ENERGY SECURITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA: AN ANALYSIS OF RISING RESOURCE COMPETITION AND CHINA’S STRATEGY AND POLICY RESPONSE

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Abstract. Energy security has become an important issue in the current international political economy; securing a stable supply of energy resources is critical for the development of military infrastructure and economic and social development of a state. China’s economic rise in recent years has put immense pressure on the global energy supply, intensifying the hitherto resource competition in East Asia. The assurance of stable energy supply has become a priority in China’s planning for economic development and national security. Over time, China has developed a set of energy policy after adopting measures in response to its dependency on foreign energy supply. The goal of China’s strategy is to ensure energy security and realize sustainable development in the country through systematic planning. This paper seeks to analyze China’s strategy based on geopolitics, economic geography and Beijing’s national interest. This paper addresses China’s new geopolitical strategy and the context, motivation, limitation and challenge in bilateral energy cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Keywords: Energy Security, Energy Development, Energy Transport, International Cooperation, New Geopolitical Strategy

INTRODUCTION

In the new century, the issue of energy security is not limited to economic concerns the problem of supply and demand (Yergin, 2006), the development and shipping of energy are also within the scope concerned; one may say that energy is an important issue that is critically related to the stable development and maintenance of global competitiveness of a state.¹ The Chinese economy has grown rapidly in recent years, with increasing demand from the population and continuing increase in gross

¹ 能源安全的概念最早是在 20 世紀 70 年代石油危機後由西方國家所提出。美國劍橋能源協會主席 Daniel Yergin 指稱，能源消費國的能源安全指的是供應安全，即以合理的價格獲得充足可靠的能源供應。
domestic produce (GDP) as the main factors driving China’s accelerating demand for energy. The pursuit for common interest has long encouraged countries in Northeast Asia to be optimistic over energy cooperation in the region, yet real disturbances and variables (particularly between China and Japan) such as Sino-Japanese conflict in the East Sea/Sea of Japan and Russia’s search for energy cooperation in the region, all disrupt the progress of bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

In terms of China’s strategy, the key objective is to establish energy security through the integration of national resources and the diversification of energy sources through foreign policy. In recent years, China has adopted a diversification approach in its energy diplomacy and emphasizes common interest and joint development for the establishment of a regional institution for resource development among the countries of Northeast Asia. From a strategic point of view, joint resource development can enhance the mutual understanding of national interest among the participating parties. The balancing of respective interests not only enhances the political will and mutual confidence for cooperation among states, consideration for different interests also removes barriers in traditional diplomatic or political negotiations and tensions in the regional environment.

This paper focuses on the issue of China’s energy security and examines China’s energy competition with both Japan and Russia. Taking into account the dual dimensions of national security and strategic interests, this author seeks to analyze the issue through the aspects of transport security and development security. This paper is divided into three main sections: after introducing the topic of energy security, the second section examines China’s new concepts of energy security and the new geopolitical strategy; the third section addresses the important meaning of energy transport and development; the fourth section examines Sino-Japanese and Sino-Russia energy cooperation and evaluates the economic and security challenges China confronts and its response to structural changes. This paper concludes with the author’s thoughts and suggestions for the future of China’s policy towards energy cooperation in Northeast Asia.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT AND THE THEORIES

As the support for economic development in the modern state, energy is vital for both national security and economic development. A shortage in energy supply severely curtails state development and affects the economic interests of a state. With China
becoming the second largest economy in the world, its energy problem has become
the focus of international attention (Asif, Muneer, 2005: 1388-1413). An examination
of the causal relationship between economic growth and energy consumption has
important meanings for evaluating the economic effects of energy consumption and
developing energy policies that corresponds to the goal of effective structural
adjustment in the short term (張明慧、李永峰 2004, 77-80). While China’s economy
continues to grow and its demand for energy continues to increase, the reality of the
security environment in Northeast Asia continues to impinge on China as well. One
may well conclude that state dependency on energy and variables in energy security
may stimulate changes in the international system and affect state-to-state relations.

