

Book reviews

The New Silk Road: Secrets of Business Success in China Today, John B. Stuttard, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 2000, (hardback), 144 pages.

This book is based on the working and living experience of a businessman, John B. Stuttard, who sojourned in China for five years as Chairman and CEO of Coopers & Lybrand China and post-merger, Chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) China, including his interviews with 11 Chairmen of multinational enterprises (MNEs) operating in the PRC. Although it is not an academic book with references, it provides a substantial 'inside knowledge', with very practical and useful advice, to entrepreneurs and managers interested in doing business in China. The valuable contribution of this book is that the author breaks the stereotypes made by the Western media. Several issues are worthwhile to be addressed here.

First, is about a realistic view of the size of Chinese market. Due to the disparity of development between the East coast and inland, the author reminds the readers that China today is not a market of 1.3 billion people, and this market is fast-changing and difficult to read. Therefore, foreign investors should not have an unrealistic hope for this vast economy. As one of the interviewees mentioned: – 'China is a giant with certain weaknesses'.

Second, is the competition in China. In this market, not only is the local competition fierce, but also that from other foreign companies is even fiercer. It is related to the first point that the illusion of Chinese market is huge, therefore everyone is here 'from all over the world'. The competition has built-up and it is even sharper than for any other market globally. Therefore, potential investors should be well-prepared before entry.

Third, is about the regulatory environment. The author highlights the necessity of control through regulation. One of the interviewees told him that 'China cannot tolerate chaos. The political instability in a country with that mass of population would destroy China. Change will come, but it will come in China's time, not on or of a timetable of external forces'. The author reminds the readers that gradual change requires

investors to be patient in terms of dealing with both macro-economic environment and routine business operations.

Fourth, is about the management system. A long-term strategy of localisation is crucial for MNEs' success. MNEs invested in China should be prepared to 'stay for a long time' and see themselves as part of the forces for its development. That is related to the issue of localisation: being a corporate citizen in China to fulfill goals such as help recruiting, training and promoting local Chinese staff, serving the local customers with high quality products and eventually achieving profits for their shareholders.

Fifth, is the issue of ethics. One of the stereotypes of doing business in China is that corruption is inevitable and foreigners who want to achieve a successful business outcome must bribe officials. In fact, the ethics issue is very much a concern by these MNEs. The author suggests that good quality of products, a trustful relationship with officials and local partners are the crucial factors for business success. One of the interviewees claims that many people somehow have the impression that *guanxi* (connections and relationships) means giving favours and thereby being owed favours. However, he views *guanxi* more in terms of sincerity and trust. Another interviewee also mentions that 'if you act fairly, frankly, and honestly', you can make a successful relationship with the local partners. Therefore, for these MNEs, corruption is not a key factor in terms of their business activities.

The last, but not the least, is cultural sensitivity. Some important advice has been offered by the author and some of his interviewees: being familiar with the Chinese culture, learning the language and being communicative with local staff, 'doing home-work well before arriving China', and 'being yourself' as a foreigner (non-Chinese) but 'with cultural understanding and sensitivity'.

Generally speaking, this is a very useful book for business practitioners who are interested in doing business in China or students who study international and cross-cultural management. I believe it would be helpful if more books like this would come out to break the stereotypes created about others by some of the more superficial Western media reports. In ad-

dition, a relatively accurate understanding of others not only benefits business operations in an unfamiliar environment, but also enriches human knowledge as whole.

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The Global HR Manager, Creating the seamless organisation, Pat Joynt and Bob Morton (eds), Institute of Personnel Development, London, 1999, 267 pp. ISBN 0-85292-815-7

This book offers ten contributions dealing with International HRM in the global organisation, topped and tailed by the editors' introduction and after-word. It may indeed be useful to those working in this field.

Black and Ulrich treat HRM from the perspective of organisations as 'bundles of capabilities', and provide useful snapshots of current practices in companies such as Disney and GE as they attempt to learn and share knowledge while managing the tensions between localisation and globalisation. These authors succeed in their aim of bringing more detail and clarity to the debate around how to manage the latter dilemma. Goffee and Jones offer a theoretical treatment of the relationship between organisational culture and international HRM. They identify four organisational 'archetypes' and suggest that HR managers need to take different approaches to the employment relationship within each. While the archetypes are help-

ful, a tighter and more detailed connection to current organisational practices would have been useful here. Sparrow provides a useful guide to international recruitment, selection, and assessment, which has the virtue of providing details of how companies such as Cadbury Schweppes, British Airways, and EMI manage these processes.

Other chapters cover international compensation, career management, cross-cultural relations, the HR manager as global partner, international teams, and international management teams. The final contribution, from Ng and Warner, treats international HRM from an Asian perspective, and offers a warning against naively superimposing Western models of HRM in an attempt to understand behaviours in this region.

The value of this collection lies in the eclectic nature of the contributions. Despite the fact that the editors' promises of cohesion are not really delivered, this book offers a valuable spectrum of current views on important issues facing managers and HR practitioners in the era of global business, and both academics and practitioners will find something of interest here.

Finally, an editorial moan. The decision to periodically lift out sections of the text and highlight them in the manner of a newspaper article trying to attract the reader's attention, simply means that readers of this book are too frequently condemned to read the same text twice. Let's hope this is a mannerism that does not catch on in books of this kind.

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