

India-China Relations in the post cold War Era

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India – China Relations from 1949 to end of the cold war

In the early 1950's, the idea of Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai represented the hyperbolic and conspicuous reality of their relationship in the international arena. The cooperative trend between China and India seemed to have a torch bearing impact on the newly emerging countries of 1950's and was also pregnant with wider implications in the arena of international politics but due to many reasons, the relationship between these two potential powers became confliction in early 1960's.¹ The seriousness of the border dispute did not became apparent until early 1959 when on the heels of the capture of Tibet, the Chinese government came out with direct and extensive claims over some 50,000 Square miles of Indian territory. During five years between 1954-59 incidents of increasing seriousness occurred on the India China border. Since the India government wishfully believed that through negotiations it could come to a peaceful settlement with China. In July 1950, a map was published in an official magazine of China which included some of Indian territory within the Chinese territory. The government of India drew the attention of the Chinese authority to this, China said, however, that they had not yet undertaken a survey of their boundary, nor consulted with the countries concerned and they could not make changes in the boundary as their own. Clearly this remark implied that they regard the boundary between India and China as an open issue which should be the subject of discussion. In July 1955, Chinese troops conducted an unauthorized incursion. In to Barahoti, and in

September they even proceeded ten miles South of Nifi lass of Danzon in U.P. in the April 1956, an armed Chinese party intruded into LinagJadang area and in September twice crossed the Shipki pass. The Indian government lodged protest against each of these 1955-56 encroachment in to the central sector of the India-China border. During 1957, Chinese incursion continued and a road running for about hundred miles across India's Aksai-Chin area was completed. In July 1958, the Khunak-Fort in Ladakh was forcefully occupied by Chinese soldiers, in September they arrested an Indian party on routine patrol duty in the northern part of Aksai-Chin. The Indians was detained and ill treated for nearly five weeks, subsequently there were incursion by the Chinese into Lohit frontier Division of NEFA and Lapthal and Sangch Malla in U.P.²

The situation became more harmful, when with the simultaneous launching by China of a persecution drive against the Dalai Lama forcing him to escape with his entourage to India in the Summer of 1959, came the first armed clashes by the Chinese border guards with Indian frontier patrols.³ The Chinese suppression of the Tibetan revolt was portrayed by India as violation of Tibetan autonomy, and thus, a violation of the 1954 Sino Indian Agreement of Tibet itself. Beijing was dismayed by India's reactions to the Tibetan situation, the granting of political asylum to the Dalai Lama and 35 others in his entourage, as well as to create a Lassa type town in Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh near the Tibet border where a Tibet "Exile" government was put in place the help to the Tibetan rebels in Kalimpong, but most of all, India's guarded but vocal concern about

Tibetan Independence. India had become home to 100,000 Tibetan refugees as well. China, in a pre-emptive action to protest its hold on Tibet, began in August 1959 to push ahead in Aksai Chin area. The conflict in Longju in and Kongka Pass causing casualties signaled China's new frontier policy. In response to China's "frontier Policy" India developed a counter-move to convert aggressively the "forward policy" initiated since 1954, but which was sporadically implemented. A fresh Government directive in November 1961 to the Indian Army Head Quarter was passed on to area commanders on December 5, 1961. The forward policy was designed to contain China further advanced, establish India's presence in Lad to be in a position to cut Chinese supply lines, and ultimately to force a withdrawal. Nehru, however misperceived that the Chinese would not respond, which was perhaps in his seventeen year tenure as Prime Minister his greatest folly. The policy was obviously based on the false premise that the Chinese would not risk on open war with India or use force against Indian posts in Ladakh and NEFA areas.⁴ The failure of the so called great leap forward in 1959, and the change of leadership in the communist party in 1958-59, created an impression internationally that China had become weak, and incapable of resisting nibbling on its borders. India was also preening on its victory in Goa in December 1961 over a rag-tag Portuguese occupation force. Nehru began openly speaking about use of force." If necessary" to clear Indian territory of Chinese "incursions" swayed perhaps by Military victory in Goa and encouraged by NATO's non-response to Goa's military takeover despite Portugal being a member of that US-led military alliance. Nehru broke the news of the border dispute to Parliament in September, 1959 when he submitted white paper number one on India-China relations. This was the first time that the public had been