Research Context

economic growth. Economic growth is an important driving force for increased energy
demand. Specifically, in the case of China, the increase in GDP and population are
important factors that facilitate the country’s growing appetite for energy (劉佩成
2004, 19-23). According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), economic and
population growth have clear impacts the demand structure of energy. China’s
economy grew rapidly after open reforms; “development” became a priority for China
while the maintenance of a stable supply of energy resource became its policy focus.
As the 2009 China Energy Development Report estimates, by 2020, dependency on
oil import would make up approximately 65% of the country’s total energy demand,
therefore it is not hard to understand why a stable supply of is critical to China (崔民

energy demand. Whether in terms of improvement in human lifestyle, economic
development or progress in civilization, strategic resources such as oil and natural gas
play a vital role. With global supply of energy resource in fast decline, rising
consumption and reduced domestic supply have caused China’s dependency on
energy import to steepen (see table 1). On the other hand, inability to control the price
of strategic resources in the global market also severely threatens China’s economic

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2 油價上揚與 GDP 也有密切關聯性。根據國際能源署(IEA)的能源 - 經濟發展模型之測算，相對於 OECD 國家而言，油價每桶上揚 10 美元並維持一年，GDP 增長受影響 0.4% - 0.5%；對非 OECD 國家的影響取決於該些國家的經濟增長對能源的依賴程度。對中國而言，油價每桶上揚 10 美元將使 GDP 下降 0.7%。假若油價持續上揚，GDP 增長率下降的速度將加快。
security (李格琴 2008, 22-23). Taking the regional geopolitical environment into consideration, in order to prevent the outbreak of energy crisis, China places high importance in the stability of external energy supply. Beijing’s policy is founded on energy cooperation and maintenance of the strategic interests of the state (王南林 2007, 65-74). Even though the use of alternative energy may increase steadily in the coming decades, fossil fuels (oil) can be expected to remain as the main resource in use due to cost and the limits of science. For most countries, the use of fossil fuels would remain as a priority due to price efficiency and long established infrastructure and skills for the production and refinement of oil.

Table 1
China’s Oil Production, Consumption, Import and Dependency Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency Rate</td>
<td>27.69</td>
<td>32.55</td>
<td>37.58</td>
<td>45.42</td>
<td>44.75</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>52.17</td>
<td>57.97</td>
<td>53.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 〈2009 年 BP 世界能源統計〉, 《BP Global》。

The Theories: Energy Security and New Geo-Strategy

With the restructuring of the international system after the Cold War, research on international security has expanded from traditional security issues to non-traditional issues that have political, economic and environmental implications (Buzan 1991, 3-20). With the intensification of problems pertaining to energy, environment, population and disease, the realm of non-traditional security centered on the human race became gradually encompassed in the thinking of national security (陸忠偉 2003, 9-95). How to confront different types and levels of non-traditional security challenges has become an important topic in international relations research and

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3 能源安全問題的核心是能源安全供給。對一國或區域而言，能源供給的威脅主要來自能源供給中斷、供應不足、價格暴漲、交通運輸受阻以及國家政策的干擾等。
policy discussions on national security (王逸舟 1999, 18-19).

China’s economic growth has caused the rise in its energy consumption and resource demand, which in turn generated strong concern from the international community on the issue of energy security. Hu Jintao’s proposal of the “new energy security view” seeks to strengthen cooperation and negotiations among relevant states on the issue of energy security and establish strategic partnerships. As Evans S. Medeiros (2009, 126-32) points out, in China’s transformation into a modern economy, its utmost concern lies in the stability of its neighboring environment. Beijing applies the so-called “good neighbor policy” to maintain cordial relations with neighboring countries, reduce the possibility for potential outbreak of conflict and strengthen institutions for security cooperation. Confronting the issue of asymmetric distribution of strategic resources across the world, China has adopted a series of foreign policy strategies that seeks to resolve its energy dilemma.

