

History Being Distorted, Inaccurate, and Omitted: The Case of Pakistani Textbooks

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Abstract

The study addresses the distortion, disinformation, or pure omission of history in the textbooks of Pakistan, from which the construction of national consciousness and national identity emanate. Examples of politicization of history will demonstrate that even such events as the Lahore Resolution and independence of Pakistan also suffer heinous distortions to serve time a constricted ideological agenda. Pushed by more or less a religiously nationalistic historiography that largely marginalizes the region's rich multicultural and multi-ethnic heritage, the study presents a similarly homogenized history that conveniently excludes other voices. This research shows how emphasizing a narrative of a homogeneous national past in the current curriculum erases all the richness Pakistan and its history come with. It also elaborates more on the wider social implications of these distortions. A one-dimensional history is presented as a system instilling an educational cult that constrains all serious criticism and debate about history in the nation. The implications are indeed heavy-reinforcing stereotypes in majority communities, addressing the alienation of minorities, and entrenching social and political cleavages. In this paper, the authors argue for comprehensive curricular reforms that entail a great deal of diversity, encourage critical thinking, and truthfully reflect the diverse history of Pakistan. Thus, guaranteeing multiplicity would allow the educational system to be transformed into a progressive instrument sustaining a better-balanced and knowledgeable national identity. For this reason, reforms become necessary in forging a multicultural society respectful of its composite past and future.

Keywords: History distortion, Pakistani textbooks, National identity, Political ideology, Multicultural heritage, Religious nationalism, Curriculum reform, Social implications

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INTRODUCTION

This research embarks upon the journey of writing Pakistani historiography not through the hackneyed ritual of going into the 'shortcomings' of history textbooks in Pakistan. It requires much finer, critical scrutiny of the history narratives relayed through the textbooks and echoed in all forms of scholarly writing coming forth from Pakistan. The present study identifies rich falsifications, misrepresentations, and omissions in these narratives, ultimately connecting them to form the collective understanding of Pakistan's history. True, through it, a far-reaching analysis will be drawn that must underline deeper implications these narratives have on national consciousness and identity. Most probably, the research would help in building a realistic and more comprehensive account of what had happened in the annals of Pakistan's history and pick up from these issues. This will finally provide an insight into the complex web between history, politics, and educations within Pakistan. It is possible only through a political historiography study in this context to understand the how and the why behind the shaping, transmission, and often manipulation of these historical narratives. In Pakistan's case, it becomes evident how the shaping of the historical events in curriculum textbooks suffered from inaccuracy, distortion, and omission.

One of the most prominent events in the annals of Pakistan's history was the Lahore Resolution. This event is, however, always misquoted as having passed on 23rd March 1940 in Pakistani textbooks. This date often oversimplifies the history behind it and distorts it, void of the actual historical significance and the context in which it was adopted. The Lahore Resolution, held on 23rd March 1940, clearly demanded 'independent states' for the Muslims in British India, thus laying the ground for the ultimate demand of Pakistan's formation. Such misrepresentations of critical events of national history through education not only lead to a distorted perception by students of their national history but also point toward broader issues in the political historiography of the region. The proceedings formally commenced at 3:00 PM on the day of the 22nd March with Nawab of Mamdot addressing the assembly as Chairman of the Reception Committee. After this, Jinnah delivered a lengthy speech, bringing the first day to a close.

The sessions resumed on 23 March at 3:00 PM Fazl ul Haq moved the Lahore Resolution and addressed extensively in its support. Chaudhri Khaliquzzaman seconded the resolution and addressed a few words. This was followed by the addresses of Zafar Ali Khan, Sardar Aurangzeb Khan, and Abdullah Haroon, who all addressed briefly in support of the resolution before adjourning the house for the following day. On 24 March, discussions were opened at 11:15 AM with the speeches in favour of the resolution being made by Nawab Muhammad Ismail Khan from the United Provinces, Qazi Muhammad Isa from Baluchistan, and Abdul Hamid Khan from Madras. Jinnah then joined the assembly, having been engaged elsewhere till that point of time, and occupied his seat as the President. Proceedings on the resolution continued with speeches in favor by Ismail Ibrahim Chandigarh from Bombay, Sayyid Abdur Rauf Shah from the Central Provinces, and Dr. Muhammad Alam from Punjab. Jinnah then allowed Abdur Rahman Siddiqui to present a resolution on Palestine, which was supported by Sayyid Raza Ali and Abdul Hamid Badayuni and passed unanimously by the assembly.

