China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges

Dr. Muhammad Nawaz Bhatti 1 Dr. Ghulam Mustafa 2 Farzad Ahmad 3

1. Associate Professor, Department of Politics & IR, University of Sargodha, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Politics & IR, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes prospects and challenges for Pakistan at national and international levels for the creation of mechanism to defeat the contemplations of rivals. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is being considered as a game changer project. It will be a source of bringing peace, harmony and prosperity not only in Pakistan but also in the entire region. It is a multidimensional developmental project in the global, regional, bilateral and domestic scenario. The power centers are being changed very rapidly due to CPEC, as many European countries are also interested in the project for their trade enhancement. The myth of “One Belt One Road” has international strategic implication. It would create opportunities not only for Asian, European and African states but also for Oceania through an effective diplomacy for the creation of new infrastructure and free trade zones. The role of international players to destabilize CPEC is also the burning question of the time that needs to be dealt with iron hands.

Keywords: Prosperity, Mega Projects, Infrastructure, Free Trade Zones, Regional Integration

Introduction

In view of Pakistan with its unique geography has immense strategic importance in South Asia. The geography of a country plays a pivotal role in different perspectives. Although, countries’ natural resources have great impact, yet, benefits could be achieved through proper mechanism of management and infrastructural development. Infrastructure, in a country, is an essential element for the development as it plays a significant role in uplifting the socioeconomic condition of the people. The means of communication such as roads, water supply, railways, bridges, airports, seaports, subways, tramways, dams, are the central cohesive source of support and stability for the progress in a country. Economic growth is directly proportional to the infrastructural development as it provides the best sources to enlarge the markets and creates the opportunities for trade not only within the country but abroad as well. Seaports are the dynamic and vibrant...
centers for trade, commerce and are the major sources of enhancement of local, national, regional and international trade. Seaports are also the source of strategic importance in the region and play a pivotal role with respect to naval defense (Sial, 2014).

China Pakistan Economic Corridor starts from Kashgar in China’s western region and ends at Gwadar district in Baluchistan a province of Pakistan. This corridor will connect the several countries of the world through Gwadar seaport and will take the bilateral relationship of Pakistan and China at the new heights. A beginning of a new journey of hopes will start to reinforce the economic condition and to reduce energy shortfall in Pakistan. There are different phases of CPEC project as international airport in Gwadar and Expansion of Karakoram Highway that connects China with Pakistan has also been prioritized for fast and secure transportation. Foreign direct investment in Pakistan will touch the new horizons of economic prosperity, moreover, it is further estimated that CPEC will create thousands of direct jobs during the period of 2015-2030. CPEC will make a bridge between Middle East and South West Asia with Central Asian Republics. It forms the closest oceanic path for landlocked Central Asian Republics.

CPEC has very vast geo-strategic importance on many accounts, for example, it possesses great magnitude with respect to trade and commercial ties with Central Asia, Gulf States, and East African countries, United Arab Emirates, China and North Western India. Gwadar seaport will become a regional hub for major trade and commercial activities (Razi, 2013).

It will bring prosperity and uplift the socioeconomic conditions of Pakistan particularly less developed provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtun Khaw. Open and deep water sea is a natural blessing for a country while landlocked countries always feel compulsion due to absence of a seaport as like Central Asian States and Afghanistan. These states are rich with natural resources but they have to rely on other seaports of neighboring countries (Rehman, 2012).

The length of CPEC is a 3,218 kilometer consisted with highways, railways and pipelines. The estimated cost of CPEC project is expected to be US$75 billion. The US$45 billion from the total amount will be used to make the corridor operational till 2020 while the remaining amount will be spent on power generation, communication and infrastructure development.

**Historical Background of CPEC**

**Revival of Silk Route**

In 1877, the term “Silk Route” was named by a German Geographer, Ferdinand Von Richthofen as “Silk” was a lucrative and a major trade product in the region. Silk Route was a network of trade routes for Afro Eurasian land mass
that brought together the regions of Asia with Mediterranean and European world. Routes from Syria, Turkey,

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and China were included in Silk route. This trade route provided a significant base to establish the culture and civilizations of China, Persia, Europe, Arabia and Indian subcontinent (Ghaleb, 2011).

