


Research article / Научная статья

BRICS+ as a Platform for China's Cooperation with the Global South

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Abstract. This article provides an in-depth analysis of BRICS' role as a key platform for China's strategic cooperation with the countries of the Global South amidst radical changes in the global political and economic system. The core idea is that the world is transitioning from a unipolar order, where the US dominated, to a new bipolar or multipolar one. The author, drawing on Yang Xue-tung's theory of moral realism, argues that China seeks not only to build economic and military power but also to gain strategic authority, positioning itself as a responsible leader and partner. This explains China's interest in developing BRICS. This study examines the primary aspects of economic cooperation within BRICS, such as the reform of global governance, de-dollarization, trade growth, and technological partnerships. The author argues that despite its internal challenges and external pressures, BRICS continues to be a viable and attractive framework for developing nations, providing them with new avenues for economic development and strengthening their position on the world stage.

Keywords: BRICS, China, Global South, multipolarity, economic cooperation, global governance, economic development

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Introduction

The world system is currently in a state of change, which is generating turbulence and conflicts. The unipolar world order, established after the end of the Cold War, is now undergoing major shifts caused by the rise of China, Russia and the countries of the Global South, as well as rapid technological progress and the weakening positions of Western countries. Many experts and politicians see an analogy in the current situation with the period of confrontation between the United States and the USSR during the Cold War. And just like in the second half of the 20th century, the world is once again divided into two opposing blocs. The difference is that if back then it was the socialist and capitalist blocs, now it is, as then-US President Joe Biden stated in 2022, “a battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force” [1]. In the 20th century, this difficult situation for many developing countries led to opposition sentiments among them, which was reflected in the 1955 Bandung Conference and resulted in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. These countries openly opposed joining any blocs and jointly sought to defend their interests in the context of superpower confrontation.

Following the start of the Special military operation in Ukraine, just as during the Cold War, countries of the Global South once again found themselves in a strategic dilemma. Supporting Russia could lead to Western sanctions, while siding with the West could mean the loss of crucial economic ties with Moscow and missed financial opportunities. Regardless of which side they supported, their economic interests would inevitably suffer. It is therefore unsurprising that countries of the Global South are once again seeking formats similar to the Non-Aligned Movement to defend their interests in this new phase of great power confrontation.

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The aspirations of the Global South coincide with China's desire to reform the post-WWII system of global governance, which no longer aligns with new geopolitical realities. These two trends converge and are reflected in BRICS, which today aims to be a "mouthpiece" through which the Global South can voice its interests, while China can strengthen its position in the new, emerging international relations' system.

The goal of this work is to examine BRICS as a promising platform for cooperation between China and the countries of the Global South and to analyze the main areas of economic activity. In writing this paper, the author relied primarily on the research of Chinese scholars whose work is dedicated to the development of BRICS and its sectoral areas of cooperation.

Materials and Methods

The research is based on Yang Xuetong's theory of moral realism, whose central idea is that for a rising power like China, it is not enough to simply build economic strength. To become a world leader and gain the trust of its allies, it must also acquire strategic authority, that is, to take on greater responsibility as a guarantor of security and prosperity. The abandonment of Deng Xiaoping's "hide your capabilities" strategy, which was relevant during the early period of the Reform and Opening-Up policy, is a correct step. The "strive for progress" strategy promoted by Xi Jinping, which replaced it, puts political dignity and "friendship" above economic gain and is based on the principles of morality, justice, and righteousness [2, pp. 32–35]. As part of this strategy, China is actively taking on international obligations, which helps to improve its image and strengthen its relations with other countries. Thus, China needs not only to develop economically but also to actively create a favorable international environment, demonstrating responsibility and a willingness to take on more obligations toward its partners.

When it comes to China's activities within BRICS, Western academic circles often view the organization — along with initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank — as a means for China to undermine the existing Western-centric order and advance its own model of governance. However, from the perspective of moral realism, the rivalry between China and the U.S. is not simply a struggle for power and resources; it's also a contest for moral leadership. China aims to show that its development model is more equitable and appealing to countries in the Global South. It's an effort to create an alternative to Western financial institutions by offering a more inclusive approach to global governance. Therefore, the future of the world order may hinge on whether China can successfully emerge as a "moral leader" and present a more just alternative to the current system [3, p. 246].

