

Japanese Civilization (Part 4)

– Maritime Europe and Japan –

By Kawakatsu Heita

The Making of Ancient Europe

The Mediterranean Origins of European History

The story of Europe cannot be told without reference to *The History* of Herodotus (ca 484-425 B.C.), the “Father of History.” The theme of *The History* is the East-West conflict between Greece and Persia culminating in the wars of the early fifth century B.C.

Herodotus relates the events leading up to the defeat of Persia by Athens, skillfully weaving in tales that vividly convey the Orient during this period. Herodotus’s account is more a history of the Orient than of Europe, but the description of the Orient – the Arab Middle East of today – throws light on maritime Athens by conveying its distinct differences with Persia. For example, Herodotus describes the outcome of the naval battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. as follows: “There fell in this combat Ariabignes, one of the chief commanders of the fleet, who was son of Darius and brother of Xerxes; and with him perished a vast number of men of high repute, Persians, Medes, and allies. Of the Greeks there died only a few; for, as they were able to swim, all those that were not slain outright by the enemy escaped from the sinking vessels and swam across to Salamis. But on the side of the barbarians more perished by drowning than in any other way, since they did not know how to swim. The great destruction took place when the ships which had been first engaged began to fly; for they who were stationed in the rear, anxious to display their valour before the eyes of the king, made every effort to force their way to the front, and thus became entangled with such of their own vessels as were retreating.”

It is apparent from this account that

the Greeks were a seafaring people who could swim while the Persians were a landlocked people who could not. The arena of the Greeks’ activities was of course the Mediterranean Sea. According to the earliest history book, Europe took its name from the daughter of the King of Phoenicia, Europa, who was carried off by the God Zeus, and had its origins in the Mediterranean Sea. Herodotus is known as the “Father of History,” but it might be more accurate to call him the “Father of European History.”

The Establishment of Medieval Europe

External Pressure from Islam – The Mediterranean Blockade

What brought about the transition from the ancient to the medieval period? This question has been brilliantly analyzed by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, who was described as “one of the greatest historians of Europe in the first half of the 20th century” by Masuda Shiro. In his masterpiece, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, Pirenne stated that Europe came into being through the medium of Islam. Rejecting the conventional view of most historians that the collapse of Roman civilization was caused by pressure from Germanic peoples in the north, Pirenne argued that the Germans took over Roman culture as part of a continuous process and that the pressure from Islam caused the decisive break in European history, resulting in the transition from the ancient to the medieval period.

The Mediterranean Sea was effectively blockaded as a result of external pressure from Islam. The Mediterranean, which had been a Roman lake in ancient times, became an Arab lake, creating an isolated, land-



Herodotus can be described as the “Father of European History”

locked Europe. After the Christian army led by Charles Martel defeated the Arabs at Tours-Poitiers in 731, both sides were encamped on either side of the Pyrenees. A separate agriculture-based feudal society came into being, resulting in the emergence of the Christian world of Europe as a cultural entity independent from Islam. From the age of Charlemagne (Charles the Great; 742-814) until the 11th century, the Frankish kingdom was a blockaded inland kingdom which was forced to develop a new economic order, the feudal system, based on the only available source of wealth: the land. Pirenne concludes his thesis by stating that the Frankish kingdom was inconceivable without Islam, and the rise of Charlemagne was unthinkable without Muhammad (ca 571-632).

The Establishment of Early Modern Europe

The Mediterranean Revival

Just as Europe entered the medieval

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The victory of Christendom at the Battle of Lepanto put an end to the Christian world's inferiority complex

era because it was cut off from the Mediterranean Sea, it could be said that a new age was born through the revival of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean revival ushered in the early modern period in Europe. Not surprisingly, Henri Pirenne was quick to notice this, describing the Mediterranean revival movement that fomented this new age in Europe as a "resurgence of commerce." With the establishment of a trading network centering on the principality of Flanders and Venice in Northern Italy, Europe once again ventured into the Mediterranean world. What was the result of this?

The French historian Fernand Braudel analyzes the transition from the medieval to the early modern era in his masterpiece *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, interpreting the Christian Mediterranean and the Islamic Mediterranean as a single, indivisible world. The symbolic climax of this revival was the naval battle of Lepanto

between the fleet of the Holy League (the Papacy, Venice and Spain) and the Turkish fleet.

