



H-Diplo Roundtable Reviews

www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables

Volume IX, No. 9 (2008)

10 May 2008

Parshotam Mehra. *Essays in Frontier History: India, China, and the Disputed Border.* New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, November 2006. 320 p., \$60.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0-19-568375-2.

Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux

Reviewers: A. Tom Grunfeld, Steven I. Levine, Jing-dong Yuan

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/EssaysInFrontierHistory-Roundtable.pdf>

Contents

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.....	2
Review by A. Tom Grunfeld, Empire State College, State University of New York	5
Review by Steven I. Levine, University of Montana	9
Review by Jing-dong Yuan, Monterey Institute of International Studies, an affiliate of Middlebury College.....	12
Response by Parshotam Mehra, Emeritus Professor of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh	17

Copyright © 2008 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

In the *New York Times* of Thursday, April 17th, 2008, the front page features a center of page headline-- “Tibet, Past and Present: Conflict Rages from Beijing to Durham”—with two byline stories by Jim Yardley from Beijing and Shaila Dewan from Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Yardley’s article is not typical of U.S. media coverage of the current anti-Chinese unrest in Tibet in that Yardley does explore with interviews some of the conflicting views on China’s relationship with Tibet as far back as the 13th century. Yardley’s article includes a photo of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama in Beijing with Mao in 1956 before the Dalai Lama’s flight to exile in India in 1959. Yardley also notes that Beijing has launched a major campaign to shape the history of Tibet-Chinese relations with a new museum devoted to Tibet, a patriotic education campaign, over 50 Tibetology research centers to promote the Chinese view on the relationship, and trained tour guides to work in Tibet. The article also mentions Chinese sensitivities about foreign intervention with references to a British invasion of Tibet in 1903-1904 and U.S. Central Intelligence Agency activity in Tibet in the 1950s.¹ A companion article on A12 discusses the prospect of Tibetan protests in India when the Olympic torch arrived from Pakistan, noting that an estimated 100,000 Tibetans resided in India.

So Tibet is back in the news, Tibetans are protesting the growing presence and influence of Han Chinese in their traditional territories, the Dalai Lama is calling for conciliation and conversation with Beijing officials, and the Chinese government as well as Chinese nationals around the globe are very upset as they proudly prepare to host the Summer Olympics in Beijing. By fortuitous circumstances H-Diplo has a roundtable that definitely enhances understanding of the history of the Tibetan relationship with its powerful neighbors, China, India, and the British Raj. From the time of his graduate studies at Johns Hopkins, Parshotam Mehra focused his scholarly attention on frontier studies -- from China’s Asian frontiers with special reference to Mongolia and Sinkiang and then to Tibet (with his dissertation on the British expedition to Lhasa in 1903-1904 to block any Tsarist Russia designs on Tibet). When China occupied Tibet in 1950 and border conflict erupted between China and India in 1962, Mehra settled into his productive career of borderland studies.

Mehra’s essays concentrate on the India-China border relationship and rely very extensively on British and Indian sources. The reviewers note with appreciation a number of significant characteristics in the essays including

- 1.) Mehra’s approach as a historian to contentious national and border issues is favorably noted by the reviewers. Steven Levine, for example, stresses that “Mehra is an historian, not a scribbler in the service of politicians, and he grounds his work in careful analysis of the documentary record, of persons and personalities, and in

¹ For a discussion on the CIA in Tibet, see the *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8:3 (Summer 2006) for a special issue devoted to U.S. policy toward South Asia in the 1950s-1960s with special attention to Tibet.

acute awareness of the prevailing international norms and conditions of different historical periods." (1)

2.) To understand contemporary border problems, Mehra emphasizes the importance of closely exploring the available primary sources, the treaties, maps, diaries, and diplomatic reports in order to understand disputes such as the Sino-Indian border dispute. Tom Grunfeld does note the absence of Chinese sources in Mehra's essays, although recognizing that they were not available for much of Mehra's career. Grunfeld suggests that Mehra's reliance on British archives and secondary sources tends to reinforce his India based perspective and raises unanswered questions in several essays.

3.) Mehra's perspective on Tibet challenges the contemporary media view by putting Tibet into the context of Asian empires, rejecting both Tibetan claims for historic independence and Chinese assertions of historic sovereignty over Tibet. Thus, Mehra views Tibet as a buffer region in "The Elusive Triangle: Tibet in India-China Relations-A Brief Conspectus," (107-121) As Jing-dong Yuan emphasizes in his review, "Tibet's ties with China and India have always been complex and rarely clear-cut ... a relationship [that] was largely personal rather than one between the subordinate and superior." (3)

4.) India's relationship with Tibet is a major preoccupation of Mehra who contrasts China's administrative demands for hegemony with India's cultural, religious, and geographical connections. The importance of Tibet as a buffer between it and China remained central to India in "India's Land Frontiers: The Role of the Buffer," (83-106), and Mehra is very insightful on the nature and role of a buffer. When Mao's China established control over Tibet in 1950, India lost its buffer and, as Mehra notes, the border with China remains unsettled to this day.

