

Looking With Fresh Eyes Across Time and Space: Europe from a Confucian Perspective

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The most valuable finding of my first sightseeing trip was that medieval Europe was the seat of Christendom and that Christianity defines the West. I was amazed to see that Europe reveals so much of its past. I had not had such an experience in the United States, where I had lived as a student and then as a professor of economics.

As I glimpsed the West, I found myself rediscovering Confucian civilization and how much I am still Confucian, although I was born into a Presbyterian family in Korea. But then, Korea is the most Confucian country. Curious about the West since my first trip, whenever I can I have toured Europe in search of the meaning of the West.

While travelling in Europe, my mind often jumps back to my early life in Korea and Japan. I am struck by the vivid contrast in appearance between medieval European towns and Asian towns, which were grey and as flat as pancakes. Medieval towns are stony and solid. Nothing is flimsy. Shaped by spires, domes, and towers, a European town's silhouette rises and falls like a stock market graph. Europeans obviously loved the vertical emphasis. A traveller can see either a soaring church tower or a castle keep miles away on the horizon. Churches predominate, as if to emphasize that the main business of the town is the worship and glorification of God.

As seen from a train, Europe is replete with churches, of all sizes, shapes, and colours. In Switzerland, I saw cute churches, their pencil-sharp spires poking at heaven. They are simply beautiful against the shining snow. On a steep Alpine hill I spotted a dozen houses among which there were four tiny churches; it seemed as though every family had its own church. In Chartres and Laon, France, in Ely, England, in Cologne, Germany, soaring majestic cathedrals appeared. I felt so drawn to their statuesque beauty that I was compelled to disembark and visit them.

A Gothic cathedral is unnecessarily huge and tall, embodying the monumentality of Western architecture. What fascinated and thrilled me were the exaggerated height, the stained glass, and the flying buttresses. I wondered if the faithful built it in the belief that the higher it rose, the closer they would come to the kingdom of heaven.

The cathedral in Amiens is the largest Gothic church; the town's entire medieval population (6,000 to 8,000) could attend a ceremony inside it. Its dimensions are 133 metres in length inside and 144.6 metres outside. Its interior height is 43 metres; its ground area is 772 square metres, and its interior volume is 183,000 cubic metres. The interior space could hold twenty replicas of my boyhood church in North Korea.

Inside Amiens cathedral I felt as if I were standing at the bottom of a deep gorge. There, for the first time, I encountered a ceiling in stone. I asked myself what kept it from

falling down. I marvelled at the genius of the Western master masons. In awe, I asked myself, "How was it possible for medieval men to build such a stone structure by hand?" No building in East Asia has ever compelled me to react similarly.

In East Asia China has a number of monumental structures. Enclosed by the 15 metre high walls, the Forbidden City covers 930 square metres. It is majestic, impressive, and shows off the imperial power. Both Tiananmen and Wumen are huge spaces that are much more awe-inspiring than Roman triumphal arches. A great gate is a symbol of wealth and power in China and Korea.

After passing through the Gate of the Supreme Harmony, one reaches the Hall of Supreme Harmony. It sits majestically on a three-tiered marble terrace 7 metres high, atop a broad flight of steps. The terrace and the steps are of white marble.

When I approached the Hall of Supreme Harmony, I felt I was hearing the Emperor proclaim, "I am the Son of Heaven". I remembered a Japanese officer's reminiscence of his war experience in China: although he was contemptuous of the Chinese, he said the Chinese are continental, whereas the Japanese have an "island complex".

The Hall (east to west) is 66 metres long, 36 metres high, and about 35 metres wide. It is the largest timber structure in East Asia and embodies Chinese monumental architecture in its majestic repose. Its two-tiered roofs are magnificent. The southern facade is much more impressive than the interior, in which I did not feel free. Punctured by partitions, columns, and lintels, the interior is not a single complete space.

