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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Avtonomov, V. (2021). West-Russia-West: Early cases of interaction in economic thought. *Russian Journal of Economics*, 7(1), 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.32609/j.ruje.7.55458>

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West–Russia–West: Early cases of interaction in economic thought

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Abstract

In this article, a specific pattern of West–Russia–West transfer in economic thought is described using two early cases from the 19th century. This pattern suggests that experiencing strong influence from the West, leading Russian economists developed and modified Western economic theories, adapting them to specific Russian political, ideological and cultural circumstances. As a result, they exerted a certain influence upon the next generations of Western economists. Two concrete examples are described: Smith–Storch–List (dealing with the theory of inner goods) and Haxthausen–Chernyshevsky–Marx (dealing with the problem of *obshina*—Russian rural commons).

Keywords: Russian economic thought, theory of inner goods, Russian *obshina*, Heinrich von Storch, August von Haxthausen, Nikolay Chernyshevsky, Karl Marx.

JEL classification: B12, B14, B15.

1. Introduction

The interaction scheme “West–Russia–West” described in the preceding article (Avtonomov, 2021) and consisting of the adaptation of Western economic ideas by Russian economists and transmitting them to the West in a modified form is encountered mostly after the 1890s when Russian economic science reached the stage of maturity. Before that time Russian economic thought was largely embedded in a broad stream of non-specialized social ideas. This syncretism of Russian social thought was frequently mentioned in the literature (Seraphim, 1925). At that stage we can hardly find examples of Russian economists having an impact on their Western colleagues. However, we will try to analyze two possible sequences from that epoch: Smith–Storch–List and Haxthausen–Tchernyshevsky–Marx.

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2. Smith–Storch–List

Under Catherine II, Adam Smith was apparently considered an important figure of European Enlightenment who came to Russia mostly through French thinkers. Catherine sent two young Russians Ivan Tretyakov (1735–1776) and Semyon Desnitsky (1740–1789) to Glasgow to attend Smith’s lectures. After 1789, when the French intellectual influence diminished, Smith’s influence survived. In the early years of Alexander’s I reign, which were marked by the rise of liberal ideas, Smith became popular in Russia mostly as a prophet of freedom, both political and economic. The “Wealth of nations” was translated into Russian in 1802–1806 and published at the cost of the state! In 1803, J.-B. Say’s *Traité* was published and Smith’s ideas in Say’s rendering became accessible to Russian French-speaking public (nobility). Under Alexander I, political economy became fashionable in universities, literary magazines and even in Czar’s family where Heinrich Storch taught two Royal Princesses and then the Great Princes Nikolay and Mikhail. In 1804, political economy and statistics were included in university curriculums. It so happened that Smith’s ideas were presented to the Russian public mostly by German professors. Germans were always considered by Russians to be exemplar foreigners. The very word *nemets* (Russian word for a German) literally means “dumb”—a person who cannot speak Russian. A lot of Germans served in Russia as scientists, military men, doctors, craftsmen and civil servants of different ranks including the highest (Ministers, generals etc.). Thus, European ideas (including British ones) most often came to Russia through educated Germans. And more importantly still, from the beginning of the 19th century, a large proportion of Russian *intelligentsia* were educated in German universities.¹

As is well known, Wilhelm Roscher even spoke about the “Russian German school,” including, among others, Heinrich von Storch (1766–1835), Christian von Schlözer (1771–1831), Ludwig Heinrich von Jacob (1759–1827), and the long-standing finance minister Georg (Yegor) Cancrin (1774–1845). In fact, the list of German professors and statesmen active in Russia could be easily extended. But Roscher’s statement was certainly an exaggeration, because such a school, strictly speaking, did not exist, but there was something important connected to the fact that the main teachers of political economy in Russia were German (Zweynert, 2004). The first Russian textbook in political economy (1805–1807) was published in German, Russian and French variants by Schlözer, who had the first Chair of political economy in Moscow University. German economists had already adapted Smith’s doctrine to the realities of less developed economies of German states and inherited a lot from German cameralism containing detailed descriptions of good state policies (*Staatswissenschaftskunst*). German economists preferred an organic, not a mechanical image of society. The next stage was to adapt classical political economy to Russian circumstances, still more distant from English origins. German professors could easily point to the relativity of the English classical school using the example of Russia.²

The most prominent representative of German Russian economists was Heinrich (Andrey) von Storch—the first Russian economist, who was known in

¹ For more on the German influence on Russian economic thought see Shirokorad (2005).

