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[Review of "Taking on the world: globalization strategies in Malaysia" by Sieh Lee Mei Ling]

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Book Reviews

Taking on the World: Globalization Strategies in Malaysia

By Sieh Lee Mei Ling, Malaysia, McGraw-Hill, 2000, 300 pages, hard cover, RM 79.90/US \$23.00

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In *Taking on the World: Globalization Strategies in Malaysia*, Professor Sieh Lee Mei Ling candidly focuses on the changes that have been taking place within Malaysian corporations because of long-term global business strategies. Her principal thrust is to emphasize "the role of Malaysia as a host country for multinational companies engaged in real productive activities and in the trade as part of their international operations" (p. 3). Stated differently, she investigates the role of Malaysian companies--at home as well as abroad--as partners with multinational corporations operating in Malaysia. She takes a futurist orientation as she deals with "what is to come." In particular, focusing on the last decade of the twentieth century, she evaluates five key globalization issues:

- With globalization, foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into Malaysia are increasingly motivated by factors different from those of earlier periods.
- The link between FDI and international trade in goods and services is enlarging.
- Even after foreign investors had decided to go overseas, what were the factors leading them to choose Malaysia?
- To what extent have Malaysian companies been successful in collaborating with foreign investors, given the many differences between them--particularly as joint-venture partners?
- In view of the recent trends, what can be predicted for Malaysia?

In order to address the above issues effectively, the author collected data from multiple sources--which she calls a three-prong approach--to help us better understand the topic. The author:

- Conducted an extensive literature search to examine how Malaysia has been used to help achieve corporate goals and business objectives of foreign companies.
- Gathered and analyzed statistical data fitting her broad research objectives. In other words, she used all available macro-level evidence to demonstrate the part played by Malaysia in the global strategies and international business operations of companies.
- Collected company-level data, both from multinationals and domestic Malaysian companies alike, by holding lengthy discussions with about 30 senior government officials from the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry as well as other relevant ministries and departments, senior managers of MNCs, and large Malaysian companies operating in the five industry sub-sectors.

Using the three terms--multinationals, transnational, and global companies--interchangeably, the author discusses the contribution of "the Malaysian economy to corporations as they cast their horizons not just internationally as before, but in a highly integrated fashion through unprecedented multidimensionally tight business relationships" (p. 3).

One of the best parts of the book is the richness of the data in terms of qualitative analysis of the selected interesting cases. In total, the author chose five specific industry sub-sectors for in-depth analysis: electronics, automobiles, food, textiles and apparel, and financial services. Each industry-case has been arranged in the following sequence: An Industry Overview, Malaysia's Role in Global Strategies, Emerging Globalization Strategies, Implications of Globalization, and Future of Malaysia's Global Linkages. The analysis of these five industry cases indicates that Malaysian investors are at different stages of involvement in different industries. The role of the various

industries is contingent on several factors such as age and history of the specific company, the adoption of advanced technology, the degree of modernization, capital intensity, local content and target market, and the quality of human resources available within the economy.

Although the author warns of the potentially adverse impact of globalization, she is optimistic about this phenomenon in the Malaysian context. She is positive because Malaysia had been successful in arresting past problems of economic downturn through fundamental policy adjustments and the political strength of the Barisan Nasional (National Front) government--both in the 1980s and in 1997/98. She concludes, "globalization will be almost irreversible as it widens and deepens. The resultant pan-global power that can cause sharp changes with lightning speed may become a potential source of great harm to mankind if globalization fails due to indiscipline or sheer immensity of corporate power" (pp. 139-140).

Overall, *Taking on the World: Globalization Strategies in Malaysia* offers a rich source of information, insights, and suggestions both for managers and for organizational leaders who wish to understand globalization and globalization strategies in Malaysia. The book is a result of Professor Sieh's four years of active research and reflection on the subject. The perspective she brings to this book is certainly unique. The book should be read by managers who truly want to encourage globalization and are willing to make the changes necessary for that to happen. In addition, the book is recommended for graduate courses such as international marketing management, international business management, and international human resource management. Finally, this book will be interesting to anyone wishing more information about globalization.