

Harvest of joy: A study of the Soviet Uzbekistan Korean millionaire kolkhoz “Politotdel” (1925-1985)

Kim Chang Jin

Kim Chang Jin, DSc (Political Sciences), Professor, SungKongHoe University. Yeon Dongro, Guro Gu, Seoul, Korea. E-mail: koruskim@gmail.com

EDN: MMZZUJ

Abstract. This study is an attempt of understanding the unique nature of the Soviet kolkhoz, which was both an agricultural production unit and a core institution of rural community. The issue of “advanced (or millionaire) kolkhozes” is one of those revealing the limitations and advantages of the Soviet kolkhoz system. Moreover, the experience of “advanced kolkhozes” from the mid-1930s to the 1980s allowed peasants to develop a form of local socialism from below through the “harvest of joy” rather than the “harvest of sorrow”. The “Politotdel” was one of the most famous Korean millionaire kolkhozes not only in Uzbekistan but also in the Soviet Union for about thirty years from the late 1950s. In 1953, when Hwang Man Gum with a strong entrepreneurial spirit was elected its leader, the “Politotdel” reached a turning point and made a leap forward in a short period of time. Its secrets of success were labor discipline ensured by efficient labor organization and fair wages, cultivation of kenaf and cotton as profitable main crops, mechanization (purchase of large agricultural machines after reorganization of MTS — Machine and Tractor Stations), and a solid feed base for livestock (due to the record corn harvest). The “Politotdel” and other Korean millionaire kolkhozes in Central Asia accumulated common assets of the local community in cooperation with rural intellectuals. Kolkhoz leaders, mid-level executives and farmers of the “Politotdel” were not passive individuals who simply obeyed the rules of the state command economy — they were innovators who created the “Soviet-style commons led from below” by peaceful multi-ethnic communities in rural society of Uzbekistan for decades. Through the historical experience of the advanced kolkhoz one can understand those institutional and practical characteristics of the Soviet kolkhoz that are not captured in the general picture of “failed kolkhoz agriculture and rural reality”.

Key words: Soviet kolkhoz, Korean millionaire kolkhoz, kolkhoz “Politotdel”, duality of kolkhoz, Korean struggle for recognition, commons, multi-ethnic peace community

Introduction

The Soviet kolkhoz has mainly a negative image in contemporary Russian and foreign studies, which is supported by numerous documents discovered by many researchers and proved by numerous case studies of the Soviet Union, making this negative image difficult to refute. In fact, intellectuals, who observed or remembered Soviet kolkhozes in their regions, confirm such negative evaluations (see, e.g., Zaslavskaya, 2000). Conquest’s work published in 1986 and translated

into Russian in 1988¹ also supported the negative perception of kolkhozes as a typical example of the “Cold War, anti-communist, liberal” Western works published in the Soviet Union/Russia in the late 1980s and deeply affecting many Russian researchers and intellectuals.

I share the critical view of the Soviet agricultural system and policy; however, it does not mean that Soviet agriculture and rural society were doomed to failure due to the kolkhoz system. The Soviet kolkhoz system should be seriously examined as one of the 20th-century farming styles². Moreover, successes and failures of the Soviet kolkhoz as a collective agricultural enterprise should not be assessed uniformly but according to their regional and ethnic features. It is also necessary to remember that the historical-sociological understanding of the kolkhoz will depend on its interpretation — as only an agricultural production unit or also a combination of core institutions of local communities, i.e., a unique duality. Thus, the issue of the so-called “millionaire/advanced kolkhoz” allows to reveal the limitations (problems) and advantages (opportunities) of the unique Soviet kolkhoz system.

There were about 3,000 advanced kolkhozes in the Soviet Union in the early 1960s³; however, this the phenomenon is still poorly researched (Kim Chang Jin, 2024a, b; 2025). Although some Russian scholars mention advanced kolkhozes in their works on the kolkhoz system (Ilyinykh, 2024; Kondrashin, 1997), no paper or monograph focuses on the advanced kolkhoz as a research object. There are several Korean studies and biographies about the Soviet Korean millionaire kolkhozes in Central Asia⁴, mainly character-centered and nationalistic and, more importantly, ignoring the duality of the Soviet kolkhoz as both an agricultural production unit and a core social institution of the local community.

This study focuses on the “Politotdel” kolkhoz in the Tashkent Region (Uzbekistan) as the famous representative of the Korean advanced kolkhozes for thirty years from the late 1950s. The study aims

1. Even if we ignore the extra-academic circumstances — that the author once collaborated with the British Intelligence Service and the book was a “political enterprise” financed by Ukrainians living in the United States — the book seems to have contributed to the extremely negative image of agricultural collectivization and kolkhoz system in the West.
2. Van der Ploeg (2008; 2013) argues that Marx’s concept of the mode of production does not explain the phenomenon of the “persistent peasant class” and distinguishes between capitalist farming, managerial farming, and peasant farming. See, e.g., Preface in the Korean edition of his *Peasants and the Art of Farming: A Chayanovian Manifesto* (Seoul: Ttabee, 2013, pp. 12–13).
3. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 20.02.1962. This was the Soviet newspaper published in Kazakhstan in Korean.
4. These works are limited in research objects, temporal scope and materials used, they do not consider connections between the Far East before 1937 and the Central Asia after deportation.

at revealing the factors of its economic success as an agricultural production unit and its social-cultural achievements as a social mechanism that ensured prosperity of the village community. There were dozens of successful advanced kolkhozes run by Soviet Koreans in various parts of Central Asia, mainly in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, from the 1940s to the 1980s⁵.

