

Heritage



Dutch Houses

Key details

Addresses	At 19 Aldershot Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109; At 2 Pasteur Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109; At 15 Lawford Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109; At 17 Lawford Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109; At 19 Lawford Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109; At 21 Lawford Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109; At 17 Aldershot Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109; At 4 Pasteur Street, Sunnybank, Queensland 4109
Type of place	House
Period	Postwar 1945-1960
Lot plan	L28_RP84952; L33_RP84952; L32_RP84952; L26_RP84952; L27_RP84952; L31_RP84952
Key dates	Date of Citation — June 2025
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (C) Scientific; (D) Representative; (H) Historical association

Built between 1951 and 1955, this highly intact group of 6 Dutch Houses in Sunnybank represent a surviving sample of the 300 concrete houses built by the joint Australian-Dutch company, Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. The houses illustrate how Queensland Housing Commission, established in 1945, sought to alleviate Brisbane's post-Second World War housing shortage and contributed to the City's suburban development in the 1950s through collaboration with international contractors. Constructed using a form of concrete wall tiles previously unused in Brisbane but popular in the Netherlands, the Dutch Houses also demonstrates how the Queensland Housing Commission addressed public concerns at the time about the apparent 'sameness' of mass-produced public housing through the use of various types of layouts, forms, roof profiles, construction materials, and settings as used to construct the houses.

History

A history of Sunnybank

Although the area around the modern suburb of Sunnybank was associated with the Moreton Bay penal settlement from the late 1820s, it remained rural until the 1950s. In 1828, a small convict post was established at 'Cowper's Plains' enroute to the limestone burning operation established at Ipswich in 1827. The significance of the locality increased in 1841 when the dray track from Brisbane was extended to the port of Cleveland, facilitating the transport of people and produce. The area's agricultural potential was recognised in 1861, when the Governor of Queensland, Sir George Bowen, proclaimed 7,876 acres of land in the district as the Brisbane Agricultural Reserve. The reserve was extended, and the name changed to the Eight Mile Plains Agricultural Reserve in 1864. This area included the present-day suburbs of Sunnybank, Sunnybank Hills, Runcorn and Kuraby and parts of Coopers Plains, Algester, and Stretton. This area developed into an agricultural district of privately owned farms as settlers took up land grants that were later subdivided into smaller holdings. In 1885, the opening of the railway line from Yeerongpilly to Beenleigh as part of the planned South Coast railway provided additional impetus to the area's development. The railway station was initially named Eight Mile Plains, though it was renamed Sunnybank, a derivation of Sunny-Brae, taken from the early farming property.

Sunnybank continued to develop as a rural township during the early decades of the 20th Century, reaching a population of 141 by 1911. During the First World War, a soldier settlement estate was established, and by 1921, the population had increased to 670. In 1929, an article in the *Sunday Mail* reported that Sunnybank and neighbouring Coopers Plains continued to be a flourishing agricultural district with orchards, vineyards, vegetable and avocado farming, dairying, plant nurseries and poultry farming. The article also predicted that this area would become 'progressive residential areas in the near future'. The opening of the Oasis Gardens resort at Sunnybank in 1938 drew many visitors to the township, but the residential population remained stable. Despite the predictions of the 1929 *Sunday Mail* article, in 1954, the population of Sunnybank was only 620. It was not until the 1950s, a period of suburban expansion in Brisbane, that housing estates began to be developed on Sunnybank's former farmland bringing an influx of families. In 1959, Sunnybank State School opened, followed by the high school in 1963. By 1974, Sunnybank's population had increased dramatically to 7,473. The former farming settlement had evolved into another southside Brisbane suburb.

