



THE IMPACT OF ACCESSION TO THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. *The article examines how WTO accession influenced the development of project management systems in Central Asian countries. Its relevance lies in the need to align trade-related reforms with project environment modernization amid Uzbekistan's accession process. The methodology combines qualitative comparative analysis, case study, and content analysis of OECD, WTO, IMF, and World Bank materials. The findings show that in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan WTO membership stimulated customs digitalization, single-window mechanisms, e-procurement, and greater regulatory transparency. The scientific and practical contribution of the study lies in developing recommendations for Uzbekistan on linking WTO-related reforms with project management modernization, digital monitoring, compliance procedures, and integrated project implementation control.*

Keywords: *World Trade Organization, project management, institutional reforms, trade facilitation, single window, e-procurement, digitalization, Central Asia, Uzbekistan.*

JAHON SAVDO TASHKILOTIGA A'ZO BO'LIHNING MARKAZIY OSIYODA LOYIHALARNI BOSHQARISH TIZIMLARI RIVOJLANISHIGA TA'SIRI

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Annotatsiya. *Maqolada Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlarining JSTga a'zo bo'lishi loyiha boshqaruvi tizimlari rivojiga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatganligi tahlil qilinadi.*

Tadqiqotning dolzarbligi O'zbekistonning JSTga qo'shilish jarayonida institutsional islohotlarni loyiha boshqaruvi bilan uyg'unlashtirish zarurati bilan belgilanadi. Metodologik asos sifatida sifatli qiyosiy tahlil, keys-stadi va OECD, JST, XVJ hamda Jahon banki materiallari kontent-tahlili qo'llanilgan. Natijalar Qirg'iziston, Tojikiston va Qozog'istonda bojxona tartibotlarini raqamlashtirish, "yagona darcha", elektron xaridlar va muvofiqlik nazorati kuchayganini ko'rsatdi. Muallifning ilmiy va amaliy hissasi O'zbekiston uchun loyiha monitoringi, e-xaridlar va JST talablarini integratsiyalash bo'yicha tavsiyalar ishlab chiqilganidadir.

Kalit so'zlar: *Jahon savdo tashkiloti, loyiha boshqaruvi, institutsional islohotlar, savdoni yengillashtirish, yagona darcha, elektron xaridlar, raqamlashtirish, Markaziy Osiyo, O'zbekiston.*

ВЛИЯНИЕ ВСТУПЛЕНИЯ ВО ВСЕМИРНУЮ ТОРГОВУЮ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЮ НА РАЗВИТИЕ СИСТЕМ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ ПРОЕКТАМИ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ

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Аннотация. *В статье исследуется влияние вступления стран Центральной Азии в ВТО на развитие систем управления проектами. Актуальность темы обусловлена необходимостью согласования внешнеторговых реформ и преобразований проектной среды в условиях подготовки Узбекистана к вступлению в ВТО. Методология основана на качественном сравнительном анализе, кейс-стади и контент-анализе материалов ОЭСР, ВТО, МВФ и Всемирного банка. Результаты показывают, что в Кыргызстане, Таджикистане и Казахстане членство в ВТО способствовало цифровизации таможенных процедур, развитию механизма «единого окна», электронных закупок и усилению регуляторной прозрачности. Научный и практический вклад статьи состоит в формулировании рекомендаций для Узбекистана по интеграции реформ ВТО и системы управления проектами.*

Ключевые слова: *Всемирная торговая организация, управление проектами, институциональные реформы, упрощение торговли, единое окно, электронные закупки, цифровизация, Центральная Азия, Узбекистан.*

Introduction.

WTO accession entails not only changes in tariff and quota restrictions but also the transformation of domestic institutions. For Central Asian countries, WTO commitments mean modernizing regulations on technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, increasing the transparency of regulatory procedures, and enhancing the predictability of the trade regime. This has a direct impact on the project cycle: from planning and investment justification to procurement and customs clearance of supplies. Until recently, procurement, customs, and public investment reforms in a number of countries in the region were often implemented in a disjointed manner. A consideration of the experiences of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan allows us to understand how aligning trade reforms with the reorganization of the project environment produces positive effects.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how WTO membership has stimulated institutional changes affecting the project management system and to formulate recommendations for Uzbekistan. To achieve this goal, the following objectives are addressed: (1) identify key reforms in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan

related to WTO requirements and trade facilitation; (2) assess their impact on the project environment (procurement, logistics, customs, transparency); (3) formulate practical recommendations for Uzbekistan, taking into account the current WTO accession agenda.

