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The similarities and differences in the ways that Russia and Japan responded to the Western challenges in the Modern period were social, economic, and intellectual.

The social similarities were the abolition of one of the feudal social classes in the respective societies, although they were admittedly for different reasons. In Russia, serfdom was abolished, while in Japan, the samurai class was abolished. The serfs of Russia were emancipated because the Russian government wanted the newly freed peasants to urbanize so that there could be successful industrialization, as well as because the Russians wanted to meet the humanitarian standards of the West. The samurai class was abolished because the Japanese wanted to better centralize their government, which could not happen with these elite warriors with other loyalties. The social difference was the position of women. In Russia, women had increasing status, able to gain higher education and some even able to enter professions that they normally would not be able to. In Japan, however, women remained in the same position because the great familial traditions were not subject to the changes other parts of the society were undergoing.

The economic similarities between Russia and Japan lay in the formation of state-sponsored companies in both societies. In Russia, these companies were mostly factories to produce iron and weapons. The purpose of the companies in Japan were more varied with mines, shipyards, and transportation networks. The state sponsorship was necessary because they needed to help start it because of the unfamiliarity with the new technologies needed to operate the companies. The economic differences come with the capital for these companies. Russia did not have the capital resources to pay for the companies, so foreign investors had to come in and invest in the companies. In Japan, the state had what was needed to pay for the operation of the companies.

The intellectual similarity of the responses of Russia and Japan is that they both had increased rates of literacy, Japan having the greatest rate outside of the West. This is due to the fact that they both increased the access to schools for the general population. Russia’s education system was perhaps not extremely accessible to general populations due to the expenses and distribution of schools, but there was certainly still an increase in literacy. Japan had schools which most of the population could attend. This increase in literacy was necessary so that they could compete with the West in the various things that come from literacy (such as scientific and technological advances). One of the intellectual differences in their reaction is how deeply nationalism developed in the society. The Japanese were able to develop a much better sense of nationalism than the Russians did. This was for several reasons. The Japanese had created Schools of National Learning, which taught some ideas of nationalism. Also, while Russia was multiethnic and thus more difficult to unite, Japan was composed of its one Japanese culture.

There were social, economic, and intellectual similarities and differences in the ways that Russia and Japan responded to the Western challenges in the Modern period.