The Queensland Housing Commission and Brisbane's housing shortage after the Second World War

Towards the end of the Second World War, it was widely recognised at all levels of government in Australia that a housing shortage existed. In Queensland, the problem was particularly acute, with the Queensland Bureau of Industry stating in 1945 that it 'estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 new dwellings' were required to meet

the needs of the state. In Brisbane, housing became a vital issue during the Brisbane City Council election in 1946, with the Labour candidate for Lord Mayor, C.A. Edwards, proposing a new municipal housing scheme to solve Brisbane's housing shortage. By July 1946, it was reported that Brisbane had a shortfall of some 16,000 houses. The problem of building new houses had two primary causes, the supply of labour and the availability of construction materials. Other contributing factors included a growing population influenced by migration after the Second World War.

The challenge of providing and building housing as part of Australia's reconstruction efforts after the Second World War was a vital element of the Commonwealth Government's post-war priorities. In 1942, the report of the Commonwealth Government's Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security had recommended forming a federal body to help develop public housing. Then, in 1943, Ben Chifley, recently appointed as Minister for Post-War Reconstruction, set up the Commonwealth Housing Commission to explore Australia's housing problems. One outcome of the reports produced by the Commonwealth Housing Commission was the negotiation and signing of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement in 1945. This agreement provided funds to states to construct new accommodation for rental purposes and was administered by the newly established Department of Works and Housing.

As well as efforts at the federal level, in December 1945, the Queensland Government established the State – later Queensland – Housing Commission. The Queensland Housing Commission was constituted under the terms of the *State Housing Act 1945* and was responsible for planning, constructing, acquiring, maintaining public housing, and granting loans for home ownership. The origins of the Queensland Housing Commission could be traced back to the *State Advances Act* of 1916 and the establishment of the State Advances Corporation, established to oversee the management of the *Workers Dwelling Act*. In turn, this dated back to 1909 and the passing of the Workers Dwelling Act and the creation of the Workers Dwelling Board. Importantly, Queensland Housing Commission acted as the 'authority for Queensland in respect of the joint Commonwealth and State Housing Agreement.' Notably, as exemplified by the building of the estate of Dutch Houses in Coopers Plains and Sunnybank, Queensland Housing Commission 'played a role in the [suburban] spread of [Brisbane] in the immediate post-war period.'

Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. and public housing in Brisbane

Announced by Queensland Government's Minister for Housing, P.J. Hilton, in April 1951 and signed on 14 June 1951, the Queensland Housing Commission contracted a joint Australian-Dutch company, Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd., to construct concrete houses in Coopers Plains and present-day Sunnybank. The contract covered the construction of '300 concrete houses' at the cost of £746,197. However, the intention was to construct 1,000 homes as the contract included an option to build a further 700 houses.

The problem of the supply of material and the availability of workers required to construct the number of houses necessary to deal with Queensland's housing shortage in the late-1940s provided the context for the agreement between Queensland Housing Commission and Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. To alleviate the State's housing shortage, Queensland Housing Commission examined alternative means of supplying public housing. One alternative solution examined in 1949 was collaboration with international contractors through the importation of prefabricated houses from Europe. Accordingly, in January 1950, Queensland Housing Commission called for tenders from 'throughout the world' for such housing. Queensland Housing Commission's interest in imported prefabricated housing emerged at the same time that the Commonwealth Government sent a mission to Europe to purchase such housing. Indeed, while members of Queensland Housing Commission did not go on the federal mission to Europe, they did converse with those who did go to Europe about 'the types of prefabricated homes suitable to Queensland.'

The first contract for prefabricated housing was signed with a French company, *Ets LeCorche Freres and Société des Entreprises Schroth and Company* in February 1950. This contract initially sought to deliver 750

prefabricated houses in Zillmere at a projected cost of £1,603,751. The project, however, faced numerous problems related to the quality of the houses built and the status of the contract with *LeCorche*. Ultimately, *LeCorche* did not complete the project, and while houses were completed, several houses were left either unfinished or unstarted. Nonetheless, in 1951, contracts were also signed with Swedish and Italian contractors to provide prefabricated houses in Brisbane. Similar issues as experienced with *LeCorche* also plagued these contracts. These projects, unlike those houses built by Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd, was supported by funding provided through the Commonwealth Government's *States Grants (Imported Houses) Act* of 1950. This scheme supported the importation of prefabricated housing through the grant of £300 per unit. Indeed, unlike the schemes to build prefabricated homes, the houses built by Concrete Development Pty. Ltd. were not 'imported' from Europe but constructed in Australia from a mix of materials sourced locally and from the Netherlands and Europe. This was possibly due to the weight and cost of transporting some of the required materials from Europe.