Because it is based on the post-and-lintel system, Chinese architecture is incapable of constructing a soaring building with a monumental and complete interior space. The advantages of the arch over the post-and-lintel system are the greater distances that may be spanned.

Roman architects exploited the structural and aesthetic possibilities of the arch, relegating the column to symbolic and decorative roles. They also substituted the vault for timber roofing. By so doing they created a monumental space free of beams and pillars. An example of this is the Pantheon.

The Pantheon is a circular building with a single huge dome. Both the diameter of the interior and its height are 43.2 metres. Once inside I felt free, yet small, because the interior is a completely empty, huge, single space. Its spatial volumes are so vast that it could swallow the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, the largest circular timber building in East Asia. Its exterior diameter and height are 30 and 38 metres respectively. Although its three-tiered circular green roofs and its facade are stunningly beautiful, the Temple's interior is cluttered with columns and beams.

Western scale is simply monumental. Even music such as Wagner's *Ring* and Bach's *St Matthew Passion* are monumental. This heritage reasserted itself during the Baroque period after which it bloomed in central Europe.

The Western desire for height reached its zenith in Gothic architecture. The ceilings of the cathedral in Strasbourg, France, are 100 metres high and the spire rises to 145 metres. The Romans loved soaring columns, tall buildings on podiums with broad flights of stairs, and statues on pedestals. Europeans preferred a hill-top building with high ceilings, tall columns, towers, domes, and pinnacles.

In my travels I gradually noticed that Westerners built monumental structures with huge slabs of stone, like the Porta Nigra in Trier, Germany. In Ravenna I was astounded to learn that the Byzantine Emperor Theodoric (d. 526) was buried in a monumental

circular mausoleum. Its top, made out of a single slab, weighs 470 tons! I also learned that the Pantheon's porch is supported by eight columns from the eastern desert of Egypt, each of which is 21.3 metres tall and weighs an estimated 84 tons. I wondered how the Romans transported these huge slabs of stone. Westerners dared to tackle this difficulty, a challenge East Asians did not undertake.

Throughout my trips, I was also impressed by the Western partiality for impregnable structures. Some parts of the Pantheon walls are 6 metres thick. The streets in Pompeii are paved with fat stones, as if they were for tanks. The imposing Porta Augusta (an Etruscan wall gate of the third century BC) in Perugia, Italy, tops all other wall gates. It makes a human being seem minuscule by contrast. Its top was wide enough to build houses on in the fifteenth century. When I approached these Roman walls or medieval castles, a sort of terror struck me, a feeling I did not have in front of Chinese architecture.

One church I visited had huge floor stones that dated from the ninth century. The inscriptions on them were almost gone, but the stones will last several more millennia. Many churches were built for eternity, or to last until the Second Coming of Christ.

I also sensed an imperial mind in Westerners. They desired to behold sky-rocketing spires and to look up at a sky-high dome, standing in the midst of a huge empty space. It is exhilarating to behold Strasbourg's single spire soaring into heaven. It is majestic to look up at the dome of the Pantheon through which light comes. In the Book of Genesis heaven is referred to as a dome. And the vault of Empress Galla Placidia's mausoleum is of lustrous blue with some eight hundred stars in mosaic.

The Pont du Gard near Nîmes, France, is the creation of a magnificent mind, an architectural wonder that displays the Roman art of the arch. When I beheld it, I felt as refreshed as if I were drinking a glass of ice water on a hot summer day. The Romans built it to carry water to the fountains of Nîmes from springs thirty-one miles away. The series of arches on the second tier are monumental; each of them spans about 22 metres and is extremely graceful.

Another magnificent creation is the Roman theatre in Orange, France. When we reached the town it was nearly midnight. The outer wall of the theatre, which is 108 metres high and nearly three times as long, is so monumental and majestic it caused my wife to say "Wow" when we saw it. The next morning the two thousand-year-old wall was glowing with warm colours. In the south and south-west of France I could see why Westerners have loved stone as a noble building material. Even I began to appreciate creamy stone houses.