"The two fleets, each looking for the enemy, came upon one another unexpectedly on 7th October at sunrise, at the entrance to the gulf of Lepanto in which the Christian fleet, by a brilliant tactical move, at once succeeded in trapping its adversary. Face to face with each other, Christian and Moslem were then able, to their mutual surprise, to see their true numbers: 230 warships on the Turkish side, 208 on the Christian. ... the Christian triumph was a resounding one. Only thirty Turkish galleys escaped ... In this encounter, the Turks lost over 30,000 dead and wounded and 3000 prisoners; 15,000 galley-slaves were freed. The Christians had lost 10 galleys, 8000 men killed and 21,000 wounded. Their success was dearly bought in human terms, more than half the combatants being put out of action. To the exhausted soldiers the sea seemed suddenly to run red with blood. ... the vic-

tory can be seen as the end of a period of profound depression, the end of a genuine inferiority complex on the part of Christendom and a no less real Turkish supremacy."

If we consider this together with the Persian wars in the ancient period and Islam's mastery of the Mediterranean in the medieval period, it becomes apparent that Europe has repeatedly shed its skin through its changing relationship with the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean was the mirror reflecting Europe as it came of age.

Europe's Inroads into the Indian Ocean

It is no coincidence that the two greatest historians of Europe in the 20th century, Henri Pirenne and Fernand Braudel, both stressed the importance of Islam in Europe's development. Islam was also profoundly linked with the transition from the early modern to the modern period in European history. In the early modern period, Christian

countries such as Britain, Holland, Belgium and Denmark all together established the East India Company and embarked upon trade in the Indian Ocean region. Before the Europeans came, Islam had made inroads into this region. According to the records of the 14th century traveler Ibn Batuta, the Islamites had advanced as far as Northwest Africa, India and China. The regions surrounding the Indian Ocean – East Africa, Ottoman Turkey in the Middle East and the Mughal empire in India – had already become Muslim. As Europe entered into this region, Arab merchants were replaced by European merchants as the prime movers in Indian Ocean trade, but rather than destroying this commercial network the Christians made use of the existing trading structure, conveying the goods that the Muslims brought West via the Middle East directly to Europe via the Cape of Good Hope. Up to the end of the 18th century, Europe had a substantial trade deficit in the Asian regions ruled by the Islamic kingdoms. In the course of this trade, gold and silver, particularly silver, from the New World were brought to Asia because India had adopted the silver standard. Around 1800, however, as a result of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the structure of the Indian Ocean trade underwent a considerable transformation: while exports of Asian goods to Britain decreased dramatically, there was a sharp increase in exports of British products to Asia. Symbolic of this change was the reversal of the flow of goods through the replacement of Indian cotton cloth by Lancashire cotton cloth at the beginning of the 19th century.

Colonization of the Mughal Empire

The expulsion of the Islamites from the Iberian Peninsula completed the conversion of the Mediterranean from a Muslim to a Christian sea between the medieval and early modern periods. Similarly, the transformation of the Indian Ocean from a Muslim to a Christian sea from the early modern to the modern period began with the

expulsion of Islam from the Indian subcontinent.

The Mughal Empire (1526-1857) was without doubt a Muslim empire. In 1858 it fell under direct British rule and in 1875 Queen Victoria (who reigned from 1837 to 1901) was crowned Empress of India. Queen Victoria was Head of the Church of England, a title Henry VIII had adopted in 1543, giving the English monarch supreme authority over the Church as well as the State. When Queen Victoria became Empress of India, therefore, the Muslim Mughal Emperor submitted to the authority of the Head of a Christian church. If Britain is seen as representative of the great European powers, the colonization of the Mughal Empire can be interpreted as a major event in cultural history through which the dynamic power relationship between Christian and Islamic civilizations that had lasted for several centuries shifted decisively in favor of Christian civilization. As a result, the Indian Ocean was a Christian, and predominantly British, sea on the eve of World War I. After World War II, when Britain recognized India's independence, it adroitly expelled the Muslims from India to Pakistan and Bangladesh.

It must not be forgotten that no country in East Asia became either Muslim or Christian. East Asia, therefore, was an area of civilization that operated under a dynamism that was different and separate from the civilizations of Christendom and Islam.

The Position of Japan

Modern European Civilization and Japan's Policy of National Seclusion

Let us now consider the historical periods of transition in Europe from the perspective of East Asia. During the eighth and ninth centuries, when the opposing cultural spheres of Islam and Christendom (Europe) came into being, Japan emerged as a civilization rivaling China in East Asia following the defeat of the Kingdom of *Wa* (the Chinese name for ancient Japan). And during

the transition to the early modern period in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, Japan entered its own early modern age – the Edo period (1603-1867). From the same description “early modern” (“*kinsei*” in Japanese) and correspondence of these periods, it is apparent that parallel historical transitions occurred at both ends of the Eurasian Continent. Before this, there had been no interchange between Japan and Europe, but since exchange did take place from the early modern period onwards, their subsequent parallel development was not such a coincidence.