The session was then adjourned until 9:00 PM. Sayyid Zakir Ali and Begum Muhammad Ali made the last two speeches on the Lahore Resolution during the night session. Thereafter, the resolution was put to a vote and carried unanimously. Two more resolutions, one dealing with the Khaksars and the other concerning amendments to the party constitution, were hurriedly presented and

passed. Finally, the office-bearers were elected for the ensuing year. Jinnah spoke a few words of thanks, and the session ended at 11:30 PM. Thus, no doubt can remain about any other date being a possible date for the passing of the Lahore Resolution: it was most unambiguously passed on 24 March. However, this historic fact remains chiefly ignored in Pakistan, including by the government, which continues to observe "Pakistan Day" on the wrong date. Reasonable explanation for such enormous historical dishonesty is hard to come by (Aziz, 1993, p. 142).

The dates agree: according to Stanley Wolpert (2006), the Lahore Resolution was adopted on March 24, 1940, during the session of the All-India Muslim League Quartering in Lahore. According to him, it was a historic step toward the demand for the independent Muslim states. The annual session of the Muslim League was held in Lahore on March 22, 1940; this date marks a landmark in history. After heated debates, the resolution was passed for the creation of "independent states" in the northwestern and eastern areas of India where Muslims were in majority. The formal adoption of this Lahore Resolution took place on March 24, 1940, which made it a pivotal turning point in the Pakistan Movement (Wolpert, 2006, p. 176). Another fallacy is the generally accepted date for the emergence of Pakistan: 14 August 1947. As a matter of fact, 15 August 1947 was when Pakistan came into life, on the same date as Indian independence. This information has always been ignored or hidden while writing in textbooks or even by the common man. If realized, it was August 15 when all this regarding partition and the formation of Pakistan happened. This house of information must correct itself so the students may get a more transparent and truthful concept of their nation's history.

The conventionally accepted notion, reinforced during the official celebrations of independence that Pakistan became free on the 14 August, is indeed wrong. The Indian Independence Bill was introduced in the British Parliament on 4 July and was enacted into law on 15 July. It unequivocally stated that the two new Dominions, India and Pakistan, were to become independent at midnight intervening between 14 and 15 August. The transfer of power had to be conducted personally by the Viceroy, the British King's official representative in India. Lord Mountbatten could not be in Karachi and New Delhi at the identical moment of independence, so he transferred power to India on the morning of 15 August. He could not have transferred power first in New Delhi and then run to Karachi because by then, he would have ceased to be the Viceroy of India and would have become the Governor-General of the new Indian Dominion. So, the only workable solution was to act while still being the Viceroy of India. This does not mean, however, that Pakistan got independence on the 14 August as the Indian Independence Act did not allow such a provision (Aziz, 1993, pp. 149-150).

Four of Pakistan's major national anniversaries fall on wrong or doubtful days. Independence Day is observed on August 14, an event that, according to the Indian Independence Act, does actually occur on August 15 for both India and Pakistan. Pakistan Day is held on March 23 when, according to history, the Lahore Resolution was passed on March 24. Jinnah's birthday is celebrated officially on December 25; however, some recent studies suggest that he was born sometime in October. Iqbal's birthday is celebrated on November 9, although this too is debatable and consequently, no serious attempts have been made to verify it. Besides, from the primary school to the university level, the historical content provided to students is incomplete, distorted, misleading, and factually incorrect (Aziz, 1992, p. 84).

