1 Modernisation theory and Russian history

Modernisation theory

Loosely conceived, 'modernisation' may signify nothing more than a programme of reform required to bring an allegedly outmoded institution 'up to date' and fit to face the future. In Britain, for example, both the Labour Party and the Anglican church have recently been subjected to such campaigns, the one with more obvious benefit than the other. Modernisation, in this simple sense, has long appealed to historians as shorthand for the ways in which an apparently isolated and backward Muscovy – transformed into the Russian empire when Peter the Great (1672–1725) assumed the title 'Imperator' at the thanksgiving service for the end of the Great Northern War on 22 October 1721 – adopted Western standards in the eighteenth century in order to compete in the cut-throat world of the European international system. Scholars, however, have given modernisation explicit conceptual content, and it is in this sense, not always synonymous with Westernisation and sometimes directly contrary to it, that the term will be used in this book.

Modernisation theory takes as its principal economic transformation the shift from a network of predominantly rural communities, preoccupied by the needs of agrarian self-subsistence, to an increasingly urbanised, market-oriented society dominated by mechanised industry. A specialised workforce, distinguished by a division of labour unknown to traditional society, is supplied by a demographic revolution brought about by a fall first in mortality rates and later in fertility rates. Sustained economic growth, beyond the reach of traditional society, grants increased productivity to the modern state and a better standard of living to the majority of its population. Whereas traditional communities were stable hierarchies dominated by kinship networks, modern social mobility creates a more impersonal society in which national loyalties outweigh social ones. In this sense, nationalism generates nations, and not the other way around. Within the amorphous national mass, individuals have more choice than before, empowered not only by increased

affluence but also by the spread of literacy. This allows the written word to replace face-to-face contact as the principal mode of communication. By popularising scientific discoveries, education helps to demystify the world, enabling modern man to spend more time contemplating his history than agonising about his future. Wider access to education makes traditionally restricted high culture publicly accessible and opens up careers based on talent rather than on lineage, leading ultimately to an increase in popular politicisation and political equality. However, there is a price to pay. Modern states, in which personal sovereignty is eclipsed by bureaucratic institutions governed by law, exert a tighter fiscal hold over their citizens than did their traditional predecessors and constantly seek to extend their regulatory tentacles. Further, autonomous individuals may become alienated from their fellows and are likely to be beset by doubt in a secular modern world.[1]

Derived from the ideas of Max Weber (1864–1920), and reformulated by English-speaking scholars in the 1960s, such a bold thesis could hardly be expected to pass without criticism. Its rigid categories are by definition incompatible with the shimmering world of post-modernism. Yet post-modernists who regard rationality as an elusive, not to say undesirable, goal are far from the only ones to question modernisation theory: conventional scholars have also attacked it. Its linearity is evidently misleading: historians of religion, for example, have convincingly rejected any straight-line claims for secularisation.[2] Recoiling from the excesses of concept-driven historical writing, Joanna Innes complains in the cause of authenticity that 'we obstruct our own efforts to understand the eighteenth century by imposing upon it a set of analytical dichotomies [industrial/pre-industrial, secular/religious and so on] with their roots in nineteenth-century

[1] This paragraph amalgamates several key statements of the theory. Important early formulations included C. E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization* (New York, 1967), and S. N. Eisenstadt, *Tradition, Change and Modernity* (New York, 1973). J. Goody and I. Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', in Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 27–68, signified an interest in modernisation theory that was subsequently modified in Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977), and implicitly retracted in Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge, 1996). The central modernist interpretation of nationalism is E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983). Among recent reflections, see S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Patterns of Modernity*, 2 vols. (London, 1987); M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1989); J. A. Hall and I. C. Jarvie, eds., *Transition to Modernity: Essays on Power, Wealth and Belief* (Cambridge, 1992); C. Offe, *Modernity and the State: East, West* (Oxford, 1996). See also H.-U. Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1975), and T. Nipperdey, 'Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland', *Saeculum*, 30 (1979).

