

# *The Causes and Influences of the Renaissance in the 14th and 16th Centuries*

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**Abstract:** The Renaissance from the 14th to the 16th century is a cultural movement of great historical significance. Its causes are complex and diverse, including the emergence of capitalist sprouts in places such as Italy in the late Middle Ages, which brought economic development and the rise of the emerging bourgeoisie. They were eager to get rid of the shackles of feudal theology. The rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman cultures provided people with rich ideological resources and artistic models. The rise of cities and the growth of the citizen class have higher demands for culture and art. The Renaissance had a profound impact. In terms of ideology, humanist thought was widely spread, emphasizing the value and dignity of people and breaking the confinement of people's thoughts by theology. In the field of literature and art, many outstanding works and artists emerged, promoting the innovation and development of art forms such as literature, painting, and sculpture. In terms of education, it promoted the popularization of education and the development of disciplines and cultivated a large number of talents. In the field of science and technology, it inspired people's exploration of nature and laid the foundation for the rise of modern science. In short, the Renaissance had an indelible impact on the historical development process of Europe and even the world.

## 1. Introduction

The Renaissance (Renaissance) was a profound change in the history of Europe. It rose from the Italian city in the 14th century to the whole of Europe in the 16th century. Its influence ran through many fields such as culture, thought, science, religion and on. The Renaissance marked the transition from the medieval feudal society to the modern society, and was regarded as an important turning point in the development of human history. This paper will discuss in detail the causes of the Renaissance and its influence on the development of Europe and the world history, in order to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of this cultural Renaissance movement<sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2. The cause of the Renaissance

### 2.1. Changes in the medieval social structure

In the late Middle Ages, European society experienced profound economic and social changes and laid a solid foundation for the rise of the Renaissance. During this period, the feudal system was gradually disintegrated due to multiple internal and external factors. Internally, the Lord's economic model gradually lost its vitality, and the decrease of land income led to the Lord's economic control over the peasants; externally, the plague of the Black Death and the failure of the Crusade greatly weakened the authority of the aristocracy<sup>[1]</sup>. In this context, the civic class gradually rises and becomes an emerging force to promote social development. This class was mainly concentrated in the emerging cities, and with the prosperity of handicraft industry, trade and finance, the civic class accumulated great wealth and longed to promote its social status through cultural education and artistic sponsorship. Urbanization process has also been significantly accelerated at this stage. Venice, Florence, Milan and other places in Italy became the economic centers of the late Middle Ages due to their unique geographical location and trade advantages. The connectivity of trans-Mediterranean trade and the Silk Road brought a steady stream of wealth to these cities, which not only stimulated the development of commercial activities, but also formed a market-oriented social structure with a market economy. The prosperity of the city has created favorable conditions for the revival of culture<sup>[2]</sup>. While pursuing economic interests, the civic class also showed a strong desire for culture and knowledge. This need for knowledge prompted the rediscovery and dissemination of classical literature and provided financial and spiritual support for artistic creation during the Renaissance. In addition, the educational needs and cultural identity of the emerging bourgeoisie also became an important driving force for the Renaissance. They want to break through the traditional class restrictions through the mastery of knowledge and culture, and to demonstrate their social status and values by funding artists, scholars, and scientists. This passion for and investment in culture has directly led to a number of famous Renaissance figures and art works. For example, the Medici family was a typical example of the bourgeoisie during this period, and their support made Florence the cradle of the Renaissance. Therefore, with the adjustment of the economic structure and the rise of the civic class in the late Middle Ages, the European society gradually formed a cultural soil suitable for the development of the Renaissance, which provided an important social foundation for this glorious historical period<sup>[3]</sup>.

