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# Migration Processes and the Impact on the Economy of Central Asia in the 19th and 20th Centuries

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## Abstract

*This study examined migration processes and their impact on the economic and social development of Central Asia during the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing on the factors that shaped their scale and direction, including the colonial policy of the Russian Empire, natural disasters, economic crises, and Soviet reforms. Employing historical and economic analysis, archival documents, statistical data, and comparative approaches, the research demonstrated that migration significantly transformed the region's structure. The Russian Empire's resettlement of peasants and Cossacks altered ethnic balances, redistributed land, and fueled social tensions, while the introduction of monoculture cotton production enhanced agricultural exports but depleted soil and increased dependence on foreign markets. In the Soviet period, migration was closely tied to industrialization, collectivization, and political repression, with forced deportations reshaping demographics and rapid urbanization contributing to the growth of city populations. These changes, however, disrupted traditional ways of life, heightened social stratification, and triggered environmental challenges. Overall, the findings highlight that migration was a central force in shaping Central Asia's economic and social fabric, simultaneously laying the groundwork for modernization and embedding long-term dependence on external economic factors. The study emphasizes that understanding the historical context of migration is essential for formulating modern strategies aimed at sustainable development in the region.*

**Keywords:** collectivization, colonial policy, cultural exchange, demographic change, social structure, sustainable development.

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## Introduction

Migration processes are substantial in shaping the socio-economic landscape of regions, especially in the context of Central Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period, large-scale population movements were caused by economic and political factors, which radically changed the region's demographic balance and social structure. The Kyrgyz population, faced with the challenges of colonial policy, economic pressure, and natural disasters, was forced to adapt to new conditions, which significantly affected the economic development of such regions as Batken (Kyrgyz Republic) and Sughd (Tajikistan) (Duyshev et al., 2021).

These migration processes reflected internal transformations associated with agrarian reforms, trade expansion and infrastructural changes, and external influences, including the colonial expansion of the Russian Empire, which sought to integrate the region into its economic system. The movement of Kyrgyz people affected not only economic performance but also the formation of new social ties, ethnic interactions, and cultural exchange, which were substantial in the transformation of society (Agadjanian & Nedoluzhko, 2022; Efremov, 2025).

An analysis of existing research shows a growing interest in studying migration processes and their consequences. In particular, the monograph by Mulska and Ivaniuk (2022) examined the theoretical and methodological provisions of the new theory of causality of migration and its regulation, and the socio-economic consequences of migration processes. The monograph emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to assessing migration's impact on regions' economic development, highlighting such key aspects as the transformation of the employment structure, the formation of new labor markets, and the redistribution of income and resources. The research highlighted the importance of historical, political, and cultural factors that influence the dynamics of migration flows. Regional aspects of migration, which are highly relevant for analyzing migration processes in Central Asia, were emphasized.

Additionally, Scott et al. (2024) studied the relationship between labor migration and the acceptance of gender relations and roles in Kyrgyzstan, the second most remittance-dependent economy in the world. Based on 591 surveys and 34 qualitative interviews with adult household members in the At-Bashi region, the authors analyzed migration decision-making processes, perceptions of female migration, women's labor patterns, and the relationship between migration and divorce. The study determined that despite the acceptance of women migrants' economic contribution through remittances, they face community disapproval for deviating from traditional gender roles related to child-rearing and marriage. The

study results showed limited changes in social expectations of women's roles in rural Kyrgyzstan. The study is also important in the context of analyzing the impact of migration processes on the Central Asian economy, as it illustrates how labor migration is shaping new socio-economic models and changing the structure of the workforce, which is a continuation of historical trends in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Another important contribution was the study by Hugo (2012), which addressed the impact of recipient countries' policies on the development of countries of origin, in the context of managing human resource flows. The study emphasized the importance of including immigration issues in economic development programs, noting the role of remittances, migration diasporas, and introducing practices that promote the reproduction of human capital in countries of origin. These provisions are particularly relevant in Central Asia, where migration processes that began in the 19th and 20th centuries left a deep mark on the region's economy. As the study noted, labor migration and remittances remained substantial in transforming the region's economic structures, emphasizing the interconnection between the historical preconditions of migration and the current challenges of globalization.

Thus, the research analysis demonstrated that migration processes in Central Asia caused significant changes in the region's demographic structure, social organization and economic development. However, despite the growing interest in the topic, the question of how migration processes have contributed to forming new economic models and social dynamics in the region remains insufficiently studied (Lipkova et al., 2020). The study identified the long-term effects of migration processes on the employment structure, economic adaptation of the population, and changes in social integration mechanisms, contributing to the definition of the role of migration processes in the transformation of Central Asia.