² This issue was first mentioned by Wilhelm Roscher (1874, S. 791–792).

Western Europe, praised by J. R. MacCulloch, published (without the author's permission) and criticized by Say (1823). “Storch, who in Russian literature is usually referred to as ‘Andrei Karlovich’, was a mediator between Western Europe and Russia” (Zweynert, 2004, p. 525).

His main work, “Cours d'économie politique” (Storch, 1815) was written and published in French. In fact, that was the language in which he taught Great Princes. These lectures actually built the foundation of the *Cours*.³ The *Cours* was divided into two parts. The first one was devoted to the theory of national (material) wealth. Here Storch was mainly following and partly citing Smith and Say,⁴ but not in all issues. For instance, his theory of value was not labor- but utility-based. But we will concentrate upon the second part devoted to the so-called “theory of civilization.”⁵ This part contains Storch's main original input in theoretical economics—his theory of “internal” non-tangible goods: “health, skill, knowledge, aesthetics, morals, religion, security and leisure.” (Storch, 2008, pp. 608–609).⁶ These goods cannot be bought or sold, but the labor producing them can be bought and sold in form of services. This is Storch's original theory, we cannot find any borrowings here. Smith and Say approached the topic which we may now call human capital, but their treatment was rather materialistic: they stressed the analogy between material resources and human skills. Schlözer went further and had a broader conception of non-material resources (Zweynert, 2004, p. 530). But the highest point was reached by Storch. This theory became a remarkable feature of the Russian version of classical economics in 1840–1850 (Zweynert, 2002, S. 71). Storch attempted to enrich political economy with the analysis of non-material goods and factors, and directly opposed Smith's division of productive and nonproductive labor, which was based upon the distinction of material and non-material goods. Storch considered the labor creating internal goods to be productive.⁷ But most important was his emphasis on inner goods as a component of national prosperity. These goods can also be accumulated and transformed into capital like the material “richesses” (Storch, 2008, p. 613). Storch's theory of inner goods is not confined to basic definitions; it is developed on a large scale and the non-material side is never forgotten. The motives for providing services include (besides material benefits) also moral ones: the desire of esteem and honor, love, virtue and duty (Storch, 2008, p. 621). For instance, a remuneration for services of Russian Senate members consists mostly of honor, because the modest pecuniary award could be only supplementary (Storch, 2008, p. 644).

Summing up, “what Storch's theory of internal goods is dealing with is the connection between cultural and economic development” (Zweynert, 2004, p. 532).

³ Later it was translated into German and published by K. H. Rau in 1819. It was never translated into English. The Russian translation of the first volume was performed by Ivan Vernadsky in 1881. In this article I refer to the full Russian translation which appeared only in 2008 (Storch, 2008).

⁴ This practice caused the angry commentaries of Say. We can explain it by pedagogical goal of the *Cours*. For Storch it was an acceptable practice to insert classical texts without citation marks where they did not need improvements and corrections on his part.

⁵ The French term “civilisation” was translated into other languages as “social education” (“gesellige Bildung” in German, *obrazovanie* in Russian). But the original meaning of the term was much broader.

⁶ The basic internal good is security. Probably one reason for this is that the addressed “audience” will by definition take care of national security.

⁷ By the way, according to Storch, for producing inner goods we need not only the producer's but also the consumer's labor (student's, patient's, spectator's etc.).

