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The Public Education System in the Fergana Oblast in the Pre-Revolutionary Period

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Abstract

Building on wide-ranging statistical material, the work looks into the public education system in the Fergana Oblast in the pre-revolutionary period. The research materials included both archival resources from the Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, and published collections of documents, which are represented by annual reviews of the Fergana Oblast, stretching over the period from 1887 to 1913. The work's methodology is based on system, statistical and chronological methods.

In conclusion, the authors come out with the following findings:

- 1. In the pre-revolutionary period, the development of the public education system in the Fergana Oblast had unique local distinctions. Efforts by the Russian administration to introduce secular education were made in an unfriendly environment, where the Asian Muslim population took negatively any attempts to change the deep-rooted traditions of the local patriarchal society.
- 2. In the period from 1887 to 1913, the Russian administration was able to found several gymnasiums and progymnasiums in the region, which made secondary education accessible both in the Oblast's center and in some district cities. Lower and primary education went along a similar path in the region.
- 3. Despite the positive trends set by the launch of Russian and Russian-indigenous educational institutions, as the Russian population was insignificant in the region, it had some of the lowest indicators in the Russian Empire both in the number of secular educational institutions and in the number of children enrolled in them.

Keywords: public education, Russian Empire, Fergana Oblast, Turkestan Educational District, 1887–1913.

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1. Introduction

The Fergana Oblast was constituted in 1876, with an administrative center in the city, founded by the Russian administration, - Novy Margelan (later renamed Skobelev). We will not go deep into the history of the area, but it is worth noting that 20 years later, in 1898, the region witnessed an anti-Russian revolt on religious grounds, which was called the Andijan Uprising (Glushchenko, 2010: 531). With such destabilizing incidents, the system of secular public education was unable to develop rapidly in the region. Nevertheless, in the pre-revolutionary period, the Fergana Oblast, in terms of public education, was part of the Turkestan Educational District created in 1875 (Cherkasov, 2023: 1690). In 1897, the Fergana Oblast was home to slightly more than 1.5 million people and showed a major gender imbalance (850,000 men and 700,000 women). The Oblast had the largest population as compared to other regions in the Turkestan Educational District (Cherkasov, 2023: 1690). A glimpse into the ethnic mix which lived in the Fergana Oblast is offered by the materials of the First General Census of 1897. For example, of the 1.5 million population, the Sart language was native to the half (788,000 people), the Turkic-Tatar language was spoken by 260,000 people, Kara-Kyrgyz – by 200,000, Uzbek – by 153,000. By comparison, Russian was the native tongue for 10,000 people, of which only 25% were women (Pervaya Vseobshchaya..., 1904: 61).

Materials and methods

The materials for our research included archival resources from the Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, and published collections of documents, which are represented by annual reviews of the Fergana Oblast, stretching over the period from 1887 to 1913.

The work's methodology is based on system, statistical and chronological methods. The system method enabled us to explore the public education system in the Fergana region, taking into consideration the characteristics of educational institutions, i.e. based on their types: secondary, lower, primary and religious Muslim educational institutions. The statistical method made it possible to analyze the progression of public education and identify its region-specific characteristics. The chronological method, in turn, helped us put together the general picture of public education in the region, following its chronological sequence.

3. Discussion

The historiographical overview of our research topic can be arranged into two groups. These are works that describe the Fergana Oblast and its public education system and works that study regional public education systems in the Russian Empire with a similar (overwhelming majority of the non-Russian population) demographic makeup.

The first group includes the work by S.S. Khamrakulov on how the printed media evolved in the Fergana Oblast in the pre-revolutionary period (Khamrakulov, 2017). We should also point at the work by A.A. Yusupov on trade and economic relations between Turkestan and Kashgar in the pre-revolutionary period (Yusupov, 2021). The work closest to our research subject belongs to M.V. Rygalova, which studied the history of regional education, using the Fergana Oblast reviews (Rygalova, 2019).