Literature review.

Uzbekistan's strategic documents until 2030 link export orientation to infrastructure modernization and increased investment efficiency; protectionist support for export industries "prior to accession" to the WTO is also permitted (Concept of the Integrated Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030, 2019). Discussion materials on the draft Uzbekistan 2035 strategy interpret long-term growth as a derivative of public administration reforms and an innovation agenda (UzDaily.uz, 2019). A scientific publication on the foreign trade and integration priorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan emphasizes the need for conceptual preparation for WTO accession and interdepartmental "roadmaps" for reforms, which presupposes project development and coordination (Ziyadullaev and Ziyadullaev, 2020).

WTO materials describe Uzbekistan's accession process as an interdepartmental program of institutional change (WTO, 2023; WTO, 2024). WTO communications emphasize the development of a mechanism for reviewing legislation for compatibility with WTO norms, as well as the creation and strengthening of coordination functions on WTO issues within government agencies (including relevant departments and specialized structures) (WTO, 2023; WTO, 2024).

A number of studies in the field of project and risk management point to the importance of institutional factors (transparency, control, compliance) for the effectiveness of large projects. In particular, Flyvbjerg and Budzier (2011), using large IT projects as a case study, demonstrate that risk management errors and institutional dysfunctions lead to "tail" risks of cost overruns and deadline misses. In the context of post-Soviet countries, reports from international organizations on the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), the development of the "single window," the digitalization of procedures, and public procurement reform are particularly important (OECD, 2023; OECD, 2019). This literature review did not reveal a sufficient number of studies that directly and systematically link WTO accession to the maturity of project management in the public sector at the level of measurable institutional mechanisms; therefore, the relevant empirical evidence relies heavily on reports from the WTO, OECD, and international financial organizations (OECD, 2023; IMF, 2024).

Comparative sources show that requirements for predictability and transparency in the trade regime are implemented through project portfolios (digitization, procedural simplification, institutional coordination). The OECD records improvements in trade facilitation indicators in Central Asia in 2022, while barriers to automation and interagency/cross-border interaction remain, which are typical bottlenecks in project-based change management (OECD, 2023). The International Monetary Fund, in its Public Investment Management Assessment for Tajikistan (PIMA with a Climate Module, C-PIMA), notes the parallelism of foreign-financed and budgetary frameworks, pointing to the need for unified project oversight regardless of the funding source (IMF, 2024). The World Bank's Public Expenditure Review (PER 2022) and Infrastructure Governance Assessment (InfraGov, 2023) emphasize the importance of improving spending efficiency (value for money) and addressing project cycle management constraints, including project selection/preparation, transparency, and coordination (World Bank, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Additionally, the Asian Development Bank's policy documents for Uzbekistan describe support for reforms related to public investment, procurement, and institutional modernization of governance, which aligns with the objectives of developing project management in the context of international integration (Asian Development Bank, 2025)

Research methodology.

A qualitative comparative analysis was used. Data sources include official reports and studies: OECD materials on trade facilitation in Central Asia and publications on procurement, WTO country trade policy reviews, as well as IMF and World Bank documents on public investment management and expenditure efficiency issues. A content analysis of these documents was used to highlight institutional changes following WTO accession (customs modernization, electronic services, procurement reform). The results are presented as structured descriptions and comparative tables. In addition to text data, diagrams based on OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators (TFI) are used to illustrate the relative achievements of countries (Figures 1–3). Thus, the research methods include a review and systematization of secondary data and a comparative analysis of the practices of the three countries. A case study is also used to interpret the results for applicability to the situation in Uzbekistan.

Analysis and discussion of results.

