

THE FORMATION AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TASHKENT TRADE FAIR

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Abstract

This article explores the establishment of the Tashkent Trade Fair in the 19th century, analyzing its origins, historical circumstances, early operations, and its contribution to the economic development of the Turkestan Governorate-General. Drawing upon archival documents, historical studies, and modern research, the paper examines how the fair became a vital center of regional trade, linking Central Asia to the Russian Empire and the global market. The study also highlights the fair's influence on industrialization, infrastructure, and the modernization of local commerce and society.

Keywords: Tashkent Fair, Turkestan, economic history, trade, Russian Empire, cotton, industrialization, modernization.

Introduction. The second half of the 19th century marked a turning point in the economic history of Turkestan. Following the Russian conquest of Tashkent in 1865, the region was gradually integrated into the economic system of the Russian Empire. This new political reality brought about both challenges and opportunities: the empire sought to secure new sources of raw materials, expand trade routes, and open new markets for Russian industrial goods.

In this context, the idea of establishing a permanent and large-scale trade fair in Tashkent emerged. Due to its strategic location at the crossroads of

ancient caravan routes connecting Bukhara, Samarkand, Fergana, and Orenburg, Tashkent was a natural choice for such an enterprise. Over time, the Tashkent Fair evolved from a regional trading event into one of the most important commercial hubs in Central Asia.

Main part. By the mid-19th century, Russia's industrial centers were in urgent need of raw materials, particularly cotton, to supply the growing textile industry. Turkestan's rich natural resources — including cotton, silk, wool, and livestock — made it an attractive target for imperial economic expansion.

After the establishment of the **Turkestan Governorate-General in 1868**, Russian authorities began implementing policies to integrate the region's economy with that of the empire. Among these initiatives was the creation of major trade centers to facilitate the exchange of goods between Central Asia and Russia. The Tashkent Trade Fair became a flagship project in this broader strategy.

The first Tashkent Fair was officially organized in 1868. Initially, it was held annually during the summer months (June–July) in the *Noviy Gorod* or “New City” district of Tashkent — an area developed after the Russian conquest. The fairgrounds were located near the military garrison and administrative buildings, ensuring government supervision and security.

Russian merchants brought manufactured goods such as metalware, sugar, tea, fabrics, and machinery, while local traders offered raw materials and agricultural products: cotton, silk, wool, dried fruits, carpets, hides, and vegetable oil. The event quickly became a focal point of intercultural exchange, where Russian, Uzbek, Tatar, and Bukharan merchants interacted and negotiated.

Within a decade, the Tashkent Fair became the largest commercial event in the Turkestan region. Archival data show that by 1885, its annual trade turnover had reached approximately **3.5 million rubles**, a significant figure for the time.

The fair not only facilitated trade but also stimulated industrial development. Cotton-cleaning factories, oil mills, and small textile workshops emerged around Tashkent, laying the foundation for the region's early industrialization.

A crucial factor in the fair's success was the **expansion of transportation infrastructure**. The opening of the **Tashkent–Orenburg railway in 1898** connected the region directly to the Russian heartland, dramatically increasing trade volumes and reducing transportation costs. This connection effectively transformed Tashkent into the economic gateway between Central Asia and the Russian Empire.

Beyond its economic importance, the Tashkent Fair profoundly influenced local society. For many Central Asian artisans and farmers, participation in the fair provided access to new markets and introduced them to modern business practices and pricing systems. It fostered a gradual shift from traditional barter-based trade toward a cash economy.

The fair also encouraged the establishment of **financial institutions**, including local banks, credit cooperatives, and Russian-native (Russo-Tuzem) trading companies. These institutions played a major role in integrating local entrepreneurs into the imperial economy.

Moreover, urban infrastructure developed rapidly around the fairgrounds: new roads, warehouses, inns, and telegraph lines were constructed. The “New City” area of Tashkent soon became a symbol of modernity and progress, contrasting sharply with the traditional “Old City.” The fair thus contributed to the city’s transformation into the administrative and economic center of the region.

From the perspective of Russian colonial policy, the Tashkent Fair served multiple purposes. Economically, it ensured a steady flow of raw materials — especially cotton — to Russian textile factories. Politically, it strengthened

imperial control over local trade networks by bringing them under Russian regulation.

The fair also served as a tool of cultural influence, promoting Russian goods, language, and administrative systems in everyday commercial interactions. For many Central Asian merchants, it became a space where they encountered not only Russian products but also new technologies and Western business practices.

At the turn of the 20th century, the nature of trade in Turkestan began to change. With the development of permanent marketplaces, banks, and railway-based logistics, the role of traditional fairs gradually diminished. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Tashkent Fair remained significant. It had laid the groundwork for **industrial capitalism** in the region and played a decisive role in integrating Turkestan into global economic networks.

By fostering connections between Russian manufacturers and Central Asian producers, the fair contributed to the economic modernization of the region and prepared the ground for later developments during the Soviet period.

Conclusion. The establishment of the Tashkent Trade Fair in the 19th century marked a crucial milestone in the economic transformation of Turkestan. It acted as an economic bridge between the Russian Empire and Central Asia, introducing new patterns of production, trade, and finance. The fair's influence extended far beyond commerce — it reshaped urban life, promoted infrastructural growth, and accelerated social modernization.

Today, the history of the Tashkent Fair is recognized as a vital chapter in the broader narrative of Central Asian economic modernization. Its study provides valuable insights into how colonial economic policies, local enterprise, and global trade dynamics intersected to shape the destiny of the region.

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