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"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 & Hijra)

5-1(37) Hijri eroded by Gregorian



In the Islamic world, Hijri calendar (Islamic calendar) has penetrated every corner of Muslim life. Hijra was the day when the Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Makkah to Madinah. And Hijri is an Islamic calendar starting from the emigration of Prophet Muhammad, corresponding to July 16, 622 AD.

The hijri is a lunar calendar which based on the monthly cycles of the Moon's phases. The month of a lunar calendar alternates between 29 and 30 days. So the period of twelve such lunations, a lunar year, is only 354 days and 8 hours. The hijri, purely lunar calendar, loses around 11 days per year relative to the Gregorian calendar.

Once upon a time a lunar calendar was used in Japan, too. At that moment an additional month was set up to adjust the seasonal deviation. However, same adjustment does not apply in a hijri. The seasons, therefore, are gradually shifting every year. As a result, the 9th month of a hijri, Ramadan, known as the fasting month, or the 12th month of hijri, Hajj may start in a midsummer or in a midwinter from year to year. The lack of additional one month causes the lunar months to cycle through all the seasons of the Gregorian year over the course of a 33 lunar-year cycle. A Hijri started in 622 AD, and in September this year (in 2018) a hijri will reach the year of 1440. There were 1,396 years from the year 622 till 2018, but it was 1,440 years in a hijri. In a hijri, 46 years passed ahead on a Gregorian calendar.

In Japan the seasonal deviation was adjusted by introducing an additional month. On the other hand, a Hijri has no such adjustment. It is interesting to think about the reason why the Islamic countries and the old Japan used the same lunar calendar. Basically, the time of sunrise and sunset becomes

faster or slower day by day in a year. But it is difficult to perceive the difference of daylight hours of yesterday and today. On the contrary, phase of the moon can recognize every night.

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

People in the Middle East Islamic countries dared to accept the seasonal discrepancy without creating an additional month in the lunar calendar. Japanese created an additional month in their lunar calendar. The reason is conceivable that the former is pastoral society and the latter is agricultural 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 growing in the field and breeding of animals are closely related to the seasonal change, too, but grass grows and livestock breeds its children naturally without human assistance. Therefore, pastoralists need not to be so sensitive for the seasonal change as agricultural people.

There are various kinds of events related to the daily life that match to a lunar calendar. For example, there are many events in Japan such as 88th day and 210th day which start from the beginning of February (i.e. The day just Spring has come). 88th-day is the suitable day for picking green tea around May 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 natural phenomena. However, Ramadan (fast) and Hajj (Makkah pilgrimage), typical events of a Hijri, are both human acts unrelated to nature and season.

Let's think about economic activities which have nothing to do with the seasons. Economic activities are often settled in monthly basis, such as payment of salary or debt. However, in this case, it is not necessary to adjust the duration of each month to a Gregorian calendar. Merchants in the Islamic world decide 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 a 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 not only in the Western countries but also all over the world.

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. In contrast, in the Middle East Islamic world Thursday and Friday were holidays, so trading day was from Saturday to Wednesday. The duplicated working days are only three days on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. This is extremely inefficient. The Sabbath day is on Friday in the Islamic countries and that of Sunday in Western countries respectively. Of course, the Islamic countries cannot change the Sabbath on Friday. In the end, 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 mere change of institution. 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 a Hijri and a Gregorian. Hijri was eroded by Gregorian.

(To be continued ----)