## **Methodology**

A comprehensive interdisciplinary approach was used to study migration processes and their impact on the economy of Central Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including historical and economic analysis, demographic modelling, statistical analysis, and content analysis of archival sources. The study covered the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, as these regions were most exposed to migration processes during the period under study (Pierce, 2023). The primary sources of data were archival documents of the Russian Empire (1991), including legislative acts, censuses (Ploskikh, 2016) and agrarian reforms (Lysenko, 2020; Barzun et al., 2025) available in the state archives of Russia (Ikhsanov, 2021), as well as statistical compilations containing data on population, ethnic composition and employment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

(Migration data in Central Asia, 2025; Migration and development in Central Asia, 2011). In addition, scientific articles and monographs covering the impact of migration processes on the economic and social development of the region were used (Abiyev, 2016). The research methodology included several key methods that provide a comprehensive analysis of migration processes in Central Asia and their impact on the economic and social development of the region. Historical and economic analysis was used to study the impact of the colonial policies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet government on migration processes, including land reforms, tax policy, industrialization, and modernization of transport infrastructure, which contributed to population movements and changes in employment patterns.

Comparative analysis was used to compare migration processes in different parts of Central Asia, which identified regional differences and common patterns in the dynamics of population resettlement, changes in ethnic balance, and transformation of economic activities.

Statistical analysis included processing demographic data to assess quantitative changes in population size, employment structure, urbanization and land distribution during active migration waves. The content analysis of archival sources was used to study legislative acts, official orders, statistical reports, and personal testimonies reflecting population resettlement, assimilation policies, distribution of economic resources, and social adaptation of migrants.

The study was conducted in several stages: first, archival and statistical data were collected, including materials on population resettlement, demographic changes, and economic policy; then the data were classified according to key parameters, such as the scale of migration, the socio-economic status of migrants, and the impact on agriculture and industry. The next stage was statistical processing to identify the long-term effects of migration processes and their economic significance. Next, a comparative analysis of data from different regions was conducted to identify migration's general and specific impact in Central Asia. The final stage was interpreting the data obtained and formulating conclusions based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. A comprehensive approach identified the key patterns underlying migration processes in Central Asia and provided a holistic assessment of the impact on regional development.

## **Results and Discussion**

Central Asia experienced significant migration processes during the 19th and 20th centuries, profoundly impacting its economy, social structure, and political landscape. These migrations were driven by a complex interplay of factors, including the colonial policies of the Russian Empire, internal and external conflicts, climate change, and the search for more favorable economic conditions. In the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire expanded into Central Asia. It led to the gradual conquest and annexation of territories such as Turkestan, the Bukhara Emirate, and the Khanate

of Khiva (International Organization for Migration, 2024). The establishment of the Russian administration, the construction of railways, and the development of trade created new conditions for migration, which, in turn, became a factor of significant changes in the social and economic life of the region. Because of these processes, population migration was a multifaceted and multifactorial phenomenon that affected all spheres of life in Central Asia and became an important aspect in forming its new political and social structure under Russian colonization.

One of the key reasons for migration in Central Asia was economic factors, which substantially affected the lives of the region's population (An et al., 2024; Teymurova et al., 2025). Cattle breeding and farming have been the main occupations since ancient times, and their successful conduct required a constant search for new pastures and fertile land. Population growth, the depletion of natural resources, and natural phenomena such as droughts, livestock epidemics, and the reduction of available land have made farming much more difficult and forced people to migrate in search of better living conditions (Kerimkhulle et al., 2023; Huseynov et al., 2024; Piskunova et al., 2024). To secure more stable and predictable livelihoods, many sought to develop new land, which became vital to the survival of families and communities. The development of trade and industry, spurred by railways such as the Trans-Caspian Railway, also contributed to migration, creating new jobs and infrastructure that attracted labor migrants from across the Russian Empire, including Russian peasants and Cossacks seeking better economic opportunities.

In addition, social reasons, particularly traditional intertribal conflicts, which had a long history in Central Asia, were an important factor in migration. The struggle for land, resources, and influence between different tribes and ethnic groups in the region often led to armed clashes, during which entire communities and settlements were destroyed, and their inhabitants were forced to seek safe areas to live. Resettlement became not only a necessity but also a way to save their lives and property from violence and looting. Along with social factors, the political situation was also substantial. The Russian Empire's colonial policy significantly impacted migration processes, as the Russian Empire actively pursued a policy of resettling Russian peasants and Cossacks to Central Asia, which strengthened control over the regions and developed new land for agriculture. It was part of a broader effort to colonize and develop Central Asia, which inevitably led to conflicts with the local population, who lost land and traditional living space. Such processes changed the region's demographic structure, often upsetting social and ethnic balances.