A culture of stone makes the European past visible. Ruins are basically a phenomenon of such a culture and reveal the nature of what was destroyed. Furthermore, some Western architectural structures speak to one. When the magnificent Holstentor in Lübeck, Germany, came into view, I felt that it was proclaiming loudly and clearly that "Our town is mighty and wealthy".

Stone culture endowed the West with additional characteristics. First, since stone architecture tolerates human imperfection less than architecture in wood, master masons had to have been convinced of the importance of the foundation and perfect craftsmanship. They had to acquire some knowledge of physics and geometry. This is also revealed in the Pantheon. Gothic design is geometric; I saw countless geometric designs in Europe.

The Western master masons tried to secure stability or equilibrium of a soaring colossal structure by the interplay of the thrust and counterthrust of vaults, achieved by the flying

buttresses. Interestingly, Adam Smith conceived of equilibrium emerging out of competition between the many. Confucian scholars, on the other hand, exhorted people to cooperate with each other because, for them, co-operation is what ties a society together and is the only path to harmony, a Chinese character that appears prominently in the Forbidden City.

Secondly, paintings of enormous size presume either huge ceilings or walls. Monumental stone architecture is also the most fitting acoustic environment for Western music, and especially for choral and organ music. Bach's organ music is heard to best effect in a space like Notre-Dame in Paris. Western music is incompatible with Chinese architecture; the Japanese house vibrates at the sound of a solitary drum.

Thirdly, stone architecture gave rise to fresco, glass painting, and mosaic painting. The constant chill inside a castle, with its thick walls, prompted feudal lords to increase demand for tapestry as a shield against the chill. The cold also encouraged Europeans to eat meat, which made them plumper (and so less sensitive to cold).

Fourthly, works of art are likely to survive longer in a huge stone building than in a small stone house and more certainly than in a wooden house. A telling example is the eleventh-century Bayeux tapestry, kept inside the cathedral at Bayeux. "So much to see" was my first reaction to Europe, whereas "Not much left to see" was my overall impression of China. Xian in China was the capital for two thousand years. It was a world-class city during the Tang period (618–906). Yet there is no trace of the Tang palaces inside its walls.

Fifthly, Europeans are surrounded by historical objects that they can look at, touch, walk on, and even inhabit. Many Europeans live in their ancestral homes and people in Ravenna and Rome say mass in ancient churches. Until recently the people of Nîmes drank water supplied by a Roman aqueduct. The owner of a bistro boasts that his restaurant was built into the Roman ramparts. Even priests boast of the Roman marble columns in their churches. Among Europeans I could detect reverence for both the past and the old. The words "an old house" have a different meaning in East Asia. In Korea old wealth does not exist and old families do not matter.

Finally, thickness, heaviness, and permanence are attributes of a stone culture. The Japanese see beauty in wood and love wood more than anyone else, because Japan embodies a genuine wood culture. Almost everything in Japan is light, thin, and even fragile. There is a joke: "There are only three objects which are heavy and thick in Japan. A go-board, the wooden top of a rice pot, and the feet of a chambermaid." The Japanese boast that they love cherry blossoms best because they last only a few days.

While Western architectural monumentality hit me like lightning, the Western propensity for narrating stories with images dawned on me slowly. This also set Western civilization apart from Confucian civilization. Westerners have always told stories from the Bible, history, legend, and even illustrated the most abstract concepts with the help of pictures and symbols.

Chartres cathedral contains up to ten thousand figures, pictured in glass and in stone. They illustrate a vast range of Christian as well as secular subjects, and actually mirrored the content of the most erudite and comprehensive encyclopedia of the Middle Ages by Vincent de Beauvais. In *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Hugo says, "In the Middle Ages men had no great thought that they did not write down in stone".

