

# STATE BODIES REGULATING RUSSIAN-ASIAN TRADE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE XIX CENTURY

## ORGANISMOS ESTATALES QUE REGULAN EL COMERCIO RUSO-ASIÁTICO EN LA PRIMERA MITAD DEL SIGLO XIX

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Marina Maratovna Imasheva\*<sup>1</sup> ; Aidar Yurievich Khabutdinov<sup>2</sup> ; Dina Abdulbarovna Mustafina<sup>3</sup> ;  
Linar Fargatovich Abzalov<sup>4</sup> ; Sevindj Israfil gizi Alieva<sup>5</sup>.

1. Kazan Federal University, Russian. imaschewa@yandex.ru
2. Kazan Federal University, Russian. aihabutdinov@mail.ru
3. Kazan Federal University, Russian. maktub29@yandex.ru
4. Kazan Federal University, Russian. len\_afzal@mail.ru, ORCID ID.
5. Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University. sevincaliyeva2000@gmail.com

\*corresponding author: Marina Maratovna Imasheva. email: imaschewa@yandex.ru

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### ABSTRACT

The urgency of the investigated problem is caused by the state regulation of foreign economic relations is one of the priority political tasks. In the first half of the XIX century, when the era of colonial world division ended, the spheres of influence and colonial expansion of the world powers were outlined. During this period, rivalry with England in Central Asia, Iran and Transcaucasia proved strategically important to Russia. These territories had long been economic partners for Russia. The paper aims to show the role of specially created bodies in the Russian Empire in regulating trade and economic relations of the state with the countries of Central Asia, using general scientific and special-historical methods. The leading methods in the presented study are the method of institutional analysis, problem analysis, and comparative-historical method. Results show that In 1819, the Asia Department and the Asia Committee were established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to reorganizations and the search for the best solution to the urgent problems of economic cooperation with Asian countries. A main task of regulating economic relations was customs and tariff regulation. The compilation and enactment of the Asian Tariff was central to the activities of the bodies that controlled Russian-Asian trade.

**Keywords:** foreign trade; Russo-Asian trade; state policy; government agency; Asia Department.

Revista de Investigaciones Universidad del Quindío,  
34(S2), 231-240; 2022.

ISSN: 1794-631X e-ISSN: 2500-5782

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## RESUMEN

La urgencia del problema investigado se origina en que la regulación estatal de las relaciones económicas exteriores es una de las tareas políticas prioritarias. En la primera mitad del siglo XIX, cuando terminó la era de la división mundial colonial, se delinearon las esferas de influencia y expansión colonial de las potencias mundiales. Durante este período, la rivalidad con Inglaterra en Asia Central, Irán y Transcaucasia demostró ser estratégicamente importante para Rusia. Estos territorios habían sido durante mucho tiempo socios económicos de Rusia. El documento tiene como objetivo mostrar el papel de los organismos especialmente creados en el Imperio Ruso en la regulación del comercio y las relaciones económicas del estado con los países de Asia Central, utilizando métodos científicos generales y especiales-históricos. Los métodos principales en el estudio presentado son el método de análisis institucional, el análisis de problemas y el método histórico comparativo. Los resultados muestran que en 1819, el Departamento de Asia y el Comité de Asia se establecieron dentro del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores debido a reorganizaciones y la búsqueda de la mejor solución a los problemas urgentes de cooperación económica con los países asiáticos. La principal tarea de regular las relaciones económicas era la regulación aduanera y arancelaria. La compilación y promulgación de la Tarifa Asiática fueron fundamentales para las actividades de los organismos que controlaban el comercio ruso-asiático.

**Palabras clave:** comercio exterior; comercio ruso-asiático; política estatal; agencia gubernamental; Departamento de Asia.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of the paper is to show the role of specially created bodies in the Russian Empire in the regulation of trade and economic relations of the state with the countries and territories of Central Asia using general scientific and special historical methods. The research work was aimed at solving three interrelated tasks. First, it is to identify and characterize the stages of development of foreign economic relations between Russia and the countries of the East in the first half of the XIX century, the definition of which allows us to talk about the tasks that were set before the special authorities for the management of Russian-Asian trade in the stated period. Secondly, the task is to examine the history of the creation of these bodies themselves. And the third task is to determine the practical orientation of the activities of these bodies focused to manage the Russian Empire's economic relations with the countries of the East. It was expressed primarily in the creation of the Asian tariff and its implementation in the practice of trade relations throughout the Asian border of the empire.