The second group features the work by N.A. Shevchenko et al. on the public education system of one of the Asian territories of the Russian Empire – the Amur Oblast (Shevchenko et al., 2023), research papers also addressed another similar territory – the Semirechenskaya Oblast (Magsumov et al., 2023), as for the studies dealing with non-Asian territories with a predominant non-Russian population, we should refer to the work by G. Rajović on the public education system of the Dagestan Oblast (Rajović et al., 2022; Rajović et al., 2022a; Rajović et al., 2022b).

4. Results

The public education system in Central Asia was formed by Russian and Russian-indigenous educational institutions. However, their number was so insignificant that regions in the Turkestan Educational District ubiquitously included figures on Muslim (religious) educational institutions in their reports, which had no relation to do with the secular model of education.

Russian-indigenous schools were opened in 1886, they taught reading and writing in the Russian and Sart languages to boys from the native population. The schools immediately opened evening courses to teach adults as well (Obzor..., 1893: 102).

In 1887, there was only one lower educational institution in the Fergana Oblast – the Russian city 4-year school for boys in Novy Margelan with its own carpentry and craft workshop. At the same time, for girls, the region provided only primary education, namely the city parish 2-year school for girls. In addition, there were four more 1-year parish schools for both genders. Overall, there were 6 Russian educational institutions in the region in 1887, which taught 93 boys and 84 girls (Obzor..., 1889: 51). Russian-indigenous educational institutions taught 147 boys in total (Obzor..., 1889: 51). As for indigenous religious educational institutions, they were divided into Muslim and Jewish ones, but the number of the latter was small (only two schools with 38 Jewish boys). Muslim religious educational institutions were, in turn, organized into three types: madrassas (higher education), the region had 171 such institutions with a total number of students 7,985 people (only for boys); mahtabs (lower education), there were 1,082 such institutions with 14,154 boys and 1,240 girls; and qarihanes (education for Koran reciters), where 660 boys studied (Obzor..., 1889: 52). The report also explained that public education in the region was solely controlled by the Muslim clergy, and it was the clergy that had significant funds. As a result, the indigenous population was educated exclusively in line with Islam and would hardly soon take "the bright path of science and progress" (Obzor..., 1889: 52). Looking ahead, we should say that the prophecy as a whole will be fulfilled, but first things first.

It is worth noting that no magazines, newspapers, or books were published in the region in 1887.

In 1890, the 2-year girls school in Novy Margelan was reorganized into a 4-year girls school. Thanks to this, lower education became available to girls as well. The remaining four Russian 1-year schools were located in cities Kokand, Namangan, Andijan and Osh. By this time, the 4-year boys city school had opened another workshop doing bookbinding. Overall, taking into account the 4-year boys school, the total number of Russian educational institutions did not change, although the student body increased to 240 people, of whom 126 were boys and 114 girls (the 4-year boys school had 79 students, the 4-year girls school had 76 students, other schools had 85 students) (Obzor..., 1893: 102).

In 1890, the enrollment in Russian-indigenous schools fell sharply from 151 people in 1889 to 82 (Obzor..., 1893: 103). Meanwhile indigenous schools boosted the number of students to 30,197, of which 2,411 were girls in 1,515 religious educational institutions (Obzor..., 1893: 104).

In 1892, the 4-year girls school carried the name Mariinsky School. The other five Russian educational institutions sustained no changes. At the same time, the number of Russian-indigenous schools grew to 6. All 12 educational institutions taught 437 students (283 boys and 154 girls) (Obzor..., 1894: 97). As for indigenous schools, they depended to significant extent from the economic situation of the region's population. Harvest years saw religious educational institutions opened on a massive scale, their number reached hundreds, and hundreds closed if crops failed. For example, in 1892, there were only 1,130 religious educational institutions in the region, and the number of students went down to 16,965 (Obzor..., 1894: 98).