After the establishment of Soviet power in the 1920s, political pressure on the local population intensified, which also led to significant migration processes. Political

repression, forced collectivization, and forced deportations of people from different parts of the Soviet Union became a characteristic feature of this period, which further increased the flow of migrants to Central Asia. These changes also affected internal migration within the region, forcing people to leave their homelands for safer and more lucrative living conditions. In turn, environmental factors have played a significant role in migration processes. Central Asia is known for its dry and hot climate, which has made the region vulnerable to the effects of frequent droughts and low-water periods (Huseynli et al., 2024; Zhussip et al., 2020). Droughts, water shortages, natural disasters such as earthquakes, and epidemics such as plague and cholera have often caused enormous damage to the population, forcing people to seek more favourable living conditions. In this context, migration became a necessary survival mechanism for many families and communities, and the search for water and food became a significant challenge for the region's population (Mendikulova, 2006).

One of the most visible and significant areas of migration in Central Asia was the resettlement of Kyrgyz to Batken and Sughd provinces, which became an important aspect of internal migration and influenced the demographic and social structure of the region. This process was not accidental, but unfolded over several decades, spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The nomadic lifestyle of the Kyrgyz in the nineteenth century, as well as the cattle-breeding-based economic system, created the illusion of vast free land, which contributed not only to the resettlement of the Kyrgyz population but also to the attraction of other ethnic groups (Mukhamediyarova, 2025; Abdraimov et al., 2013). An important moment was the accession of Kyrgyz tribes to the Russian Empire, which led to significant changes in migration processes. From 1868, in the north, and from 1893, in the south of Kyrgyzstan, active resettlement of Cossacks and peasants from different provinces of the Russian Empire, such as the Voronezh region and Ukraine, began. This influx of new settlers created tension over land resources and increased competition for pastures and land, pushing the Kyrgyz to seek new areas to live and farm (Usenbaev, 1967).

Batken and Sughd provinces were becoming attractive for migration due to their fertile lands and rich pastures, which played a key role in ensuring the food and well-being of the Kyrgyz population. The growing number of livestock, the depletion of local pastures, and the struggle for land resources, especially in the context of growing migration pressure, forced the Kyrgyz to move to more favorable and peaceful areas (Abdraimov et al., 2013; Kushenova et al., 2025). In addition to economic reasons, social and political circumstances were important factors in migration. Intra-Kyrgyz conflicts and clashes with neighboring peoples, such as Uzbeks and Tajiks,

have also contributed to migration to relatively more peaceful areas such as Batken and Sughd. Conflicts over territory and resources between different tribes and ethnic groups have created security threats and displaced people to seek refuge in neighboring areas.

The policies of the Russian Empire aimed at strengthening its control over Central Asia, as well as those of the Soviet Union, profoundly impacted migration processes. Collectivization was an important element in changing traditional ways of life (Kaluzhynska & Miroshnichenko, 2024; Doszhan, 2023). The requisition policy and the 1916 uprising led to significant human losses among the Kyrgyz population and their massive flight to East Turkestan, which also increased migration flows. However, after the overthrow of Tsarism and the establishment of the Soviet government in the spring of 1917, some 64,000 refugees returned home. Nevertheless, a significant part of the Kyrgyz population remained outside Kyrgyzstan, continuing to migrate in search of better living conditions (Dzhakishev, 2017). This process of re-emigration continued until the 1960s, demonstrating the longevity and complexity of migration processes that affected not only the economic and social, but also the political aspects of the region (Table 1).

*Table 1. The Dynamics of the Kyrgyz Population and Migration in Batken and Sughd Provinces (XIX-XX centuries)*

Period	Characteristics of the demographic situation and migration
19th century: before joining Russia	The predominantly nomadic lifestyle of Kyrgyz makes it challenging to account for the population accurately. Batken and Sughd regions are areas of traditional nomadism for the Kyrgyz tribes. Low population density, seasonal migrations associated with the movement of livestock on pastures
The end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century: Russian Empire	The beginning of mass migration and changes in ethnic composition. The influx of Russian peasants and Cossacks into Semirechye and other regions led to competition for land and pastures. Possibly stimulating the migration of some Kyrgyz, including to Batken and Sughd provinces, in search of new pastures. The Russian population has a general upward trend and associated pressure on the indigenous population, with limited accurate data on the number of Kyrgyz in these areas. In 15 years (1868-1883), 36 settlements were created in the Semirechen region, with 2,500 families of Russian settlers, which increased pressure on land resources and could have stimulated Kyrgyz migration to the south.
The period of revolutions and the Civil War (1916-1920s)	Demographic losses and migration are associated with the 1916 uprising. There were significant losses among the Kyrgyz, with some 130,000 fleeing to East Turkestan. Profound impact on the Kyrgyz population in Batken and Sughd provinces, with a temporary reduction. After the establishment of Soviet power, the

	partial return of refugees, and the long and challenging process of restoring the population
Soviet period	The policy of settling nomadic collectivization of agriculture, and radical changes in the Kyrgyz way of life. Forced creation of collective and state farms, the fight against “baytism”, resistance, and new waves of migration. The famine of the early 1930s was caused by collectivization and the worsening of the demographic situation. Internal migration is due to the redistribution of labor within the planned economy, and external migration to neighboring regions in search of food. Deportations of various peoples in the 1930s and 1940s affected the demographic situation in the region, although to a lesser extent than in other parts of the USSR.