**energy security.** The global energy crisis in the 1970s gave the world a lesson on the meaning of so-called “energy security.” Early theories on energy security see international politics to be in a state of anarchy, with nations as security actors, realizing energy security through self-help and the pursuit of national interest. Energy security can be divided into the concepts of absolute and relative security. “Absolute energy security” refers to a dominant form of security. The resource consuming state controls key resource producing sites and supply chains in the world through a combined use of political, economic and military force. The state dominates main strategic shipping lanes around the world through military alliances while also controlling international energy organizations.

“Relative energy security” refers to a cooperative form of security. Energy security is enhanced through bilateral cooperation in resource development and direct investment between the energy consuming and energy producing state. Some forms of cooperation include the establishment of mechanisms for response against energy shortage, information exchange, strategic reservation, price control and the

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4 中國重視與周邊國家的防務安全磋商。與蒙古、日本、越南、菲律賓、印尼、泰國、新加坡、印度、巴基斯坦等周邊國家建立防務安全磋商和政策對話機制。定期舉行不同層級的磋商對話，主要探討亞太安全形勢、雙邊軍事關係、地區問題等問題，對促進相互理解、鞏固睦鄰友好、深化互信合作、維護地區和平穩定發揮了積極作用。

5 能源外交戰略的制定和實施業已成為國家安全戰略的重要環節，其包括維持境外能源來源的充足與穩定、能源的輸送安全、國際能源安全合作、技術與效能的提高以及保護氣候環境。
management of shipping lanes. The current scope of energy security includes: (1) energy supply. Price stability and security in shipping; (2) energy use. Sustainability and efficiency of energy; (3) energy technology. Technological development (陳新華 2008, 140; 許勤華 2008, 59-64). The non-traditional concept of energy security emphasizes interdependence and cooperation.

As Gupta (2008, 1195-1211) points out, energy is a precondition of human survival and national economic development. In the face of rapid depletion of non-renewable resources such as oil, natural gas and coal, while meeting the pressure of resource shortage, Northeast Asia also confronts the zero-sum game of energy competition (Zweig, Jianhai 2005, 25-38). As China is a part of the regional concept of Northeast Asia, energy security should be established on the system level. In other words, under the condition that state interests are not damaged, states in the region should seek to establish an integrated energy system that facilitates economic development and safeguards the security of regional energy consumption. The system should be open and provide spillover effects.

new geo-strategy. Recognizing the fact that in the age of globalization, China must base its national strategy in the harmonious world, China’s President Hu Jintao introduced the concept of “new geo-strategy” in 2005. The new strategy serves as the policy guideline for China’s national development, stressing the ideas of peace, development and cooperation. The strategy emphasizes the initiation of multilateral diplomacy, establishment of a harmonious neighboring environment and stabilization of great power relations. In October 2007, Hu Jintao proclaimed five points explaining the basic elements of the harmonious world: (1) politically, China holds the principles of mutual respect and negotiations on an equal footing while making an effort to realize harmony among states; (2) economically, China emphasizes cooperation that is mutually beneficial and complementary while making an effort to realize general development; (3) culturally, China promotes mutual learning and harmonization of different interests while making an effort to realize progress and prosperity; (4) in terms of security, China stresses mutual trust and the strengthening of cooperation while making an effort to realize common security; (5)

6 2005年4月，胡錦濤在「亞非峰會」上首次提出「和諧世界」理念。同年7月，胡錦濤出訪莫斯科，其發佈的《中俄關於21世紀國際秩序的聯合聲明》中將和諧世界理念確認為兩國之間的論述共識。同年9月，胡錦濤在聯合國大會發表的《努力建設持久和平、共同繁榮的和諧世界》講稿中闡述和諧世界的主旨意涵。
environmentally, China calls for mutual assistance and joint promotion between states while making an effort to realize harmonious development (中國共產黨第十七次全國代表大會文件彙編 2007, 45).