5.) Nehru's role in Sino-Indian relations and the disputed border area with China is a major theme of Mehra's essays. Levine notes that Mehra has a mixed view that stresses China's miscalculations in attacking India and, at the same time, Nehru's failure to strengthen India in the face of Beijing's hostility on the border. (2) Grunfeld suggests that Mehra gives insufficient consideration to Indian army maneuvers and the establishment of outposts in the contested border regions as a provocation. (2) At the same time Levine and Grunfeld agree with Yuan's appreciation for Mehra's endorsement of Nehru's concerted effort to bring Communist China into the United Nations and to negotiate a major trade agreement in 1954.

6.) Yuan asks for one more essay from Mehra, a retrospective on "if, how, and to what extent any impact of the passage of time and the availability of primary sources ... has [had] on his understanding and interpretations" on the border issues. As Yuan concludes, Sino-Indian relations have improved since the late 1980s with expanding bilateral relations and the re-emergence of two ancient civilizations that have become major powers in the global economy and international organizations.

Participants:

Parshotam Mehra was formerly Professor, and Chairman of the Department of History and Central Asian Studies at the Panjab University, Chandigarh. He has written extensively on India's land frontiers and relations with Tibet and China. Noteworthy among these are *The North West Frontier Drama 1945-1947: A Re-Assessment* (1998); *An 'Agreed' Frontier: Ladakh and India's Northernmost Borders 1846-1947* (OUP, 1992); *The McMahon Line and After* (1974); and *The Younghusband Expedition (To Lhasa): An Interpretation* (2nd edition, 2004).

A. Tom Grunfeld is SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor at Empire State College/SUNY. He specializes in the history of modern China and Tibet. He received his PhD. from New York University. He is the author of *The Making of Modern Tibet* (1996) in addition to many articles and book chapters pertaining to Tibetan history. Currently he is moving away from the study of Tibet and is engaged in historical research pertaining to the Chinese Communist Party during the 1920s and 1930s.

Steven I. Levine received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in Government and Far Eastern Languages in 1972. He is the author of *Anvil of Victory: The Civil War in Manchuria, 1945-1948*; co-editor of *China's Bitter Victory: The War with Japan, 1937-1945*, and has published about several score book chapters, journal articles, and review-essays. He is co-authoring a book on America's wars in eastern Asia from the Philippines through Vietnam with Michael H. Hunt of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and collaborating with senior Chinese scholar Zi Zhongyun on her English-language autobiography. He is also translating an authoritative Russian-language biography of Mao Zedong and a Chinese-language collection of essays on the Cold War for publication in the U.S. He is Associate Director of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana.

Jing-dong Yuan is the director for the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and an associate professor at the Graduate School of International Policy Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, where he also coordinates the Certificate in Nonproliferation Studies program. Dr. Yuan has held teaching and research positions at Queen's University, York University, the University of Toronto, and the University of British Columbia and is a recipient of the prestigious Killam fellowship. He was a visiting research scholar at the Cooperative Monitoring Center at Sandia National Laboratories before he joined CNS/MIIS in 1999. Dr. Yuan's publications have focused on Asia-Pacific security, global and regional arms control/nonproliferation issues, and China's defense and foreign policy. He is the co-author of *China and India: Cooperation or Conflict?* (Lynne Rienner, 2003).

Review by A. Tom Grunfeld, Empire State College, State University of New York

Pershottam Mehra began his studies as a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University in 1952 working under Owen Lattimore, then the Director of the Walter Hines Page School of International Relations, and to whom the book is dedicated. It must not have been a fortuitous year for Mehra to begin his studies as Lattimore had just been indicted on seven counts of perjury and labeled "a conscious articulate instrument of the Soviet conspiracy" by the nefarious McCarran Committee.

Lattimore, who died in 1989, would have been proud of his student for Mehra went on to become a highly respected scholar in diplomacy and border studies through a host of books and articles in the half century since those student days. I have relied on Professor Mehra's research and astute scholarship ever since I began writing about some of these same subjects myself in the 1970s and as familiar as I am with his work I was delighted to see that this volume contained several pieces I was unaware of and I found them, as always with Mehra's work, illuminating.

Mehra's expertise is the history of the Sino-Indian border and given the recent emergence of the two countries as major economic powers the need to know about their historical relationship, and the relevance of Mehra's scholarship, looms larger everyday.

Mehra writes in a lucid, flowing, masterfully learned language. In addition, he has an admirable command of the nuances of diplomacy being extraordinarily well versed in the intricate details of treaties and diplomatic agreements long since forgotten by most. One cannot help but wonder if there are people in the foreign ministries of India and China who are as well versed in these matters as Mehra is.