Since joining the WTO, Kyrgyzstan has implemented reforms aimed at digitalizing foreign trade procedures. According to the OECD, significant progress is attributed to the development of the single window and related digital services, as well as improved predictability and transparency of procedures for trade participants (OECD, 2023). Additionally, the introduction of information resources on trade procedures (Info Trade Portal), created with the support of international projects, has increased the availability of step-by-step information on import/export procedures and complemented the institutional reforms of the Single Window (International Trade Center (ITC), 2026). The WTO Trade Policy Review (2021) also noted Kyrgyzstan's steps to develop the Single Window, make changes in procurement, and strengthen the regulatory framework (WTO, 2021).

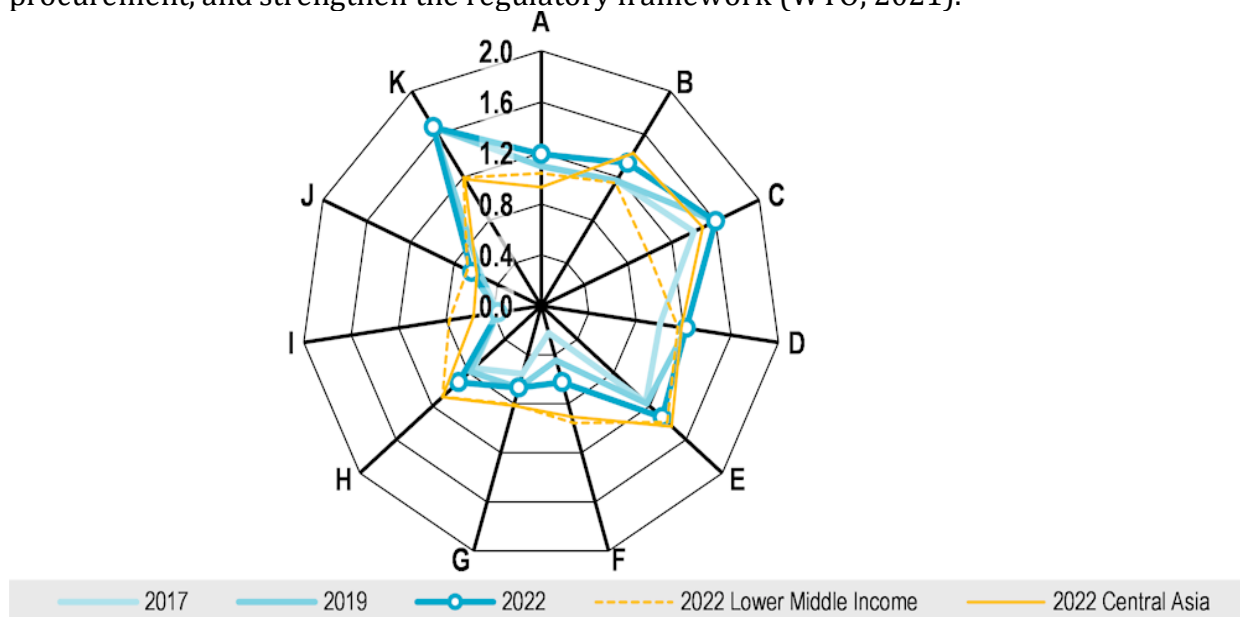


Fig. 1. Results of the Trade Facilitation Assessment (TFI) for Kyrgyzstan (OECD)

Source: OECD. Trade Facilitation in Central Asia. OECD Publishing, 2023.

The OECD Trade Facilitation Indicators (TFI) aggregate the implementation of trade facilitation measures across 11 dimensions (A–K) and are reported on a scale of 0–2 (2 being the highest achievable score). Key: A – Availability of information; B – Engagement of the trade community; C – Advance rulings; D – Appeal procedures; E – Fees and charges; F – Formalities: Documents; G – Formalities: Automation; H – Formalities: Procedures; I – Border agency interaction within the country; J – Border agency interaction with other countries; K – Governance and impartiality (OECD, 2023).

