



A geographical assessment of labour immigration in Turkey¹

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Abstract

Turkey has a unique geographical location, and serves as a bridge between East and West, and between Asia and Europe. While it has been a source country for labour migration, especially to Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, it has become a destination country, particularly for those from neighbouring countries in the 1990s. Immigrants from more distant countries were also attracted. Due to the end of the Cold War (the dissolution of the Soviet Union), economic problems resulting from regime change in the Eastern Bloc countries, China's emergence as an economic power affecting the world economy, along with globalization, political problems and civil wars in the Middle East and Africa, a proportion of the people living in these geographical regions migrated to Turkey to find jobs. The aim of the present study is to investigate the quantitative changes concerning foreigners with work permits in Turkey and to research their origins. The study also presents some figures on distribution by gender and country of origin. To achieve this aim and investigate the present state of Turkey, statistical data concerning labour migration have been used. It is concluded that Turkey being considered as a country mostly sending labour emigrants has turned into a country receiving labour immigrants, not only from neighbouring countries but also from distant countries thanks to its unique geographical location and economic diversity.

Keywords: Geography; Immigrant; Labour; Immigration; Turkey

1. Introduction

In today's world, the number of people migrating from the country in which they were born to a foreign country, either permanently or temporarily, or who are mobile between continents, regions and countries, increases with each passing day (Massey et al., 1993; Bartram, 2005; Harald, 2006; Cohen and Sirkeci, 2011). While economic, social, cultural and environmental factors could cause such population movements, some obligatory factors could lead to these population movements as well, such as repression, conflicts, wars and natural disasters. In the Age of Globalization, the circulation of people, capital, materials and information around the world accelerates more and

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Turkish Migration Conference 2014, Regent's University London, Regent's Centre for Transnational Studies, 30 May – 1 June 2014, London, United Kingdom.

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more. Increase in population movements is a change caused by globalization (Sassen, 1998; Held and McGrew, 2003). According to data from the United Nations in 2013, 232 million people (or, in other words, 3.2 per cent of the world's population) maintain their lives in another country as an immigrant. This figure was 175 million in 2000 and it was 154 million in 1990 (UN Population Facts, 2013/2).

Referring to data from the International Organization of Migration and the International Labour Organization, 105 million people have immigrated to another country so as to work there. The form, direction and type of immigration, together with the rate of male and female immigrants, change every day, and it makes immigration a dynamic and complicated matter. Today, many researchers from different disciplines are making efforts to contribute to the understanding of immigration. The departure and arrival spaces of immigration are two different locations. As immigration leads to social, economic, cultural and spatial changes in both locations, the interaction between people and space is included in the research subjects of geography (Tanoglu, 1952–1953; Mutluer, 2003; Doganay, 2011; Deniz and Ozgur, 2013).

There is no doubt that immigration is as old as the history of humanity. Now, in today's 'Age of Migrations', where rapid changes and developments are happening, it has become essential to analyse immigration in detail and develop good management of immigration (Castles et al., 2013) because immigration has started to affect many more people from different locations in the world. The objective of this study is to carry out a geographical assessment regarding labour immigrants coming from different countries and regions to Turkey, which has a unique geographical position between East and West, and North and South, in order to work with a work permit, and what kind of changes these labour immigrants show in the profile of countries with regard to immigration types.

Turkey has been both an emigration country and an immigrant-receiving country, at different periods, since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The international immigration movements which have affected the country since the establishment of the Turkish Republic have been studied by many and are relatively well known; and hence will not be included in this study (Simsir, 1989; Ari, 2000; Clark, 2008; Karpat, 2010). In this study, we will analyse in detail the population movements affecting Turkey since 2000 with an emphasis on growing labour immigration.

2. Data and Methods

In order to achieve the study's objective, we have reviewed the literature and made some observations about the large cities of Turkey, such as Istanbul, Bursa, Ankara, Antalya and Izmir. We have made contact with the relevant ministries and institutions and tried to obtain data. The number of people coming to Turkey as tourists and then working there illegally has increased notably. Another point that needs to be highlighted is that these people are not reflected in the statistics. In this study, we will benefit from statistics obtained from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Turkey concerning foreigners getting work permits in Turkey in 2012.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Immigration to Turkey

As it is well known, Anatolian Peninsula has become an area throughout the history where people from different regions of the world and accordingly different civilizations and cultures have met and interacted with each other. The geographical position of the Turkey has historically been a reason for immigration in this part of the world.

