

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE USA AND JAPAN SOFT POWER MODELS

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Abstract: Today, as modern society is in the "fourth wave" of the so-called information society, we can see that the concept of "soft power" has also evolved *and is viewed from the perspective of international politics. This is facilitated by several main reasons. Soft power, a concept introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990, refers to the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. The United States, as the originator of this concept, is one of the world's leading countries in this direction. Japan, an eastern country, which in cultural terms, despite the similarity with the United States, manages to preserve its cultural identity, and even more goes its own way of "soft power" different from the United States, the work analyzed the main tools as well as the positive and negative sides of each country in the field of "soft power" and gave recommendations on building the "soft power" of Uzbekistan based on them*

Keywords: *Soft power, culture, USA, Japan, Uzbekistan, cultural influence*

Introduction

The concept of soft power, introduced by Joseph NYE in 1990, describes the ability to influence others using attraction rather than coercion.

"Soft power can influence both societies and individuals on two levels. The first is a superficial or external influence, visible in temporary changes in style, behavior, or clothing in a specific situation. On the other hand, deep influence affects the subject's consciousness and subconscious; in turn, this can influence the archetypes and stereotypes in the target's consciousness, ultimately leading to an imperceptible transformation.

The peculiarity of superficial influence is that it is easily absorbed, but, in turn, does not form a new mentality or culture, does not change the target's fixed behavior and thoughts, and does not affect the orientation of foreign policy. For example, you can listen to foreign music, read literature, or watch foreign films while staying true to yourself.



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Deep influence changes worldview, consciousness, and ways of thinking. Although it is difficult to achieve, most modern tools of soft power are designed precisely to produce such long-term effects.

This is especially relevant today, in the modern world, where military power is no longer the only instrument of influence; soft power is becoming an increasingly important factor in international relations. The United States and Japan, as two key players on the world stage, use soft power to achieve their foreign policy goals, but they do it in different ways

In the context of "soft power" under consideration, the United States and Japan represent two opposing models of soft power, reflecting the Western and Eastern approaches to international relations. And now let`s see what the pros and cons of each model are, and how Uzbekistan can build its own model using the best parts of each model

The United States: A Global Leader with Powerful Cultural Influence

The United States has traditionally been regarded as the most prominent global actor in the field of soft power, consistently using non-coercive tools to strengthen its position and influence in international relations. The idea that power can rest not only on economic or military capacity but also on cultural attraction and ideological leadership is central to American foreign policy thinking. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has systematically invested in cultural production, educational exchanges, scientific innovation, and public diplomacy, gradually creating an infrastructure of influence that extends across the globe.

One of the main reasons for the effectiveness of American soft power lies in its ability to craft images, narratives, and symbols that appeal to foreign audiences. Hollywood films, world-famous music, globally recognized universities, cutting-edge technologies, and political ideals such as democracy and human rights form an interconnected ecosystem of influence. This system does not function in isolation: culture complements education, technology reinforces development aid, and democracy is projected through diplomacy, collectively creating a comprehensive picture of America as both a model and a partner.

What distinguishes the United States is the scope and reach of this influence. American culture and values permeate not only allied societies but also those skeptical of U.S. policies. Even in countries where Washington's political agenda is contested, American brands, films, and technologies remain desirable. This paradox illustrates the strength of cultural appeal: while military power can generate resistance, soft power often bypasses political barriers and embeds itself in the everyday lives of people worldwide. The fact that American universities attract students from across the globe, or that U.S. music and digital platforms dominate cultural consumption, demonstrates that the cultural dimension of power has a depth and resilience that hard power cannot easily replicate.

At the same time, the American model of soft power is not free from criticism. Many scholars and policymakers argue that cultural dominance sometimes turns into cultural imperialism, eroding local traditions and fostering homogenization. Others point to double standards, in which the rhetoric of democracy and freedom coexist with pragmatic geopolitical interests. Yet these criticisms themselves highlight the centrality of American soft power in international debates: precisely because of its global impact, the United States is constantly scrutinized.