Ayesha Jalal (1994) says, while Pakistan celebrates its independence on 14th August, the actual transfer of power from British rule took place at midnight between 14th and 15th August 1947. This moment was also that of India's official independence on the 15th. Jalal asserts that since Pakistan's actual legal independence came into effect at the stroke of midnight simultaneously with India, therefore '15th August' would have been the technically correct date of independence (Jalal, 1994, p. 204). The curriculum of Pakistan has been under narrow ideological constraints for a very long period. This pursuit is based on creating a homogeneous national identity deeply founded on specified religious and cultural values. In many ways, these constraints manifest themselves as much of the teaching, especially in history, social studies, and Islamic Studies, is oriented toward propagating Islamic teaching and values. While an awareness of the prevalent religion is understood, more often than not, it steals the limelight from other equally important aspects of education, such as scientific inquiry, critical thinking, or multicultural understanding.

For the most part, the course puts great value into the nationalistic approach toward underlining the achievements of the Muslim rulers against British colonial rule for independence.. This approach has eulogized certain periods in history and figures while belittling or ignoring others that pertain to contributions and the existence of other cultures and communities in the region. The same old curriculum of history promulgates and reinforces the same brand of nationalism that has essentially been related to Islamic and nationalist ideals. It reduces students' ability to appreciate Pakistan's rich, varied cultural and historical inheritance and further expounds the global perspective ,history and in contemporary times, any conflict in which Muslims were engaged was justified and thus it was said that Jihad was legitimate and laudable cause. The moderate voices of Pakistani historians are often drowned in the cries of fundamentalists (Gilmartin, 1998). In 2003, Professor A.H. Nayyar pioneered the study of social studies textbooks, which led to international conferences, but sadly, very little significant change has occurred in the textbooks since (Ponomarev et al., 2012). In the subcontinental nations of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, similar to many other countries, the mass media extensively covers the ongoing politicized alterations in textbook narratives. People often find themselves astonished and occasionally entertained by the manipulation of historical accounts within these textbooks (Masud, 2002).

History teaching in Pakistan remains remarkably the same: static and sanitized. Several factors are attributed to this fact, which shall now be discussed. In these history textbooks, only the salient features of the bright side of Muslim rule and the struggle for independence from British colonialism are focused upon. This drops typically, or at least diminishes, complexities and multifaceted dimensions of historical events, such as contributions of non-Muslims and negative implications of some policies. The educators consistently emphasize: "History remains unchanged!" In certain nations, pupils and their families adopt a skeptical attitude towards the narrative style that rejects the idea of impartial historiography, which is fundamental for appreciating the subject. This perspective is primarily observed in the haphazard approach to textbook composition (Ponomarev et al., 2012). Meanwhile, in different countries, the media will gradually recognize more incremental changes in the curriculum. The international attention to the politicization of history adds a noteworthy dimension to this phenomenon. In Pakistan, the politicization of textbooks began following the initial military coup soon after gaining independence, with a notable increase during the tenure of General Zia-ul-Haq. Despite this, a group of prominent intellectuals in Pakistan has persistently advocated and labored for years to transform the alarming xenophobic and jihadi narrative present in Pakistan studies.

The politicization of the textbooks in Pakistan is evident from the telling of military coups and their justifications. Again, it has several implications. Justifications found in the textbooks are that military coups were 'needed' intervention to save the country from political instability and corruption. This discourse legitimizes the role of the military in politics. It portrays military leaders as saviors of the nation, belittling the negative consequences of military rule, such as suppression of democratic processes and civil liberties. Military coups have been projected as one-way accounts of history, touting the successes of military regimes, with their failures overlooked. This kind of selective presentation disallows the students to understand the actual impact of military rule on Pakistan's political and social development.

Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board, Class IX History Textbook (2017) This textbook glorifies Muslim rulers like Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad bin Qasim, portraying them as just and benevolent conquerors. For instance, Muhammad bin Qasim is depicted as treating non-Muslims well and allowing them to practice their religion. In contrast, non-Muslim rulers receive minimal attention or are portrayed negatively. For example, Alexander the Great is described as a "proud man" seeking revenge, while Raja Porus is briefly mentioned for his bravery. Ashoka is acknowledged as a "great king," but his contributions are not elaborated upon. This selective portrayal emphasizes Muslim rulers' achievements while neglecting the broader historical context. (Khokhar, 2021).