3.1.1 International immigration affecting Turkey from 2000 to present day

Turkey started to become an immigrant-receiving country after the 1990s, due to the transformation at the end of the Cold War, and owing to its geographical position, a transit country in irregular immigration oriented to Western countries. It has continued since the early parts of 2000s in Turkey and foreign immigrants have become more visible in society within the last decade. Globalization, accelerating flows of people, capital, materials and information around the world, has a substantial influence on the cities as well. The power of cities in affecting the world economy is classified according to the size of the influence area. This classification has been subject to change in time (Sassen, 2002; Taylor, 2004; Karabag, 2011). The cities in the world are linked up with each other through the network model of connections with the advanced producer service firms in these cities (Beaverstock et al., 2000). According to GaWC-2012, Istanbul is in the group of alpha-cities. This means that Istanbul is one of the most important cities in providing a connection with advanced economic regions and states and the world economy. There are some other cities in this group, such as Seoul, Johannesburg, San Francisco, Barcelona, Bangkok, Buenos Aires and Munich. Foreign labour immigrants, both with a work permit and working illegally, participate in the labour market of Istanbul. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, in 2013, the population of Istanbul was 14,160,467. In other words, 18.5 per cent of Turkey's population lives in Istanbul. The

population density of Istanbul is 2.725 per km². As it has been throughout history, the city of Istanbul continues to make an enormous contribution to the Turkish economy. The foreign direct investment that started flowing to Turkey in the 2000s, due to the influence of globalization, has continued, and Istanbul has come into view as a regional centre. The importance of Istanbul in being the regional centre in the area covering the Balkans, the Middle East and the North Africa, has been rising around the world (Keyder, 2005). Due to internal and external factors, decentralization of industry has been realized in Istanbul and important progress has been seen in the sectors of trade, tourism, banking, law, insurance, communication, transportation, culture, and education. Thus, the labour market in the service sector has been enlivened and significant changes have been observed in the central business area (Goney, 1995). From this information, it is possible to say that Istanbul is a centre of attraction for foreign labour immigrants in both the immediate and the remoter geographical regions to Turkey.

As a result of social, economic and cultural developments in the country, especially in Istanbul, the developed coastal regions in the West and South of Turkey have become a centre of attraction for foreign labour immigrants coming from Russia and former Eastern Bloc countries (the home care services and sale sector in Istanbul, the tourism sector in Antalya) and for retirement immigrants coming from Western Europe (Sudas, 2012). Turkey has become an attractive country in which to be an immigrant.

With the increase in the number of foreign direct investments and multinational companies in Turkey (Yavan, 2006), the highly educated labour immigrants (managers, engineers, technicians, foreign language teachers, academics and artists) from the developed Northern countries have come to Turkey for fixed term employment. The number of these labour immigrants has increased over time.

Many African immigrants have come to Turkey, particularly to Istanbul, in the last decade because of the poverty, conflicts, wars and environmental degradation in Africa. There are some African immigrants who come to Turkey for higher education, while some of them plan to use Turkey only as a transit country by living here for a temporary period of time. Some of the African immigrants start to live and work in Turkey during this process.

Citizens of Asian countries have also come to Turkey in order to work, especially Chinese (entrepreneurs and employees working in Chinese restaurants), as China has started to become a notable power in the world economy, the Japanese, owing to the Japanese investments in Turkey (in the industrial and construction sectors requiring advanced technology), the Filipinos working in home services, and the Indonesians working in spa centres.

In addition, owing to the events in the Arab world in December 2010 and the increasing interaction between Turkey and the Arab world, the number of people from Arab countries visiting Turkey has increased. Turkey has accepted many refugees escaping from the Civil War in Syria since April 2011. In the light of data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is 641,906 as at 19 March 2014 (Figure 1).

