

***What's Really Behind Chinese Assertiveness in the South China Sea?* Turcsanyi, Richard Q. Beijing: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, 183.**

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China is not assertive in the sense it is commonly used. China is naturally a big nation, a global economy and a large military power owing to its size and geography. Many analysts do not realise these facts and start criticising China. Lately, in media, many analyses have appeared on the Chinese assertiveness as to see whether it is becoming an assertive power or not. The phrase “Rising Power” is often used to ascribe the increasing assertive power of China. This school of thought projects the Chinese assertiveness and cites the case of the South China Sea and the Chinese growing military activities there. Another school of thought talks about the Chinese soft power and argues about China’s peaceful rise as an economic power. Both the arguments exist parallel to each other.

The recent scholarly work of Richard Q. Turcsanyi titled *What's Really Behind Chinese Assertiveness in the South China Sea?* is a stimulating study on the subject to see if the Chinese military power is on the rise along with its economic power. The author is associated with the Institute of International Relations, Prague, Czech Republic. Originally, the research was developed as a PhD thesis at the Department of International Relations and European Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. He makes interesting observations about the Chinese assertiveness to refute many commonly-held views about the rise of China and its assertiveness.

The book enriches knowledge on the Chinese assertiveness at three levels. It adds to the understanding of power in international relations by conceptually analysing power and by suggesting a comprehensive model of power for analytical use (p. 25). The book contributes to a comprehensive analysis of China’s sources (p.25) and finally the book seeks to enrich the discussion on the alleged assertive shift of the Chinese foreign policy (p.25).

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In the beginning of his discourse, Turcsanyi describes the “puzzle of the Chinese assertiveness” and asserts that the large size of the Chinese population naturally makes it the largest country and China becomes an assertive country in the sense that it is. He firmly believes that assertiveness of China is largely embellished. He holds this view that the narrative of an assertive China has been largely exaggerated (p. 1). He pinpoints that Beijing became assertive in the South China Sea by 2009 and this was more of the outcome of the controversies in the region and the position taken by major powers and their allies. Moreover, domestic issues in China such as Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang compelled China to become assertive. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) gained importance due to the crises in the South China Sea. The author believes that the Chinese policies in the South China Sea led the country to assert its behaviour in world politics based upon domestic compulsions such as growing nationalism and other factors as well (p. 12).

The prime chapter of the book is discussion on China’s assertive policies in the South China Sea. The author gives an historical account of geo-politics and geo-economics with a legal context of the South China Sea in terms of the Philippines case, which was pleaded in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at the Hague that gave verdict in favour of the complainant. Chapter three of the book is on the theoretical structure of power. It discusses China’s power and its influence on its foreign policy, in general, and after 2008, in particular.

Chapter four highlights the sources of China’s power such as military, economy and national performance. Turcsanyi argues that the Chinese military is the most powerful tool in settling disputes in the South China Sea (p. 93). China could conduct even more sophisticated naval and amphibious operations in the sea (p. 94). The author maintains that the Chinese economic growth is the history of its rise (p. 100).

The author maintains that China’s national performance is well documented by its quantitative and qualitative posture for the government’s effectiveness in all its matters (p.103). He claims that China’s institutional position in the regional and global international system is stable with the exception of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) (pp. 109-111) but the author finds, China’s soft power is not strong and lags behind the US, Japan and South Korea (pp. 126-131). However, contrary to this, China enjoys a

high level of legitimacy among its people compared to many other countries (pp. 132-135).

The author used a broad range of the US, European, Japanese and Chinese sources to illustrate his refined arguments. The work presents a European viewpoint on the rise of China through its assertive behaviour in world politics. The work is well-illustrated in the tables and graphs with each chapter cited with huge literature making the work more argumentative and convincing through the prism of neutral eyes. If an index was added to the next edition, it would have enhanced the utility of the work. Nevertheless, the work is the first detailed account on the Chinese assertiveness and it must be read by scholars working on the contemporary Chinese foreign policy.