

## MASTER'S THESIS

# Cooperativism as ethical practice: a study of worker cooperatives in Hong Kong

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**Cooperativism as Ethical Practice**  
**A Study of Worker Cooperatives in Hong Kong**

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## ABSTRACT

Under capitalist hegemony, demeaning work is rationalized as necessary to achieve wealth accumulation and ever increasing consumption. Both the right and the left are skeptical about worker cooperatives as an alternative to capitalist organization of work. Review of the existing literature, however, suggests that the development of coops is an open-ended process rather than a predetermined matter. In Hong Kong, a number of worker coops were founded in response the economic downturn in the early 2000s, primarily by middle-aged, lowly educated, workers under the sponsorship of NGOs. An overview of cooperatives in Hong Kong shows that they suffer from a restrictive system of regulation and lack of recognition of the values of cooperatives. An intensive study of a particular case, the CR Coop, however, demonstrates, while it is difficult, it is far from impossible to practice cooperativism in capitalistic Hong Kong. It confirms that, various structural and internal challenges notwithstanding, people can achieve meaningful and dignified work with democratic collective decision-making and bottom-up management, if they can learn to work together with mutual regards. Through their courage and imagination, people can establish a set of practices and new interpretation of the meanings of work that treat workers as ends rather than means and allow them better coordination between work and other values in life. With a supportive social and political environment, worker cooperatives can thrive as an ethical practice and the aspiration for an inclusive society in Hong Kong is not utopian.

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