While Queensland Housing Commission showed an interest in prefabricated housing, as early as April 1950, the Commission sought tenders from abroad for the 'supply and erection of 1000 concrete houses.' Significantly, it was noted that two important conditions of the tenders were that the companies would 'provide modern plant and use migrated labour.' The shift towards the use of concrete was an interesting development given that traditionally, low-cost housing in Queensland had typically been constructed of 'timber and tin'. For example, while the War Service Homes Commission had built several brick houses in Queensland after the First World War, they had quickly reverted to 'timber and tin' construction methods, as they recognised that brick houses were 'too expensive, and less suitable to the Queensland climate than wooden houses.' However, by 1950, Queensland Housing Commission believed that there was no good reason not to build concrete houses. This change in the perception of concrete as a construction material was influenced by the 'post-war shortage of bricks and timber' and a view that housing construction could be quicker and cheaper due to the increased size of concrete blocks compared to bricks.

During 1950, in response to the April 1950 tender to build 1,000 concrete houses, Queensland Housing Commission was approached by *V/H Firma J Krap*, a building company based in Utrecht in The Netherlands. The company offered to build 300 to 1,000 concrete houses. It was recorded that the houses would be 'precast concrete slab houses' and that a factory would be established in Brisbane to support the construction of the homes. Even before winning the tender, *V/H Firma J Krap* expected to form a company in Australia to support its endeavours. However, Willem Schumacher, the director of *V/H Firma J. Krap*, did not wish to take on the financial risk of building the houses alone. Therefore, in late-1950, discussions were held with Petercity Pty. Ltd., a subsidiary of Palgrave Corporation Ltd., to form a joint company to build the houses in Brisbane. On 18 November 1950, an agreement was signed to create a new joint company, incorporated in Sydney on 4 April 1951 as Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. In Queensland, the company was registered as a foreign entity.

In line with Queensland Housing Commission's tender in early 1950, Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. planned to use a migrant workforce from The Netherlands to build the concrete houses. However, that the migrant workforce came from The Netherlands related more to which company was awarded the contract by Queensland Housing Commission rather than any distinct migration pattern to Australia. For example, when *The Courier-Mail* reported on the tender process in April 1950, it was recorded that both 'British and Continental firms' were interested in the contract from Queensland Housing Commission. Nonetheless, the establishment of the Department of Immigration by the Commonwealth Government in 1945 to plan, manage and implement an immigration programme to Australia, assisted the migration of Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd.'s labour force. The need for immigrants was driven by the popular idea of 'populate or perish.' The Australian Government recognised that it needed to increase its population to help the country develop and defend itself through skilled labour migration. However, while immigration into Queensland did occur, immigrants were typically encouraged to settle in rural areas rather than Brisbane. The State Government's 'restrictive immigration policy' reinforced Queensland's

‘ethnocentrism.’ As such, between 1947 and 1961, the number of people born overseas residing in Queensland rose by only 58 per cent compared to an increase of 139 per cent for the whole of Australia. Nonetheless, several European migrant communities, such as the Dutch workers employed by Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd., contributed to Brisbane’s suburban development in the 1940s and 1950s.

Initially, 73 men were recruited to come out to Brisbane to construct the houses, though, by 1952, that workforce grew to around 200 workers. Passage to Australia was organised by the Commonwealth Government’s assisted immigration scheme. However, through this scheme, the Commonwealth Government could redirect Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd.’s skilled workforce to other projects. Nonetheless, the workforce did make its way to Brisbane. By the end of November 1951, the first group of workers arrived in Australia via aeroplane. These workers arrived to erect accommodation – barracks – for the rest of the workers who arrived by ship. Given the type of housing being constructed by Construction Developments Pty. Ltd., the workforce was highly skilled. Of the original 73 men recruited, only 14 were unskilled.

