Journal: As you know, the theme of this issue's Policy Forum is inspired by a course you teach at Georgetown titled “The Makers of Modern Asia.” What was the impetus behind this course and what do you encourage your students to think about, both culturally and historically, as they analyze leadership in Asia?

Green: I started teaching “Makers of Modern Asia” after serving at senior levels on the National Security Council staff. As I briefed President George W. Bush, the Secretary of State, and the National Security Advisor, I realized that the president and senior officials wanted to know where the leaders they were meeting were coming from, including their ambitions, their domestic political opponents, and the narratives they were perpetuating. So, analytically—and in terms of policy—I had to think about leaders more than in previous government or university positions.

I also saw clearly how the personal relationships between leaders impacted international relations. The U.S.-China relationship during the early George W. Bush administration is a good example. We had a crisis when a Chinese fighter jet collided with an EP-3 U.S. Navy surveillance plane, and President Bush tried to call President Jiang
Zemin twelve times but couldn’t get through to him. When Bush finally did reach Jiang, they both agreed that they needed to connect and build a dialogue of trust. President Bush successfully did that with President Jiang and, later, President Hu Jintao. Given the opacity of the Chinese decision-making system, its relatively weak foreign ministry, and the fact that information does not always flow to senior leaders, (at least it didn’t in those days), U.S. presidents’ relationship with their Chinese counterparts is critical. Moreover, between China and the United States, the two nations’ governments do not align institutionally, which makes it more difficult for decisions to be reached and negotiations to be effective down the chain. A lot of it comes down to the leaders.

Even with close allies like Japan, the fact that President Bush became close friends with Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi made a big difference in that alliance because President Bush would not do anything that might affect Japan’s interests without telling his own government that he needed to talk to Koizumi first. So the level of trust was very strong. In contrast, Roh Moo-hyun of the Republic of Korea (ROK) had a hard time connecting with the president. They liked each other on a personal level, but their domestic political situations in particular made for an unpredictable relationship between the two leaders. For the National Security Council staff at the time, which included me and Victor Cha, it took a great deal of effort to ensure that the leaders’ personal dynamic didn’t send a damaging signal to the world, particularly to North Korea. From these experiences, I realized that when I came back to teach that students of international relations, particularly those focused on Asia, do not have enough opportunities to think about how leaders affect bilateral and multilateral dynamics in Asia.

In my course “Makers of Modern Asia,” I encourage students to understand leaders in terms of the instruments they have to advance their power. As one of my advisors, Dick Samuels, points out in his book *Machiavelli’s Children*, leaders have a toolkit comprised of three choices to advance their agendas. The first is to *inspire* people to follow them. The second is to *bully* or *coerce* people into following them. And the third is to *buy* followers through political deal-making, electoral support, or pure bribery. Leaders use all three of these strategies, whether they are acting in a democracy like Japan or a totalitarian dictatorship like North Korea. While something a leader does may seem contradictory to national interest, it may make perfect sense in terms of the domestic political environment. So, understanding this toolkit is one way to begin to explain why leaders say and do the things that they do—and why they do or do not succeed.

*Journal:* Your experience at the National Security Council highlighted the significance of relationships between leaders for bilateral relations in Asia. Do U.S. policymakers have any common misconceptions that impact U.S.-Asia relations?

*Green:* I would first point out that it is tempting for American policymakers—who are focused on achieving policy objectives—to assume “it’s all about us.” So, when a summit is canceled or a diplomatic initiative collapses, it is tempting for the U.S. government to think, “Why did they do that to me?” In this case, providing context is critical so that U.S. leaders do not become vindictive when they could instead help achieve policy outcomes with a slightly different approach. For example, President Roh
Moo-hyun was unhappy when the Department of Defense (DoD) requested in 2005 that Korea agree to what we called “strategic flexibility” in our alliance, which means that U.S. forces in Korea should be free to respond to regional crises outside of Korea. Roh Moo-hyun thought this would mean granting U.S. forces a blank check to fight in contentious regions like the Taiwan Strait. Leadership at the DoD was furious and wanted President Bush to demand at a widely publicized summit that Roh Moo-hyun agree to the strategic flexibility proposal. However, President Bush realized that agreeing to strategic flexibility would place Roh Moo-hyun in a difficult position domestically—and that rejection of strategic flexibility by Seoul might unnecessarily signal that Korea was not a strong ally. Instead, President Bush gave Roh Moo-hyun time to work on a quieter approach that would still allow for something close to de facto strategic flexibility. A U.S. President who did not understand the complexities of leadership in South Korea may have unnecessarily harmed the U.S.-ROK relationship.

