

Abstract

**Title : The publication control policy of Catherine II:
transformation of intellectual activities of literati
aristocrats**

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In the late 18th century, Catherine II led enlightenment to Russia in order to modernize her country. Although she patronized publication industry and aimed to increase the numbers of literate intellectual population as tools to westernize the nation, the publication shaken up idea of modern self of the population, she ended up in regulating the industry to govern freedom of thought and speech.

By reviewing her regulation policy, the study reveals the relationships of Catherine II with literati aristocrats emerged in the late 18th century. It also analyses how the literati aristocrats' the senses of modern identity and social function affected with the policy.

As explained in Chapter 1, vast majority of the readers of publications called “public” were learned aristocrats of means who could afford publications. Literati aristocrat familiar with Western European cultures and languages played central role among the public. Public opinions were formed as publication industry developed, however it should be noted as one of the characteristics of Catherine II’s reign, “public

opinion” was of the limited circle and not of broader general population.

As the public spread in wider area and the publication world and journalism developed rapidly, the Empress and her court lost its attractions as the center of culture. Publication and literature were no longer the national monopolistic business. When the intellectuals became liberal and independent from the state control, the Empress utilized publication policy in full term in order to suppressed freedom of thoughts and speech to protect the traditional religion and autocracy.

The publication policy of Catherine II consisted of three factors: business regulations on productions and distribution, contents censorship, and development of the censorship institutions. Three were closely connected to each other and each could not function on its own account.

In the following chapters, the Empress’ relationship with the intellectuals and the purpose of her edicts are reviewed in chronological order. Her reign thus can be divided into three periods.

The first period from 1762 to 1782 was the time when the nation monopolized publishing business. The regulations were to protect publishers and journalism, and aimed to patronize literature and import of foreign cultures. The seconds from 1783 to 1789, Catherine II allowed private printing office to operate, and at the same time began to control the contents of publications. From this period on, her policy confronted the position of intellectuals hence the Empress aimed to keep private publisher under surveillance. Moreover cultural integration was reviewed. In the last from 1790 to 1800, Catherine II issued numbers of decrees to oppress intellectuals like Nikolay Novikov and Aleksander Radishchev and reinforced censorships. Aftermath of the French Revolution made the Empress to review the censorship policy. Her

antagonistic relationship with literati aristocrats was changed to repressive one. The censorship policy of this time was designed to increase the level of oversight on publication industry and insulate public from foreign influences.

The characteristics of the concerned decrees can be summarized as follows: (1) development of legal system was closely connected to growth of publishing industry and of the enlightenment movement including literature in the nation; (2) official censorship institutions were founded in 1796 right before her death as a tool to control intellectual activities and publishing; (3) Catherine II's concern on foreign influence was reflected on the consolidation of censorship; (4) secularization of the society led the decline of Most Holy Governing Synod's influence. The Synod sought to restore its privilege; (5) principle of the decrees were based on the maintenance of Orthodox Church, the monarchy, public order and morality. After the French Revolution, insulation of foreign elements in Russian culture was added; (6) censorship was categorized into religious, secular, foreign publications as foreign influence increased; (7) the effectiveness of the decree was questionable for they were *ex post facto* measures. The policy changes caused opposition within the empire; (8) before official institutions and censors were placed in 1796, the Empress directly involved in authorization of publications; (9) Catherine's censorship was influenced by modern identity and social role of literati aristocrats and formation of "public" and "public opinion".

These were caused by absence of institutional censorship, lack of recognition about the contribution of publishing business, and excessive expectation of the role of police as censorship institution. The intellectuals were critics, competitors, collaborator under the imperial aegis.

The correlation between modern identity and social function of aristocrats are observed in the works of Nikolay Novikov, Aleksander Radishchev, and Denis Fonvizin. Through publications or charity, they wrote political analysis and directly involved in political issues. At the early stage they aimed at supporting public interests and were collaborating with the Empress. Catherine II was quick to sense the latent danger of their activities and after the French Revolution felt the need to develop laws to control publications.

The Empress's confidence in enlightenment and its failures as seen in the Radishchev incident and influx of foreign publications were indicated in the problems of censorship policy. It also reflected the intellectuals' expectations and disappointment with the authority.

Literati aristocrats admired and tried to accept Western European culture while they identified themselves with the significance of Russian history and culture throughout the modern period from the Catherin's age. The emergence of the public who had ability to think reasons critically, and the formation of public opinion were the results of wide distributions of books and public debates in the late 18th century. As a corollary of it, they began to criticize the sovereign ruler. The censorship decrees thus are to be assessed as the history of struggles over the freedom of thought and press and criticism which Catherine II gave to the public.