

Analysis of the costs and benefits of citizenization in China

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Rapid industrialization in the wake of reform and opening up has transferred a large rural population to the cities, yet the vast majority of these people are not entitled to the same urban social services as are urban residents, including education and healthcare. This poses unique problems for the urbanization of the migrant agricultural population. Many analysts hold that the biggest barrier to making these migrant rural citizens into complete urban citizens is the high cost. Pan Jiahua, through a comprehensive analysis of the benefits and costs of the agricultural population transfer, maintains that the benefits far outweigh the costs, and the problem lies in the asymmetry of real interests and the limited expenditure on basic urban social services for the transferring agricultural population. The key to resolving the conundrum of cost in the urbanization of the transferring agricultural population lies in scientifically understanding benefits, breaking pattern of real interests, and accelerating the process of urbanization of the transferring agricultural population.

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1. Introduction

China's industrialization has brought a large number of rural citizens to the cities, but the social services offered in urban development are far from satisfying the demands of the migrant agricultural population. Thus, a huge urbanization level gap has appeared between the nominal urbanization rate and the genuine urbanization rate such as measured by the size of the migrant population that enjoys the full range of urban social services. According to the analysis of "National Planning for New Urbanization for 2014-2020" released by the Chinese government in March 2014, the share of the Chinese population that has resided in cities for over six consecutive months reached 52.6% in 2012. However, the ratio for the number of people with official city household registration and as such have access to urban social services was only 35.3%, 17.3 percentage points lower than the other number. This difference represents 234 million people. By 2020, the nominal urbanization rate is expected to reach 60% and the urbanization rate per "household registration" 45%. A further analysis of the "National Planning for New

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Urbanization for 2014-2020” reveals that the obstacle to genuine urbanization of the migrant agricultural population is the large costs, which need to be shared by various social groups. But since one reason why so many people move from the country to the cities is to pursue benefits, it is necessary to conduct cost-benefit analyses for the urbanization of the migrant agricultural population.

The genuine urbanization of the migrant agricultural population constitutes a grand and historic social engineering project integral to China’s economic transformation and upgrading. All the decisions in this project should, just as in any other engineering project, in principle include an evaluation of the costs and the benefits. If this project is begun hastily on administrative order, and the high costs end up outweighing the benefits, it will be unsuccessful and unsustainable. But if the benefits are greater than the costs, then it would lead to economic losses and even social costs if it is not undertaken for any reason, such as the lack of incentive, or even the presence of by deliberately placed man-made barriers. For a long time, the majority of the analyses on the genuine urbanization of the migrant agricultural population have estimated and emphasized the costs while ignoring the economic and social benefits. This bias may cater to the interests of a certain group, but may misguide the public, and its only consequence would be maintaining or even strengthening the “household registration” system, which is deficient in terms of social justice. This kind of reform would be perversely counterproductive, instead of going forward, it would be going backward. When we do investigate the benefits, we discover a massive and constant stream of benefits far outstripping the costs. Only with correct understanding and accounting of the costs and benefits in the genuine urbanization of the migrant agricultural population can a sound, quality, and sustainable urbanization track be taken and the Chinese Dream realized.

2. Who need to become urban citizens?

According to China’s household registration system, citizens who migrate on their own accord (rather than being ordered by the government) cannot enjoy equal rights and interests of public services as do local residents, regardless of their residential and employment situation. However, China’s urbanization rate is calculated according to where people have lived for six consecutive months. On this method, the urban population includes urban residents with urban household registrations, villagers without urban household registration and whose land has been occupied, and non-native residents who have no local residential registration and variably referred to as “migrant workers,” “floating population,” and “migrant agricultural population.”¹ Non-native residents are not entitled to the same rights and interests as those with local urban household

¹ In government documents and in the media, they were referred to as rural migrant workers before the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which indicates their identity as peasants and profession as workers, or of the floating population unable to take root but flowing constantly due to a lack of household registration. President Hu Jintao described this huge and special group as the transferring agricultural population for the first time in his report to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

registrations, including the right to vote and run in elections, equal employment, compulsory education for their children, medical care, unemployment benefit, and early retirement. In some Chinese cities, especially large ones, non-native residents face many significant obstacles when they try to purchase houses, to send their children to school, and to receive social security benefits.

