



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Cotton, capital, and colonialism in southern Korea, 1910–1945: Semi-governmental organizations in the construction of imperial agriculture

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## Abstract

This article investigates cotton promotion policies in colonial Korea, with a focus on the role of a series of semi-governmental organizations (SGOs) in implementing colonial policies to shape farmers' interactions with global, capitalist markets. Colonial attempts to develop the cultivation of cotton, a quintessential commodity of modern capitalism, highlight the incorporation of the Korean countryside into imperial networks of commercial commodity production and circulation. However, despite appeals to the rhetoric of capitalism and the expected response of profit-maximizing cotton cultivators, in practice colonial cotton campaigns relied on the active intervention of the colonial state to reinforce the adoption of new scientific and commercial agricultural practices. SGOs performed multiple roles in the promotion of cotton cultivation—distributing resources, defining expertise, regulating the production and sale of cotton, and attempting to change the behaviour of cotton cultivators, landlords, and even merchants in line with the colonial government's strategic interests. As such, SGOs represent an understudied extension of the colonial state into the rural economy, which influenced the conditions under which farming households engaged in the commercial cultivation of cotton.

**Keywords:** Agriculture; cotton; Korea; colonial state; capitalism

## Introduction

The cultivation of cotton increased dramatically during the period of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, rising from around 60,000 cultivated hectares in 1910 to over 340,000 hectares in 1942. This expansion was not limited to a minority of large-scale producers—the number of households engaged in cotton cultivation also increased significantly, from around 20,000 households in 1910 to 1,245,757 households in 1936

(roughly 40 per cent of the rural population).<sup>1</sup> Increased cotton cultivation reflected the priorities of the colonial government. From 1912, the Government-General of Korea (GGK) introduced a series of multi-year campaigns that sought to develop Korea as a source of raw cotton for the Japanese textile industry. Notably, the colonial government not only aimed to increase the overall amount of cotton produced within Korea, but also to change the type of cotton grown. In southern Korea—the area identified by colonial officials as most suited to cotton cultivation—colonial policies promoted American upland cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*; K. *yukjimyōn*; J. *rikuchimen*) over existing native varieties (*Gossypium arboreum*; K. *chaeraemyōn*; J. *zairaimen*). By 1936, upland cotton constituted 70 per cent of all cotton planted, with over 75 per cent of cotton-cultivating households engaged in its cultivation. In the southern half of the peninsula the dominance of upland cotton was even starker. By 1918, at the conclusion of the first cotton promotion plan, upland cotton accounted for 93 per cent of all cotton grown in the six southern provinces; by 1935 upland cotton provided the entirety of the cotton grown in the southern provinces.<sup>2</sup>

Cotton was a strategically significant resource within the Japanese empire. The textile industry had been at the forefront of Meiji-era industrialization, with the mechanized production of cotton and silk representing an important source of wealth and exports for Japan. Yet, at the same time that Japanese textiles promised to compete against Western rivals, politicians and business leaders feared a new source of dependence in the form of raw cotton imports which had increased dramatically after the removal of import tariffs in 1896.<sup>3</sup> Of particular concern was cotton imported from India, which regularly provided over half of Japan's total cotton imports, but was vulnerable to changes in the colonial policy of Britain—one of Japan's main competitors in the textile industry.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, even before the annexation of Korea, figures such as Wakamatsu Tosaburō (1869–1953), the Japanese consul in Mokp'o (in office 1902–1907), investigated the viability of cultivating upland cotton in Korea as an alternative source of raw cotton imports.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen sōtokufu tōkei nenpō* (Keijō, 1944), pp. 42, 46, 47; Nichi-Man menka kyōkai, *Chōsen shibu, Mengyō tōkei* (Keijō, 1937), pp. 18, 19. In all likelihood, the proportion of the rural population engaged in cotton cultivation only increased after 1936, as wartime mobilization policies moved to further increase the production of cotton. Senda Sadao, 'Wata-ama zōsan no jūyōsei', *Jiriki kōsei ihō*, no. 70, 1939, pp. 15–20.

<sup>2</sup>*Chōsen sōtokufu tōkei nenpō; Mengyō tōkei*, pp. 18, 19, 38. The six southern provinces refer to North Ch'ungch'ōng, South Ch'ungch'ōng, North Chōlla, South Chōlla, North Kyōngsang, and South Kyōngsang.

<sup>3</sup>Nihon mengyō kurabu, *Naigai mengyō nenkan* (Ōsaka, 1942), pp. 7–11; W. M. Fletcher, 'The Japan Spinners Association: Creating industrial policy in Meiji Japan', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1999, pp. 49–75.

<sup>4</sup>Concerns over British policy materialized in 1916 when a reduction in the issuance of promissory notes in India limited Japanese cotton imports. See Chōng An'gi, 'Cheguk ūi nongjōng, Chosōn myōnhwa chūngsan chōngch'aek ūi yōn'gu: Che-2 ch'a (1919–1928 nyōn) Chosōn myōnjak changnyō chōngch'aek ūi chungsim ūro', *Han-Il kyōngsang nonjip*, vol. 47, 2010, pp. 144–152.

<sup>5</sup>Nihon no bōsekigyō to Kankoku mensaku kakuchō no kyūmu', *Kankoku chūō nōkaihō*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1910, pp. 52, 53; Rikuchimen saibai jū-shūnen kinenkai, *Rikuchimen saibai enkakushi* (Mokuho [Mokp'o], 1917), pp. 30–48; S. Beckert, *Empire of cotton: A global history* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), pp. 340–343. Around the same time, representatives from the spinning industry also investigated mechanisms to increase the reliability and quantity of Chinese cotton imports through adjustments to trading practices. M. Setobayashi, 'Market approaches to dealing with cotton adulteration in early twentieth-century

The continued emphasis on upland cotton in later colonial policies exemplifies the significance of commercial cotton cultivation within Japan's imperial project. Industrial textile manufacturers preferred upland cotton for its longer staple fibre, while agricultural technicians praised the variety for its increased yields. Within colonial plans, officials envisioned upland cotton as a cash crop to be sold for profit rather than being used in the household, simultaneously providing new sources of raw cotton for Japanese manufacturers while also developing exports to strengthen the colonial economy.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, colonial cotton campaigns aimed to transform all aspects of the production and handling of cotton—distributing new seed varieties, promoting new cultivation methods to maximize the harvest, facilitating access to fertilizers and credit through new organizational networks, and even introducing regulations to monitor and redirect cotton sales.

Cotton cultivation associations (hereafter cotton associations; K. *myōnjak chohap*; J. *mensaku kumiai*) lay at the heart of the colonial government's cotton cultivation plans. Indeed, as one report on cotton promotion in South Chōlla province proudly claimed, 'it is no exaggeration to say that cotton promotion in this province is carried out entirely through the cotton associations'.<sup>7</sup> Of course, the officials who published the report had every reason to praise their own activities and those of the cotton associations they oversaw. Nonetheless, as one of several semi-governmental organizations (SGOs) established by the GKK to implement colonial agricultural policies, an examination of the activities of the cotton associations provides crucial insights into the ambition and influence of colonial cotton policies within the rural economy. At the same time, the very existence of the cotton associations speaks to a further shift in the colonial rural economy: the expansion of the colonial state in support of new forms of scientific and commercial agriculture. While previous studies of the colonial economy have highlighted the overlapping interests of landlords, capitalists, and the GKK as pillars of colonial rule, the implementation of colonial cotton policies and the work of the cotton associations reveals a stronger state presence that attempted to manipulate the behaviour of even landlords and merchants. Despite appeals to the rhetoric of capitalism in official policy, in practice the SGOs engaged in a wide range of activities to influence and direct the behaviour of cultivators which reveal the limits of the colonial government's assumptions of the commercial appeal of cotton.

### Cotton in colonial agriculture

Despite the prominence of cotton in colonial policy—cotton promotion campaigns spanned nearly the entirety of colonial rule, revealing a longer, more consistent range of interventions than comparable rice campaigns—cotton has been largely overlooked in accounts of colonial agriculture. Most studies have instead focused on rice cultivation as representative of the changes to the colonial rural economy, exploring such topics as the Program to Increase Rice Production and the expansion of rice exports to Japan, rural indebtedness and the extension of new forms of finance, the

China', in *Imitation, counterfeiting and the quality of goods in modern Asian history*, (eds) K. Furuta and L. Grove (Springer: Singapore, 2017), pp. 21–45.

<sup>6</sup>'Chōsen sōtokufu kunrei dai-8 go', *Chōsen sōtokufu kanpō*, no. 459, 11 March 1912.

