

ECONOMIC RIVALRY BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN THE MARKETS OF CENTRAL ASIA: THE CASE OF THE KOKAND KHANATE (19TH CENTURY)

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Abstract

This article analyses the economic rivalry waged by the British and Russian empires in the 19th century for control of the markets of Central Asia, and of the Kokand Khanate in particular, on the basis of the reports of Russian travellers and officials. Drawing on A.N. Teterevnikov's work "Ocherk vnutrenney trgovli Kirgizskoy stepi" (1867), the article examines the mechanism by which English goods penetrated the markets of Central Asia along the Peshawar-Kabul-Bukhara-Kokand route through intermediaries known as "parachi," as well as Russia's active seizure of the Kokand market following the rapid development of Russian industry after 1861. The study demonstrates that the rivalry between the two empires unfolded not only on the military-political plane but, above all, at the level of commodity prices, transport costs, and control over local intermediary networks, with geographical proximity and the short transport route running through Tashkent ultimately proving to be the decisive factor in Russia's gaining the upper hand.

Keywords: Great Britain, Russian Empire, Kokand Khanate, economic rivalry, parachi system, Peshawar-Kabul road, A.N. Teterevnikov, Tashkent, the Great Game.

The relevance of the subject lies in the fact that even in contemporary geopolitical analysis, rivalry between great powers is still frequently studied solely through the prism of military-diplomatic events, while its economic-commercial dimension is treated as secondary. Yet it is precisely the everyday rivalry at the level of trade routes, cost prices, and intermediary networks that can constitute the factor determining long-term strategic advantage - and this is vividly demonstrated by the example of 19th-century Central Asia.

In the 19th century, Central Asia became one of the centres of the geopolitical rivalry between the British and Russian empires - a process known in historiography as the "Great Game." While the military-political aspects of this rivalry have been widely covered in historiography, its economic-commercial dimension - in particular, the struggle waged by the two empires to directly capture local markets such as that of the Kokand Khanate - has been comparatively little studied. It is precisely this aspect that is reflected with considerable clarity and detail in the reports of Russian travellers and officials, in particular those of A.N. Teterevnikov, based on direct observation.

The purpose of this article is to establish, on the basis of the numerical data found in the reports of Teterevnikov and other contemporary authors, the routes by which English and Russian goods entered the market of the Kokand Khanate, their relative cost, and the role of the geographical factor and local intermediary networks in this rivalry. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) By what routes, and with the help of which intermediaries, did English goods enter the Kokand market? (2) What was the ratio between the cost of this route and the cost of delivering Russian goods? (3) How did the growth of Russian industry after 1861 alter the balance of the rivalry? (4) What role did Tashkent's geographical and commercial-intermediary position play in this rivalry?

Methodologically, the study relies on a critical analysis, as historical sources, of the reports of 19th-century Russian authors - above all A.N. Teterevnikov - based on trade statistics, on the systematisation of the figures they contain regarding prices and transport costs, and on a comparative examination of the commercial strategies of the two empires. Such an approach makes it possible, first, to consider the subject of the "Great Game" not only from a military-diplomatic standpoint but also at the level of everyday trading practice; and second, it points to the necessity of critically evaluating the views of contemporary observers, which were bound up with their own interests (for instance, Teterevnikov's conclusions, which were not impartial and favoured Russian goods).

In the 19th century, with the aim of capturing trade in the Central Asian khanates, the English employed an indirect method of distributing their goods in the Bukhara and Kokand khanates: through Indian Muslims residing near Peshawar in northern India - the so-called "parachi." English merchants extended their goods to the parachi on credit for a term of three years, and the parachi, in turn, sold these goods on credit (nasiya) in Bukhara and Kokand; some of them settled permanently in the local markets and sought to disseminate English goods more widely. This system, on the one hand, gave the English the opportunity to enter the market without direct political responsibility, while on the other hand it created an additional chain of intermediation that raised the cost price of the goods.

