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## **Socio-Cultural Factors of the Russian Reforming Process of the 18-20th Centuries**

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### **Abstract**

The modern Russian reforms aimed at moving the society to a new stage of development are going through a complicated, contradictory way, with great social costs and zigzags of the political course of power. This poses the task of identifying and overcoming the inhibiting factors in the development of the country. One of the most effective mechanisms of such work is the study of the three-hundred-year experience of Russian reformation and the identification of timeless sociocultural and mental risk factors affecting the nature and content of reforms. This article is devoted to this purpose.

In the course of study, we have drawn the conclusions about the deterrent effect on the development of the country of such features of Russian society as its socio-cultural split, absence of internal mechanisms for the self-development of society, lack of a dialogue between government and society, whose relationships are determined by the principle of "antisocial state - anti-state society", mental characteristics of the Russian intelligentsia, which dogmatically implements particular ideas at the expense of economic expediency and common sense, orientation of the ruling elite on the Western values as opposed to national traditions, conservatism and lack of conscious reformative motivation of the masses. This leads to the need to correlate the current reforms not only with the current trends of socio-economic development, but also with the sociocultural foundations of Russian society and the peculiarities of its mentality.

**Keywords:** Russian reforms, Society, Power, Split, Social base.

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## **Introduction**

### *1.1 Introduction to the problem*

The last three centuries of Russian history are taking place in the logic of catching-up development. With the help of periodically repeating reforms, Russia is trying to reach the European level, but each time it cannot fully solve the task set and is forced to undertake new reform efforts under new conditions, with a new ideological framework, with a new team of performers, but with the same traditional goal of "entering" to Europe as an equal partner.

### *1.2 Relevance of the problem*

Taking into account that the country is passing through the next reformative cycle, an analysis of the specifics of Russian reforms, starting with Peter's modernization, represents not only scientific but also practical and political interest. Identification of the long-term risk factors, timeless blockages of sustainable, progressive development of the country in all spheres of society's life and their account in the modern transformations of the country would allow not stepping on the traditional Russian «rake» once again and adjusting the reformative course of power.

Many attitudes of modern mass consciousness are adequate to the understanding of pre-revolutionary Russia by humble beginnings and preserve space-time stability. Their identification based on a comparative historical analysis of pre-revolutionary and modern data makes it possible to take into account their influence on the state construction of post-Soviet Russia and the likely correction of the reformative course of power.

### *1.3 Study of the problem*

A vast historical and sociological literature is devoted to the study of Russian reforms. The peculiarity of prerevolutionary and Soviet historiography was the study of the largest reformatory cycles, beginning with Peter I, Catherine II, the great reforms of Alexander II, the individual projects of the Soviet period in specific time frames and the context of social and economic problems of his time, without a broad historical retrospective. As an example of such an approach, we can refer to the works of V.I. Buganov (1989), N.I. Pavlenko (2000), L.G. Zakharova (1996), S.G. Kovalenko (2008), E.T. Gaydar (2007).

This approach, from the standpoint of new methodological guidelines, is also preserved at the present stage. At the same time, its peculiarity is the shift in emphasis from the concrete historical analysis of individual reforms toward a comparative historical analysis of the reformation process of Russia as a whole within the framework of the modernization theory, revealing its regularities and distinctive features within the boundaries of the global modernization process. The largest works of this direction include the studies of A.S. Akhiezer (1994), V.V. Ilyin, A.S. Panarin, & A.S. Akhiezer (1996), B.N. Mironov (2003).

### *1.4 Hypotheses*

As a rule, the bulk of researchers focuses on the socio-economic risk factors of Russian reforms. We believe that the sociocultural and mental features of Russian society have even greater inhibiting influence on the development of the country, and this article is devoted to their analysis.

## **2. Methods**

The main methods used in writing this article included the historical-genetic method, which made it possible to trace the impact of Russian reforms on the historical development of the country, the historical-comparative method, which made it possible to trace these changes in a long historical

perspective and to reveal the general and particular of the individual reformatory cycles, the historical-typological method, which made it possible to reveal the main categories of changes in the evolution of the state and society. Consideration of the evolution of the main features of state consciousness in the broader context of the historical transformation of Russia and consideration of the diversity of corresponding changes predetermined the importance of the historical and systemic method.