To understand how this system works, it is essential to examine the specific instruments through which U.S. soft power is projected. These include six major areas: culture, education, technology, development, democracy, and diplomacy. Each of these instruments reflects a distinct dimension of influence, but together they form a comprehensive strategy that shapes global perceptions of the United States. The following sections examine each of these instruments in detail, outlining both their strengths and limitations, and demonstrating why the United States continues to be regarded as the global leader in the sphere of soft power.

Culture

The cultural dimension of American soft power remains its most visible and, arguably, most influential. Hollywood films, the music industry, television shows, and digital platforms constitute a global entertainment empire that shapes lifestyles, aspirations, and consumer behavior across continents. From the post-World War II spread of American jazz and rock 'n' roll to the

contemporary dominance of hip-hop, streaming services, and blockbuster franchises, U.S. culture has been a symbol of creativity and modernity. Fashion brands, internet memes, and global pop icons reinforce the perception of the United States as a trendsetter. Importantly, cultural influence does not simply transmit entertainment; it normalizes American social values such as individualism, freedom of expression, and entrepreneurship. Critics, however, argue that this dominance can appear as cultural imperialism, undermining local traditions and promoting homogeneity. Nevertheless, culture remains a central pillar of U.S. soft power, capable of reaching audiences inaccessible to traditional diplomacy.

Education

Higher education has long been one of the most effective channels of American influence. U.S. universities such as Harvard, MIT, and Stanford are consistently ranked among the best in the world, attracting hundreds of thousands of international students each year. Scholarship programs, most notably the Fulbright Program, facilitate academic exchanges that create generations of alumni with strong ties to American society and values. These students often become political leaders, diplomats, entrepreneurs, and academics in their home countries, indirectly extending U.S. influence. American research centers also foster collaboration in science and technology, further enhancing the United States' prestige as a knowledge hub. Yet, the educational dimension is not without criticism: high tuition fees and growing visa restrictions limit access, while accusations of "brain drain" highlight the asymmetry of benefits. Nonetheless, the educational system continues to act as both a magnet and a transmitter of soft power, reinforcing the intellectual leadership of the United States.

Technologies

Technology is another central pillar of U.S. soft power. Silicon Valley has become a symbol of innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation. Companies such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Meta dominate global markets and shape digital culture worldwide. By setting technological standards, American firms indirectly influence regulatory environments, privacy debates, and the future of artificial intelligence. The United States also promotes internet freedom, positioning itself as a defender of open and accessible cyberspace. In doing so, it contrasts itself

with more restrictive models of digital governance. However, dependence on American platforms also generates suspicion, with concerns about data security, monopolistic behavior, and surveillance. Despite these challenges, U.S. technological leadership continues to symbolize modernity and progress, embedding American values in the digital fabric of global society.

Development

Foreign aid and humanitarian programs have historically reinforced America's international presence. Institutions like USAID provide financial assistance, healthcare initiatives, and infrastructure development to countries around the world. These programs are not merely acts of altruism; they foster goodwill, stabilize fragile states, and create favorable environments for cooperation. For example, U.S. aid has played a significant role in post-disaster reconstruction, combating epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and Ebola, and promoting sustainable agriculture. Development programs also serve as a counterbalance to rival powers, allowing Washington to compete for influence in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. At the same time, critics argue that such aid often comes with political conditions, raising questions about its neutrality. Despite these debates, American assistance continues to function as an important instrument of soft power, shaping perceptions of the United States as a benevolent global actor.

Democracy

Perhaps the most ideologically charged component of U.S. soft power is its promotion of democracy and human rights. From Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points to the post-Cold War expansion of democratic norms, the United States has consistently portrayed democracy as both universal and indispensable. Programs supporting electoral integrity, civil society organizations, and independent media are meant to reinforce democratic governance abroad. Washington frames this mission as a moral responsibility, strengthening its narrative as the leader of the "free world." However, this aspect is also the most controversial. Critics highlight the perception of double standards, where support for democracy is selective and often subordinated to geopolitical interests. The Iraq War, for instance, tarnished the credibility of U.S. democracy promotion, as it revealed tensions between values and strategic objectives. Nevertheless, the

normative appeal of democracy continues to resonate globally, keeping this dimension central to American soft power