I was dumbfounded when I saw an early medieval comb with reliefs depicting the scene of the three wise men from the East admiring an infant Jesus. I was also fascinated

by spooky reliefs on Romanesque capitals narrating Christian stories of virtue and vice in grotesque figures; they must have taken months of work. With so much of Christendom depicted in pictorial language, everyone except the blind was 'literate'.

The Trajan's Column in Rome clearly shows that the Romans wanted to see their history in pictures. This column, from the early second century AD, stands about 38 metres high and consists of seventeen marble drums (one drum weighs four tons) sculpted in spiral panels that narrate episodes from Trajan's war against the Dacians. The reliefs are like newsreels. Even decorative designs in Europe are narrative and it is sometimes hard to tell if they have been made to decorate or to tell a story.

I was amazed at the Western propensity to decorate, especially with sculptures and paintings. The relentless pursuit of a beautiful, magnificent church resulted in an endless variety of churches. And many cathedrals resemble art galleries. I saw more paintings and more statues in one of these churches than I did during all my college years in Tokyo. Seeing masterworks at the altars, I said to myself that popes and bishops were connoisseurs.

In marked contrast, narrative art is the exception to the rule in China and Korea. For centuries in East Asia parents and teachers have related the story of the Mother of Mencius to children. The story's gist is this: Mencius and his mother first moved to a place near the town cemetery. Seeing her son play acting an undertaker, the mother moved to a market place instead. When her son began play acting a peddler, she moved near a Confucian learning hall. Observing Mencius studying, she settled down there for good. Eventually Mencius became an important person, second only to Confucius himself. Mencius's mother is regarded as the mother of all mothers in East Asia.

The tale of Sim Chung is probably the most popular story in Korea. Sim Chung embodies filial piety. The tale of a girl who sells herself to be sacrificed for her father moves people to tears. Although staged and made into movies, it has yet to be narrated with images.

Seeing Beilin (forest of steles) in Xian convinced me that, in a Confucian world, language is the exclusive means of communicating, expressing, and storing information. Beilin has a collection of historic stone tablets from the seventh and eighth centuries, numbering more than sixteen hundred. Only a single stele has a bas-relief showing the profile of Confucius. The rest is words. Confucian classics such as *Hsiao Ching* ("filial piety") were engraved on steles as if they were eternal truths.

By contrast Westerners visualized almost everything in pictorial language, resulting in a vast amount of visual art. The Romans made visible even what is invisible, depicting gods in figurative images. Because concepts such as love and victory cannot be depicted, Westerners developed a genius for doing so; they personified love as the goddess Venus and Victory as the god Nikè.

In the West, even solitary portraits are expressive and narrative. Portraits in East Asia tend to be like a Buddha or a perfect Confucian gentleman. It was quite an experience for me to see so many sculptural portraits in Rome, especially in the Capitoline Museum, where I saw more statues than I had in Japan and Korea.

East Asia is bereft of sculptural portraits, except standard Buddhist statues. In the Forbidden City there are a few dragon reliefs and only a handful of stone sculptures, such as lions and imaginary creatures, set up to dispel evil spirits.

Portraits of Czech rulers hang on the walls of Karlstein Castle, and in the corridors of Melk Abbey there are portraits of the rulers of the Babenberg dynasty (tenth to thirteenth century) and the Hapsburg dynasty (thirteenth century), even though no one had any idea how most of these rulers looked.

My wonder increased when I saw the "Procession of Dukes" depicted on 25,000 pieces of Meissen porcelain in Dresden. It depicts all the rulers of the House of Wettin. Leading the procession are musicians trumpeting, followed by the first ruler, Konrad the Great (1123–1190).

The importance of portraiture in Western art is a reflection of the importance given to individuals. Heroes and heroines figure prominently in Western history and biographies are an important part of historical literature. In France many streets are named after prominent national figures. The Japanese named their streets after trees and flowers. East Asians do not get their given names from historical figures; they are made of Chinese characters that sound Confucian.

