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The most dynamic domestic enterprises in Malaysia are the small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), yet there is a paucity of research on these firms. SMEs reputedly could have contributed much more to Malaysia’s industrial progress had the government provided them greater support, yet there is little analysis of state policies on SME development. This publication is thus a potentially important contribution to scholarship on Malaysian capital and the role of the state in developing domestic enterprise. It is, however, a disappointment on two unpardonable grounds.

First, this volume, evidently unedited by the publisher, is a laborious read because of the author’s poor command of the English language. The author’s arguments are difficult to grasp because of poor sentence construction and basic grammatical mistakes. Many of the references cited are not listed in the bibliography.

Second, this book, though empirically laden, is devoid of any meaningful analysis. The author’s main contribution is the listing of the policies, agencies and incentives introduced by the government to promote the development of SMEs. Although a bulk of the volume is dedicated to this effort, there is no critical assessment of any of these government initiatives. This is a major flaw as the author raises an important question: why is it that in spite of extensive government support for SMEs, an ensemble of entrepreneurial firms has not emerged at this level?

The penultimate chapter (of the nine chapters in the volume) and the brief conclusion are the most important sections of the volume. This chapter provides two, albeit too condensed, case studies of SMEs operating in different parts of Malaysia and in different economic sectors. The case studies draw attention to important SME themes, including ownership structures, sources of financing and intra-ethnic business networking, none of which are analyzed in any depth. Other interesting issues noted in the case studies are not probed deeply: for instance, policies in place to help SMEs appear instead to have benefited large enterprises; bank loans are inadequate and those that are available are not properly disbursed; and most SMEs are not privy to all forms of government benefits available to them.

The volume’s key question is inadequately addressed because the discussion is not put in perspective, within the context of economic and political developments in Malaysia. Analysis of the New Economic Policy (NEP), for example, should have been developed given the findings of the research. The NEP was introduced to ensure, among other things, more equitable distribution of corporate wealth among ethnic communities. This involved positive discrimination favouring Malay capital, and while Chinese SMEs were not denied the right to apply for government aid, it was unlikely that they secured much state support. Thus the volume’s most interesting fact, that the most successful SMEs are those which did not benefit from any government support, takes on added significance. The author only briefly acknowledges in the conclusion that Chinese-owned SMEs were more successful than Malay firms. Why have successful Malay-owned SMEs not emerged in large numbers in spite of government efforts to develop such ethnically-owned enterprises and why do Chinese firms thrive in spite of little state support? These questions are not even raised, nor does the author identify the norms that underlie business strategies of the ‘successful companies’. Insight into these questions would have contributed new policy ideas for the development of SMEs, the key objective of this study.
The publisher must ultimately be taken to task for publishing this volume in this form. Had the author been encouraged to reflect more on his area of research, his book which promises so much would not have delivered so little.

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This text is the result of PhD work undertaken at the Eindhoven Centre for Innovation Studies (ECIS), Eindhoven University of Technology, and was embedded in the International Comparisons of Output and Productivity Project (ICOP). It was completed with the cooperation of academics and statisticians in various countries and parts of it were presented at numerous conferences between 1996 and 1998.

The book presents a study of a comparative analysis of the industrialization process in China, India, Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan, chosen due to the importance of their economic growth in Asia. The study focuses on the measurement and explanation of comparative productivity levels within manufacturing industries for the period 1963–93. It builds on a host of previous studies from the ICOP and ‘augments the emergent literature by providing both level comparisons of output and productivity and a analysis of growth drawn by sector of manufacturing’.

To say the text is informative would be understating the depth of detail and care in data analysis. To say it is focused and technically endowed would be describing exactly the raison d’être of a PhD study. Comparing the study nations to the USA and their degree and form of ‘catch-up’, as well as explaining some uninformative preconceptions about how less developed countries can grow economically are the strengths of the text. Unlike many ‘economic’ type texts with numbers, the text is very readable. In keeping with the need for ‘originality’ at PhD level, the text does provide some new insights into economic development in the countries under study, and provides a new slant on the methodological process. The numerical techniques used in the analysis are justified and the conclusions drawn are soundly based. The author states that the ‘accumulationist’ school would have us believe that there is nothing miraculous about the economic growth of Asian manufacturing, due to the accumulation of capital; on the other hand, the ‘assimilationist’ school stresses that technological change has been the main driving force in the Asian growth boom. The author concludes that both forces are at play in East Asia, stimulated by active government policies. However, in China, India and Indonesia accumulation of capital was accompanied to a lesser extent by technological change (unlike South Korea and Taiwan), hence relative levels of productivity remain low and ‘catch-up’ growth potential large.

The book will be of interest to all who seek an insight into the Asian manufacturing ‘miracle’, particularly academic researchers, university lecturers and teachers. It may be too specific for undergraduates, but would be a good source for literature and methodology for master’s and PhD students.

The book does raise further research issues. The author rightly omits factors like marketing ability, product quality, consumer preference, etc., which have been factored out of the analysis. In the context of the study this is perfectly acceptable. However, it would be interesting to put these in some time, and re-run the analysis. There may be a different answer.

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BOOK REVIEWS


Logic is a fine book, in fact an outstanding one, in their enthusiasm. The book records and analyses the politics of pulling together collectively (what I call the ‘political personal aggrandizement’) which characterised as “refractive”, absorbing and construing the LDP’s ‘Return to Power’ and the belief in the ‘Uncertain Political Future’ in Chapter 8. The bibliography and four very useful appendices (1995–1999: Appendices 2 and 3 and Appendices 3 and 4 provide party within the last dozen years or so.

Curtis has obvious in-depth knowledge of all the detail here. It is a detailed view of the basic point is as follows: ‘The Japanese electorate by trying to be as much as possible to the interests and themselves’ (p.9). The problem is that their managers became more complacent. It is the organizations than politics. It is the boiler at the place it in a pot of cool water, slowly environment is warming up, and, eventually...

For the Japanese scholar, the detail of the insider’s view, written by an outsider, this and the ‘Changing Japanese Voter’ seem to be the my view.

Its strengths have a few drawbacks. Thucydides. You get more of the ‘what’ the level of detail, even in this example, that some Japanese political restaurant. If Ruth Benedict’s The Changing Japanese Culture (Boston: Houghton Mifflin), Curtis gives us the 300-foot view.

Curtis is a political scientist, and ‘nagata-cho’, or ‘inside the belter’ within the political scientist mindset. I wish the Japanese, as perhaps is true with the politics of pulling together collectively (what I call the ‘political personal aggrandizement’) which would be...

Wish Curtis had added one more perspective and mountain of facts...