

THE FUTURE OF THE ASIAN CREDIT UNIONS IS WHAT WE 'LL MAKE OF IT

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“When the perfect order prevails, the world is like a family shared by all....A sense of sharing displaces the effects of selfishness and materialism.” ----Confucius

THE GRAND UNION

I first came to Korea in the year 1968 for a workers' education seminar held in the YMCA . I was surprised to see a strong Confucius culture here, more so than in Hong Kong at that time. Then, in 1971, I came as Chairman of the Planning Committee for a confederation of credit unions in Asia which led to the formation of ACCU in April at the Cooperative Education Institute. I found the great credit union leaders in Korea such as Xavier Park Hee Sup who was Sister Gabriela's " Right hand man", Michael Sangho Lee whom I first met in Bangkok in 1963, John Park and Augustine Kang knew some sayings of Confucius' Analects (Lun Yu:論語). In Xavier Park's home, there was a scroll of the full text of the passage from the Conveyance of Rites (Li Yun:禮運), describing the Grand Union(大同):

“When the perfect order prevails, the world is like a home shared by all. Virtuous and worthy people are elected to public office, and capable persons hold posts of gainful employment in society; peace and trust among all people are the maxims of living. All people love and respect their own parents and children, as well as the parents and children of others. There is caring for the old; there are jobs for the adults; there are nourishment and education for the children. There is a means of support for the widows and the widowers; for all who find themselves alone in the world; and for the disabled. Every man and woman has an appropriate role to play in the family and society. A sense of sharing displaces the effects of selfishness and materialism. A devotion to public duty leaves no room for idleness. Intrigues and conniving for ill gain are unknown. Villains such as thieves and robbers do not exist. The door to every home need never be locked and bolted by day or night. These are the characteristics of an ideal world, the commonwealth state.” -----Translated by Professor Richard Hooker, Washington State University

OUR UNDERLYING BOND

Twenty years after the birth of ACCU, I was asked to write a Bond and I had the Conveyance of Rites in mind because to us a credit union is in itself a "Grand union". The Underlying Bond was subsequently polished by Leni, our present CEO and it was put in most ACCU's major publications, including in this year's calendar. Our Bond reads:

“ACCU is unique of tis human richness and diversity. ACCU resembles a family which varies widely in age, appearance, taste, talent and temperament. We have no difficulty in recognizing each other as relatives and in putting a value upon our kinship. We appreciate each other's special qualities and distinctiveness. We complement other's weaknesses by other's strengths. We are ready to lend a hand, share and care for one another. This is the nature of our underlying bond which we treasured so much in the past 45 years and which will continue to give ACCU life and bring our future success in helping to improve the quality of life of the people in Asia.”

AN UTOPIA

Sounds like Sir Thomas More's Utopia, a dream? In a way, credit union people are dreamers, sharing the same dream and doing our part for the Grand Union.

Take a look at the U.N.'s 17 Sustainable Development Goals that we in ACCU has been working hard for and comparing it with the Grand Union and our Underlying Bond. Are there similarity? There are rich resources of ethical ideas in ancient Asian culture which we need to explore and promote so that we could play an important and right role in our common efforts to realize the SDGs of the U.N. which embody the ethical vision of the Asian experience. For example,

- Take man as an integral part of nature (天人合一)
- Buddhist ideas all living beings are equal (眾生平等) and discovering one's own innate Buddha nature (直指本心) to give full play to one's own innate goodness in one's relationship to other people, to all Creatures in the world and to ecological environments
- Help the poor to help themselves
- Teach people to fish; not to give fish to people (授以漁; 非受之以魚)
- In education, there is no separation into categories (有教無類) and promote social justice and fairness through education
- Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire (己所不欲, 勿施於人)

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY

In the early days, many credit union leaders in Asia had the Encyclical letters such as Mater et Magistra and Populorum Progressio as guiding principles. Lately, Pope Francis in Laudato si pointed out that "We urgently need a humanism capable of bring together the different fields of knowledge, including economics in the service of a more integral and integrating vision (141)." And his predecessor, in Caritas in Veritate: "Locating resources, financial, production, consumption and all the other phases in the economic cycle inevitably have moral implications. Thus every economic decision has a moral consequence." Credit unions have always been in sustainable finance and in helping people to help themselves. Credit unions being basic cooperatives have been promoting a culture of service to society.

Globally, free market capitalism is coming under fire as countries across Europe question its merit and some emerging markets run their own forms of state-directed capitalism. After the 2008 financial crisis, the simple question to ask is: "Are financial institutions doing things which provide a clear, measurable benefit to the real economy?" Credit unions in the past were believed to be a balance between capitalism and other forms of economic activities. In a time like today, credit unions can, more than ever before, be therapeutic by keeping our values and principles of cooperatives and our ongoing membership education program that includes:

- Co-operative democracy and its practice
- History of the cooperative
- The co-operative identity
- Members' role and involvement
- The cooperative difference
- O-operative management

An ongoing co-operative renewal program is equally important too to maintain our cooperative identity.

If credit unions do not build in the ingredients of cooperation, they might not be readily distinguished by their own members and others from other enterprises.

CREATING UNITY

Committing to the altruistic aim of a unified movement in Asia has all along been our greatest effort. This requires individual credit unions, chapters, federations and ACCU to see all of our Movement as their family and to concentrate on positive purpose, values and vision. We must be aware that to fulfill our functions as financial institutions for the people, we must provide attractive efficient services. We must be protected from crippling attacks the legislation within which we operate all the time. We must be alert to changes in management, know-hows and in new technology. We must change, progress, keeping abreast with the time. We must be dynamic! We are conscious of how no one credit union can really be “An island unto itself” as the poet John Donne once summed it all up. Isolation and just bouncing around on the high seas with hands on the two oars of saving and loan of our little row boats, the credit union while looking backwards over the sterns is a very risky wager with fate. Too much division in our movement is like a car stuck in deep mud: the engine races and the wheels spin, but the car goes nowhere.

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

The world is in the Exponential Age and the 4th Industrial Revolution. In the past 10 years, we have seen many business models disappear and go bankrupt. It will soon happen with artificial intelligence, health, autonomous and electric cars, education, printing, agriculture and jobs. We need to understand the nature of transformational change in order to adapt to internal and external change of our movement, if we are to move into the future comfortably and with powerful energy. Knowing that change is an essential component to evolution of the self and organizational environments allows us to cease being reactive and instead to respond positively with the conscious understanding that there is an opportunity for us to help shape the future. To this end, ACCU has just completed a “Managing Yourself For Others” (MYFO) course for cooperators based on the belief that “To inspire and lead others, one must learn to manage oneself.”

A GOOD ANALOGY

In MYFO, we use the life cycle of a lobster, an eagle and a butterfly for a credit union leader and the credit union movement in Asia to cope with transformational change. To end this talk, I am using the analogy of the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. A caterpillar is a voracious feeder--- a massive eater, eating almost continuously the whole day. It eats several times its weight in volume of food. It sheds so fast that those who are studying it closely can literally see it grow in the 10 days or so that it is a caterpillar. In contrast, a butterfly is a very selective feeder, flitting from one flower to another, feeding on nectar. The butterfly is a very delicate animal. In between the two---the voracious feeder and the delicate feeder---is the pupa, the chrysalis which is totally immobile. It does not feed at all for the three or four weeks it is in that stage, neither does it move except wiggling its tail. Biochemically and physiologically a profound transformation is taking place during this period. The whole organism is being transformed into a totally new animal---but it is the same animal....transformed in the silence of the pupa!