

<b>Levon Chorbajian</b> Brian D. MacLean and Dragan Milovanovic, eds. Thinking Critically About Crime	77
On The Political Arts <b>John Doheny</b> Wayne Burns The Vanishing Individual: A Voice From the Dustheap of History, or How to Be Happy Without Being Hopeful	81
<b>Michael Bacon</b> Gary Zabel, editor Art & Society: Lectures and Essays by William Morris	84
<b>Susan Packie</b> Sascha Altman DuBrul Carnival of Chaos — On the Road With the Nomadic Festival	86
<b>Susan Packie</b> Patrick Borden The Space	87
On The Political Process <b>Ronald Creagh</b> Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience	90
<b>Levon Chorbajian</b> James J. Ferrell The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism	93
<b>Greg Hall</b> Ron Jacobs The Way the Wind Blew	98
<b>Frank Lindenfeld</b> Angus Mackenzie Secrets: The CIA's War at Home	102
<b>Working on this issue</b>	106
<b>Information for Contributors</b>	108
<b>Credits:</b> Cover, typesetting & design: a.h.s. boy/dada typo	

Indexed by the Alternative Press Index

## A Look Inside Japan's Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative

Richard Evanoff

### Seikatsu and the International Cooperative Movement

The Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative (SCCC) is a Japanese food cooperative that has the goal not only of providing wholesome food to its members, but also of fundamentally changing the relationship between producers and consumers and between people and their environment. This article will offer an inside look at how the cooperative operates, what its basic ideals and goals are, and how it manages to combine Western values of individual autonomy and self-reliance with traditional Japanese values of social harmony and cooperation.

The cooperative movement is a worldwide phenomenon. The International Cooperative Association has an estimated aggregate membership of 400 million in 70 different countries (Krimerman and Lindenfeld 1992, p. 213). In Japan there are about 670 consumer cooperatives with a total membership of 15.1 million people (more than 10 percent of the population), a capital base of ¥274 billion, and an annual turnover of ¥3 trillion (Hiratsuka 1991, p. 2). Cooperatives still form a relatively small sector in the Japanese economy, but they are by no means small potatoes.

Modern cooperatives typically attempt to extend Western democratic traditions to the workplace. They trace their ancestry back to the first consumer cooperative formed in Rochdale, England in 1844. Six essential principles evolved from the Rochdale experiment which have come to typify cooperatives: (1) open and voluntary membership; (2) democratic administration; (3) not-for-profit status; (4) return of surplus to members; (5) education of the membership; and (6) cooperation among cooperatives.

Many people who are involved in the international cooperative movement see cooperatives as offering an alternative to both the "free" enterprise system of capitalism (which offers "freedom" for only a relatively small handful of capitalist owners and wage slavery for most everyone else) and the nationalization of industries under socialism (which simply substitutes state ownership for ownership by private corporations). Cooperatives can be seen as an attempt to create what is in effect an entirely new economic system that is neither capitalist nor communist. By bringing producers and consumers into direct contact with each other, they

are able to eliminate the inefficient “middle men” of both systems (i.e., capitalists who profit not on the basis of their labor but simply because they own the means of production, and oppressive socialist governments that operate on the basis of central planning and dictatorial control over the economy).

Cooperatives are essentially organizations that are owned and managed by their members. Because the members are themselves the owners, all economic benefits are retained by the members—profits are not siphoned off by private shareholders as in capitalism nor by bureaucratic governments as in socialism. As a result cooperatives are generally able to provide producers with higher incomes and consumers with lower costs. And because the members are themselves also the managers of the organization, there is more active participation and less alienation than in more traditionally structured organizations. In place of top-down, hierarchical, and typically patriarchal systems of control, there is the prospect for genuine democratic decision-making.

While cooperatives offer freedoms, however, they also involve responsibilities. Members are expected to actively contribute to the life of the organization by helping with its administration and work. In place of passive consumers who are heavily influenced by advertising and think they have to buy more and more simply to keep up with what “everybody else has,” cooperatives encourage their members to make active decisions about what their real needs are and how they can best be satisfied. It is increasingly clear that thoughtless industrialism and consumerism are at the root of many contemporary social and environmental problems. What goods and services do people really need, however, in order to have genuinely fulfilling lives, a just society, and a sound environment?

Cooperatives in Japan can be seen as extensions of the Western ideals of individualism and freedom, but in addition they draw inspiration from traditional Japanese cultural values which emphasize group cooperation and social harmony. The fusion of Western democratic principles (particularly the six Rochdale principles) and Japanese cultural values can be found at work in many types of cooperatives in Japan, including agricultural cooperatives, housing cooperatives, and credit unions. The food cooperative Seikatsu Club provides a particularly good case study of this fusion, however, because it consciously seeks to promote a new vision of society which combines Western notions of individual autonomy and self-help with Japanese notions of collective effort and active involvement in local communities. The coop has attracted the attention of a growing number of Western writers who see it as a model for grassroots economic initiatives that are socially just and ecologically sound (Krimerman and Lindenfeld 1992, pp. 265-267; Mies 1993; and Morrison 1995, pp. 156-158; the *Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter* has devoted two special issues, nos. 12 and 13, to

Seikatsu). This article will attempt to give a fuller account of the cooperative's organizational structure and ideals.

