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President Václav Havel as a Symbol of Good and Kim Jong-il as a Synonym for Evil

By IRIYAMA Akira

The news of the death of two world leaders was reported in succession at the end of last year. One was a symbol of good and hope, and the other was labeled as a synonym for evil and destruction. These two figures were Czech Republic President Václav Havel and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 is now a past event in history. However, the Civic Forum and Václav Havel, the playwright who led the group, bravely stood up to the former Soviet Union that possessed a dominant power according to the principle of nonviolence. Those courageous people could be described as living witnesses to the conscience of humanity for their great moral nobility and lofty ideals. I had a fortunate opportunity to meet Václav Havel in person through my occasional involvements in several "democratization" projects in Central Europe during the same period of time. This personal experience made me a strong impression of him as an extremely unforgettable person. In addition to being a fiercely compulsive smoker, he was far from being harmonious and amiable in disposition. His character and remarks often caused a frictional sound everywhere. However, he never tried to cover things up and always behaved in a straightforward and honest manner. Ordinary people loved him for his candidness. Lech Walesa, who also played a central role in the Polish democracy movement as the leader of the trade union "Solidarity," was a typical "laborer," whereas Mr. Havel was an "intellectual" to the core for better or worse.

Meanwhile, the enigmatic image of Kim Jong-il associated with anything anti-democratic, such as successional socialist state, military-first politics, brinkmanship diplomacy, dictatorial politics and personality cult, had long appeared on the world stage. It was nearly impossible to speculate about and forecast the real intentions of what he said and did. His behaviors and remarks were sources of income for people who criticize and speculate about their intentions like this or that. As these suggest, he was

beyond rational reasoning. The intentions of his behaviors and remarks were impossible to understand. Even if his intentions were possible to understand, the causality behind his behavioral patterns to realize those intentions was well above understanding. However, it would be extremely problematic and confusing to think that he was totally insane and was completely incomprehensible by rational judgment. Therefore, I suspect that people tried to figure him out based on the assumption that he made decisions with the minimum rationality. This kind of characteristic is not exclusive to Kim Jong-il only but is also more or less applicable to the behaviors and remarks of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Sadly, it is true that a synonym for evil and destruction can attract people's attention more easily than a symbol of good and hope. Probably, this is partly because for a symbol of good and hope, it is predictable how people will react to it, while for a synonym for evil and destruction, people's reaction is unpredictable and its language system is different. It shows the true nature of human beings that they find something unknown attractive, but I do not want to see any general or leader like the dead North Korean any more.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. IRIYAMA Akira, Visiting Professor at Cyber University, and Executive Research Advisor of the International Development Center of Japan, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Somei" of CEAC on December 21, 2011.)