

## Softcover: UK

Chinese imperialism  
and the seeds  
of anger in Tibet

Tsering Shakya and Wang Lixiong show how the Chinese perspective on Tibet is strikingly similar to Western colonialism

BY J. MICHAEL COLE  
STAFF REPORTER

After nearly half a century of Chinese occupation of Tibet, riots on an unprecedented scale occurred not only in the Tibetan Administrative Region (TAR), but also in parts of China with substantial Tibetan populations. Prior to what has come to be known as the March Incident of 2008, Tibetan protests had largely been limited to areas within TAR proper. How can we explain the spontaneous — and violent — uprising that shocked the world months before the Beijing Olympics and invited an ironfisted crackdown by the Chinese authorities?

The answer is the culminating achievement of *The Struggle for Tibet*, a collection of articles written by Tibetan academic Tsering Shakya and the Chinese intellectual Wang Lixiong (王力雄). In what often reads like a dialogue between the two authors, the book explores the question of Tibetan identity, religion, assimilation and resistance from the perspective of Tibetans.

Wang's opening article, *Reflections on Tibet*, which first appeared in the *New Left Review* in 2002, provides an anthropological assessment of the Tibetan experience that, though it strives to comprehend Tibetan reality from a local perspective, is far more successful in highlighting the shortcomings and biases of the observer as colonizer.

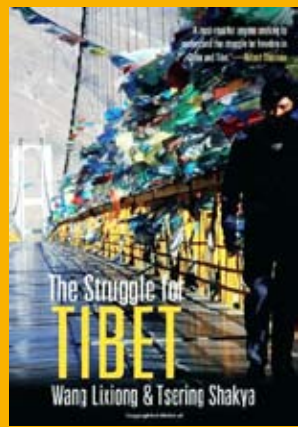
Wang, who has a commendable record of publicly denouncing Beijing over its treatment of ethnic minorities (and served jail time as a result), is well-intentioned, but his facile explanations for Tibetan acquiescence during the Cultural Revolution and alleged substitution of Buddhism for Maoism are quickly dispatched in *Blood in the Snows*, Shakya's response to Wang's article, also published in the *New Left Review*.

Shakya convincingly shows us that the Chinese (and Wang's) perspective on Tibet is strikingly similar to Western colonialism in its *mission civilisatrice*, condescension toward the simple-minded "native" and co-optation of the elite to manage the colony. Here Shakya is largely influenced by Palestinian academic Edward Said, whose work on how colonial powers interpret the "other" and justify the modernizing endeavor remains essential reading. Even well-meaning Chinese dissidents like Wang, Shakya argues, perpetuate the colonial mind-set, mostly by virtue of their being the product of the society in which they evolve. This leads to the conclusion that democratization in China wouldn't necessarily result in improvements in terms of the rights of ethnic minorities there.

Interestingly, Wang's tone makes a notable shift in the following chapter, *Two Imperialisms in Tibet*, published two years later. Part of that reassessment is likely the result of his marrying the famous Tibetan dissident Tsering Woeser (程文海), who suffered the direct consequences of intellectual resistance to Chinese colonialism in Tibet. To limit this progression to his relationship with Woeser, however, would do Wang great injustice, as his intellectual development on the question of Tibet also stems from his efforts to understand its people. His discussion of Tibetan intellectuals using the Chinese language, rather than Tibetan, to oppose the Chinese authorities makes some good points, especially when he contrasts the benefits of doing so with the Uighurs' failure to communicate their plight with both the Chinese and the outside world. We also learn that rather than being uprooted, Tibetans who receive an education in China often return as the harshest critics of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

In the next chapter, *The End of Tibetan Buddhism*, Wang continues on his journey of discovery and turns to the destruction of the monastic class by Chinese authorities. The consequences are far-reaching not only for the Tibetan religion and culture, but also in terms of criminality and environmental protection. Beijing has thrown the monastic class into disarray by ridding itself (sometimes by execution) of independent-minded monks and co-opting those who toe the party line, often via appointments to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), as it did with a low-ranking lama from

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## THE STRUGGLE FOR TIBET

BY WANG LIXIONG AND  
TSERING SHAKYA

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VERSO

Nachu, TAR, who publicly condemned the Dalai Lama on several occasions. Rather than provide dharma teachings to the community, many lamas nowadays are more interested in mingling with wealthy devotees from China, rich businessmen and government officials. Some have even attempted to make it into the movie business, Wang laments.

Beijing may claim that Tibetans are allowed to practice their religion, but by corrupting age-old monastic practices and limiting religious acts to superficial traditions, the "freedom" Tibetans experience is "only a freedom to proceed on a downhill secular path," Wang writes. Out of the ashes of religion are emerging patterns of violent behavior that are uncharacteristic of Buddhism, he argues, which surely wasn't what the authorities expected.

This assault on religion (such as Beijing's insistence on imposing its own selection for the 10th Panchen Lama), added to the authorities' inability, following the demise of reform efforts by premier Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦) in the 1980s, to distinguish between those who actively oppose Chinese policies and the rest, Shakya argues, is what gave rise to the mass unrest in TAR and China that caught Beijing unawares in March 2008. Cellphones and a shared anger at a common enemy, rather than an external plot by Western governments and the "Dalai clique," as Beijing alleges, are the reasons why the violent protests appeared synchronized and coordinated, he says.

