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Alessandro Stanziani

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Alessandro Stanziani

EHESS and CNRS

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It is interesting that even new approaches to world history such as Pomeranz's "great divergence," while contesting Chinese backwardness and European ethnocentrism, still considered Russia the paradigm of unfree labor and lack of markets and, as such, opposed to both the Lower Yangtze and Britain.¹ Osterhammel as well, in his magistral book, qualified Russia as an "exception" in Europe in terms of ending famines, introducing private property and democratic rules.² In all these approaches, the "Russian case" systematically expresses either the boundary or the negation, of Western economic growth and capitalism. Russia is at the edge of global dynamics both in terms of its economic performances and from the standpoint –crucial to any approach in global history- of decentralizing Europe (or the West). When Russia is concerned, decentralizing perspectives fall apart. Why is it so? Why is it so difficult to include Russia into critical (and not normative and teleological) global perspective similar to those advanced for China, India, Africa or Latin America during last years?

This essay seeks to answer these questions into two steps: it will first resume the main interpretations of Russian economy; it will then move to identify historical dynamics.

Historical interpretations of the Russian economy

From the eighteenth century to the present, comparisons between Russia and the major European countries have formed part of a wider debate about "backwardness." From the European side, the goal has been to create a comparative scale to account for both economic growth and so-called "blockages". Montesquieu's "Asiatic Despotism," Voltaire's and

¹ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

² Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Diderot's perceptions of Russia and Asia, and the so-called Asiatic mode of production described by Liberal, radical, and Marxist historiography in the nineteenth century are well-known examples. The invention of backwardness in Western economic and philosophical thought owes a great deal to the attention given to Russia and Poland after the start of the eighteenth century.³ In the course of the eighteenth century, the work of slaves, serfs and apprentices was judged not just by ethical standards but increasingly by its economic efficiency. On that basis, hierarchies were justified, such as the "backwardness" of the colonies relative to the West, of Eastern relative to Western Europe, and of France relative to England. Turgot, one of the leading economists of the time and future comptroller-general (i.e., finance minister), who had read closely the accounts of travelers to Russia, likened the "serf to the land" (*serf de la glèbe*, the famous expression popularized by Montesquieu twenty years earlier) to the Russian serf and to the slave; he even spoke of slavery to the land. Likewise, the slave in the colonies and the Russian serf would soon become vestiges of the past, though for now they remained justified by the backwardness of the colonies and Russia.⁴ Diderot as well believed at the time in the reforming potential of Catherine and the French monarchy; based on this belief, he distinguished between nations that had already achieved their highest level of civilization and were starting to degenerate and those that remained closer to nature and could strive for a higher level of order and morals while avoiding the evils of civilization. He placed America and Russia among the latter.⁵

These approaches to progress and backwardness had an important impact in Russia itself. No doubt we can see the influence of more radical, even revolutionary thinkers on that careful reader of Raynal, Aleksandr Radishchev.⁶ However, in part because Catherine and hence the censors were reticent, even hostile, and in part because of the leanings of the Russian reformers and the Enlightenment philosophers who inspired them, this kind of radical outlook remained in the minority in Russia. Instead, Catherine encouraged her collaborators and

³ Albert Lortholary, *Le mirage russe en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions contemporaines, 1948); Jan Struys, *Les voyages en Moscovie, en Tartarie, Perse, aux Indes et en plusieurs pays étrangers* (Amsterdam: Van Meers, 1681); John Cook, *Voyages and Travels Through the Russian Empire, Tartary, and Part of the Kingdom of Persia* (Edinburgh: no publ., 1770).

⁴ Turgot, *Oeuvres et documents le concernant*, 5 vols., ed. Gustave Schelle (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1913-23), 2: 375. See also Turgot, "Plan de deux discours sur l'histoire universelle," in *ibid.*, 1:275-324.

⁵ Diderot, "Observations sur le Nakaz de Catherine II," in *Oeuvres politiques* (Paris: Garnier, 1963): 365.

⁶ On the influence of Raynal on Radishchev, see Vladimir I. Moriakov, *Iz istorii evoliutsii obshchestvenno-politicheskikh vzgliadov prosvetitelei kontsa XVIII veka: Reinal' i Radishchev* (on the history of the evolution of the socio-political orientations of institutors during the eighteenth century: Raynal and Radishchev) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1981); Allison Blakely, "American Influences on Russian Reformists in the Era of the French Revolution," *Russian Review* 52, 4 (1993): 451-71. On Nikolai Novikov, see Editor's Note of 1784, reproduced in Nikolai I. Novikov, *Izbrannye sochineniia* (Selected Works) (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1951): 562.

young economists to familiarize themselves with and disseminate the ideas of the physiocrats. While the heritage of the physiocrats (the notion that agriculture and large-scale farming were the driving force of the economy) and of the moderate *philosophes* (the support for education and a partial reform of serfdom) is apparent, Catherine was also inspired by German cameralism, which spread in Russia through the intermediary of the German economists in the Academy of Sciences and at Moscow University.⁷

Among the economists, it was without a doubt Storch who most violently criticized the slave system, and this despite his role at the University of St. Petersburg and the Academy of Sciences. A disciple of both Smith and political arithmetic, he attacked the cumbersome guild system in Europe as well as forced labor in the colonies, Russia, and the United States. At the same time, he drew an important distinction: “only in Eastern Europe has the improvement of their (slaves, serfs) lot been delayed by the slowness with which progress has occurred in the growth of wealth and civilization; but as these are everywhere advancing at a rapid pace, it is probable that here too, little by little, slavery and serfdom will disappear.” However, he opposed the immediate abolition of serfdom, which would provoke riots as well as the collapse of Russia’s economy and society. He instead envisioned gradual reforms, beginning with giving the serfs more responsibility by assigning them a share of the revenues, expanding the use of *obrok* (quitrent) at the expense of *barshchina* (corvee), and, most of all, educating the landowners more fully about new management techniques.⁸

Like the other German cameralists, Storch was not only well-versed in Smith’s work and an advocate of his ideas; he also drew inspiration from the reforms being undertaken in the German lands where, as recent research shows, the evolution of serfdom had begun before the arrival of Napoleon’s armies and the civil code.⁹

⁷ Albion Small, *The Cameralists: Pioneers of German Social Policy* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1909); Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience, 1660-1815* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Carl William Hasek, *The Introduction of Adam Smith’s Doctrine Into Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925); Keith Tribe, *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse, 1760-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁸ Heinrich Storch, *Cours d’économie politique ou exposition des principes qui déterminent la prospérité des nations*, 5 vols. (Saint Petersburg: A. Pliushar, 1815), booklet. 5: 255, 258, 261, 279, 291-2. On Storch, see Paul Romeo, “Heinrich Storch, Adam Smith and the Question of Russian Economic Development,” M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1996; Roderick E. McGrew, “Dilemmas of Development: Baron Heinrich Storch, 1766-1835, on the Growth of Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 24, 1 (1976): 31-71; and Iuri Iu. Bliumin, *Ocherki ekonomicheskoi mysli pervoi poloviny XIX veka* (Studies of economic thought during the first half of the nineteenth century) (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii nauk, 1940): 173-195.