### How the Seikatsu Club Works

In 1965 a group of householders, believing that the companies which then dominated the milk market were offering an inferior product and manipulating prices, formed a collective buying organization to enable them to purchase quality milk at lower prices. The project was successful and the group began to extend the principle of collective buying to other products, leading to the formation of the Seikatsu Club Consumers Cooperative as a legal entity in 1968. (A detailed history of the SCCC can be found in Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative 1992, pp. 5-6; and Yokota 1990, pp. 3-22.) The network of SCCC-affiliated consumer cooperatives is presently comprised of twelve autonomous organizations in twelve different prefectures. The SCCC has a total membership of 225,000 households embracing more than half a million individuals (*Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter* 1994, March/April, p. 1). As of 1991 it had a capital base of ¥12 billion, an annual turnover of ¥66 billion, and a staff of 901 (Hiratsuka 1991, p. 2).

The Seikatsu Club in Tokyo, which has served as a prototype for the creation of clubs in other prefectures, has spawned 27 affiliated workers' collectives involving 300 member-employees. (Statistics in this and the following paragraph are from Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative 1992, pp. 8-10.) The Tokyo club also has partnership relationships with two dairy firms, a delivery company, a cattle ranch, and a publishing house, and has established the Social Movement Research Center which promotes research, organizes study exchanges, and publishes the monthly magazine, *Social Movement*. There is also the Tokyo Seikatsusha Network, which is legally registered as a political organization but is independent of any political party. By 1992 the Network had elected one metropolitan assemblywoman, nine ward assemblywomen, and 20 city assemblywomen in Tokyo.

The basic organizational unit of the SCCC is the *han* (“small group”—often used to refer to a group of people living in the same area). Ideally a *han* consists of seven to ten neighboring households. The actual average number of households per *han* in the Tokyo club is 7.5. The responsibilities of the *han* include gathering orders from individual members, passing on the orders to the local center, receiving products from the delivery truck, and distributing them to members of the *han*. Individual orders are placed a month in advance and forwarded from the local center to a regional center and finally to the cooperative union, which collates them and then places a single order directly with each producer. The

goods are delivered bi-weekly by a delivery truck to the neighborhood *han*, which then distributes them to individual members. Since the food is coming directly from the producer, it is extremely fresh. Eggs, for example, are delivered the day after they have been laid and arrive unwashed. The *han* system eliminates the need for storage and thus also the need for artificial methods of preservation, such as chemical preservatives or irradiation.

Since the producers receive the orders in advance they can anticipate how much of a given product will be needed in the coming months and are often able to adjust production accordingly. Producers are thus able to fill orders directly to meet actual needs, and are not simply producing vast quantities of a product which they must subsequently try to sell on the “open market” (with no guarantee that they will be able to sell everything they have produced). There is no need for expensive advertising. Bulk ordering also helps to reduce prices. The cooperative system thus eliminates overproduction and waste, improves efficiency, reduces the stress caused by differences in supply and demand, and helps to stabilize prices. Ultimately it provides more security for both producers and consumers: consumers can be assured that their demand for goods will be met and producers can be assured that the goods they produce will be sold.

In the traditional market system the flow is from producers to consumers: producers produce goods which they must then advertise and persuade people to buy. The cooperative system provides an alternative to the market system by reversing this flow: consumers take the initiative by telling producers exactly what they want. The principle of *sanchoku*—“direct from the producer”—creates a relationship of interdependence between producers and consumers. Over time consistent patterns of consumption and production develop which help to stabilize this relationship. Consumers are provided with quality products at a fair price and producers are provided with a secure livelihood at a reasonable income. The *sanchoku* system also eliminates the need for a “middle man.” While the cooperative functions to coordinate orders, its purpose is not to generate profits but to serve its members.

Since goods are delivered directly to consumers, the cooperative has no stores, giving the *han* system several advantages over the conventional store system. In the *han* system there is no need to invest in commercial property and buildings. Even though there are still the expenses of maintaining offices and depots for the cooperative, paying salaries to coordinators and delivery personnel, and servicing delivery trucks, overhead is still considerably lower for *han*-based cooperatives than for conventional stores. There is no need to hire managerial experts who must insure that the supply of goods in the store roughly matches actual consumer demand. Delivering directly to the *han* also gives members direct involvement in at least part of the labor process. For all the above reasons, overall costs

can be reduced and efficiency improved, often resulting in lower prices for consumers.

The system developed by the SCCC, and other similar food cooperatives in Japan, is based on the concept of local production for local consumption. Most of the suppliers are local farmers and collectives. The freshness and quality of goods can thus be assured and the cost of transporting goods long distances is also eliminated. This decentralized model is the antithesis of the current “global market” model. Advocates of the global market claim that an international division of labor and free trade will create a larger world economy and thus more jobs. However, a growing number of critics (Greider 1997; Korten 1995; Lang and Hines 1993; Mander and Goldsmith 1996; Nader *et al.* 1993) claim that free trade agreements often override local quality, safety, and environmental standards. Such agreements also enable multinational corporations to more easily shift production to countries where wages are lower, taxes are minimal, and environmental standards are more lax. Furthermore, they break down traditional distribution networks which, while often cumbersome and inefficient, are nonetheless reliable. It is precisely these established local relationships which cause so much consternation to international traders, who regard them as “non-tariff barriers” to free trade. When

**Seikatsu has supported the notion that all countries should be**

**moving towards forms of self-sufficiency which are both ecologically**

**sustainable and in accordance with local cultural traditions.**

these relations begin to break down, however, local communities also begin to disintegrate. Cooperatives help to reestablish and maintain these relationships. Whereas goods are impersonally sold to the highest bidder in a market economy, the personal needs of both producers and consumers are taken into account in a cooperative economy.

