

# Evaluation of peter the greats westernization of russia



The westernization of Russia, initiated and propagated by Peter the Great was successful because of the change in domestic, military, and foreign policies during his rule. Evaluating historical evidence and arguments presented by historians such as Derek Wilson, W. Lincoln, and Robert Massie, show the course of events that allowed Peter to bring western European culture into the Russian aristocracy. Contradictions have risen from historians such as Nicholas Turgenev who debate that western influences were moving into Russia from the natural flow of migration throughout Europe and Peter's decisions as ruler inhibited Russia's progress. I argue that Peter's strong leadership abilities and first hand experience in Europe contributed to the process of Russian westernization and determined the western characteristics that Russia would adopt. In reality, westernization is a mindset that Peter enabled through his attempts at connecting Russia to Europe.

Peter was born in 1672 as the fourteenth child of Emperor Alexis. He came to the throne at ten years old with his brother Ivan, who was almost an idiot. The boys were proclaimed joint emperors of Russia but their older, ambitious Sophia, acted as regent and aligned herself with Gallitzin, the prime minister. Peter's interest in the world was evident to Gallitzin who said " Madam," said Gallitzin, " we need fear nothing from Ivan, but Peter alarms me. He has a thirst for knowledge that cannot be quenched. He wishes to know everything,' (Berend 629). From an early age Peter made an effort to understand everybody's perspective by learning through experience and starting at the lowest rung of trade skill hierarchies.

An analysis of Peter's abilities as Tsar begins by exploring the Russia he inherited. Both in size and world economic strength, Russia was smaller than Western Europe. Decades prior, Ivan the terrible conquered an enormous territory from the Tatar Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, thus gaining control of the whole course of the Volga. Up to the 1630s Russian conquests had pushed into Europe, collecting an enormous territory and Russia eventually spanned a continent (Lincoln 56). However, the climate of the land imposed hardships on the residents who had to endure freezing winters, scorching summers, and a shorter growing season for crops compared to Western Europe. The climate was an obstacle to economic progress because it caused lower standard yields of crops than those in Europe (Lincoln 87).

Such natural barriers were coupled with man-made problems and although Russia was geographically connected to Europe, it was also culturally and economically disconnected in many ways. The Russian rulers built a very autocratic government with a large separation of classes and severely large unequal distribution of the wealth, favorable in wealthy Romanov families. The expanse of the Russian territories demanded a strong, centralized government but the underdeveloped economy, even in the more populous Moscow region, kept Russia out of the European elite. Growth was slowly taking off due to iron, linen and canvas production, and salt abundance on the White Sea coast (Riasanovsky, 222).

Throughout the seventeenth century, the capitals of Europe lacked a permanent Russian diplomatic presence. Diplomats were typically sent to Europe during a state of crisis for only a brief period of time. They had difficulty interacting in European courts because of European ignorance to <https://assignbuster.com/evaluation-of-peter-the-greats-westernization-of-russia/>

the Russian language. Thus in 1673 after Prussian protest, the Russian government made an agreement to provide Latin or German translations of any documents which its envoys might bring to Berlin. Furthermore, Europeans criticized the Russian diplomats for taking advantage of their position abroad to sell furs and collect an individual profit on government travel (Lincoln 222).

Russia's influence in Europe was increasing among few countries. King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden recognized Russia as a potential ally against Poland. Since the 1550's the Dutch Republic was the most commercially advanced in the world, allowing Russia to step in as a raw materials provider of pitch, tallow, leather, grain, and furs. By the 1690s over 300 Dutch merchants were based in Russia, while the whole European sect in Moscow was only 1000 (Anderson 223).

Peter's widespread reform eventually also addressed military and domestic policies where he helped establish Russia as a western power. As Tsar his military and domestic policies helped established Russia as a western power and a dominant country in the Baltic Sea. Peter admired the English navy, influencing him to expand the Russian powers across the seas. The Russians were at odds with the Turks and the Crimean Tatars. Although these nations were not in a state of active war, the Russians suffered from incessant Tatar raids and the Cossacks in the southern lands were also growing restless. Peter wanted to capture the Ottoman port of Azov but his first attempted failed. The following year in 1696, he took five months to build 25 armed galleys, 300 barges, and 30 sea going boats in addition to rafts and fire ships allowing the second campaign in Azov to be an instant success (Cracraft 23).  
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Afterwards, Peter recognized the need to build and train an effective navy and he decided to travel abroad to learn more about modern naval warfare. Before his departure, he instructed his Boyar council to gather twenty thousand men to build a town and harbor on the shores of the Sea of Azov. Then, based on wealth allotments, each group was required to contribute a certain amount of materials, ships, and sailors to the Navy (Cracraft 49).

In March 1697, traveling incognito, Peter embarked on his first European tour with his Grand Embassy with the hope of securing a European alliance against the Ottoman Porte. Peter also had an ulterior motive; he wanted to see the great naval forces behind Holland, England. As a boy, Peter had loved ships and during his Grand Embassy, he worked undercover in foreign shipyards, starting at the lowest rank. Holland and England's naval forces impressed Peter and inspired him to finish his naval studies in England, after which, King William III presented him with a magnificent yacht.

Russia's breakthrough in the Baltic came after Peter decided the Ottoman Port conquest was a hopeless cause but recognized it could still have a potential victory in a Swedish conquest. This led to the northern war between Peter and Charles XII of Sweden and lasted 21 years. This war finally concluded when Charles invaded Poland, allowing Peter to conquer Ingra in the Baltic and gain access to the sea (Cracraft 65). At the mouth of Neva, Peter immediately founded a port, a fortress, and named the town St. Petersburg. European alarms went out that Peter had conquered Ingridia, Charles XII was not finished, however, and after Charles destroyed his other enemies, he systematically turned to Russia preparing for a final victory. At

Poltava in June 1709, Peter led his army to brilliantly prove itself by defeating the Swedes and replacing them as a great power in the north (Cracraft 68).