Grave allegations against the Pakistani textbooks relate to bias in the historical narrative, glaring inaccuracies, deliberate neglect, and denial of this rich, multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multireligious heritage of the region. However, these references are too brief and do not seriously address the extent and culture of this civilization. Likewise, all the latter centuries' hefty historical periods and events have also been skipped over. There is barely any mention of Aryan civilization that granted a very strong social system and that epic poetry, such as Mahabharata, where Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had an important role. The Brahminic influence, the millennium-long Buddhist phase dotted with its famed universities, and the far and wide Gandharan civilization covering most of present-day Pakistan are glossed over. These scant references have built up a partial and fragmented representation of the region's history, thus grossly underestimating these epochs' far-reaching cultural and historical contributions. No student in any of the schools in Pakistan would tell us anything about Pakistan's links with Cyrus the Great and Darius of the Achaemenid dynasty.

Likewise, few know that the Sassanid Empire, governed by the legendary Noshirwan, the "Justified," also included Pakistan. In a similar vein, it is uncommon for students to know that Ashoka, whose capital was Fahrenheit in the eastern subcontinent, considered Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab as part of his territory (Asif, 2022). The consequences of this neglect have severe implications for the youth of Pakistan. Rather than recognizing their heritage encompassing various civilizations, they now possess a limited and onesided perspective (Masud, 2002). This goes against what individuals later observe in the contemporary world of information technology and collective knowledge. The creators of the unbalanced educational curriculum seem oblivious to the fact that this contradicts Islamic teachings as well. The Quran's initial directive is "Iqra bi Ism I Rabik" (There is no restriction on knowledge acquisition). However, in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, we prohibit books, digital platforms such as YouTube, and even newspapers (Mastoor, 2015).

In general, history books in Pakistan don't really do justice to the dimensioned nature of our national identity and rather depict a reductionist distorted image. The flaw becomes more serious when historical facts are twisted for certain objectives to develop a prejudiced self-image. The other glaring lie which has been perpetuated through Pakistani Studies books is the one concerning the birth of Pakistan. It is said that it is mainly created due to some kind of inbuilt incompatibility between Hindus and Muslims. This narrative, a conceptual civilizational rift between two distinct entitlements--Hindu and Muslim--is actually based on a far more complicated and intertwined division. This kind of error is encouraged in the mind by the textbooks while overlooking the complexity and multidimensional transactions these communities had with one another in those periods. They are descriptive distortions of historical perspective and thus construct the incomplete fragmented knowledge regarding our shared heritage and identity, hence a wrong understanding of the past as well as present.

In Pakistan the general history books do not do even justice to, and instead they tend to take the reductionist, incomplete, and distorted picture. The aggravation of the problem is further aggravated by twisting the historical facts to serve objectives which then transform into prejudiced self-images. One of the biggest lies that have been fed into the minds of children through Pakistan Studies books is that there was inherent incompatibility, which is generally defined as the definition of birth of Pakistan thereof because there was an inherent incompatibility between Hindus and Muslims. The narrative that a conceptual civilizational divide between some distinctly carved-out Hindu and Muslim identities rests upon a far more complicated and intertwined division. These textbooks breed such error in the mind, ignoring the complex, multidimensional transactions of communities with each other in these periods of time, historical perspective distortion, and hence lack the proper step towards building your knowledge about the pretty much fragmented and incomplete heritage shared with the present nation, thus leading to a wrong perception in past and present.

History must act as a teacher, and ensuring its proper encoding and transcription is the duty of historians. Alas, this very principle has not borne out in the subcontinent, where this eminent profession continues to be muddled and fragmented (Bibi & Farooq, 2017). And, thus, an explosion of so-called "polemicists" have escaped the bounds of objective historical methods on either side of the political divide. The recent appointment of a nominee from the Indian Council of Historical Research, selected by newly appointed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and one linked to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologically, speaks unequivocally of this (Alhassan, 1964). According to Mohirul Hasan, one of India's "polemicists", liberal-secular historians are growing more and more uncomfortable with their future. Concerned that things are changing in the direction of Indian historiography, away from Marxist analysis, he observes that while there is a variety of methods to history in India, the liberal left-wing historians have not entirely rejected the Pakistani interpretation of history (Alhassan, 1964; Rauws & Rauws, 2017). This has shown a guarded handling of Islam within post-colonial Indian academia, where hypersensitivity to public sentiment has constrained historians' formation of narratives. Interestingly, saffron-influenced Indian social studies textbooks often refrain from condemning Islam outright and target certain Muslim minorities or rulers instead. Thus Islam itself is not blamed, although Ghaznavi and Aurangzeb may receive criticism for their violent acts (Amjad, 2022). On the contrary, Pakistani textbooks tend to depict Hinduism in the worst possible light by presenting it as either a primitive cult or a corrupted social system. While Indian textbooks avoid offending Islam, Pakistani

educational materials paint Hinduism with a very broad brush of hostility (Ahmad & Owoyemi, 2012).