### **3. Discussion**

Traditionally, Russian reformation was carried out in the form of "revolutions from above," which began typically: either as a result of the weakening of international authority and the loss of former greatness (the beginning of Gorbachev's perestroika) or as a result of direct military defeats (the reforms of Peter I and Alexander II). Thus, although there were growing moods in favor of transformations within the society, and the causes of external failures were hidden in internal ailments, the first push was always of foreign origin.

In our opinion, such a course of events reflects the absence or, at least, the embryonic state of the society's self-development mechanism (which is so tightly integrated into social fabric in dynamic societies that the society develops not because of an external incentive in the person of power structures, but because of immanent nature), and is a consequence of the inertial nature of the development of social processes in our country's history, the underside of which is the impulse, spasmodic rhythm of Russian reforms.

The reforms were aimed at the development of new technologies of economic, social and cultural life and on this basis aimed the country to perform a solo part in a European concert. Europeanization was usually accompanied by a violent break-up of the old, including viable sprouts of folk life, a break with national traditions and succession of the forms of historical development. This means the negativism of the bulk of population in relation to reforms and the particularly acute problem of their price for Russia (Antipyev, 2010).

The Westernization of Russian society, inherent in the last three centuries of Russian history, has always been a matter for the minority of the people, the absolutist state represented by its ruling elite and has never proceeded from the people's initiative. According to A.I. Gertsen, the mass of people has always been the "meat of liberation", and therefore the Europeanization was limited to changing the external aspects of social life, turning into liberation from one slavery to another (Barulin V.S., 2000). The concern of Russian reformers, first of all with organizational forms, and not with the correlation of the internal content of reforms with the value orientations of people, created only a "superficial" tension between various elements of the society. The internal ties remained flimsy and unsound, and the ideology of reforms "passed" the mass consciousness. It is no accident that the problem of forming the social base of reforms has consistently been a painful point of the Russian transformations, and the absence of a "counter movement" of the upper and lower class inhibited the development of reforms.

The "appearance" of the revolutions from above gave a special urgency to the common problem of power and society of all countries in Russia. Its reflection was represented by the division of society into two subcultures with their own values and the formation of a peculiar mechanism for the mass unaffectedness with their inherent psychological stereotypes (Akhiezer A.S., 1994). In the mass opinion, the power and politics as a whole were assessed as a dirty, immoral occupation, distrust towards the authorities focused the population on self-survival regardless of its personal carriers and nature, and the mainstream behavioral stereotype was the opposition between "we" and "them" (Shchestopal, 2014).

In many respects, this situation was a consequence of the peculiarities of the country's historical development. The objectively existing weak structure of the people, a large territory, an isolation of the city from the village, the underdeveloped infrastructure, the political tradition of strong state power that held back social and national conflicts on the "rarefied" poly-national territory and, most importantly, the absence of "commoners", resulted in the need to subordinate private interests to the interests of the whole, and the interests of the whole in Russia were represented by the supreme power, as a rule (Boronoev & Smirnov, 1992). Therefore, it was the Russian state that was the "engine of progress".

The nature of the Russian reforms was influenced by the features of the ruling elite, its behavioral stereotypes and Western values. The breakaway of the reformative avant-garde from the foundations of national culture and basic spiritual values was constantly observed. This allowed for reforming the potential threat of total destabilization, fraught not only with kickbacks in its behavior, but also with the risk of imbalance in the social mechanism.

For the reformative elite, it is typical to have a sense of one's own infallibility, arrogant attitude to the national culture, national traditions, which used to be qualified as peasant ignorance. Today it is called "sovkovost". Perhaps this is the secret of the authoritarian nature of the current "democrats", distinguished by verbal democratic tinsel and real authoritarianism in the style of conduct and administration.