For most of the post-war period Japan sought to strictly regulate the amount of imported agricultural products that could be sold in its domestic market—especially rice, beef, and oranges—on the grounds that the country needed to maintain agricultural self-sufficiency. The recent liberalization of the market for agricultural products, however, has led to increased competition for Japanese farmers, many of whom are finding it increasingly difficult to survive. Consumers as well are uncertain about the quality and safety of the imported products they buy. Instead of continuing to pursue a policy of increased self-sufficiency in food production by diversifying its agricultural base and protecting existing agricultur-

al lands from urban development, Japan's current policies increasingly rely on the global market to supply its basic food needs.

Seikatsu has supported the notion that all countries should be moving towards forms of self-sufficiency which are both ecologically sustainable and in accordance with local cultural traditions. Katsumi Yokota, an influential spokesperson for Seikatsu, writes that the organization is "against the complete liberalization of agricultural trade, because we believe every nation should support its own basic food production" (1990, p. 67). Yokota points out that Japan is lowering its rate of self-sufficiency at the same time that it is increasing the amount of industrial manufactured goods it sells in the international market (1990, p. 126). This shift bolsters the profits of transnational corporations more than it satisfies the needs of ordinary people and local communities.

The principle of self-sufficiency does not necessarily preclude the possibility of fair trade across international borders, however. Seikatsu currently has trade relations with local communities on the Negros Islands in the Philippines, for example. Sugar cane is the main export crop of the Negros Islands. When sugar prices fell in the mid-1970s, however, the entire local economy collapsed. Since the land had been used exclusively to grow export crops rather than crops for local consumption malnutrition and starvation became serious problems. Relief agencies attempted to revive export-led growth and to improve working conditions on the sugar plantations. This approach required constant new infusions of outside financial assistance, however, and did nothing to address the problem of food self-sufficiency or unequal income distribution. In 1985 the average annual wage of a skilled laborer in the sugar industry was approximately US\$210, while the poverty line in the Negros Islands was US\$1,078 (Iwami, no date-b, p. 11).

A different approach, however, was developed by the Negros Council for Peace and People's Development (NCPD), which coordinates the efforts of thirty local self-help groups. The NCPD promotes group farming of rice, corn, vegetables, and livestock on unused land in order to sustain local populations. It is also involved with organizing a credit union, constructing various communal facilities (including a water supply), and establishing an agricultural training school. In addition local groups are encouraged to grow cash crops, such as mangoes, bananas, and vegetables for export. Japanese cooperatives, including Seikatsu, annually import 700 tons of these bananas directly from the producers, bypassing conventional distribution channels. Local producers avoid using chemical fertilizers, not only for ecological reasons but also to decrease costs. Efforts such as these promote self-sufficiency in both Japan and the Philippines, while still allowing a measure of fair trade in surplus goods.

## Underlying Values of the Seikatsu Club

The work of Seikatsu is based on a number of fundamental values, all of which have as their aim an increase in personal well-being, the promotion of social justice, and a reduction in environmental impact.

*An alternative to consumerism.* There is no doubt that the Seikatsu project advocates a fundamental change of lifestyle, away from the values of conspicuous consumption and consumerism towards the values of simplicity and ecological sustainability. The term *Seikatsu-sha*, "Seikatsu citizens," is used by the club to describe people who are interested in creating an autonomous lifestyle for themselves, who want to be actively involved in making the decisions which affect their lives, and who are able to distinguish between mere consumerism and a more genuine quality of life. Quality of life refers not only to eating wholesome foods, but also to the effective utilization of time, to meaningful and creative work, and to the kind of fulfillment which comes from individual and collective accomplishment rather than from the mere possession of material goods.

Seikatsu's goal, then, is nothing less than offering individuals an alternative to modern capitalistic consumerism—in Yokota's words, "to seek another (an alternative) lifestyle based on the idea of a conscientious consumer's autonomy, not just a rebellion against or assimilation of the industrial society" (Yokota 1990, p. 14). The SCCC promotes active involvement in choosing the types of goods people really want rather than merely acquiescing to passive consumption. Average consumers, who buy into the contemporary consumer ethic, may feel they are making a "choice" between various products when in fact they are often simply being manipulated into buying products they neither need nor want. Advertising creates artificial desires where none existed before. Fashions routinely change so that people will want to buy more things. "New improved" products convince consumers that the goods they already own are obsolete and must be replaced. Planned obsolescence insures that goods will in fact become unusable over time and will be unrepairable, meaning that consumers have to be constantly buying new products.

Seikatsu avoids many of these problems by selling only one type of each product. Superficial diversity is eliminated in an effort to offer one superior product which is suitable for most purposes. There is little real reason, for example, to market light and dark types of soy sauce in a variety of different size bottles. Competition between various "brands"—which are often virtually identical in their actual contents—is eliminated, along with the need for superfluous but expensive advertising (the cost of which is passed on to consumers, of course). At Seikatsu each product is listed on the order form and no further advertising is considered necessary. As a result consumers are less apt to be manipulated and

are ultimately more in control of their purchasing choices. Furthermore, since standardizing the size of containers makes them easier to recycle, only one size of each product is offered. Reducing the number of types of products and buying in bulk means that cooking methods sometimes have to be adjusted, however. Traditional cooking methods, while sometimes laborious and time-consuming, are emphasized over the convenience of “heat-and-serve” dishes.