informed by its government about a border dispute which had been in existence since 1954, while Indian people were made to Chant 'Indians and Chinese are brothers'. The white paper came thus as a 'big surprise' to Indian Parliament and the public.⁵ The turning point was reached in the Galwan valley in July, and in N.E.F.A. In September Dhola, or Che Dong as the Chinese Call it, was the most strategically sensitive spot where India had built a military post in June 1962 considering it to in Indian territory. China fiercely contested this point. Dhola was nearly sixty mile west of Tawang, in that wedge of territory which the Chief of the General Staff judged essential for the defence of India's northern frontier in 1962. On September 8, Chinese troops infiltrated south of the Thag La. They were variably reported as numbering 300, 800 and 1200 on September 20, Chinese guns went in to action against and Indian auxiliary outpost two miles past of Dhola. Two Indian Generals have since publically expressed their views of their unpreparedness to meet this situation.⁶

General K.S. Thimayya said, between the first week of September, when the first incident took place at Dhola when it was realized that the Chinese were making large-scale concentrations, and October, when the Chinese launched their attacks, it was not possible for India's reinforce equip and maintain its forces in what he termed as that difficult terrain, Chiefly due to insufficiency in India's logistics. The reasons why India's suffered reverses were due to the lack of a proper coordinated plan, the lack of control of the battle and heavy losses in personnel and equipment.⁷ The Defence Minister in Delhi decided that 'as a matter of policy' there was no alternative but to exist the Chinese from the Dhola area. The army chief pointed out the consequences of such a step. Defence Minister Krishna Menon

was at the United Nations at the time, but on his return said that Government policy was to make an impact on the Chinese in N.E.F.A before they settled down for the winter. It sounded well, but General Kaul, who had earlier been Menon's right hand in introducing politics into army affairs, asked some four years later ! was this "tough posture" an attempt on Menon's part to appear in line with his oft repeated claims in the past, made publicly from time to time, that India was capable of defending herself against aggression from any quarters' or was it a typical political statement with a double meaning to appease public opinion? Or, could it have been just bravado? Unquestionably politicians and Menon was, above all else, a politician talked far too glibly about Indian Military preparedness, while they invariably believed their troops would be aimed against Pakistan, both Nehru and Menon according to general Kaul, believed as late as October 2, 1962, that they had good reasons to believe that the Chinese would not take any strong action against us.⁸ But Chinese by September 1962 had occupied almost 19000 square kms of territory in Ladakh and had penetrated along the South of the McMahan Line as far as they could upto stationed Indian troops in the NEFA area.

Chinese Offensive Behavior - October 1962

On October 10th Chinese used heavy Mortar and medium machine guns against the Indian positions and escalation of the war was irretrievable. Yet when Nehru flew to Ceylon on October 12 he remarked almost casually that the Indian army had been ordered to clear the Chinese from the area which they were occupying South of the McMahan line. A massive attack began on October 20. The Chinese claim that India had opened the offensive was obviously

nonsense. The border posts of Khinzemane and Dhola fell almost immediately and other posts fell after little resistance Lumpu, near Khinzemane, the last hold on Thag La ridge; Longju and others to the south-west; Buon La whose fall exposed Tawang; and Kibitoo, whose fall exposed Walong, guarding the Lohit valley, when Jang, to the east of Tawang and directly to the north of Se La Callapsed the Indian defences in the Kameng area were virtually destroyed. The Chinese were in a position to dominate N.E.F.A.

Simultaneously, Chinese troops launched attacks on Indian military outposts in the northern sector of Ladakh. It was in this sector, at the Kongka pass in October 1959, that Indian lives were first lost. Following that incident, India had built a number of Military outposts in the Chip Chap valley - at Daulet Begoldi, near the karakorun pass, and in the Pangong Lake area. They were extremely difficult to supply, and in some cases they were behind the Chinese Line. In this Himalayan game of cat-and-mouse, China was in such a vastly superior strategic position and had made plans so far ahead that when its troops launched the attack in October 1962, one outpost fell after another. Every out post had fallen inside 48 hours and Nehru broadcast to the nation that India must unit to face the greatest Mehanche that has come to us since independence. In two days all posts within the Chinese claim line as shown on its maps of 1960 had been taken. Indian had no coordinated plan in either of the two sectors and little experience of the logistical problems involved in either of them.⁹ This conflict of October 1962 fractured the history of India China interactions as no other event or development in this relationship ever did.¹⁰ China's next Move was diplomatic and skilful. On October 24 their news agency broad cast a three-point cease fire offer which Chou En-lai proposed to Nehru:

