Parshotam 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.

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.