

Transformation of the European System of Learning : A Case Study of France in the Seventeenth Century

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Transformation of the European System of Learning: A Case Study of France in the Seventeenth Century

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europe appears to have undergone a crucial transformation in its social and intellectual structures. Generally called the “formation of the modern world” of knowledge and learning, this transformation occurred in the midst of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment debates regarding the definition of reason.

Today, we wonder how this so-called modernization was achieved in what appeared to be an easy and smooth manner; we wonder why the threshold between the pre-modern and modern worlds was crossed with such confidence, welcoming the modern age of knowledge and learning. In reality, the European system of learning was far too complicated to accomplish changes without great controversies. The end of the seventeenth century marked the decisive point in the process of these changes. Conditions in France at that crucial time form the focus of the following study of the relationship between the modern world and learning.

2. THE ANCIENTS AND THE MODERNS

On January 27, 1687, a party was held at Louis XIV (le Grand)’s court in Versailles to celebrate his recovery from illness. The king had reigned for forty-four years since his enthronement at age five. Praises for this great king, appropriately called le Roi Soleil, filled the court. The poet Charles Perrault read a laudatory verse titled *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand*. According to the usual practice of flattering the court, Perrault praised the king so extravagantly that he compared him to Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire. Moreover, the poet praised not only the king but the noblemen under his protection, placing them on a level with ancient

sages. Perrault's idea was that ancient times set precedents to respect but that modern precedents closely rivaled them.

Modern as well as ancient people, according to Perrault, belonged to the same human race: There was no need for the moderns to bow to the ancients. In the Kingdom of France, as far as belles-lettres were concerned, the moderns were far superior to their ancient predecessors. The ancient predecessors in this context were the Greeks and Romans of the classical period, while the moderns were the people of the most recent period.

Nicolas Boileau, a poet in attendance when *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* was recited, became extremely offended. Setting praises for the king aside, Boileau found intolerable Perrault's impudence in weighing the modern courtiers and poets against the sages of classical times, as if the former were superior to the latter. To Boileau and his contemporary colleagues, Greek and Roman poets were almost divine beings. This impudence of modern people irritated poets who were making every effort to come as close as possible to the ancient glory. Boileau immediately brought out counter-arguments. This was the beginning of the controversy over the ancients and the moderns, also called the controversy over the old and the new.

The advocates for the ancients represented the common sense of the age. Regarding classical antiquity as the mirror of the ideal, as it had been regarded since the Renaissance, the ancient school aimed to revive both its philosophical thoughts and literature. The playwright J. Racine, who created a Baroque style of plays in accordance with the rules of classical aesthetics, naturally defended Boileau. Racine cited Homer and Pindar in his defense, asserting that the ancient school kept to the correct path of classicism. He accused Perrault of barbarian neglect of the value of the classics.

Perrault responded to this criticism by setting out to write a book titled *Les parallèles des Anciens et des Modernes* in 1688. In it he proclaimed the superiority of the moderns with increased confidence. There had been, he surely admitted, distinguished sages in ancient times, whereas many modern people were mediocre. Yet Perrault insisted that modern poets, even second-class poets, as latecomers aware of the achievements made by the ancients, could attain a higher level by imitating the poetic imagination developed by their predecessors.

Perrault's reasoning was followed by B. Fontenelle in his *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* published in 1688. In this essay Fontenelle emphasized the significance of historical accretion, thereby maintaining that the present, being the sum total of the past, was larger in volume than any portion of the past, the past being a mere part of the present. Great antiquity was the foundation on which more glorious achievements were built by the moderns. Thus, the age of Louis le Grand was, according to Fontenelle's reasoning, the highest peak yet reached by man.

The ancients school was on the defensive. Setting aside gifted men such as T. de La Bruyère, defenders of this school, who included Menage, Dacier, Longepierre and Callières, were less competent as disputants. La Fontaine, famous for his Fables, intended to argue for the ancients in his epistle to Huet. Despite his

original intention, the arguments eventually came close to agreement with the defenders of the moderns.

The exchange of harsh words from both sides ended with a reconciliation between protagonists Boileau and Perrault. With Perrault's death in 1703, the dispute evaporated, or so it appeared.