Diplomacy

Diplomacy remains the umbrella under which all other instruments of soft power are coordinated. The United States maintains one of the largest diplomatic networks in the world, participating in international organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank, and the IMF. Through hosting global forums, initiating peace talks, and engaging in cultural diplomacy, Washington projects its leadership in multilateral affairs. U.S. embassies not only manage state-to-state relations but also engage directly with civil society through outreach programs, cultural centers, and public diplomacy initiatives. Moreover, American diplomacy is supported by think tanks and NGOs that shape global debates on security, trade, and human rights. Still, the assertiveness of U.S. diplomacy sometimes generates resistance, particularly when it is perceived as unilateral or domineering. Despite this, the diplomatic machinery of the United States remains indispensable in consolidating its global influence and embedding American perspectives within international institutions.

Japan: A Quiet Power with a Focus on Economic Cooperation

Japan represents a distinctive model of soft power, fundamentally different from that of the United States. Whereas the American approach often emphasizes projecting universal values and global cultural dominance, Japan has chosen a more restrained and nuanced path. Its strategy rests on the pillars of economic cooperation, technological innovation, and cultural authenticity. By combining modern achievements with deep respect for tradition, Japan has created an influence that is attractive yet non-confrontational, subtle yet remarkably effective.

The idea of Japan as a "quiet power" captures the essence of its foreign policy orientation. Since the end of World War II, Japan has limited its use of hard power due to constitutional pacifism and political constraints, thereby relying on non-military means to secure international influence. This limitation became an opportunity: instead of pursuing coercive strategies, Japan developed a reputation as a reliable economic partner, a source of technological progress, and a guardian of a rich cultural

heritage. As a result, Japanese soft power rests not only on persuasion but also on credibility, trust, and consistency.

Economy

Japan's economy has long been the foundation of its soft power. Unlike military might, economic cooperation creates positive interdependence and tangible benefits for partner states. Through **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** and the activities of the **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**, Tokyo has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure, education, and healthcare projects across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. For example, Japanese funding for transportation networks in Southeast Asia or clean water initiatives in Africa not only addresses local needs but also fosters trust and long-term partnerships.

Trade relations represent another dimension of this strategy. Japan positions itself as a reliable trading partner that emphasizes quality and stability rather than dominance. Bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), showcase Japan's commitment to open markets and fair competition. Such initiatives highlight Tokyo's ability to act as a stabilizer in the global economy.

Aid and investment are not purely altruistic. They generate goodwill, reduce anti-Japanese sentiment rooted in the country's wartime past, and establish political capital that Tokyo can use in diplomatic negotiations. At the same time, Japan's economic soft power faces challenges. Rising competition from China in Africa and Southeast Asia, demographic decline at home, and slow growth rates limit its capacity to maintain the same level of generosity as in the past. Nevertheless, the credibility of Japan's economic commitments remains a core element of its influence.

Technologies

Japan's reputation as a high-tech powerhouse is central to its global image. From the postwar "economic miracle" to today's cutting-edge innovations, Japanese technology has consistently represented quality, precision, and reliability. Robotics is perhaps the most symbolic field, with companies like Honda and SoftBank producing world-renowned machines that embody both functional efficiency and futuristic imagination. In the automotive sector, brands such as Toyota, Honda, and Nissan are synonymous with

durability and innovation, while Japan's leadership in hybrid and electric vehicles underscores its commitment to sustainability.

Electronics—ranging from Sony and Panasonic products to advanced medical devices—extend Japan's technological influence into households and industries worldwide. Beyond consumer goods, Japan is also a pioneer in green technologies, developing renewable energy solutions and disaster-resilient infrastructure. These innovations address global concerns such as climate change, giving Tokyo additional legitimacy as a responsible international actor.

Technology as soft power operates on both symbolic and practical levels. Symbolically, Japanese innovations represent a disciplined, future-oriented society. Practically, they create dependence: states and consumers who rely on Japanese technology indirectly internalize an appreciation for the country's values of efficiency and precision. Challenges remain, particularly from South Korea, the U.S., and China, which compete aggressively in similar sectors. Still, Japan's reputation for excellence ensures that technology remains one of its most persuasive soft-power tools.