⁹ Melton, “Population Structure”; and William Hagen, “Village Life in East-Elbian Germany and Poland, 1400-

During the nineteenth century, in Russia, the critique of capitalist society quickly became a critique of positivism, not only because the latter spread throughout Russia when serfdom was abolished, but also and especially because the symbiosis between the intelligentsia and the people was supposed to open the door to emancipation from both serfdom and autocracy. Social utopia was in reality an intellectual utopia and the peasant commune was the cornerstone of the whole system. This was the peculiar context in which Marx thought penetrated Russia.

During much of the nineteenth century, and particularly after the 1850s, the question arose in the main countries of Europe as to whether or not the “historical laws of development” were the same everywhere. Like Russia’s political and intellectual elites, its nobility was ultimately less afraid of the peasants’ emancipation than of their proletarianization, and as the latter became the focus of the discussion, the nobles gradually came to accept the abolition of serfdom. At some point, the idea that wage labor was the worst form of slavery was accepted by much of the Russian elite. That is why, in the twenty years preceding the emancipation, the debate on serfdom intersected with that about the commune and then about Russia’s “uniqueness” vis-à-vis the West.¹⁰ It was not so much the abolition of serfdom as such that was discussed, but the when and how, and consequently the status of the commune and of property. The emphasis on the commune and private property made it possible to relegate to the background the details of what “emancipation” was supposed to mean and just what kind of labor contract and labor relations would be put in place after the emancipation.¹¹ This is where the encounter between Marx and Russia became relevant.

In the first volume of *Das Kapital*, and in the *Critique of Political Economy* and *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx accused classical political economy of putting forward abstract theories and laws that failed to take into account the historically situated nature of capitalism. He opposed the abstraction of economics to concrete, empirical analysis of societies and their history. In reality, he was less critical of models in general than of those, like the authors in

1800,” in *The Peasantries of Europe, From the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Tom Scott (London: Routledge, 1998): 145-190

¹⁰ Andrzej Walicki is one of countless authors who have analyzed the debate between the Slavophiles and Westernizers during this era (A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). For an examination of the economic debates on this subject, see Kingston-Mann, *In Search*, and my *L'économie en révolution. Le cas russe, 1870-1930* (Paris: A. Michel, 1998).

¹¹ V.G. Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, (Complete works) 13 vols. (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1953-59) 12:444-68; I.A. Aksakov, *Sochinenii (Works)*, 7 vols. (Moscow: Tip. M.G. Volchaninova, 1886-7), v. 2; A.S. Khomiakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 8 vols. (Moscow, Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1900), v. 3; P.A. Zaionchkovskii, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1978); Terence Emmons, *The Russian Landed Gentry and the Peasant Emancipation of 1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); L.G. Zakharova and J. Bushnell (ed.), *The Great Reforms in Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); N.A. Tsagalov, *Ocherki russkoi ekonomicheskoi mysli perioda padeniia krepostnogoprava* (Studies on Russian economic thought during the fall of serfdom) (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1956); and V.N. Chicherin, *Sobstvennost' i gosudarstvo* (property and the state) 2 vols. (Moscow, 1882-83; new edition, St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkoi Khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2005).

the classical school, who de-historicized capitalism. Indeed, his approach led him to identify simultaneously the historical singularity of capitalism and its “general laws.” In fact, this schema, which he claimed to be universal, corresponded to Britain, or more accurately, to a stylized description of its history sketched out by Marx. Here historical determinism and the philosophy of history come together in a positivist approach in which history serves less to question than to validate a general schema.

In Russia, this comparison became the keystone in the tensions between Slavophiles and Westernizers and later between populists and Marxists. The issue was precisely whether there was a global tendency at work in economies and societies or whether historical singularities could shape its direction. This debate was at once ideological (the role of the peasantry in the revolution), empirical (how to prove the arguments used) and methodological (how to make comparisons).¹² From the early 1870s, Tkachev, Mikhailovsky and Vera Zasulich questioned Marx and Engels regarding the commune and the “laws of development”: was it possible to follow a different development path from the one in the West and thus achieve socialism without going through a capitalist stage?

In a letter addressed to Mikhailovsky in 1877, Marx said he thought Russia could take a different route from the one in the West. Four years later, in a letter to Vera Zasulich, he wrote that the peasant commune was the basis for the social regeneration of Russia.¹³ In the same letter, Marx changed his mind about the impact of British colonialism on India; in the 1850s (*Grundrisse, Critique of Political Economy*), he had maintained that the introduction of private land ownership was a considerable improvement. Now he concluded, on the contrary, that this measure had helped to impoverish India.

By turning his focus towards Russia and Asia and empirically casting doubt on his theory, Marx ended up unlocking it. Of course this change has to be understood within the political and intellectual dynamic in Russia at the time. The evolution of the country and the debate taking place there prompted Marx to introduce some leeway into his approach and theory. Conversely, the difficulties in finding translations and equivalent terms for Marx’s text in Russian indicated the more fundamental problem of exporting Marx’s categories into other contexts. It marks the limit of a particular form of Eurocentrism that sought to model

¹² Nikolai G. Chernyshevskii, “Ob Obshchinnom vladenii”. Regarding these debates: Alessandro Stanziani, *L’économie en révolution, le cas russe. 1870-1930* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).

¹³ Alessandro Stanziani, *L’économie en révolution*. For the letters between Marx and the Russians: Teodor Shanin, (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road, Marx and the ‘peripheries of capitalism’* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

economics on the natural sciences. This type of Eurocentrism has never disappeared from Marxist thought in all its variants.

In Russia, at the turn of the century, Lenin still sought to preserve Marxist orthodoxy against so-called revisionists. He claimed the universality of Marx' scheme: no place for the Asian mode of production and still less for a direct passage from the commune to socialism. Instead he claimed the insertion of Russia into the universal transition to capitalism and sought to prove this statement with figures and empirical analysis. A huge debate followed, several authors confirming and other denying Lenin's argument.¹⁴

After 1917, the problem was how to reconcile the October revolution with this scheme. Until the mid-1920s the debate was relatively open. The identification of capitalism in tsarist Russia was the crucial point in this debate: Trotsky as well as Menshevik authors considered the revolution as a deviation from the "normal" historical path. To a given extent, they were joined in this appreciation by socialist (non communist) and the still few remaining liberal authors (mostly writing abroad).¹⁵ Instead, despite his thought at the turn of the century more or less in line with this reasoning, Lenin advanced –at the eve of WWI and mostly after 1917- an alternative approach, according to which the limitations of capitalism in Russia did not have to stop the revolution insofar politics and the party had took the lead. During the years following Lenin's death, debates continued until when, at the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s a new turn took place: historical necessity, the role of the leader, and the Soviet path were bound together in the Stalinist interpretation of history. Russian history could no more be made in isolation from that of its nations on the one hand, of Europe and the rest of the world, on the other hand.¹⁶

Debates on tsarist Russian economic history and capitalism officially re-opened in the late 1950s, with new discussions about the necessity of the revolution, then of the collectivization and, more generally, on the existence of universal historical laws.¹⁷ Some soviet authors came back to Marx and his Asiatic mode of production, while some others insisted on the historical possibility of alternative forms of socialism. Comparative history and economic history went

¹⁴ On this debate: Alessandro Stanziani, *L'économie en révolution. Le cas russe, 1870-1930* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998). Kingston-Mann, *In Search of the True West*.

¹⁵ Samuel H. Baron and Nancy W. Heer, eds., *Windows on the Russian Past: Essays on Soviet Historiography since Stalin* (Columbus, OH: Anchor Press, 1977); John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928-1932* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981).

