



Extreme Confrontation between China and Australia: Implications for South Korea

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The conflict between China and Australia is serious to a great extent. It is beyond simple conflicts of interest but involves a pattern of sentimental confrontation. After a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Lijian Zhao, posted a photo of an Australian soldier mocking an Afghan child hugging a lamb on his Twitter, even the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, denounced China fiercely. The next question comes to the surface as relations between Australia and China, which had been on good terms in the past decades, have deteriorated rapidly recently. Is it challenging for countries with different ideologies, thoughts, and behaviors to get along well? The simple economic logic is that there is no reason to distinguish one's opponent, if it brings prosperity. Based on the logic, China and Australia enjoyed honeymoon period for a long time. However, recent bilateral relations signal that simple logic of economy is not everything.

When the huge wave of globalization swept the earth after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideology seemed to disappear as well. Through active economic and human exchanges, the globe seemed to be united. The above idea became more solid when China, a huge socialist market economy, joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. Such changes were also reflected in Sino-Australian relations. In 2000, the Chinese import market had accounted for only 5 percent of Australia's exports but after two decades in 2020, the portion has been increased to 40 percent. This is the power of globalization, which has swallowed up all non-economic factors.

However, the bilateral relations started to crack as China pursues an excessive expansionist strategy after becoming more powerful. The revival of Sinocentrism, symbolizing expansion and domination, resulted in China treating its neighbors as a subordinate state. Neighboring countries with a large economic dependence on the

Chinese economy were bound to be in trouble. Countries that go against China's Sinocentrism have faced punishment. Examples include a ban on exports of rare earths to Japan, a ban on imports of Norwegian salmon and a ban on tourism to South Korea. The maritime territorial claim to the South China Sea, which threatens the entire Southeast Asian countries, showed the true face of China after gaining its power via economic prosperity.

Australia has touched a raw nerve of China. Earlier this year when the COVID-19 was in full swing, the Australian government announced it needs an investigation of the origins of coronavirus. This was followed by the Australian government's criticism on the Chinese government in its human rights violations in Hong Kong and Uyghur. Huawei's 5G business in Australia, which is the pride of China, has also been put on hold. When the situation turned out this way, China banned imports of Australian wine and imposed an additional 80 percent tariff on barley imports. Other major Australian exports to China were also constrained. However, the Australian government is nowhere near to bend to China as Australian Prime Minister Morrison said, "Australia will not compromise sovereignty and democracy (ideologies and values) because of money (economy)."

Did Australia really provoke China because it was unaware of China's tendency to be obsessed with Sinocentrism? China's responsibility for the COVID-19, negative impact of Hong Kong's democracy movement on mainland China, and Uyghur's movement harboring separatism, are the most painful parts of China. It is logically unconvincing that Australia did not know such a fact. In any case, Australia has dealt a direct blow to these issues. Then, what was Australia's intent?

Australia is also a key Western Pacific ally of the United States along with South Korea. Therefore, Australia also adhered to foreign policy strategy named "Anmigŷŏngjung (安美經中)," a term coined by South Korea that indicates South Korea's foreign relations with the U.S. on security issues and with China on economic issues. As a result, it is true that Australia gained a lot of wealth by selling goods to China, but China's growing influence over Australia was also unavoidable. Real estate prices soared due to large-scale Chinese investment. In the end, Australians had to live in their Chinese owners' houses. With the influx of many Chinese students, Chinese and socialist ideas and actions have spread throughout Australia. Social corruption, a characteristic of China, was also imported to Australia. The corruption of Australian politicians, which was rarely found in the past, has become serious.

On top of that, as the U.S. offensive against China became visible after the Trump administration, the U.S. called for allies to join the move. Does money really outpace values and ideologies? It was Australia's perception that if values and ideologies are distorted, the meaning of simple money-making also decreases. The alliance with the U.S. was more than just military cooperation, taking on the nature of a value alliance.

It is the conclusion of the Australian people and the government that the close ties between human rights states cannot be exchanged for other values.

Democratic capitalism countries around the world will probably take the path that Australia pioneered. This is because their ideas are not much different from those of Australia. To this end, efforts to cushion the impact are becoming visible, which is the decoupling policy with China that the U.S. is actively promoting. For other countries, it can also be understood as a strategy to lower the economic dependence on China. In 2010, Japan and China experienced territorial disputes over the Senkaku (Chinese name Diaoyu Dao) islands. At that time, a ban was imposed on the export of rare earth products to Japan, which were exclusively produced by China. As a result of Japan's aggressive push to import rare earths from other countries, including Australia, and by holding onto its stockpiles, there was little to no damage to Japan. China's direct production of rare earths worldwide, which had stood at 97 percent in 2010, has fallen to 70 percent today. Since then, no news has been heard that Japan has suffered on loss by China. Australia and South Korea are in a similar situation; therefore, no detailed explanations would be required about how they should act. ♣

※ *Translator's note: This is an unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

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