Regional integration is a necessary measure to meet the needs of economically globalized world therefore the revival of Silk Route, named as ‘One Road, One Belt’ is being reformulated by China, which will become an economic belt along the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road (Liping, 2015).

In 1958, during President Ayub Khan Regime, Pakistan paid £3 million to buy Gwadar from the Sultanate of Oman. The euphuism of the project then slowly started disappearing. Numbers of press reports on the progress of the project started diminishing. Authorities started realizing that there were many a slip between the cup and the lip. Since then the history of the decision making process for its development has been that of studying, planning, shelving, restudying, re-planning and waiting and hoping for some outside aid agency to finance the project. Government of Pakistan formally developed the plan to convert Gwadar as a major deep seaport in 1993 and also planned to link it with road and railway networks. Federal government began construction of port in 2002 and finally it became operational in 2008. This port is 180 nautical miles away from the Strait of Hormuz, through which 60 percent of the world’s oil is transported. The port has also become a key shipping hub and will provide the opportunity of mass trade with Central Asia. In 2015, Chinese President Mr. Xi Jinping, in order to enhance the bilateral relationships in the form of CPEC, visited Pakistan with his delegation signed fifty-one memorandums of understandings with Pakistan (Ali, 2015).

**Significance of CPEC for Pakistan**

**Economic Boost up**

It is a logical prediction that if everything goes according to the plan, Pakistan would be able to revive its industry and advancement in its economic initiatives with the proper utilization of China Pakistan Economic Corridor as this project could potentially lead to synergies among various downstream sectors with benefits accruing to the larger population.

Foreign investment will also boost up the economic condition of Pakistan and will help to overcome the barriers of decline. it could catalyze Pakistan's slow but sure transfer from an agrarian economy to a logistics hub for the transport of goods from China to emerging markets in the Middle East and Africa and vice versa. The so called concept of “Failure State” for Pakistan can be defeated through CPEC.
CPEC project will not only be the source of development of Pakistan but also become a source of regional integration. Multi-dimensional changes in the national economy will bring direct benefits for common people. The corridor will improve the economic, commercial and geostrategic worth of Pakistan. Poverty, unemployment and socio-economic inequities of less developed provinces of Baluchistan and KPK will be dealt with effective mechanism. The game-changer project; China Pakistan Economic Corridor, will generate massive trade and economic activities in the whole region. It will open new horizons of peace, progress and prosperity for the common people of Pakistan (Falak, 2015).

Solution of Energy crises

Energy is to be considered as a life line of a country. To fulfill the needs of energy is mandatory for vibrant socioeconomic progress of a country. Industrial demands, political instability and lack of efficiency are the major causes behind the energy crises in Pakistan. WAPDA, KESC and other power generating stockholders have been failed to tackle the problem of energy crises. China’s great economic cooperation to Pakistan will help to resolve the energy dilemma. The Projects of 10,400 Megawatts generating electricity through nuclear, wind, thermal, coal and solar sources have been prioritized in CPEC project and it will be completed till 2018. China will help in Thar Desert project for the production of 6,600MW electricity as it helps to convert this remote and underdeveloped area into energy capital (Akram, 2015).

Improvement in Infrastructure

Construction of roads, ports, railways and highways is another significant vision in CPEC project. Pakistan will improve its infrastructure in order to connect it with regional countries and Europe and Africa as well.

Investment and trade barriers would be removed which would create a sound business environment within the region. Adjacent areas to the corridor get attractive locations for manufacturing, agricultural and services industries. Besides this, small and medium companies would be special benefits from the corridor also. The project will attract several countries of the world for economic and trade activities which would expand employment and economic growth for Pakistanis. Economic and industrial free zones would be established which will connect all the regions of Pakistan to get direct benefits from the corridor (Husain, 2015).

Balanced environment in South Asia

Pakistan and India are two major nuclear powers of South Asia and history of bilateral relationship between both countries remained in chaos. Due to support of USA, India thought itself the hegemony of region. CPEC is spotlight in the new Pakistan economic paradigm creating opportunity to act independently particularly to get rid of western influence especially the US influence. Pakistan
would be able to normalize its ties with India, Iran and Afghanistan through the project of CPEC which will provide opportunity to keep a balanced environment in the region.