Strictly speaking, it is not necessary to turn all non-native residents into registered urban residents. The emphasis on people's livelihood and the need to realize social justice do not imply that all non-native residents must become official urban citizens. First of all, for residents in villages inside urban districts, their means of making a living disappears as their land is expropriated. This group must be allowed to register as urban citizens so their social security can be guaranteed, consistent with the social needs of reducing social conflicts and maintaining social stability. Secondly, all migrant workers do not form a homogeneous group and must be treated differentially depending on their specific circumstances. It makes sense for migrant workers with stable employment and fixed residences who pay all local taxes and fees, and who seek to permanently resettle in cities to demand equal urban social services and to expect to integrate with local culture with political, economic and social rights and interests as citizens. However, many seasonal workers or contract workers who are primarily economically motivated, do not intend to become urban citizens. A large number of cotton-picking workers employed during the cotton-picking season in Xinjiang, workers dispatched abroad, and "Filipino maids," have no expectations or even desire to become urban citizens in the places where they work. Some of those who engage in short-term work do not belong to the place where they work even if they may stay there for a considerable period of time, sometimes over half a year. They primarily value economic rights and interests and may not place great value on social and political rights. Third, literally speaking, the "floating population" refers to the community without roots or the desire or intention to take roots. Foreign workers, permanent local staff in international agencies, and long-term dispatch workers for businesses whose headquarters are in a different city all have the properties of the floating population. Since their employers are responsible for all their affairs, they may be provided with social security services equivalent to or even better than those of local residents. However, they do not have the right to vote in the location to which they have been dispatched. Their demand for urban social services is in fact a kind of purchase. A striking contrast is formed when they are compared with other groups, such as migrant workers. To a large extent, however, helpless and weak in terms of economic, social, and political rights, they are unable to afford basic urban social services. Therefore, this group should be treated the same as migrant workers. Fourth, the migrant agricultural population can be literally understood as the group that has left agricultural production and moved to non-agricultural sectors. With change in the type of work they do, these workers must change their place of residence as well. No longer engaged in agricultural production, they break away from their rural residences and reside in cities. And this move is often irreversible. Their original social economic and political rights have been lost, but the rights and interests related to their new work and place of residence are yet unavailable to them due to current institutional arrangements. What they need are the same basic

rights and interests as local citizens, including urban social services, equal job opportunities, and local political rights.

The above analysis shows that peasants who have lost their land and the agricultural population moving among urban districts generally need to become genuine, i.e., officially registered urban citizens. Migrant workers and members of the floating population, especially those in the first two categories need to be turned into urban citizens. Others do not.

3. An objective view of the benefits of citizenization

China's urbanization process, starting with a rate of less than 18% at the early stages of reform and opening up, has been sustained, stable and rapid despite the constraints of the urban/rural household registration system, reaching 53.73% at the end of 2013 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The target urbanization rate for 2020 has been set at around 60%, according to the government's "National Planning for New Urbanization for 2014-2020." In addition, various forecasts indicate that this process will continue and the urbanization rate will reach about 70% around 2030, compared to the rate in moderately developed countries. These figures themselves show that this process would be cost-effective, with massive and continuous benefits in the current economic and social transition.

First, citizenization, i.e., the process of turning formerly rural population into urban citizens is a powerful source of growth of the Chinese economy that is now undergoing significant transformation and upgrading. Before reform and opening up, economic development was mostly funded by drawing on the "systemic price differential between industrial products and agricultural products," that is, the unequal exchange between the more highly valued industrial products and the lowly valued agricultural products. Industrialization and urbanization were promoted through the subsidization of the industry by the agriculture and the subsidization of cities by the countryside. After reform and opening up began, as urbanization was driven by rapid industrialization, external demand and investment facilitated economic growth. Now, as China's economy has largely entered the later stage of industrialization, with some regions stepping into the post-industrial society (Chen et al, 2012), the room for external demand and investment to expand is limited. The market demand of developed countries is becoming saturated. Even though the development of the markets of most developing countries was underpowered at start, their products are in competition with China's foreign trade. The capacity of some of China's capital and labor-intensive manufacturing industry has peaked or has been over their peak. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (2014), China produced 1.46 billion mobile phones, 123 million sets of LCD televisions, 131 million air conditioners and 22.12 million cars in 2013. With a population of 1.3 billion, out of a world total of 6.3 billion, China's conventional consumer goods market capacity cannot grow infinitely, even if the products are constantly updated. The next issue is steel and cement mainly used for infrastructure construction. The year 2013 saw that China's steel production capacity reached more than 900 million tons and steel production 779 million tons, accounting for nearly half of the world's total, and

