

**THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS OF ASIAN ECONOMIES IN THE GLOBAL APPAREL  
COMMODITY CHAIN**

**Gary Gereffi**

*Duke University*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Apparel is one of the oldest and largest export industries in the world. Most nations produce for the international textile and apparel market (Dickerson, 1995:6), making this one of the most global of all industries. Apparel is the typical “starter” industry for countries engaged in export-oriented industrialization, and played the leading role in East Asia’s early export growth. Many questions have been raised, however, concerning the degree to which international trade can be the fulcrum for sustained economic growth for developing nations. Under what conditions can trade-based growth become a vehicle for genuine industrial upgrading, given the frequent criticisms made of low-wage, low-skill, assembly-oriented export activities? Do Asia’s accomplishments in trade-led industrialization contain significant lessons for other regions of the world?