

"The Impossible Peace - 70 Years after The World War 2 in the Middle East"

2. Middle East connecting Europe and Asia



Eurasia is the largest continent in the world. As its English name indicates it is a word synthesizing Euro and Asia. Where is the boundary between Europe and Asia? It is almost a common view that one of the boundaries is the Bosphorus Strait in Turkey. The west side of the Bosphorus is Istanbul, and Uskudar on the other side of the strait is the entrance to Asia. The Bosphorus Bridge, now called July 15 Martyrs' Bridge is exactly a bridge connecting Europe and Asia. And the area of Anatolia Plateau from Uskudar to Turkey's capital Ankara is called "Asia Minor".

Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom used the name of Asia in the Age of Discovery in the 15th century. These European countries competed each other to monopolize the trade. They battled not only in India but also in Indonesia. They made strengthen the colonial rule. The geographical concept of Asia was established in this process. It was a one-sided decision by the Europeans. Asians, however, did not recognize the one Asia. I am confident that all of Japanese does not see Islamic Arabs as the same Asians.

But why people in the Middle East themselves sees Japanese as the same Asians? It is no doubt that the reason why people in the Middle East view the Far East as the one Asia is the imprinting by Europe or the United States when they establish the world order in modern history. It is obvious if you look at the grouping of the countries for various sports competitions. For example, Asian League of the World Cup Football covers the countries from the Far East to the Middle East countries. In other words, the definition of Asia means the areas except Europe.

The area Europeans named "Asia" occupies a large part of the Eurasian Continent. The Eurasian continent extends from the east longitude 10 degrees, where the Portugal is, and 180 degrees of the Bering Strait. Istanbul, the eastern end of Europe, is located at 30 degrees east longitude. This means that five-sixth of the Eurasian continent is Asia, Europe is only one sixth.

Asia is so wide that Europeans could not bundle Asia as one region, They, therefore, divided Asia into several regions. It was a very simple and unilateral division from the viewpoint of their geographical perspective. They named each regions as the Near East, Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia and Far East. Far East means the end of the east. It is a very rude naming for the people living in that region. Suppose that If the history was reversed, Britain, France might have been called "Far West" at the end of the west!

Anyway, when crossing the Bosphorus Strait, you are now in "Near East". It covers the Anatolian peninsula. And the eastern Levant (nowadays Syria and Lebanon), Israel, Iraq and Iran consist "Middle East". In modern history, however, "Near East" and "Middle East" are united and called "Middle East". India and Pakistan are called South Asia.

Europeans desired to trade with South Asia, South East Asia and Far East countries directly. But unfortunately, the onshore route had to rely on relay trade with the Ottoman Empire or the Persian Empire. Free trade was hindered in those days. In the 15th century to the 17th century, The biggest reason why European countries embarked on the ocean is to get peppers and tea in Indian Ocean coast or obtain gold, silver and China pottery from Japan (Zipang). Europeans found the offshore route instead of onshore route through the Cape Hope at the southern tip of African Continent by sailing ship. Age of Discovery has begun.

European countries advanced from South Asia to Far East Asia along the coast of the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. It is an invasion dots by dots. The Age of Discoveries was an age of trading. At that time European countries themselves did not have own competitive goods to export to India, Southeast Asia, Java, etc.,. Europeans purchased local products at one port and resell them at the other port resulting big margin. Sometimes they looted the precious products from the local and brought them back to home. Many merchants got huge wealth. When it came to industrial revolution with accumulated wealth into weapons in the 19th century, trade became as nominal ones. Asian colonization has started.

Ottoman Empire gradually eroded through Western colonial invasion. France built the Suez Canal in 1869, after which the UK became a substantial ruler of the Canal. In this way, the route, from the Mediterranean to the Suez Canal and then through the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, has been secured and the reign of Asia by Western powers has become firm. Finally Ottoman Empire was defeated in the First World War from 1914 to 17, the vast Asian region ranging from the Middle East to Southeast Asia was dominated

by Western colonialists of the UK, France and the Netherlands. They monopolized the wealth of Asia.

(To be continued ----)

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