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THE ECONOMY AND CRAFT INDUSTRIES OF THE SYR DARYA REGION IN TURKESTAN

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ABSTRACT

In the 19th century, Russian merchants entered Turkestan, gradually dominating its markets and monopolizing trade. Local peasants and artisans produced cotton, silk, and other goods, while Russian imports and industrial expansion disrupted household industries. Zakat and other levies enriched the Russian state, and railways strengthened both economic and political control. Tashkent became the main trade center, distributing goods regionally. Factories and workshops, including silk-reeling and tanning plants, were established under Russian and local supervision. Agriculture improved with better crop varieties, viticulture, and artisanal crafts persisted. By the early 20th century, Turkestan served as a raw material base and a profitable market for the Russian Empire.

Keywords: Trade centre, silk-reeling, local supervision, political control.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 19th century, Russian merchants sought to penetrate the markets of Turkestan and thereby secure a stable source of income. One of the initial measures undertaken in this regard was an agreement by the Turkestan Governor-General with Bukhara and Kokand to ensure the safety of Russian

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merchants within the territory of Central Asia, while also granting Asian merchants in Russia equivalent rights.

Following the Russian conquest of Tashkent, a systematic process began whereby Russian merchants increasingly dominated the markets of Turkestan, effectively establishing control over regional trade.

Soon thereafter, Russian capitalists secured a government decree prohibiting foreign merchants from conducting transit trade with Central Asia through Russian territory. The military governor of the Syr Darya region subsequently proposed the detention of all foreign caravans.

According to the 1867 Regulation, all Uzbek, Tajik, and other Central Asian merchants were required to pay *zakat* amounting to 2.5% of the value of their goods, as had previously been the case. Only raw cotton and silk were exempted from this duty. For Tsarist Russia, zakat represented a highly beneficial fiscal obligation; consequently, between 1868 and 1873, more than one million rubles were collected through this levy.

In April 1868, the importation of British goods into Central Asia was prohibited, with the exception of specific items such as turbans and indigo, which were subject to a 50% customs duty. In 1883, the import of goods from Afghanistan was also banned, effectively closing all channels of trade for England.

With the support of the Tsarist authorities, Russian capitalists thus established a monopoly over trade between Turkestan and the global market.

The principal producers of cotton textiles, yarn, and silk fabrics were predominantly peasants and artisans. In the initial period, there were no factories in Turkestan; instead, the rural population spun cotton within their own households.

As Karl Marx observed: "Unlike the British, Russian trade in Asia left the economic foundations of local production intact."

The weaver was regarded as an individual producer who, working on a loom, manufactured cloth according to consumer demand. The loom itself was

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cumbersome and occupied considerable space. This craft was traditionally passed down from father to son. Nevertheless, in comparison with many industrial workers, such a weaver labored under particularly difficult conditions.[1]

From the 1870s onward, the situation began to change. The development of Russian capitalism created a growing demand not only for sources of raw materials for factory industry, but also for markets in which to sell manufactured goods. Turkestan, with its abundant natural resources and vast economic potential, fully met these requirements.

At the same time, Russian manufactured goods—especially textile products—began to flood the markets of Turkestan. The Russian bourgeoisie believed that by encouraging cotton production in the region, it would be possible to integrate it into the broader framework of imperial economic interests. However, the large-scale import of Russian textile goods undermined one of the fundamental pillars of the local economy—household-based industry.[2]

The import of Russian textiles increased steadily: from approximately 700,000 *poods* in 1891, it rose to one million by 1903 and reached two million *poods* by 1912. In this way, Turkestan was transformed into a highly favorable market for Russian industrialists. Goods found buyers in the region with increasing speed, not merely day by day, but almost hour by hour.

However, beyond its economic significance, the construction of railways in Turkestan also held considerable political importance. Tsarist generals believed that Russia needed to establish a strong and dominant position in Central Asia. To achieve this objective, the most effective instrument was considered to be the construction of the Central Asian railway.

Russia's domestic textile industry expanded significantly, and with the outbreak of the American Civil War, the regular supply of American cotton to Russia was disrupted, leading to a sharp increase in prices.[3] In response, an American variety of cotton was introduced into Turkestan, and in 1884 the first small shipment was sent to Moscow.

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Cotton cultivation areas expanded rapidly, and exports of raw cotton to Russia increased accordingly. Prior to the introduction of the American variety, cotton had been grown by Uzbek and Tajik peasants on small farms, primarily as a supplementary crop alongside grain and other food products, either for additional income or for barter. However, as Russian demand for cotton grew, efforts were made to transform the region into a monocultural cotton-producing economy. The expansion of cotton cultivation onto all suitable lands led to increased grain imports from Russia.

During the period of Russian administration in Turkestan, large estates were fragmented and redistributed among peasant households engaged in agriculture. By the mid-19th century, crafts such as the production of cauldrons, jugs, lamps, and braziers were often finely decorated, and metal casting was a highly developed artisanal field. Under the pressure of Russian competition, however, this craft declined and became largely limited to the production of iron wheels, ploughshares, and components for wagon wheels.[5]

The Fergana Valley had once been renowned for its weapons production, but by the early 20th century this craft had nearly disappeared. Similarly, in urban teahouses, samovars gradually replaced traditional local devices previously used for boiling water.

