

First Session of the symposium

Ms. Sakurai (moderator): Tibet, with a population of six million people, has suffered a great deal of hardship since the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China. The Chinese Communist Party's policy toward non-Han peoples in China is unjust, as it dismisses them as minorities, or ethnic groups, instead of recognizing them as independent nations. China has argued that the Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongolians are just a few among the 56 ethnic minorities that exist in the country. That's how China has trivialized the presence of non-Han Chinese peoples within its territories.

The Chinese Communist Party's policy of oppression against non-Han peoples has been criticized by the international community from time to time, but basically, it has remained unchanged and the Chinese oppression, repression and massacre are escalating year after year. Unable to endure the oppression and repression by the Chinese Communist Party, many people (Tibetans) have taken their own lives through self-immolation.

I believe it is wrong that in the world of the 21st century, there are people who suffer such oppression. We must not sit idly by and allow a situation like this to continue.

The wave of prodemocracy movement that began in the Middle East has now reached the Eurasian continent and is spreading throughout Asia. For a long time, people who have simply wanted to live their life in their own way have been subjugated by military force and violence. But this wall of oppression is beginning to break down.

It is against this background that Dr. Lobsang Sangay was elected prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile, which is based in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala. It is very significant that we have invited him to Japan at this time.

How will Tibetan people be able to live with pride in their national identity and live a life that reflects their rich history, culture and civilization? How can we create an international community that allows the Tibetans to live such a life? These are the questions I would like to consider with you today.

For those of us who have closely watched China's behavior in Asia, it is clear that the Chinese Communist Party favors the policy of "divide and rule." They drive a wedge between different peoples, prevent them from joining hands and negotiate with them separately. This allows China to gain the upper hand. However, regarding those three peoples — the Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongolians — we Japanese cannot intervene in how they fight against oppression and how they deal with the Chinese Communist Party. Nor should we try to do so. What we can and should do is to try to understand the problems faced by each of them and offer our best possible cooperation and support.

I hope that what we discuss here today will help all people oppressed as "minority groups" in China overcome their problems. I also hope that it will help us Japanese regenerate values and rebuild Japan as a nation that can serve as a role model for Asian countries and the world.

Professor Takubo: I will outline the international context in which the wind of nationalism and the wave of pro-freedom movement are spreading.

In relation to China, which is the root of evils, there are two major issues.

One is whether the Jasmine revolution will spread to China.

The other is the possibility that if China pursues the values of democratic nations such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the future, it could face a great contradiction: it may have to deny its one-party rule,

First, let me talk about how the wave of revolution in the Middle East, namely the jasmine revolution, may affect China. The wave began in Tunisia when a young Tunisian vegetable vendor burned himself to death in protest against what he regarded as an insulting treatment by police officers. This small act of defiance spread throughout the Middle East like a bushfire. In just one year, this wave ousted from power the dictators of four countries: Tunisia (President Ben Ali), Egypt (President Mubarak), Libya (Colonel Gaddafi) and Sudan (President al-Bashir).

Right now, the focus of attention is Syria. Since a protest movement began on a small scale in March last year, 8,500 people have been killed by a crackdown by the government of President Assad, according to an estimate by the United Nations. A Syria expert at the Institute of Developing Economies told me that if people who died in prison were included, the death toll due to the crackdown would be double or triple the number estimated by the United Nations. What will be the future of Syria? People around the world are closely watching the situation of the country. Those are the countries where the protest movement flared up. A similar movement also arose in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Morocco and Nigeria, but these countries brought it under control in their own ways. The fact that four dictators were ousted in just one year was quite unexpected even for experts on international relations.

When we consider this movement, there are two key points.

One is the ongoing development of civil society. Civil society means a society with an advanced level of civilization. The other key point is the spread of the Internet. In the Middle East, Internet users are increasing rapidly, especially among young people. Information and messages instantly spread via Twitter.

It has become clear that once civil society is established, followed by the creation of a tightly-knit network of communication between people, it could create the power to topple a government by mobilizing thousands of people, tens of thousands of people and hundreds of thousands of people.