By 1894, one of the 1-year parish schools, which was located in the Kokand city, had been reorganized into a 2-year school. The number of Russian educational institutions generally remained the same, which was also the case for Russian-indigenous schools. In Russian educational institutions alone, the total student body amounted to only 285 people. The 1,703 indigenous and Russian-indigenous schools included 5 Jewish schools, and their total enrollment was 36,172 people (Obzor..., 1896: 84).

By 1897, the number of Russian educational institutions reached 9, including 4-year boys city and 4-year girls Mariinsky schools, a 2-year boys city school in Kokand, four 1-year parish schools in Namangan, Andijan, Osh and the Pokrovsky village (Osh district), as well as two girls parish schools in Kokand and Novy Margelan. So, not only the region's administrative center, the Novy Margelan city, but also a district city, Kokand, now had its own boys and girls schools (Obzor..., 1899: 61). The number of Russian-indigenous primary schools also increased with the opening of a Russian-indigenous school with a boarding facility in Kokand (Obzor..., 1899: 62-63). In total, 16 Russian and Russian-indigenous educational institutions taught 574 people (405 boys and 169 girls) in 1897 (Obzor..., 1899: 62-63).

As for indigenous religious schools, in 1897, the region had 186 madrassas with 11,063 students, 159 qarihanes with 1,933 students and 1,585 mahtabs with 27,834 students, and in addition there were 6 Jewish schools with 215 students. In total, 1,936 indigenous educational institutions taught 41,045 students (Obzor..., 1899: 64).

By 1899, the 2-year city school in Kokand had been reorganized into a 4-year institution to make lower education available in the city of the Fergana Oblast as well. In addition, the total number of primary parish schools for students of both genders reached 7 (they operated in the cities, such as Namangan, Andijan and Osh as well as in Pokrovskoe, Uspenskoe, Blagoveshchenskoe and Nikolaevskoe villages), and two primary girls' parish schools were also located in Novy Margelan and Kokand (Obzor..., 1901: 243). Considering two 4-year schools in Novy Margelan, Russian educational institutions reached 12 in total. Russian-indigenous educational institutions increased to 8 (one Russian-indigenous school with a boarding facility and 7 primary Russian-indigenous schools) (Obzor..., 1901: 244-245). So, in total, Russian and Russian-indigenous educational institutions together reached 20 with a total student body numbering 918 children (686 boys and 232 girls) (Obzor..., 1901: 244-245). At the same time, 2,248 religious indigenous schools had 25,021 boys and 3,399 girls (Obzor..., 1901: 246-247).

On July 1, 1900, Novy Margelan saw the first progymnasium inaugurated in the city—the Novy Margelan 4-year boys progymnasium (Obzor..., 1901a: 117), and the total number of Russian educational institutions reached 14. The Kokand boys city school opened two craft classes—on carpentry and bookbinding (Obzor..., 1901a: 119). The number of Russian-indigenous educational institutions also grew—a Russian-indigenous school with a boarding facility was opened in Novy Margelan and another Russian-indigenous school in the region (Obzor..., 1901a: 117). In addition, there were 2,399 indigenous religious schools in the region, which provided education for 29,488 boys and 2,762 girls (Obzor..., 1901a: 118-119).

By 1904, the region's administrative center had made secondary education available for both boys and girls. This was the result of the boys progymnasium reorganized into a boys gymnasium and the 4-year Mariinsky school into the girls Mariinsky gymnasium (Obzor..., 1905: 103). The Oblast's secondary educational institutions taught 209 boys and 200 girls, while lower and primary institutions taught 1,443 people, of which 1,079 were males and 364 females (Obzor..., 1905: 104). The total number of Russian and Russian-indigenous educational institutions reached 38 in the region. Particular strong growth was demonstrated by Russian-indigenous educational institutions that, along with 17 Russian-indigenous schools, included 6 schools with evening courses for adults (Obzor..., 1905: 104). It is worth noting that the entire Fergana Oblast was able to offer only two city libraries – one in Novy Margelan and one in Namangan (Obzor..., 1905: 106).