Discussing the incident, Wang posits that the system, rather than top CCP leaders, was to blame for the violence. With 13 institutions at the provincial and ministerial level dealing directly with the question of Tibet, and 11 overseeing "anti-separatism," decision-making has fallen into the hands of bureaucracies that seek to maximize their resources, even when their actions go against central policies or the common good. If Wang is right, even if they had sought to restrain the security crackdown on Tibetans, leaders like President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) and Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝) would have been unable to do so. The validity of this argument may be questionable, but it nevertheless raises interesting questions about changes in the CCP leadership from the era of Mao Zedong (毛澤東), who often sidelined government institutions to implement his policies, until today, when the state apparatus has become thoroughly institutionalized.

The authors' conclusions intersect: Tibet as part of China is a construct of Chinese nationalism, and absent radical change in how China manages its empire, its obsession with "anti-separatism" will inexorably turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Wang concludes that the March Incident was the birth of true Tibetan nationalism; Shakya maintains that given full autonomy over their affairs (which is highly unlikely), Tibetans could be amenable to the "one country, two systems" formula.

*The Struggle for Tibet* is a valuable addition to the ongoing debate on Tibet and sheds much needed light on China as empire and colonial power.

## Brink

*Brink* looks like it could well be a surprise hit upon its release in the fall.

A cinematic trailer for *Brink* gives a strong impression of the game's unique visual style and scenery-grappling dynamics.

Paul Wedgwood, owner of the game's developers, Splash Damage, is certainly enthusiastic about the game, and from the looks of it that enthusiasm is warranted.

Aside from by-the-numbers sci-fi setting ("floating city," "rival clans" and "2045" is pretty much all you need to know), *Brink* looks like it will be a breath of fresh air for the well-trodden FPS genre.

Pitched as a more cerebral, co-op based alternative to *Call of Duty* and the like, we were shown an hour of gameplay across a number of locations.

One of the most immediately impressive aspects of the game is the fluid mix of on and off-line game modes. Unlike your standard FPS, with separate multiplayer and single-player settings, all of *Brink*'s missions can be played with the same character, gaining experience points whether or not you are connected to the Internet. Even if you're just waiting for your friends to fire up their Xboxes and playing with AI teammates, they can still jump in at any time



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SPLASH DAMAGE

to assist you as all the game's levels are co-op-based.

The missions themselves are fiendishly clever, dynamically changing at in-game checkpoints depending on your priorities. Attacking a power plant won't just simply involve running in, planting a bomb and running out again, as you're regularly given opportunities to switch your objectives and gain control of new areas, earning experience as you go. What this means is that while there are a finite number of missions in *Brink*, you never need play one out the same way twice.

Different classes are available to make up your team, again meaning more opportunity to play through the game in a variety of different ways. Those willing

to take less glamorous roles like medic or engineer will be rewarded with extra experience points, meaning team strategy is cleverly incentivized.

Customization is also one of *Brink*'s key features, as your in-game character and weapons can be altered in hundreds of ways. Clothes, weapons upgrades and new abilities are unlocked as you progress, with the idea being to use them across a group of customized characters, each suitable for different situations. A fat character can carry larger weapons, while a thin, agile character can leap over obstacles and climb scenery.

The interaction with *Brink*'s in-game landscapes using the SMART system (Smooth Movement Across Random Terrain) is another great new feature. Simply hold down the SMART button and run towards an obstacle and your character will vault across or climb up, thankfully saying goodbye to the horribly imprecise world of FPS jump mechanics.

While the graphics aren't particularly impressive (with the smoothness of online play clearly a priority), the stylized, colorful art design goes some way to make up for this. The characters' elongated faces and distinctive outfits contribute to giving the game a truly distinctive atmosphere. Combined with such a fresh approach to the co-op based FPS, *Brink* looks like it could well be surprise hit upon its release.

*Brink* is due out on Xbox 360, PS3 and PC this fall.



## Rage

*Rage* could well be the best-looking game ever released.

Another game that I knew very little about, *Rage* was once scheduled to be released by Electronic Arts, but id Software has been working on the title for quite some time, and it looks to be in fantastic shape.

Tim Willits, who guides us through about 45 minutes of gameplay, seems pretty pleased with its progress. His company created first-person shooters, he says, and this title, he believes, will propel it back to the forefront of the genre.

Borrowing heavily from both *Borderlands* and *Fallout*, *Rage* adds story-driven RPG elements and vehicle combat and racing to a pretty standard FPS template. Your character wakes up in a post-apocalyptic world (called, um, the wasteland) and has to shoot his way through mutants and bandits, stopping to talk to human characters in junk-filled



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ID SOFTWARE

shantytowns along the way to pick up missions and plot exposition. Sound familiar?

To be fair, it would be harsh to criticize a game that's been so long in development for any seeming

originality. *Mad Max* is probably just as much of an inspiration.

