

# EMERGING LEADERS IN EAST ASIA

*The Next Generation of Political Leadership in China,  
Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan*

— TABLE OF CONTENTS —

ii	Foreword <i>Travis Tanner</i>
1	Political Generations in East Asia: The Policy Significance <i>Kenneth B. Pyle</i>
15	China's Fifth Generation: Is Diversity a Source of Strength or Weakness? <i>Cheng Li</i>
55	Prosperity's Children: Generational Change and Japan's Future Leadership <i>J. Patrick Boyd &amp; Richard J. Samuels</i>
99	The Rise, Fall, and Transformation of the "386": Generational Change in Korea <i>L. Gordon Flake</i>
123	Rising Rationalists: The Next Generation of Leadership in Taiwan <i>Shelley Rigger</i>

## — FOREWORD —

A new generation of leaders is on the rise in East Asia. Shaped by distinctive political experiences, the emerging leadership in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan will bring new perspectives and fresh priorities to the region's political climate. How this up and coming elite responds to regional trends and potential crises will shape the future course of East Asian politics for years to come.

Formative influences such as professional background, education, social ties, and political allegiances provide important indicators of these future leaders' respective world-views and likely policy priorities. As Asia emerges as a critical center of gravity in world politics, a nuanced understanding of these factors provides U.S. policymakers with an essential foundation upon which to build effective policy toward the region.

This report represents the culmination of a year-long initiative launched by NBR to provide U.S. government and corporate leaders with a better understanding of East Asia's future leadership. By examining the qualities and characteristics that define these rising leaders and distinguish them from their predecessors, the initiative explores the possible implications of their emerging influence for U.S. foreign, economic, and security policy interests. To this end, in the spring NBR conducted a series of briefings on the report's findings to policymakers in Washington, D.C., and in July two sections of the report were published in NBR's journal, *Asia Policy*. We look forward to continued interaction with the policymaking community on this subject as well as to a wide distribution of the report's research findings.

Given its considerable policy relevance, exploring the emergence of new leadership in East Asia will remain a priority research area for NBR's Politics and Security Affairs Group. As such, we are already in the process of developing a future round of research in this important topic area.

I would like to recognize and express appreciation to the members of the research team whose work appears in these pages. It has been a true pleasure to work with each of them, and the project has benefited immensely from their expertise and professionalism. In particular, I would like to thank Ken Pyle for his vision and leadership, which guided the project from its inception. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the NBR project team, fellows, and editors, whose efforts contributed to the success of this initiative. Finally, I would like to thank the Smith Richardson Foundation for its generous support of this project.

Travis Tanner  
*Director, Pyle Center for Northeast Asian Studies*  
The National Bureau of Asian Research

THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH  
NBR PROJECT REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2008

# Political Generations in East Asia: The Policy Significance

*Kenneth B. Pyle*

**KENNETH B. PYLE** is the Henry M. Jackson Professor of History and Asian Studies at the University of Washington, and Founding President of The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR). Dr. Pyle's most recent book is *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose*. He can be reached at <[kbp@u.washington.edu](mailto:kbp@u.washington.edu)>.

The contemporary societies of East Asia have experienced more decisive generational change in the last several decades than any other region of the world. Because intergenerational value change is one of history's locomotives, American policymakers need to accumulate intellectual capital about this process. It is not a subject that has drawn the attention it deserves. With the four states that are the subject of this National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) study—China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan—the United States has its most important bilateral relations. In East Asia, the United States has more sustained military deployments, conducts more trade, and owes more of its national debt than in any other region of the world.

Policymakers, seeking to discern the trajectory of change in this region, must consider generational change as a critically important insight into the dynamics that will influence the future politics in these societies. Discerning the consciousness of new generations as they come of age and move toward their time on the stage of history gives indications of the concerns and mindset of the emerging leaders in the region. Generations are one of the producers of historic change. Generations are the creatures of history, but they are also the makers of history.

A long-term U.S. strategic approach to East Asia must take account of the massive changes that are shaping the world-view of emerging generations in this region. Understanding the significance of this generational change will provide no simple conclusions that can be readily absorbed and worked into a clear pattern of the future. The reality of contemporary Asia is too complex—it possesses too many historical processes and involves too many causative forces—to permit one view of the future such primacy. But understanding the nature and extent of intergenerational change will sensitize the policymaker to one of the underlying driving forces shaping the future course of politics in this region.

Generational change is preeminently a modern phenomenon. Sharp distinctions between generations occur owing to the acceleration of the historical process that is characteristic of the modern world. Ordinarily, we think of a generation as changing every 25 years, but a political generation has dynamics that are not biological. A political generation, as opposed to a biological generation, is determined by major events that shape a distinctive outlook or a characteristic approach to issues among young people living through these events at a formative age. It needs to be emphasized that political generations may not be of common mind. Formative experiences need not lead to a consensus of views. There may be a diversity of viewpoint. There may be debates within a generation. But there is a common concern, a shared sense of problem consciousness, that is shaped by the formative experience that creates a generation.

The ever increasing tempo of change since the industrial revolution has produced marked differences in outlook between generations. Americans, with their history of a mobile and open society, have long grown accustomed to this phenomenon. Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 1830s that generational change mattered less in Europe than it did in the United States, where, he wrote, "each generation is a new people." Americans saw themselves as freed from the traditional institutions and the deference to age and status that pervaded the old world. "The woof of time is ever being broken and the track of past generations lost," Tocqueville added. "Those who have gone before are easily forgotten, and no one gives a thought to those who will follow."<sup>1</sup> More recently, Americans have also been accustomed to contrasting their liberal tradition with the conservative traditions of Asian societies. But this contrast is not what it once was. In contemporary East Asia,

---

<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1969), 507.

the rapid tempo of change is disrupting the once smooth transfer of life patterns from generation to generation.

Each of the East Asian societies in this NBR project possesses a powerful conservative tradition that historically was underwritten by a moral code that admonished reverence for family and ancestors, respect for age and hierarchy, and deference to class and status distinction. The typical and safest course for a son was to follow the occupation of the family, whose training, capital, and help in time of need were crucial for survival. In addition to these economic bonds, the ritual, ideological and emotional ties of kinship secured a solidarity that left no room for the development of an explicit youth consciousness or ideology. The institutions of Asian societies, especially the immutable authority of the family and community, assured continuity between biological generations.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century when the Western impact of scientific and technological change began to make itself felt, this conservative tradition has been under mounting pressure. Processes by which society transmitted its heritage across generations, and so assured its own continuity, have been increasingly disrupted. Japan, which made its transition to industrial society in the Meiji period (1868–1912), was the first Asian nation to experience a youth consciousness and a conflict with filial traditions.<sup>2</sup> Students played a prominent role in the nationalist uprisings of 1919 in China and Korea and foreshadowed the role that new generations would later play in promoting historic change.

