

Russia Under Peter & Catherine

During his childhood, his half-sister Sophia staged a coup in the palace, during which many of Peter's uncles & relatives were killed. Fearful of staying in the palace, Peter would spend his teenage years roaming and exploring Moscow's Foreign Quarter, where he gained a lasting admiration for Western methods and ways.

Selective Westernization (cont.)

② were modernized along Western lines. Peter had no use for or interest in Western political systems such as limited monarchy. He and his successors would resist political reforms until the 20th Century.

③ His economic reforms did not seek the creation of a western-style commercial economy, although contacts with the West greatly increased under his rule. Russia would be drawn into the global economy as a supplier of raw materials such as furs & timber & increasing grain, but would not be an equal partner in this system. Russia would remain far behind the West economically until the 20th Century as a result.

Peter's death in 1724 due to a boating accident would lead to a succession of weak & ineffective Tsars. When his grand-nephew Peter III reached the throne in 1762, it appeared this procession of weak Tsars would continue. Fortunately for Russia, Peter's German-born wife would take matters in hand.

Catherine the Great (1762-1796)

her name to Catherine, and her reign and its achievements would cast her as arguably the most powerful and successful female ruler in modern world history.

Her first challenge was internal, in the form of a peasant uprising led by Emelian Pugachev, a peasant Cossack warrior who claimed to be her dead husband Peter I. Her stern and brutal repression of this uprising - Pugachev's severed head was displayed on the walls of St. Petersburg as a warning to others - cemented her authority as a powerful Tsarina (Empress).

As a compromise for this power relationship, she granted the nobility control over most of Russia's lands as well as most of its people; most Russian peasants were now serfs, landless peasants tied to the land they worked for their noble masters. This compromise meant that Russia would remain feudal in appearance long after the West. Russian serfs would not be freed until 1861, & the social divide encouraged would persist for longer.

she continued the agenda of her predecessors; territorial expansion. At her death Russia had ~~grown~~ tripled in size. She won a series of wars in Eastern Europe and South Asia that saw Russia's territory greatly increase in these regions. She also continued and expanded colonization of Siberia and encouraged expansion onto North America. Russian explorers claimed Alaska for Russia,

Catherine the Great

and spread down the North American coastline, establishing settlements as far south as Northern California.

- By the time of ^{Catherine's} death in 1796 Russia had passed through almost 300 years of extraordinary development.

- ① It had freed itself from all traces of foreign rule.
- ② " " constructed a strong central state.
- ③ " " extended its control over the largest land empire in the world at that time.

Many of these changes closely resembled the rise of Western Europe's absolute monarchy. * It must be realized, however, that unlike the Western monarchs, Russian Tsars possessed virtually no limits on their authority. Their success in imposing education, culture and political responsibilities on their nobility would have made Louis XIV jealous.

* These trends have long-term consequences for Russia
① they encouraged an autocratic tradition - a belief that Russian civilization requires a strong, autocratic government. This belief still persists in Russia today.

② lack of peasant access to power and - both political and economic - generated recurring peasant unrest.

The Pugachev Rebellion demonstrated this, and it was clear to many observers of Russian affairs that this "peasant problem" would continue to increase.

By 1800 this was the critical problem facing Russia's leaders - attempts to resolve it form the background of Russian history b/t 1800 & 1917.