It is difficult to assert that the Russian environment exerted an important influence on Storch's theory of inner goods. Storch was born into a German family (although Riga already was part of the Russian empire at that time), studied at German universities (Jena and Heidelberg) and besides Smith's doctrine, received a German cameralistic education.⁸ He did not seem to find inspiration in specific Russian circumstances. In fact, in the foreword he underlined that, in such a country as Russia, political economy can also be applied. He wanted to set the right goals before future governors of the Empire—the Great Princes. As Zweynert (2002) underlines, the theory of inner goods was an attempt to set directions along which Russia could catch up with more civilized Western European countries.⁹ Probably the most important issue is the detrimental role of serfdom which is underlined in many places of the book in connection with different issues, such as fertility and morals. A special chapter deals with the influence of slavery upon civilization and this influence is declared to be negative. It is handled on a theoretical level and the examples given are mostly not Russian. But one can unmistakably feel what the author is trying to convey to his Royal students. For instance, Storch mentioned that while a serf-peasant had a chance to be happy, a serf-industrial worker did not. This was a clear allusion to Russian realities.

Another specific Russian detail worth mentioning is that Storch saw the favorable aspect of Russian reality in the predominance of agriculture in relation to industry. We should bear in mind that the industry he saw was in an early stage of development characterized by a long working day, children's work etc. and did not look attractive to contemporaries. A peasant, working in the open air, possessing various productive skills and not one primitive skill of the specialized industrial worker (and being personally free—let us not forget the previous point!) had many advantages, including moral ones (Storch, 2008, p. 676) in comparison with the alienated (Marx's term is in place here) industrial worker (Storch, 2008, pp. 652, 663). Storch's slogan could have been "Every progress is reactionary if it destroys the human being" (a quote from Soviet poet Andrey Voznesensky). He investigated what happens to each internal good with the transition from agricultural stage to the industrial one, and found that in some cases, especially health, skills and morals, the situation was going to get worse (Storch, 2008, pp. 650–663, 674–685). On the other hand, aesthetics and knowledge grow in the industrial era. Thus, the theory of internal goods led Storch to reconsider the growth of civilization and stress the advantages of the agricultural stage Russia was experiencing. Even in foreign trade, as Storch argued, industrial products tend to grow cheaper while the prices of agricultural products increase (he used the example of Ireland) (Storch, 2008, pp. 776–780). Storch used, though not very often, examples of different countries, illustrating his theoretical statements. But Russia is mentioned less frequently, than, for instance, England, although Storch compiled and published a vast collection of facts and figures on Russia. Probably, more plausible is Zweynert's thesis that German states and Russia had much in common, both economically and mentally, with Russia lagging behind.

⁸ Georg Sartorius (whose work was also translated into Russian in 1796) could be mentioned among his forerunners (Zweynert, 2002, S. 102).

⁹ By the way, one of such important directions was to enhance the knowledge of foreign languages.

The influence of Storch upon Russian economists of future generations and their estimates of his work is profoundly analyzed by Anton Dmitriev (2005). Our task here is to consider a possible feedback from Storch to Western thought. Schlözer and Storch are considered by some authors (among them, Roscher) as forerunners of the German Historical school (Zweynert, 2002, S. 81). Their works are believed to contribute to the transformation of Classicism into Historicism in Germany. A good illustration of this transformation is provided by Storch's description of subject matter of political economy at the end of the introductory chapter of his *Cours*: political economy is based on study of man and people. "It is necessary to research the human nature, state and fate of society in different places at different times, to consult the historians and travelers, not only laws and customs but also the way they are realized" (Storch, 2008, p. 55). But we must not forget that the founder of the German Historical school, Roscher, did not accept the theory of inner goods and criticized it for its dissolution of economic issues in general considerations (Zweynert, 2004, p. 538).

Zweynert discovered that Storch's list of internal goods literally coincides with the list of productive forces compiled by Friedrich List in his "National System of Political Economy" (Zweynert, 2002, S. 84). This indicates that List was influenced by Storch in the essential part of his doctrine. This doctrine also was not academic and was directed towards making German states catch up with world industrial leaders. But List and Storch had quite opposite political views (Storch was a consequent free-trader).¹⁰ To my mind, this can be considered as the first example of the feedback influence of Russian economic thought on Western European thought. Another Western economist who is believed to be directly influenced by Storch was a French liberal, Charles Dunoyer (1786–1862). In fact, Dunoyer mentioned Storch in a footnote, where he acknowledged that Storch rightly criticized Say for mixing the labor, which produced non-material goods, with its products—the goods themselves. Storch did it 12 years before Dunoyer, but Dunoyer claimed that he did not know about Storch's book before he came to the same conclusion. Dunoyer (1846) asserted that Storch did not make good use of this distinction. So, if we give credit to these words, we cannot speak about a direct influence of Storch on Dunoyer. However, Dunoyer devoted a lot of space and effort to describing and analyzing cultural factors of economic life. In Britain, Storch was not well received because British economists, at least since Ricardo, worked on a more abstract level, than continental ones. Storch's theory of internal goods (partly through Dunoyer) had a lasting impact only in Russia (Zweynert, 2004).