In the past several decades the tempo of change in the East Asian region has accelerated in breathtaking fashion. Some of this change is endemic to all modern societies around the world. Globalization and the beginning of a new long cycle of technological change, especially the information revolution, are having an impact on young people in their formative years, giving rise to their new consciousness. The authority of age is undermined by the new technology. Young people, exposed to the new knowledge in their schooling and thereby acquiring new technical skills, feel themselves better suited than their elders to the new era. The new technological paradigm has unmistakably created cultural discontinuities that are universal among youth in the developed world.

In Asia these “universal” sources of change are especially pronounced when joined to the sweeping change in their own societies. Young people in these Asian societies sometimes feel themselves starting the world anew. The magnitude of change often kindles a sense of liberation and confidence that the knowledge, traditions, and responses of previous generations are unreliable guides to the future, and that a sharp break with the past is necessary. Young people can feel liberated from history, convinced that their own experience is so different from their parents that they are no longer subject to the concerns that shaped their nation’s past.

In my recent book, I cite an example of a young Japanese Internet entrepreneur and venture capitalist dismissing his elders’ historical experience—their wartime memories of suffering; their experience of Hiroshima, surrender, and occupation; and their consequent pacifism—as irrelevant to his generation. Ito Joichi, born in 1966, reflected in 2005 on the 60th anniversary of the atomic bombings, choosing his words in a way that vividly reflects the independent outlook of a new generation growing up in a new technological paradigm:

The bombings don’t really matter to me, or, for that matter, to most Japanese of my generation. My peers and I have little hatred or blame in our hearts for the

---

<sup>2</sup> See my book *The New Generation in Meiji Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

Americans....My grandparents' generation remembers the suffering, but tries to forget it. My parents' generation still does not trust the military. The pacifist stance of that generation comes in great part from the mistrust of the Japanese military.... For my generation, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and the war in general now represent the equivalent of a cultural "game over" or "reset" button. Through a combination of conscious policy and unconscious culture, the painful memories and images of the war have lost their context, surfacing only as twisted echoes in our subculture. The result, for better and worse, is that 60 years after Hiroshima, we dwell more on the future than the past.<sup>3</sup>

Such assertiveness of a new generation is hardly new and we know that it often masks a fragile self-assurance. Cultural values may be challenged by the young, but they cannot be outlived. History matters. Cultural traditions persist. For this reason, we often find that the world-views of a generation may change as it matures. They may moderate with age or they may, for example, alter from a characteristically youthful liberal orientation to a strident nationalist view as they encounter changed political environments affecting their society. In none of the cases studied here is the older generation to be dismissed. Patron-client relations remain important in the success of a new generation. Family ties and inherited electoral bases are still prominent in the emergence of new leaders in all these societies.

Because of its location early in the life cycle, education is critical in its formative influence. New and different educational opportunities are a significant factor in creating generational change. Conservative traditions and old values are challenged in the new schools. In each of the societies studied here there is an increased breadth of educational experience, and liberal trends have been conspicuous in the schooling of the emerging leadership generation. Young people in all of these countries have had more opportunities than their elders to study abroad, most notably in the United States. Education opens new career opportunities, giving the emerging leaders that are studied here new career paths to power with consequent influence on their world-view. Western liberal societies, particularly in the United States, have a strong appeal to the young in their educational experience.

But along with this attraction to the West, soon comes ambivalence, for the age of full-blown nationalism has arrived in Asia. The United States and the West are viewed with mixed feelings. The younger generations in all four countries are being shaped at a formative stage by the unprecedented economic strength and the emerging power and self-awareness of Asia. These generations are living through the historic rise of Asia. They are coming of age amidst a massive shift in wealth and power from the North Atlantic to their region. The end of the Cold War revealed a new economic strength in Asia that is bringing about a deep, long-term shift in the global distribution of power. This transformation has brought dramatic improvements in per capita income, living standards, health, and literacy. A region that for two centuries had been the object and victim of history's major forces began to emerge as a dynamic and competitive actor. Although remnants of the Cold War system remain, Asia is a vastly different region than it was under the Cold War order. The Western age in Asia is at an end.

In both economics and politics the conservative traditions of these societies have given ground to liberalizing trends. Market-oriented policies in all these states have diminished the role of government in planning, financing, and controlling economic development. New legal mechanisms

---

<sup>3</sup> Joichi Ito, "An Anniversary to Forget," *New York Times*, August 7, 2005, 12, cited in Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose* (New York: PublicAffairs Press, 2007), 358.

# China's Fifth Generation: Is Diversity a Source of Strength or Weakness?

*Cheng Li*

**CHENG LI** is Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution's John L. Thornton China Center. He is also William R. Kenan Professor of Government at Hamilton College. Dr. Li's most recent publication is *China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy* (2008). He can be reached at <cli@brookings.edu>.

**NOTE** The author is indebted to Yinsheng Li for his research assistance. The author also thanks Sally Carman, Christina Culver, Scott W. Harold, Kenneth B. Pyle, and two anonymous reviewers for suggesting ways in which to clarify the article. An abridged version of this research paper appeared in *Asia Policy*, no. 6 (July 2008).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Crucial to any analysis of China's political trajectory is a solid understanding of what kind of leadership will govern the country in the next decade and beyond. This essay studies the emerging "fifth generation" of leaders with a focus both on intergenerational shared characteristics and on intragenerational diversities.

### MAIN FINDINGS

China's decisionmakers are by no means a monolithic group of elites who share the same views, values, and visions. Yet it is also too simplistic to assume that Chinese leaders are always engaged in a ferocious zero-sum struggle for power in which the winner takes all. The growing diversity within China's leadership and the dynamic interdependence among competing factions or coalitions are particularly evident in the fifth generation. The fact that the two most powerful camps in the fifth generation—tuanpai and princelings—have been allotted an equal number of seats in China's supreme decisionmaking organs indicates the intensity of factional competition. Yet these competing factions are willing to cooperate, partly because they are in the same boat and partly because their expertise and leadership skills are complementary. Consequently negotiation, compromise, consensus-building, and behind-the-scenes lobbying will likely occur more often in the future. The emerging bipartisan balance of power will further contribute to the diversity of outlooks and stances on some major issues, such as economic globalization, social justice, political democratization, and environmental protection. The next decade will test whether China can take a major step toward a more institutionalized transition to power-sharing.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Washington should understand that the political survival of the Chinese Communist Party is the most important consideration for this new generation of leaders.
- Although fifth generation leaders will probably respond to challenges and crises with more confidence than their predecessors, this new generation cannot afford to be arrogant. Increasing factional checks and balances will constrain these leaders in making new foreign policy initiatives.
- Though interested in promoting bilateral cooperation with the U.S. on various issue areas, the new generation of leaders will likely reject any lectures from the U.S. regarding how to behave in the modern world.

The greatest challenge to the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) probably comes not from outside forces but from forces within the party. China's top leaders through the years—including Mao Zedong in the first generation, Deng Xiaoping in the second, Jiang Zemin in the third, and Hu Jintao in the fourth—all have publicly acknowledged the pivotal importance to the Chinese regime of unity and cohesion within the party leadership. From time to time, however, each of these top leaders preserved leadership unity and elite cohesion by moving decisively, sometimes even violently, to eliminate political rivals.