The new geo-strategy is mainly based on several guidelines: (1) actively develop multilateral diplomacy and participate in multilateral cooperation; (2) structure a harmonious environment, promote open regionalism and establish the foundation for the new geo-strategy; and (3) consolidate friendly partnerships with developing countries. Characteristics of the new geo-strategy can be found in the trends of geopolitical restructuring such as globalization and multilateralization. Harmonious geopolitics, mutually beneficial geoeconomics, mutually accepting geoculture and a cooperative security environment are the basic elements that make up the new strategy. The new geo-strategy supersedes traditional geo-strategy that merely focuses on strategic competition on the military and political levels, and works towards the establishment of a global development model that encompasses political, economic, cultural and security cooperation. China stresses that the new strategy will have a significant impact on foreign policy in the new era as it serves as the main strategy in response to the neighboring security environment. In response to a regional atmosphere characterized by intertwining traditional and non-traditional security challenges, the neo geo-strategy seeks to resolve regional tension and concern through an emphasis on potential political, economic and cultural dividends produced in a harmonious environment.

**CHINA’S ENERGY SECURITY STRATEGY**

China’s government agencies and academia have undertaken discussions regarding the production, transport, price and security of energy resources, as well as environmental security and security cooperation, in an effort towards designing policies in response to energy challenges (陳軍、成金華、吳巧生 2008, 62-68). Rather than being absolutely decided by the risk exposure of a state’s energy reserve, energy security is decided by the amount of influence or dominance a state has over the global energy market. China’s position in the international order will be considerably decided by its response to pressing concerns related to energy supply and transport security. Regarding future energy concerns, the priorities in China’s
energy strategy are to strengthen domestic resource development; promote cooperation with Southeast Asia; establish crisis warning systems and strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) and realize the new concept of energy security under the principle of mutual benefit.

**Transport Security**

From a strategic point of view, there are three key components to China’s energy transport: maritime transport, oil pipelines and railway. Currently, China mainly relies on maritime transport for energy imports due to cost efficiency. Oil pipelines on land are used for importing energy from Central Asia while the railway serves as a means of transport for energy imports from Russia. In terms of geopolitics and geoeconomics, the establishment of cordial relations between China and Northeast Asian countries is not only beneficial for regional security but also contributes to China’s economic development and energy security.

**maritime shipping lanes.** Due to heavy resource dependency on the Middle East, the most critical maritime shipping lane for China is the route from the Middle East to the South China Sea through the Strait of Malacca. With China’s development into one of the biggest resource importing states in the world, approximately 80% of China’s oil import from the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia pass through the Strait of Malacca; China’s economy is under major threat if stability in the Strait is disrupted. Exposure of the Malacca shipping lane to international politics challenges China’s energy security by increasing the risk in maritime transport (see figure 1). On the other hand, various disputed waters in the region are also rife with the issue of piracy, which greatly threaten the security of infrastructure and transport (Young and Valencia 2003, 270-74). In the face of potential severance to energy supplies from afar, it is critical for China to seek the establishment of a secure long-term shipping route.7

Figure 1
China’s Main Maritime Shipping Lanes for Energy

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land shipping lines. With piracy and sovereign disputes in the South China Sea raising constant threats against the security of China’s maritime transport, Beijing’s thinking for energy security has gradually expanded to the search for stable energy channels on land and domestic resource development in recent years (魏艾、林長青 2008, 23-4).

Beijing has adopted the strategic guideline of “pushing towards the West and connecting the North” (xijin beilian) to enhance its energy security. China has begun cooperation with Kazakhstan to the west while cooperating with its northern neighbor Russia through investment and joint establishment of pipelines and basic facilities (魏百谷 2008, 45-76). The Russia led Teshet-Nakhodka land route originally set for completion by 2010 (delayed until 2020) is expected to become an important channel of resource transport between China and Russia (see figure 2).

