

F. Gerard Adams (2006) East Asia, Globalization and the New Economy, Routledge, ISBN: 0-41-576991-4.

Reviewed by Robert Davison

This slim (194 pages) tome purports to offer “a general business/professional audience concerned with IT and e-business with focus on East Asia, ... an audience of business managers in East Asia and in the Western countries who directly face the problems and opportunities brought about by rapidly changing technology, ... [and] an academic audience” (Adams, 2006, p.xii) a focus on the “implications of the globalization and information and communications technology (ICT) revolutions for the economic development of East Asia” (ibid., p.xi). I felt it appropriate to highlight this audience identification at the start of this review, because this is clearly not a book for everyone. Indeed, I am not sure that the three audience components identified above are strictly correct either: there is a slightly more subtle flavour in this book as well, viz.: the assumed familiarity with the vocabulary of international business and academia, at least from the Western (American) perspective.

Globalization is defined, at length, early on, in fairly loose and generic terms. East Asia is not so defined, but from the countries referred to in the book, it seems to comprise the economies of China, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and to a lesser extent Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. The Russian Far East is not mentioned, nor are North Korea or Mongolia. The American (USA) perspective dominates the text, with frequent reference to US terms, regulations, acronyms and abbreviations. Perhaps this is not surprising given the provenance of the author and his long time tenure at US universities, but it is more than a little disturbing in a book that claims to be about globalization. It seems both unfortunate and rather naïve that such a US-specific view of globalisation should prevail, given that although East Asia is the nominal focus of the book, it is very much East Asia seen through the eyes of an American – an outside-in, etic perspective. The emic is hardly present at all.

The etic characteristic is most notable in the way the author has chosen to organise his material in a functionally integrated fashion – each chapter deals with a specific topic, e.g. the digital divide, development economics or e-business. Inside each chapter, all of the various countries are drawn upon for examples and illustrations. This certainly makes for interesting and easy reading, but it tends to mask the detailed reality of each individual country or economy. The exception to this occurs in Chapter 9 “Science, Technology and Communications Policies”, where a number of country-specific analysis are provided. These are certainly useful, but their lack of depth underscores the etic perspective of the author – each country could usefully be treated in considerably more detail. Overall, it is almost impossible to construct an impression of any one country and its integration into the globalised new economy from these fragmented pieces. The etic is also present in the sources that the author draws upon: the vast majority are written by authors who are also on the outside. Relatively few are from Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and so forth living and working in those countries.

All of the above leads me to query whether this is indeed a fair picture of globalisation and its impact on the East Asian economies. Or if, perhaps, there is a richer picture that deserves our attention. Country-specific studies, ideally informed by a balance of emic and etic perspectives, would certainly help. So too would an attempt to show that globalisation is not a one-way process. It is not just about Western developments percolating through to less

developed economies, though doubtless this is a large part of the equation. Lenovo's recent purchase of IBM's PC division is but one example of FDI out of China.

To return to the audience, this book is most likely to be useful for and appreciated by those who share the author's personal preference for an American perspective on globalisation and are primarily interested in economic, not social, analysis. There are gems hidden in the text for those who are assiduous enough to seek them out. But for this reviewer, this is an unnecessarily naïve view. East Asia, whatever it is, should be portrayed from both etic and emic perspectives, if the portrayal is to inform a broad readership.