In addition, according to this theory, BRICS is also important because countries around the world are "tired" of the unilateral decision-making style. Such decisions undermine a state's strategic reputation and increase mutual suspicion between states [4, p. 140]. Therefore, BRICS is important to China as a platform for consultation and joint decision-making, which enhances its image as a responsible global power.

In writing this paper, the author applied general scientific and specific methods of historical and political research, including narrative analysis, comparative analysis, and case studies. To analyze the positions and goals of BRICS, the author studied declarations and speeches of BRICS leaders.

Results and Discussion

The International Context

After the Cold War, the United States maintained its leading position on the world stage for nearly two decades. During this time, an international system emerged with the U.S. as its hegemon, gathering a pool of great and middle powers that benefited from this system and supported American hegemony. A unipolar consensus was reached, and with it, the liberal values proclaimed by the United States became truly universal [5, p. 1].

However, in the 2000s, China gradually gained strength, and by 2006, it held the world's largest foreign exchange reserves, including gold [6]. In 2010, it surpassed Japan in GDP to become the world's second-largest economy, and in 2012, it overtook the U.S. to rank first globally in goods production. By 2014, China became the largest economy in terms of GDP by purchasing power parity [7, p. 115]. Following the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, China's position in the Global South was further strengthened through the expansion of its investment activities.

The consolidation of the China's position coincided with growing discontent among developing countries regarding the Washington Consensus. The financing model based on "neoliberal restructuring" led to chronic underfunding of infrastructure, which hindered the development of the Global South [8, pp. 1095–1096]. Consequently, Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2013 "Belt and Road Initiative" was met with enthusiasm, despite skepticism from the U.S. China subsequently began to more actively develop investment cooperation within multilateral institutions such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, earning it political points in the Global South.

The subsequent increase in tensions in U.S.-China relations, driven by Washington's fears of a threat to its hegemony from China, led to a trade war that negatively impacted the global economy. In recent years, the antagonism between Western countries, on one side, and China and Russia, who advocate for a multipolar world, on the other, has taken on threatening forms. Furthermore, the development gap between the core and the periphery, which emerged in the 1840s, is narrowing, and the influence of Western countries is declining. It is clear that the Global South no longer wants to be a "silent majority" on the international political stage but aspires to be a driving force and a new variable in the international balance of power [9, p. 17].

Thus, the global shift in power is a much larger event than just a confrontation between the U.S. and China [10, p. 247], which is why BRICS is becoming a platform through which countries of the Global South can assert their interests.

BRICS Development

BRICS is currently attracting attention from all over the world, from experts and politicians in the West and in the countries of the Global South, especially due to its recent expansion. Overall, the accession of Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia in 2024 is not a new phenomenon for BRICS, as the format has been evolving continuously since it was first conceived as a Russia-India-China triangle and after its official formation in 2009. For example, in 2011, South Africa joined BRICS, after which discussions began about further expansion. In September 2017, China chaired the BRICS leaders' summit in Xiamen and proposed the following measures for the further development of the organization:

first, to strengthen global governance and deepen practical cooperation; second, to broaden the scope of cooperation; and third, to form a broader partnership and create a more comprehensive dialogue platform [11, p. 3]. Thus, the BRICS+ model was proposed. Leaders from Egypt, Guinea, Mexico, Tajikistan, and Thailand were also invited to this summit [12].

