The role of the solidarity economy in the development of society (on the example of Asian countries)

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Abstract. Social and solidarity economy (hereinafter referred to as SSE) is traditionally defined by forms of economic organization that have goals for economic activity and income extraction, oriented to the needs of society and managed on the basis of democratic principles. The structures of the SSE reproduce the relations of mutual assistance, solidarity, cooperation, equality and collectivism. The article considers the models of social and solidarity economy of four Asian countries - Japan, China, Malaysia and South Korea. The purpose of the study was to identify the historical and cultural features of the genesis and development of solidarity forms of the economy in these countries. An important characteristic of the enterprises of the Asian solidarity economy is their conditionality with traditional worldview doctrines and power ideas closely related to those. At the same time, the article emphasizes that paternalism in relation to the SE often leads to the loss of its autonomy by its subjects and the deprivation of the principles of direct democracy. Based on the analysis of empirical data, the authors compiled a table – diagram of the economic entities of the Asian SSE, reflecting the essential qualities, which made it possible to visualize their distinctive features from the enterprises of the commercial sector. The formation of the SE, according to the authors, is complicated by the lack of legislative, organizational, statistical, financial, and informational support for this sector of the public economy, which creates unjustified difficulties and risks of the form of economic organization demanded by societies. The materials of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which contain the formulation of the problem of theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of the solidary economy, provided significant assistance in conceptualizing the SSE.

Keywords: social solidarity economy, essential qualities and forms of organization, consumer cooperatives, Asian miracle, family farms

1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s, the term SSE has gained considerable popularity in international academic, political and public circles. The main characteristics of the SSE have been described by the United Nations Task Force on SSE (UNTFSSE) as follows: “The SSE encompasses organizations and enterprises that pursue clear economic and social (and often environmental) goals; assume various degrees and forms of cooperation, association and solidarity relations between workers, producers and consumers; and practice democracy on workplace and self-government.

SSE includes traditional forms: cooperatives and associations, and mutual assistance groups, social security institutions or ”proximity services", fair trade organizations, associations of informal sector workers, social enterprises"

There is a growing interest in SSE initiatives among policy makers, research foundations and academic institutions around the world. Despite the growing interest, there remains critically little research related to SSE. SSE initiatives that make a significant contribution to the development of local communities need to be more recognizable among the general public.

2 Problem Statement

The problem of SSE is widely discussed in academic communities.

The relevance of the researched problem is confirmed by the interest of practitioners and public figures around the world in it. The article analyzes publications from 2000 to 2020 in WoS and Scopus, a total of 1297 registered publications related to the topic of social economy and the economy of solidarity in various aspects of this issue in English, Spanish and French. Spain is the country with the largest contribution to the study of the topic (17.5 %) of publications, and Canada 11.6 % and the USA 7.7 % [1]. Mainly, researchers from French-speaking and Anglo-Saxon countries have identified the theoretical roots and foundations of social economy and the economy of solidarity.

Comparative analysis of the SSE on four world continents was presented by the works of Calvo S., Morales A. and Zikidis Yu. The authors have established a link between the SSE and the closed-loop economy, social propaganda, social entrepreneurship and ‘new’ social movements [2].

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In the article Geiger, L.I. on the basis of economic and historical analysis, the issues of creating a solidarity economy in Brazil are considered. The researcher identified the necessary conditions or drivers of the solidarity economy in the sense of expanding its borders, legislative support and coordination in order to make it more efficient [3].

In the research Csoba, J. the issue of the emergence of SSE in Europe is considered. The scientist proposed his own vision of the economic, social and political prerequisites for the transition from a social economy to an economy of solidarity. He noted country differences in the use of key concepts related to the SSE [4].

Using the example of Greece, the team of authors considered the "solidarity economy" as an experiment in the field of direct democracy and self-organization in the public economy. The project participants developed the concept of "HCI solidarity", aimed at developing transformations through the processes of agonistic pluralism and competition, where the goals and objectives of the SE are constantly reformulated and implemented in practice [5].

The work of researchers from Italy shows that CSE organizations can contribute to the creation and preservation of jobs in traditional sectors and promote the improvement of labor quality by providing stable employment, facilitating women's entry into the labor market, incorporating "disadvantaged" workers and helping the transition from informal to formal employment [6].

The role of the SSE in the implementation of the UN SDG 2030 is considered in the work of Lee S [7].

3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the main subjects of SSE in Asian countries. Research objectives:

1. To assess the scope of SSE activities in Asian countries;
2. To identify the mechanisms of interaction between the state and enterprises of the SSE.

