

followed, as did representatives of other insurgent groups from Mizoram, Manipur and Assam. Lintner believes that the pattern for Chinese encroachment into southeast Asia and northeast India has already been set.

I first met Lintner in Bangkok in the 1980s. A deadpan Swede with thick glasses and an encyclopaedic grasp of insurgent activity within the Golden Triangle, he was addressing a lunchtime meeting at the Foreign Correspondents' Club. The correspondents were more interested in the lunch than in the twenty-odd cartels, each with a barely distinguishable acronym, that he reeled off. We met again soon after in his adopted home town of Chiang Mai. Mrs Lintner proved to be a camera-carrying local. Called Hseng Nounng, she looked about fifteen and was fetchingly dressed in fatigues and a Mao cap. Had she been in a fancy dress parade? I asked. No, she had been taking a parade, I was told. She was, it transpired, a colonel in the Shan State Army.

Thanks to their excellent contacts, the indomitable Lintners have been extending their range of inquiry ever since. From the Golden Triangle their treks extended to Nagaland, where their daughter was born, and from there to northern Burma and Yunnan. Over four decades, they have made the region their own and, government press officers apart, few would challenge their authority. Bertil's carefully researched reports, along with Hseng Nounng's photos, were one of the delights of the late, lamented *Far East Economic Review*. There have been books, too, some replete with understated adventures which are reprised in *Great Game East*. But as usual, the dramas are eclipsed by Lintner's insatiable appetite for obscure insurgencies and unremarked collaborations.

After a somewhat tangential chapter on the CIA's activities in Tibet in the 1950s, the reader of *Great Game East* is dropped in at the deep end with an account of the Naga conflict and the no less bloody squabbles of the Naga leadership. Like other groups, Nagas are distributed over a much larger area than that in which they have traditionally comprised a majority. Greater Nagalim would include a bit of Burma and considerable chunks of adjacent states that are now part of India. As a result, irredentist Nagas encounter as much hostility from their neighbours, many of whom are engaged in identical struggles for autonomy, as they

do from the Indian security forces. None of these other liberation fronts, however, can be said to have taken their struggle to the constitutional extremes favoured by the Nagas. The Naga Federal Government, Lintner informs us, has usually operated from a place called Oking. But Oking 'was never a permanent location, as the kilonsers had to be on the move most of the time'. ('Kilonsers' are government ministers, the prime minister being the Ato Kilonser, whose *azha* is not unlike a *fatwa*: 'it could mean life or death'.)

For such insights one cannot but be grateful. *Great Game East* may be a chal-

lenging read for those unfamiliar with the region. Its central thesis – that China and India are embarked on a new 'tournament of shadows' – is not proven and would anyway require a much wider study than this. Maritime rivalry in the Indian Ocean extends way beyond the Andaman and Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal; Beijing's mooted 'economic corridor' through Burma is matched by others through Pakistan and Central Asia. But make no mistake: however circumscribed, this book is as authoritative as it is intriguing.

To order this book through our new partner bookshop, Heywood Hill, see page 32

JONATHAN MIRSKY

Wild West

China's Forgotten People: Xinjiang, Terror and the Chinese State

By Nick Holdstock

(1 B Tauris 273pp £14.99)

In the April issue of *Literary Review* Nick Holdstock ended his perceptive review of Michael Meyer's *In Manchuria* by asking where the 'great books about country life' in other parts of China were. Now, here is one such book – by Holdstock himself – on life in Xinjiang, a Chinese region at least as large as Western Europe. Extraordinarily insightful and informative as it is, I have one problem with it: the title. Neither the population of Xinjiang nor its people, the Uyghurs, are forgotten by China. Indeed, Beijing pays them much, often violent, attention.

Holdstock is a journalist and English teacher who has travelled and lived in Xinjiang on and off since 2001. His new book will make anyone who writes about the region think more deeply – even though there are plenty of others on this area, which he cites gratefully. In some, but not all, ways, what has happened in Xinjiang since the Chinese occupation of the territory from the 18th century onwards is much like what has happened in Tibet, an important similarity unmentioned by Holdstock. Both are vast areas, long inhabited by peoples with their own histories and cultures who in no way resemble the ethnic Chinese, the Hans, who claim that Xinjiang, like Tibet, has always been China's.

That is a big lie, wholly without credible evidence. But because of this claim, nearly any sign of regional difference, in language, food, music or, of course, religion, can be treated as subversion. The fact that Xinjiang is singled out for special treatment, of a kind that has no parallel in Tibet, can be grasped by looking at the statistics for executions there, which Holdstock cites (using Amnesty International's figures). There were 190 executions in Xinjiang between 1997 and 1999, mostly of Uyghurs convicted after 'only cursory trials'. Per capita, this is 'several times' higher than anywhere else under Beijing's control. Tibetans are not officially murdered in such numbers.

One of Holdstock's singular achievements, and an unexpected one, is to show how international press coverage of the Chinese persecution of the Uyghurs has changed in recent years: 'There has been a gradual convergence of the official Chinese account and that of many Western news outlets.' His point is that, as Western governments have become transfixed by Muslim-connected terrorism, the Western media has started using phrases such as 'Islamic terror' in the context of the Uyghurs. China has bought into this international preoccupation, says Holdstock, encouraged by the fact that