Interpretation of the profile in Figure 1 shows that certain elements of procedural predictability (in particular, advance rulings and appeal procedures) have become a strength, while interagency coordination within the country remains weaker. This illustrates the uneven nature of the reforms: the project's foreign trade framework is becoming more streamlined, but internal interdepartmental stages of the project cycle are synchronizing more slowly.

According to the OECD, since 2017, Tajikistan has demonstrated sustained relative improvement across several TFI dimensions, including fees/payments, business community engagement, and document simplification (OECD, 2023). The development of portals and "single-window" services has increased the openness of foreign trade procedures (OECD, 2023). However, according to the IMF (PIMA with a climate module), the problem of parallel investment frameworks remains: externally financed projects and budget projects are managed separately, which reduces the integrity of the public investment system. It is also important that the government of Tajikistan has adopted policy documents on the development of e-procurement (including the program for 2013–2015); however, the effectiveness of implementation depends on integration with budget planning and institutional practices.

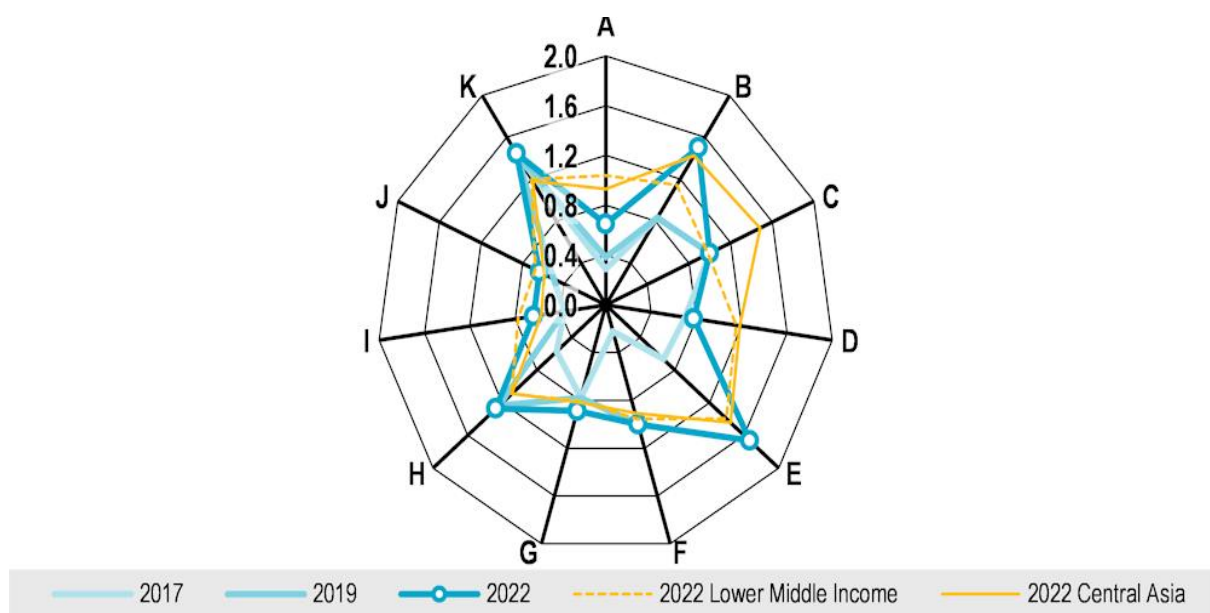


Figure 2. Trade Facilitation Assessment (TFI) for Tajikistan (OECD)

Source: OECD. Trade Facilitation in Central Asia. OECD Publishing, 2023.

Kazakhstan (a WTO member since 2015) demonstrates the most comprehensive reform model. According to the OECD, Kazakhstan is a regional leader in terms of improvements in trade facilitation and the institutional environment for procedures (OECD, 2023). In the customs area, the introduction of electronic declarations and digital tools has played a significant role; the ASTANA-1 system was developed as a component of the modernization of customs procedures. In the area of public procurement, the OECD notes that the mandatory use of an electronic procurement system has significantly transformed and accelerated the procurement cycle, as well as systematized elements of contract management and risk management.

