

Creation of a Network of Asians through Solidarity

Journalists, Academics and NGO activists from eleven countries, including Korea, China and Japan



Members of the Asia Leadership Fellow Program, co-organized by the Japan Foundation and the International House of Japan

“I think we can unite rather smoothly since we share common pains as Asians.”
“I had some knowledge about Gwangju, but this visit has made me recognize the efforts for democratization by the Busan people again.”

From June 28 to 30, forty-six members of the Asia Leadership Fellow Program visited Busan. The group consisted of journalists, NGO activists, academics and other various intellectuals from eleven Asian countries (Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, etc.).¹

According to the co-organizers of the Asia Leadership Fellow Program—Japan Foundation (www.jpf.or.kr) and International House of Japan (www.i-house.or.jp)—in commemoration of the program’s tenth anniversary, all the participating fellows of the past programs were invited (to join in the reunion conference). They originally intended to hold the conference only in Fukuoka, but they made a rather exceptional decision of having an additional venue in Busan, the closest city/country to Fukuoka/Japan, to

¹ In actuality, there were twelve participating countries, another one being Sri Lanka.

symbolize the “sharing of and uniting in common Asian issues.”

During their stay in Busan, in addition to holding a conference among themselves, the ALFP fellows visited Democracy Park. Later, they split into two groups and took a tour that was different from the usual touristic visits. The “History Course” visited the UN Memorial Cemetery, Busan Museum and a traditional Korean tea house while the “Civil Movement Course” visited Mulmangol Community and the Beautiful Store.

“This is my first visit to Korea, let alone to Busan, but I got the impression that it is a beautiful city,” says Ms. Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda (48), Coordinator of the Sri Lanka Women’s NGO Forum from Sri Lanka. “What struck me most is that I was able to be part of vibrant discussions with other participants of this program. Although we come from different countries with different historical backgrounds, I felt that we are contemporaries sharing similar concerns and problems.”

Ms. Naoko Shimamura, Program Officer of the International House of Japan, explains the meaning and significance of the program as follows: “The special feature and the goal of this program do not only lie in the promotion of individual research, but also in the creation of the basis for a personal network, where Asian intellectual leaders can actively unite and raise voices for the solution of regional and global issues, by engaging in dialogues and sharing common experiences. Such attempts have begun to bear some visible fruits.”

Mr. Lee Jong Won (52) from Korea, an advisor to the program since 2001 who teaches international politics at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, visited Busan for the first time in twenty-five years. “We have been preoccupied with our own issues. Gradually, however, the notion that Asian regions must unite is growing. Now is the time to seek an active solidarity among Asian nations and Asian peoples and to discuss global issues,” Lee points out.

The Asia Leadership Fellow Program, co-organized by the Japan Foundation and the International House of Japan, invites five to eight selected fellows from Asian countries to stay in Japan for up to three months. So far, fifty-four fellows from thirteen countries have participated in the program, including four Korean fellows.

(Kim Eun-Young)