

Brief Analysis of the Medieval and Modern European Cultures

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Abstract

Irrationality of the medieval culture in the Dark Ages gave birth to the bright modern European culture and the modern European culture had more rational, scientific, secular and individualist characteristics. The progress in the culture meanwhile promoted the progresses in other aspects of politics, economy and social life, etc.

Keywords: Middle Ages, Christianity, Promote

In the history of the European civilization, modern European civilization is undoubtedly one of the most magnificent stages. If we want to uncover the veil of modern culture, it might be well to compare the modern European culture and the medieval European culture. And we will easily find that they are essentially the collision of rational cognition and irrational cognition.

1. The medieval culture with irrational cognition

"Irrationalism" means that the medieval Europe was controlled by the backward and unplanned cultural tradition, resulting in unclear boundaries between man and god, reality and otherworldliness. Examining the medieval culture, we may find that it emphasized too much the religious orison, heroism, romanticism and scholastic philosophy. All these show that the medieval European culture is lack of rational spirit.

1.1 Religion was indispensable to human life and Christianity was undoubtedly in a dominant place in the Middle Ages.

The religion of Christianity has two sources. One is that the ancient Greek philosophical heritage, especially the new Platonism and Stoicism, is its ideological root. The other is the Holy Bible, including the Old and New Testaments, and its theoretical interpretation. The core of Christianity is the belief in the spirit of God, the Triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the creators of any world, they produce tremendous impacts on nature, the world and human beings. God's will and activities were recorded in the Holy Bible, the Christian classic. Its sovereignty makes it the important basis of Christianity and the tool for the rulers to fool the people as well. The reverence to god and the divine rights was preached, as controls the human life, restricts the comprehensive development of human beings and hinders the full growth of culture.

1.2 Irrationalism in the medieval culture is mainly about the heroism and romanticism.

In the Dark Ages, in search of spiritual sustenance and in memory of the heroes, some people left us an indelible cultural heritage. *Song of the Cid* of Spain shows us the heroic deeds of a Spanish national hero in fighting against the Arabian aggression. All the epics took heroism as the theme to show the very memory and praise for heroes. *Trojan Stories*, *The Story of Alexander* and other romantic works express the dislike for the secular world and the pursuit and longing for an ideal kingdom.

1.3 The rise and development of scholastic philosophy is another important expression of irrational cognition in the Middle Ages.

Scholastic philosophy originally means "thoughts in colleges or universities" or "intellectual learning". It takes theology as the basis and destination and induces people to worship the Church authority and give in to the feudal rule. Representatives of this period are Peter Abelard in France and Thomas Aquinas in Italy.

2. Rational modern European culture

Modern European culture is like a bright pearl, and its shiny color is mainly from its rationality. That is to say, people had been liberated from the conception of emphasizing the future life while despising the worldly life of the Middle Ages. Renaissance and religious reformation became the inchoation of the rational cognition, which made the European culture develop in a scientific, rational, utilitarian and irectic way.

2.1 *The religious reformation laid a good foundation for the development of European civilization.*

When the old religion could not meet the pious wish of the people, things began to become complicated. On October 31 of the year of 1517, the Halloween, Martin Luther posted the Ninety-five Theses in the Church of Karst in Wittenberg. Its main content was to expose, denounce the shameless act of selling indulgences, and call on open debate. The whole European community was in uproar. Then he proposed that man could communicate with the God directly and openly denied the papal authority and his rule in Germany. Martin Lutheran theology revised the theology of the Roman Catholic in a revolutionary way. He sensitively and scholarly grasped the pulse of the Middle Ages theology and made a very good start for the modern religious reformation sweeping the whole Europe.

2.2 *The Renaissance is of epoch-making significance in modern European cultural history.*

It gradually makes man return to the right place, leading to the liberation of humanity. That is to say, man was freed from the shackles of god and began to understand the world from the angle of world itself. Humanism was the guiding ideology in the Renaissance. It advocated taking "people" as the center and opposed the world view of the Christians' "god" as the center. It called for "human rights" instead of the "divine rights", encouraged people to pursue fame and wealth, and criticized the ascetic view of religion. Humanists advocated objectivism and believed that it was man not God that was the creator of fate. Man could objectively study nature and understand nature. Thus the scientific doctrine was spread gradually in a variety of inventions and ideas of medieval criticism against religion. More and more attention was paid to human dignity, and human desires were also accepted.

The development of scientism made people know that objective existence is the foundation of human life. People began to understand themselves and enjoy their life. The satisfaction of material life provided realistic basis for the development of literature, science, thoughts, arts and other areas. These phenomena were first reflected in painting and literary creation.

When the concept of human desires was gradually accepted by people, human dignity got more praised by humanist philosophers. In *Defending Epicurus*, Xmas Remonti refuted the dualism that man's body and spirit were in contradiction. He believed that man's real happiness consisted of two aspects: one was the enjoyment of life in reality; the other was the enjoyment of future life. Furthermore, "the former is the ladder leading to the latter." Geanauzo Maniati in *On human dignity and excellence*, radically put forward that the main dignity of people was in varieties of behavior with "hands and wisdom". He believed in creative activities, ability was the "only, real, and realistic" task or mission of human beings.

Modern Reformation in Europe officially established the human and divine theories. Man's world and the divine world were believed not to be in the same level. Secular world and heaven were clearly divided and people could begin to live according to their own wishes. In the Renaissance, the humanists raised the status of man to a new height, and began to realize that man could know himself and the world. Man was not a part of god, as is of a strong color of rationality. The progress lies in the distance away from the medieval religious tradition, cultural rules and scholasticism. Its innovative significance lies in that man's morality is really reflected in the secular life. Man achieved progresses in ideological, cultural, and political fields.

In summary, it can be seen that there is an inevitable trend of historical development from irrational culture in medieval times to the modern rational culture of Europe. It can not be denied that the irrationality of medieval culture in the Dark Ages gave birth to the bright modern European culture. And the modern European culture bears more rational, scientific, secular and individualist characteristics. With the development of culture, all these have promoted the political, economic and social progresses in modern Europe.

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