

The Europeanized Elite in Russia, 1762–1825

PUBLIC ROLE AND SUBJECTIVE SELF

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Abbreviations

- AMAIV—Arkhiv muzeia artillerii, inzhenernykh voisk, i voisk sviazi
(Archive of the Museum of Artillery, Engineering, and Communication Corps)
- GANO—Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Novgorodskoi oblasti (State Archive of Novgorod Oblast')
- GARF—Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation)
- GIM OPI—Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei. Otdel pismennykh istochnikov (State Historical Museum Division of Written Sources)
- IRLI RO—Rukopisnyi otdel Instituta russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii dom)
(Manuscript Division of the Institute of Russian Literature. Pushkin House)
- KFZh—Kamer-fur'skii tseremonial'nyi zhurnal (Ceremonial Diary of the Chamber Fourrier)
- PSZ—Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii s 1649 goda (Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire since 1649), Pervoe sobranie
- RGA VMF—Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv voenno-morskogo flota
(Russian State Archive of the Navy)
- RGADA—Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (State Archive of Ancient Acts)
- RGALI—Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art)
- RGB OR—Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka. Otdel rukopisei (Manuscript Collection of the Russian State Library)
- RGIA—Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Archive of History)
- RGVIA—Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Military Historical Archive)
- RNB OR—Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka. Otdel rukopisei (Manuscript Department of the Russian National Library)

Note on Transliteration and Dates

In keeping with standard scholarly practice, we have used the Library of Congress transliteration system to render Russian names and words, except where there is a well-established English equivalent.

Dates are indicated in the Old (Julian) Style except where otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION

Russian history is not short of utopian projects. Some, like communism, are defined as such when they failed or are close to failure. Others escape this kind of analysis at all, because they largely succeeded. This book is devoted to such an exceptional enterprise. It would not be too difficult to argue the impossibility of creating a Europeanized educated upper class residing in a predominantly non-European country, had history not proved the contrary.

The changes initiated by the emperor Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century were dramatic, but not entirely unique in the annals of history. They arguably represented the most far-reaching attempt at enforced Westernization until the Meiji restoration in Japan in 1868 and the Atatürk reforms in Turkey in the 1920s. Russian parallels have been obvious to the ideologues of Japanese and Turkish reforms as well as to the scholars studying them (Beasley 1973, 82, 91; Mardin 2002, 357, 370).¹ The editors of a recent volume on Turkish modernization start their introduction by referring implicitly to the famous formula from Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*, comparing Atatürk who "opened wide windows to the west—those that were already half-open as well as those that remained shut until his reforms" to Peter the Great, who "hacked through

the ice that surrounded Russia to open a window to the West” (Kerslake, Öktem, Robins 2010, 1).

As in Russia, which began to forge a Europeanized nobility for military and civil service in the context of its prolonged war with Sweden in the early eighteenth century, the complete overhaul of the basic institutions and practices of national life in Turkey and Japan was prompted by a military situation, in this instance after major military defeats. In both instances, Westernization was an inevitable response to the challenges posed by Western civilization, perceived to be more advanced militarily, economically, technologically, and culturally (Esenbel 2011, 167–168). Russian and Japanese emperors as well as Turkish national leaders viewed their own country as not only backward but dangerously fragile, risking annihilation by their more advanced rivals. The time span left for catching up was usually deemed precariously short, not allowing reliance on gradual evolutionary changes.

At the same time, this transformation was regarded and promoted by the authorities as a significant step toward enlightenment, interpreted mostly in universalist terms. While warning against slavish imitation of Western patterns (he was especially worried about material inequality), Fukuzava Yakuchi, one of the most influential thinkers of the Meiji restoration, wrote that “the West’s wealth and power must be truly envied.” (His treatise about the advantages of learning was published in 3,400,000 copies.) He believed that “the progress of civilization lies in seeking the truth both in the area of physical facts and in the spiritual affairs of man” and that in this respect “the civilization of the West is of course to be admired.” He complained that “it has been only recently that we have begun to do so” (Miyake 1993, 4). Thus, the imitation of the “advanced” West was marked by a specific constellation of admiration, love, envy, and animosity that did not in the least preclude a strong growth of patriotic feelings, but actually implied them.

In all three countries, the predominant response to presumed “backwardness” was to create an educated Westernized elite, able to compete with European peers. Selçuk Esenbel noted “the elitist character of decisionmaking for the top-down reform experiences of Japan and Turkey” as the members of the elite “were in a ‘head-start’ position of incorporating western culture in their personal lives and were trying to use western culture in reforms” (Esenbel 2011, 165). However, the ultimate goals of both Meiji restoration and Kemalist revolution were to mobilize a broader stratum of society that would follow the example set by the elites. In the latter case, nation building was at the core of the project as the partial Westernization of the narrow circles of imperial elite was already achieved to a significant degree during the nineteenth century. In both countries, the transformations aimed to break with the narrow and