¹⁶ Harun Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁷ *Ocherki istorii istoricheskoi nauki v SSSR*, 4 volumes (Moscow : Nauka, 1966).

far beyond the basic vulgate of marxism.¹⁸ This is where the dialogue with western economists and historians worked the best during the cold war.

Alexander Gershenkron is justly famous for *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*. Indeed, like Max Weber and others before him, Gershenkron began by drawing up the list of Western characteristics on which his comparison would be based; he too emphasised cities, the bourgeoisie, markets and private property. Yet unlike Marx and to some extent Weber, he thought it was possible to arrive at industrialisation (but not capitalism) without a bourgeoisie. In place of this component, “backward” countries (to use the jargon of the 1960s and 1970s) such as Prussia and Russia had “substituting factors”, notably the state. This is a very clever solution to the problem raised by the need to reconcile particular features, historical specificities and general dynamics. If backwardness and diversity go together, then it is possible to conceive of alternative paths.¹⁹

Contrary to appearances, Gershenkron did not compare Russia to England in specific historical contexts. Instead he opposed an ideal image of the West (and of England in particular) to an equally ideal image of nineteenth century Russia. English economic development was associated with the early introduction of a Parliament, privatisation of the commons and hence the formation of a proletariat available for agriculture and industry. In contrast, Russia was associated with market towns – and therefore with a bourgeoisie – as well as the presence of an absentee landed gentry living off serfdom.

This work was part of a broad debate in the 1950s and 1960s: with decolonization, economists raised the problem of (under)development and what should be done to remedy it. In the context of the Cold War, this issue was inseparable from the question regarding which economic and political form the new states would take: capitalism or socialism. Several economists emphasized the need to put these debates in “historical perspective.” In particular, one well-known argument borrowed from other authors by Wallerstein consisted in showing that the expansion of Western capitalism was the cause of the second serfdom in Russia: increased demand for wheat in Europe prompted Russian lords to coerce peasants into producing the amount of wheat required for export. This was said to have resulted in an international division of labour: England produced textiles using wage labour, whereas Russia sold grain by resorting to serfdom. Authors as different as Wallerstein and North agreed on

¹⁸ Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia: The Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956–1974* (New York: Palgrave, 2001)

¹⁹ Alexander Gershenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1962).

this: in early modern times, Russia and Eastern Europe responded to the commercial, agrarian and then industrial expansion of the West by binding the peasantries to the land and its lords.²⁰ As we have mentioned before, and despite the advocated distance from neo-institutionalism, authors such as Pomeranz and Osterhammel still keep this argument when they discuss of Russia. Was this true? Was serfdom opposed to capitalism or was it its extension?

Russia as the quasi-periphery of Europe and Asia?

Russian serfdom was introduced in the fifteenth century in connection with the consolidation of Muscovite power; restrictions on peasant mobility were a factor in complex agreements and tensions between state elites and various categories of landowners.²¹ The issue revolved around identifying which social groups should be allowed to own inhabited estates and transfer possession to their heirs. What was really at stake in the rules limiting peasant mobility was the social, political and institutional difference between old aristocracy and nobility resulting from state service, and later between these two categories and others (merchants, ecclesiastics, workers, peasants).²² These transformations took place between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, well before English industrialization, and had little to do with the West. The identification of social groups in Russia consequently had to do with establishing state power in the Muscovite expansion to the steppes, on the one hand, and against Poland and Lithuania on the other.²³

The increase in labour service (*la corvée*) in the eighteenth century, so frequently mentioned by Wallerstein, therefore takes on a whole new meaning. According to the traditional analysis of serfdom, the rapid development of labour service was linked to a drop in commodity sales,

²⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, London: Atheneum, 1974,1976); Witold Kula, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System* (London: New Left Books, 1976); Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York: Norton, 1981).

²¹ Richard Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

²² Daniel Kaiser, *The Growth of Law in Medieval Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Dmitri Grekov, *Sudebniki XV-XVII vekov* (Precis of laws, 15th-16th centuries), (Moscow, Leningrad: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1952).

²³ Alessandro Stanziani, "Serfs, Slaves, or Wage Earners? The Legal Statute of Labour in Russia from a Comparative Perspective, from the 16th to the 19th century," *Journal of Global History*, 3, 2 (2008) 183-202.

causing the estates to fall back on their own resources and exert greater pressure on the peasants. The dynamics of Russian estates at the time does not confirm this argument. Most microeconomic studies focus on large estates²⁴—even if some Soviet scholars like Koval’chenko exploited several estate archives. Data reveal quite good outcomes for the Russian economy as compared with most Western economies,²⁵ and this despite the well-known tendencies of statistics to underestimate products, yields, and revenues. In eighteenth-century Russia, agricultural prices continued to climb, rising by a factor of two and a half, which no doubt made service labor more profitable than quitrent.²⁶ At the same time, this solution was possible only if the estates were efficiently supervised. Hence the aforementioned increased interest in supervisors on the part of landowners. The supervisor was supposed to adopt good working methods, carry out an inventory of goods, land, and harvests, and keep the landowner informed about the running of the estate.

In this context, there is no evidence of an increasing autarchy of the demesne coupled with increasing wheat exports from “backward” Russia to the benefit of “advanced” Europe, as Wallerstein and Kula have argued. Exports undoubtedly rose, and Russian markets were more and more integrated into the international and European markets. At the same time, the growth of exports did not take place at the expense of local and national markets; indeed, by 1760 the demand for grain in the heartland created a rise in grain prices.²⁷ Russian local markets were therefore increasingly integrated into a national market during the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁸ The nobility’s role in the expansion of rural trade is reflected in the fact that much of the rural expansion took place on the gentry’s estates. If in 1760 nobles’ estates were the sites of 413 out of 1,143 rural fairs (36 percent), in 1800 they had

²⁴ Dennison, *The Institutional Framework*; Peter Czap, “The Perennial Multiple-family Household,” 5–26.

²⁵ Carol Leonard, *Agrarian Reforms in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²⁶ Boris Mironov, *The Social History of the Russian Empire*, 2 vols. (Boulder, CO: Westview 1999).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Boris Mironov and Carol S. Leonard, “In Search of Hidden Information: Some Issues in the Socio-Economic History of Russia in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”. *Social Science History* 9 (Autumn 1985): 339-359; Boris Mironov, *Vnytrennii rynek Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVIII -pervoi polovine XIX v.* (The domestic market in Russia during the second half of the eighteenth-first half of the nineteenth century) (Leningra: Nauka, 1981).

1,615 out of 3,180 (51 percent). This data clearly shows that not only landlords, but also their peasants firmly entered the rural agrarian markets. Peasants' activity in rural markets surpassed that of merchants and small urban traders.²⁹ Therefore, contrary to traditional arguments, trade in estate production increased with *barshchina* (corvees), which was compatible not only with exportation and long distances, but also with the rise of local and national markets.³⁰ Peasants had been buying important shares of proto-industrial products while benefiting from increasing incomes. For example, the larger accessible labor market of peasants already familiar with linen weaving gave Moscow and Ivanovo firms a greater competitive viability than St. Petersburg.³¹ To control this market, noble landowners were taking back control of the sale of products from their estates and entering into urban trade circuits with a certain degree of firmness.³² Proto-industry became ruralized.³³ The urban population dropped from twelve percent to eight percent of the total population between 1742 and 1801.³⁴ Thus, agricultural and industrial rural areas were sometimes differentiated and sometimes overlapped.