In 1721, Peter's representatives signed the Treaty of Nystadt, where Sweden recognized Russia's preeminent position in the Baltic. W. Bruce Lincoln credits the treaty of establishing Russia as a major force in European affairs during the last decade of his reign. Between 1715 and 1725 Peter constructed the domestic supports for the empire he proclaimed after his victor of Sweden. From Peter's perspective, if Russia was to support the military colossus, her newly proclaimed emperor had created and if the government were to look after the welfare of Russians, a far more sophisticated central administration was needed (Lincoln, 117-120).

In 1722 after Peter studied western bureaucracies, Peter introduced the Table of Ranks. The new legislation set aside the traditional Muscovite hierarchy of titles and ranks, replacing it with the Table of Ranks. Before long the Table of Ranks turned into a veritable charter of the service class. At that time power and wealth in Russia were attainable almost exclusively by working for or with the state, acquisition of status, or chin, bestowed on the holder uniquely privileged status. Such people were assured of a government job for themselves and, in most cases, for their offspring as well. They also enjoyed the most valuable of all economic privileges, the right to own land worked by serf labor. In the words of Nicholas Turgenev, 'Russians lacking chin were en dehors de la nation officielle ou legale- outside the pale of the nation in the official or legal sense of the word' (Anderson, 25-28). Turgenev regards the Table of Ranks as Peter's backwards attempt to westernize Russia that did more harm than good.

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Entry into the service and advancement in it became a national obsession for Russians especially those from the lower middle classes. Clergymen, shopkeepers and scribes developed a consuming ambition for their sons to acquire the rank of a cornet in the army or commissar or registrar in the civil service and in this way gained access to the trough. The kind of motivation, that in commercial countries went into accumulation of capital, in Imperial Russia tended to concentrate on the acquisition of Chin.

As Peter built his army his military expenditures consumed the majority of Russian revenues. He explored and practiced many methods of taxation and in 1724 decided to eliminate a complex system of payments in money, goods, and labor and instead charged a single " Soul" tax on each individual adult male. Instead of taxing households individually, where many families lived in one home to avoid high taxes, no one could evade capitations.

The taxation changes also led to reclassification because impoverished nobles and low-level clergymen suddenly became part of the serf class. Also, Peter required households to send a soldier annually to add the 32, 000 army of commoners. The government was able to triple the state income, which was important to support the large army. The introduction of the soul tax led to various changes in the Russian social structure. Compulsory military service became a requirement of the lower class and nobles were freed from state service so the divide between classes heightened.

The wars against Sweden not only forced the expansion of the Russian navy, but the expansion of the Russian economy as well. M. E. Falkus (Anderson, 115) compared European industrialization to Russian industrialization

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because ' Russian industrialization was ' forced' by Peter within a relatively backward Russian economy in order to ' catch up'. ' As war often causes, the growth of manufacturing and provided thousands of industrial workers with new jobs as old industries grew ad new ones were crated. Foreign commerce had a large role in the newly grown Russia because the main port was moved from the Archangel port in the White Sea to St. Petersburg in the Baltic.

Old industries such as iron forging and salt mining continued, but many of the new technologies were developed in support of Peter's continuous wars. Cannon foundries and armaments works were constructed, iron and copper mining developed, and geological surveys were initiated to discover mineral resources (Lincoln 248). Woolen cloth factories were set up to provide uniforms for the armies, while sailcloth, rope and other manufacture war developed to provide equipment for the newly formed navy. The state was heavily involved in developing public and private enterprises because it was the largest customer and consumer of the new goods. With Russia's new port on the Baltic, Peter also imported new industries to manufacture in Russia include luxury items like velvet, brocade and silk (Cracraft 92).

Unfortunately, industrialization in Russia was still not helping everyone. ' Substantial industrialization cannot take place on the basis of mass demand private domestic capital and available entrepreneurial resources. The state, if it desires industrialization, has to foster industries,' (Bushkovitch, 738). In Peter the Great's time came the strengthening of serfdom, the crushing poll taxation on the peasants and various other adverse actors, which increased the already powerful forces in the economy resistant to spontaneous

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industrial growth. The retarding effect that's Peter's method of industrialization had on Russia, affected the welfare of Russia people for the next hundred years, as only the aristocrats were able to escape the brutalities of serfdom. The overwhelming number of serfs made it difficult to form an industrial free labor force that could develop the new technologies.

To ease industrial difficulties, merchants were allowed to purchase serfs for industrial labor, and later in 1721 merchants were allowed to purchase entire villages for his enterprises. Such serfs did not become the property of the purchaser, but became the property of the industrial enterprise and would remain with the enterprise if ownership changed hands. Arcadius Kahan debates that Peter's industrialization was not backward and instead Peter grew the manufacturing sect by creating entrepreneurial opportunities (Berend, 630). The Kahan debate contributes to my belief that westernization refers to the cultural awareness of the Tsar's push for change. People were open to the new opportunities that Peter was creating in his effort to at least appear to be more western.

After Peter's reign, his immediate successors were unassertive and short to rule. The army and bureaucracy Peter established developed a set of principles that diverged sharply from his insistence that all Russians must serve their country. However, through the historical evidence presented about Peter's military and domestic changes it is clear that Peter had a great affect on the mindset of the Russian people, which is the foundation of the westernization of an empire.