However, due to a lack of consensus on further expansion, BRICS countries decided to expand gradually, first launching the New Development Bank expansion project. In 2021, the New Development Bank began its first expansion process, accepting such developing economies as Bangladesh, Egypt, the UAE, and Uruguay as new members [13, p. 113], which strengthened partnerships in areas such as infrastructure development and sustainable development. In 2022, China, as the chairing country, officially raised the issue of expansion and organized the first BRICS+ foreign ministers' dialogue [14]. At the BRICS summit in Johannesburg in August 2023, a decision was made to admit six new members: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and Argentina [15]. On November 21 of the same year, BRICS leaders held a special video summit on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. This was the first meeting of BRICS leaders after the second round of expansion, marking the official start of a new stage of "Great BRICS Cooperation". Starting in January 2024, Egypt, the UAE, Indonesia, Iran, and Ethiopia completed internal procedures for joining BRICS and became official members of the organization [16, p. 12]. Argentina withdrew its agreement, and Saudi Arabia postponed its accession to BRICS [17, p. 7]. Nevertheless, interest in BRICS is growing among the countries of the Global South, and currently, about 30 countries have submitted official applications to join BRICS+ [18, p. 43].

At the 16th BRICS summit in Kazan in 2024, a meeting was held in the "outreach/BRICS plus" format on the topic "BRICS and the Global South – Jointly Building a Better World", which was attended by representatives of emerging market and developing countries from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. At the same time, the BRICS countries officially introduced a new concept of "BRICS Partner Countries": before obtaining full membership, a country can become a "BRICS Partner Country" and participate in cooperation within BRICS [19]. At the 17th BRICS summit in July 2025, partners such as Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Nigeria, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Uganda, and Uzbekistan already participated [20].

Thus, BRICS is a dynamically developing association that is constantly expanding its membership and, along with it, its influence on the international stage. China has played a special role in this process, paving the way for a broader partnership with other developing countries.

BRICS as the Voice of the Global South

One of the most important goals of BRICS is to create a more open and equitable international system that takes into account the interests of the countries of the Global South. To this end, BRICS leaders are putting forward various initiatives that demonstrate their commitment to cooperation with developing nations. For instance, in his speech at the closing ceremony of the BRICS Business Forum 2023, Xi Jinping emphasized that, "As a developing country and a member of the 'Global South', we have always shared a common destiny with other developing countries, firmly upholding their common interests and promoting a greater representation and voice for emerging markets and developing countries in global affairs. China has no desire for hegemony or to engage in great power games. We stand firmly on

the right side of history and adhere to the principle that 'a great path is common to all' [21]. Thus, BRICS is striving to associate itself with the countries of the Global South, advancing their interests on the international agenda. The Johannesburg Declaration stated that BRICS adheres to a "balanced approach, continuing to strengthen and further integrate the role of the Global South into the G20 agenda" [22]. In the 2025 Rio de Janeiro Declaration, the phrase "Global South" appears 13 times. The document specifically highlights the role of developing countries in global politics: "We emphasize the importance of the Global South as a driving force for positive change, especially in the face of serious international challenges, including deepening geopolitical tensions, rapid economic downturns and technological changes, protectionist measures, and migration issues. We believe that BRICS countries continue to play a key role in voicing the concerns and priorities of the Global South and in promoting a more just, sustainable, inclusive, representative, and stable international order based on international law" [20].

The inclusion of new partners from the Global South in BRICS provides significant advantages in this regard, legitimizing their actions. For example, the parties have reached a level of discussion and consolidation of positions on global issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Ukrainian conflict is also important. The majority of middle-tier countries, including South Africa, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Argentina, Mexico, Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey, and Nigeria, have taken a relatively moderate and neutral stance, disagreeing with the excessive measures applied by some Western powers to resolve the conflict. Some countries, such as Turkey and Indonesia, have even actively played the role of mediators [9, p. 21]. Additionally, in May 2024, China and Brazil held a meeting in Beijing to discuss ways to politically resolve the Ukrainian crisis. Following the talks, they reached a consensus on six key points, calling on the international community to promote conflict de-escalation, create conditions for launching negotiations, unite efforts to provide humanitarian aid, adhere to international norms to avoid nuclear escalation, and reject the division of the world into blocs [23].

Thus, BRICS is becoming not just an economic bloc but an important tool for forming a unified position and achieving consensus among its members and the countries of the Global South on key issues of the international agenda.

