

Huwen and Intertextuality: Chinese Traditional Intertextuality and Western Intertextuality

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Abstract

Intertextuality, an academic term coined by Kristeva in France, attracted scholars both in and out China. Coincidentally, in ancient Chinese language and literature, there is a similar term huwen, which is understood as traditional intertextuality. Therefore, the research on intertextuality itself is still the most important issue so far to Chinese scholars. The study of intertextuality from the perspective of China will undoubtedly supplement the insufficiency of western research. This paper analyzes the concept of “huwen” and tries to provide an otherness perspective for the study of intertextuality.

Keywords: Huwen, Chinese intertextuality, Western intertextuality

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Introduction

Intertextuality, an academic first term coined by Julia Kristeva in France in 1966, attracted scholars both in and out China. It was first introduced into China in 1980s. Coincidentally, in ancient Chinese language and literature, there is a similar term *huwen*, which is understood as Chinese traditional intertextuality.

Huwen, a term first used by Zheng Xuan (127-200) in the East Han Dynasty, is a rhetoric device in ancient Chinese language and literary studies.

The two terms are similar to each other. The concept of Kristeva's intertextuality was accepted and promoted by Chinese scholars fast. No doubt the research on intertextuality itself is still the most important issue so far to Chinese scholars. The study of intertextuality from the perspective of China will undoubtedly supplement the insufficient of western research.

Research objectives

This paper aims to enrich the dialogue and communication between Western intertextuality and Chinese traditional intertextuality. It also tries to pave the way for the possible integration of the two concepts in the future and enrich the study of intertextuality.

Literature review

In 1966, Julia Kristeva (born 1941), a Bulgarian-French philosopher, semiotician and feminist, coined intertextuality (*intertextualité*) in *Word, Dialogue and Novel*. This concept was first introduced into China in 1980s through the translation of *Structuralism: Moscow-Prague-Paris* (Broekman, 1980. Y. Li, Trans.)

Intertextuality refers to the textual space where texts intersect and new texts emerge. It is the shaping of a text's meaning by other (inter)texts present in it. This term consists of the prefix *inter-* and the root *text*. Intertext represents the relationship between two or more texts. In Kristeva's opinion, a single text does not exist, and all texts are related to each other. Kristeva has not only initiated the concept of intertextuality, but

also insists on an understanding of the text in the context of the whole historical and social background. Kristeva argues that intertextuality implies “the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history” (Kristeva, 1986, p.39), “any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, 1980, p.66) as well as “the term intertextuality denotes the transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another” (Kristeva, 1974, p. 111).

Intertextuality is not made out of nothing, but has its theoretical basis. Although Worton and Still (1990, p.2) traced intertextuality back to Plato, most scholars believe that the academic origin of intertextuality comes from Saussure linguistics and Bakhtin’s poetic aesthetics (Zhao, 2012, p.65). Since the term was coined, the research on intertextuality has been fully carried out from France to all the world. Therefore, in this study, “Kristeva’s intertextuality” is used to name the series of the study on intertextuality derived from the term coined by Kristeva. In order to tell it from Chinese traditional intertextuality (*huwen*), it also named as Western intertextuality in this paper.

Huwen (互文), a long-standing concept in China known as Chinese traditional intertextuality, refers to a rhetoric device in ancient Chinese. Its purpose is to express rich meaning in simple language. It is a literary technique adopted for the sake of conciseness in writing.

The term *huwen* 互文, which shares striking similarities in the way of word formation and basic meaning of Western intertextuality. Obviously, *hu* of *huwen* literally means inter and mutual, while *wen* of *huwen* literally means text. No doubt that many scholars regard they are a same concept. In fact, *huwen* originated individually and developed in a unique way.

Coincidentally, “text” of “intertextuality” and *wen* (文) in *huwen* (互文) is also etymologically similar. “Text” derives from the Latin *textus* (a tissue), which is in turn derived from *texere* (to weave). Thus “text” could be understood as weaving. In China, “*wen* contains the earliest concept of the Chinese script and signifies a wide spectrum of meanings: script / sign / pattern / configuration / text / textuality / literature / culture” (Wang, 1992, p.280). The origin of *wen* is found in a myth recorded in the “Xi-Ci”

(系辞), which describes Bao Xi Shi (包牺氏) invented the eight trigrams with the patterns from observing the heaven and the earth, and marking birds and beasts and regions (Wang, 1992, p.280). It indicates that *wen* could be understood as patterning.