<sup>7</sup>Zenra nandō [Chōlla namdo], *Men no Zennan* [Chōnnam] (Kōshū [Kwangju], 1926), p. 8.

emergence of class conflict, and the diverging socioeconomic interests of landlords and tenant farmers.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, the attention paid to rice cultivation is not misplaced; rice was Korea's most significant crop before and during the colonial period, and colonial policies prioritized the cultivation of rice over other grains.<sup>9</sup> Where colonial policies exacerbated the economic polarization of rural households, studies of colonial agriculture have provided important insights into the social and political legacies of such changes.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, rice was just one of many crops cultivated by rural households, and the recent examination of other activities such as forestry and livestock-rearing have shed light on a wider range of changes in the rural economy under colonial rule.<sup>11</sup>

With regard to cotton, the global nature of its cultivation—in particular its entanglement with commercial and imperial competition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—invites a comparative perspective on the development of capitalism and colonialism in the Japanese empire. That cotton was grown under a range of competing 'cotton empires', from Egypt to Mozambique and from Togo to Uzbekistan, only highlights the significance of understanding the institutional context that supported colonial cotton cultivation schemes. Around the globe, colonial powers drew on a broad array of techniques to induce cotton cultivation, ranging from physical violence against peasant cultivators and enslaved plantation labourers to regimes that relied on the economic pressure of markets acting through investors, moneylenders, and commodity traders.<sup>12</sup> Through a focus on the cotton associations and the

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, Y. S. Kim, 'The landlord system and the agricultural economy during the Japanese occupation period', in *Landlords, peasants and intellectuals in modern Korea*, (eds) K. C. Pang and M. D. Shin (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2005), pp. 131–174; Hong Söngch'an et al. (eds), *Ilcheha Man'gyöng-gang yuyöck üi sahoesa: suri chohap, chijuje, chiyök chöngch'i* (Seoul: Hyeon, 2006); D. N. Kim, 'National identity and class interest in the peasant movements of the colonial period', in *Colonial rule and social change in Korea, 1910–1945*, (eds) H. Y. Lee, Y. C. Ha and C. W. Sorenson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), pp. 140–172. For notable exceptions, see Kwön T'ae-ök, *Han'guk kündae myönöpsa yön'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1989); Chöng An'gi, 'Cheguk üi nongjöng'; Chöng An'gi, '1920–1930 nyöndae Ilche üi myönöp chöngch'aek kwa Mokp'o chomyönöp: k'arüt'el (cartel) hwaltong ül chungsim üro', *Kyöngje sahak*, vol. 49, 2020, pp. 73–113.

<sup>9</sup>U Taehyöng, 'Ilcheha hanjön changmul üi saengsansöng chöngch'e', *Taedong munhwa yön'gu*, vol. 66, 2009, pp. 393–415.

<sup>10</sup>E. H. Gragert, *Landownership under colonial rule: Korea's Japanese experience, 1900–1935* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994); G. W. Shin, *Peasant protest and social change in colonial Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996); H. O. Park, *Two dreams in one bed: Empire, social life, and the origins of the North Korean revolution in Manchuria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, No Söngnyong, '1920 nyöndae Chosön ch'ongdokbu üi 'kyöngu taebu saöp (耕牛貸付事業) unyöng kwa sönggyök', *Yöksa wa hyönsil*, vol. 104, 2017, pp. 299–336; D. Fedman, *Seeds of control: Japan's empire of forestry in colonial Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020); J. Seeley, 'Cattle, viral invasions, and state-society relations in a colonial Korean borderland', *Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2023, pp. 5–31.

<sup>12</sup>S. Beckert, 'From Tuskegee to Togo: The problem of freedom in the empire of cotton', *Journal of American History*, vol. 92, no. 2, 2005, pp. 498–526; M. Peterson, 'US to USSR: American experts, irrigation, and cotton in Soviet Central Asia, 1929–32', *Environmental History*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2016, pp. 442–466; S. Hazareesingh, "'Your foreign plants are very delicate": Peasant crop ecologies and the subversion of colonial cotton designs in Dharwar, Western India, 1830–1880', in *Local subversions of colonial cultures: Commodities and anti-commodities in global history*, (eds) S. Hazareesingh and H. Maat (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 97–124; M. W. Ertsen, *Improvising planned development on the Gezira Plain, Sudan*,

breadth of their interactions with rural cultivators, this article highlights SGOs as one of the distinctive features of Japanese colonial rule in Korea even as the GKK's cotton promotion policies paralleled similar imperial projects.

When thinking about the role of capitalism in colonial Korean cotton cultivation, British activities in Egypt and India offer some of the clearest examples of market-led colonial policies. Although a full comparison is beyond the scope of a single article, a brief survey of the existing literature is nonetheless instructive. In the case of Egypt, scholars have noted that cotton cultivation long predated British control, as did the commercial development of cotton which began as a state-managed project in the 1820s before expanding to incorporate the interests of large estate-holders from the 1840s.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, as noted by Aaron Jakes, studies of Egyptian cotton cultivation have often emphasized the 'qualitative continuity and quantitative expansion' of cotton cultivation under British rule.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as Jakes argues, even as British rule intensified some existing features of cotton cultivation—a reliance on irrigation, the fiscal significance of cotton exports, and the accumulation of environmental problems stemming from cotton monoculture (notably insect infestations and soil salinization)—other aspects of colonial policy led to fundamental changes in the rural economy. In particular, British policies targeted smallholders as an untapped source of capitalist productivity, while financial reforms enabled the speculative investment of foreign capital into the rural economy, ultimately combining to create the conditions for both a debt-fuelled boom and a financial crisis in Egyptian cotton cultivation.<sup>15</sup>

As with Egypt, India had a millennia-long history of the cultivation of cotton and the production of high-quality textiles prior to the arrival of British imperialism. While much research into the economic impact of imperialism has focused on colonial attempts to displace Indian textiles and support industrial textile production in Britain, scholars have also explored British attempts to influence cotton cultivation in line with the demands of industrial textile manufacturers.<sup>16</sup> To this end, foreign advisers and colonial officials established multiple experimental farms to investigate the viability of foreign cotton varieties, especially long-staple varieties. For the most part, however, attempts to establish the cultivation of imported cotton varieties were unsuccessful. Many of the imported varieties did not grow well, and local peasant cultivators rejected the unreliable new seeds.<sup>17</sup> Colonial efforts to improve the quality

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1900–1980 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); A. Jakes, 'Boom, bugs, bust: Egypt's ecology of interest, 1882–1914', *Antipode*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1035–1059; P. Guimaraes, 'Violence, science, and cotton in colonial-Fascist Mozambique (1934–1974)', *Perspectivas*, vol. 25, 2021, pp. 89–108. For additional discussion and examples of global cotton imperialism, see also Beckert, *Empire of cotton*, pp. 340–378.

<sup>13</sup>E. R. J. Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian economy, 1820–1914: A study in trade and development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 28–88; T. Mitchell, *Rule of experts: Egypt, techno-politics, modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 59–70.

<sup>14</sup>A. G. Jakes, *Egypt's occupation: Colonial economism and the crises of capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*; Jakes, 'Boom, bugs, bust'. On the impact of financial changes on commercial cotton cultivation, see also Mitchell, *Rule of experts*, pp. 95–103.

<sup>16</sup>On imperialism and the cotton textile industry, see, for example, P. Parthasarathi, *Why Europe grew rich and Asia did not: Global economic divergence, 1600–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); T. Roy, *The crafts and capitalism: Handloom weaving industry in colonial India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>17</sup>According to research by Guha and Harnetty, improvement programmes that focused on local cotton varieties (often subvarieties of *Gossypium arboreum*) fared better than attempts to cultivate imported

of raw cotton entering the market also proved largely unsuccessful, with European traders complaining of dirty and adulterated cotton despite decades-long attempts to regulate and standardize the quality of raw cotton.<sup>18</sup>

Historians have provided several explanations for the failure of British attempts to influence the production of raw cotton in India. On the one hand, some have noted incompatibilities in the climate and environment which left imported seed varieties vulnerable to drought and inconsistent rainfall.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, other aspects of peasant agriculture led cultivators to reject the new varieties, including the negative impact on subsistence crop cultivation, cattle grazing, higher labour demands, and the continued availability of short-stapled cotton seeds through local traders and moneylenders.<sup>20</sup> Traders and moneylenders also appear in explanations of the failure to impose quality controls on raw cotton; where European traders relied on local dealers and merchants who purchased cotton from, and extended credit to, peasant cultivators, the decentralized nature of the trade in raw cotton limited the ability of colonial officials to enforce new cultivation and handling practices.<sup>21</sup>