BRICS and the Global South: A New Chapter in China's Economic Engagement

The economic sphere remains a key area of cooperation among BRICS countries. This issue is also relevant to the association's efforts to collaborate with countries in the Global South, which need assistance and investment for their development. Today, amid a pandemic and international conflicts that disrupt global supply chains for key goods, the countries of the Global South are particularly vulnerable. The great power confrontation, which forces developing nations to choose a side, further exacerbates this situation. In these circumstances, BRICS has great potential for cooperation, and China and its economic initiatives can contribute to the development of the Global South.

As the largest economy in BRICS, China has significant advantages and seems to have a strong influence on shaping the organization's economic agenda. Let's consider the key areas of economic cooperation.

First, a crucial vector of BRICS' activity is the reform of global economic governance. The modern system of global economic governance was formed at the end of World War II, but with the beginning of the new millennium, the global economic situation has undergone significant changes, presenting countries

with new dilemmas. It is clear that it is now in crisis and requires a transition to a more advanced level — so-called “global good governance,” which implies joint participation, the rule of law, transparency, timely response, consensus, equality and inclusivity, effectiveness and efficiency, as well as accountability [24]. Chinese scholars note the following four necessary features of an international economic system. First, justice, which means the system should be free from the dominance of major powers that control a large portion of public goods. Second, the system should be one that benefits everyone. Third, it should be coordinated, meaning the internal institutions of each sovereign state must constantly coordinate their actions with the global governance system. Global economic governance is both the management of global economic issues and the distribution of global power. Consequently, the global economic governance system also reflects the significant influence of national power on the distribution of global economic power. Thus, the coordination process must be mutual: on one hand, countries should orient their internal governance toward the global economic governance system; on the other hand, they should strive to externalize successful internal governance systems into the global economic governance system. Fourth, global economic governance should contribute to sustainable development worldwide [25, pp. 109–110]. Therefore, universal prosperity should be the main goal of the system.

Regarding the issue of fairness, another Chinese scholar writes that within the framework of international economic system reform, the Chinese government should identify, expose, and reform unjust and unreasonable governance rules. In this context, the “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” concept and the “Belt and Road Initiative” are precisely China’s steps toward reforming the international system [26, p. 52]. China positions both projects as inclusive formats in which all participants have free, equal, unlimited, and non-discriminatory access to participation, decision-making, and obligations. Thanks to the BRI, China is strengthening existing partnerships and forging new ties, thereby reinforcing its credibility among the countries of the Global South.

It is these efforts to reform the global economic system that have become a key area of BRICS’ activity. The Rio de Janeiro Declaration points to the ineffectiveness of modern international financial institutions. The BRICS countries call for a swift reform of the IMF, especially in reallocating quotas so that developing countries gain more influence commensurate with their role in the global economy. They also advocate for increased representation of developing countries in the World Bank and for a change in its priorities to favor the fight against poverty and inequality. As for the WTO, the declaration expresses concern about the rise of protectionism and trade barriers that threaten global trade. Therefore, the BRICS countries are calling for urgent WTO reform and the restoration of its dispute settlement system, emphasizing that developing countries should benefit from special provisions [20].

Second, a key area of cooperation within BRICS is the promotion of a move away from the dollar in international settlements and the use of local currencies. During his visit to China in April 2023, Brazilian President Lula da Silva visited the headquarters of the New Development Bank and asked the world three questions: Why should international trade be conducted in US dollars? Why not use the yuan and BRICS currencies? Why is the world so polarized, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? [27]

In Chinese academic circles, there is a discussion about the reform and future development of the international monetary system. The current system, which is dominated by the United States and other developed countries (specifically, the

United States is the only country with veto power in the World Bank), is unable to adapt to the changes caused by the growing influence of the Global South. Therefore, China needs to either actively promote greater transparency in the decision-making mechanisms of the IMF and the World Bank or adopt the EU's approach: first coordinate its position with the countries of the Global South, and then, relying on their combined power, compete with the developed countries [28, p. 50]. It appears that China is currently pursuing the second path.

