



## **Pacific Forum Young Leaders Project**

by Vivian Brailey Fritschi

There is a growing gulf in Northeast Asia between generations, marked by profound cultural differences. Generational change has begun to alter the political and cultural landscape. For example, in China, the fourth generation of leaders is largely non-Soviet educated. This generation was the youth vanguard during the Cultural Revolution. While many believe they will be more flexible and forward looking, some analysts have suggested that they will be more likely to avoid radical change, including reform measures that might profoundly challenge the status quo.

In South Korea, the 386-generation is the first with no experiential memory of the Korean War. To them, the Kwangju riots are a more defining moment, as was the historic North-South summit of 2000. This affects their view of history and their relationship with Washington. In Japan, the current postwar generation of leaders is inclined to carve out a more significant international role for Japan in the region as well as in the world. The younger generation differs from previous ones in its desire to increase Tokyo's role in international security affairs, in keeping with the rights and responsibilities of a "normal" nation.

In analyzing events in all three countries and in the region more generally, it is vital that the views of the next generation be incorporated and addressed. Thus, in 2004 the Pacific Forum founded the Young Leaders fellowship program, with the support of the Freeman Foundation, the Hawaii-based Strong Foundation, and the CNA Corporation. The program aims at exposing Young Leaders to the practical aspects and complexities of policymaking, while generating a greater exchange of ideas between young and seasoned professionals.

This project aims to develop a network of as many as 100 Young Leaders, who will have participated in multiple events during an initial three-year period. Our partners and other experts help us identify talented young professionals. Young Leaders who attend a Pacific Forum conference submit an essay that discusses how their attendance will be beneficial to their current research and how the policy issues being discussed are relevant to their own country.

The Young Leaders are encouraged to fully participate in the discussion and to raise questions and express their views to both senior participants and their peers. Senior participants are also encouraged to share their ideas and experience with the Young Leaders during conference breaks and meals, in an effort to spark dialogues and an exchange of ideas. Following the close of the conference, the Young Leaders submit a revised essay that reflects their impression of the conference as well as new insights they have formed. The final versions of papers prepared during three 2004 conferences have been compiled in this volume of *Issues & Insights*.

## **Young Leaders Seminar, Maui, April 2004**

The Pacific Forum CSIS and New Asia Research Institute conference on "Managing U.S.-ROK Relations with China" in April 2004 was Pacific Forum's first opportunity to fully integrate the Young Leaders into its conference program. A dozen Young Leaders from South Korea, China, and the U.S., participated in this meeting in Maui.

One of the primary themes to emerge from this conference is that the U.S.-ROK alliance is in a state of significant change. South Korea's economic and political maturity has given rise to significant material wealth and an ever-increasing range of domestic political perspectives that shape the ROK's foreign policy in new and unexpected ways. The perceived growth of anti-Americanism and a national outlook that appears more favorable toward China are also having an important impact. The decisive victory of the Uri Party in the April 2004 elections was attributed by many analysts to a more politically active and socially engaged younger generation seeking to change the status quo (particularly in North-South Korea relations and in the U.S.-ROK relationship).

The Young Leaders found that the Chinese-Korea perception gap on regional security issues was in many respects as significant as the generational perception gap in South Korea. They agreed that the older leaders' underestimation of the younger generation was in part a reflection of their failure to assess how deeply modernization and growth had changed Korean society as a whole. As a consequence, the existing power elite had failed to meet the needs of this increasingly vocal and active group.

The Young Leaders fully agreed with observations that the U.S.-Korea bilateral relationship must change to better reflect South Korea's political and economic maturity. They further offered that anti-Americanism among young Koreans was being misunderstood; it is not so much a political movement against the U.S., but rather an expression of support for Korea's maturation as a regional power and of discontent with the status quo – regional insecurity on the Korean Peninsula and a U.S. policy that seemingly perpetuates it. They were optimistic that the Six-Party Talks could serve as a base for building a Northeast Asian security mechanism in which the major powers in the region cooperated as equal partners and indicated that U.S. support for such a mechanism would go far to strengthen the bilateral relationship.

## **Young Leaders Seminar, Beijing, August 2004**

The second Young Leaders conference was co-sponsored by the Pacific Forum CSIS, the Research Institute for Peace and Security, and the China Institute for Contemporary International Studies in Beijing, in August 2004. "Toward a Stronger Foundation for United States, Japan and China

Relations,” included 10 Young Leaders from China, Japan, South Korea, and the U.S.

The Young Leaders noted the general optimism of the conference subject matter, but noted the very real difficulties of dealing with the roots of bilateral problems between China and Japan. Many expressed concern that “China-Japan relations could become a key obstacle to greater East Asian regional integration.” History in this case has a profound impact on the way in which Japan and China view and approach one another.

As a conference participant noted, for the first time in history, both China and Japan are major world powers – a situation that would naturally give rise to historical insecurities, but that also may provide unique opportunities. Both senior participants and the Young Leaders noted that the U.S. has a critical role to play in shaping these opportunities, particularly since its bilateral relationships with China and Japan are both “the best they have ever been.”

Young Leaders from both China and Japan were greatly concerned with what each viewed as a failure of both governments to stem the rising tide of nationalism in their countries. There was a general impression that nationalism served the political aims of both governments and yet both failed to appreciate the negative impact on public perceptions in foreign countries. Without an obvious demonstration of the government’s desire to temper nationalism, inaction could be viewed as tacit approval and could harden the mistrust that already exists between China and Japan.

The Young Leaders agreed that a more thoroughgoing public education and outreach (or exchange) policy, particularly aimed at the youth in both countries might help to offset and reshape nationalist trends.

#### **Young Leaders Seminar, Shanghai, August 2004**

The Pacific Forum CSIS, the American Center at Fudan University, and the Honolulu-based Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies co-hosted a U.S.-China workshop on bilateral relations and regional security in Shanghai, China immediately following the Beijing trilateral conference. Eight Young Leaders from the U.S., China, and Japan participated in the conference. Participants highlighted the significant improvements in the U.S.-China relationship over the previous year and since Sept. 11. Nonetheless, the trajectory of the bilateral relationship was marked by pessimism and mistrust; a reflection of the fact that the U.S.-China relationship is at an important crossroads and will be shaped by events on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait. Although the U.S.-China relationship is not marked by any overriding historical enmity, there remains a profound current of mistrust that stems from history, in particular the role that both nations have played, and see themselves destined to play, in Asia. The Young Leaders expressed concern that this mistrust seems to be enduring contrary to (and despite) overwhelming evidence of a warming and deepening U.S.-China relationship.

The Young Leaders had a vibrant discussion about ways to improve contacts between youth in the U.S. and China, but seemed to recognize that mistrust and misunderstanding (and perhaps a miscommunication of national interest) would

continue to distort each nation’s perception of the other. Many expressed hope that both nations might consider placing more emphasis, where possible, on mutual strategic interests and expressing their common ideals through non-strategic arenas (like humanitarian aid and disaster relief) that might strengthen the bilateral relationship and build an enduring foundation for regional cooperation.

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