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Dancing is my hobby

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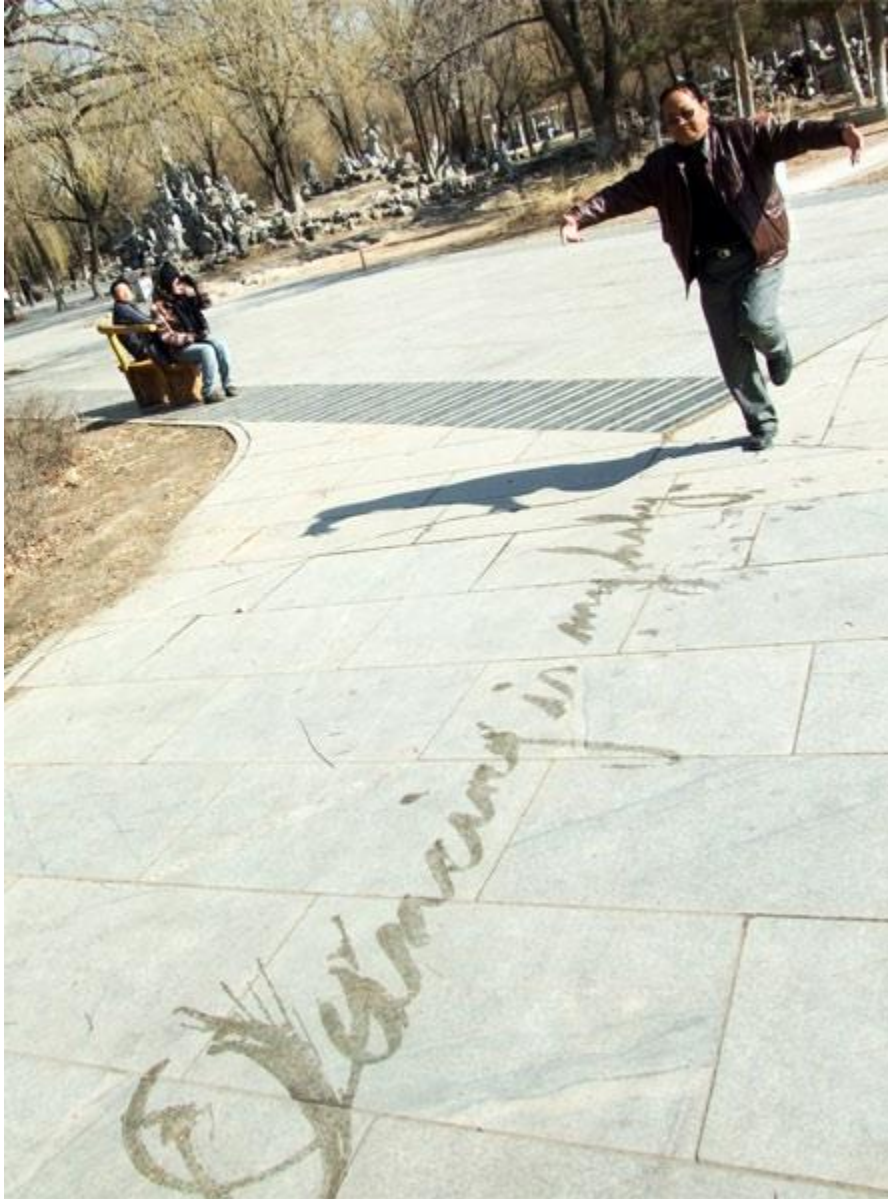
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Dancing is my hobby

April 16, 2010 in [Photo](#) by [The China Beat](#) | [1 comment](#)



"In Hohhot, capital of Inner Mongolia, a 76-year-old former PLA soldier and amateur calligrapher from Shanghai dances away another Tuesday morning. Underneath his footwork, he has written in almost as flawless spelling, 'Dancing is my hobby'."

— Alec Ash, [Six](#)

If Radio Interviews Had Footnotes...And April East Coast Speaking Dates

April 15, 2010 in [Uncategorized](#) by [jwasserstrom](#) | [Permalink](#)

I've recently been lucky enough to get a chance to speak about my latest book on a pair of radio shows: Jon Wiener's lively Wednesday [KPFK drive-time program](#), which airs exclusively in Southern California (though [available on the web](#) to people based far from L.A.), and "[Morning Edition](#)," which airs nationally. Doing these two shows virtually back-to-back reminded me yet again of a couple of

recurring challenges that many academics, myself included, face when trying to communicate with broad publics. Namely, striving to wean ourselves from two kinds of habits that are cultivated in graduate school.