Journal: Discussions of leadership in Asia often center on Asian archetypes of leadership, which are typically described as paternalistic and rooted in cultural or philosophical traditions such as Confucianism. Do you see certain leadership qualities and strategies as truly unique to Asia?

Green: Yes, but they’re not necessarily uniquely “Asian.” That is to say, Asian leaders in the post-war era were heavily influenced by the archetypal leadership of their own cultures. Japanese leadership style does not involve a lot of bombast, and often Japanese leaders are trying to maintain consensus. This is because of the factionalized nature of Japanese politics, which reflects Japan’s traditional clan structure in the first thousand years of the nation’s existence. Similarly, leaders in Indonesia, including President Joko-wi, reflect the classic Javanese “shadow puppet” style of avoiding direct confrontation. Alternatively, Korea has long been on the receiving end of other decisive leaders and the object of international relations, so Korean leadership style today reflects an archetype of leadership in which leaders who roll the dice and seize decisive moments are rewarded. So, all of these residual or historic archetypes are still very powerful.

Asia scholars in the West often have wanted to explain how Asians are different. I think many of these scholars have lent too much legitimacy to this theme—that there are uniquely “Asian” values—and have probably underappreciated how universal norms actually have resonance. The high-watermark of this tendency is the book Asian Power and Politics, which was written in 1985 by the great China scholar Lucian Pye. He tried to explain Asian leadership types and said, in effect, that if you look at the history of Asian leaders, they tend to like communalism and authoritarianism more than we do. Yet, a few years later, Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan and the Philippines democratized. Young scholars today don’t recognize a lot of Asia’s supposedly enduring political-cultural attributes. So, on the one hand, scholars have to be careful about projecting Western norms. On the other hand, scholars have to be careful about the tendency to ignore basic human needs for openness, free speech, and so forth.

There is a strong characteristic of Asian leaders in the post-war era which is Western in its roots, and that is nationalism and national development—and the conduit for this
In post-war Asia, nation builders like Deng Xiaoping, Park Chung-hee, and Lee Kuan Yew adopted models that mirrored the way Japan imported Western learning, nationalism, and the developmental state model to secure national sovereignty in the Meiji era. The ideology of nationalism is a Westphalian Western concept. So, in analyzing the developmental state, it is important to look at the fusion of traditional leadership archetypes that reflect, for example, Confucianism or Buddhism with Western ideology. In the modern era, you must also look at the diffusion of power—as a result of the Internet and globalization—and how this has forced leaders to act differently than their fathers or grandfathers.

**Journal:** To follow up on the rise of the Internet, nearly half of the world’s Internet users are in Asia—and the Internet has yet to penetrate even half of Asia’s total population. How has technology required current heads of state to exercise different leadership qualities than their predecessors?

**Green:** The Internet is a powerful and transformative tool, but it is neutral in terms of whether it is used for good or evil, or whether it is used by leaders or by the public. It is definitely transformative in Asia, but in different ways depending on the country. One effect of the rise of social media is that nationalism is expressed in spontaneous outbursts: Koreans against Japan, the Vietnamese against China, and the Chinese against Japan. In many ways, this terrifies the state. While China’s protests against Japan are sanctioned by the state, somebody in those rallies will eventually pull out a poster protesttesting the Chinese state. In Vietnam, social media is a major driver for nationalism against China, because of conflicts over the South China Sea, but that converges with criticism of the state. In both Vietnam and China, criticism of the external adversary and expression of historical grievances is useful to the state for legitimacy purposes, but that also provides a space for anti-regime liberalizers to de-legitimize the state.

**Journal:** Would you say that leaders in Asia are generally wary of the Internet?

**Green:** I think Chinese and Vietnamese leaders are terrified of it because they do not have elections, so they never test where the people are to understand how deeply resentment and anti-regime protests have penetrated society. Alternatively, Japan or Korea have elections and a free media that is constantly rating the government’s strength; they are less afraid of the Internet because these elections ultimately judge how leadership is doing and whether or not they’re in peril.

**Journal:** On the topic of elections, given Aung San Suu Kyi’s recent electoral victory in Myanmar, do you think she could become a “maker of modern Asia” and leave her imprint on Myanmar as aforementioned leaders have left a mark on their respective states?

