

# The Reverse Direction Strategy of Overseas Expansion with Chinese ICT Equipment Firms: The Cases of Huawei and ZTE co. Ltd.

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## The Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Earlier Literature Review
3. ICT Equipment Industry and its Main Firms in China
4. The Outward Foreign Investment of Huawei
5. The Overseas Expansion of ZTE
6. Conclusions—Implications and the Remaining Issues

## 1. Introduction

After “Zou Chu Qu” (overseas expansion) that was clearly ranked as a national strategy of the Chinese government in 2001, the outward foreign expansion of Chinese firms rapidly expanded. Chinese FDI flows were 50 bn. Dollars per year from 2008, and in 2015 it reached 145.7 bn. Dollars. China has also become the second biggest foreign direct investment (FDI) country in the world. As of the end of 2015, 20,200 Chinese firms had established 30,800 companies in foreign countries, and these companies expanded into 188 countries and regions <sup>1)</sup>. Chinese FDI in stock was 2 trillion dollars, and the total overseas assets was 4.73 trillion dollars at the end of 2015 (Ministry of Commerce of Republic of China, et al. “The Official Report of Chinese Firms FDI, 2015”).

Not only is the outward foreign expansion of Chinese firms mostly influenced by the Chinese government, but individual companies have these expansion desires also, as they have their own private motivations and intentions, too.

This paper focuses on the top 2 Chinese ICT equipment firm cases – Huawei & ZTE co. Ltd. It will make clear the features of overseas expansion with Chinese multinational enterprises (CMNE). With this, the research will explicate the common features of emerging countries’ multinational enterprises (EMNE) in their outward foreign expansion. Also, some implications from this research will be anticipated.

## 2. Earlier Literature Review

So far, there is much literature regarding the features of CMNE’s overseas expansion. For instance, the “Multi purposes’ approach” (UNCTAD, 2006) that

analyzed the Chinese enterprises' motives for becoming MNEs; "12 Hypotheses" (Peter Buckley et al., 2007) that analyzed the decision factors of Chinese enterprises' outward foreign expansion. Chinese researchers, such as Liu, Lee & Liu etc. presented the "Reverse Technology Spillover Hypothesis" (2009, 2012), and Wang Zhi Le et al. organized the Annual Report of the main CMNE's overseas expansion, and so forth.

In Japan, researchers such as Amano & Ohki (2001, 2014), Marukawa & Nakagawa (2008), Takahashi (2008), Kawai (2013), Hatori (2013), Nakagawa (2012, 2013) and Natsume et al. (2017) etc. analyzed the background, the real conditions, the structural valuation and the management strategies of the CMNEs, respectively.

Based on earlier literature, the outward strategies of CMNEs is organized into three categories: "variety for their process", "multiple layers for their purpose and preferences" and "peculiarity for the CMNEs". Especially the "peculiarity for the CMNEs" is expressed as the "3 Reverse Phenomena" (LIU, 2014). Meanwhile the strategy of CMNEs' overseas expansion is described as the "Reverse Direction Strategy" in this paper.

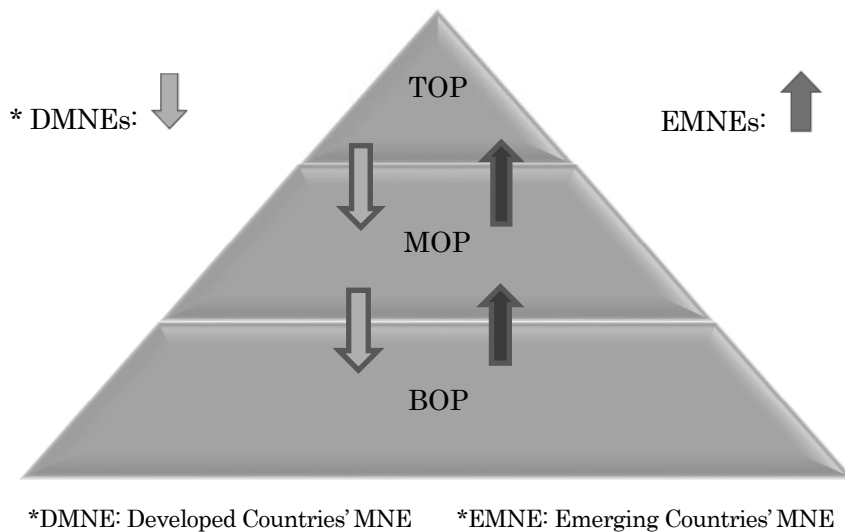
The sample companies of the "3 Reverse Phenomena" are as follows:

Getting the specific advantages from foreign countries in advance as Lenovo did, which is the no.1 PC maker in China; Choosing tough target markets such as developed markets to expand in the first stage of overseas expansion rather than choosing more accommodating markets like the developing markets and lower MOP (Middle of the Economic Pyramid) to advance as Haier did, which is the top maker of consumer electrical appliances in China; Targeting the BOP (Base of the Economic Pyramid) and lower MOP consumer layers in the beginning of overseas expansion rather than targeting the TOP (Top of the Economic Pyramid) and upper MOP consumer layers at the first stage of overseas expansion as Huawei and ZTE did, which are the top 2 ICT equipment enterprises in China. Chart 1. shows this reverse phenomena. (See Figure 1)

### **3. ICT Equipment Industry and its Main Firms in China**

#### **3-1. "8 Communications' Systems from 7 Countries" – under the controlling world powers**

"8 Communications' Systems from 7 Countries" meant that the Chinese ICT market was controlled by 8 kinds of communications systems from 7 countries during the 1980's through to the 1990's. These systems and controlling countries were Fujitsu & NEC from Japan, Ericsson from Sweden, Siemens from Germany, Bell Communication Industrial co. Ltd. from Belgium, Alcatel from France, AT&T from USA and Northern Telecom from Canada.



**Figure 1. The Image of Reverse Phenomena**

### **3-2. The “Big 4” – JuLong, DaTang, ZTE, Huawei – Came into Being**

The Chinese government saw the “8 Communications’ Systems from 7 Countries” as a “tuition fee”, because there were not any respectable ICT industries in China at that time. This led to the Chinese feeling a sense of humiliation due to this situation. From the second half of 1980’s, more than 400 communication equipment firms came into being in China within a short period of time. These firms included state enterprises, private firms and joint ventures. These “new” firms had to compete with the world powers which have a long history and strong competitive advantages and were from Western countries and Japan, so finally these Chinese enterprises ended up going bankrupted.

While most Chinese communication equipment companies disappeared from the market, only 4 companies were an exception. They were called the “Big 4”, which included Julong Communications, it’s first president was Wu Jiang Xing who successfully developed the big capacity digital switchboard HJD04 in China. Datang Telecom, the founder, Zhou Huan who once worked for the Chinese government and used to be a director of the Science & Technology Bureau in the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications. ZTE, it’s founder, Hou Wei Gui who used to be the vice president of a state company that belonged to the Ministry of Aviation & Universe. Huawei Technology, it’s founder, Rei Zheng Fei who once was a People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officer. These 4 companies shouldered the expectations of the Chinese government and its people, and finally created fierce competition with the world powers in China. In the end, they managed to gain a stable position in the Chinese market<sup>2)</sup>.

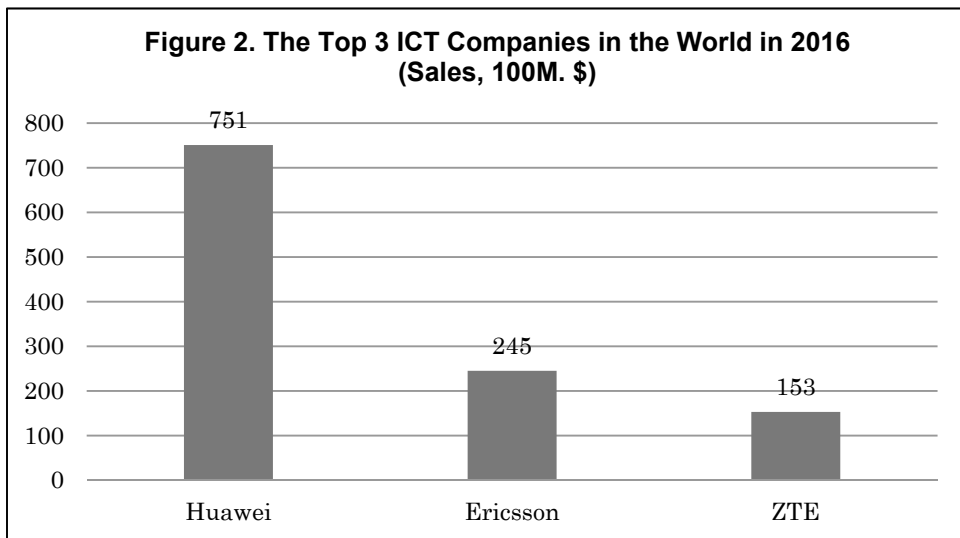
### 3-3. From “Big 4” to “Big 2”