In terms of purchasing power, the focus on only one type for each product actually gives the SCCC an advantage over traditional retail outlets. A large supermarket may carry many different kinds of soy sauce in containers of various sizes, for example, but it typically only orders small quantities of each kind from suppliers. The SCCC, on the other hand, which sells only one kind of soy sauce in one size container, can place a much larger bulk order. While the total number of purchases may be fewer, on a per-item basis the purchasing power of the SCCC often exceeds that of major retail outlets.

Modern consumerism is based on buying the “best” product at the cheapest price, without considering the various processes that go into making the product. The SCCC, on the other hand, checks the source of its goods to insure their safety and quality. Production methods must also be environmentally sound, with a concern for the health, safety, and fair compensation of workers. Cooperatives thus offer a genuine alternative for both producers and consumers. The SCCC estimates that average members spend one-third of their total food budget on cooperative products. Members with the highest utilization rates (the top 25%) spend approximately 70% of their total food budget on cooperative products. These figures are seen as indicating “a partial boycott of the existing commodities (food) market,” even though the total impact of consumer cooperatives on the Japanese economy is still relatively small (Yokota 1990, p. 15).

*Environmental impact.* The SCCC is concerned about the environmental impact of its products in several respects. First, the cooperative insures that environmentally sound processes are used at the point of production. Organic farming methods with a minimum of artificial pesticides and fertilizers are the norm. As has already been noted, the speed of the distribution system—direct from producer to consumer—eliminates the need for chemical preservatives or irradiation.

In addition the products themselves must be environmentally safe. The SCCC developed its own original natural soap in 1979, for example, to replace synthetic detergents. This action was taken as part of a campaign to totally ban synthetic detergents, which involved direct petitions (a total of 220,000 signatures was collected in Kanagawa alone) and discussions with government officials. The discussions were ultimately unsuccessful—Yokota writes, “we were all surprised and disappointed to know how few politicians were interested in the people’s quality

of life” (1990, p. 12)—but it gave the members their first taste of grassroots citizens’ activism. Seikatsu intentionally uses no labels to indicate that its products are “eco-friendly.” The feeling is that such labels have been co-opted by mainstream corporations which are more interested in “greenwashing” their corporate images than they are in actually reducing their impact on the environment. Because there is no need for products to be attractively displayed in stores, packaging can be simple and recyclable, reducing the total amount of garbage. Moreover, the efficiency of the system leaves no products unsold at the end of the day which must be thrown out. The bulk ordering system means that instead of ordering specific cuts of pork, for example, households can band together to “buy the whole pig” (this has become a Seikatsu slogan). If every household were to order the same cuts of meat, other cuts would be wasted and costs driven higher. With the bulk ordering system, however, waste is eliminated and costs are reduced.

Since the cooperative system depreciates consumer lifestyles, unnecessary consumption can be reduced or eliminated altogether. The focus is on satisfying genuine human needs rather than on creating artificial wants purely so that corporations can sell more goods and reap larger profits. If the same principles the SCCC applies to food could be extended to manufactured goods, there would be less of the “throw-away” mentality which both consumes precious resources and produces enormous amounts of garbage. By stressing quality, durability, and a simplified lifestyle over fashion and conspicuous consumption, goods can be made to last and planned obsolescence can be eliminated.

*Social empowerment.* The SCCC is particularly concerned with empowering its members. Members are able to have a real voice in the operation of the cooperative, and through citizens’ initiatives and collective political action they are increasingly able to have a real voice in Japanese society as well.

One particular area of concern for Seikatsu is the empowerment of women. Over 80% of the organization’s elected board members are women (“Seikatsu’s ‘Women’s Democracy’ ” 1991, n.p.). Seikatsu advocates what it calls “women’s democracy.” One interesting feature of the citizens’ movement in Japan is the fact that it involves many female householders who, precisely because they are more or less excluded from obtaining significant employment in male-dominated capitalistic corporations, have the time and energy to engage in social activism. The social activism of most other social groups, students included, pales in comparison. Moreover, since female householders have no careers to risk, they are in a better position to engage themselves in controversial issues. Nonetheless, many women in Japan retain strong links with family and household issues (such as purchasing wholesome food, which cooperatives attempt to address). While Western feminists may see these links as reinforcing traditional gender roles, there is a

sophisticated twist. Since empowerment is not necessarily seen in terms of gaining equal access to traditional male domains of power, the hierarchical principles upon which this power itself is based are called into question.

There are two specific areas in which women have taken considerable initiative within the Seikatsu framework. The first are the workers' collectives (i.e., producer cooperatives). As of 1990 there were 89 Seikatsu-affiliated workers' collectives throughout Japan, employing more than 2,200 women in 104 workshops (Iwami, no date-c, p. 1; Morrison 1995, p. 156, cites a 1992 figure of 161 workers' collectives with 4,200 member-employees, without distinguishing by gender). These collectives engage in a variety of activities, including baking, catering, day care, distributing consumer goods, marketing vegetables and fish, recycling, and manufacturing soap. The collectives were started by Seikatsu members but are wholly worker-owner and administratively independent of Seikatsu's central organization.

The second area of initiative is grassroots political campaigning. In 1991 there were 33 local political groups composed of 2,500 women. A total of 27 councilors had been elected in 14 cities (Iwami, no date-a, p. 6). Seikatsu shares with the U.S. Green Party a focus on independent politics and grassroots organizing, and local rather than national elections. The *han* system can be easily used to collect signatures for petitions, to mobilize people, and to raise funds.