Studying the history of economic and political relations with countries and territories of the Middle and Near East in the first half of the XIX century is of great interest at the present stage. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia found itself in approximately the same geopolitical environment as it was in the first half of the nineteenth century. Today, as a century and a half ago, one of the most important regions in economic and political relations for our country is Central Asia. Our country's strategic security also depends on the efficiency of economic relations with the countries of the Middle East. Under these conditions, studying the experience of the past will make it possible to find the most appropriate options for the development of bilateral ties at the present stage, to develop the

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best possible plans and their implementation in the bilateral relations between Russia and the Central Asian countries.

A decisive role in building an economic regulation strategy belongs to the special executive authorities. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Russian Empire was faced with virtually the same geopolitical and economic challenges as the Russian Federation is facing today in relation to the Middle East. In the course of several decades, a number of structures were created which fully focused the entire range of problems related to the implementation of the state's most important strategic plans in the East. In a short period, the Asia Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire became the centre of economic and political interaction with the Middle East. Every aspect of its activity was aimed at protection of Russian state interests, first of all economic ones, which consisted in preserving necessary markets and raw materials. It is therefore important and necessary to refer to the historical experience of these structures in implementing programmes of economic cooperation with Central Asian countries today.

At the beginning of the XIX century, the political program of the Russian Empire began to be distinctly influenced by new factors that affected the foreign trade sphere as well. First, there was a need to take strict measures to protect domestic industry due to the fact that the industrial revolution in the West contributed to increased competitiveness of foreign industry compared to Russian industry many times over. Secondly, the international scene was favourable for Russia due to the eastward expansion of the borders of the Russian Empire during the military conflicts with Turkey and Iran. Thirdly, there was a real possibility of having an active foreign trade balance. Finally, the drain of gold from the country had to be stopped (Gevorkyan, 1953). These tasks were to be resolved by the new executive body, which was to direct all Russian policy towards the Eastern countries.

## **METHODS**

The study of the problem involves written sources, both those published in various thematic collections, and unpublished and deposited in the archival funds of Russia.. The information potential is extremely broad: they reflect the history of the Caucasus and neighbouring Asian territories, including the development of Russia's economic relations with Persia and its provinces. The accounting and statistical materials essential for disclosing the subject of interest were included in the "Collection of data on the history and statistics of foreign trade of Russia" which has been prepared by the Russian Ministry of Finance (1902). We found a wide range of documentary materials in the funds of the Russian state archive of ancient acts (fund 19 "Finance"; fund 276 "Commerce-collage") and departmental Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Empire, which is a part of the Historical and documentary department of the Russian Foreign Ministry (funds "Library of Asia department", "Central Asia department", "Main archive"). A special place among the sources belongs to the statesmen's memoirs containing their views on economic relations with the Eastern countries, and also methods and forms of their implementation. Interesting information on this issue is recorded in the memoirs of Minister of Commerce N.P. Rumyantsev, Russian Ambassador to Iran I.O. Simonich, court counsellor A.G. Golubkov and others. Their source value is determined by the fact that in the first half of the 19th century emperors, when taking final decisions, including on issues of economic relations with the East, listened to the opinion of competent officials.

The reminiscences of contemporaries (Simonich, 1967; Butenev, 1881), works of famous Russian statistical economists of the 19th - early 20th centuries (Tarasenko-Otreshkov, 1858; Miller, 1903;

Guriev, 1913; Yianzhul, 1869; Voschinin, 1915; Grigorjev, 1840), who studied and analysed quantitative indicators of the Russian-Asian trade development, were used in the scientific work. The value of these works is due to the fact that, on the one hand, their authors could not overlook the issues taken place at the initial stage of state regulation of trade with the Middle East. On the other hand, based on the analysis of a considerable amount of statistical data, they proved to the Russian society the legitimacy and necessity of including the Asian direction of foreign trade into the priority components of state policy. They emphasized that the government's regulation of Russian-Asian trade was subordinate to the tasks of ensuring state security and stimulating the development of domestic industry.

