



# Global Health Policy: Perspectives from the EU and China

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# Preface

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The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a global health crisis the world has not witnessed within a century – since the “Spanish Flue” pandemic of 1919. Unlike 1919, when many governments were still busy dealing with the aftermaths of World War I, the COVID-19 pandemic was met with considerable counter-measures across the world.

Though almost all countries took measures against the spread of COVID-19, approaches, strategies and successes were distributed unevenly: Most East Asian countries, notably China, followed a strict “Zero Covid” strategy with severe lockdowns, border closures and a quick comeback of relative normality. European countries, in contrast, were hesitant to enact such measures and adapted their policies according to the numbers of infections, trying to “live with Covid” while providing a massive vaccine rollout.

From the distribution of protective equipment to the development and distribution of vaccines, COVID-19 has underlined the necessity for international cooperation and coordination in the fight against global health crises. The likelihood for those is increasing in the context of climate change, globalisation and the encroachment of humanity into previously untouched natural habitats of various species. The question is not if such a global health crisis will occur again, but only when.

In order to take stock of anti-pandemic policies so far, compare different approaches and identify best practices, the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation’s office Shanghai has invited two scholars from both the EU and China to present the European and Chinese approaches to Global Health policies.

# The EU's Global Health Policy

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## INTRODUCTION

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union (EU) has been engaged on many fronts to support its member states, third countries, and international organisations in fighting the indirect and direct effects of the pandemic, including assisting in socioeconomic recovery and taking action on trade, humanitarian aid, and public health. In the area of health in particular, the EU has been implementing and supporting initiatives at the European and the global level. The EU supports its member states by ensuring cooperation and the exchange of information (European Council/Council of the European Union 2021), while at the same time, it advocates a global approach to quelling the pandemic, emphasising global solidarity and multilateralism.

Although the EU has always promoted multilateralism, it has never been particularly supportive of the World Health Organization (WHO), and itself has not been a driving force in global health policy. Thus, global health policy has never been one of the EU's key priorities. Furthermore, the EU's role in global health is substantially influenced by significant fragmentation within the European global health community, diverging interests of member states, and varied understandings of global health (Steurs et al. 2018:433). Therefore, in years past, EU global health policies lacked coherence as well as visibility. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, marks a turning point, with the EU becoming a more visible actor in global health policy.

For a better understanding of the EU's scope for action in global health policy, this article outlines the EU's basis for action, referring to the most relevant frameworks, actors, instruments, and partnerships while also addressing recent initiatives to alter the EU's role. Comprehending this is vital to grasp what the EU can do to support the COVID-19 response and future health emergencies.

## LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE EU'S GLOBAL HEALTH POLICY

The EU's scope for action in global health is based on the competencies it receives from member states to act internally, which highlights the interrelationship of internal and external health policy. According to Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the member states bear responsibility for health policy, from organising and de-livering medical care and health services to defining the actual policies. By contrast, the EU complements national policies, such as through monitoring and issuing early warnings of serious cross-border health threats and combatting them (European Union 2012a:122). The EU shall coordinate its health policies and activities with the member states, and together, they shall foster cooperation with third countries and international organisations (ibid.:123). In this sense, EU health policy pursues three strategic objectives: protect and improve the health of EU citizens, support the modernisation of health infrastructure, and improve the efficiency of Europe's health care systems (EU Commission 2021). In short, the EU is to ensure a high level of human health protection through the definition and implementation of all its policies and activities (European Union 2012a:122). This obligation can also be found in Article 35 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which emphasises the EU's commitment to the human right to health and asserts that "[e]veryone has the right of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices" (European Union 2012b:402). The human right to health should not only guide all internal policies and activities, but should also be upheld and promoted in the EU's "relations with the wider world", as stated in Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union (European Union 2012c:17). In this regard, the EU follows a Health in All Policies approach, since health is not only to be promoted by health policies, but in all EU policies and activities.