After the fierce competition, Julong and Datang that started as state firms became smaller, however Huawei & ZTE that are market directional companies became bigger. In the Chinese communications equipment industry, the “big 2”—Huawei and ZTE were beginning to become a huge presence in the Chinese ICT equipment market. Furthermore, beyond people’s expectations, Huawei & ZTE became the top runners in the ICT infrastructure industry in the world after only 15 years. (See Table 1 and Figure 2)

**Table 1. The Market Share Ranking of World Mobile Communications Equipment Enterprises (as of the first quarter of 2009)**

Ranking	Firms	Market share
1	Ericsson	33%
2	Nokia • Siemens	21%
3	<b>Huawei Technology</b>	<b>15%</b>
4	Alcatel • Lucent	14%
5	Northern Telecom	10%
6	Motorola	8%
7	<b>ZTE</b>	<b>5.68%</b>

Source: Huang Li Jun & Cheng Dong Sheng (2010) p.55.



Source: From the Annual Report of Huawei, Ericsson and ZTE, Respectively.

## **4. The Outward Foreign Investment of Huawei**

### **4-1. The History of Huawei**

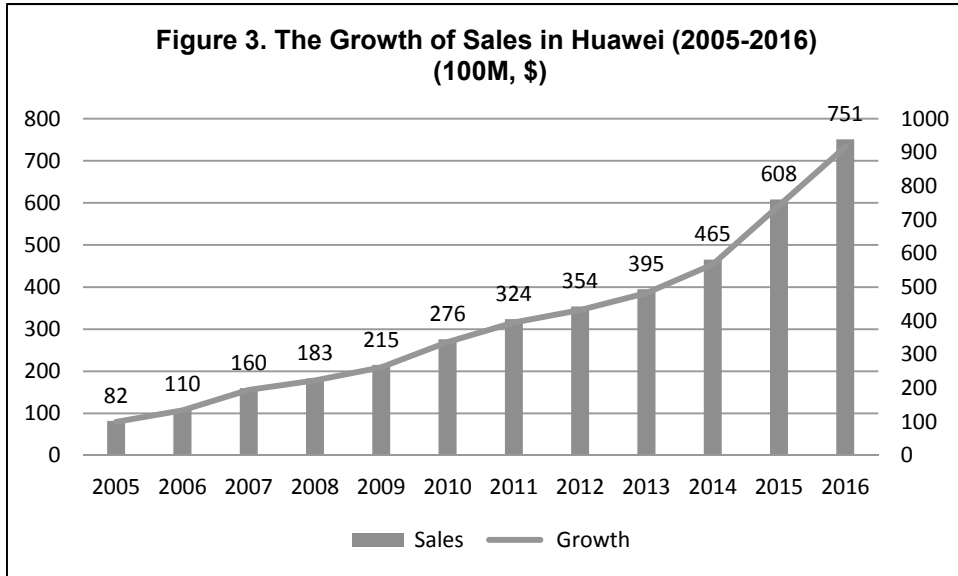
In 1987, Huawei was established in Shen Zhen, the first Special Economic Zone in China. In the beginning, Huawei was just a distributor for a Hong Kong firm, which manufactures the private branch exchange (PBX) for call extensions in companies and ISDN for telephone office. After technology developed, Huawei began to manufacture and sell its original PBX's for hotels and the small and medium sized companies that were located in rural areas. Huawei also started to manufacture the automatic switchboard and made a great achievement in the rural markets.

The first switchboard that Huawei developed was the JK1000, which was half digital and half machinery. After 6 months, Huawei started to develop the automatic switchboard and successfully developed the automatic switchboard, C&C08, which contained 2000 lines. Following these successes, Huawei developed a switchboard which included 10,000 lines. In urban areas in China, however, the market for switchboards in telephone offices was still under the control of Shanghai Bell (America) & Alcatel (France) in the 1990's in China.

### **4-2. Domestic Marketing Strategy of Huawei**

First of all, Huawei made a strategy called "From Rural to City". Developed countries' multinational enterprises (DMNE) such as Shanghai Bell were not interested in the rural areas, because the markets were far smaller. Meanwhile, Huawei went into the rural markets and offered a good service to the telephone offices in the counties and even the villages, therefor they grasped the rural markets firmly.