The workforce, and the families that came with some of them, had to adapt to working conditions in Australia, including working in Queensland’s hot and humid climate. The immigrants also sought to integrate themselves into Australia’s way of life. For example, as early as December 1951, one Dutch Foreman recalled:

We feel that the only way to understand our new country, and to think the same as other Australians, is to speak the same language.

Many of these families chose to stay in Australia with some eventually living in the houses they helped to build while employed by Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd.

Boundary Road, Breton Road, Everest Street, Aldershot Street, Lawford Street, Jamaica Street, Valencia Street and Troughton Road formed the estate’s boundary that contained the 300 Dutch Houses. The houses were built on land resumed by the Queensland Housing Commission in the early 1950s to build public housing. For example, in late-1951, Queensland Housing Commission resumed an area measuring 11 acres, two roods and 36 perches (subdivision two of portion 519) at the western end of the planned estate. Similarly, at the eastern end of the planned estate, 4 acres, one rood and 20 perches were resumed by Queensland Housing Commission in September 1951. On this portion of land, this highly intact group of 6 Dutch Houses was built. Broadly, estates developed by Queensland Housing Commission were drawn up in accordance with the views of Brisbane City Council’s planning section; however, they included few innovations. Indeed, while attempts were often made to provide recreational, community and shopping facilities, they sometimes did not eventuate.

The concrete houses built by Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. consisted of four types described as C-9, C-10, C-11, and C-12. While they shared the same construction techniques and similar detailing, differences existed in their layout. Both C-9 and C-10 houses had two bedrooms, while C-11 and C-12 had three bedrooms. Seventy per cent of the houses constructed had hipped roofs, while the other 30 per cent had gabled roofs. In 1954, weekly rents for a two-bedroomed house was £2 19s 0d while a three-bedroomed dwelling cost £3 3s 6d. This group of Dutch Houses provides a good representative sample of the layouts and roof styles used on the houses constructed on the former Queensland Housing Commission estate.

The variations in the house designs helped address any public concerns regarding the ‘sameness’ of mass-produced public housing. Indeed, as early as 1946, the Queensland Housing Commission had developed a measure of independence regarding the styles of housing it provided. Queensland Housing Commission was reluctant to follow New South Wales’ example, where blocks of flats were erected. Instead, as evidenced by the lot boundaries provided to this group of Dutch Houses, Queensland Housing Commission recognised that Queenslanders preferred individual houses on blocks of land where they could engage in gardening. Nevertheless, while Queensland Housing Commission marketed numerous housing styles in their brochures, they were often described as being conservative in design.

The Dutch Houses were built on foundation walls of 'concrete slabs filled with concrete after erection.' The external walls were:

[m]ade of concrete slabs of six different colours, with an internal cement-wood ('Heraklit') lining. Wood-cement plates were mounted on frames. Then the internal walls were made of blocks. Finally concrete was poured between wall and plates. After two days, the concrete was dry, the frames removed. Afterwards the cement-wood plates were plastered.

The pigments used to colour the tiles were imported from Germany, and the colours used were red, yellow, brown, green, and blue. Some houses were left in grey, the uncoloured colour of the concrete. Newspapers reported widely on the type of tiles used to construct the houses, with it being recorded that this was a 'new type of concrete tile used considerably in Holland.' To support this work, Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. established a factory at Darra to cast the concrete slabs used to construct the walls. However, problems in production at the factory contributed to the slow completion rate of the houses. Internally, except for bathrooms and laundries, which were concrete reinforced with iron, the houses had 'wooden bearers and joists, coated with creosote, and supporting flooring board.' It was widely reported that a form of expanded clay – Lightweight Expanded Clay Aggregate – was to be used to construct these houses, though it was not used despite Queensland Housing Commission noting in 1950 that this material would 'be an important contribution to housing' in the Queensland.