The volume under review here is a collection of articles, speeches and public discussions over a period of five decades (1956-2005). Mehra has divided this collection into three sections: "The Background," "India and Her Neighbours," and "India and China: 1962 and After." Even though the groupings are chronological, the individual pieces are not, resulting in, perhaps unavoidably, much repetition and while each contribution holds up well by itself the order they are placed in makes the whole rather uneven. And, because our understanding of history changes over time, especially through access to previously unavailable documents, the historical judgements made in these writings are inconsistent when read, as we must here, out of chronological order. As a result it is hard to comment on the whole, while commenting on each article would require an essay of far greater length than is possible here.

A. Tom Grunfeld is SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor at Empire State College/SUNY. He specializes in the history of modern China and Tibet. He received his PhD. from New York University. He is the author of *The Making of Modern Tibet* (1996) in addition to many articles and book chapters pertaining to Tibetan history. Currently he is moving away from the study of Tibet and is engaged in historical research pertaining to the Chinese Communist Party during the 1920s and 1930s.

One interesting comment that Professor Mehra made in 1968 demonstrates how our historical judgments evolve. At the time he could quite safely claim that,

In the light of the recent breathtaking advances in the domain of science and the art of warfare - Polaris submarines and thermonuclear rocketry, not to mention the cosmonauts and the impending man on the moon - one wonders if the age-old division between the natural and artificial frontiers has any validity today. (p. 87)

Forty years on events have forced us to be more inclined to see that borders are as much, if not more, about nationalism than diplomacy and lines on a map.

The contributions are both very broad and very specific. The broad overviews will be of interest to those less familiar with this history. For historians versed in these matters it is the detailed articles which will be the most interesting. His discussions of the Simla Conference (for which he became broadly known after he published *The McMahon Line and After: A Study of the Triangular Contest on India's North-Eastern Frontier between Britain, China, and Tibet, 1904-47* (MacMillan, 1974), for example, and his discussion of the 1962 Sino-Indian War are important contributions to the field and no current historian can write about these events without consulting Mehra.

Much of Professor Mehra's writing is strongly from an India perspective and there are scholars who take exception to some of his views. For example, his claim that the Chinese military excursion across the northern Indian frontier in 1962 "...had been unilateral... in the sense that they had just thrust themselves in," [p. 181]) does not take into account Indian Army maneuvers in the same border regions, which the Chinese perceived of as provocative, prior to the invasion.

Also notable are Professor Mehra's views on Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's policies towards China. This has long been a major topic of debate in India and among foreign scholars of this period. Mehra tends to be favorable and sympathetic towards Nehru and the decisions he made. I share his views on this but I suspect we are in the minority.

What's missing, and crying out for inclusion, from all these works, are Chinese sources. To be fair, for much of Professor Mehra's career they have been unavailable and when Mehra talks about the Chinese positions on various issues - which I believe is not often enough - he is relegated to secondary or even tertiary sources, especially the British archives. While these archival resources are the very heart of Mehra's research and vital for any understanding of Anglo-Indian actions, they are less reliable for their speculation on Chinese actions and sensibilities. For example, his essay, "Lu Hsing-chi, The Simla Conference, and After," lays out a fascinating and detailed account of the secret dealings of a Chinese official, then resident of India, in the political machinations leading to and during the Simla Conference of 1913-1914. Mehra's main sources are the communications between Lu and Chinese authorities in Beijing; telegrams which were intercepted and translated by the British/Indian authorities. However, they mysteriously end just as the conference was coming to an end. Many questions have to be asked about the veracity of these sources: are they the entire telegraphic communication or only selected portions?

How good is the translation? Why do they end when they do and did anything important transpire after that date? Were there other means of communication? etc. While there were no Chinese documents about Lu available in 1976 when Mehra was conducting his research he does not raise any possible issues about them; rather, he accepts the veracity of these documents at face value.

Another example would be the article, "Nehru and the Border Dispute with China. A Reassessment," which was written in 2005 and relies on secondary sources pertaining to China at a time when there were considerable materials published, in China, in Chinese and English about these events.

Also missing from these essays is an assessment of the role the United States, and especially, the Central Intelligence Agency, was playing from the mid 1950s onward. China certainly believed that there was CIA-Indian collusion and we now know that to some extent there indeed was.

One last important omission is a complete bibliography of Professor Mehra's work.

I also found some very odd editing decisions. The chapter, "India's Political Institutions At Work During the 1962 Conflict," (pp. 180-207) ends with a section labeled "Discussion;" a text of a discussion between Mehra and several others who are not identified except for their last names. There is no segue to this discussion, nor an explanation. Moreover, the discussion makes mention of an article published in 1968 when the preceding article was published in 1963. I assume this "Discussion" should have been a separate chapter, but it's just a guess.

I was also puzzled by the chapter titled "Summary." Mehra opens this essay by saying that "three popular, if highly partisan views of the border dispute aired by Karunakar Gupta, Subramaniam Swamy and Neville Maxwell need scrutiny." (p. 225) But no scrutiny follows. Instead we get a summary of Mehra's views. Was the first sentence meant for another chapter?