²⁹ Mironov, *Vnutrennyi rynek*: 153-154.

³⁰ Koval'chenko, *Russkoe*.

³¹ Klaus Gestwa, *Protoindustrialisierung in Russland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999); Ksenia N. Serbina, *Krest'ianskaia zhelezodelatel'naia promyshlennost' tsentral'noi Rossii XVI-pervoi poloviny XIXe vekoi* (The peasant metallurgic home industry in Central Russia, from the Sixteenth to the first half of the Nineteenth century) (Leningrad.: Nauka, 1978). For the Demydov estate in Tula: RGADA, fond 271, delo 1061.

³² Tatiana F. Izmes'eva, *Rossii v sisteme evropeiskogo rynka. Konets XIXe-nachalo XX v.* (Russia in the system of the European market. End of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century) (Moscow: Nauka 1991).

³³ Sergei Strumilin, *Ocherki ekonomicheskoi istorii Rossii i SSSR* (Studies in the economic history of Russia and the USSR) (Moscow: Nauka, 1966): 330-33; RGADA, fond 199 (G. F. Miller); Emilia I. Indova, "O rossiskikh manufakturakh vtoroi poloviny XVIII v." (On the Russian manufactures during the second half of the eighteenth century), *Istoricheskaia geografiia Rossii: XIX-nachalo XX v.* (Moscow: Nauka 1975): 248-345; Emilia I. Indova, *Dvortsovoe khoziaistvo v Rossii* (The palace economy in Russia) (Moscow: Nauka 1964).

³⁴ Boris Mironov, "Consequences of the Price Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *The Economic History Review* 45 (1992):

Thus, while five percent of all private factories belonged to nobles in the 1720s, the percentage rose to twenty in 1773. In 1725, seventy-eight percent of industrial activity was located in cities; that percentage dropped to sixty in 1775–1778 and fifty-eight in 1803.³⁵ On the whole, during the second half of the eighteenth century, landlords massively entered the proto-industrial sector; the “ruralization” of proto-industry was not a symptom of demesne autarchy, but, quite the contrary, testified to the demesne’s increasing commercialization. Both peasants and landlords entered the market in cereals as well as going in for proto-industrial activities and trade and transportation activities. Numerous “serf-entrepreneurs” registered, on behalf of the landowner or sometimes quite independently, to start up businesses or even proto-industrial and industrial activities.³⁶ Serf-entrepreneurs often employed workers in their proto-industrial activity. They came from the same villages or from neighboring districts.³⁷ During and after the mid-eighteenth century, peasants bought an important share of proto-industrial products while benefiting from increasing incomes.

457-78.

³⁵ Mironov, “Consequences”: 465.

³⁶ Lidia S. Prokov’eva, *Krest’ianskaia obshchina v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVIII-pervoi polovine XIX v* (The peasant commune in Russia during the second half of the eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth centuries) (Leningrad: Nauka 1981); Iurii A. Tikhonov, *Pomeshchic’i krest’iane v rossii: feodal’naia renta v XVII-nachale XVIII v* (The private estates’ peasants in Russia: the feudal rent in the seventeenth to early eighteenth century) (Moscow: Nauka, 1974).

On the urban activity of private peasants, I have consulted the following archives: RGADA, fond 294, opis’ 2 and 3; fond 1287, opis’ 3. TsGIAM, opis’ 2, dela 31, 40, 82, 124, 146; RGADA, fond 210: razriadnyi prikaz; fond 248, Senat I senatskie uchrezhdeniia; fond 350: revizkie skazki po nizhegorodskoi gubernii, opis’ 2, dela 1975 and 2056; fonds 615, krepostnye knigi, dela 526, 528, 529, 4753, 6654; fond 1209 (pomestnyi prikaz), opis’ 1, delo 292; fond 1287 (Sheremetev), opis’ 5 and 6; RGIA, fond 1088 (Sheremetev, opis’ 3, 5, 10). See also Klaus Gestwa, *Proto-Industrialisierung*.

³⁷ Serbina, *Krest’ianskaia*, 37.

All this increased the need for labor and exacerbated competition for goods and proto-industrial and labor markets. Competition therefore rose not only between nobles and merchants, but also among nobles; even more than in the first half of the eighteenth century, landlords were in competition with each other to keep the best master-peasants, who trained other artisans. Litigations on runaways and estate records confirm this picture. As a consequence, many estate owners sought to keep on the estate their peasant-workers instead of sending them to town. As in the case of the sale of products, it would be reductive to see the landowners' orientation toward factories merely as a desire for estate autarchy and market closing, and hence as a regression of the Russian economy. In reality, what the landowners wanted was to take over the proto-industrial and manufacturing sector, once dominated by peasants and merchants. This accounts for their request, which Catherine granted, to prohibit any form of serfdom in factories owned by non-nobles.³⁸ Estate archives show that landlords had every interest to develop a sort of "protectionist" politics beneficial to the estate's peasants and craftsmen.³⁹ For example, Count Sheremetev did not hesitate to publish an *instruksiia* giving priority to local peasant-traders over urban merchants in the commercialization of the Pavlovo estate's products.⁴⁰ Peasant-masters also demanded from Count Sheremetev the exclusive right to sell their products in Nizhegorod.⁴¹ Sheremetev's estate-law court regulated conflicts between peasants and merchants, and the decisions were often favorable to the former.⁴² In other words, peasants and landlords made arrangements to

³⁸ Edgar Melton, "Proto-industrialization, Serf Agriculture and Agrarian Social Structure. Two Estates in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Past and Present*, no. 115 (May 1987): 73-81.

³⁹ RGIA, fond 1088, opis' 10, dela 616 and 618.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ RGIA, fond 1088, opis' 10, delo 611.

⁴² Sheremetev published *instruksiia* in 1802 and 1832. RGIA, fond 1088, opis' 10, delo 607.

shape markets and competition rules to their own advantage and to exclude urban merchants and producers.

Labor relations were therefore extremely complex. In Nizhnyi-Novgorod province (250 miles east of Moscow), on the Demidov estate in particular, there was a mix of both compelled and hired labor. The latter was used for some processing of products and for the supervisory personnel in the mills and brickworks; compelled labor was used to mill rye and wheat and for cottage industry, including spinning yarn and making linen cloth.⁴³ Relations of “dependence” among peasants, merchants, and manufacturers have to be included in this context. One of the key factors was the control of raw materials. As long as every stage in the production process took place within the peasant household, the producer remained more or less an independent craftsman. The fact that flax cultivation was so widespread in the non-black-soil provinces helped make linen production especially resistant to change. But in sectors like cotton and silk weaving, where the cottage weavers depended on outside sources for their materials, wage relations grew more rapidly. For the supply of raw materials for metalworking, the development of production in the Ural region modified the networks and the hierarchies. This was true in particular after the 1760s, when the Demidov estate in the Ural region “exported” “raw materials for metallurgy to the proto-industrial districts of Tula, Nizhni Novgorod, and Moscow.”⁴⁴

Peasants could buy materials themselves, but sometimes landlords provided raw materials and made advances to their peasant-master. In such cases, too, after the end of the eighteenth century, landlords developed a clear strategy to enter and control networks that had been previously dominated by traders and merchants. It is interesting that nobles adopted

⁴³ Robert Rudolph, “Agricultural Structure and Proto-Industrialization in Russia: Economic Development with Unfree Labor,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 45 (1985): 47-69.