Consequently, the EU's role in global health is limited to a complementing and coordinating one, focusing on the human right to health and health protection. The latter has been further emphasised by a Decision (European Parliament 2013) on serious cross-border threats to health, a measure aimed at enhancing the EU and member states' co-operation and co-ordination of responses in the event of health crises.

## EU FRAMEWORKS WITH RESPECT TO GLOBAL HEALTH

The strategic objectives of the EU's global health policy date to a 2010 Commission Communication and the subsequent issuance of "Council Conclusions on the EU Role in Global Health" (Council of the European Union 2010). At a high-level conference in 2010, the Directorates-General (DG) of the European Commission for Health and Consumers, Research and Innovation, and Development presented a policy framework for EU action on global health. Arguing that global health is about the "worldwide improvement of health, reduction of disparities, and protection against global health threats" (European Commission 2010:2), the DGs set out four key priorities: improving global health governance (support for the WHO and the United Nations system), ensuring universal health coverage, increasing coherence of EU policies, and investing in research that benefits all (ibid.:4–5). In that respect, the Commission stated that "addressing global health requires coherence of all internal and external policies and actions based on agreed principles", thus recognising global health as a multidisciplinary issue that needs to be addressed comprehensively.

The Communication was followed by the Council Conclusions, which were adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU. The member states on the Council determined the guiding principles for stronger EU action, stating that the EU shall reduce global health disparities by supporting countries to achieve equitable and universal coverage of quality health services and adopt an Equity and Health in All Policies approach (Council of the European Union 2010:1). The EU shall translate into practice

the interlinkages of global health policy with trade, financing, migration, development aid, security, climate change, and environment as well as research and innovation (ibid.:4). Despite the initial effort to define the EU's role in global health, however, the Council Conclusions soon lost momentum and failed to be followed up with an action plan.

Nevertheless, additional strategic documents mention global health issues in brief, among them the 2016 EU Global Strategy, in which the EU, in line with its objective of policy coherence, expresses a desire to "adopt a joined-up approach to its humanitarian, development, migration, trade, investment, infrastructure, education, health and research policies" (European Union 2016:27). In addition, the EU set a goal to "work for more effective prevention, detection and responses to global pandemics" (ibid.:43). With the COVID-19 outbreak, this approach was further elaborated in a Communication by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), Josep Borrell. As an actor in the multilateral system, the EU is to strengthen the global health system and include such policy areas as global poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation into pandemic preparedness (European Commission/High Representative of the Union of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:4). Moreover, the EU is to expand its global engagement to deal with transnational challenges such as health, promote multilateral solutions focussing on sustainable and resilient health systems, and strengthen and reform the WHO (ibid.:13).

In conclusion, the strategic documents that refer to global health reflect the EU's broad understanding of it, stressing health security, worldwide improvement of health, and reduction in health disparities while at the same time highlighting values and human rights. Such a broad understanding may be in part due to three different DGs leading discussions around global health as well as an attempt to obtain the formal support of the member states on the Council, which represent somewhat diverging interests and understandings on how to define global health.

## KEY ACTORS IN GLOBAL HEALTH

In accordance with the EU's broad understanding of global health, a number of actors within the EU's institutional landscape deal with various global health issues. Since health policy remains largely intergovernmental, the government ministers on the Council of the European Union set the overall priorities of the EU in global health, as they did with the 2010 Council Conclusions.

As for the European Commission, there are several DGs that implement policies relevant to global health. While DG SANTE (Health and Food Safety), DG TRADE, and DG FPI (Service for Foreign Policy Instruments) deal with issues concerning pharmaceuticals, DG RTD (Research and Innovation) and JRC (Joint Research Centre) cover research in disease control (Bergner/Voss 2020:3). Being responsible for crisis management, DG ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) includes access to healthcare in its humanitarian policies. DG DEVCO (International Cooperation and Development) oversees the EU's development policies involving global health, which is particularly noteworthy, as global health is strongly anchored in the EU's development policy. Funding for health programmes and projects in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) comes mostly out of this budget (Donortracker 2020). Lastly, the three DGs that published the 2010 Commission Communication—DG DEVCO, DG SANTE, and DG RTD—collaborate in an inter-service group on global health to discuss further developments of the EU's global health action.