[2] See S. Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Historians and Sociologists Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford, 1992).

social science'.[3] And the modernist view of nationalism has recently sustained a damaging blow (though not a knock-out punch) from Adrian Hastings.[4]

In fact, modernisation theory has been vilified by both Left and Right. The Left took offence at the arrogance of the theory's Anglo-American liberal–capitalist assumptions and condemned it for making invidious comparisons between 'advanced' societies and so-called latecomers. It was in this way that modernisation became equated with Westernisation, which critics portrayed as 'a subtle form of "cultural imperialism"' discredited by its association with American expansionism.[5] By contrast, the Right, offended by modernity itself, has tended to dismiss modernisation as the Whig theory of progress dressed up in sociological jargon, and to condemn it for offering the sort of teleological historical education that imparted to Evelyn Waugh's unprepossessing Hooper 'a profusion of detail about humane legislation and recent industrial change' when it might instead have instilled in him a litany of glorious battles and respect for religious orthodoxy.[6]

Even its most distinguished proponents acknowledge weaknesses in modernisation theory. In striving for comprehensiveness, to borrow a phrase from the late Ernest Gellner, it sacrifices precision, so that the exact 'conditions of the exit' from tradition to modernity remain unclear.[7] Overexcited by the prospect of quantifying historical change in terms of economic growth, early theorists made modernisation synonymous with industrialisation. Long after their optimism had evaporated, Gellner continued to stress the qualitative influence of industrialisation, arguing that the mutual relationship of a modern culture and state were determined by the requirements of a modern economy. By contrast, E. A. Wrigley distinguishes *between* modernisation and industrialisation, seeing 'the twin, key notions' underpinning modernisation as 'rationality and self-interest', where rational behaviour is defined as action tending to maximise the decision-maker's economic returns, and self-interest is

[3] J. Innes, 'Jonathan Clark, Social History and England's "Ancien Regime"', *P&P*, 115 (1987), p. 177.

[4] A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997).

[5] D. C. Tipps, 'Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective', *CSSH*, 15, 1 (1973), pp. 209–10. Tipps's article is reprinted with other significant contributions to the debate in C. E. Black, ed., *Comparative Modernization: A Reader* (New York and London, 1976).

[6] E. Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 15. The most aggressive spokesman for this point of view has been J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832* (Cambridge, 1985), and Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion* (Cambridge, 1986). See Innes's critique (above, n. 3).

[7] E. Gellner's *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (London, 1988) is his most ambitious treatment of the subject.

interpreted in terms of individual monetary gain.[8] Cyril Black's definition of modernisation suggested that 'economic development depends to a great extent on the intellectual and political aspects of the process, the growth in knowledge and the ability of political leaders to mobilise resources'.[9] A fourth variant, pioneered by Joseph Lee, defines modernisation as 'the growth of equality of opportunity', since 'this requires that merit supersede birth as the main criterion for the distribution of income, status and power, and this, in turn, involves the creation of political consciousness among the masses, the decline of deference based on inherited status, and the growth of functional specialisation, without which merit can hardly begin to be measured'.[10] In the light of these differing modulations, it is clear why Wrigley once confessed that 'a cynic might say that modernisation has come to be a term of convenience used by those who are aware of the profound difference between traditional and modern society, and need a word which can convey their appreciation of its importance, but which does not commit them to any one interpretation of the causes or the course of change'.[11]

According to its many detractors, then, modernisation theory, inherently disfigured by anachronism and ethnocentrism, is either too diffuse or too rigid to be a useful conceptual tool. Confronted with such a barrage of criticism, one can see why a scholar who 'stumbled upon the debate unwittingly' instinctively wished he could 'stay out of it altogether'.[12] Why have so many historians of Russia persevered with a concept which arouses such widespread dissent?