First, to clarify the historical and sociological significance of the issue of advanced Soviet kolkhozes, including the Central Asian Korean millionaire kolkhozes, we need to acknowledge that it was a unique form of peasant economy and communal lifestyle in the centrally planned economy. Kolkhoz was not only controlled by the state, but it also had institutional and policy support for agricultural production (land, credit, machinery, temporary labor, construction of rural infrastructure, etc.). Although the advanced kolkhoz leaders and members were to achieve the state production goals, they did not passively obey "commands" from Moscow but demonstrated flexibility both inside and outside the kolkhoz system as often as possible, actively created various opportunities for overcoming limitations imposed by the Soviet system and policies.

Second, the general idea that "success and failure of the Soviet kolkhoz depended on who the chairman of the management committee was" should be verified by examining specific situations in different kolkhozes. The Soviet kolkhoz, transformed into a large-scale agricultural enterprise after the integration of small kolkhozes in the 1950s, was no longer an organization that could be entirely controlled and managed by one chairman. His leadership had to be proven by the ability to ensure positive labor motivation with efficient labor organization, rational farm management (selection of profitable crops, compliance with the farming schedule, scientific approach, advanced technologies, mechanization, etc.), and fair distribution of income. Otherwise, the leader would be distrusted by peasant members, and it would be difficult for the district party organization to recommend him as a kolkhoz leader.

We need to consider the Soviet kolkhoz, especially advanced kolkhoz, in terms of its organic duality. To do this, first, we need to understand kolkhoz leadership, labor organization, farm management methods, mechanisms by which increased productivity led to improved living conditions for villagers through the accumulation of various common funds, and community activities of the village. More specifically, kolkhoz leadership should be examined in terms of the leader's personality, organization management and labor motivation methods, factors of increased productivity (crop cultivation and livestock breeding suitable for each branch and district), mechanization, and advanced farming methods. Second, to consider social and cultural achievements of the advanced kolkhoz, we need to understand

5. Since the 1950s, their number has been estimated at around 50.

how diverse and numerous common funds were accumulated, how the community shared space created with these achievements, and features of communal activities.

Kolkhoz “Politotdel”: A brief history

The “Politotdel” was organized in April 1925 in the wilds of the Chirchik River in the Tashkent Region of Uzbekistan. It was different from most Korean kolkhozes that had been deported to Central Asia from the Russian Far East in the fall of 1937. In 1933, the kolkhoz got its name “Politotdel” in honor of the newly established political department of the recently organized MTS (Hwang Man Gum, 1977; 1981).

This tiny Soviet Korean kolkhoz had only simple tools such as shovels and hoes (Kim Brutt, 2019). Members had to expand their farms in thickets teeming with mosquitoes, snakes, and howling jackals, uprooting tough wild roots mostly by hand. Household items were also made of reeds (Kozlov, Son Jin Pa, 1961). In the first year, only 40 hectares of rice were cultivated; the rest of the land was reed beds and swamps. Many kolkhoz members lived in old, dilapidated houses with clay roofs, cave-houses, and yurts (tents).

In the fall of 1937, 100 Korean families from the Primorsky Region joined the “Politotdel” as new members. By that time most of the swamps were dried out by the hard work of the “Politotdel” members, and the kolkhoz was in dire need of labor for farming. The “Politotdel” further expanded in 1939 by merging with the “New Life” kolkhoz. However, many kolkhoz members still worked more in their personal gardens than at the collective farm (Hwang Man Gum, 1977), because the kolkhoz productivity was low, and its members’ incomes were meager. Thus, the “Politotdel” remained a typical backward kolkhoz until the early 1950s.

In 1953, the “Politotdel” had 874 hectares, and the average yield per hectare was only 35.5 centners of kenaf, 23 centners of rice, and 35 centners of alfalfa. The livestock sector continued to suffer losses. The total cash income of the kolkhoz was only 185,500 rubles. Labor discipline was extremely weak, and the level of agricultural technology was very low⁶. On the other hand, the area of individual gardens had increased to almost one hectare. Some kolkhoz members lost hope and moved to other kolkhozes. At that moment, Hwang Man Gum appeared as a savior. He was a communist, had worked as an agricultural officer in the party committee of the Upper Chirchik district of the Tashkent Region, and had experience as the chairman of the nearby kolkhoz “Lenin’s Road”. On October 23, 1953, he was

6. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 30.06.1970.

elected chairman of the management committee at the general meeting of the “Politotdel” (Hwang Man Gum, 1961: 4).

1954 was a major turning point for the “Politotdel”: the new chairman began to change labor discipline by reducing the over-extended individual gardens. He energetically rationalized labor organization by recruiting talents according to individual abilities, introducing new farming technologies, pursuing agricultural mechanization policy, and developing measures to satisfy the material needs of the kolkhoz members. The results were not long in coming: yields of the main crops, such as kenaf, cotton and corn, increased significantly, which allowed to pay members rice and other grains in advance. Due to this success, the members’ attitude towards collective labor began to change, and the kolkhoz began its rapid development. After 1954, five nearby poor farms were incorporated into the “Politotdel”, further expanding its area.

