

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Economic Relations Among The Soviet Republics Of Central Asia Under The Conditions Of A Centralized National Economic System (1950s-1970s)

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Abstract

This article analyzes the formation and development of economic relations among the Soviet republics of Central Asia under the conditions of a centralized national economic system in the 1950s-1970s. The study examines inter-republican industrial and energy cooperation, the exchange of material and technical resources, and the main directions of the territorial division of labor on the basis of historical and statistical sources. The role of the Uzbek SSR within the regional economic system and its integration into the Union economy is examined. The findings show that while inter-republican relations accelerated industrial growth, in the long term they constrained the economic independence of the Central Asian republics.

KEY WORDS

Centralized national economy, economic relations, Soviet economic system, industrialization, energy infrastructure, division of labor, raw-material specialization.

INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the twentieth century, the centralized national economic system operating in the Soviet Union continued to strictly regulate inter-republican economic relations through state planning mechanisms. The period from the 1950s to the 1970s was particularly significant for the Soviet republics of Central Asia, as it was marked by the intensification of industrialization, infrastructure development, and processes of territorial specialization. During this time, economic relations among the republics were outwardly presented as forms of internationalist cooperation and mutual assistance; however, their internal substance was closely linked to center-republic relations.

The main objective of this article is to reveal, on the basis of historical analysis, the mechanisms underlying the formation of economic relations among the Central Asian republics under

the conditions of a centralized national economic system, as well as to assess their economic effectiveness and long-term consequences. Particular attention is paid to the case of the Uzbek SSR, examining its functional role within the all-Union economy and the features of its economic specialization.

METHODOLOGY

The source base of the study consists of official statistical compilations published during the Soviet period, reports of ministries and state agencies, materials from five-year plans, as well as archival documents related to inter-republican economic relations. In addition, scholarly monographs and articles devoted to the Soviet economy and the industrial development of the Central Asian region were analyzed.

Methodologically, the study is grounded in the principles of

historicism and systemic analysis. The research employs historical-comparative, structural-analytical, and statistical methods. A critical analysis approach is used to identify discrepancies between the official planning discourse and actual economic practices in inter-republican economic relations. This approach makes it possible to assess economic processes not only in terms of quantitative indicators but also from the perspective of their institutional and territorial consequences.

RESULTS

The findings of the study indicate that:

- In the 1950s-1970s, economic relations among the Central Asian republics reached a high level in terms of both scale and complexity.
- Large-scale projects implemented in the energy, oil and gas, machine-building, and chemical industries strengthened inter-republican production cooperation.
- Major thermal power plants, gas pipelines, and industrial enterprises increased the industrial potential of the region and served the needs of the all-Union economy.
- The structure of economic relations was based not on the principle of equality among the republics, but on rigid specialization.

While the Uzbek SSR was formed as a supplier of cotton, natural gas, and certain machine-building products, other republics assumed the role of providers of machinery, fuel, or construction materials.

Although this process ensured industrial growth in the short term, in the long run it intensified the dependence of republican economies on external supplies. Statistical data demonstrate growth in industrial output; however, the low share of products with high added value and imbalances in the export structure reveal the structural shortcomings of the centralized economic system.

DISCUSSION

Issues related to strengthening Uzbekistan's industrial cooperation with fraternal republics, as well as the experience of industrial development in the Uzbek SSR, clearly illustrate the regional characteristics of the Soviet economic model through the example of the Central Asian republics. In the 1950s-1970s, the industrialization policy implemented at the all-Union level was aimed at the territorial allocation of

productive forces by intensifying economic ties among the republics. Within this framework, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan were regarded as a single economic-geographical region, and their economic specialization was subordinated to all-Union interests.

The Central Asian republics occupied an important place in the all-Union division of labor. In particular, Uzbekistan, as the core component of the Central Asian economic region, was transformed into the country's leading cotton base. Approximately two-thirds of the cotton produced in the Soviet Union accounted for Uzbekistan's share, which clearly defined the republic's agrarian-industrial specialization [1; 23]. However, while this specialization ensured a stable supply of raw materials for Soviet industry on the one hand, on the other it disrupted the sectoral balance of the republic's economy. High-technology processing industries developed only to a limited extent, and the function of supplying raw materials remained dominant.

At the same time, together with other Central Asian republics, Uzbekistan constituted a large economic-geographical region with closely interconnected interests in addressing nationwide tasks. Under the conditions of a centralized national economic system, these interests were officially assessed as serving the achievement of maximum efficiency for socialist society, the fulfillment of the country's key economic objectives, and the planned development of the republican economy [2;1]. In practice, however, many decisions were made at the center, while regional needs were assigned secondary importance.