Though necessarily brief, the contrasting experiences of cotton cultivation in British Egypt and India highlight all the more the importance of understanding the extent of the colonial state's activities in Korean cotton promotion campaigns. Discussion of the state is surprisingly absent in existing accounts of colonial agriculture. Although some of the earliest Marxist analysis of the colonial economy discussed the GGG's efforts to institutionalize Japanese monopoly capitalism within Korea, subsequent research into the rural economy has tended to highlight landlords as both a beneficiary of colonial policies and one of the main agents in the rural economy. In this argument, where the class interests of landlords overlapped with colonial objectives, the landlords' desires to realize their own profits from a commercializing agriculture encouraged the further exploitation of the peasantry, with the landlord system acting as one of the foundations of colonial rule in rural Korea. Taken to its extreme, in this argument landlords 'eagerly forced their tenants to participate in [the Program to Increase Rice Production] ... and gladly witnessed the successful completion of

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seeds, but even these efforts struggled to achieve consistent results. S. Guha, *The agrarian economy of the Bombay Deccan, 1818–1941* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 105–114; P. Harnetty, 'The Cotton Improvement Program in India 1865–1875', *Agricultural History*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1970, pp. 379–392; P. A. Fryxell, 'A nomenclature of *gossypium*: The botanical names of cotton', Technical Bulletin no. 1491, United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, 1976. On failed attempts to introduce foreign cottons, see also S. Leacock and D. G. Mandelbaum, 'A nineteenth century development project in India: The Cotton Improvement Program', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1955, pp. 334–351; Hazareesingh, "'Your foreign plants are very delicate'".

<sup>18</sup>C. Dejung, 'The boundaries of Western power: The colonial cotton economy in India and the problem of quality', in *The foundations of worldwide economic integration: Power, institutions, and global markets, 1850–1930*, (eds) C. Dejung and N. P. Petersson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 133–157.

<sup>19</sup>Hazareesingh, "'Your foreign plants are very delicate'"; Leacock and Mandelbaum, 'A nineteenth century development project'.

<sup>20</sup>Hazareesingh, "'Your foreign plants are very delicate'"; Harnetty, 'The Cotton Improvement Program'; Guha, *The agrarian economy*, pp. 106, 107.

<sup>21</sup>Dejung, 'The boundaries of Western power', pp. 148–151; J. Banaji, 'Merchant capitalism, peasant households, and industrial accumulation: Integration of a model', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2016, pp. 410–431.

the project'.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, scholars arguing against narratives of colonial exploitation (K. *sut'allon*) have similarly emphasized the activities of landlords and merchants in responding to market incentives independently from colonial coercion.<sup>23</sup> However, in highlighting the agency of landlords, both arguments have neglected the broader institutional context within which landlords conducted transactions, and the extent to which the colonial state intervened in the rural economy to achieve its desired outcomes.

In common with British activities in Egypt and India, Japanese colonial cotton policies emphasized commercial cotton cultivation. But, as the remainder of this article will explore, increases in cotton cultivation were intimately connected to the expansion of the colonial state through SGOs. A closer inspection of the activities of the cotton associations reveals not only the contours of the colonial state in the rural economy but also the challenges to colonial ambitions that sought to change peasants' behaviour so they would grow cotton as a commercial crop. Following Jun Uchida's call to problematize, rather than presume, colonial state control, the history of cotton promotion campaigns reveals the extent of colonial efforts to influence farming practices as well as the limits of state efforts to confront alternative understandings of the value of cotton within the peasant economy.<sup>24</sup> Although an examination of colonial policy necessitates some reliance on official publications, reading colonial sources against and along the grain enables a clearer understanding of where government campaigns fell short of the hubris and assumptions of colonial officials. Equally, where colonial officials themselves recognized the gap between the expected appeal of commercial cultivation and the incongruous responses of farming households, attempts to correct for perceived failures in the behaviour of markets and peasants alike add complexity to understandings of the extension of capitalism in the colonial rural economy.

### Cotton and colonialism

The work of the cotton associations closely followed the GGK's cotton promotion policies, which began in earnest in 1912 with the publication of a directive on the encouragement of cotton cultivation across the southern half of the peninsula. With its emphasis on the cultivation of upland cotton as a valuable raw material for the Japanese spinning industry, the directive laid out the priorities that would inform the GGK's cotton promotion policies until liberation. Across three major campaigns (1912–1918, 1919–1928, and 1933–1942), the GGK introduced detailed targets for the expansion of cotton cultivation. In the southern provinces, this entailed replacing existing strains with American upland cotton; in the north and west of the peninsula where the climate was deemed unsuitable for the new variety, officials nonetheless

<sup>22</sup>Kim, 'National identity and class interest', p. 163. For similar arguments, and an overview of the evolution of Marxist historiography of colonial Korea, see also K. C. Pang, 'Paek Nam'un and Marxist scholarship during the colonial period', in *Landlords, peasants and intellectuals*, (eds) Pang and Shin, pp. 245–308; Kim, 'The landlord system and the agricultural economy'.

<sup>23</sup>Chöng An'gi, 'Cheguk üi nongjöng'; Chöng An'gi, '1920–1930 nyönda Ilche üi myönöp chöngch'aek'; N. N. Kim, 'A reconsideration of "colonial modernization"', *Korean Social Sciences Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, pp. 221–262.

<sup>24</sup>J. Uchida, "'A scramble for freight': The politics of collaboration along and across the railway tracks of Korea under Japanese rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2009, p. 121.

aimed to increase the cultivation of existing varieties as well as promote changes to farming methods designed to maximize the yield and quality of the harvest.<sup>25</sup>

The cotton cultivation associations emerged as part of an administrative infrastructure that sprang up to support cotton promotion plans. Just months after the announcement of the 1912 directive, Kudō Eiichi (1870–n.d.), the South Chōlla provincial governor, responded with a plan to establish cotton associations, publishing model regulations for the associations the following year.<sup>26</sup> The other southern provinces quickly followed suit to establish similar cotton associations in each region. By 1922, ten years after the publication of the directive on cotton cultivation, cotton associations existed across Korea's cotton growing regions, with a total recorded membership of 642,265.<sup>27</sup> The cotton associations were typical of many of the SGOs established under colonial rule in maintaining close connections to local government offices. According to the model regulations, the cotton associations were to correspond to administrative districts (generally at the township [*myōn*] or county [*kun*] level), with the township head or county magistrate often playing a prominent role in establishing the association and serving as its head. All farmers of upland cotton within the district of a cotton association would automatically be registered as members, with supplementary leadership positions elected from among the membership. Despite the incorporation of members in roles such as councillors (K. *p'yōngūiwōn*; J. *hyōgi'in*), leadership roles in the associations were honorary appointments and subject to the approval of provincial and county officials (Articles 1, 4, 17–27), limiting the autonomy of individual cotton associations to challenge government priorities.

The primary goal of the cotton associations was to increase the cultivation of upland cotton, for which the associations provided a range of incentives and assistance. At the outset, the cotton associations distributed an initial stock of upland cotton seeds after which the associations encouraged members to preserve and maintain their own supplies for future years (Articles 9, 14). As well as seeds, the associations could help members access low-interest credit from the Agricultural and Industrial Bank (J. *nōkō ginkō*) and coordinate the bulk purchase of fertilizers and tools for members (Article 9). In addition to material resources, government-employed agricultural technicians regularly visited the cotton associations to oversee members' activities, promote upland cotton cultivation through lectures and demonstrations, and spread information on cultivation techniques suited to upland cotton. In each of these activities, the work of the associations closely followed the goals set out in the 1912 directive.<sup>28</sup>

In pursuing their objectives, the cotton associations did not operate in isolation but functioned as part of the broader infrastructure of the colonial state. As well as local government offices, the associations maintained close connections with the

<sup>25</sup>Chōsen sōtokufu kunrei dai-8 go'; Kobayakawa Kurō, *Chōsen nōgyō hattatsushi*, seisaku hen (Keijō: Chōsen nōkai, 1944), pp. 217–232, 373–380, 597–602.

<sup>26</sup>Chōnnam myōnjak chohap', *Maeil sinbo*, 14 July 1912; 'Zenra nandō mensaku kumiai mohan kiyaku', *Chōsen sōtokufu kanpō*, no. 305, 6 August 1913.

<sup>27</sup>Mun Chōngch'ang, *Chōsen nōson dantaishi* (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 1942), p. 36. This number only increased under continued cotton promotion campaigns, and by 1937 colonial officials calculated that 955,627 households were engaged in cotton cultivation. *Mengyō tōkei*, pp. 18, 19.

<sup>28</sup>Chōsen sōtokufu kunrei dai-8 go'; 'Zenra nandō mensaku kumiai mohan kiyaku'; 'Zenan Muan-gun mensaku kumiai jōkyō', *Chōsen nōkaihō* (hereafter *CNH*), vol. 9, no. 11, 1914, p. 61; Rinji sangyō chōsa kyoku, *Chōsen ni okeru menka ni kansuru chōsa seiseki* (1918).