Thus, the history of the “Politotdel” is divided into two periods — before and after the leadership of Hwang Man Gum. He was the head of the “Politotdel” from 1953 to 1985, making it one of the most famous advanced kolkhozes not only in Uzbekistan but also in the Soviet Union. In addition to his outstanding leadership, one of the major factors of the rapid growth of this kolkhoz was reorganization of the MTS in 1958, which allowed the kolkhoz to purchase a lot of agricultural machinery, including tractors and combines, and use them to its advantage, which increased autonomy and efficiency of farming. The government decision to raise agricultural product prices in the early 1960s also contributed to increasing the kolkhoz profitability. These state policies were general for the Soviet Union, but only such advanced kolkhozes as the “Politotdel” managed to turn them into a great positive opportunity for their development⁷.

In 1960, the cotton harvest of the “Politotdel” increased to 43.7 centners per hectare, and the kenaf harvest — to 202 centners (35.5 in 1953); accordingly, the total income of the kolkhoz reached 57 million rubles (Kozlov, Son Jin Pa, 1961: 3). It was a huge leap compared to seven years ago. If the election of Hwang Man Gum in 1953 was a turning point for the kolkhoz organization, then the 6-meter corn grown by the corn foreman Lee Lyubovi in 1960 symbolized the rapid growth of this kolkhoz. Her harvest of 1,650 centners per hectare on the farm of her working group surpassed the record for Iowa farms in the United States. This increase in the production of corn, a nutritious forage crop, led to high profitability in the livestock sector. Deeply moved by this remarkable success, Khrushchev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, visited the kolkhoz in November 1961. He traveled around the Soviet Union

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Soviet Uzbekistan
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7. Many backward kolkhozes experienced financial difficulties, including going into debt to purchase heavy equipment through the MTS.

and promoted the success story of the “Politotzel” at every agricultural workers meeting⁸.

The production of kenaf, the most profitable crop of the “Politotdel” and a very useful industrial raw material in the postwar USSR, also increased significantly. Kenaf workers recorded world-class production, surpassing traditional producers of this subtropical crop — Brazil, India and Pakistan (Khakimov, 1961: 3). Brezhnev, the Soviet leader after Khrushchev, visited the kolkhoz in September 1970 to see this Soviet Korean collective farm (Hwang Man Gum, 1981: 38). The Norwegian prime minister who visited the “Politotdel” said that if other Soviet kolkhozes were like it, they would definitely adopt its management methods (Kim Brutt, 2019: 105).

As the kolkhoz income increased, its indivisible fund also increased, leading to extensive irrigation and land improvement works, and improvement of living conditions. In just a few years after the election of the new leader, living standards in the “Politotdel” improved significantly, just like those in the city. As a result, the village landscape changed completely — vast fields, well-fed cattle on highly productive farms, first-class tractor service and repair shops, colorful gardens, asphalt roads, and bright residential areas. In the early 1960s, one author described the central kolkhoz village as follows: “When someone enters the kolkhoz “Politotzel” village, he sees wide asphalt roads, European-style houses for farm workers surrounded by forests, large production facilities, various livestock complexes, saunas, schools, clubs, hospitals, shops, and so on” (Kozlov, Son Jin Pa, 1961: 19–20).

As the rural labor was industrialized, the village of the “Politotdel” began to turn into a type of garden city. Due to comprehensive mechanization of agricultural work and animal husbandry, in the 1970s the kolkhoz members were producing in just one hour what they had produced in a whole day in 1953. The annual income of the kolkhoz was 9.5 million rubles, and the average annual salary of its members — almost 1,700 rubles⁹. The material standard of living in this “truly agricultural city” was higher than in most cities. In 1974, the total monetary income of the kolkhoz exceeded 10.48 million rubles, from which 2.34 million rubles were sent to indivisible fund, 535 thousand — into social consumption fund, and 4.857 million — into personal consumption fund (Hwang Man Gum, 1977: 7; Hwang Man Gum, 1962: 10).

In the 1960s — 1970s, the “Politotdel” management committee, which had accumulated significant funds, focused on building communal social and cultural infrastructure for a dignified and enjoyable everyday life. With these funds, asphalt roads, electricity, water and gas facilities were built, and construction materials, transporta-

8. At the Tashkent Regional Council on November 13, 1961, Khrushchev mentioned the “Politotdel” as an example (Pak Deok Yeon, 1963: 9–10). He also praised it in the North Caucasus and Kazakhstan.

9. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 30.06.1970.

tion equipment and credits were provided to the kolkhoz workers to help them build affordable but good houses. In addition, they did not spare large investments in education, health care, leisure, culture and sports facilities. In the 1970s, the central village and each branch of the "Politotdel" had several primary and secondary schools, ten kindergartens, a cultural center (for 1,200 people), two large stadiums, a hotel (for 40 guests), a department store, a restaurant, a wedding hall, and four saunas with a barber shop and a beauty salon. These facilities were comparable to those in large cities. The kolkhoz had an automatic telephone system with about 500 numbers, three radio broadcasting rooms, a health center (for 100 people), and a youth camp (for 200 people). The kolkhoz football team played in the All-Union B Group. The "Politotdel" became a multi-ethnic peaceful community in which between 13 and 19 nationalities lived together at different times (Hwang Man Gum, 1977: 131).

