

It also finds that in the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries, Islamic banking earns consistently higher spreads than the conventional banks. Finally, a study of Japan's experience post-quantitative easing provides a new aspect to "rent" literature studies.

The book broadly achieves its aims. It is written in an easily understood manner and illustrates the "rent" concept well. It also extends the discussions to the less-covered area of Islamic banking and to quantitative easing, a fairly recent concept. However, while it covers several Asian countries, the choice thereof is not obvious. In terms of the more developed Asian countries, it includes only Japan, without devoting any writing space to Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Likewise, the book has also not covered major developing economies such as India and Vietnam.

If the authors' intention was to explain the "rent" concept from different angles in each chapter, the book has achieved this objective. If, however, this was coincidental, then one may wish to consider reducing the level of repetitive phrases so as to achieve parsimony. After all, the concept can be explained and discussed upfront. The latter chapters could focus on each country's contextual uniqueness without excess reiteration of "rent".

It seems odd that the discussions on China used the 2003 statistics as the latest. It would be useful to extend the data to a more recent date. Also, the lengthy discussions on Sri Lanka's historical background and Japan's quantitative easing initiatives seem to detract the reader's attention from the book's core focus of "bank rent".

The discussions on p. 133 regarding why Indonesia has higher proportions of equity-based financing (than Bangladesh and Malaysia) has to be read in the proper context. The authors state that the insights were obtained through interviews with Indonesian bank directors made "in passing". Among the ways to enrich the insights would be to interview bank directors outside Indonesia such as Bangladesh and Malaysia, or even other countries or organizations.

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***Handbook of Empirical Research on Islam and Economic Life*, edited by M. Kabir Hassan. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017. Pp. 754.**

The Islamic financial service sector today represents approximately 1 per cent of global financial assets. Nevertheless, it has been growing strongly over the past decade. In 2011 alone, for example, Islamic financial assets expanded by US\$1.086 trillion, an impressive 21 per cent growth over the previous year. Furthermore, the global Islamic finance sector has nearly doubled in size from 2007 to 2010, a period when many conventional banks across the globe were struggling. In fact, then, and even till today, as claimed by many experts in the field, not a single Islamic bank has needed to be bailed out by taxpayers' money. This reality has increased general interest in the soundness and resilience of the Islamic finance model.

According to the latest market trend, the Islamic finance sector has gradually gained market share due to increase in demand from Gulf investors with a significant capital size. Simultaneously, demand has also expanded in regions with Muslim minorities, such as the United Kingdom, Europe, East Asian and even Central Asian countries. Until today, the sector continues to demonstrate its potential to keep rapidly growing internationally. Due to this reality, various parties in the financial sector, governments and academia are keen to explore this (not so) “new” territory with different motivations. This is also the key reason why this book was authored.

As the editor of the book, Professor M. Kabir Hassan asserts in the foreword that Islamic economics and finance (IEF) is distinct from conventional economics, not because it goes against the persuasion of individuals to be self-interested rational beings, but due to the fact that the discipline adds “soul” into the individual — by inculcating a sense of spiritual fulfilment in them. According to the paradigm of IEF, economic activities must be guided by morals and ethics according to Islamic teachings. However, a question arises here: how could such a paradigm possibly compete in the cut-throat global economic environment? To answer this question, this handbook examines the level of competency and resilience of the IEF sector through empirical research.

The title of the volume *Handbook of Empirical Research on Islam and Economic Life* itself explains its nature and contents. It is a continuation of the earlier volume, “*Handbook on Islam and Economic Life* (2014), which focussed on the guiding principles, methodology and analytical tools of Islamic economics. Unlike the former, this series has shifted from a mere normative emphasis to a positive one, and includes specification of testable hypotheses and their verification when confronted with real-world data and observations. Hence, it employs an empirical approach to assess the level of success that Islamic institutions have established to crystalize the Islamic vision of economy.