The emerging generation of Chinese leaders, known as the “fifth generation,” is likely to find the challenge of producing elite harmony and unity within the CCP more difficult than leaders of previous generations. Three factors contribute to this daunting political challenge. First, over the past three decades China has been transforming away from rule by a single charismatic and all-powerful leader toward a more collective form of leadership. This shift has ended the era of strongman politics and, to a certain extent, China's long history of arbitrary decisionmaking by one lone individual. Factional politics, which have been particularly noticeable among the leaders of the fifth generation, may grow out of control as this generation now comes to the fore and result in a collective leadership model that makes the decisionmaking process lengthier and more complicated, perhaps even leading to deadlock.

Second, for most of the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) the ruling elite was largely homogeneous in terms of sociological and professional backgrounds. Communist revolutionary veterans with backgrounds as peasants and soldiers comprised the first and second generations, while engineers-turned-technocrats made up the third and fourth generations. The emerging fifth generation is arguably the most diverse elite generation in the PRC's history in terms of class background, political association, educational credentials, and career paths. Differences in the career experiences and administrative backgrounds of China's top leaders are often a source of tension and conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the fifth generation is also coming of age at a time when China faces a multitude of daunting problems, such as growing economic disparities, frequent social unrest, and repeated industrial and environmental disasters.<sup>2</sup> Foreign policy challenges have also become acute as the PRC confronts an unstable and increasingly complicated external environment. Debates over many issues—including the domestic redistribution of resources, the establishment of a public health care system, financial reforms, foreign trade, energy security, and domestic ethnic tensions—are so contentious that the fifth generation of leadership may find it increasingly difficult to build the kind of consensus necessary to govern effectively.

This pessimistic view should be balanced, however, by a competing assessment of the fifth generation. A vicious power struggle is of course hardly inevitable. Likewise, political competition in China is by no means a zero-sum game. Fifth generation leaders understand that they are all “in the same boat” and that it is in their best interest to demonstrate political solidarity when facing enormous economic and socio-political challenges. The diverse demographic and political backgrounds of this generation of leadership can also be seen as a positive development to the extent that this diversity contributes to political pluralism in the country. It might even be

---

<sup>1</sup> Lucian W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1988); and Frederick C. Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy and Conflict in China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> For more discussion of these problems, see Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007); and Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

argued that collective leadership not only is a mechanism of power-sharing through checks and balances among competing political camps but also entails a more dynamic and institutionalized decisionmaking process through which political leaders come to represent various social and geographic constituencies and thus develop better policies to meet new and complicated socio-economic environments.

Is the growing diversity of the Chinese political elite a source of strength or weakness for the Chinese political system? In what aspects does the foreign policy of the fifth generation differ from the policies of previous generations? How will the new dynamics associated with the rise of the fifth generation change the rules of the game in Chinese leadership politics? What factors have shaped the world-views of this generation of leaders? How does the fifth generation view the current East Asian security environment, and what are this generation's opinions on China's current and future role in these affairs, especially vis-à-vis the United States?

Answering these important questions requires a solid and comprehensive analysis of the fifth generation of leaders—their formative experiences, collective memories, intragenerational differences, political socializations, career paths, factional divisions, educational backgrounds, foreign experiences, and world-views. The characteristics of this generation of leaders will not only affect China's choices for the future but will also have significant ramifications far beyond China's borders.

To state the obvious, China is rapidly becoming a global economic powerhouse, and PRC government policies formulated by the fifth generation—including monetary, trade, industrial, environmental, and energy policies—will likely have a large impact on the global economy in the future. China's economic rise has been accompanied by growing influence on political and security affairs in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world. Whether China will play a more constructive international role in the future depends on many factors, perhaps the most essential of which is the ongoing transformation of China's political landscape in general and the generational transition of the political elite in particular.

To explore how the rising fifth generation will contribute to changes in China's political system and foreign policy during the next fifteen years, this essay will address four main issues. First, it discusses definitional issues regarding the fifth generation and outlines the methodology of this largely quantitative empirical study. The essay then examines the collective characteristics and defining experiences of this generation based largely on biographical data on 538 of the most prominent fifth generation leaders. These individuals are either members or alternates on the 17th Central Committee or have attained at least the rank of vice minister or vice governor (*fu shengbuji*). This essay further analyzes the intragenerational diversity of the fifth generation, with a focus on the factional distribution of power. The final section includes an assessment of how the combination of characteristics of the fifth generation and the new factors in Chinese elite politics will together determine China's future political trajectory.

## Definition, Methodology, and Scope of the Study

The categorization of elite generations can be quite imprecise and highly political. As some scholars in generational studies have observed, the distinction between “where one generation

begins and another ends”<sup>3</sup> is at times rather arbitrary. Generational boundaries are often defined by a combination of birth year, shared major life experiences and memories, and collective socio-political attitudes of peer groups. A political generation is often defined as a group of cohorts born over a span of 15 to 22 years.<sup>4</sup> These same-age cohorts have experienced the same key historical events during their adolescent and formative years (approximately between the ages of 17 and 25).<sup>5</sup>

The concept of political generations in the PRC has often been based on the distinctive political experience of elites—for example, the Long March generation (the first generation), the “anti-Japanese War” generation (the second generation), the “socialist transformation” generation (the third generation), and the Cultural Revolution generation (the fourth generation).<sup>6</sup> Political considerations among the major actors—for example Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin—have largely driven these categorizations of generational identity. It was Deng who in fact initiated these categorizations during

The concept of political generations in the PRC has often been based on the distinctive political experience of elites...

a meeting with other top leaders soon after the Tiananmen crackdown. As a member of the Long March, Deng probably should not be seen along with Zhao Ziyang and Wan Li as part of the anti-Japanese War generation. Yet by identifying himself as the “core” of the second generation and Jiang as the “core” of the third generation, Deng was determined to ensure a smooth political succession in the wake of the failures of his two previously appointed successors (Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang). Jiang, on the other hand, used generational identity to consolidate his political legitimacy as an heir to Deng. When Deng’s health deteriorated in the mid-1990s Jiang frequently referred to this categorization in order to secure his position as the “core” of the third generation.<sup>7</sup>

From one perspective, both the fourth and fifth generations of Chinese leaders belong to the Cultural Revolution generation, given that the most important formative experiences of fourth generation leaders, such as Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, and the rising stars of the fifth generation, such as Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, occurred during this time.<sup>8</sup> To a great extent the subdivision of the Cultural Revolution generation serves to extend the rule of leaders who grew up at different periods of this turbulent decade. This indicates that the boundary between political elite generations may be subject to change under certain political circumstances.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Cherrington, “Generational Issues in China: A Case Study of the 1980s Generation of Young Intellectuals,” *British Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 2 (June 1997): 304.

<sup>4</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1582–2069* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992), 60–61.

<sup>5</sup> Many scholars define the formative years of personal growth as occurring between the ages of 17 and 25. See Michael Yahuda, “Political Generations in China,” *China Quarterly*, no. 80 (December 1979): 795. For a discussion of the importance of generational studies in a historical context and in other national settings such as Japan, see Kenneth B. Pyle, *New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion of the definition of political elite generations in the PRC, see Cheng Li, *China’s Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001): 6–14.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Cavey, “Building a Power Base: Jiang Zemin and the Post-Deng Succession,” *Issues and Studies* 33, no. 11 (November 1997): 1–34.