### 2.2. The revival of classical culture

As a cultural revival movement, one of the direct driving sources of the Renaissance is the rediscovery and widespread spread of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Classical culture did not completely disappear in medieval Western Europe, but it was mostly shelved or existed in the form of a religious framework. However, with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, a large number of Byzantine scholars carried classical literature and philosophical works into Western Europe, and these precious intellectual heritage rekindled the interest in classical civilization. These scholars not only brought Greek and Latin texts, such as the works of Homer, Plato, Aristotle and others, but also introduced Hellenized philosophy and scientific methods to Western Europe, laying a deep ideological foundation for the Renaissance. Driven by these classical documents, Western European scholars and artists began to re-examine the traditional knowledge system and aesthetic ideas<sup>[4]</sup>. Their exploration of classical culture is not limited to philosophy and literature, but also extends to many fields such as architecture, sculpture and painting. For example, the architectural style of the Renaissance was deeply influenced by ancient Roman architecture, and its emphasis on the beauty of symmetry, proportion and harmony became an important principle of architectural design during

this period. In addition, artists draw inspiration from ancient Greek sculpture, take the natural beauty of the human body as the core of their expression, and pursue the perfect reproduction of reality through accurate anatomical knowledge, and artistic giants like Michelangelo emerge. At the same time, the revival of classical culture also led to the birth of humanism. This thought movement centered human values and dignity, emphasizing the importance of individual potential and reason. The brilliance of human nature and secular wisdom in classical literature are highly compatible with the trend of humanism, providing theoretical support for the rise of humanism. For example, Petrarch, who devoted to collecting and organizing classical literary works, advocated improving personal cultivation and social morality by learning from the wisdom of the ancients. Such efforts directly promoted the vigorous development of the academic activities during the Renaissance period, and the core values of the ancient Greek and Roman culture were also further developed. Therefore, the rediscovery of classical culture is not only the knowledge source of the Renaissance, but also an important driving force for the ideological and cultural transformation of western European society. Through the inheritance and innovation of the ancient Greek and Roman culture, the people in the Renaissance period created a new cultural and artistic brilliance on the basis of inheriting the tradition, making this period become an important bridge connecting the classical civilization and the modern society<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **3. The core feature of the Renaissance**

#### **3.1. The Revival of the art field**

The art of the Renaissance period has reached an unprecedented height in the expression of real life and the pursuit of beauty. Its core characteristics are the extensive use of realism, perspective and light and shadow skills. These innovations not only change the expression mode of art, but also reflect the profound thinking on the value of human beings themselves. Instead of abandoning the rigid forms and single religious themes of medieval religious art, the artists focus on human emotions, life, and the natural world. Through the observation of nature and the in-depth study of the human body structure, they try to show the authenticity of reality and the complexity of human nature. This spirit of realism makes the art works closer to life, and contains the lofty praise of human beings themselves. Da Vinci (Leonardo da Vinci) was an outstanding representative of realism in this period. He perfectly combined scientific observation and artistic creation and created many ancient works<sup>[6]</sup>. For example, Mona Lisa shows the profound beauty of the characters with its exquisite brush strokes and subtle light and shadow processing, and has become a model of humanized art during the Renaissance.

#### **3.2. Scientific breakthrough and methodological change**

The scientific revolution during the Renaissance marked a great leap in human beings's understanding of the natural world, and its core was to replace the medieval knowledge system based on religious authority with reason and experience. The humanistic thought of the Renaissance liberated the spirit of scientific exploration and led scientists to question the traditional authority, especially the geocentric universe represented by Aristotle and Ptolemaic theories. In his book on The Movement of the first time, Nicolaus Copernicus argued that the sun, rather than the earth, is the center of the universe. This theory not only challenged Ptolemy's model of the geocentric theory, but also shook the teaching foundation of the medieval church on the special status of mankind, and became the beginning of the scientific revolution. On the basis of Copernicus, Galileo (Galileo Galilei) further verified the rationality of heliocentra through observations and experiments<sup>[7]</sup>. He used telescopes to observe celestial objects and discovered the four large moons of Jupiter, the

profit and loss changes of Venus, and the irregular topography of the lunar surface. These evidence directly refuted the theoretical hypothesis of geocentrism and provided strong empirical support for the heliocentric theory<sup>[6]</sup>.

