

# INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ETHICS: CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) OF TAIWANESE ENTERPRISE APPLIES IN VIETNAM

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## Abstract

Nowadays, CSR is not a very new terms according to developed countries, however, it is no longer applied to developing countries. Particularly, Vietnam is a country where the huge of foreign companies are going to invest in. Consequently, this study was carried out to answer the question how the CSR of Taiwanese enterprises applies in Vietnam is presently looking for. This study was undertaken by a qualitative approach, therein; a case of Taiwanese enterprise business investing in Vietnam was investigated associated with their CSR strategies and viewpoints. The information used in this research was gathered from CSR reports, third parties, and the company's website. This study contains general discussions of global business ethics regarding CSR applied in developing countries, especially in Vietnam, which is mainly associated with the poor consequence of environmental problems. In conclusion, the results indicated how CSR makes the business perceptions in developing countries, especially in the case of Vietnam. This study will call for the strong involvement of local authorities, international players and local firms in collaborating together to sustain and develop CSR in Vietnam. It also shows the importance of CSR implementation that the business needs to consider.

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility (CSR), Multi-national Corporations (MNCs)

Business ethics, Taiwanese enterprises, Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, Vietnam

## 1. Introduction

Business ethic is not a very new topic where a number of researchers have been discussing in relevant fields. After the 'creative accounting' scandals, the term 'corporate governance' was attracted to everyone.

This is an effect on the whole world and this also brings out the perspective of general public after some reports as following: Primark's suppliers used child

labor in India and forced them to work in poor conditions. Thus, business ethics subject is being used to apply in the business courses by greater business schools. Nevertheless, business ethics education applied in Asia is not as well-known as in developed countries. Therefore, CSR concept is not very familiar to business in Asia (Ip, 2008; Donleavy et al., 2008). In Taiwan, business ethics education was implemented for around 20 years (Wu, 2003). Under the conditions of highly competitive market, greater and greater MNCs expand their investments into developing countries (i.e. India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and China) where they only spend lower costs regarding poor working conditions, less health and safety protections (Crane and Matten, 2007).

Some researchers has identified that MNCs and local countries altogether have a respect on four international values as follow completeness, utility, competence, and justice (Payne et al., 1997). These, therefore, can be considered as the international ethical standards for business and can be applied to the contents of international business ethics. Environmental respect, legal protection for human and environment, trust and respect of locals are some examples about the contents of international business ethics (Smeltzer and Jennings, 1998; ; Shaw, 1996; Carlson and Blodgett, 1997). In addition, these ethics are also used to apply to the matters of international business ethics such as human rights, political payment and involvement, environmentalism, consumerism, employment practices and policies, and primary freedom, and social services (Frederick, 1991; Fritzsche, 1997; Desai and Rittenburg, 1997). In contrast, several previous studies (Tavakoli et al., 2003; Batten et al., 1999) demonstrated the opposite sides of ethical managements such as bribery (Lockhead), gift-giving (Guan-xi in China and Japan), child labor (Primark), poor working condition (NHS), and sexual harassment (Mitsubishi) in international business running.

For the poorly-developed countries, they expect investments from industrial countries; in particular, Vietnam recently published new policies to encourage investments by foreign business (Quelch and Dinh-Tan, 1998; Ralston et al., 2006). However, they are also afraid of the exhausting of the resource. This leads to a struggle between “scourge” and “hope” (DeGeorge, 1995) which evaluates the business ethic of MNCs.

The question is that whether these global businesses should follow the standards as what they did in their countries or avoid their responsibility by abusing loopholes in the local countries. In this study, the concentration is on the business ethics implementations of Taiwanese enterprise in Vietnam according to CSR. The reasons for oversea investment of Taiwanese enterprises are indicated by two determinants: ‘push’ and ‘pull’. There is the shortage of labor resources in Taiwan which ‘pushes’ Taiwanese enterprises to have the oversea investment. Furthermore, ‘pull’ determinants for the enterprises to invest oversea are low wages and preferential investment in Vietnam. Thus, these determinants lead Taiwanese enterprises to foreign investment (Hu, 1996; Ho, 1993; Wang, 1991).