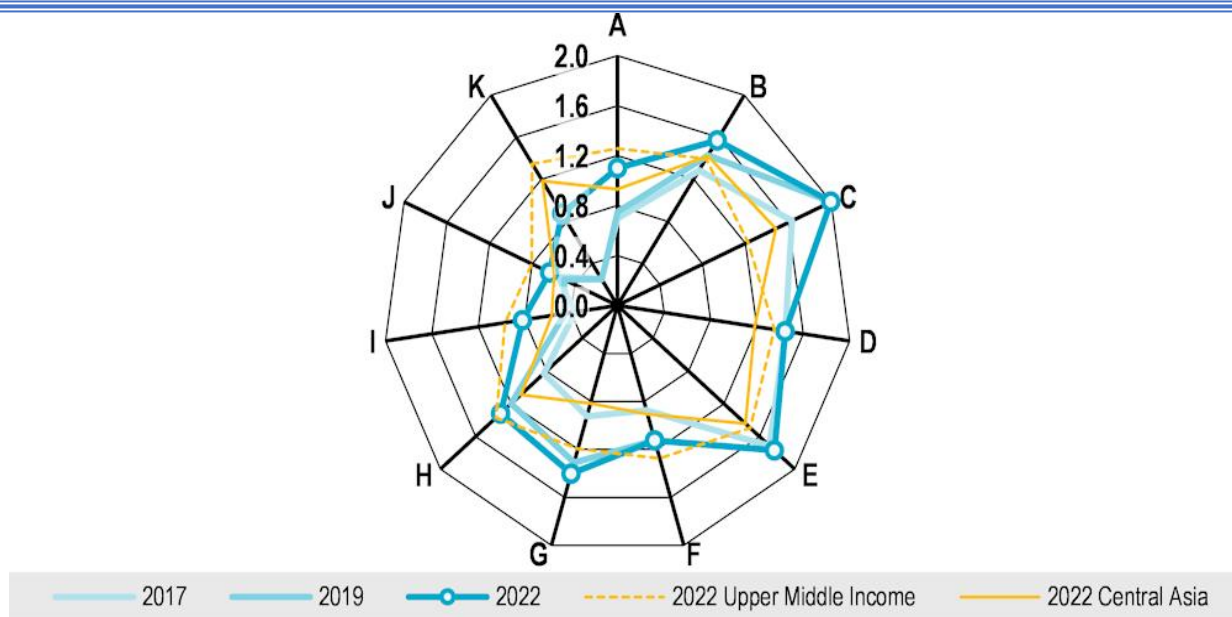


Fig. 3. Trade Facilitation Index (TFI) for Kazakhstan (OECD)

Source: OECD. Trade Facilitation in Central Asia. OECD Publishing, 2023.

Table 1.

Comparison of key reforms and effects

Country	Year of Adoption	Key Reforms	Impact on the Project Environment
Kyrgyzstan	1998	Single Window (Tulpar/SWIS), TFA implementation, Ready4Trade digital portal.	Import transparency and predictability increased; access to customs clearance procedures became easier for the business community. Reforms are relatively complete, but a comprehensive project management system is missing.
Tajikistan	2013	Simplification of the document flow, expansion of e-services (data portal, TFA).	Border formalities have been reduced, and electronic document flow has been expanded. Transaction costs at the procurement and logistics stages have decreased. However, investment projects are managed differently within the budget and through donors (parallel systems).
Kazakhstan	2015	ASTANA-1, single-window trading, mandatory e-procurement, procurement legal reform.	The most mature digital and regulatory environment for the project cycle: rapid procurement execution, contract transparency, predictable processing times. Data integration and increased competition remain challenges.

Source: Systematized by the authors on the basis of (OECD, 2023; OECD, 2019; IMF, 2024; Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2012; Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017; World Bank, 2022)

WTO membership is a powerful driver of project environment reform, as it compels countries to align their regulatory frameworks and procedures with international standards. In all three countries, trade facilitation obligations (TFAs) and related elements of the trade regime have become a catalyst for the digitalization of trade and government procedures (OECD, 2023).