The first point to make is that modernisation theory is not the only concept to prove 'a slippery thing susceptible of subtle massage and rough manipulation alike':[13] the same could be said of any historical model. If we place such models as templates over the past, expecting them to correspond in every detail, then naturally we shall be disappointed. Instead, it seems more appropriate to use models as prisms through which to view any given historical society. Certain features will doubtless be magnified or distorted; others may slip from view. Yet

[8] E. A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: The Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 99–100. For Gellner's comments on Wrigley, see his 'On the Highway to Perpetual Growth', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11–17 September 1987, pp. 980–2, a review of E. A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford, 1987).

[9] Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization*, p. 20.

[10] J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848–1918* (Dublin, 1973), preface, n.p.

[11] E. A. Wrigley, 'The Process of Modernization and the Industrial Revolution in England', *JIH*, 3, 2 (1972), p. 228.

[12] D. H. Kaiser, *The Growth of the Law in Medieval Russia* (Princeton, 1980), p. ix.

[13] K. T. Hoppen, 'Ireland, Britain and Europe: Twentieth-Century Nationalism and Its Spoils', *HJ*, 34, 2 (1991), p. 505.

without some organising principle, however tacit, the historian's work would lack explanatory power. Rather than profess not to have inhaled an intoxicating substance, it has seemed sensible to begin by setting out some of our chosen model's salient side effects.

Yet, in the Russian context, the modernisation model can also claim curative properties. Most obviously, we can point to evidence that Peter the Great and his acolytes were themselves self-conscious modernisers, even though 'modernisation' was not a word they used.[14] Neither were they the last influential Russians to think in this way. The fact that 'the drive to modernise, begun around 1700 as the wish of a ruler, became by 1750–60 the cornerstone of the government's policies, an important ingredient of the political class's ethos, and finally a tradition of government'[15] helps to explain why modernisation remains central to most histories of Russia. Even two scholars who dismiss modernisation theory as 'a shopping list of traits identified with the industrialised West in the twentieth century' and prefer 'to discuss population growth or industrialisation in their own terms without reference to an illusory standard' nevertheless refer blithely – and accurately – to 'the modernisation efforts of Peter the Great and his successors'.[16]

If modernisation theory offers a way of understanding the motives of Russia's rulers as an 'attitude of mind' designed to encourage creativity and make full use of both intellectual and material resources,[17] then the 'analytical dichotomies' around which the theory revolves also have a particular resonance in the Russian context. Lotman and Uspenskii have insisted that the eighteenth-century opposition between rhetorics of 'new' and 'old' – generated when the autocratic ruler's commitment to innovation automatically branded those who resisted change as subversives – was symptomatic of a wider polar dualism integral to a culture that knew no neutral zone between heaven and hell, Christ and Antichrist, or Holy Russia and the sinful West.[18] Their model is no less vulnerable to charges of distortion than any other. In particular, it has provoked important attempts to re-emphasise the social and political significance of the 'grey zones and middle ground' for which these

[14] See first L. R. Lewitter, 'Peter the Great and the Modern World', in P. Dukes, ed., *Russia and Europe* (London, 1991), pp. 92–107.
[15] M. Confino, 'Traditions, Old and New: Aspects of Protest and Dissent in Modern Russia', in Eisenstadt, *Patterns of Modernity*, vol. II, *Beyond the West*, p. 17.
[16] P. M. Hohenberg and L. H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000–1950* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 178, 168.
[17] M. Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600–1800* (New Haven, CT, 1983), p. 120, n. 150.
[18] Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, 'The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (Up to the End of the Eighteenth Century)', in their *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. A. Shukman (Ann Arbor, MI, 1984), pp. 3–35.

Russian scholars found no room.[19] But this is not to deny the conceptual utility of binary oppositions whose cultural roots can be traced not to nineteenth-century German sociology but to native medieval eschatology. In that sense, there is nothing anachronistic about using them to interpret the eighteenth century.