Reactions to the houses were mixed with one 1953 article in *The Courier-Mail* outlining the positive and negative aspects to the homes. Amongst the positive aspects, it was remarked that the 'houses [were] compact, easy to clean, [had] good cupboard space.' Criticisms of the houses included the 'lack of imagination' in their design, a 'lack of natural light' and that 'all meals apparently must be eaten in the kitchen.'

While this group of 6 Dutch Houses were completed by 1955, the original 300 concrete houses were not handed over until 1956. Indeed, the whole project was over time and budget with various problems, including issues with the workforce during 1953, contributing to the slow completion rate. It was not until April 1953 that the first 50 homes were completed; however, even these houses were not yet fully fitted out. By December 1953, only 98 homes had been accepted by the Queensland Housing Commission for occupancy. Another problem that emerged in 1953 was the breakdown in the relationship between *V/H Firma J Krap* and Petercity Ltd. over issues related to the profitability of the project. This led to *V/H Firma J Krap* being bought out of the joint company in November 1953 for the sum of £27,500.

While on 1 July 1952, Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. 'exercised' its option to construct the further 700 concrete houses, construction of these places did not occur. As the 1957 annual report of Queensland Housing Commission reflected, the decision not to proceed with the other 700 houses related to several issues between the Commission and Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd., such as the corrective work that was required on the original 300 houses. The remedial work was necessary because it was discovered that the houses suffered from a damp proofing problem that stemmed from issues with the foundation heights of the buildings. While this issue was resolved, there also remained in 1957 a dispute over monies owed concerning legal costs encountered over the damp proofing problem and the advancement of funds to purchase material to construct the second group of 700 houses. As a result, Queensland Housing Commission was forced to conclude that '[t]his contract has been the subject of prolonged legal correspondence and discussions and finalisation is still indefinite.'

Description

The Dutch Houses are in the suburb of Sunnybank and comprise a highly intact group of 6 surviving examples of concrete houses located at 19 Aldershot Street, 15-21 Lawford Street and 4 Pasteur Street. Constructed of concrete wall tiles, originally with Swiss-profile roof tiles not previously used in Brisbane, the houses are a representative sample of the styles of Dutch Houses built, collectively presenting a consistent, open streetscape character of similarly scaled houses, setbacks, and landscaping. In addition, the Dutch Houses are an illustrative example of how the Queensland Housing Commission alleviated Brisbane's housing shortage through collaboration with international contractors.

General description

The Dutch Houses comprise several forms of largely unaltered, single-storey concrete houses. Rectangular or L-shaped in plan, the houses incorporate several different roof forms, including the hip, hip-and-valley, and transverse gable styles. The houses are constructed from painted modular pre-cast concrete panels set on a painted in-situ concrete foundation. Roofing materials include non-original sheet metal. Where gables exist, their ends are painted and include chamferboard and timber air vents.

The street-facing elevations are either symmetrically or asymmetrically arranged. Symmetrically arranged houses incorporate a hip or hip-and-valley roof form and a central porch. Porches have roofs of sheet metal, offset concrete stairs and metal balustrades. Concrete stairs and metal balustrades are perpendicular to the principal elevation. Porches conceal the main entry and are enclosed by a combination of timber and glazed panel screening or modular pre-cast concrete panels.

Asymmetrical houses have a projection to the right of the principal elevation and utilise either a transverse gable or hip-and-valley roof form. Entries are adjacent to the projection and are concealed by porches. Where a hip-and-valley roof is used, the porch is under the eaves of the main roofline and is screened by modular pre-cast concrete panels. Conversely, houses with transverse gables have porches with separate sheet metal roofs and timber and glazed panel screening.