The methodological basis of the paper was the systemic approach combined with the principle of historicism. The general scientific system approach implies the use of socio-historical, general scientific and interdisciplinary methods: problem-chronological, comparative-historical, retrospective, etc. for the transmission and analysis of historical material. Principle of historicism assumes consideration of features concerning Russian-Asian trade development in the first half of the XIX century, taking into account specific historical conditions. The study devoted to the foreign policy line evolution in the Russian state concerning economic interaction with the Middle East countries during this period, the causes and history of the creation of special bodies and their policy of customs and tariff regulation was made by the chronological principle and based on the substantive analysis of legislative materials and acts reflecting the degree of application of legal norms in practice. The systematic approach to the problem and systematic analysis of the source material made it possible to identify the stages of economic interaction between Russia and the countries of the East in the first half of the XIX century, allowed to define their content, clarify the tasks faced by the special bodies that regulated Russian-Asian trade, to highlight the specific activities performed by government agencies to further develop economic relations and increase the political influence of Russia in the Middle East. Quantitative and mathematical methods were used to obtain representative information from accounting and statistical materials.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Russia's foreign trade policy in the East in the first half of the 19th century is clearly divided into two stages, with different objectives dictated by the priority objectives of the Russian government's economic policy towards Asia. The middle of the 1920s was the dividing line between the two stages.

The first quarter of the 19th century was characterised by the dominant opinion in government circles (which also determined the nature of the government's course) that Russia must become the main transit agent between the East and the West. The efforts of the Russian authorities were mainly aimed at finding an opportunity to establish trade contacts with India (Tarasenko-Otreshkov, 1858). The elaboration of a state programme for the development of Asian-European transit through Russia was entrusted to Count N.P. Rumyantsev, who held the post of Minister of Commerce. His plan was to incorporate Russia into the circle of powers actively engaged in world trade mediation. The Ministry of Commerce, which he headed, scrutinised the problem. Routes to Kabul via Orenburg, Bukhtarma and Astrakhan were studied with the aim of creating in one of these trading points "a place like Kyakhta and link it with fairs and then distribute Russian, European and Asian goods here" (Miller P., 1903; Guriev B., 1913; Shteinberg E.L., 1950). This very mediation seemed to economists of this time to have "a natural value and the main interest" for Russia (Tarasenko-Otreshkov, 1858; Yianzhul, 1869). In 1828 A.S. Griboyedov, the plenipotentiary representative of the Russian Empire in Iran,

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received an instruction suggesting to assist as much as possible in the Foreign Ministry's plans "to establish a trading depot in Astrabad", to turn it into a trading centre and to turn the Indian trade to the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Nevertheless, as early as in the mid-1820s, the Russian government's Asian policy was gradually reoriented and the perception of the interests of Russian Asian trade finally changed. As the Soviet historian E.V. Bunakov notes, this change consisted in a shift of attention to Central Asia proper and a weakening of interest in India (Bunakov, 1941), which actually marked the beginning of the second stage, which occurred in the mid-1820s to 1870s. That is, until Russia made the decision to incorporate the Central Asian region into the Russian empire.

Now plans to turn Asian markets into sales outlets for Russian industry were becoming dominant (Voschinin, 1915; Grigorjev, 1840; Rojhkova, 1949). This outlook on the aims of eastern trade had long been lobbied by Russian manufacturers and had been taken into account in the customs policy of previous decades, because from the beginning of the 18th century Russia's foreign trade policy had, with a few exceptions, a protective character towards industry.

In the 1820s, the Russian government became increasingly aware of the internal contradiction between the domestic industry development and the market condition, which threatened the foundations of the serfdom. The government was even prepared to reduce the rate of industrial expansion in order to maintain the desired balance (Struve, 1913). On the other hand, realising the conflict, the government was anxious to give to Russian industry products an outside market, which, in reality, could be only Asia. This led to a new appreciation of the importance of Russian Asian trade.

The new understanding of foreign economic policy in Asia was increasingly expressed by those who directly led it. The Russian Empire's ambassador to Persia in 1832-1838. I.O. Simonich in his "Memoirs" wrote about the tasks of Russian economic policy in the East in 1830s: "The products of the manufactory industry, which is developing day by day in Russia, require markets and, no doubt, it will find them not in Europe. Persia, Turkmenistan and Central Asia must become an exclusively Russian market" (Simonich, 1967).

As a result, Russian economic policy in the East was reoriented towards the search for optimal and profitable ways of developing trade and economic relations for Russian industry. And we can argue that for the first half of the nineteenth century, the Russian state began to take more account of the economic principle, separating it from the manipulation of foreign trade in the name of all-sufficient policy (Petrov, 2000).