In 1980, the "Politotdel" was a typical example of the situation when the difference in living conditions between urban and rural workers almost disappeared. The kolkhoz infrastructure and housing problems were completely resolved. The annual income of each household exceeded 7,000 rubles, and we should add to it income from individual gardens, various social benefits and subsidies (Hwang Man Gum, 1981: 28). In the central village of the kolkhoz and its branches, 900 children were cared for in 13 excellent kindergartens, 4,300 children studied in 7 secondary schools; there was a hospital with 120 beds and a clinic with 250 beds. At weddings held mainly after the autumn harvest in the event hall, the kolkhoz orchestra played live music. 700 kolkhoz pensioners led a comfortable life due to pensions paid by the kolkhoz in addition to state pensions (Hwang Man Gum, 1981: 36–38). How did this success become possible in the arid lands of Central Asia, on the southeastern outskirts of the Soviet Union?

Leadership: Personality, organization management and labor motivation

Hwang Man Gum was an entrepreneurial leader who managed the collective farm profitably and improved the living and cultural standards of farmers, looking to the future of the kolkhoz and the Soviet countryside. Many chairmen of Korean millionaire kolkhozes in Central Asia were of this type — competent, honest and thrifty, i.e., completely different from many other Soviet kolkhoz leaders (Kostyashov, 2015) — incompetent, lazy, corrupt and often alcoholics.

Hwang Man Gum's most urgent task was to ensure labor discipline. Kolkhoz members who could but did not want to work accounted for 30–40% of the kolkhoz labor force. From his first day, Hwang Man Gum visited each facility and workshop of the farm and met with enthusiasts. He taught workers by example, and they nev-

er left workplaces. As a result, the cotton harvest that used to take five months was completed in one month. Hwang Man Gum appointed several competent and experienced people, including socialist labor heroes, as work team leaders. He also took steps to reduce the area of too large individual plots, which led to some dissatisfied members leaving the kolkhoz. Due to such measures taken to strengthen labor discipline, the kolkhoz received its first modest income in 1954: members received 0.45 rubles in cash and 3.6 kg of grain per working day as a year-end dividend.

The second task of the leader was the expansion of agricultural land through restoration of wetlands and land improvement. In 1955, the kolkhoz members received 3.5 rubles in cash and 4.5 kg of grain per working day, which made them believe that the kolkhoz was developing and that a more prosperous and civilized life was possible in the future (Hwang Man Gum, 1961: 5). In 1955, agricultural production of the "Politotdel" with its improved labor discipline was already catching up with the advanced kolkhozes of the district.

Hwang Man Gum energetically implemented policies to rationalize labor organization based on the principles of recruiting people with enthusiasm and ability, applying new agricultural technology, actively introducing mechanization, and satisfying the material interests of members. As a result, the country recorded the highest yields of kenaf, cotton, and corn. The entrepreneurial leader Hwang Man Gum knew how to select and cultivate crops that provided the best economic returns with a limited amount of labor, and he was awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labor.

In 1958, when the opportunity arose to purchase a large quantity of agricultural machinery from the MTS, the "Politotdel" bought 85 tractors, 55 cars, many connecting vehicles and dozens of electric motors, which allowed for mechanization of the kolkhoz farming (Hwang Man Gum, 1962: 14–15). Additional profits were generated by increased profitability in the livestock sector due to increased corn production, and also by greenhouse vegetable cultivation and quail farming. Hwang Man Gum was a leader with outstanding business acumen.

In 1960, the "Politotdel" became a large multi-sector farm with high profits in kenaf, cotton, corn production and animal husbandry. In particular, the development of the "Politotdel" as a kenaf-specialized farm in 1958 and the understanding of the organic link between corn production and livestock sector reflected Hwang Man Gum's pioneering vision. In 1960, Khrushchev chose the kolkhoz as one of the lighthouses of agriculture, which turned the "Politotdel" into a district advanced collective farm with an excellent learning center (Hwang Man Gum, 1961: 5–6).

Hwang Man Gum understood that high productivity, high living standards, social welfare, and cultural and sports activities were interrelated. The amateur art troupe of the "Politotdel" flourished, and

its football team could compete not only in Uzbekistan but also in the Soviet Union. Hwang Man Gum knew exactly what was needed to keep the youth in the kolkhoz near the capital of the republic Tashkent.

Hwang Man Gum had excellent political skills in establishing relations that could secure the continued support of high-ranking party and government leaders. As the Hero of Socialist Labor, in the 1960s and 1970s he was elected as a deputy of the Supreme Council of the Uzbek Republic and as a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan; he attended the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow as an Uzbek representative¹⁰.

However, as the leader of the advanced agricultural production unit of the Soviet Union Hwang Man Gum did not fully support the state centralized economic planning in which production goals were often changed during the course of work. He had a critical perception of the top-down planned economic system and openly expressed his views that it was not efficient for the kolkhoz agricultural production to carry out plans handed down from Moscow or Tashkent, since such plans did not reflect the situation on the ground. Therefore, the production plan should take into account that each kolkhoz had different main products, location and soil features, i.e., the plan of the Soviet central agency and the kolkhoz's plan should be combined. According to Hwang Man Gum, production goals should be set per hectare for each area within the kolkhoz rather than be the same for the entire kolkhoz¹¹.

The "Politotdel" management committee made efforts to strengthen the capabilities and quality control of mid-level executives such as branch managers, work team leaders, work division leaders and mechanics based on their abilities and performance. Not only communists or close to the leadership were appointed. The management committee decided to limit the land plots of households, but the kolkhoz took responsibility for material security of the farm members; took measures to increase labor productivity through strengthening labor discipline, while paying attention to combining personal and social interests (Hwang Man Gum, 1962: 25).