The first habit involves growing too fond of using specialized jargon and invoking the names and ideas of theorists who are well known within some scholarly communities but little known elsewhere. The second is an addiction to footnotes, references and citations that serve a variety of functions, including giving credit to those whose work one is building upon.

Both of these challenges vexed me when I was fresh out of graduate school, but I now have little trouble with the former. It is the latter that still gives me pause, as I want to be able to make clear as often as I can when I am drawing upon things that others have said or written. I was glad, therefore, that even though [China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know](#) is not designed primarily for specialists by any means, Oxford University Press allowed me to include a small number of footnotes in the book and also append to a suggestions for further reading section at the end. (Similarly, I'm glad that it is simple in blog posts to send the reader, via links, to works that have inspired me or from which I am drawing information.)

Radio interviews about a book one has written, like newspaper commentaries, are just not conducive to more than very occasional nods in the direction of things that others have written. In the case of those recent shows, I did manage to say something nice in passing about Susan Shirk's [China: Fragile Superpower](#) (not so much because I was using its arguments as because one comment she made in it illustrated nicely a point I was making) and to take issue with an influential work that I find deeply problematic, [Mao: The Unknown Story](#), a bestseller that has drawn fire from so many academics that a collection of their critiques of it was recently published under the title [Was Mao Really a Monster?](#) Such oral counterparts to "footnotes," however, were very rare.

In one sense, this lack of oral footnotes isn't really a problem, since it is easy enough for someone curious to learn more about who has influenced my thinking on particular issues, as well as figure out what people writing about China I do and don't tend to agree with, can always go to my new book. For example, if they do this, they will find that, in the section highlighting the parallels between aspects of China's current situation and that of the United States a century or more ago (when it was the rising power generating concern in various quarters), I refer to work in a similar vein by [Peter Hessler](#) and American historian [Stephen Mihm](#).

There were two points in the interviews, however, when I wished afterwards I could have given a shout-out to the authors of things I'd read very recently, after the book went to press. First, in the "Morning Edition" segment when I brought up the extent to which Chinese leaders have to respond to pressure groups within their own country, I would have liked to acknowledge an [insightful blog post](#) by my former Indiana University colleague Scott Kennedy that stresses precisely that theme (albeit focusing specifically on current issues, something I didn't address). And, second, in the KPDK interview, when talking about what to watch for in responses to the tragic earthquake in Qinghai Province, I would have liked to mention the way that [reading a post](#) that very morning by *New Yorker* correspondent Evan Osnos on his excellent "Letter from China" blog had shaped my thinking. Mentioning Osnos would have seemed especially apt on that particular show, as one of the guests that preceded me on it was *New Yorker* editor David Remnick, speaking about his own new book about Barack Obama. (Of course, Remnick did his part of the show by phone, so had hung up before I did my segment in the studio, so it is not like Osnos's boss would have heard me sing his praises, if I had managed to bring "Letter from China" up on the air.)

Public talks offer more chance for expanding on ideas and referring to works by others, so I expect to insert a slightly higher quotient of oral footnotes into the ones I'll be giving in the coming weeks than I was able to insert into the radio shows. And if anyone who comes to these events is left wondering about who has influenced me on a subject, or wants to know who I think they should steer clear of or could benefit from reading, I'm always happy to have queries about these things come up in the q and a section.

And speaking of upcoming talks, I listed some April West Coast dates in a recent post and promised to follow up with information about East Coast ones. So, here is a quick run-down, with links that fill in all the details, including in some cases how to rsvp to reserve a spot at the events that require advance booking, of what I'll be doing in Washington, D.C., New Jersey, and New York City in late April (a few May and June talks are still to come, but I'll save mention of those until closer to the time):

April 27: I'll be in D.C., taking part in two very different events. First, [at noon](#), at Georgetown University, I'll be giving a lunchtime talk, not directly tied to the book, since it will be aimed at students and faculty members and focus on trends in publishing about Asia, drawing on my experiences with "China Beat" and as editor of the Journal of Asian Studies. Then, in the evening, I'll be featured in an [Asia Society event](#) centered on *China in the 21st Century*, in which my remarks will be followed by comments by a distinguished group of specialists in Chinese studies and U.S.-China relations.

April 28: I'll be at Rutgers in the late afternoon taking part in a [symposium on the Shanghai Expo](#), in which Susan Fernsebner (who has written about the topic for this blog in the past) will also take part.

April 29: I'll be in New York City taking part in an evening book talk sponsored by the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, which will [put me in dialog](#) with Joseph Kahn of the *New York Times*, who has extensive experience studying and writing about Chinese issues.

April 30: I'll give a [second New York City book talk](#), this time solo and at Columbia University.