As you'd expect from such FPS heavyweights, the in-game action looked solid and hugely entertaining. Weapon-mounted-buggy racing looked a pleasant diversion from the more straightforward shooting action, but even this had its clever touches, with an interesting array of weapons and fun toys like turrets and remote-control car bombs to play with.

The graphics are simply stunning. The high frame-rate and gorgeous textures of the new idtech5 model have to be seen to be believed — if it came out now, it would probably be the best-looking game ever released.

Despite lacking originality in some areas, id Software look to have created another classic single-word franchise (*Doom*, *Quake*, *Wolfenstein*), it's just a shame that we won't see *Rage* until some time next year.

*Rage* is due out on PC, Xbox 360 and PS3 in 2011.

## Hardcover: US

## On the wrong track

Europe spends too much time apologizing for past sins, argues Pascal Bruckner

BY ANDREW ANTHONY  
THE OBSERVER, LONDON

Pascal Bruckner is known for the novel *Bitter Moon*, which Roman Polanski made into a film (incidentally, a much better adaptation than his overrated version of Robert Harris' *The Ghost*). But he is also a thinker of some standing in France. The cliché of a French philosopher is the complacent obscurantist, wallowing in a swamp of postmodern jargon, who subjects textual meaning to cultural interrogation and finds that it's all the dastardly product of a white, male conspiracy. Bruckner, more an heir of Raymond Aron than, say, Jean Baudrillard, is not that kind of philosopher and *Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism* is not that kind of book. It is a work of bracing lucidity and exhilarating perception.

Bruckner is not the first writer to bring attention to the penitential condition of the West — Paul Berman, Nick Cohen and your humble reviewer are among those who've dealt with the subject — but never has the diagnosis been more eloquently or persuasively made. His prose combines an artist's appreciation of language with an aphorist's gift for concision. On almost every page there is a sentence or paragraph that

demands underlining.

For the past half century or more, says Bruckner, European ideas and debates have been informed by a sense of guilt that, despite its secular guise, is essentially religious: the guilt of original sin. From philosophy to local politics, condemnation of the West has become a reflex response.

With slavery, the Holocaust, and colonialism behind us, we in the West like to lay claim to all that is corrupt and evil in humanity. "The Euro-American is simultaneously cursed and indispensable," writes Bruckner. "Thanks to him, everything becomes clear, evil acquires a face, the dirty rat is universally designated. Biological, political, metaphysical guilt."

Thus it was that so many fine minds could greet the incineration of 3,000 people live on television in 2001 with cries of: "We had it coming"; "What did we expect?"; or, in Baudrillard's case, something close to jubilation.

But, Bruckner argues, this self-recrimination amounts to little more than delusional narcissism, a means of sustaining a sense of our own importance not through the exercise of power but through the expression of remorse. As European influence contracts, so do our claims on responsibility

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## THE TYRANNY OF GUILT: AN ESSAY ON WESTERN MASOCHISM

BY PASCAL BRUCKNER

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PRINCETON

expand. "Our superiority complex has taken refuge in the perpetual avowal of our sins," writes Bruckner, "a strange way of inflating our puny selves to global dimensions."

To what end is this cult of guilt directed? Not to the cause of equality. The world beyond Europe is too often stripped of moral agency and

instead, seems to exist merely as a source of material to feed further self-loathing. "Let us beware of anyone who values the foreigner only out of disdain for himself," Bruckner cautions. "His self-aversion will end up infecting his sympathies."

This need to assert ownership of the world's ills denies the most vital legacy of post-Enlightenment thought, argues Bruckner. Although the West industrialized slavery, it didn't invent it. But it did invent its abolition. While Europe has given birth to monsters, it has also "given birth to theories that make it possible to understand and destroy these monsters."

Yet, our sympathies duly infected by self-aversion, there is now an increasing reluctance to challenge even the most reactionary ideas and sectarian political movements if they can boast a non-Western origin. Bruckner shows that our "cultural sensitivity" is misplaced for three reasons. First, and most obviously, because it creates divisive inequalities; second, it imprisons citizens within cultural ghettos; and third, because ideologies such as fundamentalist Islam have, in fact, borrowed a great deal from the West. "The most extreme Islamists," writes Bruckner, are engaged in a "pathology of

imitation and not otherness."

Bruckner has no time for the timid insularity of a Europe that, while making a show of baring its bleeding heart, seeks to turn its back not only on the world beyond its borders but also the problems incubating within them.

One of those scandals is the manner in which an unholy alliance between the needs of commerce and the dictates of guilt-ridden politics have created two equally dysfunctional models of social integration. "The free-market model makes settlement in a country equivalent to a labor contract that can be renewed or cancelled in accord with the law of supply and demand. The third world or Christian model of hospitality requires us to welcome anyone who comes to our country, without demanding anything of him or her, in an act of pure oblation." The newcomer is held in a state of social dislocation, in the first instance the better to respond to transitory economic requirements, in the second as a symbolic reminder of our sins.

Europe needs to rethink its attitude towards its past if it is to build a more inclusive and dynamic future. As this exceptional book so emphatically shows, guilt is a luxury we can no longer afford.

## Video game reviews