"A picture is worth more than a thousand words" is a Western saying. This suggests the importance of the visual image. Westerners live in an illustrated world. They used visual aids to help them understand things just by looking at them. They tried to make it easy and entertaining to understand invisible things, complicated or new concepts, by the use of visual aids, images, allegories, symbols, metaphors, and parables. I was introduced to parables and stories of Christ preaching in parables at Sunday school.

In contrast, Confucian scholars made no effort to make it easy for children to understand their writings. In the past, kids were exhorted to memorize what they could not possibly understand. And there were neither children's books nor comic books. Even today parents do not read books to children in bed.

Western civilization is impressively visual, appealing to and provoking the sense of seeing. What is visible is lively, theatrical, and expressive, revealing a love of life, including the sensual.

It is easy to see Westerners' love of architecture; architecture fused with sculpture is truly Western. A building is more than an abode; it seems to be an expression of one's outer ego and fantasy. Architecture is much richer and more diverse than Chinese architecture. There are architectural motifs in so many paintings, inside rooms, and even on furniture. A good example is "Christ giving the keys to St Peter" by Perugino in the Sistine Chapel.

To an amazing degree, Roman architectural motifs appeared wherever I went. The most popular are the arch, the column, and the niche; they appear even on sarcophagi, on the walls of the catacombs, and on the furniture of the eighteenth century. They decorate grand civic and religious buildings as well as private houses and stores.

I was able to discern many differences between the West and the Confucian world, including differences that cannot be found in written texts. A case in point is an Etruscan sarcophagus of the third century BC in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I had never seen a sarcophagus before; stone coffins have been few and far between in South-east Asia since the invention of Chinese characters.

The reliefs on the side of this sarcophagus narrated the deceased's military career. A big surprise was that on top of the sarcophagus the deceased couple were depicted in each other's arms, embracing rather passionately. It is clear that long before the birth of

Christ, Confucian Asia differed from the West. "Boys and girls at the age of seven should be segregated" is a Confucian dictum by which I was brought up. I had never seen my parents holding hands. During the Christian church service women and girls were seated in one wing of our L-shaped church and men in the other.

The relief also suggests strongly that man and wife are the basic social unit in the West. On the other hand, in Confucian society father and son are the basic relation and all other relations are merely variations on it. Until this century neither female portraiture nor a public role for women was known. There are no female Confucian saints.

Another surprise was that saints are so numerous as to require a dictionary. In France and Italy many towns, streets, and institutions were named after saints. Yet none of these saints was canonized for his or her filial piety. Come to think of it, my Sunday school teachers talked little about it. Jesus disappointed me a little because he was cold to his mother (Matthew 13:50). If filial piety is not the highest human virtue, what else could be?

I was surprised to see the tombs of the popes in St Peter's, those of bishops and archbishops in their cathedrals, of monks and nuns in the cloisters of their monasteries, and of saints beneath the altars. Monuments and memorials are located in the places of death rather than of birth. Christianity may not have minimized the fear of death, but it seems to have reduced the fear of the dead.

Westerners were anxious to rest eternally beside God and to be saved. They sought to be buried, if at all possible, within a church; if not, then beside a church. The cemetery beside the Duomo in Pisa was made of earth brought from the Holy Land by crusaders. The vast floor of Santa Croce in Florence is paved with two hundred and seventy-six tombstones, and along the walls are more tombs, such as those of Michelangelo and Machiavelli. Westminster Abbey has two thousand tombs with fancy effigies. The entire floor of an obscure church in Norwich, England, also consists of tombstones. I am not sure that I would like people stepping on my father's tombstone.

I am convinced by what I saw on my trip – rather than by what I have read – that Europeans were much more religious than East Asians. Certainly they were very apprehensive about life after death.

On my third trip to Europe I realized that the Last Judgment was a very popular theme in the iconographic repertoire. Everywhere, day and night, medieval people must have been reminded of Heaven and Hell. They must have been terrified by graphic depictions of the tortures of the damned. The panel paintings of the Last Judgment by Roger van der Weyden (1399–1464) were shown to dying patients in the fourteenth-century Hôtel-Dieu in Beaune, France.