⁴⁴ Serbina, *Krest'ianaskaia*: 100-1; Gestwa, *Proto-industrialisierung*.

the same strategies as merchants in order to control the output system (i.e., advancing money and/or raw materials).⁴⁵ Again, this confirms that legal limitations to mobility alone did not suffice; otherwise estate owners would have not developed this system of advances to keep peasants-workers bound to them.

To sum up, the rebirth of *barshchina* (*corvées*) during the second half of the eighteenth century was accompanied neither by increased exploitation of peasants solely with a view to export trade nor by a crisis in manufacturing business and markets in general, as predicted by Witold Kula's model. The demesne economy and the Russian economy as a whole were more efficient, flexible, and market-oriented than he stated. Agriculture and proto-industrial markets developed intensively, and so did national income and per capita income. Agriculture and proto-industry expanded, and the competition between noble landowners and merchants was institutional before it became economic. The former wanted to enter into trade and industry at the expense of the latter and succeeded, thanks to the support of institutional measures such as the exclusion of "serfs" from factories managed by merchants. Thus, labor services raised commercial produce, and proto-industrial activity became strongly integrated into the demesne activity.

At the same time, these multiple activities increased competition for labor time between estate owners and peasants, nobles and merchants, and even within the peasant family. Institutions (state law, demesne law, and peasant commune law) provided a set of rules to solve this problem. These arrangements were not without conflicts, but, as a whole, rural institutions worked well enough to ensure coordination. The decreasing impact of bad harvests on the standard of living and the increasing integration of the peasantry and the

⁴⁵ RGIA, fond 1088, opis' 10, delo 524. On this, see also Boris N. Kashin, *Kres'ianskaia promyshlennost'* (The peasant rural industry), 2 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1935), Vol. I: 215, 347-49.

landlords into market networks testify to this increasing coordination among the involved actors. Evidence suggests that the output of both agricultural produce and proto-industrial products increased throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century; in turn, this sustained the demand for manufactured goods, which was mostly satisfied by local proto-industrial activity that utilized labor-intensive technology.⁴⁶

Thus, the coexistence of service labor and quitrent enabled the peasant economy and that of the noble landowners to cope with the fluctuations of the economy by limiting their impact on the level of activity, standard of living, and investments. Even if the collected data is not corrected (some considered the underestimation to be about 20 percent), the final picture still shows increasing productivity, well being, and commercialization from the eighteenth century onwards. Between 1718 and 1788, Russian aggregate national income increased five-fold, raising per capita income by 85 percent. After 1788, the annexation of rich southern provinces further intensified this growth⁴⁷.

By 1788, the average Russian was as rich as his English equivalent and only 15 percent poorer than the average Frenchman, who at that time enjoyed the peak of his fortunes in the eighteenth century. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, moreover, the Russian maintained his position, surpassing the Frenchman and rising with the Briton to the very top international level.⁴⁸

Did this trend continue during the first half of the nineteenth century?

This period has usually been described as the deepening “crisis of serfdom” in terms of income growth, demographic trends, and social unrest. However, in the last two decades, these views have been seriously challenged, and historians have revised upwards the rate of

⁴⁶ Evsey Domar and Michael Machina, “On the Profitability of Russian Serfdom,” *The Journal of Economic History* 44 (1984): 919-55.

⁴⁷ For a full discussion of these materials, see Blanchard, *Russia's Age of Silver*, chapter 5 and appendix 2, revised in Ian Blanchard, “Le développement économique en perspective historique: l'avenir de la Russie à la lumière de son évolution à l'époque moderne (1700-1914)” in *Les entreprises et leurs réseaux: hommes, capitaux, techniques et pouvoirs dix-neuvième-XXIème siècles. Mélanges en l'honneur de François Caron*, eds. Michèle Merger et Dominique Barjot (Paris: Presse de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1998): 381-392.

⁴⁸ Blanchard, “Le développement économique”.

growth in agriculture and industry as well as overall economic activity.⁴⁹ Recent analyses had sought to take into account the underestimation of birth rates in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century censuses as well as the annexation of new territories and the resettlement (legal and illegal) of the peasantry. Once these biases were corrected, the natural rate of population growth proved to be considerable: on peasant estates, it was about 0.70 percent between 1678 and 1719, 0.62 per cent between 1719 and 1744, 0.97 between 1744 and 1762, and 0.96 percent over the next twenty years. It fell to 0.60 between 1782 and 1795, rose again to 0.86 between 1795 and 1811, but collapsed during the Napoleonic Wars to -0.42 percent. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the natural rate of growth of Russia's peasant population increased again to 0.94 in 1815-33, 0.59 between 1833 and 1850, and 0.54 percent between 1850 and 1857.⁵⁰ In the decades before the abolition of serfdom, the population in some areas increased mainly because the rate of mortality dropped and children's exposure to disease also fell.⁵¹ Both reflect increasing well-being and better hygienic practices.

During the first half of the nineteenth century price fluctuations were more pronounced than during the second half of the eighteenth century and this led again, as during the first half of the previous century, to mixing *corvéés* and quitrent.⁵² At the same time, noble estates were concentrated; the number of small estates declined while large properties became the rule, to such an extent that in 1857 noble estates with less than 21 peasants accounted for barely 3.2 percent of all estates; those with between 21 and 100 peasants made up 15.9 percent, and the great majority of estates had between 100 and 500 peasants (37.2 percent), 500 and 1,000 peasants (14.9 percent), or even more than 1,000 peasants (28.7 percent).⁵³ This trend was linked to the increasing indebtedness of the estate owners and the limited capital markets

⁴⁹ Paul Gregory, *Russian National Income (1885-1913)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ Moon, *The Russian Peasantry*: 27.

⁵¹ Hoch, *Serfdom*.

⁵² RGADA, fond 1252, opis' 1: Abamelek-Lazarevy's estate, province of Tula; fond 1282, Tolstye-Kristi's estate, province of Riazan; fond 1262, opis' 1, Prince Gagarin's estates in Saratov and Tambov provinces; fond 1287, Sheremetev's estate.

⁵³ Aleksandr' Troinitskii, *Krepostnoe naselenie v Rossii po 10 narodnoi perepisi* (The Russian serf population according to the tenth census) (Saint Petersburg: Wulf) 1861: 45.

available to them; the growing institutional pressure of a tsarist state favoring peasants' emancipation and merchants' development also contributed to the concentration of estates.

Quitrent declined on state estates and on some private estates as well, while rising in the heartland (although this rise was generally moderate). Regional specialization also increased, with central and other industrial and proto-industrial areas tending to specialize while agricultural areas lost non-agrarian activities. In particular, in steppe and central black earth areas, while factories shut down and proto-industrial activity was reduced,⁵⁴ the surface area of cultivated land expanded in the territory as a whole and inside the main estates. This process corresponded to an increase in agricultural production and, most important, a growth in marketed production and market integration. Grain prices in Russia showed a clear tendency towards homogenization and correlation on the national level.⁵⁵

In the central industrial regions, the main difference from the previous century was that noble landowners no longer restricted peasant movements between city and country. This was for reasons of choice and constraint – in part, more volatile prices led some landlords to diversify their economic strategies; in part, industrial and tsarist elites pushed for increasing liberalization of the labor market. The main issue was that the use of *obrok* and the movements of peasants in the city and in neighboring estates had intensified.⁵⁶ During the

⁵⁴ Irina V. Ledovskaia, "Biudzhety russkogo pomeschchika v 40-60kh godakh XIX v" (Estate owners' budgets in the 1840s-60s), in Akademiia Nauk SSSR, *Materialy po istorii sel'skogo khoziaistva i krest'ianstva SSSR*, vol. 8, (Moscow: Nauka 1974): 240-245.