Two agencies—the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC)—have received a lot of attention during the COVID-19 outbreak. While EMA authorises and monitors medicines in the EU, the ECDC supports EU member states by collecting and analysing data on disease outbreaks and through the surveillance and early detection of health risks. To do so, the ECDC also cooperates with international organisations, such as the WHO and its regional office for Europe, the WHO EURO.

The European Parliament debates and adopts resolutions on global health. For example, in October 2015, it adopted a resolution on the Ebola crisis, in which it underlined the Commission's "endeavour for universal health coverage" and asked the Commission to review its 2010 Communication "in light of the new insights gained during the Ebola crisis" (European Union 2015: 8). Concerning COVID-19, the European Parliament adopted a resolution setting out principles for a post-pandemic EU health policy, while also welcoming the Commission's participation in ensuring that COVID-19 "treatments, vaccines and diagnostics are globally available, accessible and affordable" (European Parliament 2020).

Despite many actors being involved in global health issues and the EU's dedication to the Health in All Policies approach, some voices had been missing from the debate before COVID-19, such as DG ENVI (Environment) and the European External Action Service. The latter has now become more visible, by for instance participating in the EU's vaccine strategy.

## INSTRUMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

With respect to global health policy, the EU has several instruments at hand and maintains partnerships with a number of international and regional organisations.

As mentioned, the EU pursues a considerable part of its global health activities within the scope of its development policy, by for instance ensuring access to healthcare for all and supporting the strengthening of health systems in LMICs. Those activities have mostly been funded by the European Development Fund, which is to be merged into the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Initiative (European Council/Council of the European Union 2020). In 2016 alone, the EU was the fourth-largest funder of health in absolute terms according to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (Donortracker 2020). The EU is the sixth-largest public donor to the Global

Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, one of the most important global health partnerships (Global Fund 2021). In addition, the EU maintains cooperation with UNICEF, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the vaccine alliance GAVI and via the ECDC with public health institutes of third countries.

With respect to crisis management, the EU's most important instrument is the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM), which aims to strengthen cooperation between EU member states and six additional participating countries. It pools response capacities to improve prevention, preparedness, and response to disasters and can be called for help by any country in the world along with the United Nations and other relevant international organisations (European Commission 2020). During the COVID-19 outbreak, medical equipment was sent to North Macedonia and Mongolia via this instrument (ibid.).

Another instrument under the EUCPM is the EU Medical Corps, which mobilises teams of experts with medical and public health expertise to send to countries within Europe as well as beyond its borders. Launched in 2016 in response to the shortage of trained medical teams during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the corps has since been deployed in Angola, Mozambique, Samoa, and Uganda. The EU also supports WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN). In 2014 and 2015, the ECDC mobilised 62 experts to outbreak response operations through GOARN to support the international Ebola response in Guinea (ECDC 2017:1).

Besides cooperating on crisis management, the EU and WHO collaborate through, among other means, the Universal Health Coverage partnership, programmatic partnerships, and projects at the local level (Bergner et al. 2020: 3). Institutionally, the EU maintains observer status at the WHO. Lastly, both the EU and WHO are members of the Global Health Security Initiative, an informal international partnership on preparedness and response to global health threats.

## OUTLOOK AND CHANGES DUE TO COVID-19

Although EU member states have primary responsibility for health policy, the EU has been quite engaged by complementing and coordinating actions undertaken by member states at the global level. During the last few years, the EU has built its own infrastructure to implement global health policies, formulate objectives and strategic priorities, and establish instruments and partnerships to pursue these objectives. Even though the 2010 Commission Communication and the Council Conclusions soon lost momentum, the EU was still an engaged actor, albeit one lacking visibility.