The thirty papers or chapters in this book are divided into five major categories: Religion and Growth; Islamic Social Finance; Islamic Banking and Finance; Islamic Capital Market; and *Sukuk* (Islamic bonds). What makes the empirical studies in this volume interesting is that the case studies are taken from various regions beyond Muslim-majority countries, and from different institutions involved in the sector. Given the wide discussions on different subjects, the hypotheses put forward for testing are too numerous to summarize in a few limited paragraphs. Nevertheless, this volume, through its chapters, contains several themes: the impact of religion on economic behaviour; the role of culture and legal traditions on financial development; the determinants of access to microfinance; the impact of *zakat* (alms) on poverty and human development; the hedging and performance characteristics of Islamic investment funds; and predicting financial distress in *sukuk* markets.

Another noteworthy feature of this volume is the emphasis on certain chapters on Islamic economic instruments beyond the conventional profit-making framework of financial institutions. The discussions and evaluations of the potential of Islamic finance to help invigorate a neglected segment of society — through microfinancing, *zakat*, cash *waqf* (endowment), *mudharabah* (profit-sharing venture capital) and other tools within the framework of IEF — offer a refreshing perspective into this emerging sector.

The only obvious element missing in this book are the views of permanent critics of the sector, such as Timur Kuran, El-Gamal, Jomo K.S., A.K.M. Meera and others. Their opinions on the IEF sector would shed some light into area(s) where players could improve their performance, thereby turning the volume into a more rigorous and analytical — not to mention, a more nuanced and balanced — academic piece. Moreover, there was insufficient discussions/analysis in chapters on the prediction and foresight on how the sector might perform in the coming decade. This might be very important to the sceptical reader, as well as those who are curious about the future and prospects of the sector. Despite these shortcomings, this is an opportune “handbook” of well-researched papers. It not only provides an introduction to beginners

on how the IEF sector operates, but also answers some important questions that sceptics of the sector might have.

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Higher Education in the Asian Century: The European Legacy and the Future of Transnational Education in the ASEAN Region, edited by Christopher Hill and Rozilini M. Fernandez-Chung. New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. 158.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional block of ten countries working together to develop a strong economic community. Higher education has been identified as one of the key tools needed to enhance the development of human resources in the region. This has translated into four main priorities that are to be incorporated in the ASEAN higher education system: student mobility; credit transfers; quality assurance; and research clusters. The ultimate goal is to set up a common space of higher education in Southeast Asia that currently includes 6,500 higher education institutions and more than 12 million students across the constituent nations. This book therefore offers timely insights into the understanding of higher education in the region, with a specific focus on the Transnational Education (TNE) network.

The introductory chapter attempts to explain the European-Asian connection of TNE across higher education systems in ASEAN. Here, particular attention is given to the unique colonial experiences of eight member countries. While the chapter has been put together in a comprehensive fashion, it can be further enriched by dwelling into the conceptual discussion of topics like “the Asian century”, the underlying geopolitics and socio-economic considerations, the influence of European or Western characteristics of higher education in the Asian context, as well as the indigenous characteristics of Asian higher education.

Chapter 1 begins with Malaysia, one of the pioneering countries to embark on TNE. Morshidi Sirat explores the issues of politics and policy-making in the context of TNE in Malaysia using a non-linear analytical model that portrays diverse positive and negative situations. Robin Middlehurst then provides a commentary from the United Kingdom’s perspective — as a sending country for TNE — talking about the analytical framework used in relation to the development of higher education in the United Kingdom; the impact of TNE, particularly neo-colonial tendencies in Malaysia; and the nature of TNE as trade in services.

Chapter 2 shifts the focus to Cambodia. Here, Kee-Cheok Cheong and Sam Ghanty illustrate the success and failure of TNE in Cambodia using two contrasting case studies. Understandably, the chapter provides an extensive context of the nation’s historical narrative as well as its education system. The two case studies not only include a rich description of the Cambodian tertiary education system, but also highlight the challenges and barriers pertaining to TNE.

Chapter 3 discusses TNE in Indonesia. The discussion on the changing relationships between Indonesian universities and their European counterparts is particularly interesting here. From the initial relationship enforced by the Dutch colonizers and subsequently replaced by a nationalistic model after independence, globalization has now pushed Indonesian universities to embark on TNE collaborations with English-