1. Pending a peaceful settlement, the Chinese Government hopes that the Indian Government agree that both parties respect the line of actual control between the two sides along the entire Sino-Indian border, and the armed forces of each side withdraw twenty kilometres from this line and disengage.
2. Provided that the Indian Government agrees to the above proposal, the Chinese Government is willing through consultation between the two parties, to withdraw its frontier guards in the eastern sector of the border to the north of the line of actual control; at the same time, both China and India undertake not to cross the line of actual control, i.e. the traditional customary line in the middle and western sectors of the border.
3. In order to seek a friendly settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question, talks should be held once again By the Nehru made replay, two day later,

There is no sense or meaning in the Chinese offer to withdraw twenty kilometre from what they call line of actual control; what is this line of actual control? Is this the line they have created by aggression since the beginning of September? Advancing forty or sixty kilometres by blatant military aggression and offering to withdraw twenty kilometres provided both sides do this is a deceptive device which can fool nobody. If the Chinese professions of peace and peaceful settlement of differences are really genuine, let them go back at last to the position where they were all

along the boundary prior to 8th September 1962.¹¹

This was an implicit recognition of the McMahan Line in the N.E.F.A. China had already accepted it from the D; phu pass to the 134 Razi Pass in a treaty then under discussion with Burma. Equally implicit was China's demand for the Aksai Chin in the western sector. It would have meant the official abandonment by India of all the Military check posts set up in Ladakh between 1959 and 1962 which had in any case already been wiped out. Nehru Rejected the three point proposal on November 14. In Western Sector, he said: the line of November 7, 1959,

(In the middle sector) not only includes all the Chinese posts established in the three years since 1959, but also includes all the Indian posts in the territory till 20th October 1962, and extends even further west wards, thus taking in additional 5000 to 6000 square. Miles since their 7th November 1959 position. In the middle sector the suggestion that the line of actual control whether on 7th November 1959 or now, Coincides only 'in the main' with the traditional and customary boundary is absolutely without foundation. The Chinese have never without foundation. The Chinese have never had any authority south of the main Himalayan watershed ridge, which the traditional boundary in this sector. (And in the Eastern sector; the proposed withdrawal) would leave Chinese forces in command of the passes leading into India while Indian forces would be

twenty kilometres to the south, leaving the entire Indian frontier defenceless and the mercy of any fresh invasion.¹²

According to India, China was already in occupation of 12,000 square miles of Indian claimed territory in the Aksai Chin area of the Ladakh sector before the 1962 war, and extended the occupation to another territory.¹³

The second Chinese offensive-November 1962 Headless of the strategic realities, Indian leaders talked grandly about facing the challenge. It came on November 15, the day after the three-point proposal had been rejected when Chinese troops attacked on a 500-mile front in N.E.F.A. from Walong to Se-La. Walong fell after twenty four hours of fighting. Instead of meeting Indian troops in difficult terrain on the Se-La, the Chinese crossed the Palit range by means of a yak track and surprised them in the rear.

Another column by-passed Se-La from the east and cut off the road between Se-La and Bomdi La, cutting off the Indians concentrated in the north for the defence of Se-la. Bomdi La was left undefended and fell in a few hours. India was no more equipped to meet the attack in Ladakh. Chinese artillery shelled Indian positions around Chusul, the main Indian base. And when Indian troops had been forced to retreat in both sectors, Peking suddenly announced that from 00.00 hours on November 22 their frontier guards (they never called them troops) would cease fire along the entire India-China border. As from December 1 they would withdraw to positions twenty Kilometer behind the line of actual control which existed on Nov. 7, 1959, in short they had taken by force what they had proposed after their first attack on October 20. India had turned down the proposals for reasons we have already analysed.

North of the line China would set up checkpoints with civil police assigned to each one and the Indians would be informed of their location.¹⁴

Peking reserved the right to strike back in the self defence three circumstances.