In 1713, the debate was revived with a denunciation of the moderns by one of the defenders of the ancients, Mme Dacier; she denounced the moderns, especially H. de la Mothe, for their shallow understanding of the classics, again referring to Homer. La Mothe, provoked, criticized the obstinacy of the school of the ancients. With the second round of the debate began an exchange of criticism that lasted beyond the death of Louis XIV and was finally concluded by a peacemaking effort of the gentle scholar Fènelon. The settlement created by Fènelon, at a glance, appeared to be sympathetic with the ancients. In spite of its appearance, however, it tended to accept the contentions of the moderns, supporting the rising power of those who praised the contemporary age.

The debate of the Ancients versus the Moderns attracted great attention from courtiers and academics. Unfortunately, it created a peculiar atmosphere so filled with irresponsible scandals and plagued by so many irrelevancies that it lacked the rigor necessary for thorough study of the problem. Rather, the debate had the characteristics of a courtly game. The depth of the debate was further reduced by the intervention of Louis and his courtiers. The king and his men tried to persuade both sides to compromise or yield, treating the side of the ancients more harshly. (For more details on this dispute, see GILLET 1914: *passim*, BARRIÈRE 1961: 159-167, 268-270 & HASARD 1961, trans. in Japanese: 4-68).

Still, it is apparent that several factors contributed to the development of the disputes between the Ancients and the Moderns. Two in particular are important enough to discuss here.

The first factor concerns the subject of the debate. The subject of this debate was not new in European history. Men had quarreled for several hundred years, comparing the moderns with the ancients, or the new with the old, to decide which was superior. As early as the twelfth century, Bernard de Chartres presented the following famous proposition: "We, the moderns, are like dwarfs. However, dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants, namely the ancients, can see farther."

Renaissance humanists attached delicate implications to the words "ancient" and "modern" in interpreting the above proposition. In the end, their interpretations brought about a steady decline in the authoritarianism that had placed an absolute value on ancient times. They tried to authenticate modern times while preserving ancient values. The debate in question should be appropriately considered as almost the final stage in a long-held controversy.

The second factor is a major change in the literary climate. We can find the symptoms of this change in the seventeenth century. While classical plays and poetry were very popular, substantial independence from the classics flourished in the pursuit of unique forms free from the authority of classical rules. Such trends

provided solid ground for the disputes to come.

The starting point for these changes came when Descartes' rationalism appeared in the mid-seventeenth century. Proposing as an axiom the ultimate rationality of the thinking subject, Descartes tried to establish a method of perceiving the object of thought with absolute certainty. Renaissance men admired well-balanced reason; Descartes transformed this reason into a medium through which man can perceive the world. He praised the human reason that makes man believe in nothing but that which is proven clearly. Reason, as defined by Descartes, is such that not only great sages of ancient times but also mediocre moderns can employ it effectively if they can think clearly and distinctly. The point reached by predecessors through reason remains open to everyone that follows. A follower can always determine his way by using conclusions as starting points.

Descartes maintained with great confidence, "We should not bow to the ancients for their being old. Those who should be called the ancients are we; for the world is more aged now than it was in older times and we are more experienced in things" [cf. BARRIÈRE 1961: 268].

Descartes' rationalism found many sympathizers in French academic circles. The disputes over the Ancients and the Moderns, in which the latter were able to gain a substantial victory, had already begun. Descartes chose as the object of this thinking only what could be expressed and analysed with mathematical accuracy. He incorporated even such colossal beings as the ancients into his system, thereby expanding the sphere of awareness.

The idea of "progress" must have begun to take shape among Descartes and his followers, though Descartes himself never used the word. Progress provides the clearest landmarks along the path of reason; abandoning progress can only lead to intellectual negligence. Accordingly, the shared idea of "progress" is the thread running through every position the defenders of the moderns took in the debate. With the common ground for perception and creation established by Cartesian philosophy, the height of the pyramid constructed by man historically simply grows with the passage of time. One can enjoy a wider view from the highest point achieved by the on-going construction work, moving higher day by day, regardless of the mediocrity of each mason engaged in construction.

The recognition that progress can be achieved made the victory of the modern school over the ancients inevitable. Perrault and Fontenelle's confidence, expressed with a slight insolence, seems to be based upon their belief in progress. The eighteenth century began with the conclusion of the debate becoming apparent, at long last, ushering in the so-called Age of Enlightenment in France. What was demanded for the new age was not the superhuman greatness of the ancient sages but the intellectual judgment of ordinary citizens. "Philosophes" of the Enlightenment were to criticize the regime of the Louis dynasty by applying Cartesian reason to social reality.

