

Assess the role of the factor of competition with the West in initiating Russia's great cycles of modernisation

Russia's geographic and cultural position in the world has led to a very particular way of modernising. The cycles in which it has modernised, beginning during the 1600's in the rule of Peter the Great (1682-1785) and continuing to present day, are perhaps tied directly to the west and Russia's fight for its place in Europe throughout history. The theories which explain this include Modernisation Theory and Globalisation Theory, though this essay with focus on modernisation theory, as this literature tends to focus on this, rather than the broader Globalisation issue. This essay aims to explore the cycles using a chronological methodology applying Modernisation theory to explain how competition with the west can be directly linked to Russia's reform periods.

Rostow understands modernisation theory in five stages of growth; the Traditional Society, technologically undeveloped and based on "limited production functions" (Rostow 1990: 4); The Precautions for Take-off, the transitional period where science and research are developed and education broadens; The Take off, where the economy leaps into action and investment and saving rises; The Drive to Maturity, a period of sustained progress after the Take-off where new industries take over from the old ones and the older methods of production are replaced with the more modern versions and finally The Age of High Mass Consumption, a consumer period where real income raises and modern technology is embraced. Applying this model to somewhere like Britain, it can be seen this was a similar progression into modernisation (Hobsbawm 1968: 280-281), but applied to Russia, it is clear there are several gaps, jumps and interruptions, such as the 1917 revolutions and the rule of communism during which time the dialectic model was more what growth was based on, rather than this western model. It is therefore necessary to explore each period of modernisation in turn, identifying which period of this model Russia is striving for and the reasons behind it.

The era of Petrine reform between 1699 and 1725 is considered the beginning of modern Russian History (Charques 1956: 84) (Chubarov, 2007). Peter the Great sought to learn off the west, doing educational exchanges in order to gain the knowledge as a society to modernise in line with the west. He was always amazed at the superiority of the west, and therefore tried to pull economic and social reforms in line with them- trying to achieve the 'Precautions to Take-off' phase by research into western methods. The problem with doing this, and the reason he was not entirely successful in initiating long term sustainable growth, is due to the fact he had not taken adaptability into account;

he had sought to completely emulate a western economic climate without taking into account the different cultural and social climate within Russia (Clarkson 1962: 236-239).

Britain and other countries of the West were starting to move in the definite direction of the 'Precautions to Take off' phase, but they adapted to this quickly in areas such as urbanisation- which was impossible for Russia due to serfdom trapping peasants in the rural areas. Reforms did include changes to serfdom, for example, serfs who left land to work in factories could not be pursued by their masters and in increase in the number of serfs pushed into mining (Clarkson 1962: 238-239), but this was slow to change the rural/urban distribution. Peter had hoped to throw away the 'Traditional Society' stage and force about the 'Precautions of Growth' stage in other ways as well, including reforms to the army, technology and society (Charques 1956: 85-87). Trade was tied into this reform, along with others- Peter pushed for more trade to be done with the west, virtually abandoning the Archangel trade route and choosing instead the Baltic states and the West (Clarkson 1962: 241).

Militarily and economically, Peter reformed due to, not only the competition with the west and his desire to destroy 'Muscovite' society (Dukes: 1974: 75), but also due to the need to fight and finance the Great Northern War. This raises the argument that competition with the west was not the main factor, as the reforms of this era can be traced to not only acquisition of territory, but also to the need for trade and economic reforms to finance this. However, the model Peter used was based on the Western model, the model similar to the one put forward by Rostow, and he therefore saw an advantage in turning Russia more into a western economy than an eastern or unique one. The trade was also arguably in order to catch up with the west, which already had very strong trade routes between each other and acquired colonies, as can be seen from the strong Navy of the Dutch and English. This worry about military power and the desire to keep territory away from powers in the West became a main concern of future modernisation cycles.

It can be seen in the period after Peter's death that Russia, now more modernised, certainly very powerful militarily had slowed down its process of modernising. There was a struggle for power between members of the aristocracy and a lack of land reform sooner had led to the serfs in the same position they always had been, meaning factories and technology had not improved much. There was a territorial expansion in this period as well, taking territory from around the Black sea and other surrounding territories (Dixon 1999: 30). The need to reform is clearly not there in this period, there was no need to modernise to keep up with the west as the first cycle of reforms were continuing to allow them to reach military parity. To demonstrate this, Russia had grown by 8.6

million square miles between 1750 and 1791 (Dixon 1999: 29), and most believed Russia was simply pursuing a "competition by conquest" foreign policy (Dixon 1999: 29).