*Source: compiled by the authors based on Avdeev and Troitskaya (2021), World Bank Group (2020).*

Migration processes in Central Asia had a profound and multifaceted impact on the socio-economic structure of the region, changing not only its demographic composition but also shifting the balance of cultural, economic, and political relations between different ethnic groups. During the Russian Empire, mass migration of the Russian population, including peasants and Cossacks, caused by resettlement policies aimed at developing new lands and strengthening Russian influence in Central Asia, created conditions for forming new ethnic groups that coexisted with local peoples. It significantly changed the ethnic composition, as settlers began to occupy fertile lands, increasing competition for pastures, land, and water. As a result, the indigenous population, including the Kyrgyz, faced a shortage of land and resources, which also forced them to seek new territories. Competition for land and water resources in the context of Russia’s expanding presence exacerbated tensions, including social and inter-ethnic conflicts, which affected the region’s stability (Arystanbek & Schenk, 2023).

The Soviet period was a time of new waves of migration, which was associated with industrialization, collectivization, and political repression (Auanasova et al., 2025; Pancer-Cybulska & Zlenko, 2024). In the 1920s and 1930s, mass collectivization in agriculture led to enormous social changes, disrupting local peasants’ traditional way of life, which also led to migration. Moreover, the deportations of entire peoples during the Second World War, such as Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Meskhetian Turks, and others, became an important milestone in the history of migration processes in the region. These deportations, conducted in the 1940s, affected more than 120,000 people, significantly altering the demographic landscape of the region and destabilizing the socio-economic structure as new ethnic groups were placed in different parts of Central Asia, increasing the ethnic and cultural mix in the area.

After the 1953 amnesty and the rehabilitation of deported people, some returned to their former places of residence, which also impacted the region’s demographic dynamics. These returns and rehabilitations stabilized the socio-economic situation and changed the ethnic balance in various regions, including Kyrgyzstan and neighboring Central Asian republics. In addition, the 1950s saw an



increase in the urban population caused by the influx of migrants due to industrialization. The process contributed to an increase in urban density, which changed the ratio of urban to rural population and affected the structure of labor and social organization. Between 1950 and 1960, the urban population increased by 247,000 people, significantly impacting the development of infrastructure, industry, and social services, and the changing lifestyles and needs in urbanized areas. As a result, migration processes have not only changed the ethnic picture but also significantly impacted the economy, politics, and social relations, substantially shaping Central Asia's current socio-economic face (Omeliicheva, 2022).

The economic impact of migration in Central Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries caused a profound transformation of agriculture and the entire structure of the region's economy. The redistribution of land resources caused by mass migration, especially during the Russian Empire, significantly changed traditional economic practices based on nomadic and semi-nomadic livestock farming, which was the basis of the local population's livelihood. During colonial expansion, the Russian administration confiscated land from indigenous people to settle Russian peasants and Cossacks, which harmed the welfare and living conditions of local peoples, including the Kyrgyz. Land redistribution took place in several stages. In the initial stages, the so-called "free" pasture lands used for cattle breeding were alienated. For nomadic peoples, for whom pastures were a vital resource, the loss of these territories meant the destruction of the foundations of their economic system. Later, starting in the late nineteenth century, as part of land reform and under pressure from colonial policies, more extensive areas, including lands occupied by indigenous peoples, became subject to eminent domain.

One of the significant consequences of these changes was the competition for land between the local population and the newcomers, which led to significant social tensions and conflicts. The influx of settlers with sedentary farming methods also changed the region's economic structure. The settlers from Russia brought with them new farming methods, such as arable land, and the use of agricultural implements such as ploughs and seeders, which were radically different from the traditional methods of the locals (Novozhenov, 2014; Novozhenov, 2024). These methods were much more efficient in the context of settled agriculture, developing larger agricultural areas and significantly increasing yields in areas with suitable climatic conditions.