**Defense**

Economic and military assistance from China would help Pakistan to narrow down the widening gap in the fields of economic, military and nuclear capabilities which would be far beneficial to counter the aggression from India. China’s naval presence at Gwadar seaport will strengthen the defense of Pakistan coastal area. The presence of China at Gwadar will help to keep a check over oil transportation in the Persian Gulf. The Naval activities of India around the Gulf of Persia and Aden can also be monitored through Gwadar seaport so it can play significant role in military and strategic operations (Hal, 2015).

**International Scenario**

**Regional Connectivity and Cordial Multilateral Relations**

South Asia comprises the sub-Himalayan countries which are surrounded by Western, Central, Eastern, Southeastern Asia and Indian Ocean. Population of South Asian countries is 34 percent of Asia’s population. One fifth of the world’s population lives in South Asia, due to which it is the most densely populated geographical region in the world.

CPEC can play a significant role to utilize the resources of South Asia for effective trade and commercial purposes. It can also facilitate the north western India and Afghanistan but stable government in Afghanistan is conditional to get benefits from the corridor. SAARC was established to build regional cooperation so bilateral and multilateral trade and cooperation among the member states can be made possible by using each other’s sources and resources. CPEC is a great source of cooperation for SAARC countries to develop trade activities. All the member states of SAARC are rich in different natural resources and these can be used for the betterment of the people of regional countries. CPEC is a source of enhancement of trade for SAARC countries and further to other regional states of Central Asia, Middle East and Africa. Pakistan will be a leading country due to the emergence of Gwadar seaport and would be a gateway for the trade and business activities in the region (Mahar, 2014).

**China’s “String of Pearl” and “One Belt One Road Strategy”**

For continuous improvement of economic stature, China has to meet her energy requirements and has to manage trade and transportation of its products round the world. The industrial zones of China are away from Shanghai port. It costs a lot of taxes and heavy duties. Gwadar seaport is the best option for China to reduce the distances up to 2500 kilometers from 16000 kilometers. For this purpose, Chinese government funded millions and is providing man power with experts in
different fields on the site also. The main policy of Chinese government towards the development of Gwadar seaport is to reduce the economic gap from western to eastern China and to get a hold on the Sea Lines of Communications (Catanzaro, Qi, Jia, & Han, 2015).

The “String of Pearls” portrays the rising indications of China’s geopolitical impact to get access to ports and airfields. Other aim is to develop particular diplomatic relationships and to enhance the military capabilities. It extends from the South China Sea, across the Indian Ocean, and to the Persian Gulf. It is the China’s Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) that covers the strategic area from the Chinese land to Sudan port. These Sea Lines of Communications pass through significant and major choke points.

One Belt One Road is an initiative that covers important countries of the region which has great potential with respect to utilization of resources to boost up economy for the betterment of population of the concerned countries. The “One Belt one Road” comprises northern, central and southern routes. Southern route begins from Guangzhou and covers the areas of China which connect Kashgar with Pakistan. This is a point from where China would be connected with the Arabian Sea through Gwadar seaport. Southern route is the shortest and the easily accessible route for China. The Central route starts from Shanghai and connects the country with Iran on the Persian Gulf which further can be extended to Europe. The drawback of this route is its length as it is one of the longest routes amongst all. Northern route is another option for China that begins from Beijing, connects it with Russia and then to Europe (Mahar, 2014).

Opportunity for Landlocked Central Asian Republics to connect with Region

Sixty percent of natural resources of the world are present in Central Asian Republics. These countries have a significant status with respect to monetary prospects and geographical vital positioning. This region is a centerpiece of the international arena as Russia, China, USA and European countries are concentrating over the region for their energy requirements. For this purpose regional and extra regional players are attempting to share their interests as much as possible with Central Asian Republics. The natural resources of emerging and resource-rich Central Asia are of great importance for the regional players. Central Asia will be the highly valued region for major regional and extra regional players, including USA, China and Russia so the significance of this particular region is increasing day by day. These republics are landlocked. CPEC would provide the nearest most marine access for CARs and provides opportunities to promote trade and transport of goods and natural resources in world markets (Sial, 2014).