1. If the Indians should continue their attack after the Chinese frontier guards have ceased fire and when they are withdrawing.
2. If after Chinese withdrawal, Indians advanced to the line of control in the eastern sector and or refused to withdraw but remained on the line of actual control in the middle and western sectors.
3. If, after withdrawal, the Indian troops should cross the line of actual control and recover their positions prior to September 8th 1962.

The Chinese announcement categorically forbade the Indians to cross again the McMahon line and reoccupy the Kechilan 1 River area north of the Line in the eastern sector, reoccupy Wuje in the middle sector, and restore their forty three strong points for aggression in the Chip chap river valley the Galwan river valley, the Pangong Lake area and the Demchok area or set up more strongpoints for aggression on Chinese territory in the western sector.¹⁵ Peking was not making proposals to a defeated India, but stating explicitly how she meant to exploit her victory. Kingsley Martin, in Delhi at the time described India's dilemma. Whatever the justice of the claims and counterclaims the particular subtlety of the Chinese more lay in the fact that it presented India with a cruel choice to negotiate from a point of weakness or dare refuse and thus provoke further unequal war. The Indians who thought that Assam was to be cut off are left to watch the voluntary withdrawal of the Chinese. They must feel some humiliation, they will not like to admit their immense relief,

they will continue to say that they will fight to region all their territory in Ladakh, though they know that this is not Militarily feasible, they will continue to recruit soldiers and to regroup and strengthen their armies and to build bigger and stronger frontier posts and to expect in the future renewed Chinese affects. All this they will do and it will be of no harm but in fact, many of their reactions will look like meaningless gestures once the Chinese have actually withdrawn from the passes supposed to be impregnable, which they so quickly won and so bloodlessly restored.¹⁶ The unilateral declaration of a cease fire was a military victory for China, not only because it underlined her superiority in arms, communications strategy, logistics and planning but because it showed how deep were the political divisions in the Indian command. The Chinese slowly withdraw their troops as announced in the cease fire proposals. Twice Nehru asked for a clarification of the alignment of the line of actual control. Chou-En-Lai proposed that officials from both sides should meet to discuss the problems implicit in a twenty kilometres withdrawal of the armed forces, the establishment of check points by each party on its own side of the line of actual control and the return of captured personnel. Nehru answered, "We should create a proper atmosphere for peaceful settlement of our differences and we should settle our differences in a friendly way through peaceful talks and discussions. If we fail, we can consider what other agreed peaceful method of settling our differences should be adopted. There should be no attempt to force any unilateral demand on either side on account of the advances gained in recent clashes. The necessary preliminaries for talks and discussions suggested should be consistent with the decency, dignity and self-respect of both sides. The implementation of these proposed arrangements will not in any way

prejudice either sides position in regards to the correct boundary alignment."¹⁷

After it there was a proposal made by the Calombo conference of six Non-Aligned Nations for border settlement between India and China.

1. The conference considers the present de facto cease-fire period as a good starting point for a peaceful settlement of India-China conflict.
2. With regard to the Western sector, the conference appeals to the Chinese Government to carry out the withdrawal of their military posts by 20 kilometers as has been proposed in the letters of Chou-En-Lai to Nehru dated November 21 and 28, 1962.
 - a. This conference appeals to the Government of India to keep their existing military positions.
 - b. Pending final solution of the border dispute, the area vacated by the Chinese military withdrawal will be a demilitarized zone to be administered by civilian post of both sides to be agreed upon without prejudice to the rights of the presence of both India and China in that area.
3. With regard to the Eastern sector, the conference considers that the line of actual control in the areas recognized by both Government could serve as a cease fire line to their respective positions. The remaining areas in this sector can be settled in future discussions.
4. With regard to the problems of the middle sector, the conference suggests that they be solved by peaceful means without resort to force.
5. The conference believes that these proposals which could help in consolidating the cease-fire once implemented should pave the way

for discussion between the representatives of both parties for the purpose of solving the problems entailed in the cease-fire positions.

6. The conference would like to make it clear that a positive response to the appeal will not prejudice the position of either of the two governments as regards its conception of the final alignment of boundaries.