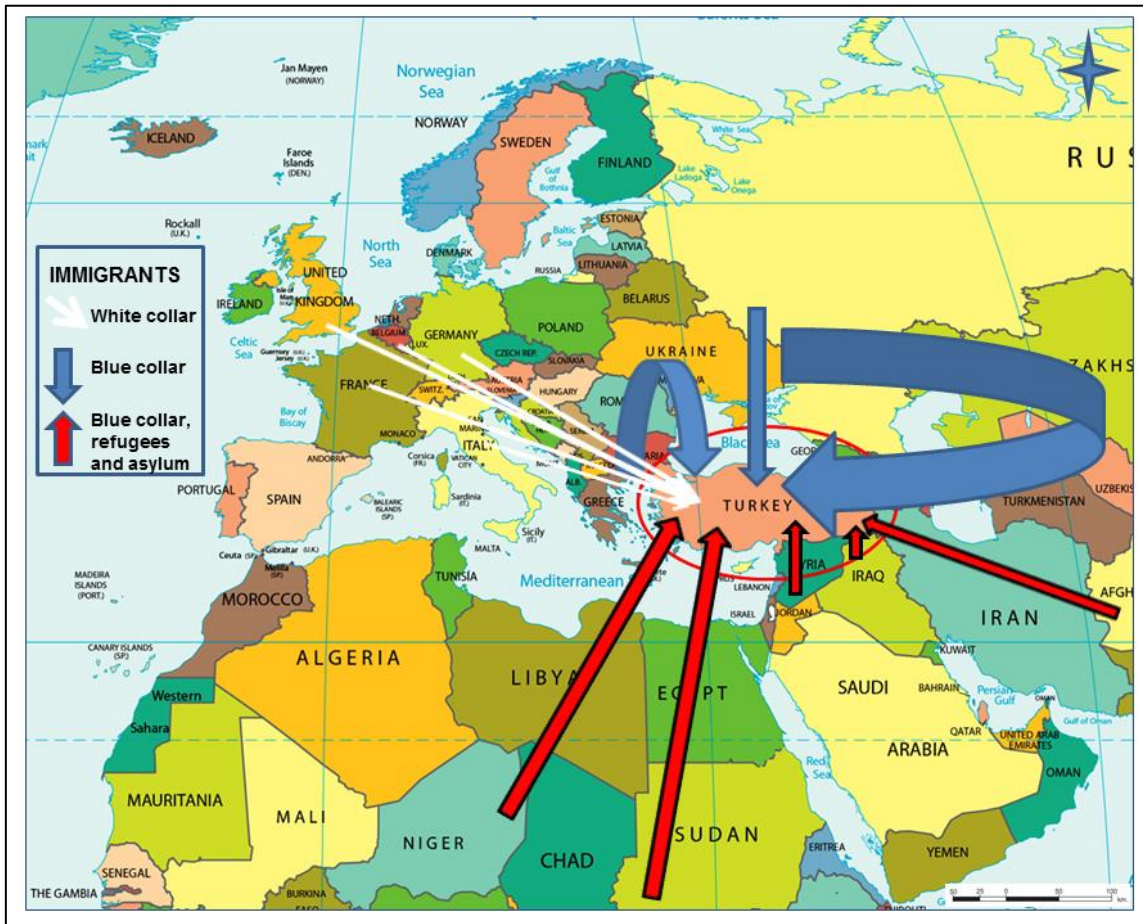


Figure 1. Labour immigrants, refugees and asylum coming from different world regions to Turkey

There are various factors which make Turkey an immigrant-receiving country and a transit country as follows: illegality in Turkey's economy cannot be eliminated; the ease of getting a tourist visa; the differences in income between the neighbouring countries; the geographical, cultural and historical closeness between Turkey and neighbouring countries; social and economic changes, and the fact that trade between Turkey and the countries in its immediate environment has substantially improved. In comparison with other parts of the world, such as Western Europe, Turkey does not use foreign immigration as a subject for internal politics and it has a less apparently racist and discriminatory attitude towards foreign immigrants in its society.

