

On the Causes of the Rise of Modern Western Civilization

-- Reflections on the Renaissance Movement

Cong Sha

North China University of Water Resources and Electric Power, Zhengzhou, Henan 450046, China

Abstract. Thought is the precursor of action, and awareness is the driving force of action. From the exploration of China's path from artifacts - institutions - ideas to salvation at the beginning of the last century, it is clear that the emancipation and innovation of ideas are the root of the rise of great powers and the key to political, economic, scientific and technological development. In the midst of the unprecedented changes of the past century, the rivalry and games between the great powers have never ceased. Rethinking the reasons for the rise of Western civilisation in the modern era is undoubtedly of great practical and historical significance in exploring the path of China's peaceful rise. Based on this, this article focuses on the Renaissance movement from the mid-14th century to the 16th century. Through the stark contrast between the dark medieval period and the bright Renaissance, it draws out the important influence of the latter's intellectual liberation and innovation on the rise of modern Western civilisation in the political, economic, cultural, technological and other aspects.

Keywords: Renaissance; Middle Ages; Western Civilization; Rise of the Great Powers.

1. The Darkness of the Middle Ages

Among the many factors that contributed to the Renaissance, the opening of new routes broke the previous isolation of continents, increased material and economic contacts, and led to the 'rediscovery of the world', which began to unite the world as a whole and gradually move towards integration. The emergence of capitalism also made it possible for this intellectual movement to take off. The prosperity of the urban economy and the emergence of a civic class led to a greater belief in the value and power of the individual by wealthy merchants, workshop owners and bankers who were successful in their careers and devoted themselves with great enthusiasm and enthusiasm to the development of workshops, crafts and the commodity economy. While these provided the conditions for the Renaissance to emerge, it seems to me that the key to facilitating these necessary conditions from emergence to maturity to positive effect was the emancipation and renewal of ideas, and that when the barriers to people's thinking were removed, people's actions became more determined, more directed and more powerful, a whole new world compared to the darkness of the Middle Ages.

When we think of the Middle Ages, the word 'darkness' comes to mind, and the reason why people associate it with that word is that it was a time when Christianity was completely dominant, when almost all rulers and ruled were Christians, when the Christian faith was the prevailing worldview, when every aspect of people's lives was oppressed by Christian ideas and confinement. The Middle Ages at that time merged all other forms of ideology - philosophy, politics, jurisprudence - into theology, making them subjects within theology. Analysed in terms of the thought of the patristic Augustine, his theology was the pinnacle of Christian theory in the patristic era. Although Augustine's system of thought and theory incorporated certain rational and scientific elements of Greek philosophy, saying that "if we did not have a rational soul, we could not even believe", his starting and ending points were still entirely at the service of Christian theology, as seen in his thought: "God made his the only Son of God, the sinless Jesus, to atone for the sins of sinful mankind, is the most important expression of God's grace and the most important expression of God's love for mankind", he always stood in defence of ecumenical authority and This is why, in the Middle Ages, when Christianity was absolutely dominant, Augustine's thought permeated all aspects of Western thought, ideas and culture. Under the tone of this irrational, non-scientific thought that valued the afterlife and despised the present world, it was difficult for people to break free from the bondage of thought and

seriously consider the value and dignity of man himself, thus exploring a humanist path of development in the darkness of the Middle Ages.

2. The Light of the Renaissance

2.1 "The Rediscovery of Man" - Promoting Reason and Opposing Divinity

The "rediscovery of man" was the core of this intellectual liberation movement of the Renaissance, which focused on the promotion of reason and the rejection of divinity. The mainstream of thought during this period focused its research on man as an entity, looking at social reality from the abstract perspective of human nature, pulling people back from the theologically fabricated world of illusion to the real world in which they now live, and emphasising the value orientation and methods of behaviour brought to them by scientific reason. Machiavelli, for example, in his study of political issues, warned people to distinguish strictly between what is actually the case and what they imagine, and to make a distinction between "what actually is" and "what ought to be", and he completely broke away from the metaphysics of ancient teleology and the theological worldview of the Middle Ages. He completely broke away from the metaphysical and medieval theological worldviews of ancient purposefulness and left behind Christianity as a thought-controlling entity and looked at political phenomena from a completely secular, rational and human point of view. This ideological tone of promoting rationality and opposing divinity led people to look at the world anew, to re-examine themselves, to live their inner world from a scientific and rational perspective, and to free their souls from the shackles of the religious theocracy of the past.

2.2 "The Rediscovery of Man" - Advocating Present Happiness and Opposing Asceticism

The promotion of present happiness and the rejection of asceticism was another important expression of the Renaissance's 'rediscovery of man'. It is a moral principle of extreme abstinence from personal needs in order to attain a moral or religious ideal, based on the idea that physical desire (especially sexual desire) is the root of sin. In my view, the promotion of present happiness and the rejection of asceticism are important ways of respecting and realising the needs of the human being himself, the fulfilment of whose legitimate desires are necessary not only for the development of the individual but also for the development of society. If we go to the extreme of abstaining from personal desires, promote religious domination under the guise of divine right, confuse the people with theology, and restrict their thinking with asceticism, we will instead cause individuals to lose their desires, their vision of good things and their passion for their future life, and then social development will lose the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of the human subject, and thus the impetus for social development.

