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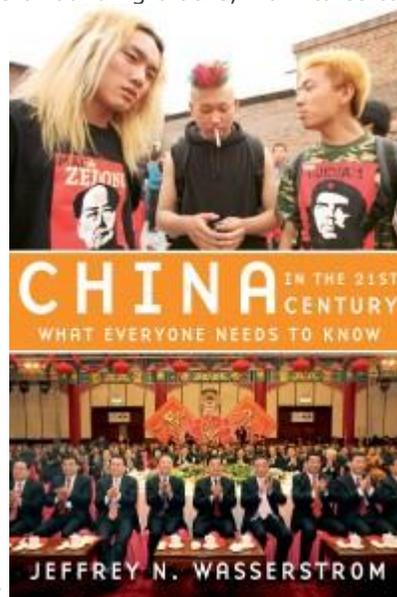
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Book Talk(s)

April 10, 2010 in [Uncategorized](#) by [jwasserstrom](#) | [Permalink](#)

Finishing up work on [China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know](#), which is due out in a few days from Oxford University Press, and then more recently preparing for a series of public events that are linked in some way to its publication, set me thinking about the varied ways that books incorporate things that have gone before them. The many kinds of building blocks, from tales told to



things written down, that authors use to create something new.

I've never written a novel, but I've heard that these can easily grow out of a tale told around a campfire or a short story. It is commonplace in the academy to assume that textbooks will contain many chapters that started out as classroom lectures. And the term "conference volume" is sometimes used as a shorthand for scholarly books with multiple contributors, since it is routine for these work to include at least some chapters that began life as papers delivered at workshops.

I know that my own first book, [Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China](#), like so many monographs by recently minted PhDs, evolved directly out of a dissertation. My second individually authored book, [China's Brave New World—And Other Tales for Global Times](#), was a more complex concoction, made up of previously unpublished short pieces and chapters adapted from works of reportage and travel writing I'd done for magazines, journals of opinion, and literary reviews. And my third one, [Global Shanghai, 1850-2010](#), though less obviously tied to previous texts, definitely had parts that had roots in academic articles and parts that had roots in public talks I'd given over the years.

China in the 21st Century is, in one sense, a departure from all of these models. It was imagined and written essentially from scratch, designed from the beginning to be part of an Oxford series, the "[what everyone needs to know](#)" one whose trademark has become a question and answer format.

It would be inaccurate, though, to claim that there was nothing I'd said or written that served as a building block for this new book. This is because the questions I chose to include were culled largely from the many that have been put to me during the last decade by students, colleagues, strangers sitting next to me on long flights to Asia, school teachers at outreach events, and people I have run into in unexpected places who after learning that I teach and write about China for a living told me what they had always wanted to know about that country. The book gives me a chance to refine the off-the-cuff answers I have given to these queries and try to weave a large collection of responses to disparate questions into a lively presentation of where China has been lately and might be headed. In the process, I am also offered the opportunity of working to unsettle common misunderstandings about China that I feel hinder the ability to see it for what it is—a place that is amazingly complex but

by no means “inscrutable” (a word that still shows up far too often, generally without the scare quotes, in discussions of the place and its people).

In a sense, then, as those who have read my posts to this blog and commentaries for related venues will realize, the book can be seen in part as a long-long-form version of the often very short pieces of writing I’ve been publishing frequently in recent years. (Long-form, but not that long, as *China in the 21st Century* is still plenty short enough, as political scientist Susan Shirk pointed out in her very nice endorsement statement for the back cover, to be read in-flight between taking off from one side of the Pacific and touching down on the other.) And, in fact, when I’ve written blog posts or newspaper commentaries, I’ve often done so in part to try to answer or place into a radically new light a question put to me by someone who was curious to learn more or I felt had gotten a distorted idea about China.

This similarity, in intent if not format, between the writing I’ve been doing for sites such as this one and the work between two covers that is about to hit the bookstore shelves leaves me with the hope that some readers of this post will be curious to know about upcoming public events I’ll be involved in that are linked in some fashion to *China in the 21st Century*. So, here are the first five ones coming up, all at West Coast venues (a follow-up post will come later dealing with East Coast talks) and each including book sales and book signings:

1) On April 19, I’ll be speaking at Portland State, focusing on one theme in the book: the role that hosting “mega-events” such as the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo has played in marking China’s renewed prominence in global affairs. The event will run from 6:30pm to 8:00pm in SMU 238 (1825 SW Broadway) and more details about it are available [here](#).

2) On April 20, I’ll be giving an overview of the book at the University of Washington in Seattle. The event will begin at 7pm and take place in the Walker-Ames Room (Room 225 of Kane Hall); to learn more, go [here](#).

3) On April 21, I’ll be at UC Berkeley reading from and talking about the book at the Institute for East Asian Studies Conference Room, 2223 Fulton Street, 6th Floor, as part of an event that begins at 4pm and is described more fully [here](#).

4) On April 23, from 1-2:30 at UC Irvine, in the Humanities Gateway Room 1030, I’ll take part in a dialog with freelance writer Mara Hvistendahl that will deal in part with themes addressed in the book; more about this event, can be found [here](#).

5) On April 25, from noon to 1pm, at UCLA, in Charles Young Hall, room 50, as part of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Festival, I’ll be taking part in a panel on China’s rise toward superpower status. To find out the identities of the other panelists (hint: we’ve recently run an excerpt from a new book by one of them) and the moderator, just click [here](#).