This proposal was released by the external affairs ministry of Ceylon on January 19, 1963.¹⁸ After the Colombo proposals India and China entered into negotiations towards a solution of their border dispute, it only resulted in a statement between them. This was evident through a letter of 09 October 1963 from the Chinese Government, which expressed disinterest in discussions on the basis of the Colombo proposals.¹⁹ Though, after pushing back Indian forces, China called for a cease fire and withdrew its forces twenty Kilometers from what it claimed was the Line of actual control (LAC) but after the war, India-China relations were cold and hostile for almost two decades. In John Garver's view, this hostility reflected an underlying geopolitical rivalry between China and India, both nations seeking to restore their traditional great-power status and with overlapping traditional spheres of influence. Garver sees this rivalry and mutual perceptions of military threat as constant features of India China relations. He notes, for example, Chinese analyses that identify the root cause of the 1962 war as India's imperialist mentality, learned from the British, and its aspirations to dominate South east Asia to the Middle east.²⁰ In fact, during the war, China had taken the imperialist policy. In the western sector China came to occupy some 14,500 square miles of territory, including areas that they had previously claimed. They also issued a stern warning to the Indians that any attempts to dislodge Chinese troops from the areas that they

had come to occupy would result in a Chinese attack.²¹

The consequence of the war of India, apart from the loss of life and the demoralization of the armed forces, were far-reaching and sweeping. The impact of the war on Indian defence planning, strategy and military organization cannot be over estimated. The Chinese attack on India left Nehru a broken Man he died shortly thereafter of a heart attack. Through his successors continued to invoke the language of nonalignment, fundamental shifts took place in Indian foreign and defence policies. Among other matters, the Indian leadership sought to forge a new defence relationship with the united states. Limited military cooperation with the united states did emerge after the 1962 war, including on the unsettled question of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The ambit of military cooperation, however, failed to significantly expand because of profound Pakistani misgivings, the inability of the two sides to reach a settlement of the Kashmir dispute, and India's own ambivalence about the relationship. Nevertheless, India did embark on a massive "Self-help" program of military modernization raising the new Mountain divisions trained in high-altitude warfare, acquiring a forty five squadron air force equipped with supersonic aircraft, creating a million man army and making a modest effort at naval expansion.

Efforts Towards Normalization

The process of normalization of India-China relations began to speed up in 1976, 14 years after the India-China border conflict in 1962 when China sought to resolve the then escalating dispute by resort to force of arms. After the 1975 border incident at Tunlung La there was no further occurrence of its kind during the 1970s between the two countries perhaps this incident

promoted Indian Policy makers to cultivate better relations with China.²²

In 1976 India established diplomatic relations with China for the first time, after the 1962 war, a ambassadorial relation were established. Mr. K.R. Narayanan was designed its ambassador to Peking.²³ A year after the resumption of full diplomatic relations the congress party was voted out of office and the Janta party came to power in March 1977. During the Janta period the continuity of the normalization process never slackened due to the lack of initiative. Foreign Affairs Vice Minister Wang Bingnan discussed the border dispute. Thereafter during September 1978, Subramaniam Swamy MP, was the first Indian Politician to visit China, the border issue formed the first item for discussion on his agenda. A highlight of the visit was Swamy's Meeting with Deng Xiaoping. Swamy gives a gist of what the Chinese leader told him. To quote:

“China is prepared to discuss ab initio the border negotiated settlement in return I think India ought to prepare some alternative for the negotiation. We should be prepared to discuss some exchange in territory. For example why not ask for the Kailash Mansarovar portion of Tibet in return for parts Aksai Chin.”²⁴

The external affairs Minister Atal Behari Vajpai went to Beijing on an official visit. Addressing the occasion 13 February, 1979, foreign minister Huang Hua said,

China and India have been friendly neighbours since ancient times and many records about friendly contracts between our two peoples can be found in old Chinese books. Relations between our two countries were good following the independence of India and the liberation of China. Subsequently there was a period of Set back but it was after all only a short episode in the

long history of our friendly relations. The Chinese government has always stood for the settlement of all dispute through negotiations on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence and the Chinese government believes that all differences and disputes can eventually be settled if the two sides makes earnest effort in the spirit of seeking truth from facts and of mutual understanding and mutual accommodation.”²⁵

