

Introduction

In the two prequels to this book, *The China Order: Centralia, World Empire, and the Nature of Chinese Power* (2017) and *The China Record: An Assessment of the People's Republic* (2023), I have attempted to explore the Chinese political tradition and worldviews and assess the record of the People's Republic of China under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP-PRC).¹ As a follow-up, this third volume of my trilogy on China attempts to answer the questions regarding the significance of and how to address the rising power of the CCP-PRC state. In the process, it gives consideration to alternative directions and the organizational optimality of human civilization. The simple message is that humanity faces a grand choice between competing world orders that shape the political organization among and within the nations and countries of the world. The policy references from this book likely will challenge a number of reigning notions and inconvenience significant vested interests. The author is not unaware of the immodest appearance of this book and is anticipating the likely rebuffs. Indeed, unpleasant premonitions of an impending inundation and the demanding efforts needed to steer clear often remain unheard or unheeded until the ship has irreversibly plunged into the abyss, pushed by the combined forces of misplaced intentions and the tyranny of small decisions at critical junctures.² An irreparable point of inflection is often not visible without the distance of time and space. As always, counterfactual analysis in hindsight and vindication in retrospect, therefore, rightfully remain delicious but forbidden fruits.³

More specifically, this book concerns a defining choice for the direction of human civilization that is unfolding right now: Will humanity continue the evolving Westphalian system with its current variant of the so-called liberal international order (LIO), a decentralized world polity of international relations among sovereign nations and states, or

be tempted by world political unification, which will inevitably result in a world empire like the China Order, which centrally ruled the entirety of the whole known world in east Eurasia for many centuries? Proposals and contentions regarding how to order and govern the world differently are neither new nor rare. To politically unite the whole known world is both a “natural” action and an ancient and “universal” ideal.⁴ Human history has witnessed both successful and failed world empire-building projects in many “worlds,” including the Mesopotamian-Persian world, the Mediterranean-European world, the Indian world, the Sinic world, the Mongolian world, and the Mesoamerican world. Many international systems have existed since the Sumerian city-states in Mesopotamia, largely isolated from each other; most were ended by the imperial power of a “world” empire.⁵ In reality, these empires were limited by geography and technology, and only encompassed the whole known worlds of their respective civilizations. Thus, they never really united the polity of the whole of humanity. At present, however, the choice to embrace political unity is genuinely global and probably irreversible, and hence weighted with unprecedented urgency and unparalleled importance. There is the usual risk associated with a consequential choice due to “clouds of vagueness,” endless uncertainty and unreason, innate “demands for precision,” and path-dependence on “moral certainty.”⁶ There is also the unusual risk of an aggregate decision that is unprecedentedly holistic in scale and likely irrevocable in course.

The China Race

The grand choice of world order is now strikingly presented in the form of an epic contest, the so-called China Race centered around the PRC-USA rivalry, between the rising power of the CCP-led PRC state and the existing world order of the LIO shaped by the West under the leadership of the United States.⁷ The two clashing sides of this global competition represent contrasting ways of ordering nations and states as the principal units of human organization, incompatible norms and rights for the people and divergent modes of government, alternative models of state-society and state-market relationships and socioeconomic development, and distinctive human-nature relationships. Consequently, the China Race is about the fortunes of humanity, as these disparate orders of world politics ultimately result in drastically different optimal-

ity of security, tranquility, justice, innovation, and efficiency for all of humankind. It concerns, therefore, shaping or reshaping, and directing or redirecting, human civilization.

The focus of this book is on the political organization of globalizing human civilization facing alternative world orders under competing leaders. Humankind has long approached questions regarding the world order with deliberations to optimize its “historical dynamics,” and hence human civilization has not developed entirely adventitiously.⁸ In fact, the Westphalian world order, based on national sovereign equality, is itself probably neither “natural” nor inevitable.⁹ In 2019 and 2020, groups of eminent American and international experts assembled by the Council on Foreign Relations identified the potential and propensity for another profound—and likely defining and “reordering”—transition of the current world order and its leadership, with decorous and abstruse speculations about the associated uncertainties and possibilities.¹⁰ In 2021, a group of Western scholars of international relations jointly published an attempt to identify the multiple, serious, and in some cases previously overlooked challenges to the existing world order, including the rise of Chinese power, which could transform the LIO “from within and without in unprecedented ways.”¹¹ Some PRC analysts openly argued in 2021 for a pending “great competition [and] vast change centered on the world order of global governance,” at a level that had been “unseen in a century” or “the first time in four centuries”; and a senior CCP official in charge of “public diplomacy” publicly declared in 2022 that the PRC “has resolved in desperation to compete with the US and the West in all areas [and] must win that competition.”¹² Characteristically, such broad arguments are politely reticent.