The survival of apocalyptic imagery into the 1920s and 1930s, when renewed insecurity prompted peasants to identify the nascent Soviet régime with Antichrist,[20] warns against any simplistic interpretation of modernisation as a linear process. Neither was it only the collectivist, risk-averse peasantry who preserved elements of traditionalism. For all Peter the Great's rhetoric, not all his policies were new, and many of his innovations succeeded only because they relied on well-tried Muscovite methods. I shall also highlight tensions between economic liberalism and social conservatism, and between freedom of intellectual inquiry and the requirements of political stability that ultimately persuaded the state to doubt the value of ideas it had once encouraged. Nor was this the only paradox: taxes designed to fund modernisation ultimately consolidated serfdom. So, far from entrenching some Whiggish notion of linear progress, modernisation theory can be used to show not only that Muscovy needs to be taken seriously on its own terms, but that due weight must be given to its legacy in Russian history. Indeed, although Russia began to look increasingly backward from the middle of the nineteenth century, the survival of traditionalism did more to strengthen than to weaken it before 1825. What made Russia powerful in our period was the peculiar compound *mixture* of traditional and modern that, in varying measure, was also characteristic of its rivals: Austria, Prussia, Britain and France.[21]

This helps us to answer a question which has naturally exercised Russian minds in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's fall: did the Russian failure to embrace capitalism stunt its development as a modern state? A leading Russian scholar has recently argued that Muscovy

[19] Notably V. Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces: The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Stanford, CA, 1996), quote from p. 266. See also E. K. Wirtschafter, *Structures of Society: Imperial Russia's 'People of Various Ranks'* (DeKalb, IL, 1994).

[20] L. Viola, 'The Peasant Nightmare: Visions of Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside', *JMH*, 62 (1990), pp. 747–70; S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 80–1.

[21] For sophisticated use of the concept of modernity, see S. Schama, *Citizens* (London, 1989); P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989); T. C. W. Blanning, 'The French Revolution and the Modernization of Germany', *Central European History*, 22, 2 (1989), pp. 109–30; Blanning, *Joseph II* (London, 1994); and J. M. Roberts, *The Penguin History of Europe* (Harmondsworth, 1997).

overcame a 'crisis of traditionalism' at the end of the seventeenth century by a necessary programme of 'Europeanisation' that was fatefully diverted along a 'special path' by the failure to abolish serfdom.[22] Historians of Germany were once attracted by a related thesis. But the notion that the German *Sonderweg* was warped by the lack of a bourgeois revolution now finds little support. It has been undermined partly by research into the *Bürgertum* but principally by the recognition that there is no common standard from which to diverge.[23] I shall not attempt to deny Russian history its distinctive identity. But by using modernisation theory as a comparative analytical framework rather than as a measure of normative development, we shall also be able to see important parallels with the Western states against which it became locked in deadly rivalry.

Some critics, as we know, regard such comparisons with distaste. Eighteenth-century Russians would have been surprised to hear it. They knew that they were lost if they could not compete with their neighbours. Population size, the impact of fiscal change on social structure, the rational ordering of administration, and the capacity to harness scientific knowledge to productive economic activity – all crucial elements in modernisation theory – were also among the indices by which eighteenth-century European states measured their relative strength. I shall follow their example in a series of thematic chapters. However, let us begin by tracing Russian history between 1676 and 1825, highlighting one of its most anti-modern features: the recurrent crises occasioned by the lack of a fixed law of succession.

Russian history, 1676–1825

Few could have predicted that the dynasty enthroned in 1613 would live to celebrate its 300th anniversary. Yet endurance was to prove one of the Romanovs' greatest assets. Under their cautious stewardship, Muscovy quickly recovered from the Time of Troubles (1598–1613) unleashed by the succession crises that followed the death of Ivan IV (the Terrible) in 1584. Messianic pretensions implicit in the notion of Moscow as the third Rome had made little enough impact on sixteenth-century rulers; under the early Romanovs they were further subjugated to a basic strategy of survival. Risking a policy of selective Westernisation that

[22] A. B. Kamenskii, *The Russian Empire in the Eighteenth Century: Searching for a Place in the World*, tr. and ed. D. Griffiths (Armonk, NY, 1997), pp. 35–6, 117–18, 281–6, and *passim*.