Modernisation during this time took the form of intellectual modernisation, rather than economic or military. The establishment of Universities during this time was the work of Catherine the Great (born 1729, 1762-96, the period of modernisation after she took the throne from her husband). The 'Enlightened' Catherine did not totally destroy and recreate a new society and set of systems the way Peter had done, but rather reformed and amended laws already in place (Clarkson 1962: 281-283).

However, when the industrial revolution allowed the West to enter the 'Take-off' phase, the lack of economic and social modernity held Russia back. With massive expansion came economic consequences and Russia was financially stretched and people within Russia started to feel without a national identity (Dixon 1999: 52-53).

The biggest warning to Russia in the nineteenth century that it needed to modernise came in the form of the Crimean War (1853-1856), which demonstrated Russia's backwardness compared to Britain, France and the United States. What this meant for Russia was that if Russia did not reach the 'Take-off' stage soon, the other Western nations would overtake Russia still further and there was a potential for being left completely behind economically and therefore militarily. This started the second cycle of reforms beginning around 1855 and ending with the beginning of the end of communism 1981. This period was of course interrupted and starts to drift away from the Modernisation Theory model due to the rise of communism, born arguably out of problems caused by the lack of modernisation between the first cycles and the clumsy reforms made during the second.

To argue this there needs to be mention of the reforms in this period up to 1917.

In the 1840s empirical research was undertaken on rural society in Russia (Dixon 1999: 80), and the serfs were emancipated in 1861. However, due to the stages system the act put in place and the lack of legislation to assist serfs once freed, the peasants still felt freedom was yet to be gained (Streich 2009).

Modern society was still being worked towards socially, but the emancipation was due to the need to reform society to make it more like that of Western powers and the need for urbanisation and social mobility.

This problem was compounded by the creation of a unified France, Germany and Italy in the 1870s, leading to the emergence of three newly established economic industrial powers. Germany, being geographically located on Russia's western border and with no

history of friendship, represented not only an economic threat, but a military one as well.

The problem in this period for the Tsars who were in power from 1855 to 1917 was that they were trying to reorganise the population without putting in the mechanisms to do that (such as the poor quality of the land for subsistence that the serfs were actually allowed to keep for themselves (Streich 2009), and the lack of land reform around a century before it happened to keep up with the western powers). Russia had stretched itself militarily and had not successfully expanded its technology base, as the Crimean War had shown, and now was being left behind due to its inability to make up for its virtually complete inaction with regards to land reform, and therefore inability to urbanise and expand its industrial base (Dukes 1974: 150-154).

During the centuries which divided Peter the Great and the revolution, there were signs that liberation and democratisation, like that in the west, was beginning. The reason for the slight reluctance for more liberalisation could be the fear which gripped Europe after the French revolution, yet Alexander the second pushed through 'liberal' reforms during mid the nineteenth century (Charques 1956: 124-1255). These reforms included the afore mentioned emancipation of the serfs, but also lifting some censorship and improving democratisation.

The reforms only went so far and the problems with not having an urban, geographically flexible workforce meant Russia could not industrialise at the same rate as the other powers. It was then that the biggest changes occurred in Russia. The people themselves, led by the intelligentsia, decided to modernise the political and social system by force. After the defeat at the hands of Japan in 1904, there was a revolution in 1905.

This revolution is tied to both the Crimean War and the Japanese War, as both were massively embarrassing for a nation which had become used to having and maintaining a massive empire and being a European leader. It can also be put down to both the 'liberal reforms' under Alexander II and the weakness of Nicholas II, being "not a person capable of wielding autocratic power" (Clarkson 1962: 420). The situation on the eve of the revolution was very similar to France before theirs; there was an unpopular royal house, a rising upper class and a restless lower class desperate for modernisation and change (Clarkson 1962: 438).

During and after the revolution, Russia began to come out of the bad financial situation caused by the Japanese war, and improvements began to take place. For example, transport networks grew and modernised, such as the railways where there was twice as much track in the period 1909-13 as there was in 1893 and Russia's industrial growth

rate was similar to those of other powers such as Germany- even outstripping Germany and the USA in some areas (Dukes 1974: 191-192). It can be argued that perhaps more modernisation was now being driven by internal factors; the Russian Government and Tsar did not want a repeat of the 1905 revolution, especially realising next time the state could be torn apart totally.

It can be seen therefore this cycle was driven by competition with the west- the sudden social and economic changes to fall in line with the west as they industrialised and Russia could not compete, the impact to the Crimean war and the revolution as a cry from the people to attempt further modernisation. Referring back to modernisation theory as set out by Rostow, Russia was now able to identify as being in the 'Take off' stage, along with the rest of the West.