Being part of the Russian intelligentsia, the reformation groups involuntarily contribute the inherent basic mental characteristics to the content of reforms, one of which, according to N.A. Berdyaev, is "the ability to live exclusively by ideas" and dogmatically absorb them (Berdyaev N.A., 1990). In practice, this was manifested in a kind of "stubbornness" of the reformers in respect of the only saving tool for bringing the country to Western standards. At the beginning of the 20th century, Marxist theory became such a guiding thread. Today it is the modernization theory developed by Western scientists in the 1960s of the 20th century.

In the transitional periods of Russian history, associated with the reformation processes, there were always expectations of spontaneous grace, rapid entry into a new quality and associated abundance, but these hopes were never fully justified. Moreover, the country was entering a state of chaos, the war by everybody against everybody else, the self-destruction impulses came to light from the depths of the people's element. As a result, the transition periods were crowned with etatism, either in the form of a party of order (restoration option, the Katkov-Pobedonostsev party), or in the form of a party of project (revolutionary-renewal option associated with the Bolshevik party). In general, the liberalization and politicization of Russian society not so much treated it as split, blasted and made the way for counter-reforms (National interests, 1996). There are some reasons to believe that the counter-reforms play not only a reactionary role, returning the past. For the inertial, clumsy Russia, the experience of trial and error created a peculiar mechanism of movement in zigzagging, a kind of oscillatory contour as the optimal option for modernization of a "catch-up type of development" in the country with a constantly conflicting social structure, traditionalism, a contradictory mentality with its sharp ups and downs from apathy to superactivity. This movement objectively became a mean of minimizing the risk of uncontrolled development of reforms into a social explosion. The reformers, who did not catch this national peculiarity, found themselves in a critical situation and condemned the country to it.

Such "failures" of Russian society are the evidence of the lack of dialogue models, when the elements of society are doomed to use the only paradoxical form of dialogue - the struggle to destroy, condemning society to a permanent state of split. The split itself, perceived by the modern researchers as an attribute of Russian culture, is in fact the result of a deeply prolonged modernization. In this situation, the society is split into two parts: advanced and archaic, and each of them develops its own models of adaptation to a

new situation (Rukavishnikov, Halman, & Esther, 1998). Therefore, any act of current reforms should be correlated in terms of its impact on various social groups, the need to foresee the possibility of a mass social shift to an uncomfortable state.

In the 20th century, Germany and Japan, which began the start almost simultaneously with Russia, solved the tasks set by history and time. What did prevent our country from using its chance and solve its age-old problem?

Apparently, with all other equal starting and economic parameters, the issue is limited with the underlying motivations of the changes occurred, the ability of social organism to implant the inocultural material. The tsarist, Soviet, and current reformers, who have tried and continue to blindly copy the European experience, traditions and values, not correlating them with national soil, folk culture, the matrix of "spiritual and intellectual system" of the Russian people, have lacked understanding of this fact. Ultimately, the reforms remained something superficial, artificial, did not penetrate the cellular level of mass consciousness for the unadvanced masses, and the reformative elite did not have any significant social base.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The current Russian reforms confirm these observations. Consciously or unconsciously, in terms of their essential characteristics, they are conducted in the logic of previous transformations. The existing natural differences do not overshadow the main thing: the content, direction, nature of the reforms are largely determined by the national genotype, stable behavioral stereotypes formed in the centuries by the socio-psychological code of perception and application of reality, through which a person comprehends the world and his place in it.

Therefore, the identification of the real and not imaginary features of national psychology, its basic values and their sense-making nucleus, use of the experience of the world and national modernization process make it possible to base the development of the strategy of current reforms on the stable value core that has remained unchanged for a long historical period, to conduct targeted selection work to identify explicitly and potentially reformative values and to minimize the negative impact of their opposites on the social processes (taking into account the dualism of the Russian soul). K.D. Kavelin wrote on the need to grow the basic features of truly Russian consciousness, relying on the common in the mental development of mankind, back in the 60s of the 19th century (Martsynkovskaya 1994). This becomes a common place for the modern socio-political literature, but the problem is far from being solved and requires the joint efforts of all interested parties, both the expert community and the representatives of state power.

#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors confirm that the data presented does not contain any conflict of interest.

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