2.3 "The Rediscovery of Man" - Advocating Freedom of Individuality and Opposing Feudal Shackles

Advocating individual freedom and opposing feudal shackles was also an important manifestation of the "rediscovery of man" during the Renaissance. The Renaissance movement was a typical modern anti-church and anti-feudal movement. The thinkers of the Renaissance not only fought against the oppression of theocracy and religion, but also fiercely attacked the feudal yoke of hierarchy. In the dark Middle Ages, the state was entirely dependent on the majesty of religion, and both the ruler and the ruled were faithful followers of the Christian faith. It was inevitable that the ruler would also be subject to the arrangements of the pope and govern according to his wishes, and the ruler had to be crowned by the pope before he could do so, otherwise he would be considered unworthy of the papal and divine approval. In order to preserve the feudal hierarchy, the medieval scribal philosopher Thomas Aquinas concocted the 'cosmic order theory' and gave it a veneer of sanctity. Thomas believed that the entire cosmic order was arranged by God in a hierarchy, with the lowest level being the inanimate world, followed by the vegetable world, and then the animal world. The lowest level is the inanimate world, above it the vegetable world, above it the animal world, and

up the hierarchical ladder to man, the saints, the angels, and finally God, the supreme being. Thomas points out that there is a hierarchy among men according to their differences in wisdom, with the brilliant ruling over men and the foolish ruling over them. It would be a sin for anyone to try to change God's arrangement and raise the hierarchy. This shackle of hierarchy ignores the individuality and uniqueness of people, curbs their individual freedom and solidifies the flow of classes. It is more important to respect people's freedom of individuality, abandon the hierarchical feudal system, give full play to their unique strengths, encourage people to innovate and create according to their own bold ideas, and let all sources of social wealth creation flow fully.

2.4 "The Rediscovery of Man" - Great Men of Thought Make Great Times

The Renaissance was a period of "rediscovery of man", a time when the ideas of thinkers collided and sparked off. During this period, great thinkers played an active role in propagating and influencing the Renaissance, and it can be said that without the impetus of great thinkers, there would have been no Age of Light. A number of great minds, such as the "Three Greats of Literature" - Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio - and the "Three Greats of Art" - Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Gustavo Boccaccio - played an active role in the propaganda of this period. - Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael; the humanist philosophers Valla, Pico, Pamponazzi, Bruno, Cusa-Nicola, Machiavelli and Campanella. They took the lead in philosophical change, raising the banner of "secular literature" and "present art" and shouting the slogan of humanism, putting "man" at the centre and opposing the "God"-centric approach. "They believed that the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment was the nature and right of human beings and the motivation for social development. They confronted medieval asceticism with arguments about earthly needs and lust, and the free development of the individual against feudal autocracy and ecclesiastical dictatorship. All these ideas powerfully combated feudal consciousness, shook up theological domination, freed people's minds from feudal theology, and opened up a wide range of prospects for the development of man's own intellectual and creative talents. It can be said that this huge group of intellectual giants set in motion a great intellectual movement and deeply laid the foundations for the rise of modern Western civilisation.

3. The Impact of the Renaissance Movement on the Rise of Modern Western Civilization

3.1 The Impact of the Renaissance Movement on Modern European Politics

Although the Renaissance movement was an ideological liberation movement, in a broad sense, its far-reaching influence was much more than that. The shadow of the Renaissance movement can be seen in the rise of modern Western civilization. Firstly, the Renaissance used humanism as an ideological weapon, directed its criticism at feudal autocracy and religious theology, promoted the development of the emerging bourgeoisie, provided strong theoretical support and ideological preparation for the bourgeoisie to overthrow feudal autocracy, and laid a deep foundation for the widespread establishment of the capitalist system in mainland Europe. The emerging bourgeoisie was not able to gain power overnight. At the beginning of its ascension to the stage of history, it was still too weak to make demands for the seizure of power, so they took the lead in the anti-feudal front in the field of ideas. On the basis of inheriting and borrowing from ancient Greek and Roman culture, they violently attacked the theological teachings of Catholicism and the dominance of the Church and feudal privileges. The Renaissance, however, was the manifesto of the emerging bourgeoisie against feudalism and theocracy, and helped the emerging bourgeoisie to take its place in the field of popular thought, scattering the seeds of the budding capitalist system across the modern European continent. At the same time, the important theories of some Renaissance thinkers, such as Machiavelli and Bodin's explanation of the theory of the state and Grotius's in-depth study of the theory of state sovereignty, also accumulated experience for reference in the development of modern European

politics, so that modern European states could follow and take fewer detours in establishing power, maintaining it and moving towards greatness.

