

The West View of China's Grand Strategy - Leading the World

Mainstream Media and Organic Views

Dr. Wordman

Rush Doshi, current Director of China in Biden's National Security Council (NSC), published a new book written before his present job, “The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order (Bridging the Gap)” on July 8th, 2021. This book received Brookings Institute's promotion and stirred up quite a bit of attention. Matt Pottinger, former Deputy National Security Adviser in the Trump Administration also wrote an essay, “Beijing's American Hustle – How Chinese Grand Strategy Exploits U.S. Power”, published in Foreign Affairs, September/October 2021 issue, in which he cited and agreed with Doshi's analysis of China's Grand Strategy. The timed focus on Chinese Grand Strategy by the above two authors may be coincidental but both, fluent in Mandarin with scholar/journalist background, claimed its existence long before the recent U.S. Administrations intrigued me. This column shall question “the existence of such a grand strategy aimed at displacing American power” by reviewing Doshi's book.

Rush Doshi took a very good Chinese name, Du Rusong, 杜若松, meaning that he is like a pine tree. In China, pine trees appear in many artists' paintings as a tree with strong character, green in all seasons even in bitter cold winter and strong against wind even in severe storms (Pottinger also has a Chinese name Bo Ming, 博明, broadly bright) showing his proficiency in Chinese. Doshi graduated from Princeton University and received a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He formerly worked at the Brookings Institute leading a research team to collect data about Chinese diplomatic strategies and digitizing relevant documentations. His research includes China's grand strategy and Indo-Pacific security issues. His works have been published in The Wall Street Journal, Foreign Affairs magazine, Washington Post, International Organizations, Washington Quarterly, etc. He has been the Special Advisor to the President of the Asian Group prior to his present position. Brookings published a long in-depth introduction and chapter outlines on his new book (Brookings website, 8-2-2021). This book can be said to be Doshi's meticulous masterpiece. It covers Western views on China and also reveals his personal imagination. I have been engaged in observations and comments on Sino-US affairs for many years but mainly based on facts not on presumption or extrapolation, thus never ventured into 'grand strategy' discussion. Doshi's book not only aroused my interest, but also gave me the feeling that it would be somewhat influential to readers because of its voluminous references, However, the book's conclusion may be misleading, The current review is written to draw public discussion on his claim of China's grand strategy.

Doshi quoted Li Hongzhang's "Great Changes Unseen in Three Thousand Years" (Li was prime minister for the last years of Qing Dynasty) and Xi Jinping's "Major Changes Unseen in a Century" to emphasize that the former represents China's unprecedented humiliation and disasters, while the latter represents China's opportunities including her cultural revival. Xi believes that China has felt its own rise and the decline of the West, so he believes that the next decade is a period of historical opportunity for China. Then Doshi used a series of questions to illustrate the theme of his book: What are China's ambitions? Does China have a grand strategy? If so, what is it? How is it formed? What should the U. S. do? His answer is: China's grand strategy is a displacement strategy, from the region to the world, China will replace the order established by the United States. First, China's motive is to defeat the control of US hegemony, and then establish China's control from the region to the world. This author believes that Doshi, like many Western political theorists making the same mistake, is inherently subjective, (if U.S. think or do so, others will do the same), not objectively analyzing China's motives. Doshi himself also said that he did not find any book on China's grand strategy, not a single book which clearly stated 'what China's grand strategy is'. On the contrary, anyone who cares about U.S. diplomacy and military affairs must have read the white papers or basket of papers regularly published by US government, officials and think tanks, clearly expounding her strategy, especially recently, strategies against China.

From my own observation, most governments have discussions and researches on international strategic issues, but such discussion are not the same as the implemented state strategy. (U.S. does carry out its strategy!) To deal with the American power in the world, countries have to take reactive measures (responding to pressure), regardless of the size of the country. Since its founding, China had to adopt reactive diplomatic policies and actions to deal with foreign nations. That is why Chinese coined the diplomatic phrases. “when soldiers come to attack, we must send wise generals to resolve it and when flood water comes, we must use soil to stop the water”.
(兵来将挡， 水来土掩) Some Western scholars, including Doshi are accustomed to the hegemonic behavior and thinking of the United States. Now they have witnessed China's gradual tougher diplomatic responses. They subjectively believe that China is also adopting a hegemonic strategy like the U.S. does. It is very convenient to imagine a Chinese grand strategy, which is to push the dominance of the U.S. away from the region (Asia pacific) then from the world, i.e. displacing U.S. order and establishing Chinese order. Doshi's book also mentioned that when the United States re-examined its China policy, the opinions of all parties were not completely unanimous in agreement. When judging what China wants and where China is heading, some think that China has global ambitions, some think that it is only regional, some think that China has a century-old plan, but some think that China is just reactive and opportunistic, and some think that China is a revisionist hegemony. Others say that China just wants to maintain peace and stability in order to continue her development of raising her citizens' standard of living, therefore only reactive to external pressure.

There are 13 chapters in Doshi's book. The content is worth reading, but its conclusions must be debated. At the end, Doshi reminded everyone to pay attention to and to understand China's grand strategy. He also suggested that the United States should use Chinese methods to deal with China. In addition to coping with internal problems in the United States, it should also invest in the outside world and establish order to prevent 'non-liberalism' forces to expand. These ideological statements as conclusions are really too much like political slogans to be accepted. This author believes that although Doshi has worked hard and has collected a lot of data, he failed (bogged down by subjective ideological views) to objectively analyze China's reactionary diplomacy (evidenced by at least one century of facts when China was bullied and pushed by external forces) and why she desires to take non-reactive but self-determined diplomatic measures towards the United States. China gradually gained self-confidence through her successes in economic development which permits her moving from reactive diplomacy to self-determined China-interest-first diplomacy (American first has been practiced by the U.S. ever since her independence 250 years ago). China ideologically uses "cultural Revival" (Cultural Renaissance) as the nation's motivation force, sets "lifting above poverty" as the nation's prime goal and deploy "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) program as a sustainable economic co-development plan with the world. BRI is a mutually beneficial economic development plan, that is China's recent grand strategy, not to replace the U.S. It was the U.S.'s own choice of boycotting the "BRI" program which received 139 countries' endorsement including the cunning U. K. The Chinese grand strategy Doshi and Pottinger referred to is a product of the U.S. China policy – A natural reaction from China responding to the U.S. pressure to suppress China's rise.

As long as the U.S. understands this and treats China with respect, a win-win Sino-US relationship between the two powers can be expected. The two great nations can engage in a Cool War where competition is selective, cooperation takes place when competition is not an option. Cold War may lead to a hot war or possibly a world war but a Cool War benefits the world, the makind, no matter which nation is the number one economy in the world.