How will the wave of pro-democracy movement affect China? It was said that the jasmine revolution would spread to China as well. On the February 22 last year, anti-establishment people tried to hold large-scale rallies along the line of the jasmine revolution in more than 10 major cities, including Beijing and Shanghai. However, this movement was suppressed amid tight security. Moreover, an Internet blackout was imposed to prevent the search of words including "jasmine."

This is suppression of the freedom of speech and press on a massive scale. Liu Xiaobo, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize two years ago, was unable to attend the award ceremony in Oslo because he was in prison. His wife was also unable to attend it because she was under house arrest. At the award ceremony, an empty chair reserved for Mr. Liu was a bizarre sight. I presume that the empty seat has sent a powerful message to the world, dealing a critical blow to the Chinese Communist Party.

On January 2 last year, Szeto Wah, chairman of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements, the largest pro-democracy organization in Hong Kong, died, and a memorial ceremony for him was held on January 27. As many as 8,000 people attended the ceremony. In the ceremony, the participants sang "When the jasmine flower blooms," a folklore song popular in Jiang Zemin's home town. I suppose that this song was chosen based on the thinking that the use of a song associated with the former Chinese leader would deter a crackdown by China. I suppose that pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong sent their message to the mainland China through this song. Mr. Lee Cheuk-yan, who assumed the chairmanship of the Alliance, received huge applause when he expressed hope for "blooming of jasmine in the mainland" in his commemoration speech.

In light of these facts, I think that the jasmine revolution is already starting to penetrate China. Let me cite one more example, an incident that occurred in Wukan Village in the Guangdong Province, which has a population of 12,000. It was a corruption case in which the village's leader earned huge profits by selling the right to use land to developers, and villagers rose against the corruption. The party leaders in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, took action to bring the situation under control. As a result, a new village leader was elected through a free election. This may be a very exceptional case, but it may be an incident connected with the jasmine revolution.

Finally I would like to talk about the situation in Myanmar. A wave of pro-freedom movement started in Myanmar last year. This wave was triggered by a controversy over the Myitsone dam being built by China in the northern part of Myanmar. Last summer, Aung San Suu Kyi and others received a memo from the builder of the dam alleging that the dam would destroy the environment and 90% of the power generated by the dam would go to China. Myanmar intellectuals who learned of this memo were infuriated. As a result, President Thein Sein was forced to unilaterally announce the cancellation of this dam project on September 1. In making this announcement, he said — this is another key point — that the decision was made out of respect for the people's will of Myanmar.

We may presume the United States was strongly interested in this remark. Before then, the United States was already conducting behind-the-scenes negotiations, but from the end of November through December, the situation evolved at an accelerated speed. U.S. Secretary of State Clinton visited Myanmar and demanded the release of political prisoners and the severance of ties with North Korea in her talks with the Myanmar president. The president agreed to sever ties with North Korea but refused to release all political prisoners at once. Nonetheless, he has already released most political prisoners. What does that mean? It means only North Korea remains a loyal ally of China in the Eurasian continent.

As for democratic Taiwan, although I have some concerns over President Ma Ying-jeou, I think Taiwan has a solid presence and solid values.

The democratization process in Myanmar should be looked at in this broad context.

The pro-democracy wave may also be spreading quietly to Russia, which is led by Putin. In November last year, misconduct in Russia's lower house of

parliament came to light. More than 100,000 people who were infuriated by that staged massive demonstrations calling for freedom in Moscow and other cities.

One Western newspaper predicted that even though Putin was certain to be elected president, instability and uncertainty is likely to occur after Putin assumes presidency.

Another major issue is the great conflict that is arising between what China aspires after and the values it advocates.

I am also concerned over China's behavior as a member of the United Nations.

In May 2010, North Korea sparked an uproar by sinking a South Korean patrol boat with a torpedo attack. South Korea tried to have the U.N. Security Council adopt a resolution condemning the attack, but China adamantly opposed the adoption of such a resolution. After a while, North Korea unilaterally shelled Yeonpyeong Island. South Korea and the United States also brought this matter to the U.N. Security Council, but the action against the North was weakened by Chinese opposition. That is what China has been doing.

Furthermore, tension is growing in relation to Iran, as Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu declared that although he is willing to consult with the United States, Israel will determine its fate based on its own judgment. Israel has no option but to do so because even if a U.N. resolution is proposed, Russia and China will veto it. Why do those two countries act in a way that helps a country promoting nuclear weapons development? It is quite natural to regard such action as wrong.