<sup>8</sup> My previous study defines the Cultural Revolution generation as consisting of those who were born between 1941 and 1956 and who were 10 to 25 years old when the Cultural Revolution began in 1966. See Li, *China’s Leaders*, 10–12. The prominent Chinese scholar Hu Angang, however, defines those who were born between 1949 and 1959 as the members of the Cultural Revolution generation. See Yu Zeyuan, “Guoqing wenti zhuanjia Hu Angang: Zhongguo juqi you sanda wenti” [Interview with China Expert Hu Angang: China’s Rise Confronts Three Major Problems], *Lianhe Zaobao*, January 15, 2007.

# Prosperity's Children: Generational Change and Japan's Future Leadership

*J. Patrick Boyd & Richard J. Samuels*

**J. PATRICK BOYD** is a doctoral candidate in Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a research associate at Waseda University. He has published his work in *Policy Studies* and *Ronza* and can be reached at <jpboyd@mit.edu>.

**RICHARD J. SAMUELS** is Ford International Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for International Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His most recent book is *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (2007). Dr. Samuels can be reached at <samuels@mit.edu>.

**NOTE** The authors are grateful to Professor Kabashima Ikuo and Assistant Professor Okawa Chihiro for their generous permission to use the data from the 2005 *Asahi Shimbun*-Tokyo University Elite Survey (ATES). We also wish to acknowledge the research assistance provided by Maeda Kentaro, Tatsumi Yasuaki, Ogata Hiroaki, and Kiyomi Boyd. We are indebted to Ellis Krauss, T.J. Pempel, Mary Alice Haddad, Kenneth Pyle, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. An abridged version of this research paper appeared in *Asia Policy*, no. 6 (July 2008).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study measures generational differences in the views of Japanese legislators across three key areas of Japan's political discourse—economic policy, security policy, and cultural issues related to right-wing nationalism. The study then explores the policy implications of these differences through three plausible midterm scenarios.

### MAIN FINDINGS

The study of generational differences provides only a limited explanation for the dynamics of Japanese politics. (1) Generational differences are most significant in domestic economic policy, where the eldest cohort favors maintaining the institutions of Japanese-style capitalism more than both younger cohorts. (2) Although the youngest cohort favors more muscular security policies than do the elder cohorts, only one instance of this generational difference proves statistically significant. (3) Even though there are no statistically significant differences between generations on cultural issues related to right-wing nationalism—an unexpected finding in itself—that the midcareer cohort, which is the primary object of this study, is more progressive than the other cohorts in this area is surprising.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Given that generational differences in two of the three most salient dimensions of Japanese politics are statistically significant in only a few instances, the findings of this study do not support expectations for impending policy transformation based on generational change.
- Japanese leaders are likely to continue trying to reform the domestic economy, especially in areas such as fiscal policy and public works.
- U.S. and Japanese alliance managers should expect continued support from Tokyo for enhanced Japanese roles and missions over the medium term despite an increasing number of questions over U.S. motives and intentions.
- Because the range of security and economic policy preferences is less extreme than is sometimes presumed, U.S. policymakers should not overreact when Japanese leaders question U.S. policies.
- Barring an unforeseen event, the study finds no evidence that right-wing nationalism in Japan will become a major problem for U.S.-Japan relations.

A new generation of politicians will rise to occupy the highest positions of political leadership in Japan over the next five to fifteen years. In the course of this transition these future leaders will face challenges both new and old. On the one hand, they will need to navigate a political landscape in which many traditional “paths to power”—the stepping stones in career trajectories leading to the highest party and government posts—appear to have been undermined by over a decade of electoral, campaign finance, and party reforms; by the development of a nascent two-party system; and by increased volatility in voting patterns among the electorate. On the other hand, these new leaders will be called on to deal with difficult issues long on the national agenda, such as constitutional revision, the pressing need to reform government spending practices, and demands from both home and abroad for Japan to assume a more activist security posture. How will members of this new generation respond to this changed—and still changing—political environment? Will they cohere as an identifiable group with shared values and preferences? Will they fragment into different policy camps due to fundamental differences in political orientations? Will the new distribution of values and preferences differ from that of the generation currently in power?

In this study we consider whether generational change spells political change for Japan. Drawing on Diet member survey data and elite interviews, we examine the preferences of over 450 of the 480 members of Japan’s House of Representatives (HOR) in order to gauge the policy views of those who will come to lead Japan over the next fifteen years and compare them to the views held by their older and younger age cohorts. We find that however much change is afoot, much continuity remains in the distribution of policy preferences among Japanese elites—and that party affiliation is consistently more important than generational location in defining this distribution. Generational differences appear strongly significant in economic policy, where the younger generations are clearly less supportive of the institutions of Japanese-style capitalism than the older generation. In security policy, however, although the youngest cohort’s enthusiasm for strengthening Japan’s defense capabilities distinguishes this generation on many important issues—including whether to reinterpret the constitution to allow Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense—no significant divisions among the three generations are apparent. Finally, in what may be our most surprising finding, the sides in Japan’s “culture war” over history and traditional values do not appear to be drawn along generational lines. In sum, generational differences matter more on economic policy issues, less on security, and almost not at all on cultural issues.

We begin the discussion with a review of the literature on political generations in order to clarify our theoretical assumptions and methodological approach. We then develop generational classifications for postwar Japan and map the contemporary political discourse to provide context for the policy dimensions examined. In the remainder of the paper, we focus on the midcareer cohort, first comparing the members of this cohort with their younger and elder colleagues and then considering what promising figures from this key group might bring to future leadership. We conclude by assessing what our findings might mean for policymaking in several midterm scenarios.

## Theory and Methodology

### *Theoretical Assumptions*

The concept of political generation is intuitive but at the same time deceptively complex. Though theorists have proposed several different models for explaining how generations shape political change, two are dominant: the experiential model and the maturation model.<sup>1</sup> First offered by Karl Mannheim in 1928, the experiential model is still used most widely.<sup>2</sup> Mannheim suggests that political values formed by particular historical experiences become an enduring part of a youth's intellectual orientation. Yet contemporaneity is not a sufficient condition for the formation of a political generation. A group of similarly aged individuals becomes politically relevant only when "endowed...with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process"—that is, when such individuals also experience the same historical events.<sup>3</sup> Mannheim refers to these events as "crystallizing agents."<sup>4</sup> When shared crystallizing agents are absent there will be greater diversity of "generational units" within the same cohort. In Mannheim's view distinctive politically relevant generations are more likely to form in times of rapid social change:

Whether a new generational style emerges every year, every thirty, every hundred years, or whether it emerges rhythmically at all depends entirely on the trigger action of the social and cultural process.<sup>5</sup>