Huawei was not satisfied with only obtaining the rural markets, so they took the next step to encroach upon the urban areas which were the DMNEs' territory at that time. The specific advantages of Huawei were its lower prices and higher quality services. Furthermore, Huawei advanced its technology and promoted its ICT equipment for digital, high speed and multi-medias. Meanwhile, following the world trend, which was switchboards changing to routers, Huawei finally appeared at the front of the ICT equipment industry. (See Figure 3)



Source: Huawei's Annual Report 2005 through 2016

#### 4-3. The Contents of the Overseas Expansion Strategy of Huawei

From the latter half of the 1990s, Huawei started to expand into the overseas markets. We can find much research regarding the process of Huawei's outward expansion, and through this process Huawei became a multi-national company. Huawei itself views its outward expansion in 3 steps: first, exporting its products to the former Soviet Union, Eastern European countries and Africa countries, then establishing maintenance based in these countries. Second, expanding into European countries and building R&D centers in many of these countries. Finally, advancing into the Japanese and the American market.

At the first stage, Huawei used its domestic marketing strategy which is called "From Rural to City" to expand its global markets in developing countries and the countries with economies in transition. As of 2006, Huawei's market share of ICT equipment was 13.7% in CIS, 27.8% in the Middle East and Northern Africa, 26.2% in Southern Africa, 7.7% in Asia and Pacific area and 9.7% in Latin America <sup>3)</sup>.

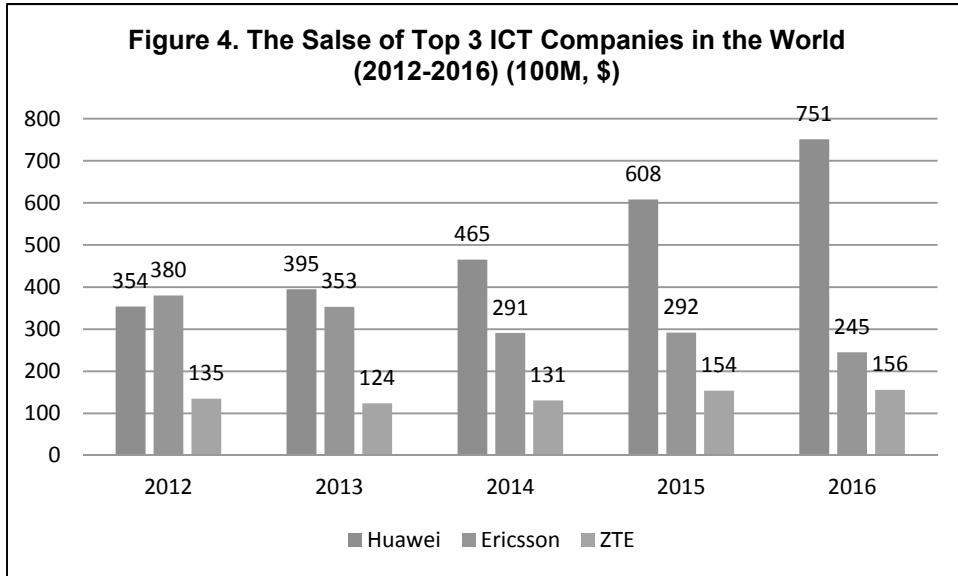
In the second stage, Huawei began to advance into the American and European markets grounded by the experience of expanding into developing countries and the countries with economies in transition. After carrying out M&A's in the Northern America market and then being caught up in several lawsuits, Huawei began to shift its focus to the European market. Optical communications system STM 64 is used practically at Germany's PFTLZKOM & BERLICOM in 2000, and Huawei obtained the sales contract of the main transfer line in France in 2003 <sup>4)</sup>.

In the finally stage, Huawei advanced into the American market again and the Japanese market. In middle of August of 2008, Huawei got a contract – the third generation (3G) mobile communication system CDMA2000 1X and communication system EV-DO Rev. A, from Leap, a new mobile communication carrier, and built the system in California, Idaho and Nevada states. Besides mobile communication, Leap also offered the multi-communication service at a low price. It was said that the software switch and IP based wireless station from Huawei was 60% lower in price than what was currently being used. Huawei advanced into Japan from the beginning of this century. In 2002, the Tokyo office of Huawei opened. In 2005, the subsidiary, Huawei Japan was established. In 2011, Huawei Japan became a member of the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren)<sup>5)</sup>.

