

The Historical Transformation of Europe from the 16th to the 20th Century

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Abstract. Since the beginning of the Great Age of Navigation in the 16th century, Europe has greatly promoted the course of history. As Columbus discovered the New World, new agricultural products made Europe more able to expand its empire. For example, potatoes, which were easy to grow, easy to preserve, and easy to carry, allowed European armies to expand more widely. The opening of new shipping routes increased the cultural exchanges in the world and also opened the prelude to vigorous geographical discovery. Since the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the world has been completely changed, and civilizations that have not kept up with The Times have been unfortunately enslaved. While Europe is changing the world, it is also changing itself. A series of revolutions since the 18th century have reshaped European politics and society and become universal values for modern states. This historical evolution also fostered the development of capitalism and modern economic systems, which further influenced global trade patterns. At the same time, the spread of European ideologies played a crucial role in shaping international relations and geopolitical structures.

Keywords: The Age of Navigation, French Revolution, Imperialism, Colonial Empire, Great War.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the process of European history from the 17th century to the 20th century, which is of great significance to the study of the culture and thinking of European nations. This study will be carried out in detail from the aspects of background, process and influence, and the literature analysis method is used to search and read relevant materials and documents. The advantage of this method is that it can well analyze authoritative materials in this field. Conducive to research; The ultimate goal of this study is to analyze the history of Europe driven by numerous events. In order to achieve this goal, the analysis of historical events is carried out.

From the 16th century onwards, Europe has played a pivotal role in shaping the course of global history, beginning with the Great Age of Navigation. The discovery of the New World by Columbus and the introduction of new agricultural products, such as potatoes, enabled European powers to expand their empires, sustain larger armies, and transform the landscape of global trade. The onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century marked another turning point, fundamentally altering social, economic, and political structures both within Europe and across the globe. As Europe spread its influence, it also experienced internal transformations.

This paper will examine Europe's historical trajectory from the 16th to the 20th century, focusing on key events and trends that influenced the continent's development and its impact on the world. It will explore how economic expansion, cultural exchange, and political revolutions not only reshaped Europe but also set the foundations for the modern global order.

2. Background

In 1453, the Ottoman Empire captured Constantinople, ending the thousand-year-old Eastern Roman Byzantine Empire. For Western European countries, the fall of the Byzantine Empire was not only the loss of a Christian country, but also the disruption of the trade routes connecting Europe and Asia. Faced with this situation, the Western European country Portugal has come up with a solution. In 1519, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese soldier for the Spanish government and the fleet that led

by him completed the feat of circumnavigation the globe, and since then human civilization has joined together [1]. Along with new lands and resources as treasures, new crises are being exploited. In the face of the new crisis, the European civilization that was the first to boldly step out of its comfort zone was rewarded with the courage of the brave, that is, with inexhaustible resources and a civilization that will be ahead of the world for a long time to come. After the opening of the new sea routes, European civilization led the world for more than three centuries.

Since the 17th century, with the development of the new World and the opening of new sea routes, the industrial and commercial population, the so-called third estate, has grown dramatically in proportion to the population base, and the politics of European countries have also undergone great changes, with the new bourgeoisie trying to compete with the traditional aristocracy and clerical class for power. Technological innovations, such as the printing press, also made possible the spread of advanced ideas that would awaken the masses, from idealists bent on truth to aspirants who sought to seize power from the Church, monarchs and nobles, but in terms of results, these actions contributed considerably to the progress of history. In 1517, Martin Luther wrote the 95 *Theses*, which opposed the sale of the penance by the Holy See, and set off a vigorous religious reform movement [2]. For a considerable period of time after the beginning of the Reformation, Protestantism was considered illegal by various countries and the Holy See, and contradictions between Protestants and Catholics gradually accumulated, finally leading to the general outbreak, that is, the Thirty Years' War. However, this religious war evolved beyond the scope of religion later, and France intended to use this war to completely split the Holy Roman Empire. Later, she also succeeded, the already fragmented Holy Roman Empire lost all hope of unification, and France became a continental hegemonic.