In relation to the sanctions against Syria, China will never take action that would force President Assad to step down. That is because China is trying to achieve economic expansion abroad and increase its influence.

Japan and China are in a dispute over sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, and China is also involved in disputes over maritime territories in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Chinese are also trying to expand into Russia.

In addition, China is advancing into Africa and Latin America. So what is China up to?

Since the era of President Nixon, the U.S. has maintained the policy of engagement with China that aims to integrate it into the international community. If China engages with the international community, the one-party rule would dissolve of itself as the country plays by international rules and undergoes transformation, resulting in a "soft landing." That was the idea behind the policy of engagement. However, although China is actively engaging with the international community, the country has not changed at all.

The U.S. is a country with complex and strategic thinking. While pursuing engagement as a carrot (friendly gesture), the U.S. is also using its stick (forceful action). This is the hedging approach. This approach is made up of three elements. First, the U.S. is reinforcing its own military power. Second, it is strengthening partnership with its allies. Third, the U.S. is seeking to increase partners. Through this approach, the U.S. tightens the screws on its opponents. For the past two years, the Obama administration has been aggressively using its stick, although it is unclear when a decisive action will be taken.

China has become economically affluent thanks to the benefits of the western values advocated by the U.S., such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law as well as its engagement with the international community. However, won't China have to deny the one-party rule if it pursues the current path further? An

editorial in the Wall Street Journal dated February 28 offered an analysis as to why China is keeping company with North Korea, Iran and Syria despite its engagement with the international community.

According to this analysis, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party are starting to realize that if they pursue the current path, they will be confronted with the Western values such as freedom, human rights and democracy and be forced to deny their own rule. Therefore, China supports those nations that reject the values advocated by the U.S. That's the Wall Street Journal's analysis.

Ms. Sakurai: Now that China has emerged as a major power, why is it ganging up with evil countries like Iran, Syria and North Korea? Professor Takubo provided us with a very meaningful analysis as to that question. Tibet is an example of victims of oppression by those evil countries. The Tibetan government in exile has existed for more than half a century. The government-in-exile is now led by a new leader from a younger generation, Prime Minister Sangay. From what Prime Minister Sangay is going to tell us, I'm hoping to get a glimpse of the future of Tibet, in which the Tibetans will lead their life in their own way.

Prime Minister Sangay: When I was put in charge of political affairs after His Holiness the Dalai Lama declared the devolution of his political powers, I was asked this question: "Do you realistically expect that the Tibetan issue will be resolved? You're facing China, which is a rising power." My answer was : "China may be new to the world, but we Tibetans have been living side by side with the Chinese for hundreds of years. We have dealt with them before and we will deal with them now." After China invaded Lhasa in 1959, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama obtained political asylum in India. I believe that he will return to Tibet just as the 13th Dalai Lama did after fleeing to India in 1910 because of the Chinese army's invasion of Lhasa.

Tibetan democracy is a genuine democracy. Otherwise, an ordinary guy like me with ordinary backgrounds would not be elected as prime minister. I still believe that I became the political leader because of my karma.

Whichever country I may want to visit, the Chinese embassy there becomes very busy. Even before my visit, embassy staff make the rounds of all people I might meet with or I might come across and warn them not to meet with me, and if I meet with them, they will be questioned as to the reason for the meeting.

Despite the pressure, I've been to the U.S. and nine countries in Europe. Japan is the first Asian country for me to visit. In all these countries, people have met with me and hosted me formally or informally.

Tibetan people say occupation is unacceptable and repression is unbearable. That is why there has been protest after protest in Tibet. Recently, 33 Tibetans have set themselves on fire, of whom 22 have died. Why?

We know life is precious. Given a choice, we want to live. No one wants to die. But when the situation became unbearable, the Tibetans set themselves on fire to send a message to the world that we are suffering and we deserve attention.

The international community has expressed concerns and issued statements, which we appreciate, but what about effective support?

Tibetan blood is as red and as warm as Tunisian blood. How many more Tibetans will have to self-immolate before the international community pays

attention? Before Beijing sees our point and shows willingness to change its policy, how many people will have to die? Instead of accepting blame, Beijing is blaming His Holiness the Dalai Lama, blaming me for instigating the problem. But the solution lies with Beijing.