Middle East

Naturally, GSP is located near the oil rich Middle Eastern countries of Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria and UAE. GSP has very vast
geo-strategic importance in this region and CPEC provides better opportunities of trade and transshipment to connect Middle East with other countries. In case of any disturbance, Gwadar seaport would be a substitute port for the continuity of trade in the region (Razi, 2013).

Inclusion of new foreign states in CPEC Project

Iran, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Russia, United Kingdom, Germany and France have expressed their intention to become part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Although the relations between Russia and Pakistan were not at good stage due to Cold War-era but now both countries have decided to create new horizons of bilateral relations. New bilateral relationship backed by military deals and joint military exercises are ascribed to the fact that Russia is interested to get close with Pakistan’s traditional ally, China. Russian Ambassador, Alexey Y Dedov elaborated that Russia supports the China Pakistan Economic Corridor as it is essential for better economy of Pakistan. He emphasized to enhance the volume of bilateral trade. Russia is interested in enhancing defense and military ties with Pakistan, adding that cooperation between intelligence agencies of the two countries would also be reshaped. Besides these states, many others are interested in the CPEC project due to its economic and strategic significance.

Challenges

Gwadar seaport is situated on the western end of Balochistan coast, which is the opposite end of the Gulf of Oman. Oil for Japan and western countries is transported through the Gulf of Oman. After completion of CPEC, the goods and products from China and Central Asia will pass through this significant trade route of Gwadar seaport which will surely be the source of enhancement of economy of Pakistan. As far as, the internal and external challenges for China Pakistan Economic Corridor are concerned, these can be divided into three possible categories.

- The insurgent groups of nationalists of Balochistan and KPK.
- Some of the competitor seaports of the regional countries.
- The role of external powers; USA, Israel and India.

Baloch Sub-Nationalists’ perspective

Balochistan is rich in energy and mineral resources. The most persistent grievance of Baloch nationalists is the exploitation of natural resources by the federal government without enough compensation to the province. Aspirations of Baloch nationalists about the economic, ethnic and political rights raised the issues and grievances in Balochistan. The successive governments did not play their role to address and resolve these matters. Consequently, the worst ways were paved to raise bleeding insurgencies and revolts. The absence of problem resolution mechanisms and the negligence of the well being of the masses are also the reasons
of nationalism in Balochistan. Real negligence from the central government is the mishandling of the nationalists’ perspective (Waqar, 2015).

Many political parties and groups of Balochistan like National Awami Party, Baloch Republican Party and the most notorious separatist group “The Balochistan Liberation Army” have many reservations about China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Even BLA strives to establish an independent state of Balochistan free from Pakistan. BLA is involved in the killing of Chinese engineers during the construction of Gwadar seaport.

Following are some reservations of Baloch Nationalists regarding China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

- Domination of Central Government
- Gwadar Seaport - Demographic Imbalance
- Political Instability
- Lack of Educational Institutions
- Less Representation in National Services
- Removal of Baloch Identity and Culture in Pakistan
- Disempowerment of Local Inhabitants

CPEC and less developed province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Some political parties of province have reservations about China Pakistan Economic Corridor and argue that federal government has changed the original route of the corridor. They claim that these changes in the corridor will divert economic and other benefits to Punjab only.

These parties are in the favor of the Western route because it covers the backward and less developed regions of country. However, security situation is a major issue on western route, due to this factor; China is most interested in Eastern route (Kasi, 2015).