However, Vajpai returned home by cutting short his China visit because of Sino-Vietnam border clashes. There after in May 1980, Indira Gandhi met Chinese Premier Hua Guo Feng at Balgrade where they both stressed the need for an amicable settlement to their problems. Obviously it was an unmistakable reference to the border dispute-being the only outstanding dispute between them. Another major initiative was the “Package deal” that Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping offered to settle the three decade old dispute in interview to the Editor of Vikrant, a New Delhi, based defense journal on 21 July 1980. The “package proposal” was very similar to an earlier abortive proposal that Premier Chou En Lai offered the Indian Government in 1960. It was formally spelt out in an editorial published in the ‘New China News Agency’ in June 1980. Based on actual control of borderlines the editorial urged both countries to make concessions. China in Arunachal area and India in Ladakh Area. Acceptance of this proposal, according to Deng, would give legal recognition by China to the McMahon line in the Eastern Sector and in return India should recognize the status quo in the western sector. In exchange China wanted India to give up its claim on 13,000 square Miles in Aksai Chin area around of Ladakh. Thus, China's proposal has endorsed the post-1962 status quo with minor modifications. To quote Deng's

interview which pertains to the package proposal that he made:

“For instance in the Eastern Sector, we can recognize the existing Status Quo - I mean the so-called McMohan line. This was left over from history but in the western sector the Indian Government should also recognize the existing status quo.”²⁶

During a visit to New Delhi in June 1981, the Chinese vice-premier and Foreign Minister Huang Hua expressed his country's desire to normalize relations with India. From December 1981, China and India started regular dialogue at the level of vice foreign minister.²⁷ The eight round of talks have been performed.

First round to talks were held in Beijing and both countries agreed to resolve the border issues and to increase cultural relations and trade contact. The second round of talks were held in New Delhi on 20 May 1982. Swimming up the second round of talk an official Spokesman said the wide basic differences on what India considered the central issue the resolution of border dispute persisted. The only saving grace was as the official spokesman put it the two countries agreed ‘to continue their talks to reach a commonly basis for dealing with their differences on the boundary in all sector. The third round of talks were held in Beijing from 27 January to 2nd February 1983, it carried further the discussion on above proposals or border issues. But the defences between the two sides could not be narrowed. The fourth round to talks were hold in discussion took place to resolve the border disputes.²⁸ Fifth round at Beijing and discussed the provision to confer each other most fevered nation status and to increase good relations. As the same time, it was agreed that the border dispute would be negotiated on a sector by sector basis. In the sixth round in 1985,

the Chinese returned to their package proposal of sweeping China's claims in the western sector for concessions in the eastern sector.²⁹ Seventh round of talks were held in July 1986. And the eight round of talks between India and China ended in New Delhi on November 17 1988 with External Affairs confirmed that the talks held in positive, cordial relations between the two countries as well as the boundary question.³⁰ Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing from December 19 to 23, 1988, broke the impasse by acknowledging a ‘disputed boundary’ on the frontiers. For about a decade thereafter, Sino-Indian bilateral relations developed steadily and smoothly. The ban on Chinese publications was lifted.³¹ An important outcome of this visit was the formation of the Joint working group (JWG) in early 1989, which among the other issues in Sino-Indian relations discussed their border dispute. The China Daily described this visit as a major event of high significance in bilateral ties and a positive reaction to this country ‘repeated invitations’. It further described more as part of the effort by both countries to increase mutual understanding and trust on the basis of peaceful coexistence rather than a step that will bring about instant dramatic changes in Sino-Indian relations.³² The early 90s witnessed flurry of unprecedented activity between China and India. The number of high level visits by the leaders of both countries have infused confidence and trust between the two major countries. The India-China relations were raised to an even higher leveling May 1992 when Indian president visited China. The communiqué issued at the end of the visit reiterated the India-China position of setting aside differences and concentrating on areas of common interest and concern. Dring the visit the Chinese President warned that “if India and China did not seize the opportunity to strengthen bilateral links, they would be build by others.³³ In 1991, the Chinese Premier Le Peng

paid a visit to India, the first visit by a Chinese Prime Minister after a gap of 31 years. The agreed to maintain peace and tranquility in the area along the line of actual control pending the final settlement.³⁴

The leadership of the two countries agreed that the difficult boundary question needs to be tackled with patience over 9 period of time.³⁵

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