

Opening Remarks

Distinguished guests, colleagues, and friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome our distinguished guests from the five countries of Central Asia to Japan. My name is Yohei Takahata, and I have the honor of chairing today's exchange of views. I serve as Secretary-General of the Steering Committee of the Global Forum for international exchange, and also as Executive Director of the Japan Forum on International Relations, a think tank dedicated to diplomacy and international affairs.

Although our time together today is limited, I sincerely hope that our discussion will be frank, insightful, and productive.

I have long believed that diplomacy should not be understood solely as negotiations conducted between governments. At its core, diplomacy is the capacity to build relationships with others. Such relationships ultimately begin with dialogue among individuals. Cultural exchange represents one of the deepest forms of this engagement, embodying the inclusive idea that every citizen can become an agent in the creation of peace.

Under the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue, launched in 2004, Japan and the Central Asian countries have steadily developed multilayered cooperation for more than two decades. At the first summit meeting held last December, the Tokyo Declaration clearly positioned the expansion of cultural exchange as an important pillar of our future cooperation.

In this sense, today's meeting may be seen as part of the implementation phase of that leaders' agreement—an opportunity to translate shared aspirations into practical policy dialogue.

The theme of today's discussion is "the preservation of traditional culture and its application to industrial development and international engagement."

In observing the initiatives undertaken by many of you, it is evident that the discussion has already moved beyond the stage of simply preserving culture. Rather, we appear to be entering a new phase in which culture is being transformed into a resource for the future.

Allow me at this point to recall a perspective that our colleagues have been examining in recent years—the concept of “states caught between great powers.” For countries situated in regions where the influence of major powers intersects, the question of how to harness cultural uniqueness as a strategic asset becomes more than a matter of cultural policy. It becomes an integral part of national strategy.

In this respect, Central Asia holds remarkable potential. Many members of our organization—including today’s Japanese panelists, Professor Tomohiko Uyama and David Goginashvili—have established an internal study group that has been examining the theme of “states caught between great powers” over the past three years. Through comparative analysis across regions, we have explored political, security, economic, and societal dimensions of this issue. Our discussions have spanned Eurasia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania, allowing us to draw insights from a wide range of international experiences.

Central Asia has long been a crossroads of civilizations since the era of the Silk Road. Japan, for its part, is a country that has sought to harmonize tradition with modernization throughout its history. What these regions seem to share is the wisdom of transforming tradition not merely into heritage, but into a living force that continues to shape the present and the future.

It is my sincere hope that today’s discussion will serve as a catalyst for new and concrete initiatives—whether through collaborative projects, exchanges of human talent, joint exhibitions and branding, or programs aimed at nurturing the next generation.

At the same time, I believe it is equally important that we speak candidly not only about our successes, but also about the challenges and difficulties we encounter along the way.

With these brief remarks, allow me to conclude my opening statement.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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