Finally, there is a "Bibliographic Survey," brief descriptions of books by prominent authors in the field. It begins with a brief summary and description of the major themes and arguments made by various scholars except when he gets to Neville Maxwell's *India's China War* (Jonathan Cape, 1970). Instead of an even-handed description Mehra launches a severe critique. This critique was promised in the earlier chapter along with similar analysis of Gupta and Swamy although the latter two are never mentioned again. Should this portion of the Bibliographic Survey been in the earlier chapter?

In any event, Maxwell is the most vocal proponent of the historical interpretation that India was largely to blame for the 1962 Sino-India war. Mehra takes considerable exception with that view and makes a forceful argument. Everyone would have been better served if this, along with the other promised critiques, were in a separate chapter.

Finally, the book has too many typos which mar the publication.

Parshotam Mehra has been an important voice in the writing of the history of the Sino/Tibetan-Indian border region. His research and his historical judgments have contributed mightily to the field and this volume, whatever its flaws, reminds us of how long he has been a voice of authority on these matters.

Review by Steven I. Levine, University of Montana

In 1962, Oxford University Press published *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers 1928-1958* by Owen Lattimore, the pioneering scholar of Central Asian history and politics. Professor Parshotam Mehra, retired from the History and Central Asian Departments of Panjab University in Chandigarh, studied under Lattimore at Johns Hopkins University until the American anticommunist hysteria of the 1950s claimed Lattimore as one of its victims. It is reasonable to suppose that Professor Mehra envisioned the book under review, dedicated to the memory of Owen Lattimore, as a kind of coda to his own lengthy scholarly career devoted to the study of India's frontiers.

The book, consisting of eleven essays arranged in three sections: (1) The Background, (2) India and Her Neighbors, and (3) India and China: 1962 and After, covers a span of fifty years, from 1956 to 2005, but the topical rather than chronological arrangement of the essays makes it difficult to get a sense of the development of Professor Mehra's thinking on the issues he addresses. Let us, therefore, deal with several of his main themes instead.

First, however, it should be noted that the tone of these studies is judicious and reasonable. Although he is not averse to delivering pointed judgments, he is neither confrontational nor polemical even when exploring issues that aroused, and indeed continue to arouse, considerable passion in India and neighboring countries, in particular China. Mehra is an historian, not a scribbler in the service of politicians, and he grounds his work in careful analysis of the documentary record, of persons and personalities, and in acute awareness of the prevailing international norms and conditions of different historical periods. At the same time, his scholarship is rooted in a classical geostrategic approach to frontier issues reflecting, *inter alia*, the politics of the Great Game between the British and Russian empires in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The first of Mehra's great themes is the importance of historical understanding if one is to grasp correctly contemporary frontier problems. Thus, in writing about the much-disputed India-China border, he examines a variety of English-language documentary materials including treaties, maps, diaries, and diplomatic reports, primarily from the British Foreign Office, and concludes with reference to the McMahon line that the Indians claimed and the Chinese rejected as their eastern border that, "the evidence at hand... makes out the Indian

Steven I. Levine received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in Government and Far Eastern Languages in 1972. He is the author of *Anvil of Victory: The Civil War in Manchuria, 1945-1948*; co-editor of *China's Bitter Victory: The War with Japan, 1937-1945*, and has published about several score book chapters, journal articles, and review-essays. He is co-authoring a book on America's wars in eastern Asia from the Philippines through Vietnam with Michael H. Hunt of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and collaborating with senior Chinese scholar Zi Zhongyun on her English-language autobiography. He is also translating an authoritative Russian-language biography of Mao Zedong and a Chinese-language collection of essays on the Cold War for publication in the U.S. He is Associate Director of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana.

presentation to be far superior to its Chinese counterpart... the Chinese claim has no historical validity...they were never physically present on this frontier." (p. 31) (Incidentally, the absence of maps in a book of this sort is unfortunate, to say the least.) Yet, instead of engaging in jingoist rhetoric, in this 1982 essay Mehra calls for mutual efforts to break the existing deadlock and "reach a mutually satisfactory settlement with Deng's China." (p. 35) Here and elsewhere, Mehra sees history as a way to understand how present geopolitical conflicts arose rather than as an arsenal from which to muster diplomatic arguments. Whatever the facts of history may be, they cannot prescribe particular solutions to frontier conflicts that are rooted in contemporary geostrategic and other concerns and that must be settled through negotiations between reasonable parties.

Mehra traces Sino-Indian frontier problems back to the imperial past, in particular to the Qing dynasty and the British Raj. The latter was much more concerned with the perceived threat of Russian encroachment southward from the tsar's recently acquired possessions in Central Asia than from the Qing dynasty whose grip on China was weakening by the mid-19th century after its own earlier imperial aggrandizement in Tibet and the Northwest frontier territories. Mehra argues that the logic of creating inner and outer buffers against Tsarist Russia led British officials to tolerate, even encourage China to expand into Turkistan which became the Chinese province of Xinjiang in 1882, and into Ladakh as well. The British "gifted away to the Raj's Chinese neighbors" territory to which they had legitimate, historically-grounded claims because of their desire to use China as a buffer against Russia. (p. 54) British India's inner buffers were Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal, territories whose foreign and defense policies independent India also insisted on controlling. Mehra's 1968 essay on "India's Land Frontiers: The Role of the Buffer" is an essay that sustains one's interest even today.

