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Commemoration in 2009

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Commemoration in 2009

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Readers may be interested to know that the new issue of *China Heritage Quarterly* is out, and it examines the issue of commemoration (a relevant issue at the moment as, having just passed one sensitive set of dates, we are now into the spring—months strewn with anniversaries). As Editor

Geremie Barmé writes in the [March issue's editorial](#):

The year 2009 also marks other significant anniversaries. Some of these will be commemorated with due pomp and circumstance in the official media and dissected at length by learned gatherings. Others—those events best thought of as ‘dark anniversaries’—will pass by in an atmosphere of heightened alertness, security crackdowns and official anxiety. These dark anniversaries are the silent markers of quelled protests, social unrest and state violence: events like those of 1959 in Lhasa, the closing down of the Xidan Democracy Wall in 1979, the tragedy of 1989 and the religious repression of 1999. They all offer other stories, and a contentious heritage, that play their own role in the unsteady growth of the strong unitary modern state... These years and the days within them offer a penumbra of history; they stand in shaded contrast to the vaunted moments of commemoration, those anniversaries which bask in the merciless glare of publicity and enjoy official largesse. Although formally ignored, or recalled only in verso, dark anniversaries cast a gloomy shadow over the orchestrated son et lumière of state occasions. The Doppelgängers of these dead anniversaries haunt the living.

Articles featured in the issue include a translation of [a commemorative essay for the May Fourth anniversary by Xu Jilin](#) (that will also appear in *Dushu*). A careful recounting of the intellectual issues and causes of May Fourth activists, this paragraph stands out:

By the end of the twentieth century, as a result of the severe damage caused by revolutionary utopias, Chinese thinking people readily reflected on and critiqued utopian ideas. And yet we recognised that although the proximate source of such revolutionary utopias were the forms of May Fourth idealism and romanticist longings, it was clear that which later degenerated into that cruel and merciless ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ could not be mentioned in the same breath as the cosmopolitan utopia of the May Fourth era. This cosmopolitan utopia was totally opposed to the blood and iron principles of the politics of power and transcended the narrow aims of nationalism. It had embodied global values that are the common quest of all races, all nations, and all peoples. The ‘Eternal World Peace’ envisaged at the time by Kant was also a form of cosmopolitan utopia, inspiring the greatest political philosopher of the twentieth century, John Rawls, to argue for his ‘realistic utopia’ in *The Law of Peoples* as a way of achieving global justice. With the rise of nationalism and statism in the modern period, human society required a cosmopolitan utopia to manage global justice, to constrain the tensions and clashes that result from the overdevelopment of statism. Utopian ideals present a global sense of values that are universal and provide the common stipulations for the existence and development of human society. How remarkable was the broad-mindedness of those May Fourth intellectuals, possessed as they were of that brand of cosmopolitan longing, never for a moment seeing the interests of a particular nation or nationality as a gulf to be crossed, seeking always for that ‘nation committed to cosmopolitanism’, basing the rise of a particular nationality solidly on global human values. This was the patriotic movement of the May Fourth, a patriotism that was possessed of cosmopolitan ideals.

Other selections in the issue include essays by Barmé as well as additional translations and literary analysis. The site also hosts [the journal's archives](#), for those interested in further browsing.