GGK's network of model industrial farms (especially the Mokp'o branch which focused on cotton). Indeed, the associations themselves contributed to the colonial state's production and dissemination of information related to cotton cultivation, through the maintenance of association records (as specified in the model regulations) and by connecting agricultural technicians to cotton cultivators within each region. The expansion of upland cotton cultivation thus proceeded in intimate partnership with the colonial state which remained actively involved in the work of cotton cultivation beyond the initial distribution of seeds and materials. For example, after technicians noticed a tendency for the quality of upland seeds to deteriorate over time, the cotton associations worked with the model farm to establish rolling seed renewal programmes, planning and overseeing the exchange of members' seeds for fresh ones at regular intervals in order to maintain the quality of the upland cotton crop.<sup>29</sup>

Despite their clear government connections, the cotton associations nonetheless attempted to build local networks among cultivators, blending public and private interests to boost cotton cultivation. Under the seed renewal programmes, the Mokp'o model farm imported upland cotton seeds from the United States and undertook initial acclimation, before supplying fresh seeds to county- and township-managed seed propagation fields for further reproduction and distribution.<sup>30</sup> As upland cotton cultivation expanded and the volume of seeds required by renewal programmes increased, provincial governments began to broaden their propagation programmes—sourcing seeds from other provinces, and even directly importing and acclimating seeds at the provincial level.<sup>31</sup> Increasingly, local governments also started to outsource the management of seed propagation fields to the cotton associations or experienced cultivators (preferably independent smallholders) who received subsidies and materials (seeds and fertilizers) in order to provide a reliable supply of high-quality seeds for renewal programmes.<sup>32</sup> Local government offices also delegated the management of demonstration fields to the cotton associations, who selected skilled farmers to manage the fields under the guidance of agricultural technicians in exchange for subsidies and discounted fertilizers.<sup>33</sup> For elite farming households who were able to establish themselves as part of the networks supplying seed for state projects and fulfilling other promotion activities, participation in government-sponsored cotton campaigns thus became an additional source of revenue.

Sales constituted the final major element of the cotton associations' activities. Association regulations obliged members to sell any cotton not used in their households through the cotton associations, establishing the associations as an intermediary in the trade and circulation of raw cotton.<sup>34</sup> In this way, the associations gained the potential to redirect cotton sales towards preferred purchasers while also monitoring and controlling the quality of cotton that reached the market. Early on, industrial

<sup>29</sup>*Taishō 7-nendo mensaku shōrei hōshin narabi ni shisetsu jikō* (Taikyū [Taegu], 1918); *Men no Zennan*, pp. 35–52.

<sup>30</sup>*Taishō 7-nendo mensaku shōrei hōshin*; *Men no Zennan*, p. 35; *Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 58–62, 90, 104, 115, 116, 127.

<sup>31</sup>*Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 90, 139; *Men no Zennan*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>*Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 60, 115, 116; *Men no Zennan*, pp. 36–52.

<sup>33</sup>*Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 62, 63, 90, 91, 104, 139.

<sup>34</sup>'Zenra nandō mensaku kumiai mohan kiyaku', article 13; *Men no Zennan*, pp. 72–76.

buyers in Japan noted several disadvantages of Korean cotton, including excessive moisture content, discoloration, and unreliable grading standards—aspects which the cotton associations sought to control.<sup>35</sup> Under the associations' joint sales (K. *kong-dong p'anmae*; J. *kyōdō hanbai*) schemes, agricultural technicians assessed and graded the quality of farmers' cotton, with the final sales price calculated against Ōsaka market prices in relation to the quality of the cotton. According to officials, such a system would not only help to standardize the quality of Korean cotton reaching the market, but would also incentivize cultivators to meet the preferences of purchasers.<sup>36</sup>

The regulatory function of the joint sales programmes applied to cotton traders as much as it did cultivators. Indeed, according to official accounts the introduction of the joint sales system was motivated by a desire to limit unscrupulous merchants whose activities were perceived as undermining colonial plans to expand upland cotton cultivation. In particular, officials criticized traders for adulterating upland cotton with cheaper local varieties, damaging the reputation of Korean cotton among industrial buyers and ultimately reducing both the demand for it and its price. Under the joint sales system, only approved purchasers were permitted to participate in association-managed upland cotton sales, and purchasers who were found guilty of mixing cotton, adding moisture to artificially increase its weight, or falsely classifying cotton grades were excluded from the marketplace.<sup>37</sup> By directing sales through the cotton associations, colonial officials hoped to use the associations to establish a market for raw cotton in support of the strategic interests of the Japanese empire.

In all of the above, the work of the cotton associations demonstrates the breadth of the GKG's ambitions to reshape the cultivation of cotton as a commercial crop. However, colonial cotton policies were not implemented against a blank slate, and the practices that the cotton associations promoted necessarily came into conflict and competed with existing patterns of production and exchange in the rural economy. At times, this was by design. Colonial officials welcomed the association-managed joint sales programmes as a way to undermine the existing practice of what they termed 'green-field lending' (J. *aotagashi*), whereby hard-up farmers promised their future crop to traders in exchange for cash and grain in advance of the harvest. As well as enabling the unregulated trade of cotton outside of the association-managed joint sales schemes, officials claimed that green-field lending reduced farmers' incomes as they struggled to negotiate a fair interest rate or valuation of the future harvest, in turn reducing the desirability of upland cotton as a commercial crop. In order to limit the practice, officials paid particular attention to the provision of credit through the cotton associations, recommending the government-backed Agricultural and Industrial

<sup>35</sup>Mihara Shinzō, 'Naichi shijō ni okeru Chōsen rikuchimen no chōsho oyobi tansho', *CNH*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1915, pp. 42–45.

<sup>36</sup>*Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 67–71; Chōsen shokusan ginkō, chōsabu, *Chōsen no menka* (Keijō, 1934), pp. 38–47. As the largest producer of cotton, South Chōlla province later introduced a separate 'competitive bidding' (K. *kyōngjaeng ipch'al*; J. *kyōsō nyūsatsu*) process, although this was still conducted through the associations which graded the cotton and managed the bidding process. On the different systems and the impact of competitive bidding on South Chōlla prices, see Chōng An'gi, '1920–1930 nyōndae ilche ū myōnōp chōngch'aek'.

<sup>37</sup>*Rikuchimen saibai enkakushi*, pp. 98–102, 139–142, 150; *Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 67–71; *Men no Zennan*, p. 75.

Bank and financial associations (K. *kūmyung chohap*; J. *kin'yū kumiai*) as alternative sources of credit that could undercut local traders and redirect the cotton harvest towards the associations.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, as the next section will explore, the basic premise of colonial cotton policies—the commercial appeal of upland cotton—was not always shared by cultivators.

### Cotton and capitalism

From the emphasis on upland cotton to the establishment of joint-sales programmes, colonial policies targeted the commercial cultivation of cotton. Assumptions of cotton's commercial appeal were woven into government plans, with officials confidently predicting that upland cotton cultivation would naturally increase once farmers realized the benefits of the new crop and the profits that could be realized through its sale.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the cotton associations were designed to foster commercial cultivation, with the first article of the model regulations stating their formal objectives as 'to plan for the improvement and development of cotton cultivation, and to promote the common benefit (J. *kyōdō no rieki*) of members'.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast to colonial officials' faith in the commercial benefits of upland cotton cultivation, many farming households were less convinced and violence and coercion dominated early efforts to promote the crop. According to the recollection of several agricultural technicians, in the early years of upland cotton promotion officials resorted to a range of coercive measures when peasants refused to plant the new seeds as ordered—bribing or beating recalcitrant farmers, or physically destroying existing cotton crops so thoroughly as to leave cultivators with no alternative but to plant to upland seeds.<sup>41</sup> Although the agricultural technicians later rationalized their actions as an unavoidable stage in raising awareness of upland cotton, after which farmers came to realize its benefits, these problems were not limited to the immediate years surrounding annexation but persisted as plans for upland cultivation expanded to incorporate new areas. As officials admitted in a 1918 report, nearly all of the upland cotton cultivation in North Chōlla province had been achieved through coercion with very few choosing to cultivate cotton based on its profitability.<sup>42</sup> To officials' surprise, even Japanese managers of large agricultural estates (K. *nongjang*) expressed doubts over the profitability of upland cotton and hesitated to push it onto their tenants, hindering the GGK's plans.<sup>43</sup>

Promoting upland cotton was not always straightforward. Despite official assertions that it was simply a more profitable equivalent to existing cotton varieties, in practice upland cotton cultivation demanded a deeper shift in households' economic and agricultural activities. In South Kyōngsang province, for example, agricultural technicians recommended upland cotton as an alternative to the soybeans,

<sup>38</sup>Chōsen ginkō chōsashitsu, *Aotagashi ni kansuru Fukkoku no hōsei* (Keijō, 1912), pp. 1–4; *Rikuchimen saibai enkakushi*, pp. 108–111; *Men no Zennan*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Chōsen sōtokufu kunrei dai-8 go'; *Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 48, 63, 82.