4 Research Methods

The study is based on the analysis of summaries (brief) of the International Labor Organization on the development of social and solidarity economy. In solving these problems, methods of comparing SSE enterprises in four Asian countries – Japan, China, Malaysia, and South Korea were used. The statistical method is used to illustrate the dynamics of SSE development in Asia, the historical method is used to identify the historical and cultural context of the appearance of SSE in Asia.

5 Findings

Malaysia

SSE in Malaysia is a new concept that is gradually emerging in the socio-political discourse and dialogue of state politicians.

Both in Indonesia and Malaysia, the practice of SSE originates from the concept of "gotong royong" or "mutual assistance", denoting joint actions in agriculture and territories. These can be community initiatives supporting villages; family and community events such as weddings and funerals; collective agricultural work such as rice planting and harvesting, one of the most important forms of SSE are cooperatives.

Cooperatives were for the first time established during the British colonial rule to solve credit problems among rural farmers. The appearance of the Law on the Establishment of Cooperative Societies was marked by the creation of the first cooperative in 1922.

Sharia principles are: charity and mutual assistance have deep cultural and historical roots in the country. In the last century, organizations that were guided by these principles and were designed to help their members or, more broadly, the poor began to appear. The first credit unions, established in the 1960s, had roots associated with Catholicism and the ideals of liberation.

After gaining independence in 1957, the Government set a course to reduce poverty and inequality in the country. The large-scale program provided for the creation of agricultural settlements for previously landless families through the allocation of land by the Federal Land Administration (FELDA). Approximately 112 000 settlers were resettled in the FELDA colonies between 1958 and 1990. After 1980, settlers were encouraged to form cooperatives within the national organization Koperasi Permodalan FELDA Malaysia Berhad (KPF), which currently functions as a second-level cooperative. As in Indonesia, State control over such cooperatives was allowed [5]. In the context of a top-down cooperative development policy, many partnerships lacked not only autonomy, but also the key resources and assets needed to maintain joint ventures.

Since the 1970s, cooperative microfinance institutions, headed by the State and non-governmental organizations have emerged. Initially serving small farmers affiliated with FELDA, credit cooperatives later embraced other industries. In the late 1980s, the Grameen credit model took root, thanks to which the rural and urban poor, primarily women, received loans for their microenterprises [8].

A number of factors influenced the development of SSE in the country in the second half of the 20th century. On the one hand, state participation and development planning were the most important conditions underlying Malaysia's rapid transition from poverty to an Asian miracle economy. Such interference contributed to the growth of certain types of SSE organizations, limiting their self-organization, but still contributed to the preservation of the basic principles related to autonomy and democratic governance. The SSE was also influenced by the gradual transition from the provision of services in accordance with state regulation to market principles.

The key direction of the country's policy since 2015 has been the development of "public and social enterprises" [9]. Malaysia's Eleventh Five-year Plan (2016–2020) [10], which included the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), paid significant attention to the role of cooperatives in modernizing agriculture, developing supply chains, as well as "alternative service delivery" through community organizations related to the care of the elderly, disabled, assistance in case of natural disasters, rehabilitation from drug addiction. The goal pursued by the strategy was to create incentives for investment in the social sphere, producing a model of public-private partnership.

In 2015, the Malaysian Federal Government launched a social entrepreneurship project designed to realize its potential for a radical transformation of capitalism by solving social or environmental problems. [10] In 2019, 12 Guidelines for the Accreditation of Social Enterprises, allowing for various levels of certification (depending on the social significance of enterprises) were adopted.

The range of state support measures for social enterprises is constantly expanding. The budget for 2021 provided for the allocation of 20 million ringgit (approximately US $ 4 million) For social enterprises under the pilot program of social procurement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, other forms of support appeared. Some social enterprises were eligible for financial assistance provided under the program in the amount of 100 million reais (US$ 23.6 million) for technology startups. Social enterprises have been granted the right to apply for cost compensation grants to support their activities [11].

The country's SSE consists of: cooperatives, social enterprises and partly religious initiatives. Such models of economic organization contrast both with "commercial companies" that realize the main goal of making a profit, practically without pursuing social goals or democratic governance, and with non-profit organizations and companies that depend mainly on donations and grants.

A cartographic study of the enterprises of the SSE showed that there are more than 20 000 of them. In addition to 14 073 cooperatives, they include 7257 commercial enterprises, 2 419 non-profit non-governmental organizations (see Fig. 1) [12].