Historically, economic relations between the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan had deep roots. Cooperation in agriculture — especially cotton growing — the development of irrigation systems, the exploitation of vast desert and mountain pastures, and the extraction and utilization of mineral resources constituted the main directions of these relations. During the years of Soviet rule, these interactions acquired a more institutionalized character, building upon the solid economic foundation established in Central Asia. In this period, key branches of industry were formed and developed across the region. The Central Asian republics assumed an important position in oil extraction and in the production of nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers, and attained a leading role in manufacturing machinery and equipment for cotton growing, cotton ginning, and the textile industry. At the same time, the production of electrical equipment and precision instruments also expanded.

However, alongside these achievements, the negative consequences of centralized planning became increasingly evident. Industrial cooperation among enterprises was often organized not on a territorial basis, but according to sectoral principles. As a result, inter-republican economic relations became more dependent on central planning directives than on actual economic needs. In the long term, this situation constrained the economic independence and sustainable development prospects of the Central Asian republics.

From the second half of the 1950s onward, the rapid development of fuel and energy infrastructure in Central Asia and Kazakhstan created the conditions for inter-republican economic relations to advance to a qualitatively new stage. In particular, the commissioning in 1958 of the first stage of Central Asia's first major trunk gas pipeline — running along the Jarkak-Bukhara-Samarkand-Tashkent-Shymkent route and based on the Jarkak gas fields — marked an important turning point in regional economic integration [3;13]. This project not only enabled the gas supply of many areas in the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan, but also contributed to strengthening energy security at the Union level by delivering gas resources to the industrializing Ural region. In practice, however, the main directions of gas infrastructure development were subordinated to central interests, and raw-material flows were allocated in accordance with Union demands rather than the needs of the republics.

Nevertheless, specialists of the gas industry of the Uzbek SSR played an active role in regional energy cooperation. In particular, the delivery in 1965 of 591 million cubic meters of natural gas to the Kazakh SSR and 102 million cubic meters to the Tajik SSR reflects the practical operation of inter-republican production links [4;31-32]. While these figures confirm Uzbekistan's leading position in regional fuel supply, they also indicate the outward orientation of the republic's resource base.

Industrial cooperation was not limited to the energy sector alone. In 1959, the supply of separators by the "Uzbekhimmash" plant to Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, as well as the shipment of diesel T-62 machines from the Andijan "Stroy mashina" plant, constituted an important example of production links formed in the field of machine building among the Central Asian republics [5; 3].

This situation demonstrates that certain branches of Uzbekistan's industry played an important role in meeting

regional needs. During this period, inter-republican cooperation expanded further. In particular, Union – level technical assistance was of significant importance for the development of Turkmenistan's oil industry. The acquisition by the "Turkmannyeft" association of oil extraction equipment from various cities of the Soviet Union represented a distinctive feature of the centralized supply system [6; 3]. In this process, the flow of machinery and equipment was directed not on the basis of territorial proximity, but in accordance with central planning directives.

In official discourse, economic cooperation among the republics was interpreted as a process fully aligned with the interests of all nations and the "family of Soviet peoples." In reality, however, while this cooperation acted as an accelerator of socialist development, it also deepened economic specialization and reopened the role of certain republics as suppliers of raw materials and semi-finished products. For example, during the years of the Seventh Five - Year Plan, the Uzbek SSR supplied Turkmenistan with machinery and materials necessary for cotton processing, including compressors, electrical equipment, tools, and rolled steel. The shipment of large industrial castings produced in Uzbekistan to the plant named after the 20th anniversary of the Turkmen SSR likewise reflected this form of cooperation [7; 2]. In addition, the delivery of agricultural machinery from the "Chirchikselmash" plant to Turkmenistan, and the receipt of aluminum wires from the Turkmen cable plant, demonstrate the bilateral character of inter-republican exchange. However, since this exchange was carried out not on the basis of the principle of equality but within the framework of economic specialization defined by the center, it ultimately constrained the prospects for independent economic development of the region in the long term.

The development of republican industry in the 1950s-1970s was significant not only at the regional level but also across the entire Soviet Union. Within the territory of the Uzbek SSR, the main branches of heavy industry — chemical production, gas extraction, metallurgy, machine building, and related manufacturing sectors — were established and expanded. On the one hand, these branches strengthened the republic's industrial potential; on the other hand, within the framework of the centralized national economic system, they primarily served the needs of the all-Union economy.