Paintings and reliefs depict angels weighing souls with a balance. I suppose that this image was derived from the statue of Themis, goddess of justice, with a sword and scales, indicating the severity and the accuracy with which justice is to be meted out. Quantification is also a Western trait.

Christendom had a well-defined incentive system. If you merit God's grace, you go to Heaven. If you are indifferent to the sick and the poor, you will fall into Hell. In a Confucian society filial piety is the highest human virtue, yet, except for moral condemnation, no clear-cut punishment was assigned to those who were unfilial.

The sheer number of extant medieval churches attests to the fact that medieval Europe was Christendom. Until the tenth century Western Europe was backward relative to the

East. Between 1050 and 1350, the per capita income of Europe was much lower than ours at present. Yet an unprecedented building boom of churches and castles took place.

Feudal lords, men of violence, built not only their castles but also churches as acts of both penance and fealty. In the fourteenth century local lords built seven churches in Parthenay, a town west of Poitiers, probably in order to remit their sins. Saint-Pierre was built to house the lords' tombs.

I did not expect to see so many churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and what puzzled me was that figurative images of her seemed to outnumber those of Christ. I encountered many paintings of the Assumption, about which I never heard at Sunday school. But I was enchanted by Titian's painting over the altar of Santa Maria in Venice, a representation of the Assumption: the Virgin Mary rises into the heavens on cushions of clouds, escorted by singing angels, whilst, far below, the apostles gaze upward in prayer. To medieval people, God was stern and the Last Judgment was final. So in the Virgin Mary they found a motherly figure who could intercede with God on behalf of sinners.

I wondered if medieval Christianity was really monotheist, for there are numerous images of saints and their relics. People adopted saints as their intercessors and housed their relics in bejewelled reliquaries. Seeking miracles and as acts of penance, people travelled enormous distances to pilgrim churches which displayed them. The possession of relics was paramount for churches wishing to attract the faithful and their business to town.

A belief in miracles rested on a childlike trust in God's daily intervention. Had Confucius known this, he would have said that Christianity is superstitious. But he would have been moved by the Abbey of Sainte-Foy.

Sainte-Foy left me with a lasting impression and curiosity about the medieval mind. Because of her refusal to recant her faith, Saint Foy was placed on a griddle kept white-hot by molten fat. A dove flew down from the heavens bringing dew, which quenched the flames. She was a blind girl from a noble family and was eventually beheaded at the age of thirteen in around 303 in Agen.

The abbey's monks stole Saint Foy's relics from Agen in the eighth century, and they became the principal relics at Conques. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries an endless stream of pilgrims made stops at Conques on their way to Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Conques is itself a rugged but picturesque village on the steep slopes of a gorge in a region of high elevation. The stunningly beautiful abbey appearing on the steep slopes moves even non-believers with the spirit of pilgrimage.

The reconstructed abbey is a magnificent example of Romanesque architecture. Its tympanum depicts a sweeping panorama of the Last Judgment, including graphic depictions of the tortures of the damned, the stern face of the Eternal Judge, and Satan presiding over the chaos of Hell, where sinners are pursued by fire. Saint Foy's relics were encased in a nearly three-foot-high jewel-encrusted statue. This must all have inspired strong religious feelings in the people of the Middle Ages. The abbey's location, its architecture, and its reliquary – everything around is mystical and moving.

It is easy to see medieval Europeans practised what Jesus taught by founding hospitals such as St John's Hospital in Bruges, the Hôtel-Dieu in Beaune, and the Hospital of the Innocents in Florence. In Korea the first hospitals were founded by American missionaries at the turn of this century.

I fondly recalled Sunday school stories about Jesus Christ's power to heal diseases miraculously. He restored sight to the blind, cleansed the leper, and even revived the dead. I am not sure that I believed these stories. However, it was only at Sunday school that we were exhorted to love others. I thought that loving one's enemy was too difficult to practise.