**Green:** Aung San Suu Kyi, like Mahatma Gandhi, used non-violence effectively. That’s where the toolkit becomes important because, like Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi was not just an inspiring visionary; she also used her iconic status to sustain Western sanctions against the regime in Burma. That would be called “bullying” since she coerced her
rivals even as they imprisoned her. The one thing she didn’t do previously was buying or deal-making because she was under house arrest. Now, Aung San Suu Kyi is a politician. It was really interesting when I met her two years ago because she was this iconic figure, yet she was talking like a politician: who in the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the military party could she trust and work with? Who did she have to isolate? How could she cut deals to enhance her power? That is really critical because the constitution that the junta established bars her from becoming president, retains 25 percent of legislative seats for the military, and includes a clause allowing the chief of the defense forces to stage a coup and declare martial law based on his judgment that there is a national emergency. So, institutionally and in terms of power, there are still many obstacles, despite the National League for Democracy’s (NLD) victory.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s ability to inspire was huge in this election. The question now is how does she use “buying” with this regime? Can she overcome the institutional disadvantages? Will she and the NLD be wise enough not to overreach? She is declaring herself a de facto leader, but, given the military’s powers, she could provoke a coup if not careful. Similarly, the military leadership has staked its economic development and new status on democratization, so it is a delicate game that requires a full toolkit. I am, on balance, optimistic—but barely because this is a very delicate transition point.

Journal: We would be interested to hear your thoughts on the broader trend of female leadership in Asia, despite the region’s strong gender norms and paternalistic hierarchies. Is this the result of international values and influence from Western democracies?

Green: In a lot of cases, female leadership is the result of dynastic succession, especially in South Asian states like India with Indira Gandhi, Bangladesh with Sheikh Hasina, or Pakistan with Benazir Bhutto. Female leadership in Asia is often hereditary. What is interesting in Taiwan is that Tsai Ing-wen is a scrapper from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), rather than from some lineage in the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT). She worked her way to the top as a smart lawyer and negotiator. Her lifestyle is not traditional for a woman either, which indicates how much Taiwanese society, since its democratization, has become open and accepting. Tsai Ing-wen is an exception in many ways.

In Japan, there are a number of prominent women who are on the cusp of leadership. Seiko Noda in the center, Tomomi Inada on the right, Mizuho Fukushima on the far left, and it seems that none of them are dynamic. A significant number of Japanese politicians in the ruling party are the sons or grandsons of politicians. Yet, many of the women who have risen to cabinet rank did it on their own (with some exceptions). Interestingly, some of the most nationalistic politicians in Japan are women; I’ve wondered whether some of this is because as a woman in Japan, they are proving their bona fides in terms of patriotism and nationalism. It is interesting that the leaders who are becoming particularly prominent, like Park Geun-hye or Tsai Ing-wen, are unmarried, don’t have children, and are not facing the challenge of finding a work-life balance.
Overall, the future of women politically in Asia is still uncertain, and there is not a big wave of women leaders in Asia just yet.

**Journal:** Most current leaders did not grow up using the Internet. Yet, for future leaders the Internet will have been a common and prevalent tool that they used every day. This highlights a difference in formative life experiences for young people in Asia compared with those of their parents or grandparents. What are the implications of such generational differences for future leadership in Asia?

**Green:** Taking a sweep across Asia, the generation that’s now in their twenties in most of these nations experienced no trauma. The sociologist Karl Mannheim proposed a theory of how generations are “imprinted on” by certain events that define their ideology and leadership style; Americans with the Vietnam War, Chinese with the Cultural Revolution, and Japanese with the war and post-war poverty. Yet, the current generation—people in their twenties—in many Asian states have experienced economic growth, with important exceptions like Myanmar (and in some ways Japan). Japanese millennials have lived through economic stagnation, which explains why they are slightly more nationalistic and resentful of external factors causing fewer opportunities for them compared with the previous generation. But this also made the younger generation in Japan more willing to look on the Internet and think of different ways of doing things. For example, many never thought Japan would join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) because of the nation’s closed agriculture market, but younger Japanese are now buying their seed and fertilizer online. Since they are not relying on the agricultural cooperative and the closed system, they’re very open to a more globalized market.

**Journal:** Another generational difference might be that future leaders in Asia are more likely to have been educated in Western countries. How might this phenomenon impact future leadership qualities and ambitions in Asia?