With respect to Tibet, Mehra argues persuasively that its historical status, which changed over time, can be understood only in the context of Asian empires rather than modern international system categories. He is equally skeptical of both Tibetan independence claims and Chinese assertions that Tibet was always an integral part of a sovereign China. His assessment of the Dalai Lama as "an enlightened and charismatic leader of his people with no overt hostility toward China," a judgment rendered in 1994, is even more apropos today when Beijing's leaders are reviling the exiled Tibetan leader in the crudest gutter language imaginable.

The Sino-Indian border war of 1962, of course, was a watershed event that destroyed Nehru, catalyzed India into becoming a major military power, and added to the chorus of those who labeled China an aggressor state. Looking back after forty years, Mehra says that the Chinese miscalculated by attacking India, and succeeded only in gaining a much more powerful adversary than the one they briefly humiliated in their month-long attack in October-November 1962. He is mildly critical of Nehru for not having taken proper measures to strengthen India even after he became aware of Beijing's hostile intentions toward India, and not anticipating a full-scale Chinese attack in response to India's forward policy along the disputed frontiers. Yet, Mehra admires Nehru as a man who strived mightily for amity and good neighborly relations with China. This, ultimately, is the position that Mehra himself adopts as a stance more than a policy prescription for

addressing unresolved frontier and other problems in the relationship between the two “natural competitors” of India and China.

In sum, reading these essays is a leisurely journey through late imperial and modern frontier history escorted by a knowledgeable, beneficent, and Old School guide with no axes to grind and no politicized version of history that he insists on impressing upon his readers.

Review by Jing-dong Yuan, Monterey Institute of International Studies, an affiliate of Middlebury College

The essays collected in this unique volume by Professor Mehra were written over a span of half a century and provide interesting and insightful descriptions and analyses of the history and the complexities characterizing the interactions and relationships between India, Tibet and China over the past hundred years. Several themes run throughout the book as the author contemplates pragmatic approaches to some of the most intractable problems as well as seeks to reflect and capture the past that remains so much part of the present. As a political scientist I find the book a fascinating read, especially many of the detailed descriptions and discussions of the historical events that continue to cast a shadow over the present and force policy makers to come to grips with what they inherit from the past.

Jing-dong Yuan is the director for the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and an associate professor at the Graduate School of International Policy Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, where he also coordinates the Certificate in Nonproliferation Studies program. Dr. Yuan has held teaching and research positions at Queen's University, York University, the University of Toronto, and the University of British Columbia and is a recipient of the prestigious Killam fellowship. He was a visiting research scholar at the Cooperative Monitoring Center at Sandia National Laboratories before he joined CNS/MIIS in 1999. Dr. Yuan's publications have focused on Asia-Pacific security, global and regional arms control/nonproliferation issues, and China's defense and foreign policy. He is the co-author of *China and India: Cooperation or Conflict?* (Lynne Rienner, 2003).

The major theme of the book is the territorial dispute between China and India. Historians have long debated the origins of such dispute and in particular the conspicuous absence of well defined and demarcated boundaries between the two Asian nations, while for most other countries, geographical features such as mountain ranges, maritime median lines, and what not, serve as boundary demarcations. Some types of administrative controls typically would serve as the point of departure for negotiation, agreement, delimitation, and demarcation of international boundaries. Not in the case of the Sino-Indian boundary where for centuries people from both sides, including Indian pilgrims, Tibetan nomads, and British surveyors roamed the vastness and barrenness of the Himalayan landmass.

The British attempt to define the boundary has its origins in the ill-fated 1914 Simla conference where the three plenipotentiaries represented British India, Tibet, and the newly established but feeble Republican China. The Simla meeting itself is often associated with the (in)famous McMahon Line, the line that remains controversial even to this date. Ironically, the ill-defined boundary between British India and Tibet/China, and the attempts at Simla to come to grips with it generated more confusion and controversies. Apparently there were no solid bases from both sides as far as evidence regarding claims to territories is concerned. Indeed, as the author would admit, "one may accept without qualification that there are gaps in New Delhi's case on the border, but it should also be conceded that the Chinese case is much more tenuous." (30-31)

For understandable reasons, the central government in Beijing, however feeble and weak it was, refused to accept the conclusion of the Simla conference. The Chinese have always contested the legitimacy of the McMahon Line and continued to assert their claims to the eastern section of the Sino-Indian border, the North East Frontier Area (NEFA), where Arunachal Pradesh is now located, with a disputed territory of over 90,000 square kilometers. Not surprisingly, Beijing often accuses India—and this the author readily acknowledges—of its inheritance of “the legacy of the British Empire whose policy of continuous and unabashed aggression on China’s frontiers was no secret” (33) But Mehra is equally concerned with the “aggrandizement and resultant expansion of China’s empire to its farthest known territorial limits” (33) and in particular to the western sector of Aksai Chin in the Ladakh region. The disputed western sector involves more than 38,000 square kilometers.