cement production 2.42 billion tons (World Steel Association, 2013). In 2013, buildings under construction covered an area of 6.66 billion square meters, including 2.01 billion square meters of newly started construction and 1.31 billion square meters sold, of which 1.16 billion was for residential housing. China also completed construction of 70,300 kilometers of new roads and 5,586 kilometers of railways. In addition to expanding, maintaining such production scale also requires constant impetus within limited space. But what would be the driving force for economic development and upgrading? The answer lies precisely in citizenization. According to the “National Plan for New Urbanization for 2014-2020” issued by Chinese government, a formerly rural population of 136 million is expected to become urban citizens, representing an annual rate of 23 million. Transforming such a large number of urban villagers into urban citizens, and the demand for coordinated urban and rural development given rise to by this process both constitute a massive and continuous source of growth for this new era of economic growth in China. To the extent economic growth and urbanization in the past 30 years had been driven by industrialization, over the next 20 years it will be up to citizenization to promote industrialization, which will in turn advance urbanization.

Second, citizenization also generates huge social benefits. Socialism with Chinese characteristics aims to eliminate discrimination, not to solidify or intensify it. The basic interests of any group that exists and that has made huge contributions to society are an integral part of the overall societal interest. For members of this significant subpopulation in the Chinese society without urban residency registration, discrimination has caused psychological stress, physiological damage, survival pressure, and deprived them of a voice. Left-behind children are no less valuable to the country’s future than other children. Being able to live in one’s place of residence, to receive medical care when struck by sickness, to be supported in old age, and to have one’s voice heard are all birthrights for any individual. From a certain perspective, the social benefits of citizenization may be even greater than its economic benefits. Among any sent of social choice, after the demonstration of the “veil of ignorance” by Rawls (1971), the optimal one calls for maximizing the interests of the most vulnerable social groups.

Third, there are also huge environmental benefits to citizenization. In terms of both scale and speed, China’s urbanization and industrialization are unprecedented and may never be repeated anywhere else in the world. The pressure this has put on resources and the environment is also unprecedented. In 2013, China imported 282 million tons of crude oil, 40 million tons product oil, 330 million tons of raw coal, and 819 million tons of iron ore (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In 2011, the amount of carbon dioxide discharged from China’s fossil fuel combustion and industrial production process accounted for 28% of the world’s total, higher than that of the United States (16%) and the European Union’s 27 countries combined (11%). Per capita carbon dioxide emissions was close to 7 tons, while the global per capita emission was less than 5 tons, and the number for of the EU was 8 tons (BP, 2013, the World Bank, 2013). The haze condition that affected much of the national territory which lasted from the winter of 2012 to the spring of 2013 prompted people to ask: if the Chinese dream is a beautiful environment with blue sky, clean water, and green grass, what sense does it make to turn our beautiful land into a land of

filthy haze, dirty water, and barren landscape first and then fall into a deep nostalgia about the past later? Some people say that urban citizens consume more energy and resources than farmers. With the reality of the urban-rural dual structure, statistical data support such claims. However, as to the development of the economy and technology and the progress of human society, a dense city is obviously a better choice than scattered rural villages for conserving resources and protecting the environment. This can be confirmed by the situation in developed countries today. The above simple analysis shows that citizenization promises huge economic, social, and environmental benefits. It is the source of fuel, the guarantee, and the right condition for upgrading China's economy.

