

## Book Review

Edward N. Luttwak, *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012, 310 pp.

The rise of China has been one of the most conspicuous topics in the academia. Among the numerous works on this topic, Edward Luttwak's *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy* hoists his own unique banner. In this book, Luttwak highlights the "logic of strategy", that is, less can be better than more (p. 66). In Luttwak's opinion, this logic is not only "the universal logic of strategy applies in equality to every culture in every age" (p. vii), but also applicable to explain the challenges facing the rise of China.

This book has 22 chapters. Chapters 1-8 evaluate the dynamics of China's rise in the fields of economy, politics, foreign affairs and defence, and explore the reasons why China's neighbouring countries and external powers (particularly the United States) were anxious to hedge and/or balance China's rise. In the following pages (chapters 9-12), Luttwak analyzes two tragic examples provided by Wilhelmine Germany (from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries), and Germany's involvement in the world wars. According to Luttwak, history always repeats itself. Chapters 12-21 stress the responses of China's neighbouring countries and external powers, such as Australia, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, Mongolia, Indonesia, Philippines, Norway and the United States. In the opinion of Luttwak, it does not exclude the possibility that there would be a potential alliance against China's rise. In the concluding chapter, Luttwak highlights his arguments.

Following Luttwak's logic of strategy, it's impossible for China to maintain sustainable economic growth and military growth at the same time. If China's search for rapid economic and military growth beyond "the levels that can be accepted with equanimity by other powers" (p. 4), this will evoke both symmetric and asymmetric adversarial reactions from its neighbours and global peers. Moreover, Luttwak considers that China's strategic dilemma arises from China's strategic culture with a label of "autism". Based on some examples illustrating China's assertiveness, China's "autism" interprets foreign motives in exclusively terms. In Luttwak's words, geo-economic containment might be recommended to slow China's economic growth and maintain a proper balance of power, which could reduce China's "growth to 4-5 per cent per year from the present 9 per cent or so" (p. 47).

As Luttwak predicts, China could not get out of the strategic dilemma easily, unless there are “radical changes inside or outside China” (p. 4). First, a full democratization could promote China to pursue other strategic aims, which maximizes ‘the happiness of the population rather than their own power’ (p. 270). Second, the emergence of more critical threats in the future, which will probably promote the neighbouring countries or global peers to consider China as an ally, not a threat. Third, in contrast to China’s neighbours and global peers, China’s relative power “passes beyond the relevant tipping point” (p. 258).

As far as I can see, though this book develops a unique perspective of its own, some arguments and conclusions may be open to discussion. First, Luttwak’s historical narratives on China’s grand strategy are questionable to some degree, when he demonstrates “China’s failure at the level of grand strategy” (p. 69). For instance, Luttwak highlights the negative aspects of “autism” strategic culture and the detectable residues of Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*. However, this argument could not provide tenable explanations to China’s significant strategic achievements in the past decades. If “autism” is synonymous of China’s strategic culture, how could China maintain a peaceful environment with her neighbours after the Cold War? How could China become a permanent member of the UN Security Council?

Second, Luttwak insists that China’s altitudes in some critical issues (e.g. China’s declaring the South China Sea to be a core interest) are the important evidences of China’s turning to more assertive altitude. Luttwak’s argument seems to exclude any other possibility. For example, as Alastair Johnston points out, it is possible for a state to be newly assertive on some limited range of issues while leaving other major policies unchanged (Johnston, 2013; p. 46).

Third, Luttwak advocates that geo-economic containment is the “only remaining resistance” (p. 266) for the neighbours and global peers of China. However, he also confesses that “what the logic of strategy predicts is a geo-economic struggle, though it cannot predict its outcome” (p. 47). In addition, some neighbours and global peers of China do improve relationships with the United States, but this phenomenon does not necessarily mean the strategic intentions of establishing an “anti-China coalition”, which could also be interpreted as conducting balance of power between the United States and China.

As a controversial work on the rise of China, *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy* will definitely provoke more thoughts and debates in the coming future. It deserves more attention from academics, scholars, policy makers and students of international relations, U.S.-Sino relationships and strategic studies.

## Reference

Johnston, Alastair Iain (2013), “How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?”, *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 7-48.

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