3.1.2. The dispersion of foreigners with work permits in Turkey in 2012 by countries and world regions

Labour immigrants participate in the labour market legally or illegally. Many factors arising out of state policies, procedures, employers and labour immigrants influence and determine participation in the labour market (Toksoz, 2006; Lordoglu, 2007; Erder, 2007; Yakar and Timurcin, 2013). A considerable proportion of immigrants coming to Turkey in pursuit of finding an occupation work illegally.

The statistics related to foreigners getting work permits give important information about labour immigrants working legally in Turkey, i.e., from which countries and which parts of the world these immigrants come from, and the differences in the numbers of male and female immigrants by country.

In Turkey, work permits used to be obtained from numerous and varied institutions. In 2003, they started to be given out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Turkey. Looking through these statistics, we can find the results as below.

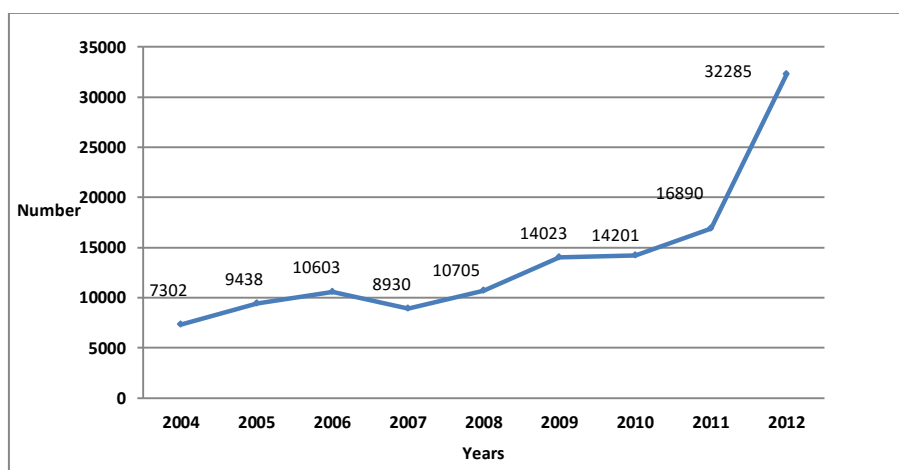


Figure 2. The number of the foreigners obtaining work permits in Turkey by year (2004-2012). *Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Turkey*

In the period 2004 to 2012, the number of foreigners obtaining work permits increased notably, except in 2007. Compared to 2011, the number of work permits nearly doubled in 2012 (Figure 2).

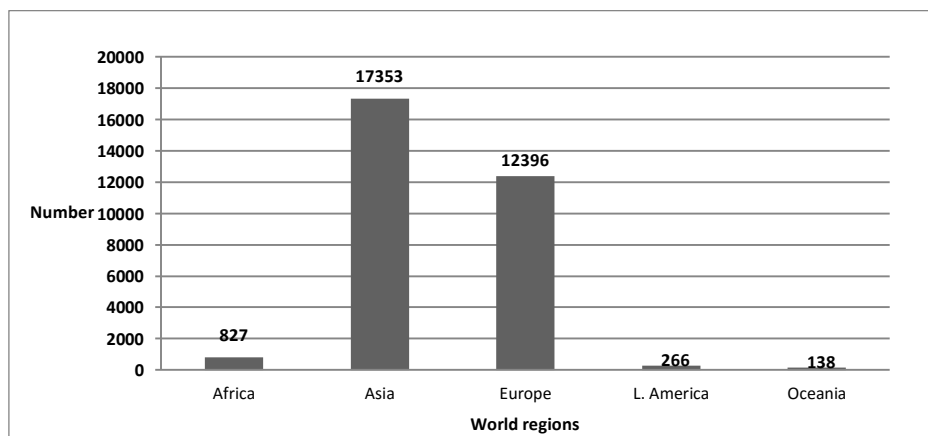


Figure 3. The distribution of foreigners obtaining work permits in Turkey, by world region (in 2012). *Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Turkey*

When studying the dispersion of foreigners obtaining work permits according to world regions, it is seen that labour immigrants come from the countries of Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America and Oceania (Figure 3). This result, preserving the importance of the South-North directional immigration, shows that the developments in the Asian economies and the increase in the number of countries participating in the world immigration networks, the South-South directional international immigrations come into prominence and they are showing a tendency to increase.