4. Scientific analysis of the costs

Under the circumstance of accelerated urbanization and increasingly prominent tensions in the process of massive citizenization, some authorities and think tanks have carried out a mass of studies aiming to estimate the cost of citizenization. The Chinese Academy of Sciences estimated in its *"Report on China's Sustainable Development Strategy"* released in 2005 that about 15,000 yuan needed to be shouldered by the public for each newcomer to a city. A rough estimate submitted in 2006 by the investigation group of the Ministry of Construction in *"The New Requirements Proposed by Migrant Workers on Urban Construction"* indicates that the cost for each new citizen of small cities, medium-sized cities, large cities, and megacities is 20,000 yuan, 30,000 yuan, 60,000 yuan and 100,000 yuan respectively (operation and management costs are excluded). The *China Development Report* issued by the China Development Foundation in 2010 concluded that the cost of turning each former rural resident into an urban citizen was 100,000 yuan. In early 2013, the State Council Development Research Center in *"Cost Calculations for Turning Migrant Workers into Urban Citizens"* put the cost at 80,000 yuan per person.

How should these data be interpreted? There is no doubt that the work of these authorities and think tanks is meticulous and in-depth and their calculations authentic. However, when it comes to the theoretical and methodological basis for these calculations, there is plenty of room for debate.

Methodologically, social costs have often been ignored in these calculations. Discrimination has deprived the children of the migrant agricultural population of access to basic compulsory education in the place where their parents work and live. For those who are discriminated against, the denial to them of equal opportunities for higher education and employment not only hurts their dignity and their social security, but it also leads to the enormous loss of human capital. From an economic point of view, some aspects of these calculations stand to be corrected. First of all, from the perspective of the whole society, there must be inputs into infrastructure and social security regardless of location. While investment toward the construction of rural areas is very little now, this is still not nothing, and the fact that there has been little investment thus far does not mean this will continue to be the case in the future. In recent years, the government has

gradually provided fiscal guarantee for minimum living allowances and other forms of social security, with different areas enjoying different levels of provision. Under this circumstance, when calculating the cost of citizenization only the incremental cost should be included, and not the full cost. Second, citizenization is inevitably accompanied by the payments from asset transfer. The land taken over by expanding cities used to belong to farmers. If everything is done according to relevant rules in this land repurposing, the cost of land would not need to be included when calculating the cost of citizenization. In 2012, the amount of money spent trading use rights of land by real estate developers reached 741 billion yuan, 16.7% less than in 2011. If industrial land and the land for infrastructure construction are taken into account, the figure would be more than 1 trillion yuan. If use transfer across administrative regions for land owned by migrant population is prohibited, then the payment from land asset transfer necessitated by urban sprawling and renovating urban villages should be deducted when calculating the cost of citizenization. It can be seen from the current rough estimate that the transfer payment of the original cost and land asset seem to have been unintentionally overlooked. As such, we suspect all these calculations may have overestimated the cost of citizenization.

At the macroeconomic level, the cost of citizenization amounts to a kind of investment. Urban infrastructure construction is an investment that generates a multiplier effect, creates more employment opportunities, and increases incomes. Basic urban social services, including education, healthcare, and pensions imply employment opportunities and improvement in quality of life, and are not purely cost. Seen from this perspective, costs need to be analyzed according to scientifically sound principles and be freed from biases.

5. Breaking outside the current matrix of vested interests

That the benefits of citizenization far outweigh the costs should be indisputable. Why, then, despite the fact that this process has been listed on the central government's work agenda and there has been consensus among different voices in about its importance for China, should some think tanks, local governments and policymakers nonetheless believe that it is too costly and the country may ill-afford it? Are there international experiences from which we can draw lessons? How can we reconcile these apparently conflicting phenomena?

The current matrix of vested interests ensured by the existing institutional arrangements places constraints on the citizenization process. The urban/rural dual household registration system has created a number of dichotomies, including those between those within and those outside the system, and between state-owned and privately owned enterprises. As a result of this, the stronger and more powerful groups will try to maintain and solidify such a configuration while the disempowered and disenfranchised find themselves unable to change the situation. A great deal of resources may be wasted in our cities, such as repetitious construction and demolition; however, funds for building kindergartens, primary schools, and community hospitals are often in short supply. Farmers' land are often condemned for public use through administrative means in exchange for a very low price or even for free, but those vacated from the land receive nothing