A.N. Teterevnikov noted that English goods entered by two main routes - the sea route and the overland Peshawar-Kabul-Bukhara route - and observed that the former was considerably more convenient, while the latter was extremely arduous. According to his calculations, transporting a single camel-load of goods from Peshawar to Kabul cost 1 tilla (8 rubles 20 kopecks), and from Kabul to Bukhara, 16 tilla (60 rubles 80 kopecks) - an expense that rose considerably on account of the duties levied by local rulers for passage through their territory. Each year, up to 10,000–15,000 camel-loads of goods were brought into Central Asia by this route, of which half went, via Khojand, to the cities belonging to the Kokand Khanate, while no more than 2,000 camel-loads reached Tashkent - thus, although Kokand received its own particular share, the length of the route and the duties levied made these goods considerably more expensive.

After 1861, the rapid development of Russian industry and the growing need for a raw-material base and external markets led to Russia's active seizure of the Kokand market. Iron, copper, steel, chintz, and other products arrived from Russia via Tashkent - that is, via a transport network considerably shorter and cheaper than the English route. Teterevnikov, by contrast, expressed concern that Russian goods sent from Tashkent to Kabul did not fully meet demand there, and that only certain products - for example, Turanian silk fabrics and Russian copper - were purchased well. Nevertheless, the general tendency was that geographical proximity and the comparatively short and safer route running through Tashkent gave Russia a strategic advantage, whereas English goods reached Kokand only via the Kabul route, and in relatively small quantities.

According to Teterevnikov's observations, in subsequent years fewer English goods were being brought to Tashkent, and it was evident that only previously accumulated stocks were being sold off. Bombay tea - one of the principal goods brought in via the Peshawar route - was rated lower in taste than Ghulja and Chuguchak tea, and its price was consequently three times lower; this was one of the factors that diminished the competitiveness of the English product in the eyes of the Kokand consumer. The author also notes that, owing to a conflict between the Emir of Bukhara and the Afghans, the transit of Russian copper and horses into Afghanistan was halted - which shows that political factors, too, exerted a direct influence on trade routes.

The above analysis shows that in the second half of the 19th century, the rivalry between England and Russia for the market of the Kokand Khanate unfolded not in a purely military-political form but as a complex commercial struggle bound up with transport costs, intermediary networks, and the local political situation. The geographical factor - Tashkent's proximity to Russia and its connection with the Siberian trade routes - proved decisive in the long run, while English goods, arriving expensively and slowly via the "parachi" system, were unable to maintain their advantage.

Another intermediary group that played an important role in the entry of English goods into Tashkent was the local Indian merchant community. Alongside English goods, they also brought local Indian products, and in many cases engaged in usury as well; A.N. Teterevnikov specifically notes that their principal occupation was precisely usury. This circumstance shows that the system by which English goods entered the Central Asian market consisted not of one but of at least two tiers of intermediation: the "parachi" on the Peshawar-Kabul route, and the Indian trade-credit networks in the local cities. Each additional tier further raised the final price of the goods, constituting an additional factor that diminished the competitiveness of English products relative to Russian ones. Given that the author did not observe the period following the Russian conquest of Tashkent in 1865, this analysis chiefly reflects the period preceding the conquest - that is, the phase in which the rivalry between the two empires was at its sharpest.

A third factor that significantly affected the commercial rivalry between the two empires was regional political instability. The fact that the transit of Russian copper and horses into Afghanistan was halted as a result of a conflict between the Emir of Bukhara and the Afghans, as well as the inconsistency of the duties levied by local rulers for passage across borders, shows that neither England nor Russia was able to exercise full control over the markets of Central Asia; rather, both sought to gain the upper hand chiefly by adapting to local political conditions. This aspect points to the need to reassess the "Great Game" not as a direct confrontation between two great powers, as it is often portrayed, but as a multi-layered and changeable process closely bound up with local factors.

In conclusion, in the 19th century the market of the Kokand Khanate became one of the commercial arenas of the "Great Game" between the British and Russian empires. A.N. Teterevnikov's calculations show that although English goods entered via the Peshawar-Kabul-Bukhara route with the help of "parachi" intermediaries, high transport costs and the great distance involved diminished their competitiveness. Russia, by contrast, made use of the shorter and safer route running through Tashkent, together with the industrial growth that followed 1861, and thereby achieved a dominant position in the Kokand market. Thus, geographical proximity and the efficiency of the transport-intermediary system emerge as the principal factors that determined the ultimate outcome of the economic rivalry between the two empires.

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