

many Western news outlets 'describe Xinjiang as a "volatile" or "restive" region, and write about the region almost exclusively in terms of violence'.

The facts are different. In terms of uprisings, Holdstock explains, there is little difference between what goes on in Xinjiang and the rest of China, where disturbances often arise because of the widening divide between city and countryside. Throughout China, farmers, enraged by corrupt local officials and their exactions, frequently manifest their frustration in riots. These are regularly reported in the Chinese press, though the participants are not termed 'separatists' or 'terrorists', as they are when they occur in Xinjiang (or Tibet). In 1956, as part of the Maoist Hundred Flowers campaign inside China, Uyghurs were invited to make criticisms of Chinese rule. When this criticism turned out to be too direct, and not the 'gentle breeze and mild rain' expected, 1,500 Uyghurs were accused of being 'local nationalists', and many of them were jailed.

Crucial to understanding the unrest or restiveness in Xinjiang is the fact that while in 1950 there were very few Hans there, by 1995 they made up over half the population of parts of the region. The rural-urban divide had assumed an ethnic dimension. These Hans have taken over more specialised urban industries – for which Uyghur education is an inadequate preparation – and have also moved into agriculture. Holdstock notes that the conventions of Han relationships, known as *guanxi*, which often involve drinking, gambling, bordellos and bribery, make it relatively easy for them to find employers, whereas Uyghurs, whose customs and preferences are different, cannot compete. As Han pressure has increased, it has been answered by the adoption of Islamic practices, such as fasting during Ramadan and growing beards, to which many Uyghurs have previously paid little attention. To the authorities, this represents a new kind of nationalism – or subversion – which has to be crushed. However, as Holdstock observes, 'many young, city-dwelling, Chinese-speaking Uyghurs ... are forging a different kind of Uyghur identity' through pop music and international fashions.

This is not to say that there is no Uyghur violence in Xinjiang or in the rest of China, where there have been bombings and murders of a sort we experience in the West.

These used to be aimed at official targets, says Holdstock, but now ordinary Hans are attacked too, often by mobs of Uyghurs after some trigger episode. 'It's difficult to use single, extremist acts as indicators of ethnic relations in general,' writes Holdstock, who examines some of these outrages in detail, 'at least not without making all kinds of assumptions about the motivations and grievances of both the perpetrators and the wider Uyghur community.' Under President Xi Jinping, he observes, there has been an increase in arrests and convictions of Uyghurs singing the wrong folk song in the wrong place, or fasting in a way that annoys local officials, or insisting on local 'Xinjiang time', which is many hours different from the official Beijing time stipulated all over China.

Underlying all this, Holdstock rightly observes, is the Han notion that their culture is superior to that of the fifty-five official 'minorities', whether Uyghur, Tibetan or any other. 'Xinjiang has frequently been characterised by the Chinese government as a "backward" region in need of (socialist) modernisation ... with the implicit suggestion that the culture of its people is equally retrograde, especially compared to that of the Han.' This led to the big lie that the Chinese occupation of Xinjiang – like that of Tibet – has been a "peaceful liberation" welcomed by all the peoples of the region, who became

"masters of the state". The origin of this, he claims, I think exaggeratedly, lies in the policies of Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China, who in 1924 'described the Han as the "single, pure race" of the Chinese nation, and took a strong line on the need for assimilation, arguing that the "dying out of all names of individual people inhabiting China, such as Manchus, Tibetans, etc" was a necessary step to have a unified nation'. I suppose such views were held long before Sun proclaimed them.

At one point in this excellent book, Holdstock insists that his aim here is 'not to dispute China's claim to the territory'. He shows that 'the history of the region is routinely distorted to meet political ends', and not only by the Chinese government. He notes that 'many Uyghur historians and activists ... regularly promote a version of history that stresses the continuity of Uyghurs in the region', but goes on to show that for centuries the word Uyghur was hardly used. The ancestors of today's Uyghurs were often not even Muslim, and during recent times much of Xinjiang was under Russian and Soviet rule. Nick Holdstock has done something very difficult: he has made a complicated situation clear enough to arouse anger and pity.

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'Moses receiving the Ten Commandments'

Photograph of the thirty-sixth capital of the Piazzetta facade of the Ducal Palace, taken from *Ruskin's Venice: The Stones Revisited* by Sarah Quill (Lund Humphries). The book incorporates Quill's photographs to illuminate Ruskin's classic work on the city. □