<sup>40</sup>'Zenra nandō mensaku kumiai mohan kiyaku', article 1.

<sup>41</sup>'Zadankai kiroku', *CNH*, vol. 9, no. 11, 1935, pp. 36, 37, 44, 45.

<sup>42</sup>*Chōsen ni okeru menka*, p. 120.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 111, 112.

existing cotton, and millet that farmers grew in the summer months. At first, the new cotton grew well, and provided greater revenue than either soybeans or existing cotton varieties. However, problems arose with the barley harvest, which was customarily double-cropped over the winter and provided an important food source for peasant households. In contrast to soybeans, which helped to restore soil fertility, or even the shallower-rooted existing cotton, upland cotton drew more nutrients from the soil, eventually reducing barley harvests and diminishing the overall appeal of upland cotton among peasants who prioritized subsistence crops. As a solution, agricultural technicians suggested the promotion of fertilizers, but the need to purchase fertilizers would only draw cultivators further away from a self-sufficient model of agriculture and into a deeper reliance on the market economy.<sup>44</sup>

Even as the area planted with upland cotton expanded, disputes over cultivation methods reveal officials' ongoing struggles to prioritize its value as a commercial crop. One of the biggest sources of debate was the practice of *kanhonjak* (J. *kankonsaku*), or intercropped and mixed cultivation, whereby peasants planted cotton amid other dry field crops (usually barley) with the two growing simultaneously for a period of time. Agricultural technicians employed by the colonial government consistently noted what they perceived as the shortcomings of intercropping—the later maturation of the cotton plant and reduced yields (generally around 20 per cent less than single-cropped fields).<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in a 1926 report, officials noted that yields had barely risen year on year despite increases in the acreage of upland cotton, a fact that they attributed in part to the persistence of mixed cultivation.<sup>46</sup> To remedy the situation, during the 1920s officials began to select areas and villages where intensive cultivation (K. *chibyak chaebae*; J. *shūyaku saibai*) of upland cotton would be pushed—rationalizing row widths, banning mixed cultivation, and promoting strict schedules for weeding, topping, and pruning—while also subsidizing and facilitating the purchase of fertilizers and agricultural tools through the cotton associations.<sup>47</sup>

Despite such efforts, the practice of intercropping cotton with barley remained widespread and agricultural technicians had little choice but to find ways to mitigate the practice alongside the promotion of intensive cotton cultivation zones. Accordingly, where intercropping could not be banned outright, technicians promoted new strains of early ripening dwarf barley in order to optimize conditions for the upland cotton plants.<sup>48</sup> Local officials also promoted 'barley-cutting days' across the major cotton-growing regions, encouraging the early harvest of barley so as to maximize the maturation time for upland cotton.<sup>49</sup> Cotton cultivators were even encouraged to adjust the spacing of their crops to favour the growth of upland cotton

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 82–85.

<sup>45</sup>Keishō hokudō [Kyōngsang pukdo], *Mensaku kōshūroku* (Taikyū, 1918), pp. 85–90; Chōsen nōkai, *Wata no saibaihō* (Keijō, 1936), pp. 71–76; Keinan [Kyōngnam] joshi mensaku denshūsho, *Mensaku kōgiroku* (Fuzan [Pusan], 1940), pp. 93–100.

<sup>46</sup>*Men no Zennan*, p. 52.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 52–72; Keishō nandō [Kyōngsang namdo] mensakukei, *Keinan no men* (Fuzan, 1931), pp. 25, 26.

<sup>48</sup>Rikuchimen no zensaku mugī toshite sekitorisai ichigō no kachi', *CNH*, vol. 4, no. 10, 1930, pp. 84, 85; *Keinan no men*, p. 75.

<sup>49</sup>*Keinan no men*, pp. 130–135; Zenra nandō Chintō [Chindo]-gun, *Nobiyuku men no Chintō* (Chintō, 1936), p. 26.

plants over the intercropped subsistence crops such as barley and soybeans.<sup>50</sup> Through these measures, colonial officials attempted to not only increase cotton yields but also to change peasants' agricultural and economic priorities to establish upland cotton as the dominant dry field crop.

Throughout, the cotton associations played a consistent role in reinforcing the commercial priorities embedded within colonial cotton plans, both in coordinating material resources and overseeing local initiatives (such as the intensive cultivation zones) as well as encouraging farmers to adopt and internalize new habits. As part of their work to promote upland cotton cultivation, many of the cotton associations hosted regular competitive fairs (K. *p'ump'yŏnghoe*; J. *hinpyōkai*) where members could win prizes (often agricultural tools or cash) based on the quality of their cotton harvest. Judged by the agricultural technicians, the fairs rewarded the farmers who achieved the best results while also encouraging members to pay attention to the characteristics of the crop that officials considered desirable. Often the judging criteria overlapped with the interests of industrial textile manufacturers—namely, colour, length of staple fibre, moisture content, etc.—but the associations also rewarded the adoption of favoured cultivation methods.<sup>51</sup> In the example shown in Figure 1, entrants were forbidden from intercropping their cotton as a condition of entry into one provincial fair in North Chōlla that offered a grand prize of 100 yen, while other associations rewarded cotton growers with the largest sales over the previous year.<sup>52</sup> In this way, the cotton associations attempted to foster cultivators' interest in the commercial value of cotton in line with the assumptions underpinning colonial policy.

In the absence of detailed sources from cotton growers themselves, it is hard to gauge how successful the cotton associations were in changing members' attitudes to cotton cultivation. On the one hand, scattered references to competitive fairs in personal documents suggest that attendees could, and did, ignore the intended messaging of the organizers. Ch'oe Pyŏngch'ae (1907–1974), a farmer from the North Chōlla region, recorded his experience attending several agricultural fairs and exhibitions in his diary. Notably, rather than commenting on the fine quality of the products displayed at each event, Ch'oe and his acquaintances instead treated the fairs as opportunities for tourism and sightseeing (K. *kwan'gwang*).<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, other sources suggest that some did internalize the goals promoted by the cotton associations. As reported by the *Tonga ilbo*, one August day in 1925, amid the second cotton promotion plan's emphasis on intensive cultivation, an employee of the Yŏnggwang cotton association in South Kyŏngsang, Mr Sim, led two township clerks and around 20 students on an inspection of nearby cotton fields. Upon seeing a field of intercropped cotton, the group leapt into the offending field and violently destroyed the crop for breaking association rules, mirroring some of the methods adopted by agricultural technicians

<sup>50</sup> *Keinan no men*, pp. 85, 86.

<sup>51</sup> 'Naichi shijō ni okeru Chōsen rikuchimen no chōsho oyobi tansho'; Keishō nandō, *Bussan kyōshinkai jimu hōkoku* (Fuzan, 1928), p. 47.

<sup>52</sup> Chōsen sōtokufu, *Nōgyō gijutsukan kaidō shimon jikō tōshinsho* (Keijō, 1915), p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Ch'oe Pyŏngch'ae, *Ch'oe Pyŏngch'ae ilgi*, vol. 1, 1928.9.1; 1928.9.5; 1929.9.3; 1929.9.8. In his diary, Ch'oe records that he attended livestock fairs (K. *chi'uksan p'ump'yŏnghoe*) rather than those dedicated to cotton, but it is not hard to imagine Ch'oe maintaining a similar attitude regardless of the ostensible focus of the fair.



Figure 1. Poster advertising a cotton fair in North Chölla province (n.d.). Source: Jeonju Museum of History.

in the early years of colonial rule.<sup>54</sup> Though colonial officials would later congratulate themselves for reaching a point where such methods had become ‘unimaginable’,<sup>55</sup> the case from Yönggwang county suggests that in practice the responsibility for coercion and regulation had simply been transferred to the cotton associations and their members. While this shift invited broader participation from the rural population—in this

<sup>54</sup>‘Kahok han kwönöp haengjöng’, *Tonga ilbo*, 27 August 1925; ‘Zadankai kiroku’, p. 36.

<sup>55</sup>‘Zadankai kiroku’, p. 45.

case students from the local school—such an approach did not preclude the use of violence.