In the early 1960s, the land area of the "Politotzel" was 5,577 hectares, of which 3,290 were cultivated, 427 were fallow lands, 195 —

10. Newspaper "Lenin's Banner", 24.02.1967; 18.01.1973; 30.05.1975.

11. Newspaper "Lenin's Banner", 15.12.1964. However, Hwang Man Gum's 32-year brilliant career as a leader of the millionaire kolkhoz "Politotdel" came to an end when he was arrested during his business trip to Moscow in December 1985. He was accused of being involved in the so-called Uzbek "cotton scandal". After three and a half years in prison, Hwang Man Gum was released in May 1989 as innocent, but then the Soviet Union, not to mention the "Politotdel", was in decline (Kim Brutt, 2019).

pastures, and 1,537 — grazing lands. The total number of members was 2,092, of which 1,598 were able-bodied¹². Of the cultivated land, 1,224 hectares were given over to kenaf, 405 — to cotton, 462 — to corn, and 419 — to alfalfa (Kozlov, Son Nin Pa, 1961: 4). During this period, the “Politotdel” had 14 combined work teams, i.e., tractor-field work teams: each of them, consisting of four cotton, seven kenaf, one vegetable-bean, one fiber crop-corn, and one corn group, was assigned a fixed amount of cultivated land, tractors, agricultural machinery, and livestock for a specified period of time (Khakimov, 1961: 8); each was given seasonal, monthly and ten-day tasks by the management committee and had to report their results to agronomists. The labor of all members and mechanics was calculated by the accounting staff. Members were paid a monthly advance, and a final settlement was made at the end of the year.

The kolkhoz party organization played a very important role in selecting and distributing talents in each sector and work team. The kolkhoz party secretary was considered a vice-chairman of the management committee. Although the party organization was basically ideological-political, its activities¹³ were not limited to propaganda or organization of kolkhoz members, i.e., the main task of the Soviet kolkhoz was to increase agricultural productivity, and the party organization took it for granted that the kolkhoz would serve that national task.

Agricultural and livestock productivity

Until the mid-1940s, the main crop of the “Politotdel” was rice, the traditional staple food of Koreans; however, later it mainly grew kenaf, cotton and corn, which were highly profitable crops. During the Soviet era, the Russian Republic was basically a grain producing region, and the state production plan was applied quite strictly, which made it difficult for kolkhozes to grow highly profitable crops. On the

12. Pensioners and students studying long-term programs at distant educational institutions were excluded from the list of able-bodied persons.

13. In the early 1960s, more than 80 party members worked as propagandists, instructors and reporters for the “Politotdel”. Many of them were leaders, foremen, teachers, doctors, engineers and kolkhoz innovators. They communicated and explained party and government decisions to farm workers and provided information on domestic and international situations. The center of such mass political activity were five propaganda offices especially active during election periods. The party organization published the wall newspaper “Thunderbolt” on the kolkhoz news and posted the results of the socialist competition on the notice board.

contrary, Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, enjoyed the advantage of relatively flexible crop cultivation¹⁴.

The turning point in the simultaneous increase in productivity in both agricultural and livestock sectors of the “Politotdel” was the corn harvest that surprised the world in 1960. Lyubov Li’s corn brigade (work team) set an unprecedented record of 1,850 centners per hectare of green corn, which ensured a solid feed base for animal husbandry. This record became widely known in the USSR, and in 1962 the kolkhoz organized the “youth corn growing school” to disseminate Lyubov Li’s experience. In 1962–1963, more than 700 kolkhoz and sovkhoz members, including from other republics, completed these training courses (Pak Deok Yeon, 1963: 8–9).

Kenaf and cotton with their high productivity determined the continued growth of the millionaire kolkhoz. The average yield of kenaf, a source of industrial raw materials, increased from 36 centners in 1953 to 215 centners in 1961, and Cheon Chil Seong brigade got 264 centners — the world record at that time (Khakimov, 1961: 41). During this period, the total production of kenaf increased more than tenfold (Hwang Man Gum, 1962: 26), while cotton yields, due to advanced sowing methods and mechanization, reached 50 centners per hectare in 1961 (Hwang Man Gum, 1962: 39). In general, from 1953, the production of kenaf has increased 14.4 times, of meat — more than 50 times, wool — 34 times, eggs — 98 times in ten years (Hwang Man Gum, 1961: 6–9; Khakimov, 1961: 7–8). In the early 1960s, corn grower Li Lyubov, milker Kwon Ro Ja and pig breeder Nikolai Kim were the “three lighthouses” of increased productivity in the “Politotdel”, and this high productivity increased the total income of the kolkhoz 295 times — from 193,000 rubles in 1953 to 57 million rubles in 1960. In 1966, after the Soviet currency reform in 1961 (the nominal value was devalued by 1/10), total revenue amounted to 8,755,000 rubles, of which net profit — 1,706,400 rubles (Hwang Man Gum, 1962: 23).

In 1966, the total income of the “Politotdel” was 8,774,906 rubles, of which 7,774,629 came from crops, 1,878,815 — from cotton, and 839,333 — from livestock; the total expenditures amounted to 1,477,497 rubles, of which 290,707 were spent on mineral fertilizers, 44,555 — on pesticides, 59,448 — on seeds, 120,118 — on forage, 98,343 — on fuel, 148,375 — on insurance, 459,975 — to support personnel, and 105,436 — on the repair of tractors and agricultural machinery¹⁵. The distribution of net profit was as follows: income

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14. This is why Uzbekistan had the largest share of advanced kolkhozes in the Soviet Union from the late 1930s (Ilyinykh, 2024: 109).

