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Last Friday, China Beat and the UCI International Center for Writing and Translation (ICWT<) hosted a public roundtable with UC Riverside professor Perry Link and Tiananmen activist Wang Chaohua weighing in on the China side, and writer Pankaj Mishra (a frequent friend of the China Beat) and UCI professor Vinayak Chaturvedi speaking about India. China Beat and UCI’s Jeff Wasserstrom moderated the roundtable discussion, and asked the panelists to consider “dates ending in 9” of specific relevance for China (1919, 1949, 1959, 1979, and 1989) and India (where 9-2 seems to be a more pertinent number, as in 1857 and 1947).

Vinayak Chaturvedi began with a discussion of 1909 as the year of publication of 2 foundational texts in Indian nationalism: Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (or *Indian Home Rule*) and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar’s *Indian War of Independence: 1857*, a history of the 1857 “mutiny” (if you were British) and “war of independence” (if you were Indian). [Readers who are intrigued by the reflections of one Vinayak, a UCI professor, on another Vinayak, a Hindu nationalist, can read Dr. Chaturvedi’s article on the same subject in *Social History* vol. 28 no. 2 (May 2003).] Gandhi’s text and work laid the foundations for the heterogeneous nationalism of a multi-ethnic state as carried forth in the Congress Party, and Savarkar’s text laid the foundations for a militant Hindu nationalism that excludes Muslims and a long list of others, as seen in today’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The two parties and two versions of Indian nationalism have long contested one another, but in the meantime neither has fulfilled its promises to the Indian people.

In addition to being a long-term activist, Wang Chaohua is also an academic with research interests in the May Fourth movement of 1919, and editor of the pre-eminent collection of contemporary Chinese intellectuals’ essays, *One China, Many Paths*. She argued that the best way to understand Tiananmen in 1989 is to compare it with 1919. In both periods the Chinese government was rather disoriented and fairly weak, and activists used similar methods of organizing themselves. The most important common feature is that in both movements, activists allied across class and occupation to create a broader social movement of students, laborers, and white-collar urban workers. Unfortunately, Dr. Wang ended on a sad note. Many people ask her about the prospects of greater freedom for mainland Chinese, but she feels that the current University students in China are even more urban and bourgeois than before so they are less likely to create such a broad-based movement.

Perry Link noted that he was in Beijing in 1989 and attended two events commemorating the 70th anniversary of the May Fourth movement. Government officials in Beijing hosted a grand event in which they labeled the movement as the foundation of Chinese nationalism, the moment when the Chinese people stood up to imperial powers, and the lead-in to the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. Meanwhile, down the road a ways, Qinghua and Beijing University professors hosted a commemoration in which they spoke of the movement as a time of opening the halls of learning to people of both genders and all classes, and of deepening public conversations about science and democracy. Since the 90th anniversary is just around the corner, we might be on the look-out for a similar split in commemorations.

Pankaj Mishra spoke of the current “9” year—2009—as a moment of geopolitical crisis for India. Many conversations of India being the 21st century superpower with the help of the U.S. had long overlooked India’s “big neighbor to the north,” but after the 2008 Beijing Olympics it has become evident that not only can China no longer be ignored, but she might in fact inherit the superpower crown. At the same time, the financial crisis is hitting India hard, and Obama has made it clear that his intentions are to use India as a political counterweight to Afghanistan and Pakistan, not to China.

The conversation touched upon many more scintillating issues, but the report shall end here for sake of a pretense of brevity.