#### **4-4. The Features of the Overseas Expansion Strategy of Huawei**

The remarkable feature of the overseas expansion strategy of Huawei is its “From Rural to City” strategy. That means beginning in the rural markets then working its way up to urban areas. This strategy was a big success in the domestic market. Using the same strategy, Huawei began to advance into the overseas markets, firstly the markets in developing countries and regions where the incomes are lower. Then Huawei expanded into developed countries such as Germany, France, the USA and Japan; these countries having both advanced technology and high average incomes.

Today, Huawei has been supplying its products and services not only to clients like China Telecom, China Mobile, China Network Communications Group, China Unicom, etc. which are all major communications carriers in China, but also to clients like British Telecom, AIS, Telefonica, Singapore Telecom, Deutsche Telecom, TeliaSonera, etc. which are all major communications carriers abroad. Huawei has become the top enterprise in the ICT equipment industry in the world since 2013. (See Figure 4)



Source: The Annual Reports of Huawei, Ericsson and ZTE (2012-2016)

## 5 The Overseas Expansion of ZTE<sup>6)</sup>

### 5-1. The History and Outline of ZTE

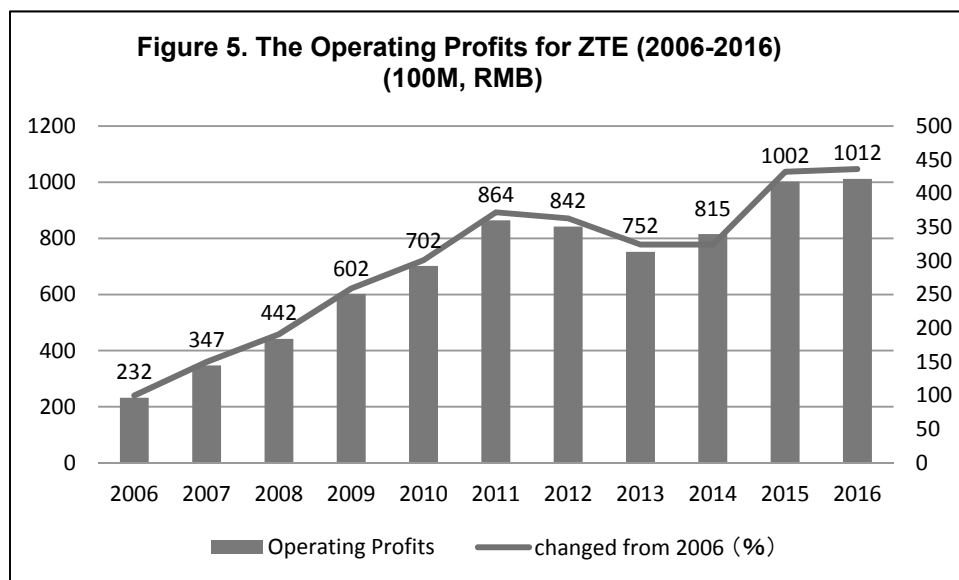
ZTE was founded in Shen Zhen in 1985. Unlike Huawei, ZTE started as a state possession company. In 1997, ZTE listed in the A Stock Section on the Shen Zhen Stock Exchange, and after 7 years, ZTE listed in the H Stock Section on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. As of the end of 2016, 81.95% of the shares were A stock and 18.05% of the shares were H stock among ZTE's equities capital.

The main shareholder of ZTE is Zhong Xing Xin (ZXX), its share being 30.35% in ZTE. ZXX is a state controlled company and its shareholders are Xi'An Microelectronics (34%), Guang Yu Aerospace (17%), and Zhong Xing Wei Xian Tong (ZXWXT, 49%). Of the 3 shareholders in ZXX, Xi'An Microelectronics and Guang Yu Aerospace are state companies, and ZXWXT is a private company. Apart from ZXX, others shareholders of ZTE are mostly institutional investors and individual investors, and these total shares account for 69.65%. At Feb. 28 of 2017, trading free stock and trading restrictive stock in ZTE was 99.88% and 0.12%, respectively.