In particular, the production of technological equipment and spare parts for the textile and cotton-ginning industries

became one of the strategic directions of Uzbekistan's industrial development. According to available data, the Uzbek SSR supplied nearly 70 percent of all spinning machines produced in the country. Moreover, the roving (drawing) machines manufactured in the republic remained for a long time the only ones of their kind in the Soviet Union, indicating a narrow but strategically important specialization of Uzbekistan's machine-building industry. At the same time, such specialization limited production diversification and left the republic's industry dependent on a specific set of sectors.

Products of the cotton and machine-building industries were supplied to all Union republics, including the RSFSR, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan. In official sources, this process was interpreted as an example of equal economic cooperation among the republics. At the same time, the Uzbek SSR received increasing volumes of automobiles, tractors, construction and road machinery, ferrous metal products, timber, grain, sugar, and other goods from other Union republics. This situation indicates the

technical dependence of the republic's economy on external supplies.

The ideological foundations of this system were widely articulated in speeches by the Union leadership at the time. In particular, in his address marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, L. Brezhnev interpreted Uzbekistan's economy as being closely interconnected with other regions, emphasizing that the condition of the republic depended not only on the cotton harvest produced within its territory, but also on the labor of machine builders in the Urals and Leningrad, miners in the Kuzbass, grain state farms in Kazakhstan, and producers of electronic computing equipment in Belarus [8; 20]. According to this theoretical framework, the economic development of each republic was regarded as the result of fraternal cooperation and mutual assistance among all Soviet peoples. Statistical indicators also appear to support this thesis: in 1961-1965, industrial output increased by 50 percent in Uzbekistan, 54 percent in the Tajik SSR, 67 percent in the Kyrgyz SSR, and 34 percent in the Turkmen SSR [9; 53].

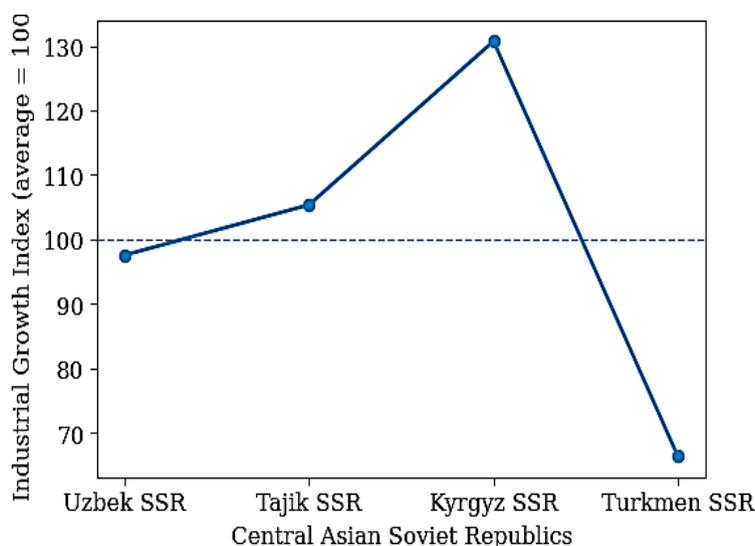


Figure 1. Relative industrial growth index of Central Asian Soviet republics, 1961-1965.

The growth and modernization of industry in the Central Asian republics on the basis of the latest technology was undoubtedly an important process. However, behind these figures lay unresolved issues related to the quality of industrial development, intersectoral balance, and regional interests. The large energy facilities constructed in the Central Asian republics far exceeded the economic and financial capacities of individual republics in terms of their scale and technical complexity. For this reason, under the conditions of the centralized national economic system, such facilities were planned and implemented as projects of all-Union significance.

The construction of the largest energy facilities in Central Asia was officially emphasized as having been carried out through the labor of representatives of many nationalities within the Soviet Union. A clear example of this is the construction of the TashGRES power plant. Specialists and skilled workers from other Union republics actively participated in the building of this facility. In addition, the main technological equipment required for TashGRES was supplied through inter-republican cooperation. Enterprises from the RSFSR, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan delivered various mechanisms and units for this project

[10;20]. The fact that boilers, turbines, generators, and power transformers were manufactured in different regions and assembled at a single site clearly demonstrates the sectoral and territorial interconnectedness of the Soviet energy industry. Despite the expansion of energy infrastructure as an important factor in industrial development, agrarian – raw material specialization remained dominant in the economies of the Central Asian republics. In particular, Central Asia and Kazakhstan accounted for 91-93 percent of the country's exports of raw cotton and cotton fabrics. While these figures clearly defined the region's position within the all-Union economy, they also generated serious imbalances in the structure of foreign trade.