**Green:** On the whole, I think it is positive—but it is not determinative. The fact that future leaders in Asia were educated in the United States doesn’t guarantee they’ll like us. Japanese foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka, who walked out of the League of Nations in 1932 and convinced Tojo and the Cabinet that Germany was going to win the war and that Japan should attack Pearl Harbor in 1941, had gone to school in Oregon and California. Matsuoka returned home with huge resentment because of, among other things, the racism he witnessed. That said, U.S. higher education is an eye-popping experience for students who come out of authoritarian systems without free debate—or even democracies where debate in the classroom is limited because they are studying to the test. I think this soft-power edge for the United States is on the whole, very positive. This phenomenon certainly indicates how little confidence Chinese leaders have in their own institutions. According to the Wall Street Journal, around 90 percent of politburo members’ kids attend school in the West. That doesn’t really square with the “China Dream” or the narratives that Xi Jinping is pushing, and is an indicator of how frail the system appears in the long run.
Journal: It also seems that in thirty years it will be much more likely for an Asian leader to have been educated in the United States, whereas future U.S. leaders are probably less likely to have had any educational experiences in Asia. How might this impact future U.S. relations with Asian countries?

Green: In terms of American leadership, the past few years have been discouraging, frankly, because leaders in Congress leaders with an interest in understanding the region (and who were really like a “second State Department” in dealing with Asia)—Senator Inoue and Senator Stevens in Alaska—are gone. Meanwhile in the U.S. military leadership, the four-star senior officers were all promoted in Iraq and Afghanistan. The senior State Department positions, including the current secretary of state, are mostly Atlanticists. We may have, except for the president himself, the weakest literacy and understanding of Asia among our top national security officials that we have had in decades. On the optimistic side though, Asian studies programs like Georgetown are booming and polls show that over half of Americans now think Asia is the most important region, rather than Europe. You have senators coming up who are very interested in Asia, including Dan Sullivan from Alaska, Senator Mazie Hirono from Hawaii, Senator Cory Gardner from Colorado, or even Marco Rubio of Florida. I think over time we are going to grow a really good cadre of senior political, business, and diplomatic leaders who've lived in Asia and studied there, done business there, served there. But we are in a bit of a deficit right now. Frankly, I think the U.S. pivot to Asia has suffered because of this lack of senior level literacy on Asia in the second term.

Journal: In your assessment, what is the biggest challenge for U.S. leaders and policymakers as they form relationships with their counterparts in Asia?

Green: The biggest challenge for Americans in senior levels of government is that Americans tend to be very transactional. Senior U.S. officials tend to be lawyers or academics and believe that if they can get the argument right, then they can make the deal—which is more or less how politics, business, and academia works in the United States. However, relations in Asia are very sticky, rather than transactional. Ties are based on, for example, regions in Korea, schools in Japan, and membership in the Communist Youth League in China. Yet, as an American, you do not have to be, for example, a former member of the Communist Youth League to build strong relationships with Chinese counterparts. Robert Zoellick did it. Jim Steinberg did it. However, building trust in China takes time, meaning long-term commitment, as well as an understanding that immediately demanding a transactional response in Asia actually sets relationships back.

Journal: Is this emphasis on the relationship related to ideology for Asian leaders?

Green: No, and that is one thing that most of Asia still does have in common. An overly simplistic explanation for this is that much of Asia evolved from rice cultivating societies which to required collective agricultural production and so in Asian history collectivization really still has a strong effect. For example, Abe is a bit more decisive but, if you watch carefully, his decisions are very much based on consensus-based
politics within the LDP leadership. Successful leaders in Asia are generally good at consensus-building. U.S. leaders have to strike a balance between getting results and investing in a trusting longer term relationship for when it really counts, like a security crisis or a financial crisis. When you have to deal with a crisis, which is when leadership really counts, does the person on the other end of the phone understand that you understand them and are committed to the relationship?

In 2004, I was a senior Asia guy in the National Security Council, Victor Cha had just started working for me there. I told him come between Christmas and New Year because it would be a quiet period. Then we had this massive tsunami. One of the things we were able to do quickly was create this “quad,” which included the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. Within a day, everyone had agreed to create a joint task force for operations among the four countries—four countries that were not all allies. Yet, the reason it worked was because the senior naval leadership and the senior diplomatic leadership knew people. Sure, the U.S. is a global power, but it’s going to be increasingly important to invest in relationships in Asia. There is only so many hours in a day and, frankly, investing in relationships in Asia is going to have to come at the expense of some of the traditional trans-Atlantic relations. It once made sense for Americans to focus on Europe because that was the center of economic output, but now we have to redistribute our efforts.

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Michael Green was interviewed by Jennifer Mayer and Brian Spivey on November 12, 2015.