Improving the conditions of economic relations with the East was part of an extensive programme outlined as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century to strengthen the trading power of the Russian Empire. Therefore, during this period, conditions for trading with Asian countries were thoroughly studied; expeditions to the East were equipped and laws were issued to facilitate trade and its course, "any undertaking indicating the manifestation of active international trade" was carefully supported, making it "healthy" (Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Empire. Fund. The library of the Asian Department. Inventory 505. Case 147). One of the first and most important points in this programme was the creation of a special body to regulate trade and economic relations with the East in the first half of the 19th century.

For all the time when the Collegium of Foreign Affairs in Russia existed and in the first decades after the creation of the Foreign Ministry, these institutions did not have any structural part directly responsible for relations with the states and territories of Asia.

For the first two decades of the 19th century, Asian problems were dealt with by the Committee of Ministers on the presentation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established, Asian problems were included in the competence model for the first expedition of the Ministerial Office headed by K.K. Rodofinikin. However, no document regulating the activities of the office in the field of Asian trade management was adopted (Butenev, 1881). There was also a practice when the study of individual issues in this area was entrusted to a group of qualified statesmen, where necessary. On 23 January, 1802, at a meeting of the Unprecedented Council there was announced the imperial decree to create a committee, which included the Infantry General Count Zubov, Minister of Commerce Count Rumyantsev, Admiral Mordvinov and Active Privy Councillor Count Kochubey, and Active Privy Councillor Engel, being the Council expeditor. Subsequently Count P.A. Stroganov was also included in the committee (Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Empire. Fund. The Central Asian table. Inventory 485.Case 1700).

The functioning of this institution draws our attention due to a number of circumstances. Firstly, the presence and integration in its programme of activities of political, trade and economic problems, which runs a red line through all the activities of the Russian government in the described period. Secondly, this committee appeared soon after the accession of Alexander I, which indicates the importance attached to it. This was pointed out in the early twentieth century by the economist P.B. Struve, who noted that in the early years of Alexander I's reign, Russian politics "took more or less clear shapes not of adventurist, but of enlightened Asian imperialism, oriented towards Asia" (Struve, 1913). And, thirdly, the composition of the committee itself deserves attention. Alexander I encouraged and supported the active work of the Minister of Commerce N.P. Rumyantsev, who for many years remained one of the statesmen close to the emperor. It was he who was a persistent promoter of the broad development of the Russian Empire's economic ties with the East (Imasheva, 2019). Along with the head of domestic commerce N.P. Rumyantsev and Minister of Internal Affairs V.P. Kochubey, who were to take care of "the circumstances relating to the Astrakhan region and Asian commerce on the Caspian Sea", the committee included one of the most prominent in the Russian Empire in the late 18th - early 19th centuries. It also included N.S. Mordvinov who had become the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army in the Caucasus not long before these events and was well acquainted with problems of interaction with countries and territories bordering Russia on this part of the Asian border. Senator F. Engel was also a member of the committee, who at the request of Mordvinov has being developed plans for various transformations of the Russian economy. All of them took part in determining the vector of Russia's Asian policy in 1800-1810 (Halfin, 1974). The Astrakhan Committee did not exist for long, especially as, due to its geographic location, it was not the kind of body that could resolve issues of economic relations with all Asian countries. The further development of Russia's political-economic relations with the countries of the East urgently called for the creation of an authoritative body to discuss these problems, develop specific solutions and coordinate efforts not only at the regional, but also at the all-Russian level.

The Asian department created on 19 April 1819 became such a body. K. K. Rodofinikin was appointed as its director. On 22 April 1819, Minister of Foreign Affairs K.V. Nesselrode prescribed to the new (and for a long period the only country study) Department "to have the affairs of Asian peoples subject to Russia, as well as those with whom these countries were in trade or in any other relations,

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as main subject of its activity " (Halpin, 1974). The Asia department consisted of two divisions, each divided into two divisions. The first division dealt with affairs of Turkish, Persian, Georgian and mountain peoples; the second division dealt with nomadic peoples of the Caucasus, Astrakhan and part of Saratov provinces, Kirghiz-Kaisaks of "all Hordes", other Asia peoples, as well as personnel of the Department (Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Empire. Fund. The library of the Asian Department. Inventory 505. Case 147). On 20 May 1819, Asian Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established to solve the most important and controversial issues. It was also in charge of the improvement and development of Russia's trade with the East and Central Asia. It was also subordinated to K.K. Rodofnikin (Popov A.L., 1940).