[23] A key revisionist work was D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984).

helped to reform part of their army, the new dynasty checked the advances of rival neighbours in Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman empire and strengthened domestic administration. Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645–76) subdued riots in Moscow in June 1648 and put down further revolts in and around Pskov and Novgorod in 1650. Twenty years later, the cossack Stepan Razin was defeated at Simbirsk, though only after Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan′ had fallen to his rebellion. The tsar's survival depended not simply on force but also on compromise. By balancing the demands of his wealthiest subjects against those of lesser officers, he was able to turn concessions to his own advantage. Further defining the privileges and responsibilities enjoyed and incurred by various splintered groups, Aleksei Mikhailovich reinforced the development of a loose but increasingly stratified social hierarchy. The key Muscovite principle of service to the state was enshrined in the *Ulozhenie* of 1649, a law code promulgated in response to the riots of the year before.[24] This was the last and most comprehensive of a series of pragmatic Muscovite codes; but it also signalled a novel intention to regulate the activities of society as a whole.

The activist language of the *Ulozhenie* throws into relief the passivity of the achievements I have just outlined: invaders had been repelled, rebels had been quashed, the dynasty had been preserved. Until the middle of the seventeenth century, Muscovy's rulers were more than content with such a strategy; indeed, it approached their ideal. Since the notion of the 'good tsar' was conceived in terms of piety, self-abnegation, and humility rather than active interventionism in affairs of state, the monarch's goal was to preserve the status quo, not to reform it. It does not seem to have occurred to Aleksei Mikhailovich's predecessors that they could mobilise the population in search of strategic goals. That he began to think of doing so implies the emergence of unwelcome new pressures, both within and outside his own realm.

At home, the seamless relationship between the Orthodox church and the state was torn apart when the Church Council of 1666–7 pronounced anathema on those who rejected a series of liturgical reforms initially proposed by Patriarch Nikon and finally enforced with the support of the tsar. The schism[25] divided adherents of an increasingly 'official' church from so-called Old Believers just when Orthodoxy needed to be at its most supple to face the challenge of Counter-

[24] R. Hellie, tr. and ed., *The Muscovite Law Code (Ulozhenie) of 1649. Part I: Text and Translation* (Irvine, CA, 1988). See also Hellie, 'Early Modern Russian Law: The Ulozhenie of 1649', *RH*, 15, 2-4 (1988), pp. 155–80, and commentaries in *RH*, 17 (1990), and *CASS*, 25 (1991).

[25] Like 'the French Revolution', 'the schism' was a more complex series of events and movements than the conventional singular implies.

Reformation Catholicism in Ukraine, incorporated at the treaty of Pereiaslavl′ in 1654. Both national unity and royal spiritual authority were damaged to an extent that far outweighed any gain the state may have made by crippling the church as a potential focus of opposition. Neither was Muscovy's international position secure. Condemned by geography to occupy territory with no clearly defined natural borders, Muscovy may have resisted its rivals, but it had not overcome them. Sweden, Poland and the Ottoman empire still rejoiced in what looked, for most of the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715), like invincible French protection. Moreover, if Muscovy was to compete in Europe, it was bound to incur significant expense. And it was not obvious that its centralised decision-making system, designed to impose order on chaos and to prevent the rise of local power bases, would be able to respond any more flexibly to this new financial imperative than it had to the challenge of the schism.