The precise boundary between British India and Tibet/China was never clearly defined nor was any attempt at its resolution successful. India gained independence in 1947 and two years later, the People’s Republic of China was established. What New Delhi thought was the settled border was contested by Beijing, which called for negotiations to resolve the issue. This leads to another major theme of the book: Nehru’s role in the border dispute and Sino-Indian relations in general. Here the author is sympathetic in as much as he laments Nehru’s approaches to handling the boundary issue. Clearly Nehru was more interested in developing a cooperative relationship with China, a country that was just as renowned for its civilianization like India and one that shared many commonalities given their similar experiences—although to different degrees and perhaps of different nature—with the West. For Nehru, it was important to bring China into the community of nations if for no other reasons than the fact this was one with a huge population and was destined to have great influence at least in Asia. New Delhi became the second non-communist country to recognize the PRC and was persistent in its position regarding the latter’s seating in the United Nations and its Security Council. As the author notes, “the Indian Prime Minister worked tirelessly for amity—not enmity—towards India’s great neighbour” (169; emphasis in original).

Not that Nehru was completely unaware of the boundary issue; only that he considered it less of an issue, more so as he expected Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou to be grateful to and appreciative of what India was trying to do. Beijing to some extent reciprocated, to a certain degree, by not immediately calling New Delhi’s attention to the disputed territories. At least for the time being, the glow and euphoria of “Hindi-Chini bhai bhai” of the early 1950s concealed deep-rooted differences over the scope of the territorial dispute and the mechanisms for its resolution. In 1954 a major trade agreement was signed between the two countries and with it was born the now famous “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” also known as the Panchsheel.

While the 1954 agreement acknowledged and indeed granted India special treatment in the areas of India-Tibet trade, access to Tibet by Indian pilgrims, and the establishment of Indian trade agencies in Tibet, New Delhi also had to give up some of the previously held privileges. However, the short-lived honeymoon was soon over and overshadowed by

growing differences on the boundary issue. The situation deteriorated rapidly after 1956 and the 1959 uprising in Tibet and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India only made matters worse. The efforts to resolve the dispute, including the reported offer by Zhou to have a comprehensive settlement by swapping Aksai Chin for the North East Frontier Area, were to no avail (172).

Having failed to reach any compromises with the Chinese on the disputed territories and obviously worried about what was seen as steady encroachment on Indian sovereignty with the construction of the Karakoram Highway and growing Chinese military presence close to the McMahon Line, New Delhi adopted the so-called “forward policy” to establish outposts in the disputed territories, some of which were even behind the Chinese military patrol stations. The skirmishes and sporadic flashes eventually led to a war in 1962, dealing India a major humiliating defeat. The author offered interesting observations of how Nehru was misled by his military advisors, in particular his defense minister Menon, who in turn misjudged and underestimated both the strength and the size of the Chinese border forces. But the Prime Minister himself had much to blame as well. His romanticized view of the need and the harmony of Asia’s two oldest civilizations and newly minted independent states working together toward peace blinded him to the realities of realpolitik and intense nature of competition between the two, territorial disputes being a key component.

A third theme of the book discusses the nature and status of Tibet’s place in between China and India. The author suggests that Tibet’s ties with China and India have always been complex and rarely clear-cut. For instance, the author observes that while Tibet’s links with China go back more than a thousand years, the relationship was largely personal rather than one between the subordinate and the superior (108). The influences and contacts from the north, the Han, the Mongols, or the Manchus, came and went, sometimes through marriages while other times in the form of forced entry or outright invasions. The intensity of such ties ebbed and flowed with the rise and fall of Chinese dynasties. The author acknowledges that both Tibet and China can offer evidence to support their cases, with Lhasa claiming “a continuous central government from the seventh century onwards” and China asserting that Tibet had always been an integral part of the mainland (113). He also cites examples of Tibet asserting and displaying independence by concluding international treaties with other countries such as Nepal, Outer Mongolia, and Great Britain (114).

Mehra also admits that “Tibet’s relationship with China defies any precise, clear-cut definition. It should be plain that the country never enjoyed ‘independence’ as the term is commonly understood.” (118) Indeed, “over the past few centuries,” continues the author, “every Chinese regime—be it Manchu, Republican or Nationalist—has staked a claim to, and sometimes actually exercised governmental and administrative authority at Lhasa” (113-114) But it was only the Communist Chinese government that was able to establish solid control over Tibet after the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) overwhelmed the Tibetan resistance and entered Lhasa in 1950. The “17-Point Agreement” was signed in 1951, granting Tibet autonomy and no change in the political system but establishing Beijing’s sovereignty over its defense and foreign affairs.