This study proposes a new approach to the reality of how the foreign companies apply CSR in Vietnam, which helps to recognize ‘what is good’ and ‘what is bad’ for Vietnamese nation when foreign enterprises come to set up their own operations.

## 2. Literature review

Globalization is an unavoidable trend (Freidman, 2005). Since the 1990s, the number of international enterprises has been increasing, which leads to the competitiveness amongst them (Porter, 1986). Thus, many companies start doing business cross the border and having incorporation with employees, suppliers, stakeholders and customers from the other different countries (McKinney and Moore, 2008; Franke and Nadler, 2008). As the result, the companies should learn how to run a global business to approach the context of globalization (Crane and Matten, 2007). For instance, MNCs must run a global business with low costs, utilizing the market capacity and producing innovative products (Weiss, 1994).

CSR is a recent term which associates with business ethics and evaluation of society according to business activities. The terms of CSR, then, may be drawn back to nineteenth century foodstuffs and boycotts produced with slave labors (Ciulla, 1991). According to a historical viewpoint, CSR is considered as a role of business in society. According to Fabig and Boele (1999)<sup>1</sup>, the new understanding of CSR is that recent discussions are implemented from the viewpoint of developments, environments and human rights, and even greater worldwide stances than earlier in the twentieth century or in the 1960s.

On the other hand, academic scholars attempt to comprehend why CSR is significant; why and how to manage CSR; how CSR might alter in various situations and result in various consequences (Halme et al., 2009); what regulations, for example, political science, sociology, economics and business ethics. These help to give contributions to our comprehending of the characteristics of the interrelationships amongst the elements; and what outcomes gained from the activities and strategies of organizations (Dobers, 2010). Therefore, it means that practitioners need to seek to apply CSR in business while scholars try to build CSR as theoretical principles. When implementing CSR concept in companies, managers may face to some issues, for instance, community development, labor rights, stakeholder management, corporate charity activities, environmental management, and corporate governance (Blowfield and Frynas, 2005).

Organizations and individuals can alter the understandings of CSR. For example, CSR definition has been changed by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) over time. In 1998, CSR is preferred as “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large”. However, its definition was described in 2002 as “the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life”.

This study selected Vietnam's economic, political and historical situations to examine the impacts of CSR of Taiwanese enterprises in Vietnam. Vietnam has both capitalist and socialist systems. Due to the fragmentation of the Soviet Bloc in 1989 and the disintegration of the Eastern European market; Vietnamese economy had faced to many systemic shocks such as loss of financial aid and trade, having loans and difficulties in commerce. Consequently, Vietnam need to change its trading direction by opening itself to the world markets, particularly the European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Japan. Since 1989, with a socialist orientation, Vietnamese market economy has been established with the aim of fulfilling a 'civilized and equitable' society. In the following years of new global economy adaption, Vietnam began a new market economy at its party Congress in 1992. In 1995, Vietnam started the diplomatic relationship with the US. Furthermore, Vietnam assessed to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007. These events lead to a developing period of Vietnam in the future.

In terms of progressive labor laws and industrial policies, socialism has not been abandoned in Vietnam. However, it unfortunately tackles the quandary of a new market economy: increase in trade and growth in investment but having limits to add value to society. Vietnam continuously provides main low paid and low skilled labor force to manufacturers, therein, foreign enterprises are the major (Tran and Norlund, 2015).

Tran (2011) and Hamm (2012) stated that the CSR concept in Vietnam has been presented by western government and both national and international organizations. Since 2002, the World Bank in the US and multi-national corporations have created pressures for the Vietnamese governments to join CSR initiative, specially the high increasing in CSR from 2004 to 2006. For example, many initial research of CSR in Vietnam have been conducted by Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Ministry of Labor Invalids.

In a study which concentrates on MNCs and their large suppliers, CSR in Vietnam was significantly signal as well as basically followed the well-being of foreign MNCs, not of labors only. The multi-level subcontracting characters of the worldwide supply chains make difficulties in monitoring their contract factories and suppliers. Therefore, harms are spread out through suppliers' factories, in which MNCs will avoid the responsibility in sharing costs for CSR implementations. Similarly, Vietnamese government has still got into troubles to monitor CSR implementations amongst major suppliers (Tran, 2011), and no CSR policy has been public in Vietnam yet (Hamm, 2012).