15. Central State Archive of the Uzbek SSR (1966). Collection 90, Inventory 10, File 1722, p. 127.

tax — 303,272 rubles, indivisible fund — 943,229, mutual aid fund and pension fund — 15,517, living and cultural fund — 269,287¹⁶.

In 1971, the total farmland of the “Politotdel” was 6,305 hectares (4,105 — irrigated land, 2,200 — arable land); it had 2,477 cows and 11,000 horses. As for agricultural machinery, there was a high level of mechanization — 225 tractors, 15 grain harvesting combines, more than 50 cotton collectors, 65 kenaf peelers, 110 cars, 226 electric motors, and more than 150 other units of equipment (Hwang Man Gum, 1977: 7).

In 1970, the average cotton yield in Uzbekistan was 27 centners per hectare, while the yield of the “Politotdel”, which started its cultivation only in 1958, was much higher — about 35 centners (economic yield was 25 centners per hectare¹⁷); the yield of kenaf reached 178 centners and of corn — 70 centners. In 1973, there were 1,800 hectares of cotton fields with the yield of 40 centners per hectare, and cotton harvesting was 93% mechanized¹⁸. As a result, in 1975 the total income of the “Politotdel” was 11 million rubles¹⁹. In 1984, the cotton yield reached 40.18 centners per hectare and kenaf yield — 235 centners; each cow produced 5,028 kg of milk and milk production more than doubled compared to the 1960s²⁰; thus, the total income of the kolkhoz in 1984 increased to 16,558,000 rubles²¹. In 1985, kenaf harvesting was fully mechanized (including fiber separators).

Table 1. Sown area of industrial crops and production²²

Crop	Sown area	Irrigation area	Total production	Average yield
Cotton	1,410	1,410	52,011	36
Kenaf				
Seed	140	140	921	6
Stem	1,595	1,595	286,554	179
Seed and stem	140	140	6,746	48

16. Central State Archive of the Uzbek SSR (1966). Collection 90, Inventory 10, File 1722, p. 128

17. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 30.06.1970.

18. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 25.10.1973.

19. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 14.01.1976.

20. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 06.02.1985.

21. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 02.02.1985.

22. Central State Archive of the Uzbek SSR (1966). Collection 90, Inventory 10, File 1722, p. 109.

Kim Chang Jin

Harvest of joy:

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Korean millionaire

kolkhoz “Politotdel”

(1925-1985)

By the mid-1960s, the “Politotdel” reached its peak — the highest level in terms of agricultural and livestock productivity and the standard of living even at the level of the Soviet Union, which was only ten years after 1953, when it was considered backward. The period of Brezhnev’s rule is called stagnation by Western historians, and the “Politotdel”, an advanced kolkhoz located near the capital of the Republic of Uzbekistan, was effectively responding to the challenges of accelerating urbanization and continuing growth. As of January 1, 1967, the “Politotdel” consisted of 2,297 households in 14 villages; the total number of kolkhoz members (regardless of participation in labor activities) was 5,988, with children — 11,623; 4,531 were able-bodied over 16 years of age (2,159 men, 2,372 women). There were 613 workers in the auxiliary enterprise, transportation and kolkhoz association (not engaged in agriculture), and 16 participants of various training courses.

There are several types of kolkhoz communal funds — indivisible, consumption, welfare, and cultural funds, of which indivisible fund is the economic basis of the kolkhoz system and financial resource for expanded reproduction. The source of these funds is cash income from the sale of agricultural produce. According to the Article 12 of the 1935 Kolkhoz Rules, the kolkhoz is to allocate 12–20% of its annual financial income to indivisible fund²³. The table below shows the trend of growth of indivisible fund in 1953–1960, when the “Politotdel” was turning from backward to advanced. From 1958, its results exceeded the standards set by the Kolkhoz Rules.

Table 2. Growth of indivisible funds: 1953–1960 (Hwang Man Gum, 1961: 27)

Year	1953	1958	1960
Deduction amount (in thousands of rubles)	29	627.7	1,374.4
Share of total income (%)	15.4	20	25

Consumption fund was mainly used for housing, leisure, education and cultural activities of villagers. If the kolkhoz wanted to pay additional pensions to retired members, a separate social security fund²⁴ was created. Cultural fund, which provided opportunities for recre-

23. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 13.09.1950.

24. According to the decision of the Soviet Cabinet of Ministers on September 4, 1964, kolkhozes were to deduct 2.5% of their total income in 1964 and 4% in 1965 to the social security fund. Pensioners working in kolkhozes or agricultural institutions were to receive full pension, regardless of their salary.

ation and attendance at artistic performances, also played a significant role. In 1966, the “Politotdel” paid 878 rubles to 23 elderly and disabled members and 376,302 rubles to 35 pregnant women; 2,319 rubles were allocated for the education of the talented youth, including 730 rubles in scholarships; 187,431 rubles were allocated for activities of cultural institutions and cultural events, 235 rubles — for filming movies and staging plays. The kolkhoz paid its members working in these sectors a salary of 137,212 rubles²⁵.