The maturation (or "life cycle") model is often associated with S.N. Eisenstadt's structural-functional model of individual development in a stable society.<sup>6</sup> In Eisenstadt's view values change as individuals age. The demands of adult life temper youthful rebelliousness, with adult roles shaping new social and political orientations. Eisenstadt sees the smoothly functioning society as one that allocates roles in part on the basis of age. Political orientations are thus temporal in such a society. Although initially formed as a response to an established order, political orientations change as youths adjust to adult society. Lipset and Ladd trace the intellectual history of this model, and find evidence of it in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and in the essays of Max Weber.<sup>7</sup>

There have been relatively few studies of political generations in Japan. Kenneth Pyle has analyzed the Meiji generation of young leaders and identified how this generation both instigated political change and inspired social and intellectual trends.<sup>8</sup> In a longitudinal study of the careers

---

<sup>1</sup> For a review of the full range of approaches, see Richard J. Samuels, ed., *Political Generations and Political Development* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1977); and Richard G. Braungart and Margaret M. Braungart, "Political Generations," *Research in Political Sociology*, volume 4, ed. Richard G. Braungart and Margaret M. Braungart (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1989): 281–319.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *From Karl Mannheim*, 2nd edition, ed. Kurt H. Wolff, (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993), 351–95. For recent comparative applications, see Bruno Wanrooij, "Youth, Generation Conflict, and Political Struggle in Twentieth-Century Italy," *European Legacy* 4, no. 1 (1999): 72–88; and Olena Nikolayenko, "The Revolt of the Post Soviet Generation: Youth Movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine," *Comparative Politics* 39, no. 2 (2007): 169–88.

<sup>3</sup> Mannheim, "Problem of Generations," 79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 365, 385.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>6</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1956). For application and elaboration of this model, see Richard A. Settersten, Jr., and Karl Ulrich Mayer, "The Measurement of Age, Age Structuring, and Life Course," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 233–61; and Michael J. Shanahan, "Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 667–92.

<sup>7</sup> W.M. Lipset and E.C. Ladd, Jr., "The Political Future of Activist Generations," in *The New Pilgrims: Youth Protest in Transition*, eds. Philip G. Altbach and Robert S. Laufer (New York: David McKay, 1972), 63–84. See also Richard G. Braungart, "The Sociology of Generations and Student Politics," *Journal of Social Issues* 30, no.2 (1974): 31–54; Catherine R. Cooper and Jill Denner, "Theories Linking Culture and Psychology: Universal and Community-Specific Processes," *Annual Review of Psychology* 49 (1998): 559–84; Richard A. Settersten, Jr. and Karl Ulrich Mayer, "The Measurement of Age, Age Structuring, and Life Course," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 233–61; and Shanahan, "Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies."

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

and political orientations of radical students in postwar Japan, Ellis Krauss provides evidence for the usefulness of the experiential model, especially for analyzing the most highly politicized members of his sample.<sup>9</sup> Through an examination of Japanese survey data Nobutaka Ike suggests that more than one variety of generational change prevails.<sup>10</sup> More recently Tanaka Aiji and Clyde Wilcox have compared political generations at the mass level in the United States and Japan.<sup>11</sup>

There is anecdotal evidence in Japan to support both the experiential and the life cycle models. For example, the Japanese media commonly refers to the “Taisho,” “Showa,” and “Heisei” generations—or to “prewar” and “postwar” generations—each a notionally different experiential group.<sup>12</sup> Likewise a 2001 survey on Japanese attitudes toward the reliability of the national pension system yielded results consistent with the life cycle model by showing how confidence in the system decreased with age.<sup>13</sup>

In this study we follow convention and focus our analysis on Mannheim’s experiential model. In part because we find only limited support for the life cycle model, but also because we do not have the data necessary to test each model fully, the article will highlight maturation effects only when suggested by the data.

### *Data and Methods*

This project combines elements of two distinct research programs: the study of political elites and the study of political generations.<sup>14</sup> In work on democratic societies, students of elite politics have tended to rely on semi-structured interviews and on analysis of legislative voting records, while students of generational politics have relied largely on analysis of polling data or focus groups designed to be representative of national populations. In applying the political generations framework to the study of Japanese political elites we have adopted a hybrid approach. On the one hand, the study taps into the rich vein of data captured in the *Asahi Shimbun*-Tokyo University Elite Survey (ATES) to map an issue space for nearly all members of the HOR. On the other hand, we also conducted interviews with both Japanese academics and politicians to gather background information on HOR members and place the study’s survey findings in context.

Additionally, we developed a database on the 480 HOR members elected in September 2005 (the most recent election) in order to comprehensively explore the rising generation of leadership. The database collected not only basic demographic information—such as age and gender—but also information on each member’s background, including family, education, and pre-Diet career.<sup>15</sup> We

---

<sup>9</sup> Ellis S. Krauss, *Japanese Radicals Revisited: Student Protest in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Nobutaka Ike, “Economic Growth and Intergenerational Change in Japan,” *American Political Science Review* 67, no. 4 (December 1973): 1194–203.

<sup>11</sup> Tanaka Aiji and Clyde Wilcox, “Beikoku yoron chosa no doko to Nichi-Bei kankei” [Trends in U.S. Opinion Surveys and U.S.-Japan Relations], in *Amerika no tagenteki henka to Nippon* [America’s Multidimensional Changes and Japan], ed. Miyamoto Seigen (Tokyo: Dobunkan, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Examples include “Posuto Kaifu de Miyazawa, Watanabe-shi ‘Taisho sedai no seiken wo’” [Miyazawa, Watanabe and a Post-Kaifu Government by the Taisho Generation], *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, March 19, 1991, 2; and “92-nen zenhan no seikai wo tenbo—henshuiin zadankai” [Editorial Staff Roundtable Discussion: Surveying the Political World for the First Half of 1992], *Asahi Shimbun*, January 16, 1992, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Tanaka Aiji, “Seijiteki Shinrai to Sedaikan Gyappu” [Political Trust and the Generation Gap], *Keizai Kenkyu* 53, no.3 (July 2002): 213–25. Important to note is that Tanaka is skeptical that this intergenerational difference is actually the result of a life cycle effect. As the panel data required to rule out the life cycle hypothesis is not available in this case, however, we cite the survey here only as a potentially illustrative example.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of work on political elites, see Robert D. Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976); and Sidney Verba and Steven Kelman, eds., *Elites and the Idea of Equality: A Comparison of Japan, Sweden, and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli’s Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> This information was taken from the following Diet guides: Seisakujiho, *Seikan Yoran* [Handbook of Politicians and Bureaucrats] (Tokyo: Seisakujihosha, 2005 and 2007); and Kokusei Joho Center, *Kokkai Giin Yoran* [Handbook of Diet Members] (Tokyo: Kokusei Joho Center, 2007).

THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH

NBR PROJECT REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2008

# The Rise, Fall, and Transformation of the “386”: Generational Change in Korea

*L. Gordon Flake*

**L. GORDON FLAKE** is Executive Director of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation. He is co-editor with Roh-Byug Park of the book *Understanding New Political Realities in Seoul: Working toward a Common Approach to Strengthen U.S.-Korean Relations* (2008) and co-editor with Scott Snyder of *Paved with Good Intentions: The NGO Experience in North Korea* (2003). He can be reached at <lgflake@mansfieldfdn.org>.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pace of development and societal transformation in Korea over the past half century has been truly dramatic. The extent of this change has endowed several generations in the post-Korean War era with remarkably distinct characteristics, despite the relatively short time span. This article focuses primarily upon the cohort, at times celebrated and at times reviled, popularly known as the “386 generation” and the pivotal generation for understanding Korea’s present and future trajectory into the next ten to fifteen years. While this generation’s rise and fall in the past decade has been meteoric, it is its ongoing transformation that most bears observation.

### MAIN FINDINGS

Within the lifespan of a single generation, Korea has experienced tremendous social change. However, the various stages of this transformation have impacted subsequent generations during their most formative times in starkly different ways. The 386 generation’s views and values were forged during the key period of Korea’s transition to democracy in the 1980s. While the political activities of the core student activists from that time have garnered the most attention, perhaps the most transformative influence of the 386 generation has been in the cultural, civic, and business sectors. During the past five years this generation shared the Roh Mu Hyun administration’s rise to prominence as well as its cataclysmic decline. Today, the 386 generation is among Korea’s largest and remains, despite recent setbacks, extremely influential in Korea’s political sphere. While individual interests, tactics, and direct involvement of this particular generation are changing, its core values remain distinctive and will continue to set expectations for both domestic and foreign policy.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Observers in the U.S. would be mistaken to conclude definitively that the recent election of the relatively conservative Lee Myung Bak and the subsequent success of the Grand National Party in the National Assembly elections mark a return to the harshly anti-Communist and unquestioningly pro-alliance positions of previous decades.
- Future Korean administrations, as well as Korea’s international relations, will continue to be influenced by and in some respects held to the standards advanced by Korea’s rising generations.

Over the past five decades the pace of change in the Republic of Korea<sup>1</sup> has been so dramatic that efforts to understand developments on the peninsula have tended to focus on how fundamentally Korea has been transformed in the space of what is loosely considered to be a single generation, rather than upon the changes in the generations themselves. Without even focusing on the upper ranks of the elderly, someone born in Korea during the 1930s or the 1940s has lived to experience Japanese occupation, national liberation, the U.S. military government, the foundation of the Republic of Korea, the division of the peninsula, the fratricidal Korean War and its resultant devastation, a period of economic development so rapid in pace that it is often termed a “miracle,” three decades of military dictatorship, and a relatively peaceful transition to a vibrant democracy.

While such witnesses to history remain an active and important part of Korean society, Korea in 2008 is increasingly a highly democratic, technologically advanced, and economic powerhouse with a vibrant civil society and a cultural sector whose influence extends throughout the region. In order to understand where Korea is today, and more importantly where Korea is going, one must understand the subsequent postwar generations in Korea, as well as the impact they have had, and are likely to have, on Korea’s future.

## Understanding Generational Change in Korea

### *Defining Events in Korea’s Recent History*

For some generations, such as the World War II cohort in the United States that has been termed the “greatest,” there is little dispute about the defining event of an era. Such is the case for Koreans over 55 who directly experienced the bloody three-year conflict that we call the “Korean War” and which Koreans in the South term the “625 War” for the North Korean invasion on June 25, 1950, that initiated conflict. For an already impoverished nation newly independent from Japanese occupation and annexation, the Korean War was a truly cataclysmic event. The conflict raged up and down the Korean Peninsula, resulting in millions of civilian casualties with destruction on such an epic scale that it could not help but be the primary touchstone even for those born in the decade following the truce that was declared in 1953.

It is in some way fitting then that the same Koreans who experienced the lowest of lows would also witness, within the lifespan of a single generation, the dramatic economic growth that has come to be known as the Korean economic “miracle,” or more colloquially, the “Miracle on the Han.”<sup>2</sup> In the space of just over 30 years Korea went from being a backwards, agrarian economy with a per capita GNP of \$60 per year to a nation hosting the Olympics and joining the developed nations in the ranks of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).<sup>3</sup>

For decades, political change in Korea did not keep pace with the economic transformation of the country. After the failed policies of import substitution led by the Republic of Korea’s first president Rhee Syng Man, military strongman Park Chung Hee, who took over in a military coup in 1961, set the country on a pace of rapid industrialization and economic progress. Koreans’

---

<sup>1</sup> This essay is focused on generational changes in the Republic of Korea or “South Korea,” unless otherwise specified. All references to “Korea” refer to the Republic of Korea.

<sup>2</sup> The “Han” being the Han River that runs through Seoul.

<sup>3</sup> To put the era in context, Korea is now the thirteenth largest economy in the world, with an annual per capita GDP of over \$20,000. While its feasibility is challenged, President Lee Myung Bak campaigned on a promise to bring the era of 747 to Korea—not the Boeing plane, but instead 7% annual growth, per-capita GDP of \$40,000, and status as the seventh largest economy in the world.

TABLE 1 Presidents of the Republic of Korea

Name	Date in office	Name	Date in office
Rhee Syng Man	1948–60	Roh Tae Woo	1988–93
Yun Po Sung	1960–62	Kim Young Sam	1993–98
Park Chung Hee	1963–79	Kim Dae Jung	1998–2003
Choi Kyu Ha	1979–80	Roh Mu Hyun	2003–08
Chun Doo Hwan	1980–88	Lee Myung Bak	2008–

hopes for democracy were dashed shortly after the assassination of Park by one of his own aides in 1979 when yet another military leader, Chun Doo Hwan, assumed control in 1980. This transfer frustrated an increasingly educated and politically aware Korean populace that thought its rapidly developing country had moved beyond the stage of rule by military dictatorship and political transition through coup d'état. Among the responses to this coup were nationwide demonstrations that led to a stand-off in the southwestern city of Gwangju and a subsequent bloody crackdown that has become known as the Gwangju Incident of 1980, an incident that would become the defining moment for the first fully post-Korean War generation.<sup>4</sup>

Although there had been active student and pro-democracy movements throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, it was in the 1980s that both the student movement and the democracy movement came to full maturity. Utilizing the international attention focused on Korea by its successful bid to host the 1988 Olympics, core groups of student activists and organizers were able to mobilize a growing number of students and ultimately broad swaths of society, perhaps most importantly, Korea's emerging middle class. These growing calls for and mass demonstrations in support of greater democracy reached their climax on June 10, 1987, when Roh Tae Woo, the designated successor of Chun Doo Hwan, accepted demands for direct elections of the president.

The presidential elections of December 1987 were the first to be considered free and fair in Korea, but they were not yet considered to represent full democracy. The failure of the political opposition represented by the "Three Kims"—Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam, and Kim Jong Pil—to field a unified candidate led to the election of former general Roh Tae Woo with a plurality of the vote. Five years later in 1992, opposition leader Kim Young Sam was elected president, though only after merging with the ruling party. It was only the election of President Kim Dae Jung in 1997, leading an opposition party and representing the underprivileged Cholla region of southwestern Korea, that finally was seen as marking the full transition to democracy.