Everything I saw in Europe confirmed that during the Middle Ages there was just one faith in which people believed intensely. Before my trips I did not imagine the extent to which Christianity soaked and moulded the West, giving an identity and a deep unity. Around a central religious core the West was harmonized. A diversified Europe had found a common home in Christendom.

Christendom was one world and a free trade zone in ideas as well as in goods; ideas were propagated and disseminated within Western Europe by the universal Church and its international bureaucracy. People were implored to believe in the brotherhood of men well before the rise of nationalism.

Everyone seemed to be on the road: bishops and canon lawyers bound for Rome; ambassadors to and from their own capitals; streams of singing pilgrims following their priests. Travellers would have felt at home wherever they went in Europe. A lofty cathedral, an awesome castle, or an impressive town gate would all be familiar to them. Neither a knight nor a priest was a stranger in medieval Europe. But a samurai would have felt strange in China and Korea.

On Christmas day in the year 800, the Pope crowned Charlemagne Emperor, not of the Franks but of the Romans. No man could be made emperor except by the pope. This illuminates a central difference between Confucian Asia and the West, where kings ruled under God and medieval rulers sought the pope's blessing and pardon. East Asia had no equivalent of Rome, no Confucian or Buddhist pope, with universal authority to speak in the name of heaven. Neither Confucianism nor Buddhism sanctioned the Chinese Empire.

I sought out medieval towns in Europe because East Asia had no autonomous towns. In the Tokugawa period in Japan (1603–1867), Osaka was a merchant city where a merchant culture flowered. But even there the samurai governed the merchants.

European public squares were also a novelty to me, because East Asia had none. Tienanmen square is a recent creation. In Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland, almost every town has at least one public square. An Italian town has several piazzas. The Piazza della Signoria was the setting for much of the civic life of Florence, as was San Marco in Venice.

Europe's town squares, town halls, and guildhalls promoted communal life. In the great cathedrals, peasants could attend services with the king, the pope, and the lord. I believe that East Asians did not have much of an organized group life; family life was their focus. Buddhist and shaman religious services were individual activities. Prayers were private and often written, and the very idea of public speech and a public hall was unknown in East Asia until the nineteenth century.

When I visited the market square in Bruges in the early morning, I saw farmers selling their produce as they have done over the centuries. Water is still flowing in the canals as it has since the Middle Ages. There stands the soaring fourteenth-century belfry.

By the fourteenth century autonomous towns competitively installed mechanical bell-clocks. These public clocks transformed the town's population into a community by

broadcasting important news such as military attacks, the election of a pope, or the death of a king. In cloth towns, bell-clocks announced working hours. One night in a strange town – Mainz in Germany – I found myself listening to the cathedral's peal breaking the dead silence of night every fifteen minutes. This reminded me of my mother, who used to say that my sister was born after second cockcrow. I smiled, half-asleep.

Europe also has many sculptural fountains, some of which are several hundred years old. Even wells were beautifully constructed, often with some mechanical devices. After quenching my thirst with water coming from a marble female statue, a fourteenth-century fountain, in the square in Bergamo, Italy, I wondered if there was a decent well in either Beijing or Seoul.

Chinese emperors brought their drinking water by horse-drawn carts to the Forbidden City from a distant lake. On the other hand, two thousand years ago the Romans wished to drink spring water instead of polluted water. They came up with the idea of transporting water by the force of gravity. Constructing stone ducts over deep gorges must have been an incredible civil engineering project, hard to imagine today.