There are more than 14 thousand cooperatives with more than 6 million members in the country, half of which belong to four types: consumer societies, agricultural, industrial, service and credit cooperatives. The total assets of all cooperatives are estimated at 143,7 billion ringgit (approximately 36 billion US dollars). The two largest second-tier cooperative organizations are the Amana Ihtiar Malaysia (AIM) Credit Cooperative and cooperatives established by settlers and FELDA members. The number of AIM members increased from 66 683 in 2000 to 380 000 in 2020. During the same period, annual payments on corporate loans increased from 107 million to 2,7 billion reais (from about 28 million to 643 million US dollars) [8]. These indicators were achieved thanks to the strategy of diversification of the loan portfolio and expansion of coverage of urban areas.

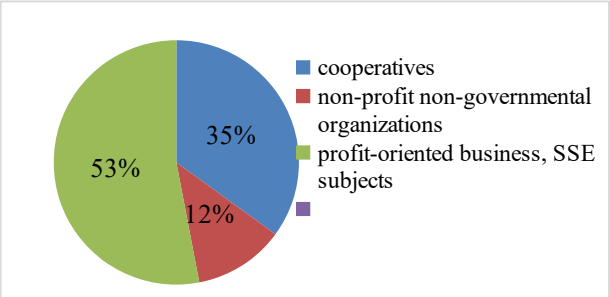


Fig. 1. Social enterprises of Malaysia by legal type, % [8].

Within the framework of the AIM model, which unites mainly women, they create a savings fund to obtain a loan and create microenterprises. Borrowers work in a group of five people, several groups form a ‘Center'. As for the cooperatives, FELDA, which currently unites 212 cooperatives with 261 572 members, has an investment portfolio of 2,3 billion ringgit (approximately 575 million US dollars) in various assets. Members of the cooperative regularly receive dividends, and family members are provided with employment opportunities [13].

Japan

Traditions are the origins of the organization of the SSE in Japan. The SSE system in Japan has developed under the influence of various traditional sources. The provisions of the Civil Code on Non-Commercial Activities, adopted in 1896, became the basis for the formation of a social solidarity economy. Subsequently, the Code was recognized as the main document defining the economic activities of citizens aimed at meeting social goals. The term machizukuri, which appeared in the 1960s to describe various local public organizations working autonomously in order to meet the cultural, social and economic needs of society. The concept of Kyodo (translated as "co-production") was introduced in Japan in the early 1980s to denote civic participation and effective cooperation between local communities and the government in order to realize public needs. The social security policy relied heavily on kyojo's representation. These three concepts have taken a central place in the strategic relationship between the public and private sectors in order to achieve the public interest.

The terms "social business" and "social entrepreneurship" appeared in the country in the early 2000s. Public enterprises have been recognized by local legislation as a social business. The Government and civil society actively supported their development through incubation programs, financial and other assistance.

SSE organizations in the country include consumer cooperatives, associations and foundations, which are established as corporations implementing public interests, forms of non-profit organizations and production and worker cooperatives.

Certainly, the largest segment of SSE in Japan is consumer cooperatives. Approximately 30 % of the Japanese population are members of 591 consumer societies, which are part of the Japanese National Union of Consumer Cooperatives. Consumer cooperatives are divided into several functional groups, such as community retail cooperatives, university cooperatives, insurance associations and medical mutual assistance organizations. The Union is also involved in educational activities, promotion of cooperative policy and international cooperative relations.

Retail cooperatives are constantly expanding the scope of their activities. As of 2020, 33 community cooperatives across Japan have 400 000 shareholder members [14].

Mirai, the largest cooperative in the country, has about 3,5 million members and 3000 full-time employees and 10300 part-time employees. The main activities of the Mirai Cooperative are direct delivery of products from rural areas to cooperative consumers, retail trade through public stores, elderly care services and insurance [15]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mirai Cooperative initiated the creation of home delivery services using bicycles with a cargo trailer.

There are various sources of financing for SSE enterprises. In addition to the membership fees of

shareholders, these include government subsidies, charity and volunteering. A survey of 3471 enterprises conducted in 2017 showed that support from commercial companies is significant for public enterprises: subsidies – 45,9 %, business cooperation – 42,9 % and donations – 38,7 %. Among the key problems affecting the activities of SSE enterprises, the most important are: lack of qualified members (66,9 %), diversification of income sources (54,2 %), lack of successors (young members) (38,7 %) and shortcomings of the management organization (36,0 %) [16].

China

SSE organizations in China were formed under the leadership of the Communist Party. The policy of Mao Zedong played an important role in the construction of socialism with Chinese specifics. Collectivization carried out in the country has led to the emergence of rural cooperatives and communes. Each commune performed the full range of economic and social functions, being at the same time an agricultural cooperative, a production association, and a military brigade – with a kindergarten, a school, as well as a hospital where patients were received by "barefoot doctors".