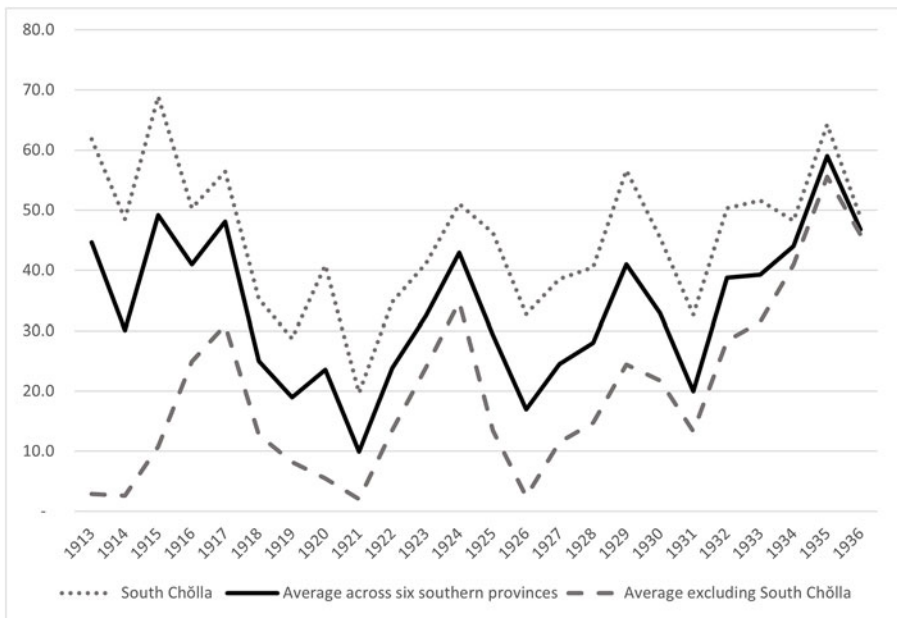
The ambivalent response to commercial cultivation is also revealed in statistics on the joint sales conducted through the associations. The joint sale of members' cotton formed a crucial link in the GKG's plans to expand cotton cultivation, with officials imagining the profits from such sales fuelling peasants' desire to voluntarily increase cultivation and adopt the resource-intensive methods prescribed by agricultural technicians. In some cases, cultivators did find ways to benefit economically from upland cotton. In a 1931 survey of cotton-growing households across three villages in South Chōlla province, the average income earned from the sale of upland cotton ranged from 235 to 413 yen, second only to that of rice cultivation (even marginally exceeding income from rice in Kwangjōng village).<sup>56</sup> However, as the survey was conducted as part of a promotional publication, the villages should be seen as representing officials' ideal scenario rather than the norm. More often than not cotton-cultivating households eschewed the joint sale of cotton in favour of alternatives. Between 1913 and 1928 (the final year of the second promotion plan), the proportion of the upland cotton harvest sold through association-managed joint sales programmes in the six southern provinces fluctuated between 20 to 40 per cent (see Figure 2). In many areas the proportion was much lower, as the average joint sales rate includes figures from South Chōlla province which consistently recorded a higher proportion of sales thanks in part to the adoption of a more favourable competitive bidding system.<sup>57</sup> Excluding data from South Chōlla, the joint sales figures appear even weaker, and in most years remained well below 20 per cent of the total harvest. Rather than sell their cotton through the associations, it appears that most cultivators preferred to either use upland cotton within the household or to ignore official sales channels in favour of local merchants and markets.<sup>58</sup>

Even when farmers adopted upland cotton as a commercial crop, the very emphasis on the profitability of cotton as an incentive to increase cultivation provided another limit to the GKG's cotton ambitions. From the mid-1920s, global cotton prices

<sup>56</sup>Zenra nandō nōkai, *Men no mura* (Kōshū, 1931), pp. 17, 18, 69, 99.

<sup>57</sup>On the influence of the competitive bidding system on South Chōlla sales, see Chōng An'gi, '1920–1930 nyōndae Ilche ūi myōnōp chōngch'aek'.

<sup>58</sup>Although there are few details on the extent of black-market upland cotton sales, it is notable that South Chōlla province introduced the competitive bidding system to counteract illicit sales from farmers seeking to avoid the fees charged by the cotton associations. In other provinces, weaker pre-existing cotton cultivation and limited transport connections may have limited the growth of a black market, although officials in South Ch'ungchōng cited a custom of barter between cotton cultivators in the (inland) Ch'ōngyang and Yesan region in exchange for salt-dried fish from the coastal regions as one explanation for weaker joint sales in the province. *Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 72, 73, 131. When comparing different avenues for the sale of cotton, the income received by farmers is just one consideration. The inconvenient location of association-managed sales and higher transportation costs may also have led some cultivators to avoid selling through the cotton associations. Indeed, officials in South Ch'ungch'ōng province proposed transportation subsidies to offset this problem. *Chōsen ni okeru menka*, pp. 129, 130. Still other cultivators may have preferred to maintain customary trading relationships, especially if local traders offered more favourable conditions for loans than the financial associations and the Agricultural and Industrial Bank which required burdensome credit checks from borrowers. H. Stephens, 'Agriculture and development in an age of empire: Institutions, associations, and market networks in Korea, 1876–1945', PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2017, pp. 212–217.



**Figure 2.** Proportion of upland cotton harvest sold through joint-sales programmes, percentage by province, 1913–1936. Source: Nichi-Man menka kyōkai, *Chōsen shibu, Mengyō tōkei* (Keijō, 1937), pp. 40–43.

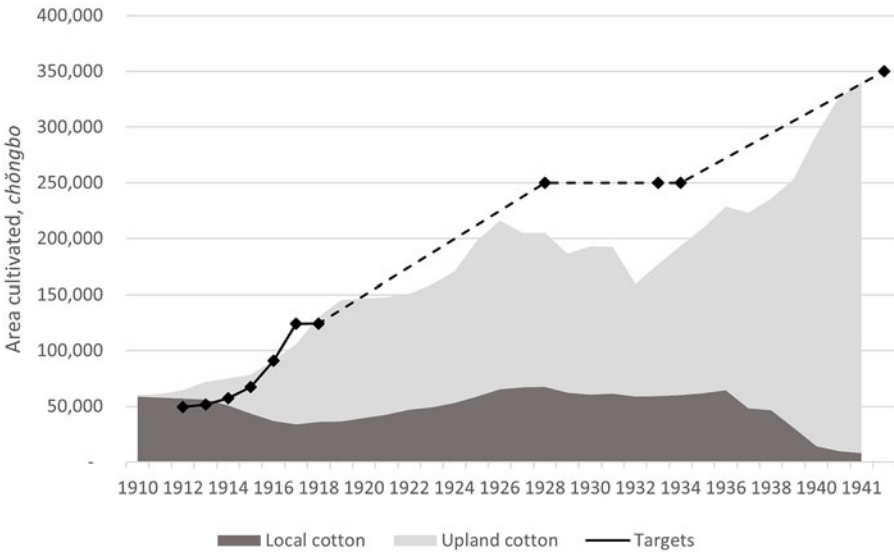
collapsed, causing the average price of cotton sold through the associations to fall from 27 yen per *kin* in 1924 to just 6.56 yen per *kin* in 1931. Shortly thereafter, cultivation of upland cotton reduced sharply as farmers shifted to alternative crops; from its peak in 1926 the acreage of upland cotton cultivated fell by as much as a quarter, dashing the GKG's ambition to reach an acreage of 250,000 hectares by 1928 (see Figure 3).<sup>59</sup> To the extent that cotton cultivators were sensitive to prices in the manner envisioned by colonial policy, the reduction in price undermined the promotion of cotton as a commercial crop. In order to achieve further increases in cultivation, colonial policy would have to rely on more than market incentives.

### Between capitalism and colonialism

Cotton prices began to recover from 1932, although to a significantly lower level than before the collapse. In 1935, for example, the average price of raw cotton sold through the associations was 16.95 yen per *kin* (in contrast to the pre-collapse peak of 27 yen per

<sup>59</sup>Nichi-man menka kyōkai, *Chōsen shibu, Chōsen no menka jijō* (Keijō, 1937), p. 88; Chōng An'gi, 'Cheguk ūi nongjōng'. While the impact of falling cotton prices was offset somewhat by the broader agricultural crisis, data collected by Ishizuka Shun show that cotton suffered a greater relative decline than comparable field crops such as rice, soybeans, barley, and millet. Moreover, to the extent that it was cultivated as a cash crop, households may have been more sensitive to price fluctuations for cotton rather than subsistence crops like barley. Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen sōran* (Keijō, 1933), p. 281.