There are also efforts to empower the aged, the handicapped, and the otherwise disadvantaged. One current project is the development of a mutual aid cooperative called *Himawari* (Sunflower) which is "designed to fill gaps...left by the Japanese public welfare system in the entire spectrum of basic human needs: food, shelter, health and home care, education, and recreational services" ("Seikatsu-sha: The Autonomous People," 1991, p. 3). The system has some parallels with the concept of "time dollars" which has recently come into vogue in the U.S.: people donate time to help those in need and later "withdraw" the same amount of time in the form of services to themselves.

Seikatsu sees itself as "working to change Japan's welfare policy from an attitude of 'welfare as charity' to the attitude of 'welfare as a human right which meets basic needs'" (1992 *Annual Report of the Tokyo Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative*, p. 1). In place of the government-centered, bureaucratic approach to welfare common in capitalistic societies, Seikatsu emphasizes self-help and local mutual assistance. The organization has created several mutual assistance networks, such as the "Ability Club," which has adopted the goal of "realizing the full integration of the aged and the disabled into society" (1992 *Annual Report of the Tokyo Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative*, p. 1). At the same time, however, Seikatsu is able to work together with the public sector to improve welfare services. In Hoya City (in the Tokyo Metropolitan District), Seikatsu has estab-

lished a Day Service Center which will offer senior citizens assistance with social and cultural activities, fitness programs, health exams, transportation, baths, and meals. Seikatsu invested in the facility's construction costs and the city government is providing funds for the center's operating budget.

*Member participation.* In keeping with the fifth Rochdale principle, which advocates member education, many cooperatives feel that knowledge should be widely diffused within the organization rather than remain in the hands of specialists. When knowledge is democratized, so is power. By sharing work and rotating responsibilities participants are given hands-on involvement in the organization. They are able to know its inner workings through direct experience and do not need to rely on the leadership of "experts" who often tend to form managerial elites within organizations. Member participation is thus the key principle on which the entire democratic structure of cooperatives is based. This principle is not widely understood among people in modern capitalistic societies, however, where the general attitude is one of dependency on major corporations to provide both employment and consumer goods, and on the government to provide services and security. The appropriate skills and attitudes which enable people to "do for themselves" are correspondingly weakened and one can observe in both Western and Japanese cooperatives a certain amount of resistance towards the assumption of collective responsibilities.

One common complaint among Seikatsu members is that they receive no monetary benefit for collecting orders and distributing goods within their *han*. Seikatsu estimates that its high withdrawal rate (currently at under 20% but once as high as 30%) is not only the result of high urban mobility but also of the amount of work and relatively high level of responsibility members are given within the organization (Yokota 1990, p. 31). Cooperatives are not convenience stores. In its defense Seikatsu argues that members do in fact receive a monetary benefit in the form of lower prices, which are a direct result of the fact that members do a portion of the work themselves. Seikatsu estimates that its prices are 4-8% lower than ordinary retail outlets. The difficulty is that these price discounts apply equally to everyone who purchases goods and does not take into account the fact that some people do a considerable amount of work in the cooperative while others do little or nothing. To be fair, work and leadership responsibilities should be shared equally among the members of each *han*, but equal participation rates are difficult to enforce.

As a nonprofit cooperative, Seikatsu retains no profits as such. It does, however, retain 16.5% of its total receipts to meet expenses for various projects approved by the General Assembly (as compared with ordinary retail outlets which typically have a profit margin in the range of 20-25%). Seikatsu also returns 0.5% of total receipts to local *han* and regional centers to help them build funds

for themselves. Any further surplus is divided among individual members in proportion to the amount purchased (*cf.* Yokota 1990, pp. 51-52).

*Democratic administration.* Seikatsu members are expected to invest a certain amount of money in the club, which differs from prefecture to prefecture. In the Tokyo club, the amount is ¥100,000, which is paid in monthly increments of ¥1,000 each. The goal is to make the cooperative entirely self-sufficient in three key areas: financing, utilization, and management. In other words, members themselves are responsible for (1) financing the organization, (2) purchasing its goods, and (3) managing its affairs. This arrangement avoids the split common in many organizations between an active leadership and a passive membership.

While the emphasis in Seikatsu is on participatory democracy and face-to-face encounters within the *han*, there is nonetheless a need for large-scale coordination. Collective buying achieves “economies of scale” not as a result of marketing power but as a result of a cooperative’s membership base. The organizational structure of Seikatsu, however, provides for a strong measure of direct democracy. Ultimate sovereignty resides in the members. At the General Assembly, which meets annually, Seikatsu members elect a Board of Directors which is responsible for implementing decisions made by the membership as a whole. Policies are determined at the General Assembly on the principle of one-member, one-vote. Various committees are also formed to deal with specific projects. A high degree of national and international cooperation is equally stressed. The twelve independent Seikatsu clubs located in various prefectures naturally have a high degree of cooperation among themselves. Seikatsu is also a member of the Japanese Consumer’s Cooperative Union, which in turn is a member of the International Cooperative Association based in Geneva, Switzerland.