3. Haxthausen–Chernyshevsky–Marx

August von Haxthausen was widely believed to be a discoverer of Russian *obshina*. His "Studien über die innern Zustände, das Volksleben und insbesondere die ländlichen Einrichtungen Russlands" (Haxthausen, 1847–1852)¹¹ published in Germany after a 12 month-trip through different regions of Russia

¹⁰ Zweynert thinks that this was the reason why List did not acknowledge Storch's influence on his theory (Zweynert, 2004, p. 534).

¹¹ See Haxthausen (1972). This is an abbreviated one-volume English translation.

in 1843–1844, which was financed and supported by Nicholas I,¹² was the first systematic and rather sympathetic description of this institution, which became the central issue of discussions in Russian social thought of subsequent decades. There are some debates about the priority of this discovery.¹³ Haxthausen himself wrote that he came across this issue while describing the organization of agriculture in Prussia in 1830 (this investigation was financed by another monarch, Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia), where he found some peculiarities in Prussian regions formerly inhabited by Slavs. In fact, Haxthausen was acquainted with Polish literature about the *obshina* before his trip to Russia (Svyatlovsky, 1923, pp. 180–181). Certainly, he also could have had some preliminary talks with Russian Slavophiles in Moscow who discussed *obshina*. C. Goehrke wrote that Haxthausen discovered the *obshina* as the crucial institution of Russian social life without any influence from Slavophiles (Goehrke, 1964). Among Russian historians there are different views on this issue. Shtein, of course, postulated the opposite sequence: Haxthausen borrowed the views of Russian Slavophiles which at that time were not reflected in any publication (Shtein, 1948, p. 116). But several pages later he mentioned that Slavophiles originally treated *obshina* as an ethical problem and formulated a corresponding social theory only in 1847–1852 (Shtein, 1948, p. 121) that is, after the publication of Haxthausen's work. This debate, however, does not change the main fact that this work was the first empirically founded scientific source upon which any further discussion could be based. Haxthausen was not a professional economist, but he certainly had great practical experience of managing for 12 years his family estate in Westfalia where the abolition of serfdom took place just in this time period. As for his research methods, they are characteristic for a representative of the Historical approach.¹⁴ We should mention his friendship with the Grimm brothers, one of whom (Jacob) taught him law in Göttingen along the lines of Historical school of law headed by their friend Karl von Savigny. Like his friends, Haxthausen collected folk songs and fairy-tales, and one of the courses he took in Göttingen was called “Man in his organic entirety.” His adherence to statistical method also points in the direction of Historicism.

Haxthausen saw in Russian *obshina*—with its regular redistribution of land sites between families and communal organization of agricultural works—a chance for Russia to escape social unrest. At the same time, he was “practical” enough to see in the *obshina* a factor retarding technological progress.

Haxthausen's book was allowed to circulate in Russia in German and French versions, but the translation into Russian was prohibited until 1870 (and even then several critical passages were omitted).¹⁵

After the publication of his travel account, Haxthausen was generally considered an expert on Russia and its agriculture. He never ceased to be engaged

¹² An interesting point is that besides obtaining information on Russian agriculture and recommendations considering its possible reform, Nicholas I also planned the publishing of Haxthausen's book as a certain antidote for European audiences to the recent critical publication of Astolphe de Custine's “La Russie en 1839.”

¹³ This question is analyzed in detail by Zweynert (2002, S. 202).

¹⁴ The accepted tradition is to classify as main members of the old Historical school Wilhelm Roscher, Bruno Hildebrand and Karl Knies. I can agree with this as far as the academic economic theory is concerned. But, for example, Friedrich List's earlier “National System of Political Economy” (1841), which was not a purely academic work, could be also called a manifestation of the Historical approach.