In October 1999, the BJP government seriously shook the academic sector with its diabolical infiltration and revision of educational materials. According to some claims Indian textbooks fail to take these rich legacies and introduce them to students as part of their learning process from skin-deep learning of Kabir, Guru Nanak, Akbar, and Dara Shikoh. But if one looks into the years of discussion among curriculum writings put up by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), then for many decades now, there has been the inclusion of Kabir and Sikh saints in the learning material. About Akbar, every Indian textbook carries at least some reference to the highly revered king, ensuring that students learn not only about him but also from contributions and legacies of some crucial historical figures. Hindus and Muslims have drawn inspiration from different historical sources. They have different epics, heroes, and historical narratives; often, the hero of one community is counted as the enemy of the other, and the oppositional viewpoint through which their victories and defeats are interpreted is different (Qureshi 1969).

Before, there were different heroes for Hindus and Muslims. For Hindus, the liberators were Shivaji, or Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhi, and Nehru; while the Muslims revered Shah Waliullah, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Ali, and Jinnah as members of their liberation pantheon. Even back in the past, Hindu India would have considered the likes of Ashoka and Chandragupta as their heroes, while Muslims would have even less of a sense of loyalty to such figures. In contrast, Muslim India had much admiration for Muhammad bin Qasim, the first successful Muslim conquering of India, and Mahmud of Ghazni, while the Hindu Indian people held them in contempt perhaps even feeling the need to detest Qasim for initiating Muslim rule and cursing Mahmud for the destruction of temples and shrines. It was usually against Akbar that Hindu historians built their argument, seeing him as a peacemaker and ruler, from whom religious tolerance could be expected. Muslim historians, on their part, viewed his rule in a different light and gushed about his admiration for Aurangzeb as a king who faithfully followed Islam and would pray before proceeding with important state decisions. On the other hand, Hindus disliked Aurangzeb for his strict Islamic orthodoxy, just as Muslims criticized Akbar for having abandoned Islam to which he was born. So too did many a Hindu glorify Shivaji as the liberator of South India and the founder of Maratha power, but many a Muslim called him the enemy of Muslim rule—a clever warrior who had treacherously killed a Muslim general (Aziz, 1966, pp. 154-155).

In giving history to children, distortions of history are provided; thus, the blunders continue to be repeated from one generation to another (Ghilzai, 2020). In East Pakistan, a substantial Hindu population existed, but many never completely accepted Pakistan (Khan et al., 2023). In schools and colleges, many educators keep projecting a negative image to their students. There is insufficient stress on imparting the ideology of Pakistan to the younger generation, which has negatively impacted national cohesion (Aftab, 2017). Economically, there are rumors that a big part of Hindu income is sent back to India. Other leaders for their own petty gains provoked strife by regionalism, presenting the central government and (then) West Pakistan as oppressors. This sort of manipulation of history has very often been used for political motives at the cost of national unity (Bibi & Farooq, 2017).

Historically speaking, the emergence of Pakistan can be traced back to the Arab conquest of Sindh and Multan under the leadership of Muhammad bin Qasim (Uroos et al., 2022). The area under Arab rule would include most of today's Pakistan. The Ghaznavid Empire of the 11th century ruled territories now comprising Pakistan and Afghanistan. By the latter half of the 12th century, however, Ghaznavid power was considerably diminished in Afghanistan and confined to the area known today as Pakistan; here began an ascent of renewed vigor and expansion toward northern India and Bengal in the 13th century. Under the Khilji dynasty, this further expansion continued south into central India and the Deccan. By the 16th century, "Hindustan" had probably lost its significance and become a mere part of "Pakistan." But contrary to various historical accounts, it is wrongly stated that the very purpose of creating Pakistan was to safeguard and to propagate Islam. In reality, the origin of the Muslim League in Dhaka in 1906 was a political move as opposed to a religious one. One of its main objectives was to maintain loyalty to the British government and to improve relations between the Muslims and the British administration. This makes it abundantly clear that the early movement of the Muslim League was politically motivated.