Supply and marketing cooperatives were one of the first forms of SSE organizations that were created after the revolution of 1949. Marketing and supply partnerships provided farmers with resources and carried out sales of agricultural products in cities. These cooperatives became part of the All-China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives [13].

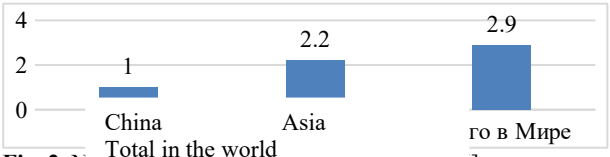
The functions of cooperatives include agricultural production, provision of market information, technical assistance, as well as coordination of activities for the transportation and storage of products. In the last decade, the number of cooperatives has increased by about 50 %. In 2019, there were 32 465 entry-level supply and distribution cooperatives, united into a national network of 10 000 distribution centers and had 846 000 outlets [17]. Sales and profit in 2018 amounted to 5,3 trillion chinese yuan (approximately 800 billion US dollars). In 2020, cooperatives launched 3152 poverty reduction projects aimed at lifting 1,13 million people out of poverty [18].

The most important place in China's cooperative sector belongs to farmers' specialized cooperatives, mutual assistance organizations that mainly unite farmers, serve their members by purchasing materials and equipment, selling, processing, transporting and storing agricultural products, as well as providing technologies and information related to agricultural production. Farmers' cooperatives play a crucial role in poverty eradication and rural development. In the last decade, their number has increased – from 311 700 in 2010 to 2 173 000 in 2018. In order to develop and successfully compete with other forms of economic organization, many cooperatives have diversified their portfolio of functionality and services and merged into larger structures [19]. Cooperatives distribute profits not on the basis of a share of participation, but in accordance with the procedures established by the annual meeting of members [20].

Rural credit cooperatives are the leading financial institution in rural areas. The PRC provides loans to farmers, rural households and local enterprises through an extensive branch network. The share of deposits of corporate structures in the total number of financial institutions is only 12 %. 8.0 % of loans to rural households and 7.0–7.5 % of loans to urban and rural enterprises account for 1000 credit cooperatives. Credit cooperatives are a hybrid of rural commercial banks and cooperative enterprises and attract capital from both individual suppliers and corporate investors, however, credit partnerships are required to allocate a certain share of borrowed funds for the implementation of agricultural projects [21].

China 's SSE differs in comparison with similar segments of other countries in two ways:

Firstly, the huge scale of individual organizations and their significant weight in certain sectors of the economy. Chinese cooperatives account for 34 % of the global number, while the number of their membership is 63 % of the global mass of cooperators (see Fig. 2, 3).



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Given that the SSE originated and spread in response to government transfers and incentives to achieve political goals, the nature of its development is closely related to the state.

Interestingly, that regulations and subsidizing the organization of the SSE create additional problems and risks. Many SSE organizations are created in order to take advantage of public financing and other preferences, without having their own assets, in particular social and human capital. Weak organizational structure and financial constraints make it difficult for many SSE organizations to compete with commercial enterprises in market conditions. Dependence on subsidies and other incentives undermines autonomy, governance effectiveness and long-term economic sustainability.

South Korea

The Republic of Korea has a dynamic SSE. The State and civil society have played an important role in the formation and expansion of various types of organizations and enterprises of the SSE.

The term "social economy" is commonly used in the Republic of Korea to refer to organizations and enterprises that combine economic expediency, social orientation and democratic management features. The legislative draft of the Framework Law on Social Economy (FASE) defines its content as “all economic activities carried out by social economy organizations on the basis of solidarity and cooperation between members; independent, autonomous and democratic governance; and aimed at reducing inequality, developing the local economy, creating decent

jobs, providing social services and promoting social integration for the common good". The enterprise of the SSE sector includes "a business organization that pursues social values and carries out the purchase, production, distribution and consumption of goods and services necessary to achieve this goal" [23].

The values and principles associated with the SSE have a long tradition in the Republic of Korea. The traditional Korean community has always encouraged cooperation and a sense of unity through rules and customs [24]. Local systems of village autonomy, subordinated to Confucian ideals, absorbed patterns of behavior in which solidarity and mutual assistance were emphasized.