The people who burned themselves to death died for Tibet and Tibetan people, so we must show solidarity for them. Their death should not be wasted. Almost all of the people who died said, "We want His Holiness the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet." Tibetans living in Tibet say they want to see His Holiness, whom they haven't seen for 60 years. This is another demand. What the 33 Tibetans who have died wanted is the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet and freedom for Tibetans. Japan has a major role to play in Asian countries aspiring for democracy because it has demonstrated that Shinto, Buddhism and democracy are compatible. Democracy in Japan is mature. Democracy is well-established in Japan. Japan is an example for many countries in the world, particularly in Asia.

Ms. Sakurai: Tibet's approach toward China is based on dialogue. But dialogue between Tibet and China has been suspended recently because China has refused to be engaged in dialogue with Tibet. How can the Chinese policy toward Tibet be changed? It appears as if there will be no change so long as China maintains the one-party rule. Could you offer your thoughts as to how the current stalemate can be broken through the dialogue-based approach?

Prime Minister Sangay: His Holiness the Dalai Lama's "middle way" approach is based on Buddhism and it is very realistic. Since 2002, we have had nine rounds of dialogue with China. But since the last round was held in January 2010, there has been no dialogue, at least formally. Recently, the people involved in or responsible for the dialogue on the Chinese side have been busy traveling around the world and criticizing His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan administration. The Chinese government always says that Tibet is an internal matter in which other countries should not intervene.

Therefore, the international community, including Japan and Japanese people, are invited to engage in dialogue with us and with Chinese people. Because our movement is non-violent, we can make progress only through dialogue. Unless the Chinese government decides to change its policy, the present stalemate might continue.

Ms. Sakurai: There are similarities between the current Tibetan situation and the history of Mongolian or Uyghur peoples. What is common is that Mongolians, Uyghurs and Tibetans have been educated in the Chinese way, as China is trying to assimilate them and make them feel like Chinese at the bottom of their heart. In addition, China is trying to assimilate the top echelon of these peoples into the Chinese society or crack down on them and kill them. In that way, China saps the vitality of these peoples. How does the Tibetan government-in-exile intend to deal with the Chinese policy?

Prime Minister Sangay: The assimilation of Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians and "other minorities" has been a long-term goal of the Chinese government. The

Chinese government is taking bright students at the age of 12 to 14 to the inner China for education and introducing the Chinese language as a medium of education at all levels from primary school to university. By educating children in Chinese, China is trying to turn them into Chinese.

And the vast influx of Chinese migrants is a major problem in the Manchurian area, where there are nine Chinese for each Manchurian. That's what you hear. And in the Inner Mongolia, we hear there are almost eight Chinese for each Mongolian. In the Uyghur region, some say the ratio is 60% Chinese and 40% Uyghur. In many of the urban areas of Tibet, Chinese are a majority. But in winter, most of the Chinese go back to their home in China proper because it is so cold. So although Chinese are a majority in summer in urban areas, their number dwindles in winter.

Tibetan people don't want global warming to come to Tibet fast, because once the weather becomes warmer, the Chinese might stay in Tibet longer. So we want the cold weather to continue in Tibet.

Most of the major monasteries in Tibet which were destroyed before the cultural revolution have been rebuilt in India, Bhutan and Nepal. So we are educating more than 30,000 monks and nuns in exile.

We have introduced a new education policy under which we educate Tibetan exiles in English and also use the Tibetan language in primary and middle schools. It has been scientifically proven that children learn faster and better when you teach them in their native language. At high school for exiles, English is used as a medium of education. Children receive bilingual education, learning in English as well as in the Tibetan language..

We pursue both scientific and traditional methods of education, as I believe we must combine the two. We must modernize. But we must also respect tradition. This is a constant struggle.

Ms. Sakurai: In relation to education, let me mention the Tibetan government-in-exile's annual budget for education, diplomacy and other affairs. The size of the budget is 22 million dollars annually. At an exchange rate of 80 yen to the dollar, it's equivalent to only 1.76 billion Japanese yen. As the prime minister said, there are representative offices in 12 countries and there are 2,000 public servants, including teachers. And the government-in-exile takes care of 120,000 Tibetans living in exile in India, Nepal and Bhutan within this budget constraint. The prime minister receives a salary of 367 dollars, or less than 30,000 yen. The major pillar of Tibetan society is Tibetan Buddhism. How will the next Dalai Lama be selected? While I expect that the Tibetan government-in-exile will pursue the current path on the political front, I would say all Tibetan people are wondering what the future of their Buddhism will be like.