The Theatre Square, Dresden, with its cathedral and surrounded by architectural and cultural treasures, contrasts starkly with wind-swept Tiananmen square, an empty lot without a fountain, a bench or even a tree. I felt like asking Chinese emperors, Korean kings, and Japanese shoguns just one question: "What did you build for your subjects?" Then I heard the voice of our Japanese high school teachers telling us that Tenno (Emperor) Hirohito loves his subjects, including Koreans, like his "pinky baby". His love moved countless Japanese to tears and sent boys off to pilot kamikaze planes. An enormous number of Tokyo citizens were being roasted by the fire of American bombs whilst Emperor Hirohito stayed in Edo Castle, which the US government decided not to bomb.

Just taking a look at the ruins of huge Roman baths, I could tell that the Romans were social. In these baths they bathed, lounged, and fraternized with each other. For the Japanese, hot baths are an obsession, but they are taken alone in a wooden barrel. It is a solitary activity to relax.

The floor plans of an English country house of the eighteenth century reveal that the public areas of the house overshadowed the family area. English landed aristocrats gave lavish dinners, masquerades, hunting parties, and visited one another's estates for days. All these social activities necessitated large and lavishly decorated halls, salons, dining rooms with huge dinner tables, drawing rooms, and guesthouses.

Grand staircases became the showpiece of a country house where the ritual of greeting guests was played out. The picture gallery became a status symbol; portraits were displayed to impress as well as to commemorate.

Fraternization among rulers and aristocrats is bound to promote art. In fact, European rulers and aristocrats vied with each other to show off their power, wealth, and cultural prowess by building magnificent palaces, collecting works of art, and patronizing artists. They not only valued military prowess, but also took great pride in their opulent life and their appreciation of culture.

During the Tokugawa period, Japanese wealth was virtually in the hands of three hundred *daimyo* (feudal lords). They were required to live in Tokyo, but they did not entertain each other. Consequently there was no social competition, no social season, and no magnificent mansions. A number of Japanese families can trace their histories all the way back to the Middle Ages. However, I am not aware of any of them possessing a

collection of art that could be the basis for establishing a museum. There are no Japanese Medici or Gonzagas.

Walking through the five hundred rooms of the Gonzagas' palace, I thought of Confucian thinkers, who would surely have condemned the Gonzagas as corrupt, lascivious tyrants. To East Asians, an ideal ruler leads a simple life and, above all, has to be virtuous. To them, a king who surrounded himself with wise scholars was an ideal ruler. If he were an accomplished calligrapher and loved letters, including poetry, he would be popular. But it was not necessary for him to be a connoisseur of art or a patron of artists.

Medieval castles were a novelty to me because neither China nor Korea ever experienced feudalism. Their ruins testify to fragmented power, which in turn bred competition. These castles' awesome appearance reminds us of the chronic and fierce warfare of the Middle Ages. Faced with the constant threat of war, European rulers competed for ever more invincible castles and more advanced military technology. Military architecture, which is absent in East Asia, was born out of the marriage of feudalism and a stone culture. Ever-increasing military spending pressured European rulers to develop their respective economies.

Sent by the central government in Seoul, the magistrate in my home town, for example, had no incentive to govern well. Shibusawa, a future leading entrepreneur, toured Europe (1867–1868), and observed that European rulers were much more interested in economic development than the Japanese *daimyo*. The central government in East Asia did not face incessant challenge and competition from other political entities. There was no intermarriage among East Asian ruling families. Were European rulers compelled to compromise and marry into each other's families? In East Asia compromise was not a virtue.

Competition, it seems to me, lay at the heart of the difference between Confucian and Western civilizations. The idea that power is divisible and can be shared by several authorities is alien to East Asians. They presume that dispersed power would foster instability.

In the West, what is beautiful, what is colourful, what is dynamic, and what is harmonious, seems to have been created out of competition among what is autonomous, multiple, various, and adverse. In East Asia, by contrast, monotone prevailed. Polyphony was unknown in Asian music.

Returning to Boston, I was amazed by what I saw, heard, and read: most people know nothing of their European heritage, and not many take any interest in it. Nowadays Christians scarcely dare to glorify Jesus Christ. "Happy Christmas" has been overtaken by the greeting: "Happy holiday!"

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