The transition to intensive farming was particularly noticeable, especially in areas with favorable natural conditions, such as the Ferghana Valley, where cotton production began to develop. The Russian administration actively supported the introduction of cotton as the main crop, which focused the economy on exporting commercial cotton to Russia and then to other countries. It led to the development of monoculture, with most agricultural production concentrated on cotton, making the region's economy dependent on a single agricultural product and the needs of the metropolis. In addition, this approach to agriculture harmed the diversity and sustainability of the region's agricultural economy, as the cultivation of a single crop

significantly reduced soil quality, requiring constant use of fertilizers and intensive labor. As a result, despite the growth of cotton production, agricultural resources began to deplete, which also contributed to the migration of the local population in search of more favorable conditions for farming (Yermekbayev et al., 2024).

At the same time, the development of commodity agriculture became part of the broader economic policy of the Russian Empire, aimed not only at the development of new territories but also at the use of the region's natural resources to strengthen the economic power of the metropolis. Cotton, which became the primary commodity, had an impact not only on Central Asian agriculture but also on industrial development in Russia. The Russian administration actively supported its production, which contributed to the establishment of textile factories and increased the need for raw materials supplied from Central Asia. It, in turn, strengthened economic ties between the region and the metropolis, creating dependence on the supply of cotton and other agricultural products and forming new economic relations within the Russian Empire.

However, this process was often accompanied by conflicts over land and water resources and the exploitation of local labor. The irrigation system was actively developed to support sedentary agriculture and cotton farming. The construction of canals, ditches, and other irrigation facilities required significant labor and financial costs. It was often conducted at the expense of the local population, which also increased economic pressure on them. The construction of railways, primarily the Trans-Caspian Railway, was central to trade development, significantly improving transport accessibility, expanding markets, and increasing trade within the region and with other parts of the Russian Empire. Population migration, both internal and external, increased demand for goods and services, stimulating the development of trade and crafts (Rexha et al., 2024; Ilyassova et al., 2025). The inflow of migrants to cities contributed to their growth and development, turning them into trade, crafts, and industry centers, offering new earnings and social mobility opportunities. Crafts related to agricultural processing, textile production, metalworking, and other activities developed, contributing to the diversification of the local economy, albeit within the framework of the colonial system (Beimenbetov, 2025).

During the colonization of Central Asia, the Russian administration carried out significant reforms, including introducing a new tax system unified with the imperial one. It meant a shift from in-kind taxes, typical of traditional economies, to monetary taxes, forcing the indigenous population to switch from traditional economic activity to commodity production. Commodities, such as livestock, crops, and other products, became subject to taxation. This transition significantly changed residents' way of life, as they had to produce more for sale on the market, not just for their own needs. It required additional efforts, costs, and integration into new market relations, which added to the economic pressure on farmers and shepherds. Taxes collected from land, livestock, crops, and other economic activities went to the imperial treasury, contributing to the region's economic subordination. Exporting resources to Russia

increased the metropolis's profits and limited the opportunities for independent economic development in Central Asia. At the same time, the indigenous population became more dependent on external economic factors, and funds allocated for local development were often used in the interests of the Russian economy.

During the Soviet period, migration processes acquired new features as they were associated with large-scale industrialization and urbanization within the framework of the planned economy. These processes required an influx of labor from Central Asia and other republics of the Soviet Union. The main directions in the industrialization policy were the construction of industrial enterprises, the development of large cities, and the development of new land, such as virgin lands. As a result of the influx of labor to work in new plants and factories and build infrastructure, the region's demographic structure changed significantly. The urban population grew, while rural areas lost their former economic role.

On the other hand, the collectivization of agriculture, which was conducted by force, caused severe economic disruption. Collectivization and other violent measures, such as dekulakization, led to massive livestock losses, the destruction of traditional agricultural patterns, and famine in the early 1930s. This famine was one of the reasons for massive migrations both within and outside the region, exacerbating an already difficult demographic situation. The rural population, deprived of their primary sources of livelihood, began to seek work and opportunities for survival in other areas or more favorable conditions. In addition, the deportation of people during the Soviet period also had an economic dimension. As part of the deportation policy, many people, such as Chechens, Ingush, Kalmyks, and others, were relocated to Central Asia and other remote areas of the Soviet Union. The deportees were often used as cheap labor, which was used by the authorities to solve the problems of the planned economy through forced labor. Work related to agriculture, construction, and industry became the field of application for this cheap labor. It affected labor relations in the region, creating additional social problems, but simultaneously contributed to fulfilling the Soviet government's targets. The deportation continued, exacerbating existing social and economic problems, creating new challenges for resource management, and maintaining stability in the region.

In the post-war period, migration was associated with developing virgin lands and constructing extensive infrastructure facilities, such as canals, hydroelectric power plants, and industrial enterprises. It also required the attraction of labor from other regions of the USSR, which continued to influence the demographic and economic situation in the region. Thus, migration had a complex and contradictory impact on the Central Asian economy. On the one hand, they have contributed to the development of trade, industry, and agriculture and introduced new technologies and management methods. On the other hand, they have led to the redistribution of land resources favoring migrants, increased exploitation of the indigenous population, economic crises and social conflicts, and a monocultural economy dependent on foreign markets (Vanda & Mamchur, 2023).