⁵⁵ Boris. Mironov, Carol Leonard, "In Search of the Hidden Information: Some Issues in the Socio-Economic History of Russia in the Eighteenth Century and Nineteenth Centuries," *Social Science History*, 9, 4 (1985): 339-359; Ivan D. Koval'nchenko, L.V. Milov, *Vserossiiskii agrarnyi rynek XVIII-nachala XXv*. (The all-Russian agrarian market, eighteenth century-early twentieth centuries) (Moscow: Nauka, 1974).

⁵⁶ Koval'chenko, *Krepost'noe*: 394; Boris Gorshkov, "Serfs on the Move: Peasant Seasonal Migration in Pre-reform Russia, 1800-1860," *Kritika. Explorations in Russian history*, 1,4 (2000): 627-656.

1840s, in the north-western and western agricultural and industrial regions of European Russia, domestic passports granted to peasants concerned between 25 and 32 percent of the male population. By 1850, in Vladimir province, 92.44 percent of the state peasants were involved at least part-time in one or another non-agricultural occupation; in Moscow province, the proportion was 89 percent; in Kostroma province, 86.5 percent; in Novgorod province, 80.5 percent; in Pskov province, 80 percent; in Iaroslavl province, 75.8 percent; and in Nizhnii Novgorod, 65.7 percent.⁵⁷ In these areas, the way back to proto-industry from countryside to town was not synonymous with a decline of the putting-out system (i.e., subcontracting while supplying raw materials). In 1828, 6,300 weavers worked in factories in the greater Ivanovo region (which included large swaths of both Vladimir and Kostroma provinces), while 18,224 (74 percent) worked outside of factories. In 1849, the number of factory weavers had doubled to 14,854; the number of non-factory weavers had tripled, however, to 56,980 (79 percent).⁵⁸ With a flexible network of knowledgeable peasant weavers, cotton-printing firms had little incentive to expend capital on centralized weaving establishments; in general, only high-end grades of cloth were factory-produced. In Vladimir province in the early 1850s, 18,000 factory looms merely supplemented the 80,000 peasant looms filling factory orders.⁵⁹

Peasant-masters increasingly employed wage earners, often for short periods during which, however, they were under the strong legal and social control of the masters. Conflicts between peasant-masters and their working people increased; petitions were sent to local

⁵⁷ Nikolai M. Druzhinin, *Gosudarstvennye krest'iane i reforma P.D. Kiseleva* (the state peasants and the reforms of Kiselev) (Moscow: AN SSSR), vol. 2: 296-390.

⁵⁸ Dave Pretty, *Neither Peasant nor Proletarian: The Workers of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Region, 1885-1905* (Ph.D. diss.: Brown University, 1997).

⁵⁹ Olga Crisp, "Labor and Industrialization in Russia," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 7, pt. 2, eds. Peter Mathias and Michael Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978): 308-415, 337-339.

landlords, who were supposed to intervene in defence of the peasant-workers, which they often did.⁶⁰ Conflicts concerned wages and the possibility of moving. In 1802, P. B. Sheremetev received a petition from some local peasants asking him to intercede for them with their masters so that they might go and take in the harvest. Sheremetev thus issued an *ukaz* regulating the renting of land (limiting it to peasants in proto-industry) and proto-industrial activity as well.⁶¹ As the putting-out system grew through the early 1800s, many independent domestic weavers found themselves increasingly tied to particular factories or particular putting-out middlemen because they had accepted loans or advances to buy yarn or more advanced looms. A law of 1835 stipulated that the employment of all workers be based upon the conclusion of a personal contract between employer and employee that specified the responsibilities of both sides. Since most workers were peasants whose period of residence in the city was determined by their passports, the period of the contract's validity was usually limited by the term of the passport. Workers were not supposed to leave their places of work until expiration of their contracts. This regulation, however, was difficult to enforce. Many entrepreneurs and managers complained that workers left their enterprises for the countryside or better employment opportunities before their contracts had expired.⁶² Yet all this was a symptom of economic and social dynamics, not of stagnation. The Russian agrarian market developed further during the first half of the nineteenth century, and the convergence of prices testifies to the formation of a real national market. At the same time, regional specialization progressed: central and eastern agricultural areas increased productivity and marketable production, while proto-industrial areas created a denser network of urban towns and

⁶⁰ For the Sheremetevs' estates in Pavlovo and Vors'mo: TsGIA fond 1088; opis' 3, delo 626, 974, 440, 370, 417.

⁶¹ RGIA, fond 1088, opis' 10 delo 642. (ukaz 11 Sept. 1802).

⁶² RGIA fond 18, opis' 2, delo 1927, ll. 1, 3, 212–13; TsGIAM fond 14, opis' 1, delo 3266, ll. 2–38 and TsIAM fond 2354, opis' 1, delo 41, ll. 197a–99, 228.

intensified product specialization. Russian growth took place on the basis of the coexistence of these different organizations and on the basis of a long-term trend in which proto-industry and manufacture units moved from the town to the countryside and vice versa. These features help to understand the dynamics of the Russian economy after the abolition of serfdom.

The impact of the abolition of serfdom

The global trend of Russia between 1861 and 1914 hardly corresponds to the conventional images of the historiography. Revised population trends show, on the whole, lower mortality and birth rates and better living conditions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than previously thought.⁶³ Conventional historiography stressed the limits of reforms, the increasing poverty of the peasantry and the persistent backwardness of Russia.⁶⁴ More recent historiography has provided a completely different picture. Russia experienced significant social transformation and economic growth between 1861 and 1914; revised population trends show that mortality and birth rates were lower than was previously thought.⁶⁵ There was a decline in the pauperization of the peasantry and the number and severity of large-scale famines;⁶⁶ the period from 1861 to 1914 was an era of steady improvement in both agricultural production and living standards.⁶⁷

The rate of growth and commercialization of Russian agriculture also accelerated.⁶⁸ Between the 1880s and 1900, through the grain trade, capitalism spread to the most remote

⁶³ Steven Hoch, "Famine, Disease and Mortality Patterns in the Parish of Boshervka, Russia, 1830-1932", *Population Studies*, 52,3 (1998): 357-368. Steven Hoch, "On Good Numbers and Bad: Malthus, Population Trend and Peasant Standard of Living in Late Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review*, 53, 1 (1994): 41-75. Steven Hoch, "Serfs in Imperial Russia: Demographic Insights", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 13, 2 (1982): 221-246.

⁶⁴ Robinson, *Rural Russia*; Gershenkron, *Economic Backwardness*.

⁶⁵ Steven Hoch, "Famine, Disease and Mortality Patterns in the Parish of Boshervka, Russia, 1830-1932", *Population Studies*, 52, 3(1998): 357-368; Idem, "On Good Numbers and Bad: Malthus, Population Trend and Peasant Standard of Living in Late Imperial Russia", *Slavic Review*, 53,1 (1994): 41-75; Idem, "Serfs in Imperial Russia: Demographic Insights", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 13, 2 (1982): 221-246.

