

Co-operatives and The State In Burma/Myanmar 1900-2012: A Case Study of Failed Top-Down Co-Operative Development Models?

Anthony Webster
Liverpool John Moores University

This paper will trace the development of the co-operative movement in Burma/Myanmar, during the period, focusing upon its relationship with the state during a period of intense economic development activity and initiatives, as well as great political turbulence. This tradition of state promotion of co-operation dates from about 1904/5, and was a central part of the British economic strategy for this part of the empire. Interestingly, the tradition of state leadership of co-operation continued under the post imperial successor regimes, even to the present, with a central role being played in the Burmese co-operative movement by the CCS (Central Co-operative Society) and the Ministry of Co-operatives, both very much controlled by the Myanmar state. The paper will explore efforts to stimulate grass roots involvement in the leadership of the movement, and the inevitable tensions which arose between the desire for central state economic planning, and aspirations to create a truly independent and self governing co-operative movement. The role of key international agencies will be explored, notably the ILO and the International Co-operative Alliance, and the extent to which these were able to influence and shape the development of the Burmese movement, Burmese state policies towards it. Ultimately the paper will provide an assessment of the record of co-operative/state efforts to develop the economy during the period, with perhaps some thoughts about where the co-operative movement might go in the future.