This movement in French society was echoed in the elementary and secondary education of the period, the nucleus of the absolutist state. Public institutions call-

ed "petite école," as well as colleges assisted by universities or religious orders, although long engaged in conservative education under a solid, institutional guarantee, were also influenced by the theories of Descartes. Though they did not dream of the immediate reformation of their social system, they had no doubt about the inevitability of progress and enlightenment. Thanks to these teachers, an estimated one hundred thousand secondary school pupils were to benefit from the victory of the moderns.

The benefits included a systematized curriculum, defined targets for achievement and an examination method that allowed objective evaluation. These new approaches were accepted as the public education ideal by the growing bourgeoisie. The liberal arts curriculum inherited from the middle ages was reformed as required. The victory of the moderns thus led to the establishment of popular learning based on enlightened reason. Although the debate itself may have been a mere court game, it was reflected in a landslide of change in the French system of learning.

3. THE OPPOSITE POLE TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Many courtiers and academics were involved in the debate over the Ancients and the Moderns, but who was concerned with the outcome of that quarrel? There did not exist as yet in French society an intellectual class composed of highly educated citizenry to formulate public opinion on the issue. Under these circumstances, then, it was court nobles who played the principal parts. They regarded the quarrel as a game. They were responsible for the quarrel becoming superficial, but they amplified its impact as an intellectual incident.

In France, with the settlement of the Religious War at the end of the sixteenth century, the King's court was restructured. During the long reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV in particular, nobles, new and old, established a courtly society in the royal palaces at Paris and Versailles. "Courtly culture" was imported from abroad, particularly from culturally advanced Italy. In these circumstances, an agreement emerged naturally among the courtiers concerning the desirable style of intellectual learning.

It was the *honnête homme* that represented the agreed style [cf. MAGENDIR 1925: 32-84, HASARD (Japanese trans.) 1961: 399-407]. The *honnêtes hommes* were not, like the Renaissance humanists, intellectuals eager to explicate the mysteries of the world. Inspired by *Il Cortesiano* (by the Italian writer B. Castiglione), *honnêtes hommes* lived in the afterglow of Renaissance humanism. But the French courtiers were far more social and secular in style. Sound judgment, clear thinking without any particular expertise or attachment, unbiased skepticism and cynicism—in other words, moderation causing no displeasure, trouble or scorn—characterized the *honnêtes hommes* and were delicately combined by them.

The Honnête Homme written by N. Faret in 1630 contains description of typical learning. One of the indispensable requirements for typical learning was, ac-

According to Faret, the ability to find appropriate phrases from classical writings to cite in conversation. Knowledge of Greek and Latin were of course essential. The *honnêtes hommes* were required to be well informed in various fields including mathematics, philosophy, music, history and aesthetics of plays and poetry, among other fields. These constituted the requirements for one to be welcome in the court.

The *honnêtes hommes* personified a guiding principle of court society. They commented on the classical plays of Molière and Corneille. They naturally played the part of judge in the debate on the Ancients versus the Moderns. Even bourgeoisie aspiring to join the aristocratic society by their wealth tried to follow the example of the *honnête homme* as the ideal. The concept of *honnête homme* produced some noteworthy phenomena. One is the emergence of the so-called "free thinkers." Freedom in this case meant primarily freedom from the ethics of Christianity. Moreover, it meant magnanimity and refined freedom for courtiers. A. Chevalier de Méré's *Essais on Honnête Homme* had a tremendous impact on the free thinking of the period.

The second is the creation of the salon, first initiated by Countess Rambouillet in her Paris mansion. Noble ladies competed with each other to hold salons. Poets and artists as well as aristocrats were invited to their salons, where they enjoyed witty and sophisticated conversation. Equipped with elaborate literary knowledge, ladies showed off their chic garments and behavior. These ladies of the salons were called *précieuses*, not without a little disdain.

The *honnêtes hommes* of the court formed the nucleus for the ideal of the age. They took interest in contemporary thinkers like Descartes and Pascal. These contemporaries had, however, limited impact on their notions of learning and knowledge. Even for the *honnêtes hommes*, who claimed the superiority of the moderns over the ancients, the wisdom of the ancients formed an integral part of their learning. They did not wholeheartedly support the modern Enlightenment. "Reason" was their favorite word, but what it implied was different from that which Descartes upheld with skepticism. The reason of the *honnêtes hommes* was identical to the common sense of sophisticated, civilized people: it included no specialized perception of the world.