### **3. Methodology**

This study used the qualitative approach. The information used in this research was gathered from CSR reports, third parties, and the company's website (i.e. newspapers...).

Aforementioned, CSR initiative in Vietnam is presently described via doings of multinational corporations which are setting up operation in Vietnam as well as the empirical research and the literature review for CSR and context of economic globalization were given. Hence, by investigating a well-known and major Taiwanese enterprise performing in Vietnam named Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, this study will show how Taiwanese enterprises identified and applied CSR in Vietnamese market. Another reason backing a belief for choosing the corporation is that several worrying environmental disasters happened and several famed social initiatives and charitable actions implemented in Vietnam are evil and unethical in Vietnamese market.

#### *Case: Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation (FHS) introduction*

In 2008, FHS was formed by Formosa Plastics Group of Taiwan to build a largest steel and iron plant in the deep-water port of Vietnam. The original co-founders include Sunco Holding LTD., Formosa Heavy Industries Corp., Formosa Petrochemical Corp., Nan Ya Plastics Corp., Formosa Chemicals & Fibre Corp., Formosa Plastic Corp. Mr. William Wong and Mr. Wu Kuo-hsiung were appointed to be Chairman and President respectively. The projects, Son Duong port and integrated steel mill, have been invested as a large industry by foreign investors in Vietnam, particularly in Vung Ang, Ha Tinh economic zone where the socio-economic conditions are harsh. This project has shaped an powerful and economic infrastructure and an essential transportation as well as has made contributions to the development of Vung Ang, Ha Tinh economic zone – one of the largest heavy industrial centers of South East Asia in the near future. The operation of both integrated steel mill and power station required a large number of labors, around 100 million persons.

This project can be seen as a first time Formosa Group has turned to invest in steel and iron industry. In the first period, South East Asia is the target market of Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation because of its excessive growth rate in steel consumption. At present, some countries in South East Asia have significantly increased the demand in steel and iron products. In particular, Vietnam does not have a sufficiency in manufacturing capability to meet the market demands, which results in the dependence on material imports. FHS gets superior duties and obtains full advantages of local tax policies from the countries which belong to the ASEAN Free Trade Area. In general, Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation will become a largest steel mill manufacture in South East Asia in the future.

#### **4. Discussion: How Taiwanese subsidiary enterprise, Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, apply CSR in Vietnam.**

To ensure compliance with both domestic and international regulations and initiatives, FHS consults the CSR practice as the following aspects: employees, environmental sustainability, suppliers and contractors, neighborhood relations and education assistance.

As for employees: By applying “employees as family members” norm, the business attempts to achieve the aim of assigning the right positions to the employees and enable them to perform their aptitudes. FHS provides good and stable payment for employees consisting of day-off schedules, benefits, marriage and child treatments, insurances and other welfares to appeal more talents within the company. Furthermore, well-rounded plan of skill training, career development and promotion are provided for employees, the employees with professional and outstanding ability, thus, can ceaselessly develop their career paths. FHS brings out a healthy, secure working place as well as focuses on physical and mental well-being of its employees to manage its human resource in the best ways. For improving the company’s operation and management as well as ensuring employees’ opinions well received, FHS has always taken considerations of their opinions and has made an attempt to improve their suggestions. For further welfares for employees, FHS also provides good accommodations not only for its employees but also for their family.

Environmental sustainability:

The first concern for environment protection is water pollution control. After an discussion with scholars and experts of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), FHS stated that they set up ecological systems into waste-water treatments so as to improve the waste-water quality prior to discharge them in the sea. The waste water is driven to the checking dam and examined by constant waste-water checking system before releasing. Besides, red tilapia, carp are fed in the fishpond, wherein FHS uses waste-water to feed the fish, and have a live broadcast of the fishpond on TV in front of the main entrance to ensure with social publics that treated waste-water does not influence on fish.