The high level of welfare in this Korean advanced kolkhoz can be clearly seen in health care, recreation and cultural life. In the mid-1960s, the “Politotdel” had a 100-bed hospital, a pharmacy, a clinic, six medical centers, a maternity hospital, four bathhouses (for 350–400 people) and a sanatorium (for 25 people per shift; for about 250–300 people per year)²⁶. The “Politotdel” and three neighboring Korean kolkhozes built a joint tuberculosis sanatorium (Hwang Man Gum, 1977: 111). In 1970, about 4,000 students were studying in one shift in the kolkhoz village schools. Each child’s stay in 13 kindergartens and nurseries from morning until evening was paid 200 rubles per year. Thus, the problem of preschool childcare and school education was completely resolved²⁷.

After the war, the Soviet rural policy can be summarized as “eliminating the gap between urban and rural areas” in terms of living standards. The “Politotdel” seemed to be an example of this policy. The advanced Korean kolkhoz in Central Asia reached the peak of the Soviet-style agricultural socialist civilization in the 1960s: people visiting the “Politotdel” were struck by the kolkhoz central village which resembled “a completely modern small town”: asphalt roads, green poplars on both sides of roads, two- and three-story school buildings, standard houses with all amenities, a beautiful cultural center, a clean hospital, and social service buildings, including a studio and a hairdressing salon. Residents lived in houses with four to six rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, water supply, sewerage, gas facilities and a garden with flower beds and orchards. There was even a system for ordering groceries and snacks by phone, which were delivered right away. At the “happiness hall”, young people held weddings and the elderly held Korean-style 60th-birthday parties²⁸.

Club and cultural center were the busiest places in everyday life of the kolkhoz members: films were shown almost every day, youth balls were held, and various amateur art groups actively participated. In 1966, in the kolkhoz villages of the “Politotdel” there were 5 cultural centers and clubs with 2,627 seats, 3 libraries with 8,710 seats, 13

25. Central State Archive of the Uzbek SSR (1966). Collection 90, Inventory 10, File 1722, p. 133.

26. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 06.09.1967.

27. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 30.06.1970.

28. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 29.01.1967.

kindergartens and preschools (812 children), 9 schools (2,917 children), 1 shoe repair shop, 3 hairdressing salons, 1 health resort, 4 saunas, 1 restaurant, 1 bakery, 43 kolkhoz apartments with 3,790 residents, and 1 stadium with 7,000 seats²⁹. The "Politotdel" library, perhaps the largest in the Soviet countryside at that time, had four rooms on the second floor of the palace of culture, 13,000 volumes and 800 readers (the library was transferred to the district administration in 1987)³⁰.

In 1955, the Amateur Art Troupe, the Youth Dance Troupe (Concert Troupe), was organized for the kolkhoz youth. In 1970, it was awarded the title of People's Dance Troupe. This troupe had the composer Timofei Hwang as its music instructor and consisted of nine musicians (performers), four singers, and seven dancers. The average age of the troupe members was 22. Its singers, including the mechanic Vladimir Kang and the telephone company operator Yevgeny Hwang, had not only Korean and Japanese songs, but also Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian and Spanish, and even an Uzbek dance in the repertoire.

In 1976, the "Politotdel" had not only a palace of culture, an open-air cinema and a club but also eight branches of music school, five libraries and a dance research institute led by actors from the Navoi State Grand Theater in Tashkent. Every performance of the youth chorus was sold out (1,200 seats). The chorus was close to the level of a professional art troupe, and in 1976 it received the Lenin Communist Youth League (Komsomol) Prize for its great contribution to the cultural life of the rural working youth (Hwang Man Gum, 1961: 36). In the late 1970s, the "Politotdel" was the first in the district to introduce the position of deputy chairman for culture, responsible for cultural education, music school, stadium, dance studio and three ensembles including the youth one (the first deputy chairman was Moisei Huang³¹). Cultural workers had the same rights as agricultural, for example, all members of the youth dance troupe were provided with comfortable housing³².

The "Politotdel", an advanced kolkhoz in the late 1950s, was the most enthusiastic about sports activities among Korean kolkhozes. Already in the early 1960s, the size of its stadium was comparable to that of Tashkent's Pakhtakor, and it had a 30-member soccer team in the B-class of the Soviet Union League. In addition to football, which was their favourite sport, the kolkhoz youth enjoyed almost all sports, including basketball, volleyball, table tennis, tennis, bicycle racing, gymnastics, boxing, athletics, wrestling, sambo, weightlifting and janggi (Korean chess) (Hwang Man Gum, 1961: 36). The

29. Central State Archive of the Uzbek SSR (1966). Collection 90, Inventory 10, File 1722, p. 143.

30. Newspaper "Lenin's Banner", 07.06.1988.

31. Newspaper "Lenin's Banner", 21.12.1979.

32. Newspaper "Lenin's Banner", 10.07.1982.

“Politotdel” football team was so popular that spectators came to its matches even from Tashkent, and on match days, the kolkhoz working day was shortened, although workers were to complete their compulsory work.

In the early 1970s, in the “Politotdel” 350 young men and women participated in sports activities, including first- and second-class football players, athletes, wrestlers and tennis players. The kolkhoz had a well-equipped stadium with a capacity of 20,000 people, dormitories, restaurants and parking³³. Such exciting sports activities were organized by the sports council (Hwang Man Gum, 1962: 132). The new stadium of the kolkhoz was large enough for 12,000 people, which was rare even in small and medium-sized cities in the Soviet Union³⁴. The “Politotdel” created the first rural hockey team and built a sports complex at the kolkhoz level, in which 600 people from 11 sectors were engaged in sports activities. In the early 1980s, the kolkhoz sports department had 26 masters of sports, 23 candidates for masters, and about 70 first-class players³⁵.