Now, with COVID-19, the EU has gained visibility by politically backing the WHO in its crisis management and by supporting LMICs by dispatching medical equipment and medical teams. In collaboration with the WHO, the EU has also established the WHO-EU Solidarity for Health Initiative in the Eastern Partnership, with a budget of over €35.22 million, to support partner countries in strengthening their capacity to prevent, detect, and prepare for and respond to health emergencies. Yet, it has been the EU's efforts to raise billions for the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, with which it became an important actor in this field. By co-organising a pledge marathon in May 2020 and another event in June, the EU managed to raise 15.9 billion to fund ACT's goal to accelerate the development, production, and global and equal distribution of COVID-19 treatments, tests, and vaccines. Further initiatives spearheaded by the EU, such as the development of a pandemic treaty to support the implementation of the International Health Regulations as well as the adoption of a resolution at the World Health Assembly in May, focussing primarily on the response to the COVID-19 outbreak, are additional examples of the EU's stronger engagement.

Apart from those initiatives, there are debates ongoing in the preparatory groups of the Council on whether to adjust the EU's competencies in European health policy, the course of which will ultimately influence the EU's role in global health. In

November 2020, the EU health commissioner, Stella Kyriakides, announced plans for the establishment of a European Health Union, including proposals to adjust the mandates of EMA and the ECDC, establish a European biomedical research and development agency, and issue a decision on addressing cross-border health threats. The EU also has to deal, however, with its vision and future activities in global health and launch an update of the Council Conclusions. Such engagement would be in line with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's aspiration to position the EU as a "guardian of multilateralism" (European Commission 2019). The Global Health Summit announced by von der Leyen to take place during Italy's G7 presidency in May will serve as an opportunity for discussions.



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# Global Health Policy in the Post-COVID-19 Era: China's Perspective

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The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic poses major challenges to public health and governance worldwide, and has accelerated shifts in the international landscape. The world is entering a period of turbulence and transformation. The international community now faces a major test with choices to be made between multilateralism and unilateralism, openness and seclusion, cooperation and confrontation (Xi, 2020). In the face of the serious international situation and global health challenge, China upholds the concept of "Collaboration for a Stronger Community with a Shared Future" and calls on the international community to strengthen cooperation in the fight against the pandemic, to follow the leadership of the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO), and to increase political support and mobilise global funding resources for the WHO to defeat the virus. In the post-COVID-19 period, China will continue to follow guidelines, intensify international health cooperation, implement its commitments to contain the pandemic, and work together with partners to maintain global health security. This paper tries to outline China's main perspectives on how to deal with global health issues in the post-COVID-19 era.

## 1. What has changed in China's role in global health since the pandemic outbreak?

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has fully exposed many shortcomings in global public health governance: the lack of a joint global prevention and control mechanism for infectious diseases, the scarcity of international public health resources and the increasing vulnerability of national public health systems (State Council Information Office, 2020). This grim reality has prompted countries to review their current dilemma, to seek to establish and strengthen mechanisms for global health cooperation, and to work together to address the crisis. In the past decades, China's global health assistance mainly included sending medical teams, building infrastructure and providing medical supplies,

which shows a rather limited scope of focus. Along with economic and social development, China's participation in global health has gradually grown to capacity-building areas such as health security and infectious disease prevention and control, public health cooperation, training of health care workers, and cooperation in drug and medical technology research (National Health Commission, 2020).