Prime Minister Sangay: With this budget, we take care of 120,000 people living in exile and we operate around 7,000 schools as well as many clinics, hospitals and kindergartens. We also provide scholarship and run many monasteries, all within the 22 million dollars. We run a very frugal and effective administration. The Chinese government has said it will decide who the next Dalai Lama should be. His Holiness has issued a statement in September last year in which he said there can be a reincarnation of the 15th Dalai Lama through emanation, reincarnation, or selection. In reincarnation, someone passes away and returns

to life in a new body. Emanation refers to the transfer of a soul from one body to another. There is also a selection, which means that religious leaders will gather and then vote and select the next Dalai Lama in a similar process to the election of a new pope. His Holiness has made it very clear that the incumbent Dalai Lama alone has the right to decide who the next Dalai Lama should be. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says he will make the decision at the age of 90.

Last year he gave up his political power. This represents a political incarnation, so to speak. Once the political incarnation has been fully consolidated, he will consider a comprehensive devolution of power, including spiritual incarnation. Devolution of power through the political and spiritual incarnations will force China to deal with not one but two leaders.

I am responsible for taking the first step. I have to prove that the devolution of political power has proceeded successfully. So I have to speak before many people around the world and work hard.

That will send a clear message to Beijing that freedom cannot be denied. Democracy and freedom of religion cannot be trampled upon, either.

Ms. Sakurai: In Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi has achieved a landslide election victory, paving the way for further progress in the democratization process. We know that the peoples of Myanmar and Tibet share ancestors and have close blood relationship. How do you think the democratization process in Myanmar will affect the Tibetans? How will it affect the Uyghurs and Mongolians?

Prof. Takubo: The dam in Myanmar that I mentioned earlier was being built over a river flowing from Tibet. That river may be called the mother of Burma (Myanmar). India and China are engaging in a territorial dispute over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The dispute concerns rivers that flow from Tibet. If China halts the river flow at the sources, the Indian people will suffer. The Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongolians are connected with each other in various ways, both tangible and intangible, through the rivers that originate in Tibet. I think that all these peoples share antipathy towards China. Antipathy towards China, which is one of the world's rogue countries, is spreading. It's like a volatile fuel waiting to explode if someone sets it alight. Currently, Tibet is suffering human casualties and is resisting attempts to eliminate the Tibetan history, tradition and culture. This struggle resonates with the hearts of all countries and people who have conscience.

Ms. Sakurai: Professor Takubo spoke of a "volatile fuel." Can we set it alight? That is the question. The international society of which we are a part can be divided into two broad groups on the basis of values. On the one hand, there are China, Russia, Syria, Iran and North Korea. These are countries that oppress people and deny democracy and freedom, which is an object of fundamental human aspiration. On the other hand, there are countries that embrace these values. Struggle over these values will never cease. That's because human beings aspire for freedom. The year 2012 is a critical juncture for us. Depending on whether we recognize that, the world could change. In the audience, there are naturalized Japanese of Chinese descent. First, Mr. Sekihei will speak, followed by Ms. Liu Yanzi.

Mr. Sekihei: I am a Han Chinese who is a naturalized Japanese citizen. As a representative of the Han Chinese, I would like to apologize to the Tibetan people. Our common enemy is the Chinese Communist Party. Until now, the Tibetan government has been pursuing a policy of dialogue in dealing with the government of the Chinese Communist Party. But my understanding is that the Chinese government has no intention to solve problems through dialogue. Dialogue is important, but what's more important is for the international community to pursue a more comprehensive and strategic approach. As to whether the jasmine revolution will spread to China, I don't think the time is not yet ripe for that. The fact that Europe, which advocates freedom, human rights and democracy, has turned to China for economic assistance has convinced the Chinese Communist Party that its autocratic rule is powerful. Fortunately, the Chinese economy has slowed down. If the Chinese economy drops to the very bottom, a force calling for democracy will arise in China.