However it was another war, World War one, which again caused conflict within Russia itself, and food and labour shortages led to another revolution, but this time a Marxist Revolution.

The war had a massive effect in beginning the transformation of the world into the modern one we know today. It led to the destruction of many of the empires, including the Ottoman empire and the German empire, and was a major factor contributing to the fall of Tsarism in Russia. The new socialist Russia was the first to announce its creation under a specific ideology (Dukes 1974: 205) and therefore can be argued as being the result of the desire to transform society into a more modern entity.

Socialism was now modernising Russia for a number of reasons, but principally competition with the west due to the nature of Marxist-Leninist ideology about class struggle and the strength of the socialist state. The idea that workers could band together was already in place in Russia in the form of communes, which had been expanded after the emancipation of the serfs. Therefore the revolution at this stage was, at a social level, a continuation of what was in place previously. Furthermore, the political structure with the local soviet already set up provided a base onto which to impose top down communism without restructuring.

With the beginning of Stalinism and particularly the New economic Policy adopted in the 1920s, the Russian economy can be seen to be mirroring western methods of production in an attempt to make them better and adapted to the Soviet way of thinking in terms of collectivisation and mass industrialisation, as well as the 'Americanisation' of trade (Hessler 2000: 188-194). This period was a continuation of the second cycle as the aims were the same, reform to create a "Take off", strong economy in competition with the west on especially economic and military aspects.

However, the "Drive to Maturity" stage leading to the "Age of Mass Consumption" was missed as Stalinism did not allow for consumer goods and incomes which would allow for this and the problems with aggressive foreign policy during the 1940s and 1950s gave rise to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) and the alienation of China (although this was probable anyway (McCauley 1981: 151). This period in Russian history (the Cold War) sees competition in the west as well as the need for self sufficiency the driving factors behind the continuation of the second cycle of modernisation, culminating in the Soviet Union matching the United States in industrial output, technology (for example the 'Space Race' of the 1960s) and militarily (with the creation of the Atomic Bomb). However, their modernisation in social areas was very much behind the USA, with the lack of consumer goods available and few social freedoms. This led to financial problems; the technological aspirations in terms of the space race were too much for such an inflexible economy, and the missing foreign investment and consumer goods sales led to massive shortfalls culminating in financial difficulties. On top of this there was the revolution of the micro chip which spread across Europe and America, With such a centralised, rigid economy, the Soviet Union was unable to adopt the new technology and was again left behind the West.

Following Stalin's death, subsequent leaders spent the next thirty years operating destalinisation and trying to modernise the economy, but, under Gorbachev, Perestroika resulted in the break up of the Soviet Union and the end of the Communist model. The reforms under Yeltsin and then Putin transformed the economy, society and political structure into a more modern and more importantly, more western model. The "Age of Mass Consumption" was now the stage to aim at, creating more consumer goods, more choice and more privatisation. The reforms have led to a boost in consumer industries, more technological advancement and less social agitation (Chubarov 2007).

The reforms under Putin show that modernisation means westernisation, and that there is more to it than organising the navy and army, but instead organising society and the economy to operate in a more westernised, capitalist way (Desai 2006: 398). Under Yeltsin, the system in the political realm was modernised in such a way that now elections were the way to gain power, so popular voting and democratic elections held the key to government, which means the government get their legitimacy from the public, so civil unrest is, in theory, a thing of the past as a new election can be forced.

The other modernisation has come in the form of the economy, which is described by some as half way between command and mixed, a controlled, managed, but liberal and free economy based on the western model, meaning Russia can compete on the same

level and trade is easier between states throughout the world (Gaddy and Ickes 1999: 45-47).

In conclusion, the three cycles all seemed to be reactions to events in the west. Under Peter the Great, his reforms were to modernise society and bring Russia into Europe, abandoning some of the culture and opting for traditionally western models of economy and society. This was shown to be needing further reform after the Crimean war highlighted how far behind Russia was compared to the western powers. The lack of social modernisation had meant that the industrial revolution had not affected Russia in the same way as the rest of Europe and the second cycle of reforms from the mid nineteenth century sought to redress this. In the last period we have seen massive changes in Russia, but only as they could not compete with the west on any sort of field, meaning modernisation along the lines of the west was their only option.

Russia has always responded to her desire to be a force in Europe, and modernisation has allowed her to do this. Cycles had to occur rather than progression due to the cultural and economic make-up of Russia and later, the USSR. Whether the aim was to modernise society, the economy, the military or politically, the competitive element has always been there, and Russia keeps fighting for its place in Europe.

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