While the author alludes to the imposed administrative relationship between two unequal players with Tibet as the subordinate one being fitted into the larger family of the People's Republic of China, he also highlights the cultural, religious, not to mention the geographic ties between India and Tibet, emphasizing the special nature of such ties and India's influences over the latter. "To the average Tibetan," claims the author, "India is the holy land to which he/she aspires to go one day on pilgrimage." Indeed, so the author concludes, "in making what may be called their fabric of civilization, the Tibetans borrowed their impulses—in generous fashion—from India." (109)

These special ties aside, what India is really interested in and worried about losing, has always been Tibet's being a buffer between it and China. Here the author defines what buffers are and how they function, citing Lord Curzon: "We do want to occupy it, but we also cannot afford to see it occupied by our foes." (88-89) If British India's interest in Tibet's role as a buffer was to fend off Russia's encroachment as much as China's, then India after independence continues to see Tibet in the same light. With Beijing effectively establishing control over Tibet after 1950, that buffer seemed to have lost and India suddenly found itself facing a China right on the border, which itself remains unsettled.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao once reportedly said that in the history of Sino-Indian relations, 99 percent of the time it has been cordial and friendly. What Prof. Mehra has focused on is that one percent that remains in the way of full and complete normalization between Asia's two rising powers. The history of the late 19th century and the early 20th is complex, with multiple players and divergent perspectives, interests, priorities, and leverage of power. The envisioned solutions and adopted approaches also vary, and political barriers are high enough that no satisfactory resolution has been found even though there have been no shortage of efforts toward that end.

However, coming to terms with history is not easy, especially since there is more than one version of what transpired and even more numerous interpretations of the presumably same period and episode of history. This volume represents yet another step, one more addition to our accumulated but not necessarily identical understanding of a particular period of the past. I would only wish that the author had included an essay that reflects on if, how, and to what extent the passage of time and the availability of primary sources and new information has had any impact on his understanding and interpretation of the events recorded in over the past five decades, and if we are any closer to beginning the process leading to a final resolution of the disputed border.

But there is hope. By all accounts, Sino-Indian relations have improved significantly since the late 1980s when the late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made a historical visit to China. Today, leaders in Beijing and New Delhi characterize bilateral ties as a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity. Confidence building measures are now in place to maintain peace and tranquility in the border regions. Trade and investments are growing at a fast pace. The two countries also cooperate on a range of international issues from the global trade regime to environmental standards. Indeed, the world is fascinated with and stands awed by the phenomenal rise of China and India and the romanticized destiny of

these two Asian giants that is pertinently captured in the term Chindia—the harmonious re-emergence of two ancient civilizations. However, the path to such harmony and amity will be rugged, as we are reminded by the stories contained in this volume.

Response by Parshotam Mehra, Emeritus Professor of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh

While responding to the observations made by the distinguished participants of the Roundtable, Professors Grunfeld, Levine and Yuan, let me at the outset place on record my deep debt of gratitude for the helpful and positive way they have gone about their task. Above all, my sincere thanks to Professor Thomas Maddux, the Editor, who no doubt with considerable investment in time and energy assembled this wonderful group, an undertaking in which his own formidable standing in the academia must have been a great help. One and all, it is a pleasure to reflect, have been overly generous in their comments and I am deeply indebted for the pains they must have taken to wade through a text parts of which were not exactly written yesterday and yet make meaningful comments on the themes it poses.

Parshotam Mehra was formerly Professor, and Chairman of the Department of History and Central Asian Studies at the Panjab University, Chandigarh. He has written extensively on India's land frontiers and relations with Tibet and China. Noteworthy among these are *The North West Frontier Drama 1945-1947: A Re-Assessment* (1998); *An 'Agreed' Frontier: Ladakh and India's Northernmost Borders 1846-1947* (OUP, 1992); *The McMahon Line and After* (1974); and *The Younghusband Expedition (To Lhasa): An Interpretation* (2nd edition, 2004).

To start with Professor Grunfeld on 'Lu Hsing-chi, The Simla Conference, and After'. (pp.58-80) It would help if a word on Lu puts matters in sharper focus. A Cantonese cobbler, he had settled down in Calcutta in the first decade of the 20th century and began spying on the Dalai Lama when early in 1910 the Tibetan ruler sought refuge in India (Darjeeling). In 1913, President Yuan gave him the rank of Acting High Commissioner in Tibet- there had been no Chinese Amban in Lhasa since 1912. And as pointed out in the footnotes, after Simla, right down to the 1930s, Lu continued to be actively involved in India's Tibet policy with whatever the regime in China. The 'intercepted telegrams' make for fascinating reading provided one does not ask too many questions which Professor Grunfeld does! They appear- and disappear- without any rational explanation. Who translated them- and how faithfully? There are no clues to these and a myriad other questions one may legitimately pose and to which a ransacking of the British archives has few if any answers. If Whitehall was keeping tabs on Lu, the latter one may be sure was not inactive either. India Office records have stray references to McMahon and Shatra being shadowed and one may be sure that Chinese archives have some juicy information on them both. Espionage is a game in which seasoned players rarely leave their tracks uncovered. Or, do they?