The issue is whether pro-democracy movement will automatically lead to the dissolution of the Middle Kingdom (China). Sino-centrism and democracy are not necessarily compatible with each other. Therefore, we face two challenges. One is how we should dissolve the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. The second challenge is how we should break up the Middle Kingdom. Only if these two challenges have been overcome, the Tibetans, Mongolians and Uyghurs will probably win freedom in the true sense of the word.

Ms. Sakurai: It is important to clearly distinguish the Chinese Communist Party and the Han Chinese people. Among the Han Chinese, there are people who aspire for democracy and respect freedom. In that regard, I am hopeful as a human being. Ms. Liu Yanzi, who is a writer, is one such Han Chinese.

Ms. Liu Yanzi: As a Han Chinese, I feel a sense of guilt toward the Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongolians and my heart is filled with sorrow. For us writers, the freedom of speech is critical. I'm hoping to share pains and sorrow with the Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongolians by taking advantage of the power of speech. I would like all of you to never forget what Mr. Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel laureate, has said. "If there is no freedom for the Han Chinese, there is no autonomy for Tibet." These words remind me of the need to question what is my dignity as a writer and what is my dignity and pride as a Han Chinese. I would like to ask the prime minister to explore a practical, constructive and future-oriented approach other than self-immolation that may be pursued by Tibetans. For example, in Wukan Village, autonomy has been realized. Isn't it possible to start with autonomy for villages in Tibet, too?

Prime Minister Sangay: There are two reasons why is Tibet important. One is that the best preserved Buddhist civilization and Buddhist scripture are held in Tibet. So, these should not be destroyed. And Tibetan civilization is an ancient civilization. Also, the Tibetan language is one of the oldest languages. And environmentally, Tibet is called a third pole because it has the third largest reserves of ice, after the two polar regions, the Arctic and Antarctic circles. And those reserves of ice constitute the source of fresh water for most of the rivers in Asia. These rivers flow all the way from India to Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh. The Mekong River flows all the way to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. The Yangtze River and the Yellow River, which are the sources of Chinese civilization,

flow from Tibet. Now, water is called white gold. In earlier eras, wars were fought over land. Nowadays, wars are fought over energy. In the future, wars will be fought over water. And Tibet, as the source of water for the whole of South Asia and for many other countries, is very valuable.

Traditionally, as the steward or the guardian of the Tibet's plateau, we have always respected the natural flow of river and respected water sharing. Now, unfortunately, the Chinese government and companies are building dams over the rivers. Not just a few but up to 20 dams over each of the rivers that flow from Tibet.

Tibet is very important from the perspectives of environment, civilization and politics.

Over the last 50 years, the Tibetan government-in-exile has invested in non-violence and democracy. We will continue to advocate democracy and commit ourselves to non-violence. That is because democracy and non-violence are our core principles. The Tibetan movement is part of the wave of democratization and freedom in Asia and in the world.

Under Article 4 of the Chinese constitution of 1982, a special administrative region can be established in China. Based on which, the Hong Kong model of "one country, two systems" was established and autonomy was granted. So why can't the same be done for Tibet?

When you raise that question, the Chinese say, "Well, Hong Kong was under British systems. They had a separate legal system and a separate commercial system, so it's different from Tibet." If that is the case, then what about Macau? Macau didn't have a British commercial system or a legal system. Macau was a crime-infested island to which criminals from China fled. Why was Macau granted the "one country, two systems" model?

Now, the Chinese government says Taiwan is also different. China is willing to grant more autonomy or recognize the status quo for Taiwan. Which means the Chinese government has the political will to grant autonomy where they want to. That's what they have granted to Hong Kong and Macau, and they're willing to grant it to Taiwan. Then, the question is, "Why is the Chinese government unwilling to grant autonomy to Tibet?" That's the fundamental question.

From the Chinese government's perspective, people in Hong Kong are Chinese, and people in Taiwan are also Chinese. But people in Taiwan disagree and say they are Taiwanese, not Chinese. But from the Chinese perspective, they are Chinese. Which means the Chinese government is willing to grant autonomy to the Chinese but not to the Tibetans. So this is a racial issue. This is also a nationality issue. Wukan Village in the Guangdong province has protested against corruption. Villagers elected one of them as their leader. They elected their leader through election. As their protest was peaceful, the Chinese government tolerated it. But when a peaceful protest occurred in Tibet, what happened? Tibetans were shot to death.