The trade balance for cotton, cotton fabrics, and cotton-based products within the CIS framework consistently deteriorated over time. Whereas in 1960 the export – import balance for these products amounted to 83.7 million rubles, by 1985 this figure had declined to 79.2 million rubles. Especially indicative is the fact that in 1985 the share of cotton and cotton fabrics in the structure of Soviet exports accounted for only 1–2 percent, while the share of garments and other cotton-based manufactured goods amounted to merely 0.026 percent of total exports, clearly demonstrating the economic inefficiency of this system [11; 195].

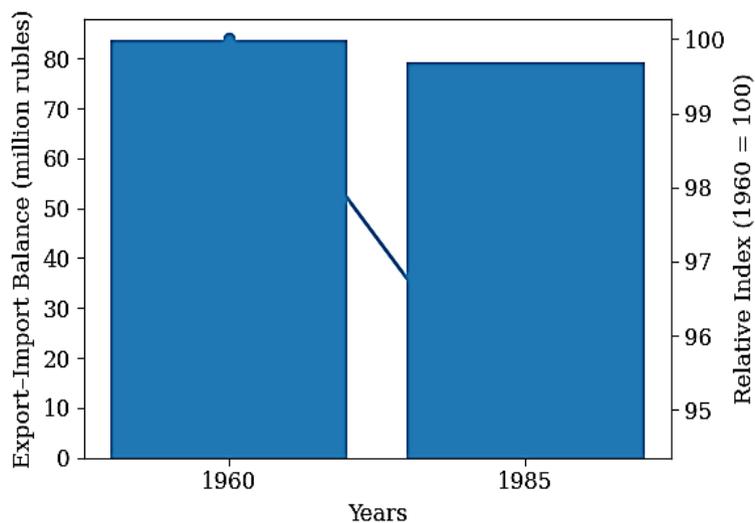


Figure 2. Trade balance of cotton and cotton products: absolute values (million rubles) and relative index

These figures indicate that the Central Asian republics, including the Uzbek SSR, participated in the world market not through finished products with high added value, but primarily through raw materials and semi-finished goods. This situation became even more acute under conditions in which world cotton prices declined by nearly 40 percent, thereby exposing the structural shortcomings of the centralized economic system.

By the mid-1960s, economic relations among the Central Asian republics had taken the form of complex, multi-level production cooperation. This was particularly evident in the oil industry. In 1964, the Turkmenneft association received from the Uzbek SSR welding units, 45 welding transformers, machine tools, cable products, equipment for transformer substations, electric motors, centrifugal and water-lifting pumps, and other technical materials. These supplies demonstrate the important role played by Uzbekistan's

industrial enterprises in strengthening the technical base of Turkmenistan's oil industry.

In 1965, the supply geography of this association expanded even further. The "Turkmannyeft" association was supplied with equipment necessary for oil extraction and processing from industrial enterprises located in nearly 160 cities across the Soviet Union [12;2]. Notably, this production complex in Turkmenistan, in turn, received materials and technical equipment from more than 80 different locations. This situation indicates the extremely high degree of interdependence in inter-republican economic relations, with production chains extending across the entire territory of the Union [13;2]. At the same time, such cooperation constrained the possibilities for the technically independent development of each republic, binding them to a single centralized supply system.

In the 1960s, the Kyrgyz SSR also emerged as an important industrial supplier within the Central Asian region. It supplied other republics with metal-cutting machine tools, forging presses, precision measuring instruments, trucks, agricultural machinery, as well as automobile radiators produced at the Frunze Machine-Building Plant. According to statistical data, Kyrgyzstan provided nearly 80 percent of all metal-cutting machine tools produced in the Central Asian economic region. This indicates that the republic possessed a narrow but strategically significant specialization in the field of machine building.

The Tajik SSR also occupied an important place in regional economic relations, supplying fraternal republics in Central Asia with metal-cutting machine tools, non-ferrous metals, and cement. These products were of strategic importance for the industrial and construction sectors and defined the functional role of Tajikistan's industry within the all-Union economic system. The Turkmen SSR, in turn, emerged as a leading supplier of fuel and certain industrial products. In particular, nearly 70 percent of glass, approximately half of kerosene, more than 70 percent of diesel fuel, and over 50 percent of fuel oil required by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan were supplied by Turkmenistan. These indicators clearly reflect the fuel and energy specialization of the republic's economy.