This book, however, intends to immodestly and unambiguously outline how the world is facing grand and present choices between alternative world orders, and how to move forward. One path is to continue the world order of the Westphalian system of international relations among sovereign nations, under which humankind continues to compare and compete and, yes, struggle and fight toward an ever more possible future, maximizing optimality aggregately, for all. Another path is to politically unite the Earth into one reign, as epitomized by the China Order: people drift, with the hedonistic elites overly embracing *carpe diem*, and degenerate due to an institutional regression that will seal human civilization into a suboptimal or even disastrous and irreversible repeat of the not-too-distant past.

How to navigate the currents of globalization under the Westphalian world order to preserve or undo popular sovereignty *and* liberal democratic rule of law, with old wisdoms and new technologies, appears to be a key challenge for all nations.¹³ More specifically, the 18 US government intelligence agencies jointly predicted in March 2021 a world of more competition and confrontation “between China and a Western coalition led by the United States,” with “competing visions of the international system and governance that reflect their core interests and ideologies.”¹⁴ Across the Pacific, CCP-PRC leader Xi Jinping proclaimed one month later the imperative task of “making a wise choice” for the pressing question of “where should humanity be heading?”¹⁵ He further declared in the United Nations five months later, and repeated to foreign partisans in March 2023, that “the world is once again at the crossroads of history.”¹⁶ Mighty minds think alike, albeit from opposing perspectives.

Central to this choice is the leadership of the current international community, which will determine how the world shall be ordered and led—the prize of the China Race between the West, led by the US, and the challenger, the CCP-dominated PRC state.¹⁷ Far more than just an issue of how a nation is governed and behaves, the kleptocracy of the CCP-PRC state represents a viable mode of political governance that is evidently undesirable to the people, but seductive to the ambitious few, as it is increasingly formidable and strident, and thus “threatens global security” and well-being.¹⁸ “Corruption fuels inequality, siphons off a nation’s resources, spreads across borders, and generates human suffering. It is nothing less than a national security threat in the 21st century.” So declared US president Joe Biden in fall 2021.¹⁹ In December 2021, analysts in the US sounded the alarm that the global race has entered the “decade of maximum danger” and Americans must counter the PRC maximally with “whatever” as “there is no time left to waste” if they want to possibly “avoid an outcome they cannot afford.”²⁰ Almost as if to explicate that “outcome,” in fall 2022 and spring 2023, PRC scholars bluntly redeclared an imminent and inevitable “100-year change” of “international governance” from under the Westphalian system to a singular “global governance” of “one Village Earth [. . .] community of common human destiny,” so as to redetermine “who governs” and “who are governed.”²¹

The China Race has actually been in progress since the creation of the PRC in 1949, but was largely dismissed, assumed or wished away by the United States until the CCP-PRC’s recent elevation on the world stage. The outcome of the China Race is in no way guaranteed, as the

contest becomes increasingly arduous and costly. Given population size and potential, its many peculiarities, and its long history, China could indeed become a viable, alternative, and even finer world leader, as the British philosopher Bertrand Russell envisioned a century ago.²² That positive statement of possibility, now seen by many as feasible and even inevitable, only makes it more of an imperative to consider the normative desirability, policy preferences, and conscious actions humanity faces in choosing the leadership and order for the world, as this book contends. Successfully managing the China Race so as to actively shape the future in the best interests of the world, including the Chinese people, is highly probable as long as the Race is approached properly and confronted in time. Humanity has an excellent chance to avoid leaping backward or embracing suboptimal alternatives, with a comprehensive strategy addressing the rising CCP-PRC power that I call *Contaformation*—containment and engagement for the transformation and incorporation of China. A fully engaged and well-run China Race is a grand and global competition that, in and of itself, is natural and critically benefits the health and progress of human civilization.²³

In the language of the well-established game theory,²⁴ the China Race (and the PRC-USA competition) appears to approximate a zero-sum game that is asymmetric, noncooperative, and continuous in nature for the CCP regime and the US/Western leadership (and the Westphalian world order itself). But it is essentially a non-zero-sum game that can be cooperative and positive for the world, including the Chinese people. Well played, this global competition could be as beneficial as any other games among nations. An optimal management of the China Race, therefore, means persevering and gaining from the great competition with a secure preservation of the Westphalian world order; an avoidance of a Sino-American war to the fullest extent possible, keeping the “inherently systemic and global war” between the two rivalries at the level of “low intensity,” rather than “high intensity conflict” or total war;²⁵ and a transformed China as a great power devoid of the CCP’s mode of governance and pursuits.