**Figure 3.** Area of cotton cultivation and GGK targets, 1910–1942. *Source:* Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen sōtokufu tōkei nenpō* (multiple years); Kobayakawa Kurō, *Chōsen nōgyō hattatsushi* (Keijō, 1944), pp. 218–220, 373, 599. *Note:* Non-dashed line (1912–1918) indicates annual cultivation targets within the first cotton expansion plan. Dashed line (1919 onwards) indicates the final target for each cotton expansion plan.

kin in 1924).<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, cotton remained strategically significant within colonial agricultural policy. Textile manufacturing was still a key industry within Japan, not to mention an increasingly important source of industrial activity in colonial Korea.<sup>61</sup> As such, Japanese bureaucrats still aimed to secure a reliable source of raw cotton, the significance of which only increased with the emergence of economic blocs and a weakening commitment to free trade in the 1930s.<sup>62</sup> Announced in 1933, the third cotton promotion plan, which aimed to increase cultivation to 350,000 hectares by 1942, and 500,000 hectares by 1952, was designed to address these concerns by not only reversing the decline in cotton cultivation but expanding beyond the goals of the second promotion plan.<sup>63</sup>

The third cotton promotion plan aligned with additional priorities within the GGK. Alongside cotton, the global price for rice had collapsed in the late 1920s prompting a rural crisis in both Japan and Korea as farmers struggled to reconcile reduced incomes with the expansion of rice production encouraged in colonial policy. Particularly in Korea, where farmers had been pushed to invest in expensive new irrigation facilities as part of the Program to Increase Rice Production, many households found themselves burdened with debts and irrigation fees even prior to the decline in rice

<sup>60</sup>Chōsen no menka jijō, p. 88.

<sup>61</sup>C. J. Eckert, *Offspring of empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the colonial origins of Korean capitalism, 1876–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

<sup>62</sup>Chōsen no menka jijō, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup>Kobayakawa, *Chōsen nōgyō hattatsushi*, p. 598.

prices; from the late 1920s, a wave of bankruptcies and heightened conflict between landlords and tenants threatened the rural social order.<sup>64</sup> With politicians in Japan also confronting their own rural crisis, the large-scale export of Korean rice to Japan became politically precarious and the Japanese government took steps to limit the flow of Korean rice to Japan.<sup>65</sup> Such measures only increased the pressure on the GKK which, while ultimately favouring the interests of Japan, faced a delicate balancing act between the interests of rice producers and traders within Korea, many of whom had been nurtured and prospered under earlier imperial policies, and the backdrop of rural immiseration that colonial officials feared might spill over into unrest and rebellion.

The promotion of cotton cultivation thus addressed multiple concerns within the GKK. First, cotton was an alternative to rice. Amid efforts to reduce rice harvests and relieve the downward pressure on prices colonial officials turned to the promotion of alternative crops, especially cotton which, according to its boosters, benefitted from 'limitless demand within Japan'.<sup>66</sup> Cotton cultivation also fitted neatly within the logic of the Rural Revitalization Movement (RRM)—a nationwide programme that the GKK introduced to pacify rural unrest through a combination of patriotic campaigns, debt restructuring, and economic initiatives to raise household incomes. Although cotton prices remained low, officials and agricultural technicians nonetheless presented its cultivation as a crop that struggling households might raise to secure additional income.<sup>67</sup>

Where the price of cotton remained depressed, officials combined familiar methods with several new strategies. Like earlier cotton promotion schemes, the third plan assigned targets for the desired increases in cotton cultivation which local officials and agricultural technicians sought to achieve through the designation of 'guided' counties, the promotion of intensive cultivation, and exhortations to improve cultivation practices. However, in contrast to earlier years, women became the focus of new attention from colonial administrators as a source of labour for cotton cultivation. With cotton prices low, colonial officials encouraged women, whose casual wages were significantly lower than their male counterparts, to play larger roles in cotton cultivation. As one study in Chindo, South Chōlla province, reported, female agricultural labours earned around 20 *sen* per day in contrast to equivalent male wages of 35 *sen*, leading officials to promote labour-intensive cotton cultivation as particularly suited to hitherto 'unproductive' female labour. Across Korea, officials replicated a similar zeal to make better use of women's 'surplus labour' (J. *kaḡō rōryoku*), neatly blending the policy imperative to increase cotton cultivation with cultural and gendered

<sup>64</sup>Gragert, *Landownership under colonial rule*; Shin, *Peasant protest and social change*, pp. 68–74, 92–113; Hong et al., *Ilcheha Man'gyōng-gang*.

<sup>65</sup>Kobayakawa, *Chōsen nōgyō hattatsushi*, pp. 549–561; Y. Hayami, *Japanese agriculture under siege: The political economy of agricultural policies* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), pp. 37, 38; K. Smith, *A time of crisis: Japan, the Great Depression, and rural revitalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001).

<sup>66</sup>*Chōsen sōran*, p. 282.

<sup>67</sup>See, for example, Senda Sadao, 'Menka shōrei keikaku ni tsuite', *Jiriki kōsei ihō*, no. 18, 1935, pp. 11, 12. For more on the RRM, see G. W. Shin and D. H. Han, 'Colonial corporatism: The rural revitalization campaign, 1932–1940', in *Colonial modernity in Korea*, (eds) G. W. Shin and M. Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), pp. 70–96.

views of Korean women as economically unproductive and the RRM's stated goals of rationalizing household labour to increase rural incomes.<sup>68</sup>

Bringing new sources of labour into cotton cultivation presented some logistical challenges. Whereas earlier campaigns implemented through the cotton associations appealed to wealthier, male farmers who already owned, or could reliably lay claim to, sufficient farmland and capital to grow cotton, women and the poorer households who were the target of the RRM, for the most part, did not. Officials across the southern provinces thus encouraged the formation of new village-level organizations dedicated to the joint cultivation of cotton. Where individuals lacked the surplus land and capital to farm cotton, village-level groups were designed to allow cultivators to jointly lease land for upland cotton cultivation and, where necessary, jointly access finance to cover the upfront costs of fertilizers and tenancy contracts. Although some smaller groups dedicated to cotton cultivation also existed in earlier years, under the banner of the RRM and the third cotton promotion plan the new joint-cultivation groups shared a greater organizational uniformity and were designed to directly contribute to each province's cultivation targets.<sup>69</sup> In South Kyōngsang, for example, the provincial government planned to establish 1,200 cotton improvement groups (*K. myōnjak kaeranggye; J. mensaku kairyōkei*) so that nearly every village in the cotton-growing regions was home to at least one, and more often two, joint cultivation groups divided by gender. The groups borrowed money to pay for land and farming equipment, with collective loans repaid through the joint sale of the groups' cotton and additional profits shared among members. The groups did not operate in isolation, but were linked vertically to the infrastructure of the county agricultural associations (which superseded the cotton associations in 1926) via assigned agricultural technicians who provided guidance, hosted competitive fairs, facilitated the purchase and distribution of fertilizers and other inputs, and managed the joint sale of the groups' cotton through the agricultural associations.<sup>70</sup> No comprehensive data exist on the overall prevalence of village-level joint-cultivation groups, but scattered sources suggest they were widespread. In South Chōlla, the provincial government planned to create a total of 2,660 joint cultivation fields, each at least four *tsubo* in size (approximately 13 square metres), while

<sup>68</sup> Ōkuma Bunzō, 'Menka zōsan keikaku ni yori nōson fukyō dakai: "Fujin kyōdō kōsaku menpo" no shisetsu ni tsuite', *CNH*, vol. 8, no. 7, 1934, p. 68; 'Mensaku no yakushin to fujin rōsaku', *CNH*, vol. 7, no. 8, 1933, p. 115; 'Senfujin no gaigyō shōrei', *CNH*, vol. 4, no. 9, 1930, p. 118; 'Fujin mensaku shūkan no jishshi', *CNH*, vol. 5, no. 8, 1931, pp. 96, 97. Of course, a similar gap in male and female wages can be assumed in earlier years as well. However, it is noteworthy that colonial policies only began to explicitly target female labour as an economic strategy in the 1930s.

<sup>69</sup> For an example of earlier village-level cotton cultivation groups, see *Men no mura*, pp. 54–57.