Culture

Japanese culture offers perhaps the most striking example of successful soft power. Its uniqueness lies in its duality: the fusion of deep traditions with globally appealing modern creativity. On the one hand, traditional practices such as tea ceremonies, martial arts, Noh theater, and Zen philosophy provide authenticity and a sense of historical continuity. On the other hand, mass cultural exports like anime, manga, video games, and J-pop resonate with youth across the globe. Together, these elements create a multidimensional cultural identity that is both ancient and modern.

Anime and manga, in particular, have become cultural phenomena shaping global entertainment. From classics like *Naruto* and *Dragon Ball* to contemporary successes such as *Attack on Titan* and *Demon Slayer*, Japanese storytelling has created transnational communities of fans. This popularity also carries implicit values—teamwork, perseverance, respect for tradition—that contrast with Western individualism. Gastronomy is another powerful tool: sushi, ramen, and matcha have become international staples, transforming Japanese cuisine into a global brand associated with health, quality, and aesthetic refinement.

Japan's government actively supports this cultural diplomacy through initiatives like the **"Cool Japan" Fund** and institutions such as the **Japan Foundation**, which promote cultural exchange, language learning, and artistic exhibitions abroad. Critics point out that Japanese culture sometimes appears insular and less accessible than American culture. Yet precisely this distinctiveness gives it appeal, offering audiences something perceived as authentic and different. Cultural exports not only entertain but also build bridges of empathy, making culture an irreplaceable pillar of Japanese soft power.

Education

Education is a less visible but highly effective instrument of Japan's soft power. Each year, thousands of students from Asia, Africa, and beyond travel to Japan for academic exchange programs, research opportunities, and scholarships. Universities such as the University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, and Osaka University rank among the best in Asia, offering not only academic training but also cultural immersion. Students who study in Japan often return to their home countries with a lasting appreciation for Japanese culture, work ethic, and social order.

Programs such as the **Monbukagakusho (MEXT) scholarships** play a particularly important role. By funding international students, Japan creates alumni networks that extend across governments, academia, and business sectors worldwide. These individuals frequently serve as informal ambassadors of Japanese values, fostering long-term bonds between their home societies and Japan.

Beyond formal education, Japan invests in research cooperation and scientific exchange. Collaborative projects in robotics, medicine, and environmental science enhance Japan's intellectual prestige and showcase its capacity to contribute to solving global problems. Critics note, however, that Japan's relatively limited English-language infrastructure can reduce accessibility for foreign students, making American or European institutions more attractive. Still, for many, the unique combination of academic rigor and cultural exposure makes studying in Japan a formative experience, strengthening its educational soft power.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the framework that integrates all other aspects of Japan's soft power. Unlike the United States, Japan rarely seeks

to impose values; instead, it emphasizes **multilateralism, consensus-building, and peaceful coexistence**. This approach reflects the constraints of its pacifist constitution and the lessons of its wartime past. Participation in organizations such as the United Nations, ASEAN+3, and the G7 highlights Japan's role as a cooperative actor committed to stability and development.

Japan's diplomacy also involves active mediation in regional disputes and humanitarian crises. For example, Tokyo's contributions to peacekeeping operations, its support for nuclear non-proliferation, and its advocacy for sustainable development goals reinforce its image as a responsible global citizen. Public diplomacy initiatives, such as hosting international expos and cultural festivals, further humanize Japan's international image.

Challenges do exist. Japan's diplomatic reach is sometimes limited by its alliance with the United States, which constrains independent action, and by strained relations with neighbors such as China and South Korea. Nevertheless, the consistency of its diplomatic style—marked by patience, respect, and subtle influence—contrasts sharply with the assertive approaches of some other powers. Diplomacy, for Japan, is not about projecting dominance but about cultivating trust, making it the glue that holds its broader soft power strategy together.

Pros and Cons of the U.S. Soft Power Model

The United States has built the most comprehensive and globally recognized system of soft power. Its **cultural influence** is unparalleled: American culture is often equated with popular culture itself. Hollywood films, globally popular music, digital platforms, fashion trends, and iconic brands like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Nike are not just commercial products; they are cultural signifiers that shape everyday life across the globe. This omnipresence creates familiarity and attraction, making the United States appear as both a cultural innovator and a lifestyle model.