Finally, in 1836 a Special Committee was created by order of Tsar Nicholas I to consider proposals on trade relations between the Russian state and Asian countries. Like others, it studied the most important problems of expanding relations with neighbouring eastern countries (Rojhkova, 1949).

## SUMMARY

Russian historical science began to study issues related to the regulation of Russia's economic relations with the East in the first half of the 19th century during the Imperial period (Miller, 1903; Yianzhul, 1869; Grigorjev, 1840). This was due to Russia's rapid expansion of its borders in this direction. The economic aspects of the interaction between those countries were seen as a factor contributing to the advancement and implementation of imperial geopolitics. In addition, economists and statisticians of the pre-revolutionary period sought to identify purely quantitative characteristics, justifying the protectionist nature of Russian policy towards the Middle East. The works of this period were predominantly descriptive in nature. There was no serious critical assessment of economic policy in these works.

During the Soviet period, the problems of political regulation of economic relations with the Middle East came to the attention of specialists in the late 1930s and in 1940s (Bunakov, 1941; Rojhkova, 1949; Popov, 194). By this time, the process of forming the Soviet Union had been completed, and the Central Asian republics had become an equal part of a single state. In this respect, the central place in the research was given to the problems of imperial colonialism, "oppression", unequal economic exchange, and all the other negative manifestations that, according to the class principles of Marxist doctrine, were peculiar to Russian capitalism. At the same time, these works were the first to formulate the scientific problem of Russian economic development in the context of the formation and development of capitalist relations in the country and Russian imperial colonialism. This concept was further developed in the works of historians since the 1950s to 1980s (Halpin, 1974; Potanin, 1972). During this period, researchers began to pay great attention to the problem of Russia's rivalry with the world powers for the colonial redistribution of the world. Another achievement of the period under consideration was the results of enormous work on identifying and forming a source base and compiling documents on the history of Russian-Asian economic relations.

In the post-Soviet period, the search for new conceptual approaches has been observed (Petrov, 2000; Kulagina and Dunaeva, 1998), with the main emphasis on criticizing the Soviet period and the transition to a civilizational concept. There are works that highlight the specifics of the activities of the Asia Department, which led to increased attention to the training of diplomatic personnel (Kuznetsov, 2014); more closely examine the origins of formation, the role of merchants of certain regions in trade with the Middle East, the attitude of power structures to them, social contradictions

in the merchant environment (Bannikova, 2006; Bannikova, 2007; Bannikova, 2014; Bazin, 2015; Khalilova, 2015; Ozdamirova, 2015).

The problem of interest to us has also been addressed in studies by foreign colleagues (Kotilaine, 2005; Dyker and David, 2011; Katz, 2015; Costa Buranelli, 2014; Barisitz, 2017). But in general, the appearance of a summary work on the history of Russian-Asian trade regulation in the imperial period, based on new methodological principles of modern Russian historical science, remains a matter for the future.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Russian government's plans for developing trade relations with the Middle East placed great emphasis on Astrakhan and Orenburg as established points of Russian-Asian trade. In order to determine the prospects, at His Majesty's commandment were established bodies that formulated the direction of public policy regarding the development of trade and economic relations with the countries of the East.

The bodies of state regulation of relations with Asia were to try to expand transit trade, and to ensure its development not to the detriment of customs duties and domestic trade (Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Empire. Fund. Main archive II-3, 1816. Inventory 34.Case 3). All Russian efforts were concentrated on creating favourable trade legislation for Russian industry and creating favourable conditions for the implementation of the government's foreign economic plans.

We can see that already at the beginning of the 19th century the government of the Russian Empire was interested in creating a state body to manage relations with the Middle East, in which trade and economic interaction played a decisive role. A range of political factors influenced the establishment and resolution of tasks aimed at regulating economic relations with the countries of the Middle East. The most important among them was Russia's growing rivalry with Western powers and its desire to become the main agent of transit trade between the West and the East. Among other things, these objectives contributed to the finalization of Russia's borders in the East (Ilikova, 2019).

A landmark event in the formation of the state-legal regulation of relations between the Russian Empire and the countries and territories of the Middle East was the establishment of the Asia Department. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Russian-Asian foreign trade policy acquired a "state" character, as in its development it reflected all stages of evolution and strengthening of state power. It was transformed in accordance with the evolution of views on the goals to be pursued by the customs system, under the influence of new economic doctrines, changes in the course of domestic policy and foreign policy factors.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.



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