Overall, in the 1960s, economic relations among the Central Asian republics became highly institutionalized but were formed primarily as a system managed through central planning mechanisms.

One of the key factors in strengthening internationalist ties among the Union republics was the joint construction of large industrial and infrastructure facilities. Under the conditions of a centralized national economic system, such facilities were planned not as projects serving individual republics, but as initiatives designed to meet the strategic needs of the entire Union. The construction of major facilities such as the Bjezinskiy Thermal Power Plant and the Chardjou Superphosphate Plant in Turkmenistan, the Nurek Hydropower Plant in Tajikistan, as well as the Karakum Canal, represents vivid examples of such all-Union projects.

According to the official interpretation, these facilities were said to benefit "all peoples," with material resources being fairly distributed across the Union. In reality, however, these projects primarily adapted the region's energy and industrial infrastructure to all-Union needs. For example, the active

participation of workers from the Central Asian republics in the construction of the Nurek Hydropower Plant not only sharply increased Tajikistan's energy capacity, but also contributed to the formation of a unified energy space for the entire region. The electricity generated at this plant was transmitted to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, becoming an important factor in supporting their industrial development.

For this very reason, all the republics participated in the construction of the Nurek Hydropower Plant, and each contributed to the development of 500-kilovolt high-voltage transmission lines [14;119]. However, rather than increasing the energy independence of the republics, this process further bound them to a single centralized energy system. Energy flows were distributed not according to regional needs, but in line with production priorities at the all-Union level.

By the 1970s, growing population needs, expanding production volumes, and other socio-economic factors began to require improvements in the efficiency of the national economy. Under these conditions, the need to deepen production ties and cooperation among the republics became increasingly evident. This process was particularly pronounced in the case of the Uzbek SSR. The material and technical resources required for the republic's industry and construction sectors were imported from nearly all Union republics. The RSFSR was the principal supplier, providing Uzbekistan with rolled ferrous metals, timber and wood products, automobiles, pumps, truck cranes, metal-cutting machine tools and forging press equipment, cable products, electric motors, power transformers, construction materials, chemical products, and a wide range of consumer goods. In terms of the volume of material and technical supplies, the Ukrainian SSR ranked second.

From the Kazakh SSR, Uzbekistan received rolled ferrous metals, cement, slate, coal, grain, and livestock products, while the Tajik, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz SSRs supplied window glass, sulfuric acid, salt, pipe products, power transformers, pumps, coal, and trucks. This situation indicates the strong dependence of key sectors of the republic's economy on external supplies. In turn, the Uzbek SSR supplied all Union republics with cotton fiber, natural gas, electrical and radio-technical products, equipment for the cotton industry and irrigation systems, road-construction machinery, excavators, textile goods, and petroleum refining products [15;6-7]. By the mid-1970s, this exchange expanded further: cable

products, electric motors, power transformers, S-245 type pumps, metal-cutting tools, construction materials, and chemical products were shipped to the Kazakh SSR. Rolled metal products, machine-building goods, cement, slate, linoleum, mineral fertilizers, paints and varnishes, and other industrial items were delivered to the Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Turkmen SSRs.

Overall, in the 1950s-1970s, economic relations among the Central Asian republics reached a high level in terms of both scale and complexity. However, rather than constituting an equal form of economic integration, these relations manifested themselves as a functional division based on centralized planning. While large-scale infrastructure projects and extensive commodity exchange ensured industrial growth in the short term, in the long run they intensified the mutual dependence of republican economies and constrained their independent development strategies.

CONCLUSION

In the 1950s-1970s, economic relations among the Soviet republics of Central Asia were formed as an integral component of the centralized national economic system. These relations accelerated industrial and infrastructure development and strengthened the region's economic integration. At the same time, they were largely subordinated to all-Union interests and failed to create sufficient conditions for ensuring the economic independence of the republics.

For a prolonged period, the Central Asian republics, including the Uzbek SSR, functioned primarily as raw-material suppliers and specialized production units. Therefore, when assessing inter-republican economic relations in the Soviet period, it is necessary to consider not only their short-term economic effects but also their long-term structural consequences. This approach is of significant scholarly importance for understanding the historical roots of contemporary economic development challenges in the region.

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