A major strength lies in the **infrastructure of influence** deliberately cultivated since World War II. Educational institutions, research centers, and media outlets were designed not only to attract talent but also to project American values. The notion of the "American Dream"—a narrative of opportunity, equality, and self-realization—became an exportable ideology. Students who come to American universities often leave with

more than degrees: they carry with them worldviews shaped by exposure to democratic debate, entrepreneurial culture, and freedom of expression.

Another advantage is **financial capacity**. As one of the world's largest economies, the United States channels enormous resources into development programs, cultural exchanges, and humanitarian assistance. Agencies such as USAID fund projects in infrastructure, health, and governance across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This generosity often wins goodwill, especially in states that benefit directly from aid.

The ideological dimension of soft power—**democracy and human rights**—is equally central. The United States positions itself as the defender of democratic governance, supporting civil society organizations, independent media, and electoral institutions abroad. The global association of "USA = Freedom and Democracy" has been powerful in creating admiration, especially during the Cold War, when America presented itself as the antithesis to authoritarian regimes.

Yet these advantages are shadowed by significant **limitations and contradictions**. First, the use of soft power for **political purposes** often turns cultural attraction into propaganda. Many states perceive American films, news outlets, or NGO initiatives as instruments of political influence rather than neutral cultural exchange. This perception breeds skepticism and resistance.

Second, American culture is frequently criticized as **imperialistic and homogenizing**. Rather than celebrating diversity, U.S. cultural exports are sometimes viewed as eroding local traditions and replacing them with standardized global consumerism. This has provoked backlash, particularly in regions with strong cultural identities.

Third, accusations of **double standards** weaken credibility. While Washington condemns human rights violations abroad, critics note its tolerance toward allied states with poor human rights records. This undermines the moral authority of democracy promotion.

Finally, the **global military presence** complicates the appeal of soft power. Bases in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East create a sense of intimidation that runs counter to the principle of attraction. This paradox explains Nye's later concept of "smart

power,” a blend of coercion and attraction. Soft power loses effectiveness when it appears to be backed by threats of force.

Pros and Cons of the Japanese Soft Power Model

Japan’s approach is markedly different. Its **focus on economic cooperation** creates trust through material benefits. Investments in infrastructure and aid programs, particularly in Asia, demonstrate Japan’s commitment to mutual growth. Unlike the U.S., which ties aid to political reforms, Japan emphasizes partnership and respect for sovereignty. This strategy reduces resistance and positions Japan as a reliable economic partner. Japan’s **technological innovation** further boosts its image. With leading positions in robotics, automotive production, and electronics, Japan is seen as a global symbol of efficiency and precision. Unlike American dominance in IT platforms, Japan’s reputation lies in tangible products that represent discipline and craftsmanship.

Cultural appeal is another strength. Anime, manga, video games, and cuisine form the heart of Japan’s **cultural diplomacy**. Unlike Hollywood, Japanese culture projects both tradition and modernity. It offers audiences something different: not just entertainment, but a worldview rooted in harmony, perseverance, and respect for community. This duality—traditional arts alongside pop culture—creates authenticity and diversity of appeal. Japan also enjoys a **peaceful image**. Constitutional pacifism and the absence of large-scale military interventions allow it to be perceived as a stable, non-threatening partner. In regions scarred by conflict, Japan’s reputation as a peaceful country is a powerful soft power asset.

Yet Japan faces constraints. Its **political influence** is limited compared to the United States. Reliance on the U.S. for military security prevents Tokyo from pursuing fully independent strategies. This dependence weakens the credibility of Japan’s diplomatic leadership.

Another limitation is **cultural insularity**. While anime and sushi are globally popular, some aspects of Japanese culture remain difficult for outsiders to access. The complexity of language, etiquette, and traditions can create distance rather than closeness. This contrasts with the easily consumable and globally adapted nature of American culture.