In 1906, 274 boys and 291 girls studied in two gymnasiums (boys and girls ones) in Novy Margelan (Obzor..., 1908: 101). We should add that girls exceeded boys in one group of educational institutions for the first time. The other 15 Russian educational institutions were: 4-year school in Novy Margelan, 3-year school in Kokand, 11 parish primary schools and 2 private primary schools (in Novy Margelan and Andijan) (Obzor..., 1908: 102-103). The total enrollment in Russian educational institutions in 1906 amounted to 1,703 (929 boys and 774 girls) (Obzor..., 1908: prilozhenie 32). Russian-indigenous schools numbered 18 with 893 students (Obzor..., 1908: prilozhenie 32).

In 1907, the Fergana Oblast's administrative city, Novy Margelan, was renamed Skobelev.

By 1910, there had been already three secondary educational institutions in the region. In addition to two gymnasiums in Skobelev, an 8-year commercial school was launched in Kokand (Obzor..., 1910: 175). In 1910, the Oblast's all secondary educational institutions taught 962 students (592 boys and 370 girls) (Obzor..., 1910: 176). In addition, the region offered 4 lower educational institutions - 4-year city schools in Skobelev, Kokand, Namangan and Andijan which had 249 students (Obzor..., 1910: 177), 9 parish city schools with 1,020 students, 11 parish rural schools with 627 students and 3 private primary institutions with 135 students (Obzor..., 1910: 177-180). In total, Russian educational institutions in 1910 taught 2,993 students of both genders. Russian-indigenous schools numbered 18. By 1910, it had become obvious to the Russian administration that Russian-indigenous schools were not popular with the local population, because several of the schools, for all the years of operation, did not graduate a single student after completing the full academic course, and many schools, had only a handful of graduates over the entire period of work (the Pop school had 3 graduates since 1902, Skobelev school – 5 graduates since 1900, Yangi-Kurgan school had not a single graduation since 1903) (Obzor..., 1910: 181). The key reason why Russian-indigenous schools were unpopular was the fanaticism of the Muslim population. In addition, indigenous inhabitants viewed children's education exclusively from a practical standpoint – on the one hand, they did not see the immediate benefits of educating children in a Russian-indigenous school, on the other, they realized that they would lack a worker in their family, since the course of study was 4 years. Therefore, in most cases, children left school after they had barely learned to read, write and speak a little Russian (Obzor..., 1910: 181-182). Nevertheless, regional officials of the Ministry of Public Education made efforts to improve the situation.

In 1911, the number of secondary educational institutions in the region did not change. Three secondary school taught 926 boys in total (Obzor..., 1914: 118). The group of lower educational institutions also remained unchanged: 4 city schools taught 263 boys (Obzor..., 1914: 120). Nine parish city schools taught 1,135 people (Obzor..., 1914: 121), 13 parish rural schools 767 people (two such schools were opened in 1911) (Obzor..., 1914: 122). The number of private educational institutions also went up to 6 (186 children of both genders studied there) (Obzor..., 1914: 123). The number of Russian-indigenous schools did not change (18 schools) with 664 boys studying there (Obzor..., 1914: 124), in addition, evening courses at the schools were attended by 243 adults (Obzor..., 1914: 124). All in all, Russian and Russian-indigenous schools in 1911 had 4,184 students (Obzor..., 1914: 124). Indigenous educational institutions numbered 3,052, of which 10 were cheders (Jewish schools) (Obzor..., 1914: prilozhenie 25).