⁶⁶ Stephen Wheatcroft, "Crisis and Condition of the Peasantry in Late Imperial Russia", in Esther Kingston-Mann, Timothy Mixer, Eds, *Peasant Economy, Culture and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991): 101-127.

⁶⁷ Elvira M. Wilbur, "Was Russian Peasant Agriculture Really That Impoverished? New Evidence From a Case Study From the 'Impoverished Center' at the End of the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Economic History*, 43, 1 (1983): 137-144; Esther Kingston-Mann, "Marxism and Russian Rural Development: Problems of Evidence, Experience and Culture", *American Historical Review*, 86, 4 (1981): 731-752; James Y. Simms, Jr, "The Crisis in Russian Agriculture at the End of the Nineteenth Century: A Different View", *Slavic Review*, 36, 3 (1977): 377-398; James Simms Jr, "The Crop Failure of 1891: Soil Exhaustion, Technological Backwardness, and Russia's Agrarian Crisis", *Slavic Review*, 41, 2 (1982): 236-250.

⁶⁸ Paul Gregory, *Russian National Income 1885-1913* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982); Alessandro Stanziani, *L'économie en révolution. Le cas russe, 1870-1930* (Paris: Albin Michel 1998); Peter Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy, 1850-1917* (New York, St Martin's Press, 1986).

corners of the empire⁶⁹ and Russia's wheat market was fully integrated into global markets.⁷⁰ The contribution of agriculture to the national income rose at a rapid pace, comparable to that of contemporary western European economies. In Paul Gregory's assessment, Russia experienced growth rates similar to those of Germany, France, America, Japan, Norway, Canada, and the United Kingdom – 1.35 percent average annual productivity growth in agriculture between 1883–1887 and 1909–1913, which was three-quarters of the rate of industrial productivity growth and nearly equal to the 1.5 percent rate of the economy as a whole.⁷¹

Net grain production rose to 3.1 percent annually between 1885 and 1913; Russia produced more grain than any other country in 1861, and in 1913, was second only to the United States.⁷² The average annual growth rate of wholesale grain and potato production in European Russia from 1870 to 1913 was 2.5 percent: 1.6 percent for the first thirty years and 4.4 percent after the turn of the century. Gregory estimated the rate of economic growth in the entire Russian empire including frontier regions from 1883–1887 through 1909–1913 at 2.8 percent, with some fluctuations within the intervals of that period.⁷³ The value of labor input increased between 1861 and 1913 by 42.6 percent, or an average annual rate of 1.7 percent.

Economic growth relied on the evolution of core Russian social institutions such as the peasant commune. It is no accident that over the past twenty years, when the history of enclosures in Britain and agriculture in Europe was being reexamined,⁷⁴ the image of the Russian commune has been called into question as well.⁷⁵ Recent estimates for Russia confirm there was no correlation between land redistribution practices and economic productivity.⁷⁶ Periodic redistributions had far less influence on productivity than endogenous investment decisions. When redistributing land plots, communes often took into account as key factors the quality of the soil and any improvements in its quality made by the previous tenant. Repartitions allowed land communes to respond to sudden, unexpected changes in

⁶⁹ Ivan Koval'chenko, L. Milov, *Vserossiiskii agrarnyi rynok, XVIII–nachalo XX v.* (The all-Russian agrarian market, 18th-early 20th centuries) (Moscow: Nauka 1974).

⁷⁰ Barry K. Goodwin, Thomas J. Grennes, "Tsarist Russia and the World Wheat Market", *Explorations in Economic History*, 35, 4 (1998): 405-430.

⁷¹ Gregory, *Russian National Income*: 126-130; 168-194.

⁷² Robert Allen, *Farm to Factory: a Reinterpretation of the Soviet Industrial Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003).

⁷³ Gregory, *Russian National Income*: Table 6.3.

⁷⁴ Donald McCloskey, "The Open Fields of England: Rent, Risk, and the Rate of Interest, 1300–1815" in David Galenson, ed, *Markets in History: Economic Studies of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989): 5-51.

⁷⁵ Esther Kingston-Mann, "Peasant Communes and Economic Innovation: A Preliminary Inquiry", in Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixer, Eds., *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800–1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 23-51; Pavel' N. Zyrianov, *Krest'ianskaia obshchina Evropeiskoi Rossii 1907–1914 gg.* (The peasant commune in the European Russia, 1907-1914), (Moscow: Nauka 1992); Judith Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia 1906–1917: Peasant Responses to Stolypin's Project of Rural Transformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

⁷⁶ Steven Nafziger, *Communal Institutions, Resource Allocation, and Russian Economic Development*, Ph.D. dissertation (Yale University, 2006).

their size brought about by epidemics or migrations, to recast the shape of the open fields and to bring order to field strips by reducing their number.⁷⁷

Peasant land possessions more than doubled between the 1870s and World War I, and acquisitions were made not only by land communes but also increasingly by individual households. Between 1863 and 1872, Russian peasants bought lands to add to their communal allotments. Over three-quarters of all peasant acquisitions on the open market were made by individuals. This trend accelerated with the foundation of the Peasant State Bank, intended to encourage loans to peasants seeking to buy land. There was a twofold increase in peasant land properties between 1877 and 1905. In 80 percent of the cases, the transactions were made by the peasant commune or by peasant associations. During the following years, between 1906 and 1914, the state sold 1.5 million *desiatines* (1 *desiatine* = 1.10 hectares) to peasants; landlords sold them one-fifth of their land, that is, 10.2 million out of 49.7 *desiatines*. Two thirds of the purchases were made by peasant associations and land communes and one third by individual households.⁷⁸ The dynamics of land acquisition thus further substantiate the assertion that peasant well-being increased between 1861 and 1914.

Among agrarian forms of capital, livestock requires a special attention: the abundance of livestock has been usually considered as one of the crucial specificities of the “West” over other continents, while within Europe and according to the same vein, Britain’s advance in agricultural development over other countries has been equally explained having recourse to livestock. On the contrary, Asian and African backwardness is explained, among other crucial variables, by the lack of livestock. This view has been progressively contested. As regards Russia, since Gregory, who followed Veinsthein, livestock appears to be not only quite widespread but also growing at around 2% per year in late tsarist Russian agriculture.⁷⁹ Deflated net investments in agriculture grew at about 10-13% per year during the same period (1885-1913).⁸⁰ Even if most of advanced machines were still imported, tools and new equipment were more and more widespread in rural Russia, also thank to the growing role of credit and peasant cooperatives and state peasant bank.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Pallot. Land Reform: 81.

⁷⁸ Ezhegodnik GUZIZ (Yearbook of the land commission of the ministry of agriculture), 1907–1916 (St. Petersburg: Gosizdat, 1908–1916).

⁷⁹ Gregory, *Russia National Income*.

⁸⁰ Aleksandr L. Vainshtein, *Narodnoe bogatstvo I narodnokhoziaistvoonnoe nakoplenie predrevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1960).

⁸¹ A.M. Anfimov, *Rossiiskaia derevenia v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Nauka, 1962); A.A. Minin, *Sel'sko-khoziaistvennaia kooperatsiia SSSR*, Moskva, 1925; Trudy TsSU, vol. 5, vyp. 1, Moskva, 1921; L. Veinshtein, *Nardonyi dokhod Rossiii I SSSR*, 1969; Roger Bartlett (ed.), *Land commune and peasant community in Russia* (London: Mac Millan, 1991).