These contradictory effects of migration in Central Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflect the deliberate policies of the metropolitan country, which sought to use the region as an important source of raw materials and a strategic foothold for expanding its influence. The Russian Empire viewed Central Asia as an object of economic exploitation and a territory for political consolidation. The migrations organized in this policy had long-term consequences for the region's economy, determining its further development and relations with the metropolis.

The resettlement of Russian peasants and Cossacks to Central Asia had several goals. Economic goals were to develop new land and expand agriculture. However, the political goal was to strengthen the Russian presence in the annexed territories, especially in strategically important areas such as the Semirechye. The creation of settlements inhabited by Russian peasants and Cossacks contributed to the consolidation of the empire in these regions, enabling the Russian administration to more easily control and manage the local population (Yang & Zhiping, 2024). Russian immigrants became a "living force" that supported the Russian authorities and created new centers for the spread of Russian culture, language, and way of life. This policy of Russification was aimed at integrating the region into the Russian Empire and weakening the position of the local nobility, which traditionally ruled their territories.

The creation of Cossack settlements, along with agricultural settlements, also pursued military and security functions. Cossack settlements became important for ensuring the security of the Russian borders, preventing possible uprisings, and protecting against external threats. The Cossacks played the role of armed guards, maintaining regional stability and preventing anti-imperial sentiment among the local population. In addition, Central Asia was rich in natural resources, which became an important factor in Russia's economic policy. Deposits of minerals such as coal, oil, and non-ferrous metal ores, as well as fertile land suitable for intensive agriculture, attracted the attention of both the metropolis and the settlers. The resettlement of Russian peasants and Cossacks to these areas contributed not only to the development of land but also to the development of agriculture and cattle breeding (D'Encausse, 1988).

The Russian administration also emphasized the growth of cotton in Central Asia. Cotton was a strategically important raw material for the Russian textile industry, and the region became the leading supplier. Migration, including forced migration, provided labor for cotton plantations and the construction of irrigation systems. The development of cotton farming led to a monoculture economy, which made the region vulnerable to fluctuations in world cotton prices and created dependence on food supplies from other regions. In other words, it is possible to state that migrations initiated and regulated by the Russian administration became a powerful tool of colonial policy aimed at the economic exploitation of Central Asia and the strengthening of imperial power (Djanibekov et al., 2021). Migration caused significant changes in the region's economy, promoting the development of specific industries while creating serious problems for the indigenous population and forming

a dependent economy. An important aspect of this colonial policy was the Russian administration's introduction of a unified imperial tax system, which profoundly impacted the Kyrgyz population's economic and social situation.

Prior to the arrival of the Russians, Kyrgyz society had traditional forms of tribute collection, which were usually of a natural nature (livestock, food, handicrafts) and regulated by customary law. The introduction of monetary taxes correlated to land, livestock, crops, and other activities was a fundamentally new phenomenon that radically changed economic relations in the region. The transition to a monetary form of taxation created severe difficulties for the nomadic and semi-nomadic Kyrgyz population. The traditional economy was oriented towards subsistence consumption, and most people had insufficient cash to pay taxes. It forced Kyrgyz people to sell their livestock, often at low prices, leading to ruin and impoverishment. Sometimes they had to sell most of their property to raise the necessary amount, undermining their traditional way of life.

Taxes were often set arbitrarily and did not correspond to the population's real incomes, aggravating the situation. For example, in the Semirechensk region at the end of the 19th century, taxes on livestock could account for a significant portion of a cattle breeder's income, especially in poor harvest years. The need to pay taxes in cash stimulated the development of commodity-money relations and increased the dependence of the Kyrgyz population on the market. Kyrgyz people were forced to sell production (livestock, wool, leather) in markets where they often faced unfavorable trading conditions and intermediation by dealers. It led to even greater impoverishment and debt bondage. The growth of usury became a characteristic feature of this period. Kyrgyz people, unable to pay taxes on time, were forced to take out loans at high interest rates, which often led to the loss of property and enslavement (Miyaki et al., 2024).

The new tax system contributed to the strengthening of social stratification in Kyrgyz society. The *bai* (rich cattle breeders), who were better able to adapt to the new economic conditions, strengthened their positions by buying cattle and land from their ruined tribe members for a song. At the same time, the bulk of the population was in an even more difficult situation. The colonial administration often relied on the *Bayeux* as its intermediaries in managing the local population, further strengthening their influence. The taxes collected were sent to the imperial treasury, not to the development of the local economy. It contributed to the leaching of resources from the region and limited the opportunities for its independent economic development. The proceeds were used to finance imperial projects, including the maintenance of the army and administration in the region. Thus, the tax system became an important tool for the economic exploitation of Central Asia by the Russian Empire (Akcigit et al., 2021).