Figure 2
The Taishet-Nakhodka Pipeline
Development Security

China’s energy security is constantly challenged by many underlying problems. While designing new energy policies, the government must aim to improve the systematic and strategic management of energy in terms of overall production, consumption, trade and security and make suitable adjustments accordingly. China’s energy policy follows two major directions. First, based on the concept of oil diplomacy, China seeks to enhance security through the diversification of its global energy market and implementation of energy efficient policies. Second, China seeks to support its growing resource demand through the enforcement of strategic policies to protect domestic resource stock while expanding access to external supply. Even though it may be inevitable for China to exploit external resources in the long run, the policy choice is fraught with potential challenges, including manipulation of the global energy market by dominant producer states, price instability caused by international investment, state conflicts over the right of use over shipping channels and piracy on the high sea. In other words, much remains to be improved in China’s energy security system.

China has undertaken two significant measures towards the advancement of energy security. First, since 2004, China has made an effort towards adjustments in its energy and economic structures, hastening the transition from an oil based economy that increases environmental pressures to a greener economy based on clean energy. In November 2009, China announced that the country will reduce its carbon emission by
45% by 2020. Second, in order to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, not only has China actively sought to increase its energy partners abroad, it has also encouraged the use and development of renewable energy such as solar, wind and nuclear power. China aims to increase the consumption of renewable energy to over 18% of its total energy use by 2020 and to further increase consumption to over 30% by 2030 (闔世剛 2010, 48). The essence of China’s adjustment policy is diversion away from the use of fossil fuels while expanding resource investment in Africa, Latin America and Central Asia and joint cooperation in Northeast Asia.

**STRATEGIC COMPETITION AND COOPERATION IN ENERGY IN NORTHEAST ASIA**

Energy politics in Northeast Asia takes the form of both competition and cooperation. Cooperation centers on partnerships between resource abundant Russia and the net importing countries of China, Japan and Korea (CJK); Northeast Asia is dominated by multiple sets of bilateral cooperation and mutual competition. As Siberia harbors a rich store of oil and natural gas and is geographically located within the region, for CJK, the Russia Far East offers an optimal choice for the diversification of energy sources. In order to enhance energy security, CJK have initiated cooperation with Russia to reduce their dependency on energy outside the region and the risks in shipping. As the Northeast Asian economy grows, CJK confront the similar challenge of finding stable energy supplies to support continued growth. Although CJK have considered joint cooperation in energy development, the three states usually give priority to maintaining their respective interests in negotiations, which contribute to the consequences of limiting progress in energy cooperation in the region and causing malignant competition among the parties.

**China and Japan**

In terms of energy consumption and energy import, China and Japan share the common weakness of excess dependency on oil from the Middle East (王郁心 2006,

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8 新能源技術是實現中國經濟可持續發展的重要保障，也是應對氣候變化和環境問題的重要環節。將新能源外交和節能減排相結合，增強國際間的新能源合作，引進國外新能源技術、設備和成果，以增強中國在新能源的競爭力。推動國際社會加強可再生能源技術研發等方面的合作，探討建立安全的全球能源供應體系。
With both countries seeking continued economic growth amidst limited global energy supply, the search for external abroad would inevitably lead to the possibility of competition and conflict over resources (Suganuma 2007, 155-72).

Japan is the third leading consumer of oil in the world; the country depends on foreign imports, especially the Middle East, for nearly all of its oil and natural gas. Political instability in the Middle East or the monopolization of oil in the region by other states directly threaten Japan’s national security and economic development. In recent years, Japan is actively involved in the geopolitical competition over energy in the East China Sea. The Japanese academia has proposed the Sea Power Theory, which suggests that Japan should break out of its isolated nature as an island, adopt open thinking in foreign policy, strengthen cooperation with maritime states such as the U.S. and Southeast Asia, and protect the right to freedom of navigation and transport security.