This study aims to achieve loyalty towards the British government in the minds of the Muslims in India and forestall any such misunderstanding of its intention regarding any of its measures (Aziz 1993: 128). The Muslim League's deliberations did not abide by any religious consideration at the very outset. This, however, changed after the election of 1937 in which the League was routed while the Congress achieved a convincing win. The defeat thus turned out to energize the Muslim League, busy thinking of strategy and action plans. During that time first time the League engaged itself fervently in the use of religious nationalism to bind Muslims within Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, and Punjab. It was an attempt on the part of the League to organize for that potential force of religious identity to be able to strengthen support and create a unified political base with the Muslim communities of these regions. Such a society would definitely not indicate or mean any tedious undertaking in terms of electoral gains. Rather, it signals at last the bugle call for a maximum inner transformation within the Muslim League. This is the very part where religious nationalism himself became one of the foundations of their ideological edifice, which started galvanizing Muslims to bring them under one body consciousness apart from regionalism and cultural differences. Different levels of success were met by the efforts for religious unity among Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, and Punjab, but their overall impact became overwhelming. These three had a considerable Muslim population and hence became the focus of any movement from the League for a unified political identity. The groundwork laid during this time for broader political objectives, other than the demand for a separate Muslim state, played an important role in the function of the Muslim League.

This time not only served an ideological basis for the League's collaboration but also established it as the foremost entity in the arena of India's independence struggle and the emergence of what constituted the state of Pakistan. The core motivation behind Pakistan was to foster and protect the class interests of the landowning aristocracy within the alliance. The landowning elite played a key role at the outset of the League, fueled by fears that, with the departure of the British, the influence of their traditional allies, the loyal Muslim aristocracy, would wane in the face of the formation of a representative government. The class composition of the Congress party further aggravated their fear. Simultaneously, the urban and rural middle class were in a quest for upward mobility and political leverage. The educated Muslim middle class from urban Uttar Pradesh (UP) initially associated itself with the League and reinforced the Hindu-Muslim divide in 1940. After

independence, however, when political considerations no longer warranted it, it dissociated itself from this narrative. By 1947, the vision of the nation put forth by the educated urban classes was that of a pluralistic state based on religious and civil equality (Arshad et al., 2018). An outdated study on India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh theorized about how South Asian nations and communities have collaboratively drawn on a common historical legacy to build distinct national identities: one diverging from another most often (Mirjat et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2020). These are anomalies that, once sorted out, will take Pakistan well on the way toward evolving an education system impelled by critical thinking, inclusiveness, and a more even-handed view of history and current affairs. The curricula reform is long overdue, purging of these narrow ideological constraints, updating historical content, depoliticizing the textbooks, and expunging jihadi narratives.

CONCLUSION

The national textbooks of Pakistan are a commentary on how history is purposefully amended through misrepresentation, omissions, and very selective ideological lenses. Events of extraordinary significance—the Lahore Resolution and Pakistan's independence—are regularly contorted and trivialized in respect of the pluricultural heritage of the area. The narrative perpetuates an evil mythology that in turn denies critical reality and pluralism by focusing religious nationalism onto military coups that are termed necessary interventions. This type of history shoots for a completely politicized embroidery that students are incapable of perceiving as a part of their course activity. History, forestalled in this fashion, not only clouds a clear understanding of the past to students but also breeds divisive ideologies protected in one form or another. This horrendous state of affairs needs a fundamentally reformed curriculum. The reforms in question should incorporate a full, factually sound, and fair panorama of Pakistan's diverse history, resulting in the emergence of a better-educated and cohesive national consciousness. Only with that interrogation of such distortions will Pakistan be able to reach a more just and truthful understanding of its past and present.

Competing Interests

The authors declared no known competing interests.

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