Farmers created the first credit union at the beginning of the 20th century. The devastating economic and social consequences of World War II led the Government to turn to agricultural cooperatives as a means of overcoming food shortages and revitalizing agriculture [25]. Significant state support and planned supply contributed to the expansion of the role of cooperatives in the implementation of agricultural modernization programs of the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, thanks to state guardianship, many cooperatives resembled parastatal organizations rather than voluntary associations. Voluntary credit unions have expanded their activities, especially in regions lagging behind in economic development [26].

According to statistics for 2019, 22 036 SSE organizations were registered. In 2018, they hired 110 829 employees and received government funding in the amount of 193,7 billion won (approximately 163 million US dollars) [27] (Figure 4).

The movement of consumer cooperatives picked up steam in the mid-1980s. It can be said that today's consumer cooperatives originated from the "Right Life" cooperative (Brown Sang Hyup), which originated in the city of Anyang in 1985 and Hansalim in 1986. In 1999, the Law on Consumer Cooperatives was adopted. Large consumer cooperation organizations participate not only in events promoting a healthy, environmentally responsible lifestyle, but also in solving social problems, such as rural development, education and socialization of women. The term "Sanghyuk", meaning "life cooperative", is used instead of "consumer cooperative", since the scope of its activities goes beyond consumption and covers cooperation in many areas of life [28].

The key organizational forms of the SSE in the Republic of Korea are

- Cooperatives: enterprises jointly owned by its members and managed democratically to provide employment and meet other social and economic needs of shareholders.
- Social enterprises: economic entities that prioritize a social goal rather than profit maximization, which reinvest profits in common property or local territories.
- Rural enterprises: communities created and managed by local residents that mobilize local resources to support projects to solve community problems and promote the interests of local residents by creating jobs and maintaining self-organization of comfortable living conditions.
- Self-sustaining enterprises: production cooperatives or other similar forms of enterprises managed by collectively united individuals using the skills they have acquired by participating in self-help projects and performing community service.

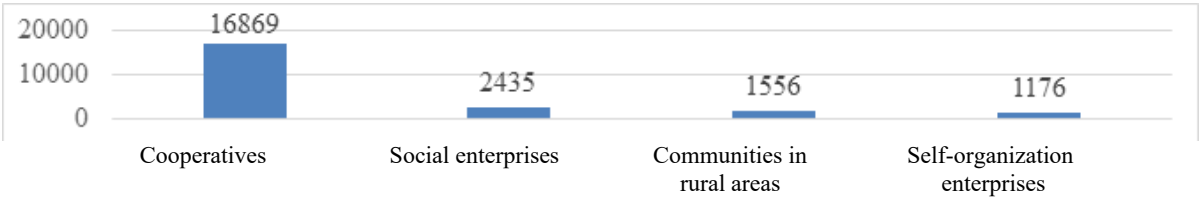

Fig. 4. The number of 4 main types of SSE enterprises in South Korea, 2019 units [28].

The state support of the SSE in Korea is carried out through state programs, through agencies of assistance and encouragement of social enterprises. The 2012 Framework Law on Cooperatives (FACE), which eased the creation of cooperatives, allowed five or more members to form cooperatives in any industry other than finance and insurance. Subsequently, worker cooperatives emerged, consisting of employees with the participation of many interested parties [23].

6 Conclusion

Thus:

- The range of organizational forms of SSE and the scope of their activities are expanding;
- While the majority of SSE subjects continue to adhere firmly to social goals, some have moved away from their mission. Seeking to increase their income, many SSE are reorienting to investing in capital and financial markets, which reflects the influence of the economic mainstream;
- As SSE enterprises grow, their top management may weaken the natural principles associated with participation and democratic governance;

Problems of SSE development:

- Gaps in legislation, barriers in the development of draft laws;
- Limited information, statistics and conceptualization of the SSE and specific types of organizations that are united by this segment;
- Many micro-level SSE enterprises lack not only tangible assets, but also the potential and opportunities to organize and establish links with communities and other SSE organizations and networks;
- The absence of a broad SSE movement that unites public organizations and associations from different sectors and carries out activities at the local, regional and national levels;

Directions of state support of the SSE:

- The promotion of the SSE is closely linked to the goals of the state's social policy;

- In this regard, improving coordination between government agencies responsible for various aspects of the SSE at different levels of government seems to be an important factor in the functioning of the social solidarity economy;
- Local authorities develop legislative and administrative initiatives at various levels;
- Measures related to lending, taxation and training of cooperative managers and executives of social enterprises;
- Encourage the participation of cooperative members in the decision-making process of municipalities;
- At the same time, excessive state guardianship creates risks of loss of autonomy and self-activity by enterprises of the SSE.

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