## **4. The influence of the Renaissance**

### **4.1. Persiasting influence on art and culture**

The Renaissance opened the golden age of European art, and its profound influence not only defined the foundation of Western art, but also laid the core concept of innovation for the later artistic styles. During this period, artists created a large number of works with shock and eternal value through in-depth observation of real life and reference from classical culture. They have rediscovered the artistic tradition of ancient Greece and Rome, emphasizing the expression of nature and human nature, and giving the art more reason and emotion. This innovation is not only limited to the technical level, but also reflected in the artist's new understanding of aesthetics, space and narrative, which provides rich material and inspiration for the later development of artistic style. In terms of painting, the Renaissance introduced linear perspective and the use of light and shadow, giving the paintings a more realistic sense of space and hierarchy. For example, Raphael's Academy of Athens not only builds a harmonious space through precise perspective, but also shows the exchange of ideas through vivid composition. This painting technique that emphasizes space and realism was further developed by later Baroque artists, whose Baroque style showed strong emotional tension with dramatic light and shadow contrast and dynamic composition. Rococo art, on the other hand, absorbed the Renaissance's attention to beauty and detail, and developed a more gorgeous and decorative style, with elegance as its core features and pleasure. In the field of sculpture, Renaissance artists revived the study of human anatomy, demonstrating the natural beauty and emotion of the human body through the precise depiction of muscles and movements. For example, Michelangelo's David is not only the pinnacle of realistic sculpture, but also symbolizes the combination of human power and wisdom. Baroque sculptures focus more on movement and drama, for example, Benini's The Ecstasy of Saint de Reza shows religious experience through dynamic body language and dramatic light and shadow effects. In architecture, the Renaissance innovation is reflected in the revival and recreation of classical architectural elements<sup>[7]</sup>. For example, the dome of the Cathedral of Florence designed by Brunelleschi not only shows the mastery of ancient Roman architectural techniques, but also creates a new architectural beauty through the use of mathematics and proportions. The pursuit of symmetry, order and harmony profoundly influenced the design style of Baroque and Rococo architecture. Baroque architecture has developed its magnificent and dynamic characteristics on the basis of the Renaissance, while Rococo architecture has further pursued the complexity and elegance of the interior decoration.

### **4.2. Promote the arrival of the scientific revolution**

The scientific development during the Renaissance not only nurtured the bud of modern science, but also laid the ideological and methodological foundation for the scientific revolution in the 17th century. In this period, scientists began to abandon the authority-centered thinking of medieval Confucian aesthetic philosophy and emphasize the importance of reason, observation and experiment, opening a prelude to scientific revolution with the law of nature as the core. The humanistic thought of the Renaissance emphasized the wisdom and potential of man, and provided scientists with the confidence to challenge the tradition, and the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman scientific works and the popularization of printing made scientific knowledge spread and

accumulate, forming a fertile soil for scientific development. The experimental spirit is the core feature of the scientific development in this period. Through rigorous experiments and direct observation, scientists shift the study of natural laws from theoretical deduction to evidence-based empirical analysis. For example, Galileo verified the law of object acceleration through oblique plane experiments, which laid the foundation for the development of classical mechanics. He emphasized the description of natural phenomena through mathematical language, a method that was widely adopted in the later scientific revolution and became one of the hallmarks of modern science. In addition, scientists' research on natural phenomena is not only limited to interpretation, but also tries to predict and control nature, and this practical orientation provides ideas for the rise of modern engineering disciplines. The thirst for knowledge during the Renaissance was also reflected in a reunderstanding of the cosmology. Copernicus overthrew the medieval cosmic system with the geocentric theory as the core, and this subversive theory marked a major breakthrough in human epistemology. And Kepler's mathematical description of the law of planetary motion further deepens his understanding of the cosmic order. Through these studies, scientists have not only challenged the traditional religious teachings, but also laid the ideological framework of modern science based on natural laws. The scientific development of this period has also promoted the rise of interdisciplinary communication. For example, the combination of art and science has led to new breakthroughs in anatomy and engineering, with Da Vinci's anatomical research and mechanical design are the most typical examples. He combined the observation power of art with the experimental spirit of science, which not only improved the cognitive level in the field of medicine and machinery, but also created a precedent for science and art to inspire each other.

## 5. Conclusion

As an important cultural movement in European history, the Renaissance is a key node in the transition of Europe from the Middle Ages to the modern society. It not only provides an opportunity for the arts, science and thought, to flourish, but also profoundly changes the social structure and the world pattern of Europe. The humanism thought advocated by the Renaissance is still one of the core values of modern society. Through the in-depth discussion of its causes and influences, we can more clearly understand the profound significance of the Renaissance to the development of human civilization.

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