### Bridging Cultural Values

Cooperatives in the West could be enriched by considering how Japanese cooperatives have managed to fuse Western democratic ideals with traditional Japanese values. The SCCC arose out of the idealism of the 1960s, which embraced democratic involvement at the grassroots level, respect for both individual and community, and an emerging concern for the environment. Seikatsu is part of the international cooperative movement and is in basic accord with the principles of the original Rochdale model. Hiratsuka (1991) suggests that Japanese cooperatives should base themselves on seven “cooperative principles”: association (or unity), economy, democracy, equity, liberty, responsibility, and education (p. 1); and five “basic cooperative values”: economic activities for meeting needs, participatory democracy, human resource development, social responsibility, and national and international cooperation (p. 2). The Mondragon system

of cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain has also served as an inspiration for Seikatsu and other cooperatives in Japan. (For accounts of the underlying values of Western cooperatives and worker-owned enterprises see Evanoff 1994b; Jackall and Levin 1984; Krimerman and Lindenfeld 1992; Melnyk 1985; Quarter and Melnyk 1989; Rothschild and Whitt 1986; and Wilson 1974.)

Intellectually the SCCC has affinities with the ideas of the Utopian Socialists—Owen, Fourier, Saint-Simone, and Blanc—and the Marxist theoretician, Gramsci. There are also parallels with anarchist theory, particularly with Kropotkin’s principle of mutual aid and Proudhon’s ideas on mutualism. *Han* are similar in some respects to anarchist affinity groups, although their purpose and function are different. Seikatsu’s decentralized, grassroots approach has much in common with the American Green movement (perhaps more so in fact than Japan’s now-defunct Green parties did), and the system of local face-to-face groups confederated at the city and prefectural levels has interesting parallels with Murray Bookchin’s concept of libertarian municipalism.

Nonetheless it would be a mistake to think that Japanese cooperatives are nothing more than attempts to transplant Western democratic ideals onto Japanese soil. In fact, many of the core values which inform Japanese cooperatives are not of Western origin but have indigenous roots in Japanese culture. Japanese often trace their modern values of harmony and “group spirit” back to cooperative traditions nurtured in Japan’s feudal agricultural villages (in much the same way that Americans trace the values of individualism and self-reliance back to the frontier experience). Specifically Japanese cooperatives look back to *yui* (*cf.* Noguchi 1983, p. 36), the feudal custom of exchanging labor on a day-by-day basis during planting and harvesting seasons (and for other services such as assisting with funerals and rethatching roofs). *Yui* associations were often formed in which neighboring households agreed to help each other in times of need—a clear antecedent to the *han* system of the modern Seikatsu movement.

Japanese cooperatives have managed to combine a strong emphasis on Japanese cooperative values with typically Western notions of democratic empowerment. This fusion of both Eastern and Western cultural values is precisely what makes Japanese cooperatives seem both “traditional” and “progressive” at the same time. Moreover, the fusion confounds prevailing stereotypes held both in Japan and in the West that Japanese values are exclusively group-oriented and conformist while Western values are individualistic and self-assertive. There is a tendency among Western critics to denigrate Japan for failing to develop a genuinely democratic society. Traditional group-oriented and cooperative values are often held responsible for the lack of individual identity among Japanese and the high degree of conformity in Japanese society. At the same time, nationalists in Japan tend to equate cooperative values with feudal authoritarianism and to see

Japan's "pure" feudal past as having been corrupted by its contact with Western individualism. Progressive social movements in Japan which draw on Western values, including the feminist, environmental, and cooperative movements, can be easily marginalized as alien forms of "Westernization."

Japanese cooperatives combine the best features of the West's individualistic, democratic tradition with the best features of Japan's group-oriented, cooperative tradition. At the same time they offer a formidable critique of the more negative features of each cultural tradition, namely the tendency of Western individualism to degenerate into self-indulgence and the tendency of Japanese cooperation to degenerate into blind conformity. On the one hand, simply equating cooperation with conformity is too facile. "Cooperation" in Japanese cooperatives has the sense of mutual assistance and self-help rather than the sense of conformity and coercion. The modern cooperative movement in Japan retains an appreciation for traditional community involvement and support while simultaneously repudiating the hierarchical and coercive feudal context in which these values were first promulgated. To be sure, a high degree of personal responsibility is necessary in cooperative structures but, in keeping with the Rochdale principle of open and voluntary membership, all responsibilities are freely undertaken. The kind of "individualism" Japanese cooperatives attempt to foster is closer to the concept of self-reliance than it is to self-indulgence. Individualism in this sense does not necessarily preclude cooperation, although it does preclude hierarchy and domination. In addition, there are clear precedents for this kind of "individualism" in Japanese culture, particularly in the intense individual training necessary to master any traditional Japanese art. Submission to an accomplished "master" is merely the prelude to becoming a "master" oneself. (For a fuller account of how the values of Japanese-style cooperation and Western-style democracy converge in cooperative forms of organization, see Evanoff 1991).

This analysis provides an alternative to the emphasis on "cultural differences" one usually finds in cross-cultural studies. The primary dividing line should not be between Japanese "collectivism" and Western "individualism," but rather between progressive democratic-cooperative tendencies and regressive hierarchical-authoritarian tendencies within each culture. Rather than see Japan and the United States as "competitors" in the global market (leading at times to Japan-bashing in the West and to a tendency among some Japanese to blame all the ills of modern Japan on "Westernization"), there is a need to foster forms of international cooperation and solidarity based on the fact that the similarities between the two countries outweigh the differences. Both Japan and the U.S. are highly industrialized, consumer-oriented societies with representational/bureaucratic forms of government. Both are experiencing the collapse of traditional values in the face of growing modernization. And both have growing cooperative move-

ments which are attempting to provide an alternative to the industrial exploitation of labor and the environment and corporate domination in the political sphere.

