Evan Osnos
“The Other China Dreams: Aspiration and Authoritarianism”
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When Xi Jinping took the helm of the China’s top leadership in December 2012, he declared that he would dedicate his life to the great renewal of the Chinese nation. In his mind, a national ambition for rejuvenation - a return to China's powerful world status it once had - is the China Dream that all Chinese, or at least the 80 million communist party members, should espouse. Since then, China Dream has been one of the most frequently discussed and referenced term in the Chinese media, and an over-arching theme shaping China's master narrative at a collective level.

But at an individual level, each of the 1.4 billion Chinese in China has his or her own personal dream. How do these varied individual dreams relate to the collective national China Dream? How do personal aspirations square with national authoritarianism in an internet-linked globalization age? What are the underlying forces that can explain China’s dramatic transformation over the last three decades that amazes outside observers? These are the questions that Evan Osnos, Staff Writer of The New Yorker, tries to address in his talk and his book *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China*, published in May 2014. By humanizing China's transformation, he makes these questions seem no longer abstract or far afield to Americans.

At the outset of his talk, Osnos describes a young Chinese man by the name Zhang Zhimin, who grew up at a remote coal mine where his parents' goal was merely to pass the day normally. Zhang was determined to leave the mine and control his own fate. Through his tenacious effort, he learned to speak English and gave himself an English name Michael. Now he lives in Beijing, in a dark bedroom shared with other seven men. He aspires to change his life again.

To Osnos, Michael epitomizes a young generation of Chinese who don't accept their life situations into which they were born, and go out to strive for a better life. This aspiration and energy propel them to change things for the better. Such individual efforts, unleashed by the relaxation of the political and economic system, are the underlying forces that transformed China from a lackluster backwater place to a glittering and dynamic place highly integrated into the world economy.

Pursuing the China Dream of great renewal has serious implications both domestically and abroad. It implies continued physical and technological upgrading and economic transformation, including explorations as far away as the moon, Mars and deep oceans, which the Chinese see as status symbols of a leading power. It implies potential tensions with those established world powers. In the past, China believed and used "韬光养晦（taoguang yanghui)" as a guiding principle in its foreign policy, which meant...
"building up yourself while keeping a low profile and biding your time." In recent years China has become more assertive on contentious issues such as its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. Sanguine Chinese leaders recognize that they cannot upgrade their physical capabilities overnight, nor do they expect to fundamentally change the global power balance. They only see themselves as one of the major powers in a multi-polar world, with the U.S. as one of the poles.

Do the Chinese people share the national China Dream, as defined by President Xi? Osnos explains how the Chinese term 野心, literally translated as "wild heart", meaning wolfish ambition, has shed its conventional negative connotation and taken on a positive color as a motivating force. Traditionally the Chinese always tried to appear bland and inconspicuous because of the insignificance of the individual in their view of cosmology. After China embarked on market reforms and opening up in 1978, people were unshackled from collective farms and factories (松绑 in Chinese) and were encouraged to strike out on their own. Being allowed to make their own decisions on issues such as where to work and whom to marry, people realized that they could become masters of their own destinies. Parents began to learn how to stimulate children's "wild heart" and to encourage them to do well in life. The individual self has become the new center of the Chinese cosmology. To overcome adversities and achieve personal triumph is considered glorious. The Chinese ethos has thus changed.

After the Chinese accumulated certain material wealth such as houses and cars, they began to think about their relations with the government and the society. What kind of laws will protect their private properties? What needs to be done to ensure clear air and water? What kind of policies and political structure will foster unfettered media coverage and independent universities, which in turn will encourage innovation and invention at large? Amid the on-going relentless anti-corruption campaign under President Xi and the downfall of many senior party leaders, the Chinese began to contemplate the meaning of life - what to believe in, what should be their moral foundations and guidance, and to what causes they should dedicate their lives. Hence, Osnos entitles his book Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China.

In the end, Osnos describes the experience of a young graduate of Fudan University in Shanghai by the name of Tang Jie. He set up a website with a central theme of criticizing the conspiracy and collusion of western media and the West's encirclement of China. As his site gained a following, he expanded its operations to other themes. For instance, his writers criticized local officials for corruption, and praised political figures whom they admired, including Bo Xilai; both of these were politically sensitive territories. Eventually, his website was shut down as his individual dream had collided with the official China Dream. This example illustrates an implicit limit as to what kind of personal dream a Chinese can have in China.