Latent weaknesses were exposed when Aleksei Mikhailovich died in 1676. Although historians usually pass rapidly over the brief reign of his teenage son, Fedor (1661–82), it is significant from the point of view of modernisation. For the first time in the seventeenth century, Muscovy went on the offensive in a war against the Turks that lasted from 1676 to 1681. The government sought to pay for the campaign by converting in 1679–81 from a system of taxation based on land to one based on households, assessed according to the census conducted in 1678. Ambitious changes to local government were also planned, though their most immediate consequence – the abolition in 1682 of *mestnichestvo*, the outdated precedence system by which boiars had traditionally defended their honour – upset few. Eighteenth-century Russia would become used to a pattern in which international ambition provoked fiscal and administrative reform with important social consequences. But there is still work to do in investigating that pattern's origins in the seventeenth century. Though perhaps not so incapacitated as historians once supposed, the tsar himself was scarcely the moving force behind changes which probably owed most to Prince V. V. Golitsyn (1643–1714). Yet the disturbances which followed Fedor's unexpected death on 27 April 1682 were enough to check the impulse for reform.

The succession crisis temporarily brought into focus the clannish connexions, normally too elastic to be described as factions, which dominated Muscovite élite politics. Two main networks lined up behind the surviving sons of Aleksei Mikhailovich, rival candidates for the throne in the absence of a written law of succession. Peter, aged ten, was promptly 'elected' by his mother's family, the Naryshkins, who hoped to regain influence lost at the death of his father; though weak both in body

and in mind, Peter's sixteen-year-old half-brother, Ivan, was backed by *his* mother's family, the Miloslavskiis, on grounds of seniority. However, there was more to the ensuing chaos than this simple rivalry might imply. In particular, it mattered that the 55,000-strong palace guards (*strel'tsy*) not only included a significant number of Old Believers who suspected a plot by 'wicked' Naryshkin advisers to instal a 'false' monarch, but were also the most prominent of those outmoded regiments who resented being sidelined by military reform. Their rebellion on 15–17 May settled scores unconnected with either the Miloslavskiis or Tsar Ivan, in whose name they claimed to act. In the aftermath of the bloodshed, a compromise was reached. While the joint rule of Ivan and Peter was ritually confirmed in the Cathedral of the Dormition on 26 May, *de facto* power passed to Ivan's elder sister, Sophia Alekseevna (1657–1704), in response to a petition from the guards who were to remain guarantors of the Russian throne throughout our period.

Shrewd as she was, Sophia was scarcely in a position to release Muscovy from its political paralysis. She made much of her ambiguous constitutional status, provoking remarkably little opposition as Russia's first female ruler. But she owed the comparative tranquillity of her regency (never formally acknowledged) not to some pre-considered programme of reform but to a tacit compact with boiars who expected no great change. Though markedly receptive to Western culture, this tiny élite had little incentive to modernise government and society as a whole. The limits to their tolerance were revealed when Sophia campaigned for recognition as ruler in her own right in the late 1680s; to contemplate coronation was to overplay her hand. Sophia's reputation had been tarnished by Golitsyn's inglorious Crimean campaigns of 1687 and 1689. In September 1689, having fought to the last for her political life, she herself succumbed to *strel'tsy* pressure, spending her remaining years under arrest in Moscow's Novodevichii convent. Though Tsar Ivan survived until 29 January 1696, Muscovy was now in the hands of Aleksei Mikhailovich's fourteenth child, known to posterity as Peter the Great.

Long fascinated by ships and soldiers, Peter, who had betrayed little interest in government in the early 1680s, soon proved an active interventionist in affairs of state. He had already become the first tsar to visit the central chancelleries in person, descending unannounced overnight in spring 1688. Following the death of his mother, Natal'ia Naryshkina, in January 1694, his domination was unquestioned. A giant of volcanic energy and a scourge of idleness, Peter maintained a lasting preference for impulsive personal supervision in matters both major and minor. He oversaw the compilation of an *Alphabetical Lexicon of New*