

The Peace on The Horizon - 70 Years after The World War 2 in the Middle East(37)

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Chapter 5: Two calendars (Gregorian & Hijri)

5-1(37) Gregorian overcomes Hijri

Hijri calendar is an Islamic calendar and is prevailing at every corner of Muslim life. Hijri calendar has started from the date when Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Makkah to Madinah, corresponding to July 16, 622 AD.

Hijri is a lunar calendar which based on the monthly cycles of the moon's phases. One month of a lunar calendar is 29 or 30 days. The lunar year is only 354 days and 8 hours. Hijri year is around 11 days shorter than the Gregorian year.

Once upon a time a lunar calendar was used in Japan, too. In Japan, additional one month was set up to adjust the seasonal deviation. However, Hijri calendar does not apply such adjustment with Gregorian calendar. Therefore, four seasons gradually get behind every year. For example, the 9th month of Hijri, Ramadan, known as the fasting month, is sometime in hot summer and sometime in cold winter. Same as the 12th month of Hijri, Hajj, holy month for Muslim worshippers. The lack of additional one-month results that the seasons come back again after 33 lunar-years cycle. Hijri started in 622 AD, and new Hijri year 1442 will begin in August, 2020. Gregorian calendar counts 1,398 years from the year 622 till 2020. But Hijri calendar counts 1,442 years. Hijri calendar is 44 years ahead Gregorian calendar.

Generally speaking, lunar calendar was widely used in ancient society. Suppose that it is difficult to perceive the difference of daylight hours of yesterday and today because the time of sunrise and sunset changes very slightly day by day. On the other hand, daily phase of the moon can recognize easily. Both Islamic countries and Japan used the lunar calendar, too.

But they adopted lunar calendar in different manner. In Japan the seasonal deviation was adjusted by introducing an additional month, but Hijri calendar did not apply such adjustment. It is interesting to analyse the reason why Japanese created an additional month in their lunar calendar whereas Muslims dared to accept the seasonal discrepancy without creating an additional month.

Japanese who lives in moderate climates seems that the sun is grace. However, Muslims in the Middle East have unique feeling about moon and sun. Muslim living in the Middle East who suffers harsh and dry climate with glaring sunshine regards that the sun means death. The calm moon night is the time of rest for Muslims. Arab people love the moon more than the sun.

Another reason is that Japan is agricultural society and Middle East is pastoral society. In the agricultural society, it moves along with the season from sowing to harvesting. It must be aligned with the movement of the sun. In pastoral society, grass grows naturally and livestock breeds babies without human activity. Therefore, pastoralists need not to be so sensitive for the seasonal change as agricultural people.

There are many events related to the daily life that match to a lunar calendar. In Japan, 88th day and 210th day which start from the beginning of February are such examples. 88th-day around in May is the suitable day for picking green tea. And 210th-day means a high season of typhoon in September. Both events are tailored for Summer and Autumn seasons respectively and are closely related to the seasonal natural phenomena. Ramadan, the 9th month of Hijri, is fasting month which is typical event for Muslim. And Hajj, twelfth month of Hijri for Makkah pilgrimage is the same. Both are human acts and not related to nature and season.

How about economic activities which have nothing to do with the seasons? Economic activities are often settled in monthly basis like salary payment or debt repayment. It is not necessarily to adjust to a Gregorian calendar. Merchants in the Islamic world granted that one month is from full moon to next full moon. They feel no inconvenience for such business manner.

Thus, the Muslim society has kept the traditional lifestyle for 1400 years. However, from the beginning of 15th century of Hijri corresponding to 1980s of AD, Muslim society was swallowed in the wave of globalization. They were forced to adjust the year and month scale to the Gregorian calendar. In order to trade with non-Muslim countries in the world, it became indispensable to conform with the Gregorian calendar as the de facto standard.

Financial business was the first field of de facto standard. In the modern financial business, the annual, monthly or daily transaction are based on Gregorian calendar. And trading day is from Monday to Friday. And Saturday and Sunday are holidays. In contrast, Thursday and Friday were holidays in Islamic world, and trading days were from Saturday to Wednesday. The duplicated working days with other world are only three days on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. This is extremely inefficient. Sunday is the Sabbath day in non-Muslim countries, while Friday is the praying day in the Islamic countries. They cannot change the praying in the mosque on Friday. Finally, the Islamic countries made compromise with Western style. Now Middle Eastern Islamic countries have changed two-day weekend from Thursday and Friday to Friday and Saturday.

It looked like a simple change of rule. But the biorhythm in Muslim society began to go wrong. Muslim was forced to obey the Gregorian calendar for business purpose, though their mind was belonging to Islam. Muslim was teared between Hijri and Gregorian. Hijri has been overcome by Gregorian.

(To be continued ----)

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