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Outward FDI by Singapore: a different animal?*

Gaute Ellingsen, Winfried Likumahuwa
and Peter Nunnenkamp**

Singapore's outward foreign direct investment is unique in important respects, even though it shares some characteristics with foreign direct investment undertaken by traditional investor countries. The focus of this investment on manufacturing in lower-income Asian host countries suggests that the motivations and trade repercussions of Singapore's foreign direct investment differ from those of such investment undertaken by major industrialized countries. We apply basic gravity models in order to investigate the relationship between Singapore's outward foreign direct investment and trade and, thereby, to assess whether the concern that outward foreign direct investment has adverse labour market implications are economically founded. We do not find that Singapore's foreign direct investment has replaced exports, but the balance-of-payments effects differ considerably across manufacturing industries.

Keywords: vertical and horizontal FDI, trade effects, labour market implications, gravity model

JEL classification: F21, F23, F14

1. Introduction

The fear that outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) has adverse labour market repercussions for the home economy is widely shared in advanced economies, even though public

* This article was prepared while Gaute Ellingsen and Winfried Likumahuwa attended the Advanced Studies Programme at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

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concerns are not necessarily grounded on rigorous empirical research. J. P. Agarwal (1997) pointed out that such worries existed in countries such as France, Germany, Japan, and the United States in the mid-1990s and earlier. In the United States, FDI flows to Mexico following the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) were supposed to represent a “giant sucking sound” of jobs in the United States. S. Brainard and D. Riker (1997a) as well as M. J. Slaughter (2000) found little evidence to this effect, whereas M. Blomström et al. (1997) as well as R. C. Feenstra and G. H. Hanson (1996) argued that the employment and earning opportunities of less qualified workers are negatively affected by the FDI-induced relocation of production and outsourcing of labour intensive stages of the value chain. In European home countries, the accession of Central and East European countries to the European Union (EU) has fuelled public concerns about the labour market implications of outward FDI. Again, the evidence is mixed. J. Konings and A. Murphy (2001) rejected the hypothesis that the emergence of Central and Eastern Europe as an attractive production location has resulted in an exodus of jobs from European home countries. D. Marin (2004) even found positive employment effects in German parent companies. In contrast, the results reported by S. O. Becker et al. (2005) suggest that cost-oriented German FDI in Central and Eastern Europe substitutes, at least partly, for employment at home.

Against this backdrop, one can reasonably expect that labour market concerns may also arise in major investor countries in the developing world. T.-Y. Chen and Y.-P. Chen (1995) for example, pointed to the risk of de-industrialization in their short account of FDI from Taiwan Province of China. The share of developing economies in the world’s outward FDI stocks is still modest (11% in 2003). However, FDI stocks held

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