

**“Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China”**  
**Featuring**  
**Evan Osnos**  
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After decades of relative inscrutability, Evan Osnos stated that due to expanding access, China is becoming much more knowable. New avenues for information allow observers to delve into the fabric of peoples’ lives - lives which in combination are a deep underlying driver of change.

Since the time of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, rapid and fundamental change is indeed the context in which China finds itself. This change has allowed many types of ambitions to be unleashed.

Mr. Osnos explained that ambitions reside at two different levels. First is the grand, national ambition as expressed by the country’s leaders.

- The “great renewal of the Chinese people” is often put forth as the *Chinese Dream*. This vision emphasizes continuing to move forward with economic transformation, as well as becoming more prominent in regional political-security affairs. Citizens’ contributions to these aims are united, of course, under the Party’s leadership.

Ambitions also reside at the level of 1.4 billion Chinese citizens. A broad cultural shift encouraging, if not celebrating, individual assertiveness and self-centeredness has prompted the loosing of 3 basic forces.

- First is the pursuit of *fortune*.
  - Increasingly, Chinese individuals’ basic needs are being met.
- Second is the pursuit of *truth*.
  - After one accumulates a certain amount of property and material goods, one must become aware and savvy in order to protect these possessions. Being uninformed is a liability in holding on to one’s fortune, so the pursuit of objective information is an important sub-goal here.
- Third is the pursuit of *faith*. Attainment of uncensored information often creates a more probing and critical mindset, including the raising of complex and existential questions.
  - This hunger for something to believe in is often fed by religious beliefs, and indeed the number of religious adherents is growing in China today.
  - But deep longings for purpose need not lead to religion; it can lead, for example, to strident nationalism.

- And national pride which is prone to being punctured can lead to angry reactions. Osnos opined that we will see more of this in the future.

The dilemma for China posed by the interests described above is that popular ambitions tend to race ahead unfettered, while Party officials aim to set limits on the types of ambitions which are considered legitimate. These two dynamics set up a collision. The fundamental clash going forward will be between the aspirations of a more efficacious citizenry and the constraints imposed by authoritarian power.

- Mr. Osnos wisely cited the fundamental nature of this clash while refraining from predicting how it will turn out.

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