The ideal of the *honnêtes hommes* was attractive to the people of the seventeenth century. It could be a model for them to refer to in all fields of social activities ranging from manners and recreation to faith as well as learning. It seems to have remained effective as such even into the eighteenth century. In the salons, the *précieuses* were still eager to maintain sage conversation, and continued to respect learning and courtesy as requirements to avoid disgrace in courtly society.

With the long dispute leaning toward a victory of the moderns, the circle of the *honnêtes hommes* found that their debate forum, not to mention their own existence, got threatened by the rise of the popular education of the Enlightenment. Neither the defenders of the ancients nor those of the moderns could reap the fruit of their debates. The *honnête homme* appeared to be a legacy inherited from an old-fashioned aristocratic society. Does this demise of the *honnête homme* mean

that Europe became conquered by reason and Enlightenment?

In effect, courtly culture never yielded to the system of learning based on Cartesian reason. In the court of Louis XV in the eighteenth century, lords and ladies began to express courtly culture in a new language. Appreciating a delicate nuance of emotion and feeling, they tried to explore the contact between man and culture. Love, grace, seclusion and melancholy became the subject matter of their culture. Such an emphasis on the delicacy of human emotion had, in fact, its origin in the culture of the *honnêtes hommes* and in the salons of the preceding century. The learning and the rules of conduct of the *honnêtes hommes* were all determined in pursuit of that delicacy.

This most recent tendency might be called courtly romanticism. The still pre-eminent classics and mythological motifs based on the classics regained their glow in the phase of romanticism. Courtly romanticists were the first readers to accept citizen Rousseau's naive romanticism. They detested the advocates of the Enlightenment who boasted sharp and clear reason. They despised those who tried to apply reason to social reform. The word "reason," employed by the courtly romanticists, implied an interior side of human nature too elusive to grasp. Those romanticists saw the kernel of learning in mysterious matters such as emotion and common sense.

Needless to say, the Revolution washed away courtly romanticism. The romanticism that did survive would return with great vigor in the nineteenth century. It was then reshaped into civil romanticism. This new type of romanticism also refused reconciliation with the arrogance of reason based on the Enlightenment. To the reason of the Enlightenment, apparently having conquered France as a result of the victory and enthronement of the moderns, courtly culture also remained as an irreconcilable enemy. Courtly culture, while seeming to be an old-fashioned legacy of the seventeenth century, in fact remained as active as ever, inheriting the tradition of the *honnêtes hommes* and salons.

There was another enemy shrewdly challenging the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Its presence, though perhaps unperceived in France, had a crucial impact on the future of European learning. This force was the anti-Enlightenment movement which rose as a reaction to the expansion of Cartesian rationalism all over Western Europe, except in Britain.

Certainly, the anti-Enlightenment may have been partly motivated by mere conservatism or authoritarianism, or by a quest for the purity of Christian faith. But it was later understood that there existed other motivations as well.

One, for instance, was presented by a classicist of Naples, G. Vico, who bitterly resisted the Cartesianism growing all over Italy at that time. In his book, *Scienza nuova* [1725], Vico sternly refused to grasp human reason through progress or any other clear evidence, instead sticking to the multi-layered nature of "created history." He demanded a return to human feelings as expressed in mythology, and to human wisdom and judgment as demonstrated in the classics. To Vico, an antagonist of Descartes, human reason did not constitute a guide to progress; rather,

ordinary wisdom did so. Ordinary wisdom had been repeatedly applied, in his view, since ancient times in order to gain insight into the nature of human beings. It was this wisdom that could explain what made human beings as such.

In other words, Vico demonstrated in the home of Renaissance humanism what the ancient school in the seventeenth century failed to do fully in France. Vico maintained that the ideal of classical people leading good and wise lives could be realized not by the reason of the Enlightenment but by insight into man and man's created history as well as by recalling the ancients' wisdom again and again.

In Vico's lifetime, his anti-Enlightenment ideas were probably never known to the French. Neglected though he was, he never gave up preaching his views on learning, while neither French courtly culture nor *honnêtes hommes* could elaborate theirs in spite of their effort. Vico would be resurrected by Helder after half a century and more universally in the twentieth century; he later came to be respected as the genuine defender of the ancients and as the champion of classical humanism upon which the European intellectual world should be founded. (See, among others, I. Berlin.)