The second concern for environment protection is air pollution management. FHS uses pure gas such as COG, BFG, LDG...etc., to reduce air pollutant emissions. The gas which still remains will be sent to Power Plant Systems in order to produce electricity for energy recover. For each process, FHS has also settled air emission treatments. Besides, the constant emission checking systems were settled in funnels to link all parameters to Environment Department and Vietnam Natural Resources in time. As shown in the air testing result of three-year monitoring programs, FHS stated that following its air pollutant emission will be treated in consistent with Vietnamese national standards.

The last concern for environment protection is waste management. FHS makes an attempt to utilize the resources by reusing or recycling waste material to make by-products. Presently FHS plans to produce numerous by-products such as steel slag secondary treatment plants, steel slag primary treatment plants, etc. Moreover, FHS has installed 16 waste storing areas to precisely categorize and store solid waste prior to appointing qualified manufacturer to clear them.

Contractors and suppliers: FHS follows the contract system of Formosa Plastic Group procurement, via E-procurement transactions. FHS fulfills its responsibility with the partnerships

and contractors by meeting the requirement of delivery, offering the lowest prices and providing the highest quality of products. Therefore, FHS expects to remain long-term relationships with its partnerships.

Neighborhood relations: The purposes of FHS are to have a sustainable development, to care the resident livelihoods in the neighborhood community and to provide supports such as allowances for poor family. FHS also entrust with the locals to build great relationships. In the meantime, FHS attempts to create comfortable lives for the communities. Furthermore, FHS has taken part in charity activities to assist the locals who suffer from the disasters and has contributed to build the local infrastructures in order that locals can understand its expectations of creating long-term relationships and supporting each other. For example, FHS organized some activities which FHS volunteers and locals can give their hands together to clean up the environments. Besides, FHS charity groups also prepared and delivered free meals to hospital patients. Additionally, FHS provides the health care of employees. In the living area, an emergency aid station ( 24/7 ambulance service) and a health care center were built to provide the employees. Their aims are not only for medical consultancy but also for health care. FHS also corporates with Taiwan Chang Gung hospital for providing online consultancy services about health management. On the other hand, FHS always makes its employees' health as a priority by cooperating with Da Nang hospital, Ha Noi hospital, Hue hospital, Vinh hospital, and Ky Anh hospital in case of emergency. Likewise, FHS has organized some free health check and medical consultancy for the poor and the elder living alone as FHS realized that activity can partly support their lives.

In contrast, FHS treated against some terms in their CSR compliance. In the worst case of environmental harms in the history of Vietnam, FHS was the offender because the government investigators concluded that FHS had caused tons of dead fish in the Coastal area of Vietnam by directly releasing toxic waste water into the sea without any prior treatments. Specifically, during the first half of April 2016, the livelihoods of fishermen, fish-sauce manufacturers and restaurants have been threatened by the number of dead fish along 200 kilometers of Coastal area (Boudreau, Pham & Mai, 2016).

The Prime Minister called this crisis “the most serious environmental incident Vietnam has faced” because of over 100 tons of dead fish collected after a month. After three months since the crisis, the government had the conclusions as what the local residents guessed from the situations that pollution poisoned the fish was from a steel plant, owned by Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation located in Ha Tinh province. As the government's investigations, which are conducted by over 100 Vietnamese and foreign scientists, FHS's plant released waste-water into the sea; comprising poisonous chemicals (i.e. iron hydroxides, cyanide, and phenol). In a press conference, Minister Mai Tien Dung announced that pollution was the cause in killing fish. More seriously, before the abandon of government for the fish consumption, an untold number of people eating those fish became sick.

Locals nearby, with local fishermen reported that they had seen red water discharged from dumping pipelines connected to the unfinished plants. At the beginning, the company's responses with a representative answering the media, "Before acquiring the land, we already advised local fishermen to change their jobs... Many times in life, people have to make a choice: either to catch and sell fish, or to develop the steel industry. We cannot have both."

