ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE AND FISCAL POLICY IN FERGANA OBLAST (1876–1917): STRUCTURE, SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES, AND COLONIAL SPECIFICITIES

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the administrative structure and fiscal policy of the Fergana Oblast within the Turkestan General-Governorship of the Russian Empire between 1876 and 1917. Special attention is paid to the hierarchical governance system (oblast–uezd–volost–rural community), mechanisms of military-civil authority concentration, land taxation reforms, cotton production policies, and their socio-economic consequences for the indigenous population. Based on archival materials, imperial legislation, and historiographical scholarship, the study demonstrates that the administrative and fiscal system introduced in Fergana primarily served imperial economic and military interests. The imposed tax regime disregarded climatic conditions, traditional agrarian practices, and Islamic legal norms, resulting in increased economic dependency and structural inequality. The research contributes to discussions on colonial governance, legal pluralism, and imperial economic policy in Central Asia.*

Keywords: *Fergana Oblast, Turkestan General-Governorship, colonial administration, land tax, cotton economy, legal pluralism, Russian Empire.*

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Introduction

The incorporation of Central Asia into the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century led to the establishment of a new administrative-territorial structure and fiscal regime. After the annexation of the Kokand Khanate in 1876, the Fergana Oblast was created as part of the Turkestan General-Governorship. The imperial administration implemented a centralized system combining military and civil authority under the supervision of the Governor-General and military governors.

The transformation of governance structures in Fergana reflects broader imperial policies aimed at economic integration, military consolidation, and resource extraction. This study examines the institutional hierarchy, fiscal mechanisms, and socio-economic implications of these reforms.

Administrative-Territorial Structure of Fergana Oblast: Until 1917, Fergana Oblast was divided into five uyezds: Kokand, Margilan, Osh, Andijan, and Namangan. Each uyezd was subdivided into uchastkas and volosts, and volosts were further divided into rural communities (qishloq jamoalari). By 1900, the oblast included 99 volosts and 602 rural communities, alongside several Russian settlements.

The governance hierarchy functioned as follows:

- Oblast – governed by a military governor appointed by the Emperor.
- Uyezd – administered by an uyezd chief.
- Uchastka – managed by a pristav.
- Volost – governed by a volost head.
- Rural community – headed by an oqsoqol (elder).

The military governor concentrated military, administrative, police, and judicial authority in one office, illustrating the militarized nature of colonial governance. Such concentration of power reflected imperial priorities of control rather than representative governance.

Land Policy and Fiscal Transformation: Initially, cultivated lands remained under indigenous usage rights. However, uncultivated lands were transferred to the state treasury. Over time, even rain-fed (lalmi) lands were legally assigned to peasants with obligatory tax payments.

Under Islamic legal tradition, taxation (kharaj) was based on actual harvest yield rather than fixed land assessment. However, the Russian administration introduced a fixed land tax irrespective of climatic conditions or harvest outcomes. In 1870, a general land tax was imposed on sedentary populations, marking a significant departure from khanate practices.

For example, one desyatina of cotton land yielded an average income of 56 rubles, while land tax amounted to 5 rubles 60 kopecks, plus 25% zemstvo levy, resulting in approximately 7 rubles per desyatina. This placed a heavy burden on peasants.

Cotton Economy and Economic Dependency: Industrial development in Europe increased demand for raw cotton. The Russian Empire transformed Turkestan into a cotton-producing periphery.

In 1887, Fergana Oblast cultivated 49,224 desyatinas of cotton, producing 772,595 puds. Of this, 300,278 puds were exported to Russia. Approximately 18.55% of the population was engaged in cotton production.

Imperial customs policies further incentivized domestic cotton production. After 1878, imported cotton was subject to customs duties, reaching 1 ruble 15 kopecks per pud by 1887.

Peasants received advances and seeds from Russian entrepreneurs, creating dependency relationships that tied them to predetermined buyers.

Taxation Practices and Administrative Arbitrary Measures: Tax collection methods imposed additional economic strain. Grain taxes were collected in natura, requiring peasants to travel 80–100 versts to designated collection points.

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Administrative deductions (3 pounds per botman), transport expenses, lost labor time (minimum 8 days), and unofficial costs increased the effective tax burden beyond the official 10%. Scholars estimate that effective taxation reached 13.5% or more.

Comparative data illustrate disparities:

- Kursk губерния: 0.88 rubles per desyatina
- Andijan uyezd: 4.57 rubles per desyatina
- Khujand uyezd: 9.31 rubles per desyatina

Thus, Andijan peasants paid nearly five times more than central Russian peasants.

Additional taxes included livestock market levies (1892 regulation), burial fees, hospital charges, and various municipal contributions.

Socio-Economic Consequences: The colonial fiscal system:

1. Undermined traditional agrarian cycles.
2. Eliminated flexibility in disaster years.
3. Encouraged monoculture cotton production.
4. Increased peasant indebtedness.
5. Strengthened military-financial extraction.

Despite fifty years of governance, the Russian administration failed to establish a unified and equitable tax system in Turkestan. The system primarily reflected imperial economic interests.

Conclusion: The administrative and fiscal system of Fergana Oblast demonstrates a classical colonial model characterized by centralized authority, militarized governance, economic extraction, and legal restructuring.

The hierarchical structure (oblast–uezd–volost–community) facilitated control, while fiscal policies transformed agrarian relations and entrenched dependency. The disregard for local climatic, economic, and religious realities reveals the asymmetrical and exploitative nature of imperial governance.

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This case contributes to broader discussions on legal pluralism, colonial economic systems, and imperial modernization strategies.

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