The internationalization of the yuan is one of China's important economic development strategies. It is aimed at raising the yuan's status in the international financial market and strengthening the global influence of the Chinese economy. One of the measures to achieve this goal is China's ambition for the yuan to take a central place in the BRICS payment system. South Africa, Russia, Brazil, and the UAE already have agreements for yuan clearing [29; 30].

The launch of a single BRICS currency does not contradict the goal of the yuan's internationalization. Modern monetary systems and technologies are already capable of supporting a multi-currency basket system. The weighting of various currencies reflects the relative significance of each economy in the global economy. Facilitating the yuan's internationalization will help increase its weight in the BRICS currency basket, improve national payment systems and those of BRICS countries, and enhance the stability and security of BRICS currencies. The creation of a single BRICS regional currency will have a positive impact on the internationalization of the yuan. Given the yuan's key role in the BRICS monetary system, establishing a single regional currency will undoubtedly elevate its status in the international monetary system. This will contribute to accelerating the yuan's internationalization and expanding its use in international trade, financial transactions, and as a reserve currency [31, p. 39].

Third, a key area of China's activity within BRICS is the development of trade and economic cooperation. From 2001 to 2022, the total volume of imports and exports between China and its BRICS partners increased from \$30.1 billion to \$803.988 billion, with trade continuing to expand and maintain positive momentum [32, p. 66]. In 2024, according to a report, five BRICS countries were among China's top 20 trading partners: Russia (7th place), Brazil (11th), Indonesia (12th), India (13th), and the UAE (19th) [33]. China's imports from most of its BRICS partners are predominantly raw materials. As a major manufacturing country, China exports mainly industrial goods to all BRICS partners, with the largest share being high-value-added products [32, p. 67], which aligns with China's goal of escaping the middle-income trap. Thus, trade between China and other BRICS countries is largely complementary and has significant potential for expansion, especially in areas like energy, agriculture, mining, and more.

Another important area of China's cooperation with BRICS countries is ensuring energy security. BRICS includes some of the world's largest energy consumers – China and India, ranking 1st and 3rd, respectively [34]. It also includes the world's largest energy suppliers – Russia, the UAE, and Iran for oil [35], and Russia, Indonesia, and Egypt for gas [36]. The share of BRICS+ in oil production is expected to increase to 43% after new members are included, with almost half of the world's oil production coming from BRICS countries. In addition, BRICS countries hold 72% of the world's rare earth metal reserves, 75% of manganese, 50% of graphite, 28% of nickel, and over 10% of copper, further strengthening their position in the international mineral resources market [37, p. 73].

The Rio de Janeiro Declaration emphasizes that BRICS countries will contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7, which involves the transition to clean energy and ensuring universal access to energy [20]. In May 2025, the BRICS countries approved an energy cooperation roadmap for 2025–2030, which highlighted the following priorities: renewable energy and bioenergy; hydrogen and its derivatives obtained using zero- and low-emission technologies; new advanced technologies, including e-fuels, emission reduction technologies, advanced energy efficiency technologies, etc.; as well as technologies in transport, fossil fuels, and sustainable construction [38]. In addition, the New Development Bank aims to mobilize resources for infrastructure construction and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other Global South countries. Since its inception, the NDB has actively supported energy cooperation projects. For example, in the area of energy project financing, the NDB provides financial support for the implementation of various projects, including renewable energy sources, coal, oil, and natural gas. A promising direction in the energy sector could be the creation of unified energy security standards for BRICS+ and enhanced exchanges of information, technologies, and experience in energy to overcome common energy risks [39, p. 30].

Overall, cooperation in the field of new technologies is an area where China has a major advantage. Amid the accelerated transformation of the global industrial chain toward smart and green processes, digital infrastructure provides a technological foundation for increasing the efficiency of traditional industries. In this regard, the digitalization of the economy is an important area of cooperation between China and the countries of the Global South within BRICS.

There are several tracks of interaction. First, it's about simplifying trade in goods and helping BRICS countries' products enter the international market. For example, AliExpress not only sells products directly from Chinese manufacturers to BRICS countries but also partners with them to help local companies export their products to the global market [40, p. 81].