When the time goes to the 18th century, Europe is bubbling under the surface of calm, and the new political ideas of the Enlightenment are spreading inexorably. France, because of the many large-scale wars from the time of Louis XIV, by the second half of the 18th century was already facing a serious economic crisis, and the French people were plunged into famine and poverty. Under these circumstances, King Louis XVI of France was unable to achieve either radical reform and a solution to the economic crisis or forceful repression. In this situation, dissatisfaction with the government's incompetence spread, and finally in July 1789, the Parisians could not bear it anymore and attacked the Bastille prison, the symbol of government authority at that time, and the French Revolution broke out. The French revolutionary government had not yet decided whether to end the monarchy, but fearing that the French people would follow suit and overthrow the government, Austria, Prussia, Great Britain, Sardinia and Russia chose to form an alliance. They gathered their armies and prepared to invade France. Preparations for the restoration of the French king. In this case, France chose to pre-empt the war by declaring war on Austria and Prussia. However, due to the French Revolution, a large number of aristocratic officers fled France, resulting in the French army could not effectively attack the Austrian army at the beginning, but the nationalist armed French army was not defeated in the end, in the case of a large number of officer vacancies, the soldiers who made war achievements in the war became the new general officers, leading the French army to successfully resist the foreign intervention forces. At this time, however, King Louis 16 plotted to escape, and the revolutionary government also found a large number of foreign letters in his residence. The angry French executed the king for treason [3]. This shocked the whole of Europe, the monarchs could not tolerate the French made so fatherless and lawless behavior, they formed a coalition against France, officially invaded France. At the same time, the Jacobins set off the white terror, and France fell into internal and external troubles. Fortunately, a French commander was favored by the revolutionary government because he had become a hero against the enemy. The commander who would later bring order and stability back to France and put it in the spotlight of history was Napoleon Bonaparte. With Napoleon's seizure of power, the chaotic French Revolution ended and a new era dawned. However, France's wars with European countries did not stop, and in the ensuing Napoleonic Wars, the French army spread nationalism from France to all of Europe. Even after Napoleon's defeat, the constitution

that bears his name became the basis for the constitution, and the nationalism spread by his army toppled the crowns of his enemies countless years later.

Nationalist ideas spread to every corner of Europe, and by 1848, the peoples of Europe had awakened under the influence of nationalism. The spark of revolution first spread from Italy to France, and eventually became a fire throughout Europe, so the 1848 revolution is also known as the Spring of the nations of Europe. The French demanded the overthrow of the king of Orleans, while the Germans, Italians and Hungarians demanded independent states. This was not what the multi-ethnic monarchy wanted, at least not what the Emperor of Austria wanted, and not when Austria was unable to suppress it. However, the Russian Tsar fulfilled his duty as the leader of the Holy League and sent troops to help Austria suppress the national revolution in Austria. However, Austrian Emperor betrayed Russia in the Crimean War three years later, and as a result, Russia chose to ignore Austria when it faced the risk of losing Germany and Italy. In 1861, under the leadership of the Count of Cavour, the Kingdom of Sardinia unified Italy except Rome, creating the Kingdom of Italy [4]. In 1871, the Kingdom of Prussia, under the leadership of its Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck, unified Germany through the victory of the three dynastic wars, the Prussian War, the Prussian War, and the Franco-Prussian War, establishing the Prussian-dominated German Reich [5]. After the Berlin Conference of 1878, which delineated the colonies of European countries, Europe ushered in a considerable period of peace, until the Great War.

