



Waking the Asian Pacific Co-operative Potential. Edited by: Morris Altman, Anthony Jensen, Akira Kurimoto, Robby Tulus, Yashavantha Dongre and Seungkwon Jang.

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Waking the Asian Pacific Co-operative Potential

Editors: Morris Altman, Anthony Jensen, Akira Kurimoto, Robby Tulus, Yashavantha Dongre, and Seungkwon Jang
Academic Press. 2020. 412pp. ISBN: 9780128166666 (pbk); 9780128166673 (e-book).

This is a very ambitious and fascinating book. Over 400 pages long, with 35 chapters which provide an overview, and compare the long history of co-operatives in the Asia Pacific Region. Its comparative analysis focuses on China, Japan, Korea, Australia, Vietnam, India, Nepal, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and the city-state of Singapore. It explores the diverse experiences in four co-operative sectors: agriculture, consumers, credit unions, and worker-owned co-operatives. It exemplifies some of this analysis with case studies of 22 successful co-operative experiences. Thus, in contrast with a comparable ambitious study — Brazda and Schediwy's (1989/2011) classic 10 country study of consumer co-operatives in Europe, which specifically wanted to sound an alarm of an impending crisis in consumer co-operation, its focus on exemplary practices is enlightening, and giving an optimistic perspective on the challenges remaining.

One cannot help but be impressed with many features of co-operation in the Asia Pacific region, and with many of the cases. At the same time, there are clear challenges. Co-operatives exist in most of the 50 countries of the Asia Pacific region, and they have the world's largest share of co-operatives in terms of numbers, but they tend to be small scale, with relatively few in the list of the world's top 300 co-operatives based on turnover. Their great numbers of co-operatives, members, and employees does not necessarily result in innovative and dynamic responses to changing economic and political circumstances. In this sense they may be considered a sleeping giant, which needs to increase its visibility as an alternative socio-economic option to achieve equitable development and growth. The title of the book alludes to this idea that in many ways the current state of affairs is unsatisfactory, and hence the clarion call for collective effort to awaken the giant inside the giant, so the promised potential can be achieved.

The aim of this book is to explore the challenges that have been overcome, and the reasons for the success that has been achieved, and so open the doors for the Asian Pacific co-operative potential to be better understood and achieved. This involves identifying the different models of co-operation, the extent to which they are distinctive (or tending towards convergence globally), exploring the patterns of evolution of the co-operatives, what can be learned from the factors enabling or hindering their success; and how can they be positioned in relation to powerful state actors, and dynamic capitalist corporations in increasingly global economies.

The Asia Pacific co-operatives emerged during the nineteenth century, often initiated through colonialism, or influenced by immigration, or via the adoption of Western models; particularly the Rochdale model of consumer co-operatives, or the Raffeisen model for credit co-operatives. The influence of colonial history is clearly very significant in many of the countries studied, and this is acknowledged, but most of this Asia Pacific co-operative analysis begins after the colonial period, when post-colonial movements developed, and institutions emerged and evolved under a variety of political and socio-economic circumstances. Those wishing to explore the colonial roots for countries linked to the UK, could well check out Rita Rhodes excellent study (2012) of the role of the British Colonial Office in co-operative development in the British Empire.

The range of co-operatives covered is incredibly diverse, in terms of size, sector, and stage of development. Some countries have early forms of co-operation in the nineteenth century, sometimes with pre-figurative self-help organisations — including in India, and Australia, while much more recent developments of consumer co-operation emerged in other countries like Korea in the 1980s and in China the advent of co-operation in one form or another is even more recent. In many countries the post-colonial state has played a major regulatory and developmental role in shaping the co-operatives; and globalisation and neo-liberal trends have in some cases loosened these constraints but brought with it the risks of demutualisation. It is an extremely complex challenge to try to make sense of this diversity and discern some of the reasons for quite different patterns of development.

The ‘Varieties of Capitalism’ approach (Hall & Soskice, 2001) provides a starting point for explaining this diversity. This approach argues that there are two forms of coordination of market and nonmarket relations, resulting in two types of capitalist economies, Liberal Market Economies, and Coordinated Market Economies. This perspective has been further elaborated by Witt and Redding (2013) who argue for five types of Asian capitalism — post-socialist, advanced city-state, emerging Southeast Asian, advanced Northeast Asian, and Japanese. But the authors of this book concerned with co-operatives argue the role of the state (developmental, and regulatory — including freedom of association) should modify this 5-part typology. Instead, they propose a 4-part typology:

1. Socialist market economies: China, Vietnam, etc.
2. Developmentalist market economies: India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, etc.
3. State-coordinated market economies: Japan, Korea, and Taiwan.
4. Liberal market economies: Australia and New Zealand.

And they go further in developing a more elaborate theoretical framework, which uses a historical-institutional perspective (including in particular the role of the state); thus, leading to a macro analysis, which is complemented with a micro analysis covering organisational, managerial and governance factors, as well as considerations related to co-operative principles.

The book is well structured to help the reader make sense of the complex diversity of Asian Pacific Co-operation. Part 1 (about 100 pages) is devoted to establishing the analytical framework; while Part 2 contains the case studies structured by sector, but with a useful analytical summary at the end of each sectoral section, and a final summary of the whole book.

The book begins with a fitting tribute to Gary Lewis, a much-loved Australian co-operator and researcher. Gary would have been proud of this excellent work, and the authors are to be congratulated on making a major contribution to co-operative thought.

The Reviewer

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Note

Dr Gary Lewis (1943-2019) — *Co-operative Democracy, Education and Finance: A celebration of Dr Gary Lewis* — was held at the fifth annual joint research symposium of the Co-ops NSW and the University of Sydney's Business School's Co-operatives Research Group. Presentations can be downloaded at <https://business.sydney.edu.au/events/research/2019/crg/co-operative-democracy> and an overview of his contributions here: <https://bccm.coop/vale-dr-gary-lewis-co-operator/>

Gary Lewis's final book — *The Democracy principle: Farmer co-operatives in twentieth century Australia*, is available at a downloadable PDF, available at https://bccm.coop/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/The_Democracy_Principle_1.pdf