Political parties of KPK are not in the favor of other routes and they advised the federal government to construct the original Gwadar-Kashgar route without and modification. These parties are in the view that demands of people of less developed province, KPK should be fulfill to avoid from any frustration. Security situation in KPK and FATA is the burning question of the hour which may shackle the completion of the project. Moreover, Destabilization in the political system of Pakistan can delay the implementation of the CPEC project. For economic development and vibrant regional connectivity, it is mandatory to create an environment of political harmony among all the provinces of Pakistan (Falak, 2015).
China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges

Route controversy (Eastern, Western and Central Routes)

Central Route

This route is longer than western but shorter than the eastern route. Backward and less developed areas of the country would get economic opportunities from this route. Construction of roads would have to be make sure because this route needs is not well constructed except Gwadar-Ratodero section. Due to insurgency in Balochistan and KPK, a better security mechanism must be ensured by provincial and federal governments. This alignment covers almost all the provinces and a better political harmony would be prevailed.


Eastern Route

This route is longer than other two routes. It covers much of the developed areas of the central Punjab except some backward areas of Balochistan, Sindh and Southern Punjab.

A major bridge is needed to be constructed on Indus River. Security situation is comparatively better than central and western routes. This rout can be a source of inter-provincial disturbance as it completely bypasses the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhaw.


Western Route

This route is one of the shortest routes among all. As this route covers most of the backward areas of country so a vast economic opportunity is available for the people of this route. Roads are needed to be constructed for western route. High security costs would be spent due to insurgent activities in Balochistan and FATA.


Competitor seaports particularly Chabahar and UAE

China Pakistan Economic Corridor is an economic threat to Iran, which is just 72 kilometers away from it. It can drag trade and commercial activities away from the Chabahar seaport of Iran. India is building a long road of 213km to connect Chabahar port with Afghanistan. This route further would be connected
with Central Asian Republics. Chabahar port is a part of the counter balance policy so that the China’s influence can be affected due to its presence at Gwadar seaport. The main concern of India is to minimize the influence of China in Indian Ocean as India considers that China is encircling it through Gwadar seaport.

Zayed, Jable Ali, Khor Fakkan, Hamriyah, Khalid, Rashid are the significant seaports of United Arab Emirates which handle million of tons of cargo each year. All of these seaports are in competition with Gwadar seaport (Bhutta, 2015).

Security Concerns

Among other challenges, security situation is the most crucial challenge for both countries. East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Daesh (ISIS), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and the militant wings of some political parties can create horrible problems for China Pakistan Corridor Project. China has deep concerns regarding security issues of the whole corridor and Gwadar seaport. Even after operation Zarb-e-Azab, many elements of terrorists are still active and can create deep troubles to destabilize China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Army will establish Special Security Division which will be comprised on army battalion, paramilitary forces, Rangers and Frontier Corps to ensure the security of China Pakistan Economic Corridor. It is mandatory for Pakistan to create a better mechanism of security at border with Afghanistan for proper utilization of CPEC (Amir, 2015).

Indian Factor

CPEC is an opportunity for Pakistan to strengthen its defense. As India considers itself the hegemony of the region so prosperous Pakistan with respect to its trade and development through the project of CPEC would be like a thorn in the paw. Sea Lines of Communications of the region would be monitored by Pakistan and China at Gwadar seaport and it will not be bearable for India. India is confused and bewildered after China’s huge investment in Pakistan. CPEC and development of Balochistan are not acceptable for India as PM Narendra Modi showed his concerns during his visit to China with the premier of China. China did not bother the reservations of Indian Prime Minister.

Production of plutonium with the help of China at the Chinese built Kyushu reactor and purchasing of eight submarines worth $5 billion from China will strengthen capability of Pakistan Navy. The nexus of India and United Arab Emirates is active to create hurdles for China Pakistan Economic Corridor

Exploration of economic activities in Balochistan would be a source of peace, prosperity and harmony for common people of province which are problematic for India and UAE. Due to China’s growing influence and Russian muscles to reach Central Asian Republics, India is in deep trouble and wants to
spread sphere of influence in the region. India has invested in Iran and Afghanistan to counter the impacts of CPEC and to reach the Central Asian Republics via land routes. For this purpose, India is active to help Iran for the construction of Chabahar seaport to build a north-south corridor will run to Afghanistan and eventually stretch to Central Asia (Bhutta, 2015).

