



Book Review

Exploring Asian-Pacific co-operatives in theory and practice: Resilience and thriving between the state and the market

Edited by Morris Altman and Akira Kurimoto
Elsevier, 2025. ISBN (pbk): 9780443237843, 340pp.

The United Nations International Year of Cooperatives in 2025 (IYC 2025) promises a rich legacy of academic exploration of the development of co-operation at a moment when the need for serious reflection has arguably never been greater. The optimism which followed the fall of Soviet communism in 1991 has long since dissipated, giving way to a pessimistic twenty-first century of economic collapse, disease, deepening social and international inequalities, global environmental jeopardy, populist authoritarianism, war, collapse of the post 1945 system of alliances and rule-based international relations, and the growing threat of retreat from liberal democracy. With its emphasis upon both creating wealth and distributing it equitably, and its commitment to co-operative principles and values which stress community, education, and respect for diversity, co-operation's vision has rarely seemed more compelling, and its realisation more urgent. It is to be hoped that the ideas generated in 2025 will offer practical guidance to the creation of a more humane and equitable world.

Exploring Asian-Pacific Co-operatives in Theory and Practice will be an important contribution to the work of IYC 2025. As an edited volume, it draws on the work of some forty academics and practitioners, many of whom are steeped in the work of the International Co-operative Alliance, and who are able to offer some unique insights into a wide range of developments in the region. The structure of the book is a real strength. Part 1A consists of an overview of recent co-operative related developments across Asia. The nine chapters in this section examine a wide range of pertinent issues, including the impacts of demutualisation, hybridisation, international collaboration between co-operatives (including from outside the region), institutional factors driving change, and how new co-operatives 'spin out' from existing ones. There is also an excellent chapter on how legal frameworks vary, and the complexities these create for co-operative formation and growth. Part 1B focuses much more on co-operatives as

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businesses, or entrepreneurial entities. The focus here varies. Ecological issues and economic sustainability figure prominently in two chapters, while youth participation and the circular economy also receive attention. Multi-stakeholder co-operatives are also explored, though the general focus on governance is quite muted. It should be added, however, that there are some good comparative elements across the chapters, and that a range of co-operative sectors (consumer and agricultural) are examined, though in this respect Part 2 offers a much richer variety of co-operative types and sectors.

Part 2 is divided into four sections, each with chapters on a variety of business sectors including financial co-operatives, health care, education, and youth co-operatives, as well as platform co-operatives. Each section has a very useful introduction to the state of the particular theme across the region, followed by country specific case studies. The latter are especially rich, and countries covered include Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Indonesia, and Australia.

The focus and style of the chapters obviously vary as is inevitable in an edited volume of this nature; but the general introduction and the introductory sections of each part ensure that a real coherence is maintained throughout. A central theme is the way in which co-operatives can thrive within a fast-changing capitalist world, applying their concomitant social and democratic benefits to an unequal and emphatically capitalist world. Herein, of course, lies the source of an inevitable criticism from those committed to the displacement of capitalism by socialist or alternative economic and social systems. The book does not explicitly postulate the co-operative model as a coherent alternative to the capitalist one, rather placing it firmly within a globalised capitalist context. But such a criticism perhaps overlooks the central aim of the book, which is to provide the reader with an overview of where co-operatives are in the Asian world at present, and how they are located within the social, economic and legal frameworks of the region. As such it is an invaluable source for those not only interested in co-operatives, but in the modern Asian world as well. It has an appeal which not only cuts across all the social science disciplines, but also offers practical insights for practitioners or others interested in modern Asia. This will be an invaluable and important book, which offers a vivid introduction to co-operative development in one of the fastest growing regions of the world economy.

The Reviewer

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