in return even if the land on which they have lived for generations should turn a handsome profit for its new owners. Let us suppose the income from national land transactions or transfers is 1 trillion yuan a year and 100,000 yuan is the full citizenization cost per person. This money can cover the citizenization cost for 10 million people. If we calculate by incremental cost, e.g. 50,000 yuan, 20 million people can be covered. Even though migrant workers pay taxes as required in their place of residence and their enterprises have paid municipal construction fees¹ as well as education surcharges², their children are still not entitled to compulsory education. The wages of migrant workers should include the cost of the simple reproduction of the labor force, including not only the basic necessities of life and the support for the old, the weak, the sick and the disabled, but also the fees for labor force reproduction, namely the expense of raising children. The rights and interests of migrant workers in some cities have been ignored, and laws meant to protect migrant workers from some types of corporate activities, such as illegal deduction from wages, and delayed wage payment, are not strictly enforced. In some state-owned enterprises and institutions, there are still no equality in either opportunities or pay for the same work. Some policymakers believe one-sidedly in the “costly citizenization” theory while ignoring the arguments about the issues of rights or benefits, apparently influence by and intent on maintaining the existing matrix of vested interests. Some think tank scholars believe that their position is neutral on the issue of interests, and that they are not catering to any particular group, but their conclusions are drawn from analysis that have used biased methods and can easily mislead. But incomplete urbanization cannot be sustained and it will not help realize the Chinese dream.

Lessons can be learned from the practices of promoting equal opportunity and basic security in the urbanization process in developed countries. Except for the few of them who work in colleges and universities and national research institutions, the majority of Chinese students who stay in the United States after completing their studies, have chosen to work in private enterprises or to start their own businesses. It seems there is no separation between inside and outside of the system.³ Eight years of living in Europe with my family allows me to conclude that basic social

¹ On February 8th, 1985, the State Council introduce “Provisional Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Urban Maintenance and Construction Tax,” which took effect in the same year. In the 1994 tax reform, some adjustments were made to the codes in anticipation for timely expansion of the scope and changes in methods of collection and calculation. Generally speaking, the greater the sizes of cities and towns, the more it would cost to build and to maintain them. Correspondingly, it was stipulated in city maintenance and construction tax that the tax rate for those taxpayers in urban areas would be 7%; for those in counties and organic towns it would be 5%; and for those outside urban areas, counties, cities or towns it would be 1%.

² Those units or individuals who pay product tax (later called consumption tax), value-added tax, or business tax, should pay educational expenses surtax except those where surtax of rural education operating expense has been paid as stipulated in “Notification on Raising Rural School Funding of the State Council” (issued by the State Council (1984) No. 174). The tax rate for collection and calculation is set in accordance with the actual amount of tax paid by every unit and individual including product tax (later called consumption tax), value-added tax, and business tax. The education supplemental tax rate was set at 3%, which must be paid simultaneously with product taxes (later called consumption tax), value-added tax, and business tax.

³ On January 5, 2013, the Hei Longjiang Morning Post reported: During the nation-wide recruitment of cleaners in Harbin, a total of 29 graduate students entered their names for the examination, seven of whom have already won the competition and started their career.

security such as the education cost for children's primary school and junior high school as well as health care was share among all taxpayers in the country, regardless of whether I was studying or working. Japan had an urbanization rate of 27.8% in 1945, which grew precipitously to 72.1% 25 years later. In order to solve the housing problems of "migrant workers," the Japanese government built public housing like "community housing" and "public-operated residences" using public funds. The "local dispersion" plan implemented from the early 1960s reversed the flow of laborers, funds, and materials back to local places and nearby employment was advocated in order to achieve local urbanization (Lan, 2013). In Singapore, one of the Asian Tigers in the last century, the process of industrialization and urbanization took 20 years starting from independence until the early 1980s. During this time, the Singapore Housing Development Board provided housing units to 80% of Singaporeans. In the 1990s, up to 90% of the population resided in homes provided by the government. Now, in the 21st century and with an aging population, the Singapore Housing Development Board has launched a housing plan for the elderly, with 30-year property rights for one-bedroom flats of either 35 square meters or 45 square meters sold for between 47,800 and 71,700 Singapore dollars (Chin, 2004). As Singapore is a country with little land and high population density, this housing policy of government monopoly and privatization not only guarantees home ownership for residents but also provides the impetus for the development of Singapore (Wong and Xavier, 2004).