This revised view of Russian agriculture corresponds to the new assessments of Russia's industrialization. According to recent estimates, between 1881 and 1913 the share of industry in national income rose from 25 percent to 32 percent. The productivity of industrial labor was 28 percent higher than that in agriculture.⁸² The rate of urbanization was considerable,⁸³ largely attributable to the influx of peasant migrants who accounted for 93 percent of all factory workers in Moscow in 1902,⁸⁴ most of whom worked in textiles. Industry labour productivity grew at an annual rate of 28% higher than that of agriculture.⁸⁵ By the time of the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, Russia possessed the sixth-largest cotton-spinning industry in the world.⁸⁶ However mechanization only slowly took hold in the 1860s and 1870s; in 1866, probably only 36.6 percent of cotton cloth was produced on mechanical looms. By 1879, 58.4 percent of Russian cotton was produced on mechanical looms.⁸⁷ The real victory of the mechanized loom took place in the 1880s and 1890s: in the Ivanovo region in 1860, 10 percent of the weavers made 20 percent of cloth production on mechanical looms; the respective figures grew to 28 percent and 44 percent in 1868, 57 percent and 84 percent in 1879; 67 and 92 percent in 1884; 77 and 94 percent in 1890, and 96 and 98 percent in 1896.⁸⁸ If the production share of mechanical looms had become overwhelming by the 1880s, the hand weavers remained an important part of the workforce until the industrialization drive of the 1890s and a small putting-out industry remained right up to the end of the empire. This also explains why throughout the post-emancipation period large firms intentionally jacked up the price of yarn or withheld it altogether from small producers to intentionally drive them from the market, both to stifle competition and exert more control over the production process. Rather than a widespread diffusion of mechanical power, machines became the feature of a few firms, denoting an increasing polarization of the Russian industry. Of the 588 Russian factories that employed more than six workers in 1902, 98 with over one thousand workers had a collective labour force of 257,353; the other 490 employed only 90,118. Thus one-sixth of the firms employed three-quarters of the workers.⁸⁹ The industry remained geographically concentrated in the central provinces of Moscow and Vladimir, as well as in and around the imperial capital. In 1890, 255 of 344 finishing factories were concentrated in these three provinces, responsible for more than 90 percent of the workers and 97 percent of

⁸² Gregory, *Russian National Income*: 132.

⁸³ Gatrell. *The Tsarist*.

⁸⁴ David Pretty, *Neither Peasant nor Proletarian. The Workers of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Region* (PhD, Brown University, 1997).

⁸⁵ Gregory, 1982, p. 132.

⁸⁶ K.A. Pazhitnov, *Ocherki istorii tekstil'noi promyshlennosti dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii: Khlopchatobumazhnaia, l'no-pen'kovaia i shelkovaia promyshlennost'* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1958).

⁸⁷ Pazhitnov, *Ocherki*: 81.

⁸⁸ Gestwa.: 108.

⁸⁹ Johnson: 22-23

the value of production. Only eight of these were in St. Petersburg province, but they were by far the largest and the most productive on average⁹⁰ By 1902, one quarter of cotton textile firms, accounting for 75 percent of workers, were located in the Central Industrial Region. If Russian Poland is excluded, these figures rise to one-third of the firms, 85 percent of workers.⁹¹

According to the 1897 census, 23.3 per cent of the active population was employed in non-agricultural sectors, half of them in proto-industrial and craft activities and the rest in industry and services. Proto-industry and especially rural cottage industry were still serious competitors for urban industry, not only in terms of production but also in the size of the labor market.⁹² Thus the relatively low numbers of the industrial labor force were not due to internal passports or legal constraints on mobility⁹³ but to the strength of agriculture, its profitability, and people's interest in staying in rural areas and leaving only for seasonal urban employment.⁹⁴ In proto-industrial and industrial areas, between 1870 and 1906, passports were delivered to about a quarter of the population⁹⁵. In these regions, two main patterns were at hand: in proto-industrial areas located in the countryside, passports were fewer and concerned mostly women. In more distant (from the towns) areas, the number of issued passports was higher and they were delivered mostly to men. In these areas, women emigrated mostly as servants; however, unlike the British pattern, this was done not so much by young women before their marriage, than by widows and "aged" unmarried women⁹⁶. Even after 1906, when internal passports were suppressed, change was slow to occur. 69 percent of St. Petersburg's population in 1910, and certainly a far greater percentage of the factory labor force, were peasants, and less than 10 percent of those over the age of twenty had been born in the capital.⁹⁷ This means that despite an increasing rate of urbanization and regional specialization, the peasant worker was still the leading figure in the Russian economy.⁹⁸

If this is so, then, unlike Osterhammel's argument (Russia as an exception in Europe), the Russian specificity consisted in adopting extreme variations of Western solutions. Estate

⁹⁰ Pazhitnov, *Ocherki*.

⁹¹ David Pretty, *Neither Peasant nor Proletarian. The Workers of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Region* (PhD, Brown University, 1997).

⁹² Gatrell, *The Tsarist*.

⁹³ Leonid Borodkin, Brigitte Granville, and Carol Scott Leonard, "The Rural/Urban Wage Gap in the Industrialisation of Russia, 1884-1910", *European Review of Economic History*, 12, 1 (2008): 67-95.

⁹⁴ Leonard, *Agrarian Reforms*.

⁹⁵ Jeffrey Burds, "The social control of Peasant Labor in Russia: the Response of Village Communities to Labor Migration in Central Industrial Region, 1861-1905" in E. Kingston-Mann, T. Mixter eds., *Peasant Economy, Culture and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921* (Princeton, 1991): 58

⁹⁶ *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik Toverskoi gubernii za 1897*, Annuaire statistique de la province de Tver en 1897, Tver, 1898; voir aussi Alpern-Engel, *op. cit.*, p.69 ; Alpern Engel, *op. cit.*, p. 140; Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1985).

⁹⁷ Robert B. McKean, *St. Petersburg between the Revolutions* (New Haven, 1990): 17.

⁹⁸ Jeffrey Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics : Labor Migration and the Russian Village, 1861-1905*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).

owners entered the proto-industrial and the cereal markets at the expense of urban merchants and producers and of occasional new “bourgeois” estate owners. This outcome was politically relevant and specific in that it expressed an extreme defence of old agrarian aristocracies in a context of progressive transformation of the peasantry. In terms of economic growth, this solution was far from being catastrophic and confirms that markets and capitalism do not necessarily stand upon democracy and free labour. At the same time, it is must not be forgotten that Russia did not catch up to them and, most importantly, it failed to resolve the tensions between economic development and social and political inequalities. The abolition of serfdom was not accompanied by dissolution of the traditional estate order of the old regime (the *soslovie* system in Russia). The population and their rights were divided into a few main groups (peasants, landlords, priests, merchants) and a myriad of subgroups.⁹⁹ Nobles continued to enjoy special rules and privileges, while peasants, despite their increasing legal rights, still had few political rights. Merchants and urban groups were allowed some rights at the local level but very few at the national level until after the revolution of 1905, when the tsar was forced to concede a constitution. From this perspective, the main feature of Russia over the long run is not so much “economic backwardness” as persistent, strong social inequalities inside an industrializing economy and society. The history of late tsarist and nowadays Russia confirm that economic growth and markets are perfectly compatible with lack of democracy and unequal social rights.

⁹⁹ Gregory Freeze, “The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm In Russian Social History”, *American Historical Review*, 91, 1(1986): 11-36.