closed its operations during the crisis. It's believed that quick and full recovery from the bad experience of IMF crisis was one of the fruits of DJ's economic policy.

According to the BoK (Bank of Korea), during DJ's regime (1998-2002), the cumulative current account surplus increased by \$90.6bn (+\$18.1bn per annum) and the resulting foreign reserves from \$20.4bn at 1997 end to \$121.4bn at 2002 end (+\$20.2bn per annum).

IMF experience made Korean companies keep sound balance sheet structures, focus more on cash flow and be ready to implement necessary restructuring processes rather quickly. The unprecedented current economic crisis is not 100% unprecedented to Korean companies as a result.

DJ's efforts focused on the re-unification of the two Koreas through a "Sunshine Policy". His philosophy is rather simple; "What if two Koreans don't find a way of co-existing or find a win-win situation via pardoning each other?" Obviously the war! The conclusion to avoid war is simple: The "Sunshine Policy" was to bring North Korean to the discussion table - however, the actual implementation of the policy is not that simple!

Things left over – without considering time constraints – after solving many current problems, like nuclear weapons, six-party talks, global sanction against North Korea etc., are to find ways of economic prosperity of both countries. Re-unification would provide the Korean people with many different aspects of opportunities in seeking economic development - it would provide an opportunity to enhance potential growth rates of the two nations. To the contrary, we could easily expect any kind of economic pull back as well. DJ's reunification policy is quite realistic, after pondering for a long period of time.

Listening to Michael's courteous suggestion to have a concert at JSA after reunification, DJ might have certainly appreciated it. Their common understanding as per (political) matters of the two Koreas must have worked as a cornerstone in building their friendship.

### Remember the time

With the big age gap of more than 34 years, Michael (51) and DJ (85) left us simultaneously, whether their deaths were natural or artificial. Fortunately however, whilst they are not alive to be influential, their legacy will be alive for a long time – their passion, effort and what they've accomplished in their lives. In addition, the Korean people will always remember DJ's sincere way of life.

The two friends will not be lonely. A gift message given to Mr. Jackson at the time of his visit to Mr. Kim was four Chinese characters: respect the heaven and love people. This seems to be somewhat linked to the song "You are not alone". At least to me...