Looking into the dispersion of foreigners getting work permits in Turkey in 2012 according to the countries, it can be seen that work permits are given mostly to citizens of Georgia (19.9 per cent), Ukraine (8.1 per cent), China (7.6 per cent), Russian Federation (6.9 per cent) and Turkmenistan (4.4 per cent) (Figure 4).

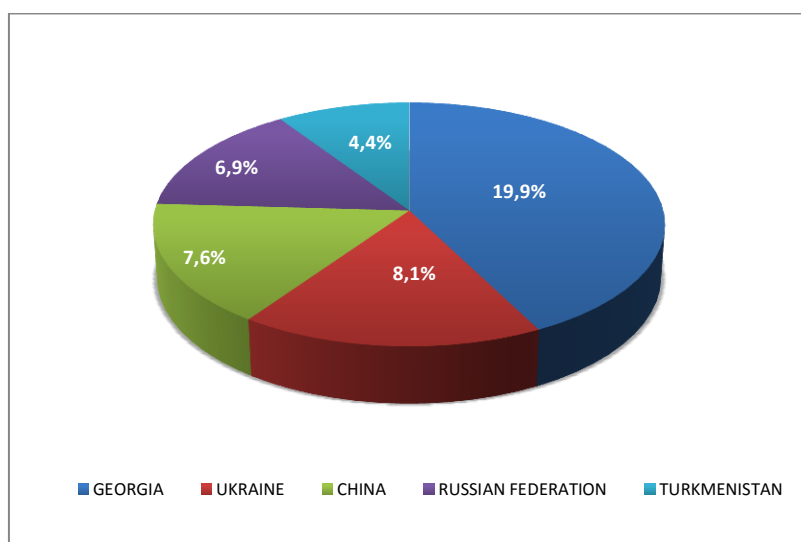


Figure 4. Top five countries for citizens obtaining work permits in Turkey (in 2012). *Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Turkey*

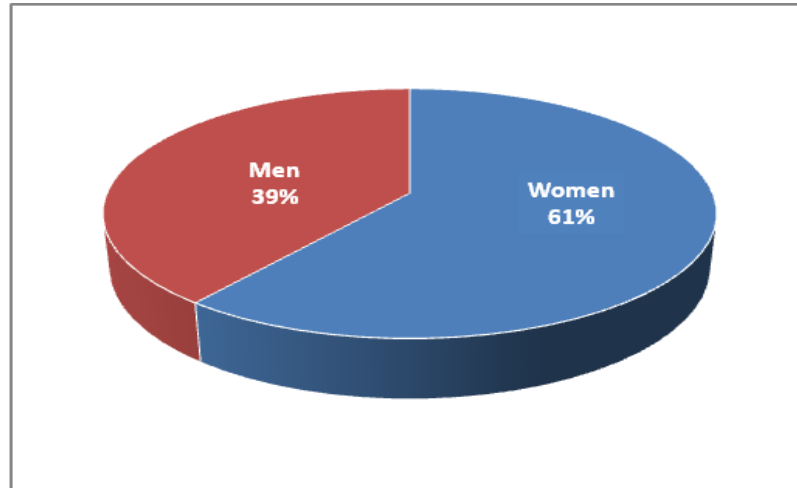


Figure 5. The percentage of foreigners obtaining work permits in Turkey by gender (in 2012). *Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Turkey*

The total number of male and female foreigners getting work permits in Turkey in 2012 was 32,285. As we study the dispersion of them on the basis of countries and according to gender, it is seen that the number of female labour immigrants (19,559 in total and 61 per cent) getting work permits in Turkey is more than male immigrants (12,726 in total and 39 per cent) (Figure 5). In this case, it seems that it is not only men who participate in the labour immigration but increasingly it is women.

An analysis of how the number of male and female immigrants getting work permits in Turkey changes according to the countries provides us with different conclusions about labour immigration. It can be seen that the number of female immigrants coming from countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and the Philippines and then getting work permits in Turkey, is much more than the number of male immigrants getting work permits who are also citizens of these countries. On the other hand, the number of male immigrants coming from countries such as China, Uzbekistan, Iran, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, South Korea and Spain and getting work permits in Turkey is much more than the number of female immigrants getting work permits who are also citizens of these countries.