Consequently, FHS admitted that worse and said that it would admit the report conclusions and its responsibilities. "We respect the government's investigation results and are cooperating with the authorities to handle and mitigate the consequences." Chuan Yuan-Cheng - the company's chairman (Shannon, 2016).

Minister Chairman, Mai Tien Dung, said "the government was seeking \$500 million in compensation from the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation for the chemical spill, which killed marine life and poisoned people along 120 miles of coastline in central Vietnam". A part of compensation was used to help the local fishermen to find a new job as the marine life cannot be recovered. He also said: "The company would like to take responsibility and apologize to Vietnam." (Richard, 2016)

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in Vietnam also stated that this crisis could spend at least 10 years to recover the area's ecological system (Pham & Nguyen, 2016).

Besides, outsiders are likely to recognize employees of the organizations based on the organization's reputation (Carmeli, 2004). Then organization's reputation might somewhat identify outsiders' views of employees of the organizations, which means employees' thinking of outsiders' views may affect their considering about the companies and also may decline their respects and trust in the organizations (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001) that can lead to decreased self-esteem, discomfort, embarrassment, even their decisions to quit jobs (Hoang Le Tuyet Van 2017). Thus, case of Formosa Ha Tinh employees, the bad reputation of their company may cause embarrassment, discomfort, decrease self-esteem, affect to their pride and satisfaction before, finally may make them think about plan to leave a job, in other words, organization reputation would be affect to job satisfaction and turnover intention process (Van, 2017).

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated current development in the terms of CSR in Vietnam and also discussed the challenges and obstacles to implement CSR policies in the country. In more details, this study figured out the negative and positive effects on MNCs' operations, particularly Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, in Vietnam through the standards of CSR. The results indicated how CSR makes the business perceptions in developing countries, especially in the case of Vietnam. In particular, the information from the media coverage provided a worse picture of Vietnam regarding its environmental problems caused by FHS. In line with above-mentioned results, the implications for scholars and practitioners have emerged.

CSR is considered as long-term investment which is very costly if looking upon the case of Vietnam. The inability to achieve the environmental and social norms means that running the business in global marketplaces is impossible. An increase in access to the WTO and start of market opening are driving CSR as a significant issue which cannot just be compulsory for only foreign partners. Thus, local enterprises should financially and technically support in order to gain more sustainable policies (Bird and Smucker 2007). From this study, the findings highlight that, instead of addressing the problems already happened, the most important thing is a prior broader and deeper involvements of government and authorities who are in charge of executing and reinforcing the implementation of CSR strategy in order to close any loopholes, inadequacies and shortcomings used by business to avoid social responsibility. Furthermore, a major cooperation between workers and managers, global and local authorities, private and public efforts is intensely required. If Vietnam could begin to make more sustainability for the environment, there is much creativity performed in this country. Hence, this leads to the success with the understandings on what is planned to be done and what has been done before. Moreover, CSR would effectively strengthen along global supply chains thanks to a strong collaboration amongst global organizations and the deep involvement of public authorities. Therefore, a greater coordination amongst international and local organizations and a strong corporation amongst international and local authorities are both extremely suggestible because these would lead to an increase in the effectiveness of implementing CSR in Vietnam.

In addition, a business creates value when considering its impact on environment, safeguarding the respect of its employees' rights and working conditions and getting involved in the development of communities. Implementing CSR strategy will not only enhance employees' commitments but also generate good awareness for governments, society and customers. Environmental and social concerns not only make the organizations more ethically accountable but also represent a growth in opportunities. Performance and sustainability are close friends! By enhancing CSR activity, organizations are taking the opportunities to increase their commercial and financial performances but also to reduce costs and risks. Having a sustainable vision is a way to gain a competitive advantage.

Nevertheless, it is concluded that Vietnamese experience cannot be applied to all developing countries. This study indicates that CSR could create business perspectives in Vietnam, but the efforts for sustainability cannot be forced, that efforts should to be fostered.

Finally, we aware that our study could have some limitations that should be addressed in the future research. This study only focused on investigations of CSR of only one Taiwanese corporation regarding environmental problems. Thus, further research could investigate on more aspects of CSR of more companies in other countries investing in Vietnam to gain more reliable results.

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