Table 2.

The Impact of WTO Reforms on Elements of Project Management

Element of the project cycle	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Kazakhstan
Regulatory Transparency	Increased transparency through SWIS and online services.	The tariff and collection regime has been streamlined, but access to information remains limited (portals are underinformative).	Significantly improved through digitalization of portals and consultations.
Customs and logistics procedures	Single Window and pre-arrival processing reduced latency.	Single Window and e-declarations have made operations easier, but borders are still a bottleneck.	ASTANA-1 and digital services ensured full automation of customs.
Procurement system.	Procurement reforms have been initiated, but there is no integrated platform; product entry security (GIPS) has been strengthened.	E-procurement has been adopted, but there is a lack of full integration with budget planning.	Mandatory electronic tendering has dramatically improved the procurement process.
Interdepartmental coordination.	Limited coordination, weak links between customs, contracting and financial authorities.	Several independent mechanisms (external/internal financing) that hinder integrity.	Improved through digital connections between systems, but further steps in data integration are required.
Risk management and monitoring.	Fragmentary: compliance rules for external obligations have appeared, but there is no unified risk monitoring.	There is a lack of end-to-end control: the risks of export restrictions are taken into account, but the project risk is poorly assessed due to fragmentation.	Monitoring quality has been improved through the automation of contract data, and standard KPIs and procurement analytics have been introduced.

Source: Summarized by the authors based on (OECD, 2023; OECD, 2019; IMF, 2024; Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2012; Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017; World Bank, 2022)

First, improved trade facilitation procedures have a positive impact on project implementation. Electronic declarations and the introduction of a single-window system reduce transaction costs and delays in the import of equipment and materials, which is particularly important for infrastructure and export-oriented projects (OECD, 2023). In Kazakhstan, the combination of e-customs and mandatory e-procurement improves the predictability of delivery schedules and contract execution (OECD, 2019; Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017).

Second, the development of e-procurement changes project logic. Kazakhstan's experience shows that digitalization of the procurement cycle impacts not only the anti-corruption agenda but also the quality of planning, contract transparency, and the overall manageability of the execution stage (including elements of contract management) (OECD, 2019). For Uzbekistan, it is important to consider e-procurement as an infrastructure for contract and deadline management, and not just as a control measure.

Directions for further research and reform development. Based on the lessons learned, the following steps are advisable: (a) institutionally link reforms related to WTO accession with the updating of the project management system (unified regulations for the external and internal project frameworks); (b) develop a digital link between a "single window" ↔ procurement procedures ↔ project registry/monitoring; (c) integrate compliance checks (compliance with WTO requirements, technical regulations, customs regimes) into standard project assessments; (d) create a unified monitoring and evaluation system that consolidates data on procedure times, the share of electronic transactions, and the achievement of planned indicators. Importantly, WTO communications on Uzbekistan's accession have already emphasized the role of specialized government agencies and interdepartmental coordination in ensuring the compatibility of legislation and procedures with WTO norms. The IMF's recommendation for unified project oversight, regardless of the source of financing, is useful for monitoring the investment framework; the PIMA climate module also emphasizes the need to consider investment resilience to climate risks (IMF, 2024).

Conclusion and suggestions.

A comparative analysis shows that WTO accession in Central Asian countries is stimulating profound institutional changes that impact the project environment. Kazakhstan, which has comprehensively digitalized customs, trade, and procurement procedures, demonstrates the most mature model, with higher procedural predictability and contract transparency (OECD, 2023; WTO, 2021; International Trade Center (ITC), 2026). Tajikistan has shown progress in simplifying trade procedures but faces the challenge of parallel investment management loops (IMF, 2024). Kyrgyzstan has achieved significant improvements in the development of a single window and transparency of trade procedures, but project environment reforms have progressed less evenly (OECD, 2023; WTO, 2021; International Trade Center (ITC), 2026). For Uzbekistan, the greatest impact is likely to come from the synchronous implementation of reforms: trade and customs modernization should be complemented by changes in public investment and procurement management, with digitalization of the end-to-end project cycle becoming a key tool.

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