¹⁵ The following passage is based on Avdeeva (1998).

in Russian reforms in intensive collaboration with the Great Princess Helene of Russia, participated in the discussion and wrote several notes which were handed to Alexander II (Stoyanoff-Odoy, 1991). In 1857 he published in *Russky Vestnik* two articles on agricultural reforms connected with the abolition of serfdom in Prussia and Austria to make the Russian public familiar with the Western European experience. In the discussion, Haxthausen's position was closer to the "liberal camp," he advocated the liberation of peasants with half of their land free of charge. According to him, the main actors in post-reform Russia should be *obshinas* and responsible noble land owners, but not Russian bureaucrats, on whom his opinion was not much more favorable than that by Marquis de Custine. How to avoid these middlemen under the autocracy of Russian czars, remained unclear. In 1866, a new book in German was published by Haxthausen and his associates provided by the Great Princess Helene to give the European public a detailed account of Russian agricultural reforms (Haxthausen, 1866). A special chapter of this book is devoted to Russian *obshina* which he recommends to preserve despite its technological backwardness because of its political importance and as a barrier to the proletarianization of the peasants.

Haxthausen's book propelled general discussion on *obshina*, with Nikolay Chernyshevsky as an important participant. The discussion started right after the publication of Haxthausen's book, but Chernyshevsky joined it with some delay. He was not an economist but a philologist by education, a prolific and energetic journalist of radical views who became the main figure in the influential *Sovremennik* magazine. He began to deal with economic problems only in 1857. But this very talented autodidact very rapidly became known as one of the leading Russian economists. His main economic work was the translation of John Stuart Mill's "Principles of political economy" with extensive commentaries, in which he tried to draw socialist conclusions from Mill's theoretical work. The second direction of his thought was devoted to the problem of *obshina*. In the beginning his treatment of this problem was broadly ethical, a combination of Slavophile and socialist ideas: "A single man becoming independent was left in a helpless state [...] After the idea of the rights of a single personality, an idea of union and brotherhood emerged [...] In the agriculture it must be expressed in the transition of land in common use, in industry — in the transition of factories into common use of their workers [...] let us not dare touch the holy, salvatory custom, which we inherited from our past, let us not dare encroach on *obshina* use of land" (Chernyshevsky, 1857a/1948, pp. 744–745). In fact, Chernyshevsky combined materialism with Christian-orthodox ethics, which should not be surprising considering his religious upbringing and education. Here we may refer to his "expressed anthropocentrism" and treatment of political economy as a normative science.

But in the polemics with the liberal Professor Ivan Vernadsky, the editor of *Ekonomicheskyy Ukazatel*, Chernyshevsky used materialist economic discourse and referred to the authority of Haxthausen as an expert and impartial researcher. In 1857, he published a big article in *Sovremennik* (Chernyshevsky, 1857b/1948), exposing Haxthausen's work of 1847 very extensively with his commentaries (these excerpts were actually the first Russian translation of a considerable part of Haxthausen's first volume!), making some corrections and praising the book overall as a source of reliable information. In his article, Chernyshevsky proposed Russian *obshina* as a more favorable transitory stage to large-scale industrialized

agriculture than small private farms of West European peasants. In this article, he did not glorify the *obshina* for its own sake like in the notes cited above. According to him, Russia was just lucky to be backward enough, so that this obsolete form of organization survived. Subsequently, when machines would be used in agriculture, *obshina* would promote a graduated transition to socialism in agriculture. In his commentaries, Chernyshevsky referred to Haxthausen as a representative of a country with privately owned farms, who, nevertheless, as a practical man was impressed by the functionality of common ownership in Russia.

In another publication in *Sovremennik*, Chernyshevsky (1858/1986) approached the *obshina* question from the philosophical standpoint using a kind of Hegelian dialectics. After the first nomadic stage with communal property the growth of population creates the need for intensification of agricultural production, capital investments and private property. But in the next stage the concentration of production will lead to the return to communal property. So Russia had a possibility to skip the second stage (Chernyshevsky, 1858/1986, p. 388).