4. WORLD OF POPULAR TRADITION

In 1697, when the quarrel over the Ancient and the Modern began to be in full swing, one of the major participants who was a famous advocate of the Moderns, C. Perrault, published a book. Composed of eleven tales, the book is presently known under the title of *Les Contes de ma mère l'Oye*. For the first time famous fairy tales such as *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Bluebeard*, *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots* and *Hop-ò-My Thumb* were collected and published in one book. In Japan these tales are better known through the Grimm brothers' works of the nineteenth century. Perrault's collection of tales, however fragmentary and imperfect it may have been, preceded that of the Germans by more than a century and a half.

The stories collected in *Les Contes* were originally those tales that had been told from generation to generation in France and other European countries, and Perrault rewrote them for publication. Perhaps Perrault heard them told in his childhood by his mother or collected them from various sources. We can find similarities and differences between Perrault's tales and many others still alive in oral tradition. M. Soriano defined some of these in his well-regarded book titled, *Les Contes de Perrault, culture savante et traditions populaires* [1968].

Without any record left to posterity, we don't know the method Perrault employed in collecting folk tales. Nevertheless, the recording of popular tales that were then generally taken for granted made him the first folklorist. It would be too harsh to criticize him for the shortcomings of his academic method.

Fairy tales and adventure tales, derived from classical ancient myths and folk traditions, were in vogue as literary games in the courtly salons as early as the late seventeenth century. Most probably this vogue contributed to Perrault's achievement. His concern with popular tradition may not have appeared to be of par-

ticularly noble taste for a member of academic society. His *Contes*, however, achieved ample success. Folk tales, especially those with literary themes, were apparently collected one after another, presented and received well in the salons.

People enjoying courtly culture in Perrault's days surely took a strong interest in folklore. However, with sophistication and *juste-milieu* being their ideal, courtiers must have taken trouble to avoid folkloric, crude expressions. Considerable revisions and adaptations must have been made for this purpose. Still, folk tradition was strangely popular among courtiers and literary men stressing brilliance in the age of classicism.

The first key to folklore's popularity may be found in Perrault's own intentions. In the preface to his *Contes*, Perrault defended his work. He maintained that many of his readers were not satisfied with reason alone but needed the authority and models of the ancient Greeks and Romans to be moved. Perrault considered it worthier to tell his tales than old tales existing in ancient times, since the latter were indifferent to "morals," whereas the French tales for children retold by Perrault were not. In his view, his French ancestors did not elaborate stories in as graceful and attractive a way as the Greeks and Romans; but they always paid careful attention to see that their tales might contain lessons both admirable and instructive.

Perrault sought justifications for the inclusion of moral lessons in his old tales. He maintained that his were superior to the old tales told in ancient Greece or Rome because of these lessons. His arguments were, needless to say, based upon ideas presented in the controversy over the Ancients and the Moderns, and they concluded that the Moderns were superior to the Ancients.

Incidentally, Perrault's old tales, which had been created by the ancients and handed down to posterity, were not those created by the ancient Greeks or Romans but by the ancient French. Accordingly, Perrault did not refer to historical progress when he compared the ancient tales with the modern, to the advantage of the latter. He attempted to attach a particular value to the French and their ancestors against the Greeks and Romans, in order to define their position. This attitude made him no mere collector of popular tales but the intellectual forerunner of French folklorists. [cf. DELARUE: *Passim*, Soriano 1988: 75-98]

Yet Perrault's view on folk tales did not necessarily prove that he showed interest in the taste or ideology of the populace. His *Contes*, whatever the original folklore might have been, were evidently expected to be read and recited in the court. The courts appearing in *Cinderella* and *The Sleeping Beauty* must have been scaled-down copies of the real court in which Perrault lived. Meanwhile, such crude and cruel conduct as depicted in various scenes in his fairy tales had a different tone from that of the courtly *honnêtes hommes*. We cannot help but conclude that the naive and unrefined violence of the people was introduced in his tales only to emphasize the difference between the two classes. It would be hard to find any sympathy towards popular culture in Perrault's work.

This is not because Perrault and his contemporaries remained indifferent to

popular culture. On the contrary, they were not only aware of its existence but sensed instinctively that it contradicted their own formal culture—the culture of the court and the learned. Calling popular culture “barbarism” and their own culture “civilization,” they regarded the former as harmful enough to be worthy of taming by the latter. They learned of practices and characteristics peculiar to popular culture, including carnivals and other festivities, witchcraft, the black art of witch-hunts, popular medicine, bogus circuit preachers and animistic feelings toward nature. For the first time, in the seventeenth century these practices and characteristics became the object of deliberate learning and investigation.