In 1889, a Russian engineer dispatched a special scientific expedition to Central Asia, which discovered approximately 9 billion units of crude oil deposits near Panjikent and in the vicinity of Samarkand.

At the same time, the number of local factories and workshops began to increase steadily.[6] In the Syr Darya region, there were 720 workshops employing more than 3,000 craftsmen; in the Fergana region, 420 workshops with over 2,000 craftsmen; in the Zeravshan district, 520 workshops with around 1,000 craftsmen; and in the Amu Darya region, 2 workshops employing about 50 craftsmen.

The most significant industrial enterprises, however, belonged to Russian owners, numbering around 40 in total. Of these, 5 were tobacco factories, 4 were leather-

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processing plants, 2 were cotton-ginning factories, 1 was an oil-processing plant, and 1 was a glass factory.

Within the structure of small-scale local production, there were also silk-spinning and reeling facilities, one of which was established in the Fergana region. In addition, nearly 400,000 meters of cotton yarn were produced in private households. These products were primarily used for military supply purposes. There was also a significant output of carpets and woolen goods.[7]

In addition to military methods, the Russian Empire pursued a second strategy to consolidate its rule in Turkestan—colonial domination. One of the key reasons for the conquest of Turkestan was the exploitation of its economic resources, including mineral wealth, agricultural and livestock products, particularly cotton, silk, and karakul, in the interests of the Russian state.

After Turkestan was transformed into a colony, the region was expected to serve Russia not only as a source of cheap raw materials, but also as a convenient market for Russian industrial goods. The colonial policy pursued by the Russian Empire in Central Asia had a particularly profound impact on the economy. The government and its entrepreneurs primarily sought to develop cotton cultivation in order to supply the textile industry with inexpensive raw materials.

It should be emphasized that prior to its colonization, despite being rich in natural resources—such as coal, oil, and rare metal ores—the region did not possess a developed industrial sector of its own. Even basic metal goods and tools were imported from Russia and, in some cases, from foreign countries.

After the colonizers seized the region, it was transformed into an agrarian territory that served both as a raw cotton base and as a broad market for the empire. The colonial policies implemented by imperial officials in Turkestan, however, did not allow the development of fully fledged capitalist industrial production. Nevertheless, the first factories and industrial enterprises were established in the region.[8]

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According to the analysis of the researcher N.U. Musayev, it is appropriate to divide the history of the emergence and gradual development of manufacturing enterprises in Turkestan into two distinct periods.

The first period encompasses the 1860s to 1890s, during which the initial capitalist enterprises began to emerge. The second period extends to the early years of the 20th century, marked by a significant expansion in industrial production.

In the first period, industrial enterprises were few in number, small in scale, and low in capacity. By the second period, however, the number of factories and plants in the region had increased sharply. Large and high-capacity enterprises were predominantly owned by the Russian bourgeoisie, with metropolitan industrial policies in Turkestan largely dictated by Russian industrial interests.

The Syr Darya region primarily supplied the Russian domestic market with agricultural and livestock products, mostly in raw or semi-processed form, including grain, cotton, leather, wool, fish, fruit, and livestock goods. From European Russia, meanwhile, manufactured products, iron, copper and items made from these metals, as well as sugar, tea, groceries, perfumery items, and other factory-produced goods, were imported.

In the region, the city of Tashkent served as the most important center of local trade. Merchants brought wholesale goods to the city, which were then distributed retail not only throughout all the districts of the Syr Darya region but also to neighboring provinces. Almost the entirety of internal trade was concentrated in the hands of the local population—primarily Sarts and Jews.

At the same time, the government and certain Russian entrepreneurs undertook a number of positive measures aimed at increasing industrial capacity and exploiting natural resources. Specifically, improved varieties of cotton, grapes, and other agricultural crops were developed, and a viticulture industry was established in the region. Additionally, notable progress was observed in the mining sector, as well as in fishing, horticulture, and beekeeping.

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These developments also revitalized the local population's activity in technical and industrial production. As a result, craftsmen such as stonemasons, plasterers, carpenters, and other skilled workers emerged and gradually developed.

Notably, in 1867, a company of engineer-technologists—N. Ulyanov, D. Kasyanov, I. Yablonskiy, N. Pisarevskiy, and O. Plavitskiy—commissioned the first European-style water mill in the city of Tashkent. In 1868, a second water mill was put into operation by Staff Captain Kakurin. In the same year, industrialist M. Khludov established the first European-style tanning factory along the Salor Canal in Tashkent.[10]

When discussing the economy of the Syr Darya region, it is important to emphasize the historically established artisanal sectors—textile weaving, dyeing, tailoring, pottery, coppersmithing, inlay work, carpentry, shoemaking, saddlery, patchwork, tanning, hat-making, and blacksmithing, among dozens of other crafts—which played a vital role in the daily lives of the population. The artisanal products produced in the region were even highly sought after abroad.

Between 1867 and 1872, seven silk-reeling factories were established in Turkestan. One of these, the Khludov factory in Khojand, opened in 1867 with 23 silk-reeling machines (looms). By 1869, this number had increased to 53. Under the supervision of skilled masters, 200 local adolescents worked on these machines, receiving a daily wage of 33 *tiyin*.

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