In general, introducing a unified tax system was one of the key factors that determined the economic and social situation of the Kyrgyz population during the period of colonial rule. It contributed to destroying the traditional economy, increasing

dependence on the market, social stratification, and the leaching of resources from the region. All these migration and tax policy processes were part of the broader context of economic development in Central Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a complex and contradictory process closely intertwined with the colonial policies of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union.

Metropolitan-organized and regulated migration was central in catalyzing economic change in Central Asia, but its effects have been twofold. On the one hand, migration contributed to the development of several economic sectors, such as cotton, agriculture, and even some industries; on the other hand, migration processes have significantly changed traditional ways of life and cemented the region's dependence on external economic and political factors. As a result, the Central Asian region, instead of developing a domestic economy, was drawn into a colonial system where its economic potential served the interests of the metropolis and the USSR.

One of the most visible effects of migration has been a change in agricultural structure. Central Asia, which initially had diverse traditional agricultural practices, essentially switched to a single type of highly dependent cotton production. Cotton farming, as one of the region's top agricultural priorities, required significant labor and resource input. The resettlement of peasants from Russia's interior provinces, as well as the forced recruitment of local people to work on cotton plantations, provided the necessary labor force to cultivate large areas of agricultural land. It led to a change in land relations, where land, often transferred for cotton production, became an object of exploitation, and the local population, in turn, became dependent on the conditions dictated by the metropolis (Rahmonova-Schwarz, 2010).

Developing irrigation systems necessary to support cotton production was also linked to migration processes. The construction of canals, ditches, and other irrigation facilities required large amounts of labor and led to a redistribution of water resources, which affected the region's ecosystem. The rural population, in turn, often did not have access to these water resources or found themselves at a disadvantage due to changes in water distribution, which exacerbated social tensions. In addition, migration stimulated trade, as migrants and new settlers engaged in agriculture, demanded products for daily living, and increased exports of raw materials, particularly cotton, which helped expand trade networks. The local economy was oriented towards supplying the metropolis and other regions of the Russian Empire with raw materials, which, in turn, strengthened the region's dependence on foreign markets and limited opportunities for diversification and growth of the local economy.

However, despite the positive impact of migration on the development of agriculture and trade, the region's industry developed slowly. The industrial enterprises in Central Asia were mainly related to processing agricultural raw materials, such as cotton, which only increased the region's dependence on agricultural processes and did not contribute to the development of high-tech industries. The metropolis controlled the entire industrial infrastructure, and most of the profits from the processing of raw materials were sent to Russia, leaving the local

industry at a low level of development. As a result of these changes, the region's indigenous population became economically dependent on external factors, creating an imbalance in socio-economic structures. The colonial economy, focused on the export of raw materials, could not develop domestic production facilities and infrastructure, which hindered the development of local entrepreneurial initiatives. The local population, although actively involved in economic life, could not benefit from these processes, as the resources received from agriculture and industry were primarily used to meet the needs of the metropolis (Cameron, 2020).

The redistribution of land resources in favor of migrants and the introduction of new forms of economic activity oriented towards commodity production substantially deformed the traditional economic systems of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of Central Asia (Askarov et al., 2024). Traditional pastoralism based on seasonal migration and communal use of pastures has been threatened. The restriction of grazing land caused by resettlement forced nomads to adopt a sedentary lifestyle or reduce their livestock numbers, undermining the basis of their traditional economy and social structure. It led to social conflicts and the aggravation of land issues. The introduction of cotton monoculture also had negative consequences, as it led to soil depletion, reduced cereal crops, and increased the region's dependence on food imports (Jolly, 2021).

As a result of migration and economic policies, Central Asia became increasingly integrated into the economic system of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, occupying a peripheral position in it, supplying raw materials, and serving as a market for the metropolis' industrial products. This dependence was manifested in the following ways:

- The region's focus on cotton production has made it vulnerable to fluctuations in global prices for this commodity.
- The decline in grain crops led to the need to import food from other regions of the empire and the USSR.
- Industrial development in the region was limited to the processing of agricultural raw materials and was subordinated to the interests of the metropolis.
- Profits from exploiting natural resources and agricultural production were exported outside the region, hindering its economic development (Zhanibek & Sharipova, 2024; Zhangabulova, 2022).

In general, migration was associated with the colonial policies of the Russian Empire and, later, the Soviet Union, which had a long-term and complex impact on Central Asia's economy and social structure. This impact was ambiguous: on the one hand, migration contributed to the development of specific sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, in particular cotton farming, and was associated with the introduction of new technologies and farming methods. On the other hand, these processes also led to a redistribution of land and natural resources in favor of immigrants, which created conditions for increased exploitation of the indigenous

population and deformation of traditional forms of economic activity. As a result, the region became deeply economically dependent on foreign markets and the metropolis, which seriously affected both the social structure and long-term economic development.

