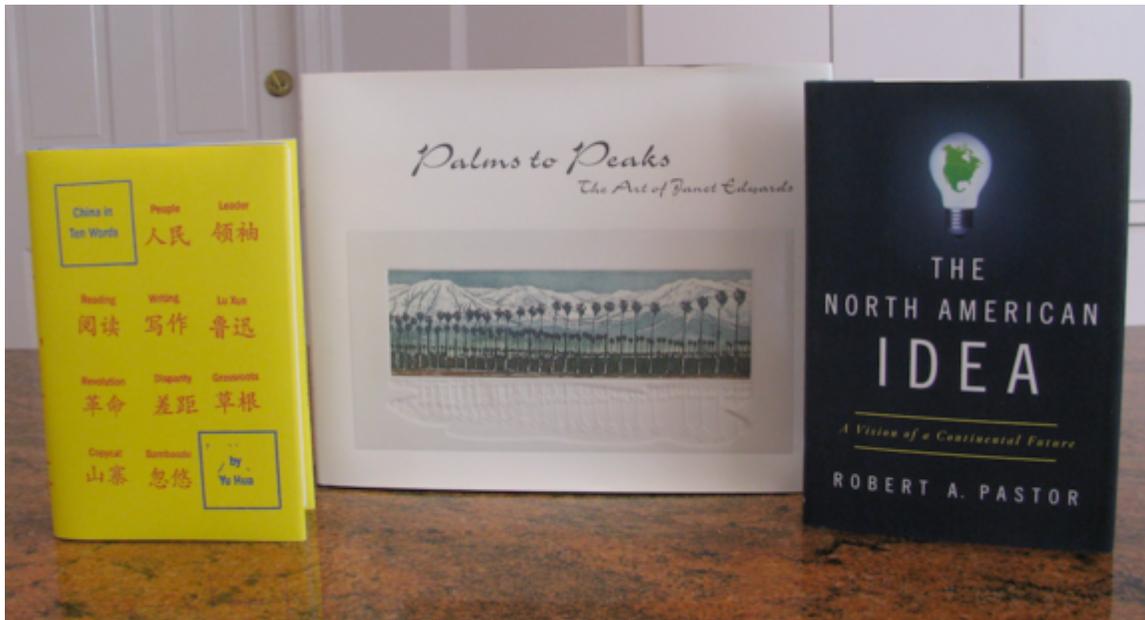


## Three Good Though Dissimilar Books

By James Fallows

Nov 5 2011, 2:31 PM ET

What these have in common is only that I've read them recently and think they're good.



From the left:

[China in Ten Words](#), by Yu Hua. The author is celebrated/controversial in China for his novels of the Cultural Revolution era and beyond, notably *To Live* and *Brothers*. This new book is an outstanding set of essays on the general topic of why modern China is the way it is, each essay centered on a Chinese word or phrase. Jeffrey Wasserstrom of UC Irvine has an extended appreciation in the [LA Review of Books](#). Very much worth reading.

[Palms to Peaks](#), the Art of Janet Edwards. The author/artist is a designer and painter of California scenes, based in my hometown of Redlands, California. Wherever my family has lived over the years, we have had prints of her mountain, desert, and orange-grove scenes around the house, as evocations of the southland. ESRI, the [main tech business](#) of that area, has now put out a gift-book-style [album](#) of her works. I did a back-cover blurb for the book, but that is a sign of the sincerity of my admiration.

[The North American Idea](#), by Robert Pastor. The author has been a friend since we were underlings together in the Carter Administration. At the time, he was a specialist in

inter-American affairs on the National Security Council. In the years since, as an academic, he has worked on, among other causes, political, commercial, and strategic efforts to make America's position in The Americas a strength, rather than a mere circumstance or an active nuisance. This book knits together his arguments on that theme and is a worthwhile counter the next time you hear about building an electrified fence, plus alligator-moat, to separate ourselves from our neighbors. We're all used to the "Asian model" and the "European Idea"; this offers a counterpart for our hemisphere.

Gift season is at hand!

Presented by

