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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.

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

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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.

H-Diplo Roundtables

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.

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