Already at the end of 1858, Chernyshevsky began to doubt the protecting role of *obshina*, but continued to believe in it as a way of transition to socialism. After the reforms of 1861 he seemed to drop the slogan of *obshina* altogether and concentrated on the struggle against autocracy (Gurevich, 1975).

Working on the first edition of “Capital” (vol. 1), Marx was very skeptical about Russian supporters of an obsolete institution of *obshina*, including Alexander Herzen. He noticed that Herzen’s views were influenced by Haxthausen, but apparently was not familiar with the latter’s work at that time (Vada, 2018). At that time Marx was confident that backward countries could make their way to socialism only with the help of the proletariat of advanced Western countries, winning the socialist revolutions in their countries. Marx learnt Russian and urged Engels to do the same to read the non-translated works by V. Bervey-Florovsky (1829–1918) on the plight of the working class in Russia. In 1870 German Lopatin (1845–1918)—a member of the First International and the first translator of “Capital” into a foreign language¹⁶—informed Marx about the work of Chernyshevsky (who was already in Siberia, where Lopatin somewhat later tried to set him free). Marx was favorably impressed both by Chernyshevsky’s commentaries on Mill and by his work on *obshina*. We do not know precisely, which of Chernyshevsky’s articles on *obshina* was read by Marx, but this reading obviously became the turning point in his attitude towards Russian *obshina* (Vada, 2018).¹⁷ At that time the situation in Western Europe did not look promising for a socialist revolution anymore. Russia, especially in the case of a possible defeat in the Russian–Turkish war of the 1870’s, could explode and in the predominantly agrarian country the *obshina* could serve as a foundation of collective socialist production. Accordingly, Marx changed the preface to the second edition of “Capital” (1873) and eliminated the principal thesis that all countries should undergo the process of primary accumulation of capital before they could aspire towards a socialist future. This change in Marx’s position was

¹⁶ With the exception of Mikhail Bakunin who dropped this project at the beginning.

¹⁷ Shtein tried to prove that Marx had a favorable opinion regarding Russian *obshina* (regarding it as an institution which mitigated poverty) even before his acquaintance with Chernyshevsky’s work (Shtein, 1948, p. 228), but this argument does not look persuasive. Marx could be hardly accused of having such a kind-hearted position in any political or theoretical question.

reflected in his letters to the editor of *Otechestvennyye Zapiski* (Marx, 1878) and to Vera Zasulich (Marx, 1881). In the first draft of the letter to the editor, Marx repeated his praise for “the great Russian scholar and critic Chernyshevsky” (Marx, 1872, p. 718) and the thesis, which was formulated in (Chernyshevsky, 1858/1986). Marx thus came to refute his earlier beliefs and revised them, insisting on the principle that no theory can be applied universally. It turned out that the influence of Chernyshevsky was the main reason why Marx did not support Russian Marxists but rather the populists in their dispute.

4. Conclusions

The first examples of West–Russia–West connection, which we described above, could be summarized in the following sequences.

- I. Classical political economy (Smith, Say)–Russia (Storch)–Historical economic thought (List).
- II. Historical economic thought (Haxthausen)–Russia (Chernyshevsky)–Marx (though not Marxism).

In the first sequence, the Russian economist Storch transformed the Classical theory into a more spiritual version including internal goods, which was inherited by an Historical economist (List), though not an academic one. In the second sequence, the Historical empirical approach to economic reality was used by the Russian thinker and activist Chernyshevsky to build a hypothesis about historical evolution of Russian *obshina*, which Marx, in turn, found promising for a future revolutionary change of the existing order. The stories these sequences are telling us are different. All the members of the second sequence certainly did not aim at improving economic theory. Social and political problems in turbulent times were really important for them, although Haxthausen wanted to avoid turbulence, while Marx attempted to increase it, and Chernyshevsky in 1857–1858 was probably moving from the first to the second position.

The first sequence points in the direction of making economic theory less abstract, embracing an array of inner goods, that classical economists abstracted from. But this was naturally done not for the theory alone but for the technical, moral, and social progress of lagging countries Storch and List were promoting.

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