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, China has been working on prevention and control in the country as well as actively promoting international cooperation, sharing its experience with other countries and committing itself to delivering global public goods for health. Partners of the Belt and Road Initiative have been strengthening their cooperation in combating the pandemic, and the "Health Silk Road" is becoming an important public good for promoting global health cooperation (Zhang, Jiao, 2020). The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and many institutions have jointly launched the "Covid-19 Resource Bank" as an academic exchange platform for researchers worldwide to release their results and discuss response strategies. Responding to the call of the WHO, the Chinese government has donated USD 50 million to support the international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic, provided emergency medical supplies for personal protection, and participated in the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator initiative. On 18 May 2020, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at the opening of the 73rd World Health Assembly and announced that China would take a series of major initiatives to support the global fight against COVID-19, including working with the UN to establish a global humanitarian response depot and hub in China, and establishing a mechanism for Chinese hospitals to pair up with 30 African hospitals. China has also announced on several occasions that it will strengthen cooperation on vaccine research and development and strive to make COVID-19 vaccine a global public good that is accessible and affordable to all developing countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Meanwhile, China has repeatedly called for enhanced

health assistance to developing countries and for joint development of the global public health system. On 8 October 2020, China signed an agreement with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to officially join COVAX, a global platform that supports vaccine implementation. This marks an important step in China's commitment to promoting vaccine as a global public good. (Xinhua, 2020) These facts show that China's involvement in global health affairs is diversifying.

## 2. China's global health philosophy and policy evolution

In recent years, global health has been highly valued and supported by the Chinese government. Inspired by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, China has actively participated in global health collaboration. The COVID-19 outbreak has prompted China to further develop the concept of "building a community of common health for mankind". In October 2016, China released the Healthy China 2030 Planning Outline (hereinafter referred to as the "Planning Outline") as a guiding document for its health sector for the next 15 years. It pays great attention to global health. Chapter 26 proposes to strengthen international exchange and cooperation, implement China's global health strategy (yet to be released) and actively promote international collaboration in health on all fronts. On the basis of bilateral cooperation, innovative models of cooperation are to be developed, people-to-people exchange to be strengthened, health cooperation between China and "Belt and Road" countries to be promoted, South-South cooperation to be strengthened, and China-Africa public health cooperation plans to be implemented (State Council, 2016). In 2015, the former National Health and Family Planning Commission released the Three-Year Implementation Plan for Promoting Health Cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative (2015-2017) (hereinafter referred to as the "Implementation Plan"). It envisions extensive health cooperation in Belt and Road countries, including the development of new joint forums such as the Silk Road Health Industry Cooperation Forum, activities on infectious disease control, training and capacity building, emergency health assistance, overseas promotion of traditional medicines, and cooperation of

health systems and policy coordination (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2015). In September 2020, Qiushi magazine (the official theoretical journal of the Chinese Communist Party) published an article by Xi Jinping on the basic principles for building a strong public health system, the eighth provision of which emphasises the need to strengthen international exchange and cooperation: The Chinese government shall seek collaboration for a stronger community with a shared future, actively fulfil its international obligations, participate in international public health and security affairs, closely work with the WHO and countries, strengthen international risk monitoring and early warning, conduct information exchange and technical cooperation on infectious diseases, participate in the formulation of relevant international standards, norms and guidelines, innovate health assistance mechanisms and models, and work together to build a community of common health for mankind. (Xi, Qiushi, 2020)

The Planning Outline and other documents are the main guidelines for China's participation in global health governance and promotion of international health cooperation. They clearly state the basic philosophy of China's engagement in global health affairs and the principles of multilateralism to which global health policy has always adhered. In practice, China has increasingly included health affairs in the scope of cooperation through multilateral forums such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the BRICS mechanism, APEC, the G20, ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The scale of China's health assistance has been growing rapidly over the past 15 years, reflecting the high degree of importance China attaches to the development of global health. As a country that has achieved progress in containing the pandemic and economic recovery, China is also calling on the international community to uphold multilateralism, resist "decoupling", support the central role of the UN—especially of the Security Council—in maintaining world peace and security, and put multilateralism into practice by taking concrete actions to maintain global health and security.