**American Approach towards CPEC**

United States of America has strategic interests and objectives in South Asia. USA has a grand alliance with India against the rising Asian tiger China. South Asian countries are enriched with natural resources and the surrounding regions of South Asia have great potentials in the energy sector. So whole of the region will sustain as a paramount for the world's economies. Forty percent of the world's oil and gas resources are present in the Indian Ocean so this region has a great strategic and economic influence. As far as strategic interests of the USA are concerned, there is an ambience and sense of tension between USA and China to secure their interests. Keeping influence over the region, there is possibility that like other hidden foreign forces for anti-Pakistani elements, the US may contribute its share to curb militancy in the province. To get access to the Strait of Hormuz, US would be more in favor of an independent Balochistan. According to Global Research scholar, Michel Chossudovsky, the separatist movements in different parts of the world have been hijacked by foreign powers to fulfill their purposes. He says that British intelligence agencies, CIA and Mossad provide facilities to Baloch militants in Iran and Afghanistan to destabilize the area. He says that the objective for such interference is to destabilize the province by creating insurgency by nationalist groups and also to create violations for its separation from Pakistan (Amir, 2015).

**Conclusion**

CPEC is an important project for both China and Pakistan for better and secure supply of their goods, products and services. The corridor would be an alternative route for China while economic prosperity and a balanced environment in the region would be ensured for Pakistan. The corridor would help Pakistan to counter Indian hegemony in the region while Gwadar seaport would become the major transit point linking Eurasia with South and South East and Central Asia. The completion of CPEC project would enhance the business and trade opportunities because major oil shipments from Middle East will be offloaded at Gwadar seaport. Gwadar seaport has very vast geo-strategic significance as it is located just 180 nautical miles away from Strait of Hormoz which is life line for Europe as 40-50 percent of oil passes through this strait. The presence of Pakistan-China naval forces would be problematic for the interests of Europe.

Most of the China’s oil is currently transported from Malacca strait to Western China which has a distance of almost 16,000 km and it takes 2-3 months. The distance would be reduced to less than 5,000 km after the completion of CPEC. 10,400 megawatts (MW) of energy would be generated from gas, coal and solar
energy. CPEC would reduce the distance from 12,000 km to 2,395 km. CPEC will act as a bridge which would connect three billion people of Asia, Africa and Europe. CPEC has received the significance with respect to trade and business not only in Pakistan but also from all over the world. Central Asia Republics, Afghanistan, China, Japan, Singapore, Russia and several European countries have showed their intention to become a part of CPEC. Viable strategies, policies and efficient techniques to convert China Pakistan Economic Corridor into a comprehensive and competitive corridor is a big challenge for government of Pakistan. The corridor will open new economic opportunities for Pakistan and it will connect China to its markets in Asia, Europe and beyond. The reservations of Baloch nationalists would be dealt with effective mechanism so that this multi-billion dollar project cannot become issue like Kala Bagh Dam. Foreign intelligence agencies are operated and working to make the corridor as a failure project. The security of CPEC is a burning issue for China for secure and better supply and transport of its goods and services. Federal and provincial governments should ensure the mechanism of better security of the corridor.

Recommendations

- Political parties should play a constructive role for the implementation of China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

- Issues regarding routes controversy must be resolve untidily and political parties must play their pivotal role for collective benefits.

- Federal and provincial governments should create an environment of cohesion for better utilization of China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

- Benefits from China Pakistan Economic Corridor must be presented to the representatives of provinces.

- Federal government should take steps to elaborate the possible internal and external challenges for CPEC.

- Federal and provincial governments must provide a secure and safe environment to all workers of China and other countries who are working for the construction of CPEC.

- The government should work quickly on CPEC so that there remains no space for terrorists and militants to create problems in the construction of CPEC project.

- Major share of revenues should be given to less developed provinces.

- Baloch-oriented developmental projects should be initiated in Balochistan.
• Employment for local inhabitants at Gwadar seaport must be ensured for their better livelihood.

• Fear of demographic change at Gwadar district must be dealt with effective mechanism so that people can get confidence.

• Improvements in communication infrastructure must be ensured for better life.

• Establishment of technical and Maritime Educational Institutions must be built for local inhabitants of Balochistan.

• Baloch and other local tribes must be recruited in Coast Guard and Navy.
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