The year 1997 was a turning point for the Korean economy as well. Korea had just enacted a range of sweeping financial reforms and obtained membership in the OECD when the 1997 financial crisis that swept through much of Asia hit Korea hard and shook the public's faith in an economy that had grown at close to double-digit rates for nearly 30 years. It was in part the perceived economic failings of the Kim Young Sam administration that opened the door for the election of the progressive Kim Dae Jung. President Kim Dae Jung's election also brought about the

<sup>4</sup> One indication of the sensitivity surrounding this event is that the "Gwangju Incident," as it was originally known, is now officially referred to as the "Gwangju Democratization Movement" after years of progressive governments. Without intending any disrespect, however, the former terminology will be maintained in this essay, given that the event is still better known among readers in the United States as the Gwangju Incident.

most significant change in South Korea's approach to North Korea in the more than 40 years since the end of the Korean War. In his inauguration speech, President Kim Dae Jung openly called for peaceful coexistence with the North—something that would have been considered blasphemy just a few short years before.

Just as the 1997 election challenged the economic underpinnings of Korean society, the election of 2002 turned to challenge another long-standing tenant of Korean political society, the U.S.-ROK alliance. Partly due to a surge of national pride after the successful hosting of the World Cup, which mobilized Korea's younger generations, and partly due to the controversy surrounding the tragic death of two Korean schoolgirls in an accident during U.S. military training exercises, President Roh Mu Hyun was elected on a wave of anti-American sentiment.

The five years of the Roh administration were tumultuous, both in Korea's domestic affairs and in its foreign policy. After ten years of successive progressive governments, the elections of 2007 brought about another shift, and the electoral success of President Lee Myung Bak arguably represents the establishment of a regular political transition between Left and Right—a change from the past when Korea had only half a political spectrum.

While in a summary effort such as this it is impossible to identify all the defining events for a single generation, let alone for the entire post-Korean War period, one useful filter is the events that are so prominent that they are known by their dates alone. Just as December 7, 1941, was declared by President Franklin Roosevelt to be a day that will live in infamy, and September 11 has become the touchstone for a new generation of Americans, there are a select few events in recent Korean history that are significant enough to be known by their dates alone: 625, 419, 518, and 610. These events are the June 25 start of the Korean War, the April 19 Revolution, the May 18 Gwangju Incident, and the June 10 concession to democratization, respectively.

### *Understanding Generational Distinctions and Differences in Korea*

In countries or societies that have not undergone significant transformation or rapid change, one might presume that the chronological distinctions between one generation and another would provide little assistance in understanding that nation's policies and proclivities. As noted in the preceding sections, however, Korea has not lacked seminal events or generational touchstones. As such, chronological distinctions between generations in Korea do have real meaning. In the case of Korea, these distinctions are defined not only by the presence of common experiences but also by the lack or absence of particular common experiences. For example, the fact that the Korean War generation as well as several postwar generations experienced rapid economic growth and democratization, the fact that post-Korean War generations did not directly experience the trauma and hardship of the Korean War and its immediate aftermath, and the fact that all of these generations experienced Korea's economic progress and democratization at different stages in life resulted in remarkably different views of and approaches to the opportunities and challenges faced by Korea.

Without delving too deeply into the academic debate on what constitutes a "generation" or applying a single rigorous definition in the attempt to explain the dramatic changes in Korea, this essay benefits greatly from the writings of one of the co-authors in this report, Dr. Shelley Rigger. Dr. Rigger clearly summarizes the late Karl Mannheim's requirements for an age cohort to achieve generational distinction if it, "during its formative years, collectively pass[es] through events

THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH

NBR PROJECT REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2008

# Rising Rationalists: The Next Generation of Leadership in Taiwan

*Shelley Rigger*

**SHELLEY RIGGER** is the Brown Professor of East Asian Politics at Davidson College in North Carolina. She is the author of two books on Taiwan's domestic politics—*Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy* (1999) and *From Opposition to Power: Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party* (2001). She can be reached at <[shrigger@yahoo.com](mailto:shrigger@yahoo.com)>.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This essay describes the rising generation of political leaders in Taiwan—those born between about 1958 and 1975—as well as the major forces shaping the generation and the distribution of political views within it.

### **MAIN FINDINGS**

Taiwan's rising generation of leaders is more moderate and pragmatic, and less ideological, than the current leadership. The young politicians will adopt a less challenging posture toward the PRC. These leaders do not support unification on Beijing's terms and will attempt to avoid such an outcome. They will emphasize stabilizing the cross-strait political relationship and enhancing economic cooperation. Trends in public opinion will reinforce the efforts of elites to move Taiwan in this direction. The rising generation's political orientation is the product of its having reached political awareness during Taiwan's democratic transition and opening to China.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- The new generation of leaders will be less inclined to push the envelope on cross-strait relations but is unlikely to surrender to Beijing's demands. Whether or not cross-strait tensions ease will depend on the PRC government's willingness to postpone unification.
- The new leaders will not push for unification but probably will align Taiwan more closely with the PRC than ever before, especially in the economic realm.
- The new leaders will seek to maintain good relations with Washington while also trying to avoid dependence on the U.S.

The Taiwan Strait has been called the world's most dangerous flashpoint. The United States and China—both nuclear powers—find themselves on opposite sides of a dispute that could end in military conflict. Meanwhile, dialogue between Taipei and Beijing stalled more than a decade ago, so that today, resolving even the simplest disputes requires Herculean efforts. Adding to anxiety over the strait is the perception around the world that Taiwan's government is pressing forward its claim to independent status in the world community. Given Beijing's determination to block Taiwan independence at any cost, the belief that Taiwanese leaders are willing to challenge China's position is causing heartburn on at least four continents.

This essay argues that though these fears were justified during the era of presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian, there is a good chance Taiwan's future leaders will be less forceful in defying Beijing. A transfer of power is at hand and is bringing to the forefront a generation of politicians who are less emotional and ideological than the current generation of leaders. This trend toward moderation is reinforced by trends in the electorate—in which the percentage of rationalists is growing—and by institutional changes, including a newly implemented legislative voting system that encourages majoritarian appeals. Although there is no evidence to suggest the new generation of leaders will welcome unification on Beijing's terms, it is clear this generation is more comfortable with the status quo—something between unification and independence—than the current leadership generation and thus will not challenge Beijing as assertively. Whether the Taiwan Strait continues to be a flashpoint will be up to Beijing.

This essay takes Karl Mannheim's theory of generational politics as its theoretical and methodological basis.<sup>1</sup> According to Mannheim, rapid and profound change (which Mannheim refers to as “destabilizing” change) in the environment in which individuals receive their political socialization can create political generations—groups of people who share an experience of the world during their formative years (which Mannheim defines as between the ages of 18 and 25) that differs significantly from that of older and younger people. Not everyone is led by these common experiences to the same attitudes and views, but they are all influenced by the same experiences, and their reactions bind members of a generation to one another even while dividing them from other generations.

