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## [Chapter 1 from] Re-Examining the History of the Russian Economy: A New Analytic Tool from Field Theory

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Jeffrey K. Hass  
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# Re-Examining the History of the Russian Economy

A New Analytic Tool from Field  
Theory

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# 1

## Fields in Russian Economic History

Jeffrey K. Hass

This volume resulted from the collective endeavor of an American sociologist and Russian economists. Despite being in different disciplines, we all share more than one might expect. In a departure from all-too-often interdisciplinary struggles and sniping, we all know the same literature from both disciplines and share a healthy appreciation, and skepticism, for the social sciences. In particular, two shared interests made this volume possible. The first is Russia's economy—past, present, and future—which drives our research and teaching. Each chapter reflects one facet of our myriad interests in how Russia's economy has operated, changed, evolved, or broken down. The general, abstract theory of economics and sociology comes alive, warts and all, when we engage that theory with Russia's reality across the centuries. And we all share the conviction that

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Russia's stories have something important to add to human knowledge about economics, just as economics and sociology have something to say about Russia's experiences.

This brings us to a second shared interest: possible insights and potential of field theory. Hass had been working with variations of field theory since his days in Princeton's graduate program in sociology in the 1990s, where he learned from one of field theory's founders, Paul DiMaggio. His dissertation and first project involved fields, *habitus*, and economic practices in Russia's post-socialist experience. Members of the Department of Economic Theory of the Faculty of Economics at St. Petersburg State University also knew the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and they had been applying various facets of that framework in their work on religion and economy, Old Believers, the historical roots of Russian economic theory, inflation, and so on. We all found it odd that Russia was absent from the general corpus of field scholarship (but we mention a few exceptions later). In discussions over a few years, we concluded that it was natural to combine our interests, knowledge, and efforts to address this oversight, both to expand the horizons of field theory and to open up Russia's rich economic history to a new analytic approach—one that retained insights of political economy and appreciated of culture in a non-ad hoc manner. This serendipitous congruence of interests and cross-disciplinary knowledge bred this project.

One of our goals is to bring Russia and fields into closer proximity to see how theory and reality can inform each other. Some of us have written explicitly on fields and Russia, and others' scholarship has come close enough to these two topics that it was natural for them to take the next step of engaging Russia and fields. We have also not been content with the existing state of affairs in much field theory. Neoinstitutionalist field theory, usually employed to organizational analyses, has worked well for cases of stable capitalist economies (especially the United States), but we suspect that this has also needlessly narrowed the possible territory a field framework could cover. For example, the usual field theory tends to focus on organizational and institutional fields, privileging one particular level of analysis (the "meso"). While we will also engage the meso level here, some authors also point to multiple levels of fields intersecting: for example, fields of interpersonal networks nested inside organizations and institutions still might have their own dynamics as a community of actors

oriented to particular rules of engagement and goals of strategies and practices. And inasmuch as institutions can create or shape networks by bringing actors into proximity, network-based fields can in turn affect higher-level institutional fields if those actors have positions or luck to propagate particular rules or ideologies.