Across the group of Dutch Houses, window, and door locations, and glazing arrangements, are original. However, most houses have had joinery removed and replaced with modern aluminium framed windows

There are minimal alterations to the houses. These include instances of:

- Replacement of Swiss-profile roof tiles with sheet metal
- Replacement of glazed panel screening with timber lattice
- Replacement of timber double-hung sash windows with aluminium-framed sliding windows
- Replacement of metal balustrades with non-original metal balustrades

The houses are set in landscaped gardens and have concrete driveways that generally extend along the side of the buildings. In addition, low height galvanised wire fences extend along the street and side boundaries of the houses, except for 15 Lawford Street which has timber fencing. Collectively, these contribute to the setting and streetscape. Landscaping varies and has been modified over time.

Significant features

Features of cultural heritage significance of the representative sample include:

- Lot patters and layouts
- Open streetscape character with houses of similar scale, landscaped front setbacks and fencing allowing unimpeded views to and from the street
- Existing location and orientation of houses
- Existing location, orientation, and relationship of the low-set housing above ground level and roof heights
- Original built form and composition, including:

- Symmetrical and asymmetrical arrangements
- Roof form and heights, including:
 - Hip
 - Hip-and-valley
 - Transverse gable
- Projections, including hip-and-valley or gable roof forms
- Open-sided front porches
- External design details, including:
 - In-situ concrete foundations with air vent
 - Expressed modular pre-cast concrete panel wall construction
 - Painted chamferboard-lined gables with timber air vents to side elevations
 - Painted timber barge boards and slat soffits linings
 - Painted metal rainwater goods
 - Entry porch and associated details, including:
 - Timber slat and glazed screens
 - Modular pre-cast concrete panel screens with central window
 - Concrete front steps with wrought metal handrails
- Original location and arrangement of door and window openings
- Landscaping
 - Open landscape setting to the perimeter of the house
 - Visual permeability from the front garden to the rear garden, where existing
 - Low height wire front and side fences, where existing

Non-significant elements

Non-significant features include:

- Non-original additions to the houses, including
 - Aluminium framed windows
 - Sheet metal roofing
 - Timber lattice screens
 - Circular hollow section balustrades
- Non-original fencing
- Detached and semi-detached structures, including secondary dwellings, garages, carports, and sheds

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

Built between 1951 and 1955, this highly intact group of 6 Dutch Houses are important in demonstrating how Queensland Housing Commission sought to alleviate Brisbane's post-Second World War housing shortage and

contributed to the City's suburban development in the 1950s. As described in the citation's history, Queensland Housing Commission contracted a joint Australian-Dutch company, Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd., to build 300 concrete houses in Coopers Plains and Sunnybank, thus contributing to the development and expansion of these suburbs. This collaboration with an international contractor used migrant labour at a time when there were labour and material shortages in Queensland.

Scientific

CRITERION C

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history

This highly intact group of 6 Dutch Houses have the potential to contribute information about the methods and materials used by international contractors in the construction of concrete houses in Brisbane. As described in the citation's history, the houses were constructed using a form of concrete wall tiles previously unused in Brisbane but popular in the Netherlands.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

Designed to address any public concerns regarding the 'sameness' of mass-produced public housing, this highly intact group of 6 surviving representative examples of the 300 concrete houses purpose-built by Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. for Queensland Housing Commission, demonstrates the principal characteristics of the design, construction techniques and materials used in the erection of the Dutch Houses. These characteristics are illustrated within this group of houses through a good representative sample of the types of layouts, forms, roof profiles, construction materials, and settings as used to construct the houses on the former Queensland Housing Commission estate.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

The Dutch Houses in Sunnybank have a special association with the work and activities of the Queensland Housing Commission, which commissioned the construction of the houses by the Australian-Dutch company Concrete Developments Pty. Ltd. The Queensland Housing Commission was responsible for the planning, construction, acquisition and maintenance of public housing and the granting of loans for home ownership. In addition, the Queensland Housing Commission oversaw the construction of housing estates, such as that in Coopers Plains and Sunnybank on which the Dutch Houses were built, as part of the Queensland Government's attempt to alleviate the State's housing shortage after the Second World War.

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Note: This information has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this information is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2025)



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