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ヒトはいつ、どこでヒトになったのか？ 人類の500万年の長い旅路

河野 龍太郎

今週は国内出張のため、通常の Weekly Economic Report はお休みし、最近読んだものの中で、衝撃を受けた一冊をご紹介します。以下は、2024年7月6日号の週刊東洋経済への寄稿を修正・加筆したものです。

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『500万年のオデッセイ 人類の大拡散物語』ピーター・ベルウッド著、 河合信和訳 青土社

本書は、考古学的世界的権威が500万年にも及ぶ人類の長い旅路を綴ったものだ。

500万年前にヒト族はアフリカでチンパンジーやボノボと共通の祖先から分岐した。今もチンパンジーやボノボの生息地が当時と変わらない一方で、人類は地球上の全ての大陸に活動領域を広げている。ヒトが「移動」を止めないのは、二足歩行が可能になった時からの習性であることが実感される。

ヒト族誕生後の物語は大きく4つのフェーズに分かれる。第1幕はヒト族のアフリカからの最初の移動だ。この段階では脳はまだ小さく、道具も稚拙で、生息地も限られていた。

その後、250万~200万年前に最初のホモ属が出現し、活動領域をユーラシア大陸に広げ、第2幕が訪れる。新天地では大型哺乳類などの食料にも恵まれ、脳を巨大化させたホモ属は種類を増やしていく。

30万年前からの第3幕は、アフリカでは早期ホモ・サピエンス、ユーラシアではホモ・ネアンデルターレンシス（ネアンデルタール）やホモ・デニソヴァ（デニソワ人）に分化する。この3種は交雑が可能だったことが、我々のDNAから確認されている。ホモ・サピエンスの2度目の出アフリカにおいて、ネアンデルタール人やデニソワ人は暴力だけではなく、交雑を通じて、数の多いサピエンスに吸収されていき、4万年前に絶滅した可能性を指摘する。

驚くべきは、サピエンスがベーリング海峡を越えて、ユーラシアから米大陸に渡り、南米の南端まで居住地を広げたことだ。最初に米大陸に渡ったサピエンスが日本人の祖先だった可能性もあるというのは、何だか心躍る気がする。東南アジア

ア経由で海を渡り、オーストラリアだけでなく遠く太平洋やインド洋の島々にもサピエンスは領域を広げた。

第4幕は、1万2000年前に中東の肥沃な三日月地帯で始る。農耕革命によって新石器時代が訪れ、2巡目の世界大移動期が始まった。人類は農耕開始をきっかけに定住生活に移行したと考えられており、確かにそれは正しい。しかし、食料事情が改善し人口が急増、土地が痩せ細ると、人々は家畜や農作物の種子を携えて、新天地へと移動していったのである。

農耕技術を持つ人々は移動先の旧石器人を配下とし、支配層に就いた。それはインドのカースト上位層の遺伝子分析などからも確認できるという。これが、農耕革命がもたらした身分社会の始原ということか。多少豊かになることで人々は絡めとられ、身分社会に組み込まれていったのだ。いや、狩猟採集時代の方が自由だっただけでなく、十分な栄養を取っていたという見方もあるが、本書は文明の発展を重視する。

中東と同時期に、中国の遼河や黄河などの大河流域でも農耕革命が始まった。それが東アジアだけでなく太平洋やインド洋の島々、オーストラリアにも伝播する。5000年前にこれらの肥沃な土地で文明が生まれ国家が誕生するが、文字によって歴史を刻む有史時代は、500万年のうち、わずか0.1%ということだ。

従来は人骨や化石などの考古学的証拠が主流だったが、分子人類学の登場以降は、前述のように遺伝子も証拠として用いられる。さらに著者のピーター・ベルウッド氏は、言語の共通性から、農耕革命がどんな経路で世界に広がったかを分析している。

有史時代以降、アレクサンダー大王のインド遠征や、ローマ人の欧州征服、チンギスハンのユーラシア征服などが、農耕革命後に定着した世界の言語分布にほぼ影響しなかったというのは興味深い。歴史的な偉業ではあったが、結局、支配層が変わっただけで、人々の言語を変えるほどのインパクトは持たなかったのである。言語分布が再び大きく変わるのは、大航海時代に3度目の大移動が始まり、西欧が世界を植民地として支配するようになった時期だ。本書はコロンブスらの米大陸発見以前で終わる。

500万年に亘って移動を続けてきた人類。しかし、次の大移動をしようにも、増えすぎた人類が向かう場所は地球にはもはや残されていない。サピエンスの減少は避けられないようにも思われる。我々の限られた関心がサイバー空間に吸い寄せられるのなら、なおさらだろう。

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