As of 2016, there were 81,468 employees working for ZTE, and the average age of the employees was 32 years old. Among the employees, 36.93% of employees worked in R&D. There are 20 R&D centers located in China and other countries, 7 research centers are distributed in America, France, Sweden, Japan and Canada, respectively. Up to September 31 of 2016, ZTE have submitted more than 68,000 applications for patents to PCT, and 28,000 have



been permitted to be used. From 2012, ZTE stayed in the top 3 positions for the number of applications of patents to PCT continually <sup>7)</sup>. The sales figures of ZTE from 2006 through to 2016 was RMB 23.2 bn., 34.7 bn., 44.2 bn., 60.2 bn., 70.2 bn., 86.4 bn., 84.2 bn., 75.2 bn., 81.5 bn., 100.2 bn., 101.2 bn., respectively. (See Figure 5.)



Source: ZTE's Annual Report From 2012 to 2016.

The sales in ZTE decreased from 2012 due to the influence of the financial crisis in 2007-2008. The influence to ZTE, however, was not as serious compared to the American and European ICT companies. From 2014 the sales in ZTE rose again, and in 2015 their sales reached over 100 million RMB for the first time in its history.

Today, in 2017, ZTE provides its services to communication carriers and company clients in over 160 countries and areas. The smart phone unit sales is ranked as 10<sup>th</sup> in the world (as of 2016), and 4<sup>th</sup> in the American market. ZTE is called “the leading company for intelligent cities”, and the “ZTE” brand has now become a world famous brand.

## 5-2. The Phases of Overseas Expansion of ZTE

### ① Phase of searching for overseas markets (1995–1997)

In this phase, ZTE was mostly learning the international business rules in the overseas markets and accumulating experience from overseas expansion. ZTE exported its products to Indonesia and Malaysia during this term, however, the scale was rather limited.

### ② Phase of expanding to overseas markets (1998 – 2001)

In this phase, ZTE began to enter into the overseas market full-scale. Besides southern Asia and Africa, ZTE made a considerable deal by exporting its ICT equipment to the former Yugoslavia during this term.

### ③ Phase of widening the scope of overseas expansion (2002–2004)

In this phase, ZTE reinforced its overseas expansion in markets, in human resources and in capitals omnidirectional. By entering into the emerging markets like India, Russia, Brazil and so forth, ZTE also made a base by advancing into the developed markets, like America and Europe.

### ④ Phase of advancing into developed markets (After 2005)

ZTE focused on the developed markets such as America, Europe and Japan after 2005 and made many alliances with the world communication's carriers. ZTE provided its products (including ICT equipment, smart-phones units and software) to Vodafone (UK), Telefonica (Spain), Telstra (Australia), Softbank (Japan), etc. These are all famous communication carriers in the world. Furthermore, ZTE opened its Japan office in 2005, and established its subsidiary – ZTE Japan Co. Ltd. in 2008.

## 5-3. The Contents of Overseas Expansion of ZTE

### ① Expanding the Markets Globally

After developing the developing markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America, ZTE began to focus on expanding the markets in America, Europe and Japan. Meanwhile, ZTE started to increase its brand value and gain world recognition.

### ② International HRM

The core content of corporate culture in ZTE is its human resource management (HRM). During the process of overseas expansion, ZTE trained a lot of employees who had the skills for international business, and employed the talented local people for their overseas subsidiary companies.

### ③ Raising money from the capital market

ZTE listed on both the Shen Zhen Stock Exchange and the main board of Hong Kong Stock Exchange. The management of ZTE was strictly monitored by its shareholders, so it made its business administration very transparent. ZTE attempted to take the best practice in its corporate governance through offering shares to the general public.

## 5-4. The Features of Overseas Expansion of ZTE

### ① The replica of domestic marketing strategy in China

ZTE advanced into developing countries and areas such as southern Asia and Africa at first, then extended to Russia, India and Brazil, which are all emerging countries. Finally, ZTE entered into the developed markets like

Europe, America and Japan. During this process, ZTE copied its domestic marketing strategy that was called “From Rural to City” in China. This paper expresses the strategy as “Reversed Direction Strategy”. This means the strategy is different from the preceding MNE’s one, and can be described as “from the periphery to the center, from the poorer countries and areas to the richer ones, from the lower end to the higher one”.

Following the chronological sequences, we found that ZTE began to create overseas outlets and gain experience through doing international business since the latter half of the 1990s. After learning the rules of doing business in emerging countries between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000, ZTE received orders of communication equipment from overseas as well as exporting its cell phone units. After 2002, ZTE started its global strategy full-scale, which included the global markets, the global human resources and the global financing.