Legislation and law enforcement are needed if the stricture of the current matrix of vested interests is to be overcome. If our cities pursued the maximization of self-interest at the expense of the interests of the migrant agricultural population, it will be national and social interests that are hurt. To overcome the existing matrix of vested interests, and to safeguard the economic and social rights and interests of 260 million migrant workers it will take much more than the efforts of the 31 National People's Congress delegates who are rural migrant workers.¹ Before reform and opening-up began, there was a simple and unitary urban-rural dichotomy. But since the beginning of reform and opening-up, this simple and unitary dichotomy has been replaced by a cluster of multiple dichotomies and dualities that reflect growth structural complexity of contemporary Chinese society. Underlying the cluster, however, is still the old urban-rural divide. To overcome the existing matrix of vested interests, first of all, the social costs and social benefits of citizenization must be clarified and confirmed by means of law. This would ensure that all citizens can share the benefits of reform and development, regardless of their age, place of birth, place of residence, or registration status. Both the costs and benefits of citizenization need to be considered. Second, decentralization and market allocation of social and economic resources must be written into legislations. The reason first tier cities and provincial capitals are currently the most favored destination for former farmers, bringing to these cities urban diseases and depletion, lies in the monopolistic control of economic and

¹ The number of representatives of migrant workers to National People's Congress has increased from 3 five years ago to 31 in the 12th NPC, on behalf of 260 million migrant workers. Yao Xueqing, *Focus on 31 Representatives of Migrant Workers to National People's Congress: behind them there are 260 million migrant workers*. *People's Daily*, March 12, 2013.

social resources supported by highly concentrated administrative powers. Nearly all the best education, healthcare, culture, sports, and other social service resources in China are in first tier cities and provincial capitals. In contrast, it is difficult to start a career and settle down in a third or fourth tier city of small-to-medium size, where employment opportunities are in short supply. Third, the most important is law enforcement, as opposed to selective law enforcement. It should be noticed that China has a full-fledged legal system, such as labor law, compulsory education law, social security law, and others. However, selective law enforcement or outright evasion by some policy makers and in some cities have seriously compromised the authority and usefulness of the law. If by their nature state-owned-enterprises are owned by the people, the salaries their employees get should not be too much higher than the national average. If public land in reserve is indeed state-owned. Using revenue from it toward building affordable housing rural migrants to cities would greatly help ease the funding shortage for citizenization. For example, in January of 2013, the value of monthly land turnover in Beijing exceeded 20 billion yuan. On February 4, 2013, 70-year property rights for 152,600 square meters of residential and commercial land in Mentougou New District, part of Longquan Town in Beijing's Mentougou District, were transferred with a transaction value of 2.13 billion yuan, equivalent to the cost of 13,101 yuan/square meter. On February 7, 2013, 50-year property rights for a 848,000-square-meter parcel of commercial land at Beijing Dongcheng District's Chongwenmen inter section were transferred at a transaction price of 2.78 billion yuan, equivalent to 32,375 yuan/square meter (Beijing Land Reserve Center, 2013). The constitution endows citizens with the right to vote and to run in elections, neither of which should be rescinded in the place where they work and live.

In short, before the start of reform and opening up, because urbanization proceeded slowly due to the constraints of the dual household registration system and insufficient impetus for industrial development, citizenization was not a prominent problem. But since reform and opening up began, even as the urban-rural dual structure has allowed cities to benefit, both directly and indirectly, from the inflow of migrant agricultural population, the huge benefit of citizenization has yet to be fully acknowledged. This has greatly impeded and slowed down the progress of urbanization and caused the accumulation and growth of the social, economic, and environmental costs of this process. Before reform and opening-up, workers recruited from the countryside, and university graduates from the 1980s and 1990s lived in shabby dormitories and received low salaries. But their basic rights and interests were protected. For many former agricultural workers, becoming urban citizens does not mean they must be treated as elite or white-collar workers, or be able to live in luxurious mansions. Having contributed their own labor and wisdom, what they most need are to have their basic rights in the areas of housing, education, medical treatment, political participation, labor, and equal opportunity safeguarded. The social, economic, legal and even moral benefits of citizenization far outweigh the costs. The proposition that its high costs are an impediment to its progress cannot be justified,

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