The study conducted in this paper confirmed the thesis of Mulska and Ivaniuk (2022), which emphasized that migration processes in Central Asia were multifaceted, caused by a whole range of factors: economic, social, and political. In contrast to traditional studies, such as by Hugo (2012) on the economic aspects of migration, including the impact on the formation of labor markets and changes in the structure of employment, this study addressed the impact of migration processes on the social structure of Kyrgyz society. Changes caused by the introduction of a monetary tax system, which was a direct consequence of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire, were emphasized. It led to increased social stratification and strengthened the position of bayevs (rich cattle breeders), which was not adequately covered in historical literature. The colonial administration used the tax system to consolidate its power, relying on the local elite, especially the bayes. Based on income redistribution, this system enables the authorities to effectively control the region's economy while maintaining exploitative relations and ensuring stability in tax revenues. However, this dependence on the local elite and the external metropolis also contributed to the deepening of class divisions, leading to increased social and political tensions.

The Russian Empire's long-term policy of strengthening its position in Central Asia led to the region's economic dependence on foreign markets and the metropolis. This dependence continued into the subsequent Soviet period, which is reflected in the region's current economic problems. One of the most prominent examples was the monoculture orientation of agriculture, with a focus on cotton. This limited opportunities for developing other agricultural and industrial sectors and increased the region's dependence on foreign trade, including food imports. As a result, the region's economy became vulnerable to fluctuations in global prices and external economic shocks.

In addition, unequal distribution of resources and income continued to affect social tensions and inter-ethnic relations in Central Asia. These problems were rooted in the colonial era, when the metropole used migration processes and the tax system to strengthen control while creating conditions of social stratification. These structural features continued to influence the socio-economic development of the region in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, contributing to the persistence of inequality and social instability (Keller, 2019). Thus, the historical trajectory in the colonial period continues to impact Central Asia's development significantly today. The continuing dependence on foreign markets, monoculture orientation of agriculture, and social inequality, which are the legacy of colonial policies, pose serious challenges to the region's countries in their quest for economic independence and social stability.



## Conclusions

The study revealed the multifaceted impact of migration processes on the formation of Central Asia's economy, social structure and cultural landscape in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These processes, initiated and regulated by the colonial policy of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, were determined by a complex of economic, social, and political factors. However, the study had limitations due to incomplete archival data and insufficient representativeness of some statistical sources, which require further clarification and analysis based on interdisciplinary approaches.

Migration flows substantially affected the development of the region's economy. Population resettlement was driven by the lack of land resources, inter-ethnic conflicts over access to water and pastures, and the search for more favorable conditions for farming. The colonial policy aimed at incorporating the region into the general economic system of the metropolis led to the transformation of Central Asia into a raw material periphery. The introduction of monoculture production, especially cotton, contributed to the economic specialization of the region but also led to soil depletion, reduced pastureland, and dependence on foreign markets. Subsequently, during the Soviet period, collectivization and industrialization policies stimulated the development of new economic sectors such as industry and infrastructure. However, they were accompanied by the destruction of traditional forms of economic activity, environmental degradation, and social upheaval. The uneven distribution of resources between different ethnic and social groups has become one of the key characteristics of the region's economic development.

In addition to economic changes, migration processes have affected the ethnic and social structure of Central Asia. The influx of people from other regions has contributed to forming a new cultural image of the region, strengthening ethnic diversity and developing multilingualism. However, these processes have been accompanied by changes in traditional social hierarchies and restrictions on access to key resources for the indigenous population, often leading to social tensions. Differences in the levels of economic and educational development between internally displaced people and the local population exacerbated social inequality, creating preconditions for conflicts and exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions.

In the context of globalization and modern challenges such as climate change and urbanization, migration issues remain relevant for Central Asia. The study determined the need to incorporate the historical aspects of migration processes and current trends affecting the region's socio-economic development. Future research should focus on developing strategies for migrants' adaptation and integration into new social conditions and finding mechanisms for effective management of migration flows. It is important to identify and minimize the possible negative consequences of migration, considering them in the context of sustainable development of the region. In the future, further research may focus on the microeconomic impact of migration on individual communities, as well as the impact of current migration trends on the

formation of labor markets and the level of social inequality. Developing effective integration and social adaptation measures can help strengthen social capital, reduce tensions, and create conditions for balanced economic growth. Thus, migration processes were central in shaping the historical face of Central Asia and continuing to shape its future, requiring further research and a comprehensive approach to their study and regulation.

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