### 3. China's participation in global health affairs shows a trend of diversified actors

The international environment for global health has undergone drastic changes due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and international health cooperation is facing serious challenges. In 2012, the UK and China launched the China-UK Global Health Support Pro-gramme (GHSP) to support China's participation in global health governance and health aid, and to explore partnerships to address current global health challenges. The programme makes important contributions to promoting health cooperation between China and the UK and addressing the COVID-19 outbreak as well as future public health threats. (Husain, Bloom, McPherson, 2020) It may also serve as a model for further deepening global health cooperation between China and other international partners. According to the white paper titled "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action" by the Chinese government, which was released in June 2020, China has been actively engaged in international exchanges and cooperation since the outbreak, with efforts to strengthen high-level communication, information sharing and scientific research with international organisations and other countries, and to work with non-state actors including the WHO, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation (CEPI) and GAVI to accelerate vaccine development and clinical trials, with the aim to jointly address the virus threat and to protect human life and health.

In the international response to the pandemic, a more diverse range of actors are joining in. Chinese charitable organisations, enterprises, private foundations, overseas Chinese groups, medical professionals and volunteers have taken the initiative to join China's global health assistance efforts. Chinese research institutions and pharmaceutical companies have actively worked with other countries to develop COVID-19 vaccine and provide support to developing countries fighting the pandemic, fully demonstrating solidarity between the Chinese people and the people of the world. Since the outbreak, uncertainties have increased significantly in the world and the topic of global health will become ever more complex. Therefore, China should fully understand the complex situation facing international health cooperation, strengthen ties with non-state actors such as NGOs,

consider engaging more stakeholders in the process where appropriate, and take the concerns of NGOs and local communities seriously. Appropriate support and service policies for non-governmental health cooperation and exchange should be developed. Efforts should also be made to establish appropriate mechanisms to facilitate cooperation, and to emphasise the principles of transparency, openness, inclusiveness, accountability, integrity and mutual respect that are prevalent in international assistance.

### 4. What are the objectives of China's participation in global health governance?

The devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has tied the fate of all mankind together, and this crisis of unprecedented scale has highlighted the current dilemmas and challenges facing global governance, with counter-globalisation, unilateralism and conservatism obstructing global cooperation. In the wake of the pandemic, human society will once again face the difficult decision of where to go from here. At this crucial moment when the future of mankind is at stake, China calls on all parties to put the safety and health of people first, uphold the concept of developing a stronger community with a shared future and join hands to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic. Efforts should be made to resolutely stem the pandemic and win the global battle to protect the world and people's well-being. (State Council Information Office, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed serious weaknesses and deficiencies in the global public health system, and there is an urgent need to strengthen global governance in the health sector, improve capacity of countries to respond to future public health crises, and establish an efficient and sustainable global public health system that benefits all of humanity. China's government has called on the international community to take collective action, with political foresight and a highly responsible spirit, to uphold the primacy of life, global unity, equality and respect, cooperation and mutual assistance, and to establish and improve long-term financing mechanisms for global public health security, threat monitoring, early warning & joint response mechanisms, resource reserves

and resource allocation systems and other cooperation mechanisms, so as to build a solid defence line to safeguard the safety and health of all human beings and build a community of common health for mankind. (ibid.) To handle the threat of global infectious diseases that may emerge in the future, countries should take action to provide support to countries and regions with weak public health systems and help developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to improve their epidemic prevention and control capacity.

The security of all mankind is the shared responsibility of all. China is an important partner in strengthening global health governance. Its initiatives can be a good booster for building a global public health system. At the same time, equal cooperation, openness, inclusiveness, mutual benefit, win-win, and multilateralism are the foundational principles of China's participation in global health affairs. In the face of global challenges that threaten human security, China is willing to work with other countries to promote international health cooperation, improve global health governance, maintain international order and jointly build a harmonious world of peace, stability, universal security and sustainable development.

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