Arrangement of the Book

The first part of this book, chapter 1, is a general introduction to the China Race, the epic contest for power, influence, and leadership that will

ultimately determine the destiny of human civilization. Being contended in this competition is the post–Cold War version of the Westphalian system, the LIO currently led by the US and its Western allies. Eagerly running in the Race as the challenger is the rising power of the PRC state under the CCP struggling for regime survival. The CCP-PRC has captured China and the Chinese people, extracting resources from the world’s largest population (prior to 2024) and second-largest economy, tapping a host of odd allies for political reconfiguration, challenging democratic rule of law, and advancing a political globalism for a safer world for authoritarian governance, at the minimum, and a world empire of either world communism or the China Order, at the maximum. At stake in this existential Race, beyond the survival of two opposing political systems, is the well-being of all humankind, including the Chinese people.

To analyze the China Race and contemplate the rationale and means to manage it well, it is necessary to introduce a few hypotheses, principles, and parameters to support a normative assessment of the contenders. As I have attempted to demonstrate in the two prequels to this book, the CCP-PRC state is a viable and mighty power, but it represents a suboptimal and undesirable alternative to governance of the West as the world leader, and a China Order–style world political centralization as an inferior alternative to the current world order based on the Westphalian system. I will discuss further issues such as globalism and national interests, justice and the common good, power transition in international relations, and why the US remains the least likely destroyer and the last capable defender of the less undesirable Westphalian world order. After a consideration of preference, epistemology, and the meaning of victory, I submit the desirability, imperativeness, and achievability for the whole world, including the Chinese people, of optimally managing the China Race and decisively prevailing in it.

The second part of this book, chapters 2 and 3, addresses what the CCP-PRC has been doing internationally and the impact of Beijing’s actions abroad. A central thesis concerns the urgency and peril represented by the PRC challenge. A tight and exploitative control of the world’s largest (or second largest after 2023) population in an era favoring the supremacy of equal human rights and globalism has given the CCP powerful machinery for its global pursuits. The unfortunate state of Sinology in the pluralistic West, especially the United States, compounded by the CCP’s capable and effective efforts to build its global “united front,” has significantly enhanced Beijing’s hand. The unscru-

pulous autocracy thus appears strong, even invincible, in its global race with the US to reshape world politics and rebuild a China Order–like world empire for the whole of humanity.

However strikingly successful in maintaining power and increasingly resourceful in its global ambitions, the CCP-PRC state is nonetheless found to be inherently suboptimal and fragile, with deep flaws and weaknesses both at home and abroad. These deficiencies can be fruitfully and inexpensively exploited by its opponents in the China Race. Beijing's foreign policy has been largely as cost-ineffective as it is undesirable, and as suboptimal as its domestic policies. At an astronomical cost to Chinese life and resources, and with many failures, the CCP-PRC accomplished little to serve the Chinese people or the Chinese nation beyond safeguarding and enriching the ruling elites. The gap and conflict between the regime's pursuits and China's national interests have become ever more apparent, making the cost of the party-state's governance through force and deception ever more exorbitant. With its gross inefficiency and rampant corruption, Beijing heavily depends on the goodwill, naivete, and somnolence of the West, afflicts the Chinese people with depressed living standards and assaults on their rights and freedoms, and faces growing problems such as popular resistance and unfavorable demographics—all of these points are critical targets for a reoriented, concerted, and intelligent effort to slow, constrain, and transform the CCP-PRC state.

Chapter 4 comprises the third and final part of this book, describing and elaborating on the feasibility and desirability of an effective and efficient strategy for managing the China Race, the so-called *contafomation*, a portmanteau for containment and engagement for the transformation and incorporation of China. After a quick recap of the nature of the China Race and the CCP-PRC state as the systemic challenger, I discuss a strategic approach of firm containment and smart engagement, enabling the world, including the Chinese people, to benefit from the global competition and avoid a tragic repeat of the history of the post-Qin Chinese world. This strategy has three hierarchical aims: to prevent the CCP mode of polity from becoming the new leader of the international community and to stop the alternative world order of political centralization; to avoid a direct war between China and the United States, to the fullest possible extent; and to transform the CCP-PRC state sociopolitically and to fully incorporate China into the international community.

This comprehensive management of the China Race, with well-reasoned objectives and fine-tuned methods, I argue, will enable the West

and the world, including the Chinese people, to feasibly and affordably benefit from and ultimately prevail in the China Race at minimal cost and tolerable collateral damage. By enabling and encouraging sociopolitical transformation of the PRC but leaving it mostly to the Chinese people, the conclusion of the China Race could be surprisingly peaceful, rewarding, and speedy in the end.

The epilogue is a brief summary of the book and the whole China trilogy, concluding with speculations on future scenarios for China and the world.