3. Progress

There is no doubt that since the age of navigation, Europe has not only advanced politically, economically, technologically and militarily, but has also advanced the whole world. Politically, the separation of powers, parliamentarian, and modern political parties form the basis of government in every modern state [6]. The demand for democracy has also become the common demand of every highly educated citizen. Economically, from the 16th century onwards, Europe gradually transitioned from feudalism to capitalism. There is no doubt that this is a great progress, and the productive forces have been liberated by the change in the relations of production, industrial revolution had come. By virtue of the advanced mode of production and relations of production, the wealth of European countries is rising every moment [7]. Whether it is a more advanced industry or a powerful army, it needs the support of scientific and technological development. The technological progress of Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries was so comprehensive that words cannot fully describe it, but the technologies that make up our lives today were developed in their thinking. Militarily, the modern armed forces created in Europe remain unchanged to this day.

4. Influence

By the second half of the 19th century, European countries had evolved from capitalism to imperialism. Britain and France had become global empires, their influence and colonies spread all over the world, and they still retain considerable influence today. At the same time, Germany, because of its late unification, did not have many colonies of value. Germany is not happy about this. At the same time, France had not forgotten the loss of Alsace and Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian War, and like Germany, she had been planning military operations to regain the land. With France and Germany as the core, European countries established two major military alliances, one led by France, including the Allies of Great Britain and Russia, and the other led by Germany, including the Allies of Austria-Hungary and Italy. The contradictions between imperialists have been accumulating, and since the beginning of the 20th century, Germany has been further antagonized by European countries because of the rude and ignorant diplomacy of the German Emperor Wilhelm II. The young and naive Wilhelm II could not understand Bismarck's continental policy, which would ensure that Germany would not be attacked from both sides, and instead dismissed Bismarck and overturned his brilliant foreign policy. Germany was left with only one trusted ally, Austria, and this act tied Germany to the

Austrian chariot, because Germany must help Austria in whatever she did, or she would lose her last ally. By 1914, Germany was already fighting on two fronts, and in four years of war, Russian and German soldiers broke out in socialist revolutions and overthrew the Czar and the Kaiser. The war ended in a field of chicken feathers, but nothing was resolved. If Germany had been completely dismembered, as France had planned, there would have been no Second World War. But Britain and America were determined to keep Germany because they feared French domination in Europe. Such a verdict could be likened to "taking away Germany's bread, but not its gun." Marshal Foch of France said, "This is not peace, it is only a twenty-year truce." Twenty years later, World War II came. The war completely knocked Europe off the throne of world hegemony, and after the war, both the former colonial empire and the criminal war initiator became fish on the chopping board for the two empires to eat. The United Nations, led by the United States and the Soviet Union, dismembered the British and French colonial systems in the 1950s and 1960s, and new nation-states were created. But instead of becoming as rich and powerful as the nations had expected, the new nations were Mired in war and poverty. They were certainly not to be pitied; after all, they had chosen to leave their sovereign country. In order to counter the United States and the Soviet Union, in the 1960s, under the leadership of France, France and Germany realized an understanding, and under their leadership, Western European countries have united to establish the European Community of nations, which is the predecessor of the European Union. A series of diplomatic efforts made by France and Germany in the 1960s to the 1990s have produced results that have continued to this day, but foreseeable is that Europe will undergo drastic changes in the future.

5. Conclusion

In short, Europe was able to dominate the world because of the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment. The Industrial Revolution made Europe far ahead of the rest of the world in hard power such as state power and military power. The nationalism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution brought about an unprecedented unity of European nations, which gave them soft power, such as the will to fight and support for the state. The exploitation of the colonies also allowed them to enjoy a far higher standard of living than other countries at the same time and greatly supported their competition. But the two world wars greatly weakened the strength and prestige of European countries, and their small territory made their resilience far weaker than that of the United States and Russia. After World War II, the call for independence of the colonies was matched by the United States and the Soviet Union, and the colonial system of the European colonial empire was dissolved. The result of this study is that the past history of Europe, especially the glorious colonial empire period, shaped their national character, and then the further research conclusion is that the 19th and 20th century Europeans shaped the current European cognition and thinking inertia of the world; This study provides a lot of valuable reference significance for future research, which mainly affects the importance of past reference in this field when studying the future of Europe. Future research should focus more on in-depth research by studying the direction of European people's consideration and acceptance of world changes.

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