By 1913, there had already been 5 secondary educational institutions in the region: in addition to the Skobelev boys and girls gymnasiums and the Kokand commercial school, a girls city progymnasium was launched in Skobelev, and a girls progymnasium was also opened in Andijan (Obzor..., 1916: 132). In total, secondary educational institutions taught 1,207 children (708 boys and 499 girls) in 1913 (Obzor..., 1916: 133). The lower level was represented, as before, by four 4-year city schools that had 422 male students (Obzor..., 1916: 135). The primary level numbered 9 parish city schools with 1,323 students (825 boys and 498 girls) (Obzor..., 1916: 136), 21 parish rural schools with 1,123 students (700 boys and 423 girls) (Obzor..., 1916: 138), 5 private educational institutions (the number of students is not specified, but we should assume there were at least 150 students) (Obzor..., 1916: 138).

In the same year, the number of Russian-indigenous schools grew to 20 (Obzor..., 1916: 138), with the student body increasing to 1,008 (Obzor..., 1916: 139). Of the 1,008 students, 949 boys were Muslims, 25 Orthodox, and the rest had other faiths (Obzor..., 1916: 139). Thus, in 1913, the number of students in Russian and Russian-indigenous educational institutions reached 5,078 people (Obzor..., 1916: 140).

Of the 3,710 indigenous schools, 10 were Jewish cheders, and the rest were Muslim religious schools (Obzor..., 1916: prilozhenie 26). The total number of students was 51,783 (43,823 boys and 7,960 girls) (Obzor..., 1916: prilozhenie 26).

For illustrative purposes, Table 1 summarizes data on the number of educational institutions by type and size of their student body.

Table 1. Number of educational institutions and students in the Fergana Oblast in 1887–1913 (Obzor..., 1889: 51-52; Obzor..., 1893: 101-104; Obzor..., 1894: 96-98; Obzor..., 1896: 84; Obzor..., 1899: 61-64; Obzor..., 1901: 243-247; Obzor..., 1901a: 117-119; Obzor..., 1905: 103-105; Obzor..., 1908: 101-103, prilozhenie 32; Obzor..., 1910: 181-183; Obzor..., 1914: 123-124, prilozhenie 25; Obzor..., 1916: 132-140, prilozhenie 26)

Years	Educational institutions				Number of students		
	Russian	Russian-	Indigenous	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
		indigenous					
1887	6	5	1,337	1,348	23077	1324	24401
1890	6	5	1,515	1526	27991	2525	30516
1892	6	6	1130	1142	15288	1704	17402
1894	6	6	1697	1705	32241	4216	36457
1897	9	7	1936	1952	-	-	41619
1899	12	8	2248	2268	25707	3631	29338
1900	14	10	2399	2423	30377	2864	33241
1904	15	23	2478	2516	-	-	34526
1906	17	18	2451	2486	36963	2176	39139
1910	30	18	2567	2615	36345	6959	43304
1911	34	18	3052	3104	45519	8590	54109
1913	44	20	3710	3774	47486	9380	56866

Although during the First World War in 1915, 186,285 school-age children lived in the Fergana Oblast, only 3,622 of them studied in Russian educational institutions at that time (RGIA. F. 733. Op. 207. D. 39. L. 1). For unknown reasons, enrollments of Russian-indigenous schools were not counted among the students.

5. Conclusion

Summing up the above, we would like to focus on the following aspects:

- 1. In the pre-revolutionary period, the development of the public education system in the Fergana Oblast had unique local distinctions. Efforts by the Russian administration to introduce secular education were made in an unfriendly environment, where the Asian Muslim population took negatively any attempts to change the deep-rooted traditions of the local patriarchal society.
- 2. In the period from 1887 to 1913, the Russian administration was able to found several gymnasiums and progymnasiums in the region, which made secondary education accessible both in the Oblast's center and in some district cities. Lower and primary education went along a similar path in the region.
- 3. Despite the positive trends set by the launch of Russian and Russian-indigenous educational institutions, as the Russian population was insignificant in the region, it had some of the lowest indicators in the Russian Empire both in the number of secular educational institutions and in the number of children enrolled in them.

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