#### ② Obtaining the specific advantages afterwards

After successfully receiving some big orders from Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1998, ZTE recognized that only the lower price advantage was not adequate enough to compete with the world major ICT equipment companies, which had the advantages of not only in technology but also in brand image. Thereafter, ZTE began to establish research institutes in America, France and Sweden. In addition, ZTE made alliances with Intel China (2002), IBM (2003), Microsoft China (2003), FT (2006), and so forth. Through this process, ZTE not only gained the specific advantage of technology, but also “ZTE” became a well-known brand in the world. Ultimately, ZTE was ranked one of the top runners of ICT companies with the preceding world powers.

## 6. Conclusions – Implications and the Remaining Issues

This paper reviewed the early literature regarding the features of Chinese enterprises advancing into the overseas markets, especially pointing out the features of the “Reverse Direction Strategy”. Furthermore, it focused on the communication equipment industry in China especially its top 2 firms – Huawei and ZTE, and reconfirmed the different features of overseas expansion between the CMNEs and the DMNEs.

Both Huawei & ZTE, have their headquarters in Shen Zhen which is the most dynamic area in China, although there are many differences such as in ownership, being listed on the stock exchange, and in their corporate culture<sup>8)</sup>, however, there are also lots of similarities such as their initial condition, types of products and market preferences between them. Especially, the strategy of overseas expansion for the 2 companies is exactly the same, which is the replica of their domestic market strategies described as “From Rural to City”. Of course,

from the outward overseas process, both Chinese enterprises gained many strategic assets including technology and the know-how plus brand image.

The experiences of Huawei & ZTE in their overseas expansion may give some suggestions or hints to other companies in developing countries to extend into the global market in the future, because the starting conditions are the same between China and other developing countries, and the MNEs in developing countries are different from the DMNEs in the overseas expanding purposes, the targets and also the original advancing processes. Furthermore, deepening the study regarding the developing countries' companies becoming MNEs will also enrich the existing theories of international business administration.

The top 2 ICT equipment companies in China — Huawei & ZTE— have focused their targets on the developed markets after almost 15 years of overseas expansion, and they have also become major ICT firms in the world. However, the emergence of MNEs in emerging countries (EMNEs) will also create fierce competition between the EMNEs and the DMNEs. Meanwhile, this competition between companies could get the governments wrapped in, and make the matter more complicated<sup>9)</sup>. Can Huawei & ZTE, both of CMNEs, without so many core technologies, endure the fierce competition or not in the future will be a point to focus on.

This paper expressed the features of CMNEs' overseas expansion strategies as the "Reverse Direction Strategy". Whether or not the strategy becomes a model in general for other EMNEs to advance into global markets, may be an issue for further study.

The Chinese government came out with a new project that was called "One Belt & One Road", a scheme to build the Silk Road Economic Zone in 2013. The policies of the Chinese government mostly affects the outward foreign expansion of Chinese firms so far, and the new project could affects how the CMNEs overseas expansion may change in the near future under the influence of the Chinese government, will be the other remaining issue, too.

### **【Notes】**

- 1) The companies in foreign countries included the company in 100% ownership, and the company in over 10% shares and have a vote.
- 2) Tian Tao & Wu Chun Bo (2012) *Is Huawei gone as the next loser?* ZHONG XIN Publishing (Beijing), in Chinese.
- 3) Ryoji Nakagawa (2008) "Huawei Technology and Lenovo" in *Chinese Multi-national Enterprises* (Written & Edited by Tomoo Marukawa & Ryoji Nakagawa) Chapter 4, DOYUKAN, in Japanese.
- 4) Ryoji Nakagawa, op. cit., p.83.
- 5) Tadayuki Nagashima (2014) "The Diversified Investment from Chinese Firms to

Japan” in *The Internationalized Strategy with Chinese Firms* (Written & Edited by Hiroki Oki & Kenji Shimizu) Chapter 16, JETRO, pp.262-276, in Japanese.

- 6) Yong Ge LIU (2014) “The Internationalization Strategy of Chinese Firms: Focusing on the ZTE Co. Ltd. Case” *KEIEI RONSHU* (Journal of Business Administration) No.83, in Japanese.
- 7) From ZTE Annual Report 2016.
- 8) The corporate culture in Huawei and in ZTE are so-called “Wolf Culture” and “Caw Culture”, respectively. In this paper I could not state this issue because of the space assigned.
- 9) You can see how the American government excluded Huawei and ZTE in the American market so far.

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