The major theoretical challenge to the generational politics model is the concept of life cycle effects—the idea that differences among age groups should be attributed to changes in attitudes over the course of a lifetime rather than durable differences between age cohorts. To address this challenge, many studies of generational politics use long-term panel data. Such data is not available for Taiwan, where public opinion surveys on sensitive political topics have been conducted only since the late 1980s. In the absence of appropriate long-term studies, this paper uses qualitative evidence—including historical analysis, focus groups, and interviews—to identify and analyze generational effects in Taiwan's political elite.

Taking Mannheim's framework as its touchstone, the essay begins by explaining the common experiences shared by members of the rising generation of Taiwanese leaders. It draws a strong contrast between the current political leadership, which came of age during the height of Taiwan's single-party authoritarianism (the “authoritarian generation”), and the next generation of politicians, who came to political awareness after Taiwan had begun its transition to democracy (the “transitional generation”). Because they have no memory of Taiwan's darkest days, these young

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed synopsis of Mannheim's theory see Shelley Rigger, *Taiwan's Rising Rationalism: Generations, Politics and “Taiwanese Nationalism”* (Washington: East West Center, 2006).

politicians are less likely than the current leadership to view their political opponents as enemies. Compared to many of today's leaders, they are rational and pragmatic in their political outlook.<sup>2</sup> The essay then analyzes the main strands of opinion—what Mannheim calls the generation units—within this group, and provides brief profiles of young leaders from Taiwan's two main political parties. The next section discusses the most common pathways to power for young leaders as well as the political environment in which these leaders find themselves, including a description of Taiwan's electorate. The essay concludes with several scenarios under which the rising generation might come to power and a discussion of the policy implications of its rise for the United States and the People's Republic of China.

## Events and Environment Shaping Politicians in the Transition-Era Generation

Taiwan's postwar history falls into three periods. From 1945 until the mid-1970s, the Kuomintang (KMT, or Nationalist Party) ruled the island as a single-party authoritarian regime, under the name Republic of China. The first stirrings of a democratic transition came in the early 1970s, but the process was most evident between 1977 and 1996. Since the mid-1990s, Taiwan has been a fully democratic state. Each of these periods—authoritarian, transitional, and democratic—had its own pattern of political activity and participation. Taiwanese who reached political maturity in the different eras developed markedly different outlooks toward politics. The result is three distinct generations of politically active Taiwanese. The current leadership is made up of men and women who came of age during the authoritarian era. People like Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou were born and raised under a repressive authoritarian state that actively discriminated against the “Taiwanese” majority. In contrast, the rising generation of political leaders in Taiwan came of age during the transitional period, when politics were in flux, repression was declining, and the “native Taiwanese” majority was learning to value its unique culture and history.

### *The Authoritarian Period*

Republic of China (ROC) administrators arrived in Taiwan in 1945 to take power from the Japanese colonial government that had ruled the island since 1895. Their practice of subordinating the island to the ROC's larger goals offended many Taiwanese, and on February 28, 1947, economic and political dissatisfaction exploded into rioting that engulfed the island. The regime used deadly force to put down the uprising, and the so-called February 28th Incident became the KMT's original sin in Taiwan. It created lasting resentment among the island's original inhabitants (the roughly 85% of Taiwan residents known as “native Taiwanese” or *benshengren*) and later became the foundation for Taiwan's political opposition.<sup>3</sup>

In 1949 the ROC state was forced from China and took refuge in Taiwan. The administrators, soldiers, and dependents who settled there came to be called “mainlanders” or *waishengren*. The Nationalists insisted that recovering the mainland from Communist control was their highest

<sup>2</sup> Taiwan's current president, Ma Ying-jeou (b. 1949) belongs to the same political generation as his predecessor, Chen Shui-bian, but his political outlook is similar to that of the transitional generation, leading some analysts to characterize his election as a generational turnover. Such a characterization is premature, however, as the generation born in the 1940s and early 1950s still occupies most of the top positions in Taiwan's political leadership. That said, Ma's success may well accelerate the process of generational turnover by breaking the grip of the more ideologically authoritarian generation.

<sup>3</sup> *Benshengren* means “a person of this province”—Taiwan—while *waishengren* means “a person from another/outside province,” referring to the rest of China.

priority, and they went to work to make Taiwan a secure base for that effort. They stressed political stability and economic development. The economic path they chose—a combination of market-driven and state-led export-oriented development—was highly successful, achieving growth rates in the 1970s and 80s that made Taiwan a leader among newly-industrializing countries.

The ROC's brand of authoritarianism stressed popular mobilization as well as repression. Forceful measures to suppress political activism outside approved channels ran parallel with efforts to make Taiwanese active participants within those channels. The KMT used propaganda and education to win loyalty, and then incorporated Taiwanese into the party-state. In particular, the KMT encouraged Taiwanese to participate in local elections. By the 1970s so many Taiwanese were active in the KMT that managing the competition among them had become one of the party's biggest challenges.

During the authoritarian period, most Taiwanese avoided political entanglements. Voting rates were high, but political activism challenging the ruling party was rare. For those who grew up during this period—including most of today's top leaders—challenging the KMT carried a heavy price. Thousands of Taiwanese and mainlanders were arrested on suspicion of supporting communism or Taiwan independence. Many opposition politicians spent time in prison or exile. The KMT also demanded strict fidelity to its leaders and ideology from its supporters, so even those who chose to identify with the ruling party were not free. As a result, politicians from the authoritarian generation who became active in the opposition movement—now the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan's second-largest party—tend to be colorful, even reckless, extroverts, whereas the KMT's top figures are mostly dour, cautious men lacking in charisma and media appeal.

### *The Transitional Period*

The first stirrings of political change occurred in the early 1970s. By the end of the decade, it was clear that Taiwan had entered a new phase. In retrospect, we can identify three trends that contributed to the transition.<sup>4</sup> The KMT's faltering international and domestic legitimacy forced the party to lighten its grip on society and make greater efforts to live up to its "Free China" moniker. Also, a handful of popular local politicians became disenchanted with the KMT and started competing openly with KMT candidates. Third, opposition activists took advantage of the KMT's diminishing control to intensify efforts at inducing democratic reform. Late in the decade, opposition politicians and activists joined forces to create a quasi-party organization, the Dangwai.<sup>5</sup>

In late 1979, Dangwai activists organized a protest in the southern city of Kaohsiung. The regime blocked the demonstration and prosecuted organizers. If the KMT imagined the crackdown would put a stop to opposition activity, it had badly miscalculated. The Kaohsiung Incident became a source of sympathy and visibility for pro-democracy forces, resulting in a sharp uptick in the Dangwai's electoral support. By 1987, the Dangwai had constituted itself as a political party (the DPP), martial law was gone, and Taiwan's path toward democratic reform was clear. The ROC's

---

<sup>4</sup> There is an extensive literature on Taiwan's democratization. See, for example, Linda Chao and Ramon H. Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy: Political Life in the Republic of China on Taiwan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Thomas B. Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1986); Tien Hung-mao, *The Great Transition: Political and Social Change in the Republic of China* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1989); Alan Wachman, *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994); and Wu Jau-hsieh, *Taiwan's Democratization: Forces behind the New Momentum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Dangwai means "outside the party."