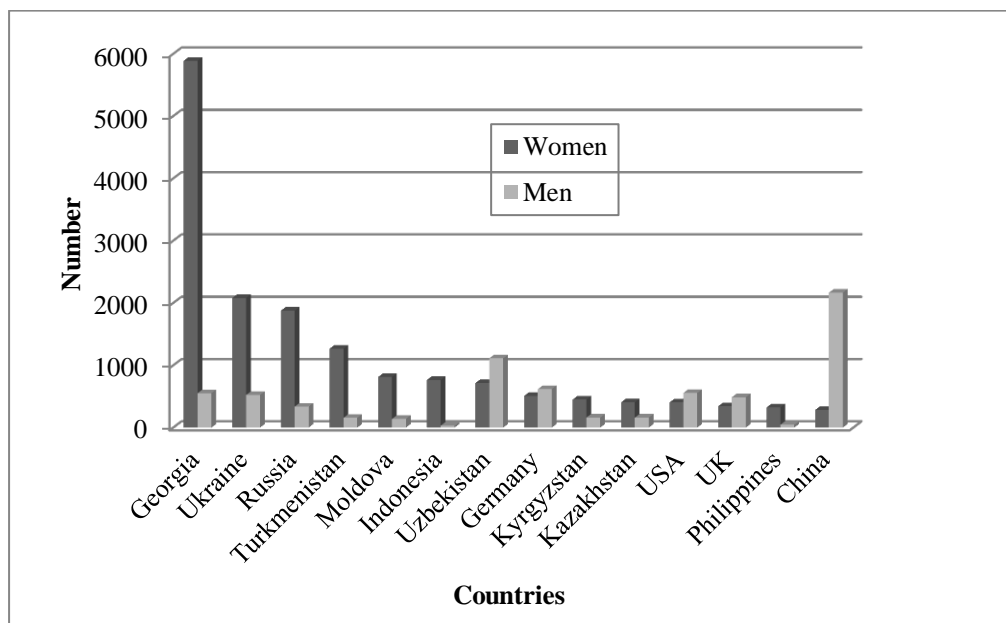


Figure 5. The number of women and men obtaining work permits in Turkey (2012). *Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Turkey*

A considerable number of women coming to Turkey and getting work permits come to work in the home services in the cities, especially in Istanbul. There could be some well-educated women among these female immigrants. However, it is known that female labour immigrants generally seek jobs that could be done by people with a preliminary and secondary level education in Turkey's labour market. On the other hand, looking into the countries of origin of male immigrants getting work permits, yields different results. It is discovered that male labour immigrants come from countries such as Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, South Korea and Spain. The countries of origin of male immigrants getting work permits in Turkey show a parallel with the countries that have the highest foreign capital investment in Turkey. Starting from this point of view, we conclude that men come to Turkey in order to work in the jobs requiring higher education (high level manager, finance sector worker, engineer, foreign language teacher, etc.) and there is an important difference between men and women in participation in the labour market in terms of the qualification levels of the jobs.

4. Conclusion

One of the significant effects of globalization is that many countries around the world have become both immigrant-receiving and an emigrant country. Turkey has become a transit and an immigrant country in the 'Age of Migrations' rather than a traditional emigrant country. Many people coming from both nearer and further geographical regions try and maintain their lives in Turkey legally but most are illegally working to get more income. Transnational immigration not only causes

important and notable transformations in social, economic and cultural structures but also in the spaces. From this point of view, the transnational immigrants oriented to Turkey should be managed better by designing prospective plans and reasonable implementation of this plan instead of avoiding transnational immigration and immigrants. Although positive developments have recently been occurring regarding legislation and regulation of immigration in Turkey, there is a long way to go concerning subjects such as terminating the informality in the economy, registration of foreign employees, and solving their problems. In conclusion, we are of the opinion that we will need many more multidisciplinary and even trans-disciplinary studies in order to understand better the social, economic, cultural and spatial effects of immigration which is an unpreventable fact.

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