PART TWO

THE CHALLENGE OF UNIFICATION AND RESISTANCE
GOVERNANCE, EDUCATION AND THE PROBLEMS OF EMPIRE IN THE AGE OF CATHERINE II*

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One characteristic of empires in comparison with nation-states is the preponderance of heterogeneity, diversity, and a multiplicity of flowing transitions, which do not fit in the legal framework of empires. This was the case with the Russian Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century as well. Attempts to adjust social, ethnic, and religious “realities” from “above” or “below” were always full of tension. We see attempts at such an adjustment throughout the existence of the Muscovite and Petrine empires. In the measures of territorializing the Muscovite empire, one might see an attempt to do this from above.¹ Russian empire under Peter I applied a number of utilitarian approaches to the management of human and natural resources in order to achieve the status of a great power and an effective state machine.² On the other hand, the popular uprisings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were but the visible tip of an iceberg of the popular frustration and attempts “from below” to cope with the incongruities of the legal framework and fiscal arrangements.³

One can interpret the epoch of Catherine as a “saddle period of history” (Sattelzeit) insofar as she tried to figure out a more scientific

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* Translated from German by Gregory Ferguson-Cradler.