The growing inability of the "global economy" to provide meaningful and well-paid work, to be responsive to the needs of local communities, and to take responsibility for the environment has resulted in a wide-spread cynicism among ordinary citizens about the efficacy of modern economic and political institutions. The basis of this cynicism is undercut, however, once the dependency which generates it is overcome. The "self-help" model of cooperatives involves breaking traditional ties of dependency on corporations and governments in an attempt to achieve a greater degree of collective autonomy. The principle of collective autonomy is precisely the point where American-style reliance dovetails most fully with Japanese-style cooperation.

The problem, however, is that while Americans are strong on self-reliance they often lack a cooperative attitude; i.e., they are unable to move beyond a self-centered individualism which is uninterested in any activities that do not benefit them personally. Japanese, on the other hand, are strong on cooperation but often lack a sense of individual responsibility, i.e., they continue to have feelings of dependency towards those above them in the social hierarchy, expecting their leaders both to direct their activities and to provide for them in more or less traditional paternalistic fashion. If Americans are to come to a deeper understanding of cooperation they must progress beyond both their own one-sided individualism and their tendency to regard all forms of cooperation as "conformist." By the same token, if Japanese are to come to a deeper understanding of individualism they must progress beyond both their own one-sided "groupism" and their tendency to view all forms of individualism as "self-indulgent."

There are signs that this process is already underway in Japan. Yokota (1990, pp. 121-124) observes that recent Japanese consumerism has moved away from the idea of "I want what everybody else has" towards the idea of "I want what nobody else has." From a Western progressive point of view the whole concept of creating an "individual lifestyle" for oneself feeds directly into modern consumerism, since it typically emphasizes defining oneself in terms of the "different" products one owns rather than in terms of genuine differences in personality and character. Yokota, however, sees the new individualistic awareness as having the potential of going beyond the shallow consumerism of Japan's "crystal clan"—the rough equivalent of Western yuppies, which Yokota defines as "those who surround themselves with materialistic extravagances" (1990, p. 122)—towards the creation of a demassified economy in which consumers have greater power to dictate what is produced. Yokota feels that the developing sense of "individualism" in Japan is the first step in moving away from a "nation-oriented society" towards a "citizen-oriented society."



Cooperatives such as Seikatsu see a possibility for creating, in addition to the private and public sectors of the economy, an “associative sphere” based on producer and consumer cooperatives, cooperative financial institutions, and cooperative forms of welfare. Cooperative principles need not be limited to food but can be extended to all sorts of goods and services. Because the profit motive is eliminated, cooperative organizations tend to be more efficient than traditional corporations. Producer cooperatives are frequently able to provide higher wages and more job security. The emphasis on democratic self-management can also lead to higher levels of social empowerment and job satisfaction.

Skeptics on the right tend to view cooperatives as utopian and unachievable. Skeptics on the left tend to see them as half-measures that can be easily co-opted by, and reabsorbed into, the market economy. There is reason to avoid raising false hopes, of course, since cooperatives remain marginal at present and the “associative sphere” is still relatively insignificant in terms of the total economy. Nonetheless, contemporary cooperatives provide a laboratory in which people can begin to experiment with more democratic forms of organization. Revolutionaries tend to ignore the deep changes in consciousness which will be necessary before a truly democratic and egalitarian society can be achieved, and rapid structural change will fail to achieve its goals unless there is a corresponding change in consciousness.

Cooperatives share many of the same utopian goals as socialists, Marxists, and anarchists, but retain the traditional capitalist virtues of self-reliance, initiative, and responsibility. As such they are neither “conservative” nor “liberal.” The cooperative model emphasizes decentralization, local control, citizens’ participation, and independent politics, while retaining the basic principle of production to satisfy human needs rather than to generate profits. The goal of cooperatives is a more egalitarian and democratic society in which everyone is able to have a meaningful livelihood, ready access to the basic necessities of life, and an ecologically sound environment. The methods cooperatives are using to achieve this goal are gradual rather than sudden, peaceful rather than violent, voluntary rather than coercive, and concerned with building an alternative at the grassroots level rather than with either reforming or overthrowing the present system.

### Author’s note

This article is a revised and adapted version of my earlier research on the Seikatsu Club Consumers’ Cooperative included in Evanoff 1993a, 1993b, 1994a, and Evanoff, Dickey, and Saito, 1993. I am also grateful to Dr. Takashi Iwami, Chairman of the Study Group on Cooperation in the Seikatsu Club Kanagawa, and Shuei Hiratsuka of the Seikatsu Club Tokyo for personal interviews, and to Makiko Saito and Diane Dickey for their assistance in conducting the interviews.