Second, Chinese companies are building digital infrastructure in BRICS countries, such as 5G and cloud computing, using a full-cycle production model of "technology+finance+localization." For instance, Huawei is mitigating sanctions risks by integrating into the local ecosystem through technology licensing, co-building local data centers, and jointly developing digital governance rules. In Russia, a local data center was built based on Kunpeng processors. In Brazil, Huawei partnered with the government to develop an AI system for monitoring rainforests and creating an intelligent transportation network. Thanks to the ICT backbone network built by Chinese companies, Ethiopia increased its fiber optic coverage and became a digital hub in East Africa. The UAE, using the Huawei Ascend chip cluster, developed a large-scale Arabic language model and deployed a private 5G network at the Port of Dubai to support unmanned operations [40, p. 82].

Third, China and BRICS countries are engaging in technological cooperation through production localization, which allows them to integrate into local markets by establishing joint ventures, licensing technologies, and training personnel to achieve mutual benefit. For example, Chinese car manufacturers like Great Wall Motors, BYD, Chery, and NIO are actively entering global markets. They are investing in local production, setting up plants in Russia, Brazil, and the Middle East. These projects not only contribute to the modernization of the automotive industry in these countries but also accelerate the global restructuring of the sector, especially in electric vehicles [40, p. 82]. These case studies demonstrate

not only the adaptability and cost advantages of Chinese technologies but also create a new paradigm for digital cooperation with the countries of the Global South.

Conclusion

Thus, while the United States practices unilateral actions and trade protectionism, China provides the countries of the Global South with new room for trade cooperation and economic development within BRICS, and also opens up opportunities for countries facing challenges in their economic development. Currently, despite the fact that some countries, like Argentina and Saudi Arabia, have not yet completed the accession process, BRICS remains an extremely attractive format for the countries of the Global South. This is confirmed by the large number of official applications for membership and the new “BRICS Partner Countries” concept, which creates additional opportunities for cooperation. As such, BRICS is actively strengthening its position as a key platform for dialogue and interaction between emerging market and developing countries worldwide.

However, despite all its advantages, BRICS also faces challenges. For example, scholars Gabriel E. Merino and Jiang Tianjiao note the following challenges. First, there is the heterogeneity (and therefore different goals) and increasing membership of the BRICS countries, which can lead to difficulties in coordinating actions. Second, there are existing contradictions between member countries, such as between India and China, Iran and Saudi Arabia (as a potential member), and between Ethiopia and Egypt. Third, there is external pressure from the United States and its allies, who fear the strengthening of BRICS. Similar risks are noted in the article by Yang Chuqiao and other Chinese authors. Studying these challenges and developing measures to overcome them could be a promising direction for further research.

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БРИКС+ как платформа сотрудничества Китая с Глобальным Югом

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Финансирование. Настоящее исследование не получало внешнего финансирования.

Заявление об информированном согласии: не применимо.

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Аннотация. Проводится всесторонний анализ роли БРИКС как ключевой платформы стратегического сотрудничества Китая со странами Глобального Юга в условиях радикальных изменений мировой политической и экономической системы. Основная идея заключается в том, что мир переходит от однополярного порядка, в котором доминировали США, к новому биполярному или мультиполярному устройству. Автор, опираясь на теорию морального реализма Ян Сюэтуна, утверждает, что Китай стремится не только наращивать экономическую и военную мощь, но и приобретать стратегический авторитет, позиционируя себя как ответственного лидера и партнера. Это объясняет интерес Китая к развитию БРИКС. В исследовании рассматриваются ключевые аспекты экономического сотрудничества в рамках БРИКС, включая реформирование глобального управления, дедолларизацию, рост торговли и технологическое партнерство. Автор утверждает, что, несмотря на внутренние проблемы и внешнее давление, БРИКС продолжает оставаться жизнеспособной и привлекательной платформой для развивающихся стран, предоставляя им новые возможности для экономического развития и укрепления позиций на мировой арене.

Ключевые слова: БРИКС, Китай, Глобальный Юг, многополярность, экономическое сотрудничество, глобальное управление, экономическое развитие

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