Japan's **reserved approach** to projecting soft power also reduces its impact. While initiatives like "Cool Japan" exist, they lack the aggressive marketing strategies of Hollywood or Silicon Valley. As a result, Japan sometimes fails to fully capitalize on its cultural assets.

Finally, **financial limitations** constrain its ability to compete with the U.S. or China. Although Japan remains a major economy, its long-term stagnation and demographic challenges limit its capacity to fund large-scale aid programs.

Comparative Analysis: U.S.A vs. Japan

The United States and Japan represent two contrasting yet complementary models of soft power, shaped by very different historical trajectories. The U.S. emerged from World War II as a superpower with global military and economic reach, naturally projecting not only hard power but also universalist values—liberal democracy, human rights, and capitalism. Japan, conversely, rose from defeat with constitutional constraints on its military, which redirected its foreign policy toward non-military forms of influence such as trade, culture, and technology. These conditions laid the foundation for two distinct philosophies: an extroverted, universalist American model and a restrained, cooperative Japanese model.

Both countries employ similar categories of tools, yet the style of their application differs significantly.

- **Culture:** U.S. culture dominates global popular culture through Hollywood, pop music, fashion, and digital platforms. Its strength lies in its ubiquity, but it is also criticized for homogenizing and being imperialistic. Japan's cultural appeal is subtler and more niche, combining modern phenomena such as anime, manga, and gaming with traditional arts and gastronomy. Rather than aiming for universality, Japan capitalizes on distinctiveness and authenticity.

- **Education:** American universities attract hundreds of thousands of international students, producing global elites trained in U.S. values. Japan's educational reach is smaller but deeper: exchange programs and scholarships foster long-term bonds, particularly within Asia, and create alumni networks tied to Japanese society.

- **Technology:** The U.S. dominates in digital platforms and the internet economy, embedding its standards in global communication. Japan, meanwhile, excels in robotics, automotive engineering, and green innovation, presenting itself as a leader in precision and sustainability.
- **Development:** U.S. aid is often tied to democratization and political reform, reinforcing its ideological mission. Japan focuses on infrastructure, economic modernization, and non-conditional assistance, which strengthens its credibility as a cooperative partner.
- **Diplomacy:** American diplomacy is assertive and often unilateral, positioning the U.S. as the leader of the “free world.” Japan’s diplomacy is cautious, consensus-driven, and multilateral, consistent with its pacifist constitution.

As we can see, perceptions of American and Japanese soft power differ sharply. U.S. culture is admired yet resisted; it penetrates every society, yet often triggers suspicion of hidden political agendas. Japan’s influence is more modest in scale but generally more positively received, precisely because it avoids overt ideological imposition. For neighbors such as China and South Korea, however, historical grievances complicate acceptance of Japan’s peaceful image.

Despite their differences, the models are complementary. The U.S. demonstrates the effectiveness of visibility and global infrastructure, while Japan illustrates the power of restraint and authenticity. Together, they reveal that soft power is not a single formula but a spectrum of strategies: one extroverted, the other introverted; one universalist, the other particularist.

Conclusion

The United States and Japan represent two different models of soft power, reflecting Western and Eastern approaches to international relations. The United States uses soft power as a foreign policy tool, seeking to expand its influence and achieve its geopolitical goals. Japan uses soft power as a tool for national development, seeking to strengthen its international authority and increase its competitiveness.

It can be said that the US and Japan use soft power to achieve their foreign policy goals, but they do so in different ways. The US, with its global cultural influence, seeks to promote its values and interests on the world stage. Japan, with its focus on

economic cooperation and technological innovation, builds strong ties with other countries through investment and exchange.

Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, the effectiveness of using soft power depends on the context and specific goals. It is important to understand that soft power is a tool that must be used carefully and strategically to achieve its goals, and, depending on the context, it must be used accordingly.

A distinctive feature of the American model of “soft” power is the use of technologies to penetrate the social and political space of other countries by creating, on their territory, support structures of American (and generally Western) influence in the form of foreign-funded organizations.

Japan also actively uses this kind of tool, which we can see in several of the largest institutions for the promotion of Japanese culture, such as JICA or the Japan Foundation, but unlike the United States, which seeks to immerse and promote its culture in this country, Japan uses these organizations for other purposes.

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