In order to secure industrial modernization and stable economic development, China and Japan have carried out fierce competition over oil deposits in the East China Sea and negotiations with Russia on the construction of oil and gas pipelines. Sino-Japanese disputes in the East China Sea encompass issues as wide apart as territorial sovereignty, underwater resources, fishing resources and energy development (柯玉枝 2005, 21). Difference in opinion between China and Japan can be found in the Chunxiao oil field, where Beijing claims the region to be within China’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and adopts the basic stance that extraction of resources in the region accords with China’s sovereignty. However, Beijing has expressed that based on the principle of “leaving disputes aside for joint development” and in consideration for regional stability, it is willing to negotiate with Tokyo over the issue of resource development in the disputed area (梁熙喆 2004, 380-88). Japan deems China’s actions as severely damaging its rights in the sea. In response to China’s unilateral actions in the Chunxiao oil field, Tokyo has issued grave protests and plans to take appropriate countermeasures (孫國祥 2004, 230).

There are various dimensions to the East China Sea issue. As China and Japan deepen their antagonism and conflict over resource and territory, the East China Sea has
become the latest tinder for clashes between the two countries (蔡增嘉 2006, 62). In 2004, China and Japan carried out their first dialogue over disputes in the East China Sea, yet progress remains limited. Even though bilateral summit negotiations may help to ease tensions between China and Japan, domestic politics and nationalist sentiment remain factors that may bring uncertainties to the problem (蔡明彥 2007, 9).

Oil and gas pipelines in Russia. Taking into account the rich supply of energy resources in the Russian Far East, China and Japan have been engaged in chronic competition over the control of pipelines since the 1990s. Beijing and Moscow have reached an agreement on joint cooperation in the establishment of oil and gas pipelines. On the other hand, Tokyo vied for Moscow’s attention by offering economic and general assistance to development of the Russian Far East in exchange for joint energy cooperation between the two countries. Moscow’s establishment of the Taishet-Nakhodka line is a decision made after taking into consideration both China and Japan’s interests. Sino-Japanese strategic competition over pipelines in Russia remains to be observed.

China and Russia

Russia’s influence in the world diminished after the end of the Cold War. Moscow’s geopolitical strategy showed conservative developments as it meets Washington and Tokyo’s pressure, a feeling also shared by Beijing. While Russia and China share a border on the Eurasia continent, the former owns the second largest oil and natural gas reserve in the world behind the Middle East. Since China and Russia’s agreement on the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation in 2001, bilateral relations have developed positively. In other words, Beijing and Moscow have become more inclined towards cooperation than conflict in terms of geopolitics. Russia’s rich energy reserves and geographic advantage corresponds well with China’s rising energy demand due to economic growth (連弘宜 2007, 51-86).

Northeast Asia rapid development into an important economic force in the world economy has caused Moscow to take CJK into account in its geopolitical planning and note the importance of the Northeast Asian market in the 2020 energy development plan. To a certain extent, Russia relies on China as the link to relations

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with Korea and Japan. Although whether Moscow has shifted the brunt of its foreign policy eastward remains unclear, one may at least say that Russia has made the opening of the East Asian market and resource development in Siberia and the Far East strategic priorities (Goldstein and Kozyrev 2006, 163-78).

CONCLUSION

In the age of economic globalization, the advancement of economic security is critical to overall development of the state. The state may only achieve continued economic growth and security under a stable international energy system. Confronting the common challenge of energy security, bilateral cooperation between China and other countries in the region should be encouraged, as joint efforts would not only have the potential of safeguarding and fulfilling the energy demand of each country, space is also reserved for future cooperation in joint development and maritime transport. Energy security is a common challenge in the contemporary world. China’s energy security strategy in Northeast Asia should be based on global and regional conditions. By carrying out objective evaluations, China can make policy adjustments accordingly and establish a stable environment. Through spillover effects from cooperation in energy security into other economic exchanges, one could perhaps look forward to common development and a foundation of mutual trust for the eventual establishment of a multilateral security institution and regional integration.

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