Conclusion

The “Politotdel”, organized in 1925 on the banks of the Chirchik River in the Tashkent Region of Uzbekistan, made a qualitative leap in the early 1950s. Its key to the significant and rapid increase in agricultural and livestock productivity can be explained by the entrepreneurial spirit of its leader who focused on cultivating profitable crops, efficient labor organization in each sector, labor motivation of workers, developing agricultural infrastructure, mechanization through the purchase of many large agricultural machines, and scientific farming methods adapted to local conditions. In the 1950s, the “Politotdel” was a famous advanced kolkhoz in Uzbekistan, in the 1960s–1970s it became one of the most famous millionaire kolkhozes in the Soviet Union. During this period, like other advanced Korean kolkhozes, the “Politotdel” turned into a garden city, an “oasis” in arid lands of Central Asia. It was a typical example of a multi-ethnic peaceful community created by people who organized the kolkhoz production system, using institutional support of the state socialist system. Various production and social-cultural facilities of the “Politotdel” were created by joint labor of its members and the soviet-style commons³⁶ from which all villagers benefited jointly.

33. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 18.01.1973.

34. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 23.08.1968; 30.06.1970.

35. Newspaper “Lenin’s Banner”, 10.07.1982.

36. As a sociological concept, commons are not a commodity to be bought and sold but a basis for collective reproduction: community members can use commons according to mutually agreed rules and social norms and prac-

The "Politotdel" and other Korean millionaire kolkhozes accumulated common assets through the joint labor and cooperation of kolkhoz members and rural intellectuals, using both the state purchase system and the kolkhoz market mechanisms. Such kolkhozes did not rely solely on state support but formed community assets through their indivisible, consumption and cultural funds. They created a new social system in which opportunities and benefits were provided to all villagers by the multi-ethnic friendly community. Such kolkhozes can be considered innovators who created Soviet-style commons in the rural hybrid "bottom-up" economy, i.e., these were small kolkhoz cities with self-organized commons.

Thus, Soviet millionaire or advanced kolkhozes (from the mid-1930s to the 1980s) were peasant "from below" forms of relatively autonomous local socialism within the state socialist system, which developed through "harvests of joy". Numerous advanced kolkhozes had record yields exceeding the state production goals in agriculture, proving that productivity could be increased through the use and flexible application of the collective farm system. Advanced kolkhozes' villages were economically prosperous and socially peaceful (multi-ethnic) communities responding to the challenges of urbanization since the 1950s. However, in the late 1980s — early 1990s, as a result of the wave of dismantling and privatization of the Soviet economic system, most of the advanced kolkhozes disappeared into history along with the kolkhoz system³⁷.

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tices used to manage such resources (Bollier, 2014; Ostrom, 1990; Standing, 2021).

37. The "Politotdel" experienced a huge shock in 1985 when its legendary leader Hwang Man Gum was arrested in Moscow. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1992, the kolkhoz was privatized and transformed into an agricultural enterprise "Dustlik (Friendship)".

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Kim Chang Jin
Harvest of joy:
A study of the
Soviet Uzbekistan
Korean millionaire
kolkhoz "Politotdel"
(1925-1985)

Урожай радости: исследование советско-узбекского корейского колхоза-миллионера «Политотдел» (1925–1985)

Ким Чан Чжин, доктор политических наук, профессор Университета Сунгконгэ. Ён Донгро, 320, Гуро Гу, Сеул, Корея. E-mail: koruskim@gmail.com

Аннотация. Данное исследование представляет собой попытку понять уникальную природу советского колхоза, который был одновременно сельскохозяйственной производственной единицей и ключевым институтом сельского сообщества. Вопрос о «передовых колхозах (миллионерах)» — один из тех, что раскрывают ограничения и преимущества советской колхозной системы в целом. Более того, именно опыт «передовых колхозов» (с середины 1930-х до 1980-х годов) позволил крестьянам развить форму местного социализма «снизу» через «урожаи радости», а не «урожаи печали». «Политотдел» был одним из самых известных корейских колхозов-миллионеров не только в Узбекистане, но и в Советском Союзе на протяжении почти тридцати лет с конца 1950-х годов. В 1953 году, когда его руководителем был избран Хван Ман Гум, обладавший сильным предпринимательским духом, «Политотдел» достиг поворотного момента и совершил скачок вперед за короткий период времени. Его секретами успеха были трудовая дисциплина, обеспечиваемая эффективной организацией труда и справедливой заработной платой, выращивание кенафа и хлопка в качестве основных прибыльных культур, механизация (приобретение крупной сельскохозяйственной техники после реорганизации МТС — машинно-тракторных станций) и прочная кормовая база (благодаря рекордному урожаю кукурузы). «Политотдел» и другие корейские колхозы-миллионеры в Центральной Азии накапливали общие активы местного сообщества в сотрудничестве с сельской интеллигенцией. Руководители колхозов, менеджеры среднего звена и фермеры «Политотдела» были не пассивными индивидами, просто подчинявшимися правилам государственной командной экономики, а новаторами, которые на протяжении десятилетий создавали в сельском обществе Узбекистана «общественные блага советского типа, управляемые снизу» мирными многонациональными общинами. Через исторический опыт передового колхоза можно понять те институциональные и практические особенности советского колхозного строя, которые не представлены в общей картине «провального колхозного строительства и сельской жизни».

Ключевые слова: советский колхоз, двойственность колхоза, борьба корейцев за признание, общественные блага, многонациональное мирное сообщество