3.2 The Impact of the Renaissance Movement on the Economy of Modern Europe

Since ancient times, the game between the great powers has always been a contest of economic strength, with the economic foundation determining the superstructure, but in economic development, the strong influence of ideas on the economy is an indispensable factor in achieving economic take-off. While the great role of the Renaissance movement in terms of ideas is obvious, it also played a not insignificant role in promoting the economic development of modern Europe. The Renaissance advocated reason and opposed divinity; freedom of individuality and the shackles of feudal hierarchy; personal happiness in the present world and the asceticism of the Church, seeing reason, personal freedom and the pursuit of individual happiness as the universal and eternal nature of mankind. This ideology was put forward to meet the requirements of the capitalist relations of production at the time, so that the people, under the influence of this ideology, continued to increase the primitive accumulation of capitalism through their own constant efforts to pursue wealth, expand reproduction and expand overseas markets.

The emancipation of human thought by the Renaissance movement overturned the original relations of production, changed the mode of production and business of man as an economic subject, created a social atmosphere that revered commerce, and made the amount of wealth a symbol and an important expression of one's value and dignity. The indirect influence of Renaissance thought on the emerging bourgeoisie and capitalist economy enabled modern European countries to walk more solidly and firmly in their exploration of the capitalist path.

3.3 The Impact of the Renaissance on Modern European Culture

The emancipation of the mind was fundamental, the key to freeing people from the shackles of religious and religious power, and the sublimation of their souls to be baptized and awakened. During this intellectual and cultural movement, a large number of people woke up from their obscurantist superstitions and began to think about the proposition of the times: man himself. The Italian painter Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna of the Flowers*, for example, although also using a religious subject, completely excludes the air of religious painting and is full of a strong human touch. The *Madonna* here is no longer the cold, indifferent face of the traditional religious painting, but a motherly figure full of maternal light and truth and goodness. The impact of the Renaissance in the cultural sphere was not only in painting, but also in literature, art, sculpture, astronomy, mathematics, geography and architecture. The Renaissance was not so much a rebirth of classical culture as the beginning of modern culture, not so much a 'revival' as an 'innovation'. The Renaissance marked a great turning point in the history of human civilisation, and was a response to a new culture, a new politics and a new economy.

This ideological and cultural liberation movement led to an unprecedented flourishing of literature and art, nurtured modern bourgeois culture, cleared the way for the spread of modern ideas and academic development, and opened up a new chapter in world civilisation.

3.4 The Impact of the Renaissance Movement on Modern European Science and Technology

The Renaissance movement advocated scientific rationality and opposed theological dogma, creating a favourable scientific research environment for the development of modern science and technology, enabling people to act in a practical and respectful manner in their infinite exploration of nature, and to oppose the spiritual control of the "supernatural" power of theology. The scientists of the Renaissance were at the forefront of advanced thinking and the spirit of the times. While focusing on re-examining, discovering and promoting classical literature and art, they also bravely challenged ancient authorities and Christian theology in a spirit of criticism and truth-seeking, observing, experimenting and investigating nature and its laws of motion as they were, making major breakthroughs in science and technology and inaugurating the modern scientific and technological

revolution. The prologue. Thus, Engels once said, "After the dark night of the Middle Ages, science reemerged at once with unexpected force and grew with miraculous speed." Especially in the middle and later stages of the Renaissance, Europe, with Italy at its centre, inherited the three great inventions of ancient China and the best classical cultural achievements of ancient Greece and Rome that had been preserved through the Arab world, so that science and technology emerged from the "sacred halls" of Christianity and became an important pillar of people's spiritual and material life. This scientific spirit of respect for facts, reason, experimentation and criticism created a liberal environment for the innovative development of science and technology in modern Europe, which was transformed into a productive force in the fastest way possible and contributed to the rapid take-off of the European capitalist economy.

In summary, the Renaissance, a movement of intellectual liberation, profoundly influenced every aspect of the rise of modern Western civilisation with its powerful countervailing force. The concrete elaboration of politics, economics, culture, science and technology testifies to the guiding significance and important value of intellectual liberation and intellectual innovation for a country and even an era. At a time of great change unprecedented in a century.

References

- [1] Yue Wendian. The Experience of the Rise of Western Powers in Modern Times and China's Path Choice [J]. Journal of Party and Government Cadres, 2012(09):25-28.
- [2] Liu Yuexia, Gu Xiaolong. There is a Giant of Thought before the Country is Rich and Strong --On the Innovation of Thought and the Rise of Western Countries in ModernTimes[J].Journalof Hebei Youth Management Cadre College,2003(01):22-24.
- [3] Zhang Shengjian. Burckhardt's Views on the Renaissance and the Historical Background of Its Creation[J]. Journal of Shanxi University Normal College (General Edition),1993(02):7-12.