The piece on 'India's Political Institutions at Work During the 1962 Conflict' (pp. 180-207) has led to some avoidable misunderstandings. As noticed it was part of a seminar paper at the University of Brussels in 1968, not 1963, a very unfortunate misprint (there must be as Professor Grunfeld suggests, others too). Sadly there was a lapse in identifying the principal participants in the discussion that followed the presentation and is indeed an integral part thereof - Professor Elegiers, who presided over the seminar, was chairman of

the department of political science at the university; Palat, a well-known Czech scholar and Professor W F van Eekelen, a distinguished Dutch historian who has written perceptively on the border dispute. I must confess I have lost track of the initials of the first two and failed to mention those of the third.

There has been, I am afraid, some misunderstanding about the 'Summary' (pp. 225-44). The objective, as the Introduction makes clear, is to furnish the 'uninitiated reader' a brief conspectus of what the individual article/essay has to offer and 'help him make up his mind' to savour the whole. It follows that the 'Summary' covers all the articles in the collection. Nor would it, for obvious reasons, go into a detailed examination; this Professor Grunfeld would notice has been taken care of at its proper place- the article itself which in his particular case covers pp. 19-32.

The 'Bibliographic Survey' and Mr. Neville Maxwell. The 'Survey', as the reader will note, falls into two parts: I (pp. 245- 275) offers the viewpoints of 'a rich mix of experts' from a variety of fields including the army top brass and high level officials who handled the negotiations and the dispute with its varied ramifications; II (pp. 275-303) spells out a 'critical assessment' of some select works that attracted a great deal of attention at the time they appeared and in not a few cases were 'pivotal' to the formulation of public opinion both at home and abroad. Professor Grunfeld would agree that NM's *India's China War* falls easily into that category. Nor is he alone: there are others too including B M Kaul's *The Untold Story* (1967), John Lall's *Aksai Chin* (1989) and Steven Hoffman's *India and the China Crisis* (1990). What has been done in each case is to reproduce a book review which appeared in learned journals at the time. Nor has Maxwell (277-84) alone been exposed to a critical gaze. Lall takes a little more space (288-7) and not a few raps as does Hoffman (297-303). Maxwell does- as 'the most vocal proponent' of the view that India was largely to blame for the 1962 war, to borrow Professor Grunfeld's words- attract notice but I am not conscious of any special animus against him for holding this view. His is an important book and deserves careful scrutiny and the review essays to provide that; no more no less.

And finally Professor Grunfeld's assertion that I have not come to terms with 'considerable materials' recently published in China, in 'Chinese and English about these events'. To be honest, I am not aware of these materials and would appreciate if Professor Grunfeld could put me wise about them. The interesting thing to me has been that Chinese scholarship does not highlight these sources, much less use them in its writings *viz.* Xuecheng Liu's *The Sino-Indian Border dispute and Sino-Indian Relations* (pp. 267-269). As has been noticed, he falls back for most part on Alastair Lamb, Karunakar Gupta and Neville Maxwell- not on Chinese research or scholarship.

One hates to underplay the importance of the U.S., especially the CIA's role and collusion with New Delhi to hot up things for Beijing. Sadly, none of the articles in the collection under review has any bearing on these themes. To be candid, I am working on another collection tentatively entitled: 'Essays in Frontier History: Accent on Tibet' which should take care of these and other related concerns. And only hope it goes into the pipeline before long.

A word on the absence of maps to which Professor Levine has drawn my pointed attention. No one is more conscious than the author and the publishers about this grave lacunae. To take the reader into confidence we both worked long and hard on at least half a dozen maps which would be relevant to the text. These included *inter alia* a couple rigorously modified from Mr. Maxwell's book for which he was gracious enough to accord permission. To our great regret things did not work out the right way; an archaic law which requires official clearance at a very high level came in the way. We fought long and hard to make the bureaucrats see reason. Not unlike their peers in other lands though ours too are deliberately obtuse, not exactly efficient and devoid of much imagination. In the event, all my investment in time and money- no mean one for a poor academic on a shoe-string budget- went down the drain. It would be revealing no secrets that the author and the publishers have come to a solemn if unwritten compact that if the book goes into a reprint- of which I am very dubious, the publishers quite sanguine- we will again mount a big effort to put the maps in. And if human endeavor draws a blank, solicit divine intercession!

Professor Jing-dong Yuan's review makes for a fascinating sum-up of all that there is to the 'Essays' and I am particularly grateful for his flattering references- by no means all that well-deserved. I'd also welcome his poser on what impact 'the passage of time and the availability of primary sources' have had on my understanding and interpretation of events recorded in the half century that the 'Essays' survey. The best about history is that these questions come up every day one way or another and the historian has to accept the challenge of all that a deeper understanding and greater depth pose. It is by no means an easy task and yet hard to avoid.

Copyright © 2008 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.
