



Journal of Co-operative Studies

2025 Special issue: Co-operative futures in China

Call for papers

Guest editors: Adrian Bailey, Senior Lecturer in Management, Department of Management, University of Exeter, and **Hao Dong**, Lecturer in Operations and Project Management, University of Southampton.

Aims of the special issue

Co-operatives have a rich history in China, and this call seeks to explore the various dimensions of co-operative development, governance, and their potential to align with the global co-operative identity as outlined by the International Co-operative Alliance. We invite scholars, researchers, practitioners, and experts to contribute original research and insights that shed light on the multifaceted landscape of co-operatives in contemporary China.

Accepted papers will be published in a special issue of the *Journal* in 2025.

Key dates

30 November 2023 Deadline for extended abstracts (1,000-2,000 words) for academic articles and short papers; outline suggestions for think pieces (500-800 words, or in full).

Email to a.r.bailey@exeter.ac.uk and h.dong@soton.ac.uk with 'Submission for JCS special issue' in the subject line, and include in your email the type of submission being made (research article, short paper/practitioner paper, think piece).

31 January 2024 Initial decisions and invitations for submissions of full papers.

31 July 2024 Deadline for submissions of full papers.

Co-operative Futures in China

It is an astonishing fact that nearly half of the world's smallholder farmers (n. 230 million) are located in China. Co-operatives currently provide a range of benefits to smallholder farmers in China and are a key component in economic development initiatives and programs (Liang & Han, 2023; Ma et al., 2022). In 2007, there were 26,000 formally registered co-operatives in China, rising to 2.17 million in 2018 (Wilmsen et al., 2023). The lives of 100 million farmers, representing 47% of China's rural population are touched to a greater or lesser extent by their membership of a co-operative organisation. The rapid growth of co-operatives in China since the passing of the Farmers' Specialised Co-operative (FSC) law in 2007 (revised in 2017) is distinctive and raises uncertainties regarding the future of co-operative organising and organisations. The majority of these co-operatives resemble private- or investor-owned companies, with core shareholding concentrated in the hands of founder members and control typically dominated by a Chairman. The characteristics of contemporary co-operatives in China raise many questions about the co-operative identity of these organisations and the trajectory of their development (Dong, 2019), not least the influence of path dependencies established by the state-policy nexus. Are co-operatives the Trojan horse for a new generation of elite landlords (Wilmsen et al. 2023), or are other futures possible? Is the scaling of farmer co-operatives in China economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable (Colombo et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023)? What innovative forms of organisation and organising hold potential for more just forms of co-operation?

Potential topics for contributions to a special issue of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies* might include (but are not limited to):

- Factors that may contribute to Chinese co-operatives engaging more closely with the Co-operative Identity outlined by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), including the Values and Principles of the co-operative movement (Wan et al., 2023).
- The role of kinship, culture, social networks, and demographic trends.
- Co-operative growth, post-growth and processes of scaling.
- Diversification beyond farming and food production.
- Solidarity economy, mutualism and rural development.
- The role of patron-client relationships.
- Elite capture, co-optation, coercion, and dispossession.
- How co-operatives in China perceive and act upon sustainability issues (e.g., social, environmental and governance challenges)?
- Diversity and inclusivity within their distinctive governance arrangements (e.g., women, migrants, child labour etc.).
- Opportunities and/or threats arising from legal or technical innovations (Liu & Zhang, 2023).

- Geographical differences in co-operative development and/or governance (e.g., provincial dynamics, North-South differences, local networks etc.) (Li et al., 2023).
- Co-operatives within the bounds of new state capitalism (Su & Lim, 2023).
- Local embeddedness and forms of community-based co-operative organisation.
- How co-operatives negotiate conflicting institutional logics internally and externally?

Bibliography

- Colombo, L. A., Bailey, A. R., & Gomes, M. V. P. (2023). Scaling in a post-growth era: Learning from Social Agricultural Cooperatives. *Organization*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505084221147480>
- Dong, H. (2019). *Contemporary agricultural co-operatives in China: A multi-case comparison of tea co-operatives and their supply chains*. [PhD thesis, University of Exeter]. Open Research Exeter. <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/39740>
- Li, F., Zhao, W., & Yeh, E. T. (2023). The locally managed agrarian transition in China: Land shareholding cooperatives and the agricultural co-management system in Chongzhou, Sichuan. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 64(6), 732-757. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2022.2071749>
- Liang, Q., & Han, Z. (2023). Farmer cooperatives in China: Frontiers in development and research. In M. S. Elliott & M. A. Boland (Eds.). *Handbook of Research on Cooperatives and Mutuals* (pp. 406-421). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802202618>
- Liu, X., & Zhang, X. (2023). The impact of the digital economy on high-quality development of specialized farmers' cooperatives: Evidence from China. *Sustainability*, 15(10), 7958. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15107958>
- Ma, W., Zheng, H., & Yuan, P. (2022). Impacts of cooperative membership on banana yield and risk exposure: Insights from China. *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 73(2), 564-579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-9552.12465>
- Su, X., & Lim, K. F. (2023). Capital accumulation, territoriality, and the reproduction of state sovereignty in China: Is this 'new' state capitalism? *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 55(3), 697-715. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X221093643>
- Wan, Q., Micheels, E., & Fulton, M. (2023). 24. Social relations and cooperative development in rural China. In M. S. Elliott & M. A. Boland (Eds.). *Handbook of Research on Cooperatives and Mutuals* (pp. 389-405). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802202618>
- Wilmsen, B., Rogers, S., Duan, Y., & Wang, J-H. Z. (2023). Farmer cooperatives and the limits of agricultural reform in rural Hubei. *The China Journal*, 89, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1086/722258>

Submission guidelines for authors