Early modern Europe was the central theme of all Fernand Braudel's work. In *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Braudel focuses on the reign of Philip II in the 16th century, while his *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible (Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Century)* also deals with the early modern era. It was in this period that capitalism arose in Europe and the policy of national seclusion was adopted in Japan.

Philip II and Toyotomi Hideyoshi

The societies of Japan and Europe moved in diametrically opposite directions in the early modern era. While Europe developed an outward-looking open economic system, Japan adopted an inward-looking closed economic system. This difference is closely connected to the intense relationships with the sea that both Western Europe and Japan experienced in the early modern period.

Philip II's victory in the Battle of Lepanto strengthened Europe's oceanic orientation. The Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), who died in the same year as Philip II (1527-1598), failed in his attempts to invade Korea in 1592 and 1597, reversing Japan's oceanic orientation and turning it in upon itself. In their experiences with the sea, Europe was the victor and Japan the loser. However, in spite of this clear difference, the relationship with the sea gave birth to a

Photo: Kodai-ji Temple



Photo: World Photo Service / ROMA: GALLERIA BARBERINI



Philip II (right) achieved victory in the Battle of Lepanto, while Toyotomi Hideyoshi (left) failed to invade Korea – in their experiences with the sea, Europe was the victor and Japan the loser

phenomenon common to both regions: sharing the same time and space, they experienced similar economic crises to which they found similar solutions. The time was the 16th century, the space was maritime Asia. The crisis was the outflow of the materials used for minting currency, and the solution was the development of the first production-oriented economic societies in human history. Both Western Europe and Japan thus underwent production revolutions and succeeded in escaping from their dependence on Asia. This requires further explanation.

The Escape from Dependence on Asia

Following the resurgence of commerce in Europe and the appearance of Japanese pirates in the seas surrounding Japan, all manner of goods flowed into Europe and Japan from maritime Asia in increasing quantities. Europe paid for these goods with gold and silver from the New World, while Japan paid for them with gold, silver and copper. Since there was great demand in both Europe and Japan for goods from maritime Asia, these imports continued over a long period during which gold, silver and copper flowed out of these regions into Asia. This situation gave

rise to economic crises in Europe and Japan. In the first half of the early modern period, mercantilist policies were adopted in Europe and measures were taken in Japan to restrict the reminting of coins and the outflow of gold, silver and copper. However, these were not radical countermeasures.

The final solution to this problem was to produce these imported goods domestically. As a result of production revolutions which took off around 1800, both Western Europe and Japan eliminated the need to import Asian products and achieved self-sufficiency. What was the historical significance of this? It gave them economic independence which enabled them to escape from dependence on Asia. Through these production revolutions at both ends of the Eurasian Continent, Europe achieved independence from maritime Islam (the Indian Ocean region dominated by the Arabs in their dhows) and Japan achieved independence from maritime China (the China Sea region dominated by the Chinese in their junks).

The Emergence of a Production-Based Society

Finally, I would like to briefly consider the transformation of society from

a theoretical viewpoint. The aggregate of the materials utilized by human beings in order to live in society may be termed the “product complex.” This product complex is the basis upon which human beings organize their lives, i.e. their culture. In other words, culture is the superstructure and the product complex is the substructure of society. The product complex imposes limitations on both material and spiritual life. When an unknown cultural element is continuously brought into an existing culture/product complex, a conflict occurs between the uses of imported and indigenous goods, resulting in cultural friction. When the use of new imported goods expands continuously, the existing culture/product complex changes from a state conducive to life to a yoke that constricts it. This is the starting point of social revolution. As the basis of the product complex changes, culture is inevitably transformed, be it gradually or rapidly.

External pressure is not confined to military power: economic power is just as strong a force. The goods and cultures that flowed into Japan and Europe from overseas resulted in massive trade deficits, putting them under severe economic pressure. The production revolutions in Japan and Europe occurred in response to this pressure, and by achieving domestic production and self-sufficiency, they both succeeded in developing production-based economies at the beginning of the 19th century. While Japan maintained its policy of national seclusion, Europe built up a Christian economic sphere spanning the Atlantic Ocean. We must not overlook this massive economic threat brought by the sea at the dawn of modern civilization. **JTI**

Continued in Part 5

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