On January 24 and 25, during the Chinese New Year, hundreds of Tibetans staged a protest demonstration. Eight Tibetans were shot to death merely for participating in the peaceful protest. As to the question of whether there is no alternative to self-immolation, Tibetans want an alternative. However, people participating in a hunger strike are killed. You organize a rally and you get arrested or tortured. And if you even stick a poster on a wall, you might get shot.

So the Tibetans are saying, “Rather than doing peaceful demonstration and getting shot at, we might as well die and show it to the world that this is what we’re suffering.” The Tibetans are choosing self-immolation as a tragic way to protest to call attention to the situation.

There is a huge discrepancy between the reality and theory. That’s the desperate cry of the Tibetan people, and there is no room for any other form of protest.

Mr. Shimada (of JINF Planning Committee) : It is admirable that the Indian government has tolerated the presence of the Tibetan government-in-exile in India. What do you think of the current relationship between the Indian government and China and how do you expect their relationship will develop in the future?

Prime Minister Sangay: India and China have a complex relationship. In 1962, there was a war between India and China. But as far as Tibet and Tibetan people are concerned, India as a host has been very kind and very generous. Our government-in-exile is based in India and a large number of Tibetan exiles live there. I believe that support will continue. There won’t be much change in India’s relationship with or treatment of Tibetan people.

Audience question: Specifically what actions would you like the Japanese government to take? Are you going to maintain the “middle way” policy of seeking independence through non-violent movement?

Prime Minister Sangay: The “middle way” is still the policy of the Tibetan administration. Other movements have shown that non-violence and dialogue can work.

As for my expectations for the Japanese government, whenever I travel, I always say the same thing. I’m really grateful to the countries that I’m allowed to visit and the people I’m allowed to meet. And I’m even thankful to anyone willing to meet me.

Audience question: Japanese people do not know much about Tibet. In the case of Mongolia, sumo wrestlers such as Asashoryu are well-known in Japan, so the Japanese people have a sense of familiarity toward Mongolia. If Tibetan students come to Japan in the field of sports such as Sumo, it would be the most effective way to make the Japanese feel familiar toward Tibet.

Prime Minister Sangay: In Tibet, we don’t have any sumo wrestler. We also have budget constraints.

Audience question: All people, whether they live in Tibet, China, North Korea or Iraq, are praying for the well-being of their families and peace. Why do they fight? That’s because they face the issues of nationality, religion and state. Grassroots exchanges among people could be a solution. What would you say to that?

Prime Minister Sangay: We have some brilliant Tibetan students already studying in doctorate courses. And we would be happy to send out Tibetan culture performances, such as dancing, which is very colorful, entertaining and different from Chinese dancing.

Professor Ito (of Tokyo University): Let me offer my comments and ask one question. This is not a problem just for Tibet but it is also a problem for Japan. When we look back at the history of Japan, we see that the country has been losing things that are unique to us because of interventions by China. At risk is not just the Senkaku islands or the Okinawa islands but the whole of Japan. China is continuing to expand. One Chinese student studying under me used to say that China must grab India, too. My question is, “Why is autonomy the issue? Historically speaking, the Tibetans were never under the rule of the Han Chinese. Shouldn’t such people seek independence, rather than mere autonomy?”

Prime Minister Sangay: You’re right. Tibet was not only an independent nation, but was also a great empire at one time. In 1913, the Dalai Lama at the time declared Tibet an independent country. In 1951, a document was signed which integrated Tibet into China.

The United Nations passed a resolution saying that Tibetans are entitled to have the right of self-determination. Historically speaking, Tibet was an independent nation and it has the right of self-determination. But as the “middle way” policy, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has advocated autonomy to preserve the Tibetan language and Tibetan identity.

Ms. Sakurai: I also wanted to refer to the question of why Tibet is merely seeking autonomy. Prime Minister Sangay’s comments represent a realistic approach that reflects his sense of responsibility as a politician.

We Japanese have to be aware of the circumstances of all those peoples, and rather than imposing what we see as ideal solutions on other nations, we should help those peoples achieve what they believe to be ideal solutions. That will be the best we can do to support them.