Such popular culture had long been in existence, since the distant past, regardless of the culture of the learned elite. Having co-existed separately, the two cultures had had no particular conflict between them for quite a long time. Toward the sixteenth century the learned began to show some interest in popular culture. Their interest in it was followed by their desire to control it; to them popular culture appeared too dangerous to be left unchecked. This reaction was motivated not only by epistemological reason but also by a sort of good will; the people had to be saved from the superstitions they held due to ignorance.

This reason is exactly what was expected of the reason of the Enlightenment. As a matter of fact, the introduction of Cartesianism into the bureaucratic society of France served to make witch-hunt trials, so rampant for centuries, gradually disappear. Witches, whose existence we could not prove by reason, deserved no discussion. Noisy rituals were prohibited, for they were merely unreasonable waste. The barbarism of the people had to be enlightened for the purpose of the refinement of civilization. Meanwhile there existed delicate contact between the ideas of public peace and order of the absolutist government on one hand and the ideas of Enlightenment of the culture of the learned on the other. Together, they contributed to the manipulation and control of popular culture. This was what happened in France in the seventeenth century (see Muchembled).

As a representative of the school of the moderns, Perrault favored progress and the rise of reason for enlightenment, while also expressing concern about popular culture. In fact, he was a learned administrator of the French monarchy. He sensed no inner conflict between his two works, *Les parallèles de anciens et des modernes* and *Les Contes*, which he wrote simultaneously. Possibly the position occupied by popular culture in society was reflected accurately in the views of this advocate of the moderns.

The “hunt” for popular culture, which began in the seventeenth century, achieved considerable success. It led the populace to “civilization.” Yet it did not necessarily mean that popular culture was completely destroyed. Popular culture, alive in European forests and in control of human subconsciousness ever since prehistoric times, was brought to a conscious level of consideration. In fact, popular culture might even be in the recesses of the minds of the learned *honnêtes hommes*. Particular views of the world and man, words and images naive in expression and therefore all the more powerful in summoning strong emotion, super-

natural incantation deeply rooted in people's daily lives and so on—these elements in popular culture were denounced by the Enlightenment as barbarism. Still, popular culture survived, maintaining its own system of learning. Perrault's *Contes* bore witness to the period in which these phenomena began to emerge.

5. CONCLUSION

In the seventeenth century, or more specifically at the end of that period, France underwent a great change in its structure of knowledge and learning. From this change emerged three different but closely connected systems of learning: the reason of the Enlightenment, courtly romanticism with its classical, humanistic knowledge, and popular culture. The first was based on a belief in progress and positivism. The second was redesigned courtly culture based on the anti-Enlightenment. The third had its roots in popular tradition and the actual events of ordinary life.

These three systems could have been discerned as three different categories even in preceding centuries. In the modern world after the seventeenth century, however, they became mutually related in a particular way, each occupying a share in the general system of French learning. Reason of the Enlightenment has been responsible for education and technological development, and courtly romanticism and humanistic knowledge have supported art and wisdom for life, whereas popular culture, its insecure standing notwithstanding, has continued to guard the day-to-day life and subconsciousness of the people.

What has been discussed so far is, needless to say, only applicable to a specific country, namely France. Some countries, such as Italy and Spain, have experienced fairly similar conditions. Other countries, like Britain and Germany, on the other hand, have followed different routes. I have never considered it possible to explain the establishment of the modern, European system of learning in whole. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that after the settlement of the long turbulence in the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, many kinds of new systems of learning emerged in Europe in the seventeenth century, and these systems had much in common. Such an assumption may be justified on the grounds that the three systems of learning originating in seventeenth century France appear to have been upheld in various parts of Europe, although their mutual relations have undergone various changes.

The European world of learning is often misunderstood as having been a homogeneous and unchanging monolith since ancient or medieval times. While it is possible to point out the continuity of Christianity and Classicism, their status or significance in the European world of learning has changed. Consequently, new systems have been created. These new systems, with complicated divisions and conflicts, have also undergone various changes. This phenomenon, however, is not particular to Europe; similar transitions can be assumed to have happened in other civilized nations, including China and Japan.

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