### References

- 1992 *Annual Report of the Tokyo Seikatsu Club Consumers’ Cooperative*. (1992). Tokyo: Seikatsu Club Consumers’ Cooperative.
- Brecher, J. and Costello, T. (1994). *Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction From the Bottom Up*. Boston: South End Press.
- Evanoff, R. (1991). “Workplace Democracy and Management Styles in Japan and the United States.” *Aoyama Journal of International Politics and Economics*, 12:57-76.
- Evanoff, R. (1993a). “I Among Others: The Cooperative Vision.” *Japan Environment Monitor*, 54:6-7 and 19.
- Evanoff, R. (1993b). “Learning from Japanese Cooperatives.” *Aoyama Journal of International Politics and Economics*, 27:113-135.
- Evanoff, R. (1994a). “Applying the Seikatsu Concept in the U.S.A.” *Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter*, 13:8-9.
- Evanoff, R. (1994b). “Employee Ownership in Northeast Ohio.” *Aoyama Journal of International Politics and Economics*, 30:113-135.
- Evanoff, R., Dickey, D., and Saito, M. (1993). “Seikatsu Club: Redefining the Relationship Between Producers and Consumers.” *Japan Environment Monitor*, 53:12-13. *Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter*, 12. (1994, March/April). Special issue: “Seikatsu: Live Autonomously, Build a Cooperative World.”
- Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter*, 13. (1994, June/July). Special issue: “Seikatsu: GEO Readers Respond: Can We Build On and Towards Seikatsu?”
- Greider, W. (1997). *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Hiratsuka, S. (1991). *The Cooperative Movement*. Tokyo: Seikatsu Club Consumers’ Cooperative.
- Iwami, T. (No date-a). “The Basic Values and Principles of Cooperatives from the Viewpoint of Women’s Self-Reliance.” Unpublished internal document.
- Iwami, T. (No date-b). “International Cooperation on the Basis of Promoting Self-help: A Cooperative Way of Ending Poverty and Preserving the Environment.” Unpublished internal document.
- Iwami, T. (No date-c). “Women’s Workers’ Cooperatives of Seikatsu Club.” Unpublished internal document.
- Jackall R. and Levin, H. (Eds.). (1984). *Worker Cooperatives in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Krimmerman, L. and Lindenfeld, F., eds. (1992). *When Workers Decide: Workplace Democracy Takes Root in North America*. Philadelphia: New Society.
- Korten, D. (1995). *When Corporations Rule the World*. London: Earthscan.
- Lang, T. and Hines, C. (1993). *The New Protectionism: Protecting the Future Against Free Trade*. London: Earthscan.

- Mander, J. and Goldsmith, E., eds. (1996). *The Case Against the Global Economy—and a Turn Toward the Local*. San Francisco: Sierra Club.
- Melnyk, G. (1985). *The Search for Community: From Utopia to a Co-operative Society*. Montréal: Black Rose Books.
- Mies, M. (1993). Liberating the Consumer. In Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed Books, pp. 251-163.
- Morrison, R. (1995). *Ecological Democracy*. Boston: South End Press, 1995.
- Nader, R., et al. (1993). *The Case Against "Free Trade": GATT, NAFTA and the Globalization of Corporate Power*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Noguchi, T. (1983). "Yui." *Kondansha Encyclopedia of Japan*. Vol. 8. Tokyo: Kodansha, p. 36.
- Quarter, J. and Melnyk, G., eds. (1989). *Partners in Enterprise: The Worker Ownership Phenomenon*. Montréal: Black Rose Books.
- Rothschild J. and Whitt, J. (1986). *The Cooperative Workplace: Potentials and Dilemmas of Organizational Democracy and Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative. (1992). *Cooperative Action Based on "Han"*. Tokyo: Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative.
- "Seikatsu's 'Women's Democracy'" (1991). *Grassroots Economic Newsletter*. Prototype issue, no page numbers.
- "Seikatsu-sha: The Autonomous People" (1991). *Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter*, 1:3.
- Wilson, H. (1974). *Democracy and the Workplace*. Montréal: Black Rose Books.
- Yokota, K. (1990). *I Among Others*. Ed. Takashi Iwami. Trans. Alternative Exchange and Translation Workers' Collective. Yokohama: Seikatsu Club Seikyo Kanagawa.

## **The challenge of national self-determination: the pitfalls and contradictions of anarchism and nationalism.**

**Matt Hern**

Speaking about anarchism and nationalist self-determination is a perilous prospect. In one sense, nationalism has always been anathema to anarchists. The idea of nationalism is in direct contradiction to traditionally reified anarchist ideas of voluntary association and autonomous communities. Yet compelling self-determination movements across the world continue to challenge anarchist notions of affiliation, loyalty and governance. I believe it critical for contemporary anarchists to confront that challenge thrusts.

It is my contention that anarchists have to recognize national self-determination movements as fundamental to creating a socially ecological society and reversing the centralized colonial domination that smears every part of the globe. I want to make an argument that self-determination has to make up one layer of a directly democratic vision for social reconstruction.

In practice and theory, the contradictions of national self-determination movements and their implications for radical thought have been largely and notably ignored: "the leading figures of political philosophy, past and present, are virtually mute on the issue of secession. Neither Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, nor Mill devoted any serious attention to secession." (Buchanan, 1991; p. vii) The term "Balkanization" has been synonymous with state breakup and breakdown, chaotic nationalist loyalties and organizational confusion for most of this century. The term is almost always used pejoratively and disdainfully by centralists, and has connotations of civil war and violent secessionism.

Anarchists have always been opposed to nationalism, or at least the manufactured patriotic defense of arbitrarily defined states, and especially the seemingly inherent nationalistic urges toward domination, imperialism and colonialism. There are, however, many struggles for self-determination, usually by one distinct nation against the colonization of an imperialist state, that ought to elicit anarchist support. I am arguing here for the dissolution of state domination into a socially ecological vision of a community of communities. I believe it possible that self-determination, even resting at root on national affiliation, may well provide the legitimate and useful basis for radically decentralized communities.