<sup>70</sup> In terms of the promotion of cotton cultivation, much of the work of the earlier cotton associations continued unchanged through the county agricultural associations which continued to employ agricultural technicians, facilitate joint cotton sales and seed replacement programmes, and connect members to sources of credit and other materials. Rather than a change to the activities of the associations, the consolidation of the cotton associations into the county agricultural associations was intended to reduce costs and duplicate membership fees from the former system of multiple crop-specific associations. On this, see Mun, *Chōsen nōson dantaishi*, pp. 68–73, 77–92. The cotton cultivation groups in South Kyōngsang province were first established in 1928, but were easily adapted to meet the objectives of the third promotion plan and the RRM. *Keinan no men*, pp. 38–65; 'Mensaku shōrei nijū kanen keikaku juritsu', *CNH*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1933, p. 108; Mitsuyō [Miryang]-gun, *Mensaku shōrei shisetsu oyobi seiseki* (Mitsuyō-gun, 1935).

other provinces announced similar plans to expand cotton cultivation through smaller organizations operating under the umbrella of the agricultural associations.<sup>71</sup>

The 1930s thus saw several changes to colonial cotton campaigns. While some coercion had always accompanied increases in cultivation, the application of targets to local joint-cultivation groups routinized such pressures within villages, as did the extension of intensive 'guidance' to rural households under the RRM. The operation of joint-cultivation groups themselves also changed the character of cotton cultivation. Whereas earlier campaigns were designed to appeal to smallholders who might be persuaded to seek profits in commercial cultivation, in the 1930s officials focused on groups of women and poorer households which they urged to seek marginal improvements in household income through the joint cultivation of small parcels of land. Within the rhetoric of the RRM, profits were to be found in reducing costs (for example, through the use of female labour) as much as in the potential commercial value of cotton itself. The third promotion plan retained the earlier association-managed joint-sale system, extending it to the new joint-cultivation groups. However, while the associations had previously struggled to persuade members to sell cotton through the associations, the structure of the joint-cultivation groups—which often borrowed money to cover upfront costs—left members with few options but to sell their crop in order to repay joint debts and rental agreements. In contrast to earlier years, when joint sales through the cotton associations rarely exceeded 20 per cent of the harvest, by 1935 the cotton cultivation groups in Miryang county, South Kyōngsang province, sold a relatively high proportion of their cotton (reaching 80 per cent in 1934) through the agricultural association's joint sales programmes. So active was the programme, that the cotton technician for the Miryang county agricultural association, Im Chongguk, spent several days in Ōsaka in 1934 to investigate and promote the sale of Korean upland cotton, facilitated through the joint-cultivation groups.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the continued emphasis on joint sales, other aspects of agricultural campaigns in the 1930s limited the degree to which cultivators might appreciate the commercial benefits of cotton cultivation. Entwined with the rationale of the RRM, the joint-cultivation groups aimed to do more than increase the production and sale of upland cotton, and in many places the scope of cotton promotion activities grew to incorporate the promotion of diligence and thrift, and the rationalization of members' labour, spending, and savings practices. Within South Ch'ungch'ōng province's 412 special cotton villages, officials assigned cultivators a minimum savings rate of 50 *sen* for each *tan* cultivated, rising to 10 *yen* per *tan* for each of the 452 women's cotton groups, claiming that forced savings were necessary to enable the groups to purchase their own land and farming equipment in the future.<sup>73</sup> Officials in Chindo, South Chōlla province, similarly required the women's joint cotton cultivation groups to save a portion of their sales revenue, ostensibly to prevent the income being squandered by both the women and their husbands.<sup>74</sup> Thus, under the banner of reducing household

<sup>71</sup>'Menka zōsan keikaku ni yori nōson fukyō dakai', pp. 66–75; 'Rikuchimen shōrei', *CNH*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1930, p. 86; 'Mensaku no fukyū wo shōrei', *CNH*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1930, p. 87; 'Mensaku-kei hinpyōkai no seiseki', *CNH*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1932, p. 115; 'Fujin mensaku kyōdōho no secchi shōrei', *CNH*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1933, p. 114.

<sup>72</sup>*Mensaku shōrei shisetsu oyobi seiseki*, pp. 11, 12, 31–42.

<sup>73</sup>'Fujin mensakukei no chochiku', *CNH*, vol. 7, no. 11, 1933, p. 110.

<sup>74</sup>'Menka zōsan keikaku ni yori nōson fukyō dakai', p. 73.

debts and encouraging diligence and thrift, colonial officials introduced greater controls over the distribution of revenues from cotton sales. Once the key incentive that might inspire farmers to voluntarily produce and sell upland cotton, the profits from cotton sales became subject to forced savings schemes as the scope of colonial policies expanded to cover all aspects of the production and sale of cotton.

Against this backdrop, the shift to wartime mobilization campaigns in the late 1930s and 1940s was gradual rather than sudden, and incorporated many existing elements found among rural SGOs. From collecting information on members' cotton cultivation, agricultural association technicians increasingly assigned targets to villages and individual cultivators—a task that was facilitated by the associations' previous participation in the distribution of resources and management of seed renewal programmes. At the same time, as wartime demand increased, officials sought to further reduce the household consumption of cotton and increase its sale and distribution through the associations. From 1941, the GGK introduced a quota system for cotton and grain sales, which obliged cultivators to sell a designated amount of cotton through official channels at a government-set price. By this time, the colonial government had introduced official price limits for major goods in an attempt to limit inflation, finally severing government campaigns to increase cotton cultivation from the influence of capitalist markets.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

The expansion of cotton cultivation in colonial Korea combined elements of both coercion and capitalism. In the first decades of colonial rule, officials attempted to establish upland cotton as a commercial crop. Although officials justified the use of violence and coercion in the early years of cotton promotion to deal with the supposed 'ignorance' of local farmers, colonial policies proceeded on the assumption that profit-seeking farmers would, over time, voluntarily expand both the production and sale of the crop. The collapse of global cotton prices in the late 1920s, combined with persistent reluctance among farming households to respond to the commercial incentives of upland cotton imagined by officials, prompted a shift in cotton policies in the 1930s towards increased control and coercion. The application of production targets and the expansion of joint-cultivation schemes increased pressure on a wider range of rural households to adopt upland cotton cultivation, while the extension of credit to joint-cultivation groups accompanied increased sales of the crop through formal, government-linked, channels.

SGOs such as the cotton (and later agricultural) associations were central to the promotion of cotton cultivation in both periods, and indeed were instrumental in building the institutional frameworks that supported both commercial and coercive cultivation practices. The cotton associations directly facilitated the trade of upland cotton, managing joint sales programmes that connected farmers to global markets through set prices based on the Ōsaka market and regulating the conditions of transactions. What is more, the cotton associations attempted to embed practices of commercial cultivation among the rural population, prioritizing production for sale rather than

<sup>75</sup>Chōsen sōtokufu nōrinkyoku, *Chōsen no nōgyō* (Keijō, 1941), p. 273; Yi Songsun, *Ilcheha chōnsi nongōp chōngch'aek kwa nongch'on kyōngje* (Seoul: Sōnin, 2008), pp. 149–172.

household use, and promoting intensive farming techniques over those associated with peasant subsistence such as intercropping and mixed cultivation. Equally, in the 1930s the associations provided a crucial infrastructure to link joint-cultivation schemes and new farming populations with sales networks, agricultural technicians, credit, seeds, and other materials that enabled the expansion of cotton cultivation. Significantly, despite the earlier emphasis on commercial cultivation in colonial policies, by the late 1930s and early 1940s the associations were equally important in removing market incentives from cotton cultivation through the imposition of forced savings programmes and the later application of fixed prices and sales quotas.

The activities and influence of SGOs are thus crucial to understanding the colonial rural economy. In particular, the SGOs highlight Korea's distinctive experience with cotton cultivation. In contrast to colonial policies in Egypt or India, where officials relied on the work of merchants and bankers to influence colonial cotton markets, in Korea colonial cotton policies were almost entirely mediated through SGOs. The embedding of the colonial state through the cotton and agricultural associations helps to explain the rapid transition to upland cotton cultivation in southern Korea even as similar efforts to introduce new cotton strains struggled to achieve results in British India. Arguably, the presence and activities of the cotton associations across multiple networks—monitoring and developing seed distribution and renewal programmes; connecting farmers with financial capital and the oversight of agricultural technicians; and regulating and managing the sale of the resulting harvest—contributed to the expansion of upland cotton cultivation as much as, if not more than, the inherent commercial value of upland cotton.

The significance of the role of the SGOs, it must be appreciated, extends beyond their ability to implement colonial policy. The SGOs were the site where many rural households confronted colonial policies through their local implementation. Importantly, even in earlier years, when landlords and independent cultivators dominated membership of the cotton associations, the commercial cultivation of upland cotton was not without dispute. The persistence of practices such as mixed cultivation and slow participation in joint sales programmes challenge the notion that capitalist values spread easily among local elites as colonial officials sought willing partners in rural Korea. At the same time, the cotton associations also reveal the broad expansion of the colonial state in the rural economy. Even in later years when households faced greater pressures to cultivate cotton, coercion was applied not just through the actions of individual officials but through diffuse mechanisms ranging from cultivation and savings targets, village-level organizations, and the financial imperatives of joint-debt obligations that pushed cultivators into the increased cultivation and sale of cotton.

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