In the broad sense, *wen* in China is accepted as cognition of *tianwen* (天文, patterns of heaven), *dili* (地理, patterns of earth), and *renwen* (人文, patterns of humanities); on the other hand, the term “text” in the Kristeva’s sense is also a broad one. In other words, the “text” of Chinese traditional intertextuality and the one of western intertextuality share a common sense of generalization. The text does not exist in isolation, but reflects and elucidates each other with broad social texts and even social culture. Therefore, the text associates with the other text and sees the shadow of the other text in the text.

Huwen 互文, was originally a rhetorical device used in ancient Chinese literary works. It is widely used and becomes an important content of ancient Chinese language and literature study.

Jing zhuan 经传, which are finished before pre-Qin dynasty (before 221B.C.), is a name of the Confucian classics and commentaries on them used in the field of ancient Chinese language and literature. Similar to the emergence of the term intertextuality, this rhetorical phenomenon *huwen* originated from *jing zhuan* (经传), but without being named at the beginning. At the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, as this rhetorical phenomenon was widely used in various literary styles, the word “*huwen*” first appeared in the annotation of “Huainanzi” (《淮南子》). After textual research, Liu (2012) found that “the term *huwen* was first used by Zheng Xuan (127-200), and the rhetoric of speech of *huwen* was also first discovered by Zheng Xuan” (p. i). When annotating *jing zhuan*, Zheng Xuan and other Chinese Confucian scholars in the Han Dynasty noticed that there was some interactive relationship in *wen*文, and consciously used *hu-X* terms such as *huwen* to refer to them. The terms of *hu-X* can be roughly categorized into two groups: (1) general ones such as *huwen* 互文 and *huci* 互辞, which only reveal the interactive relationship between different *wen*文, but do not indicate what kind of interactive relationship there is; (2) Explicit ones which indicate the specific interactive relationship between different *wen*文, such as *huyan* 互言, *huju* 互举, *huxiangyan*

互相明, *huxiangjian* 互相见, *huxiangcheng* 互相成, *huxiangzu* 互相足, *huxiangbei* 互相备, *huxiangxie* 互相挟 etc. (Liu, 2012, p.271). However, those Confucian scholars including Zhengxuan did not conduct in-depth research on *huwen*, let alone clearly explain its connotation and formation mechanism. There has been a lack of direct research on *huwen* since then.

In Tang Dynasty, Jia Gongyan (birth and death unknown) systematically summarized theory of *huwen*. He not only studied the formation mechanism of rhetoric *huwen*, but also explored the understanding mechanism of it. However, as Liu (2012, p.77) said, Jia Gongyan plays a double-edged sword role in the construction of Chinese traditional intertextuality theory. He is the first pioneer in China to make a theoretical summary of Chinese traditional intertextuality, and the first pioneer in China to study and accurately summarize the connotation and formation mechanism of *huwen*. On the other hand, his research on the mechanism of *huwen* has defects that cannot be ignored.

In other words, Chinese traditional intertextuality was not limited to figures of speech at the beginning, nor to the inner-text, but later it became narrower and narrower. Although Chinese traditional intertextuality is often regarded as rhetoric device and not as complete, systematic and independent a theory as Western intertextuality, it does not mean that there is no intertextuality phenomenon and intertextuality thought of Western significance in Chinese literature tradition. In fact, there are a large number of language phenomena with unique Chinese characteristics in traditional literary works. Although these phenomena were not regarded as *huwen* or intertextuality by the ancients, they actually have something in common with the phenomena concerned by Western intertextuality theory. Matching poems, matching antithetical couplet, singing folk songs in Chinese traditional culture, as well as the drinkers' wager game culture that has been still popular, are intertextual phenomena.

There are also a large number of discussions with intertextuality in ancient Chinese literary theory, which are a useful supplement to the Western intertextuality theory. For example, Fu Xuan (217-278) proposed "it should be drawn from its source and made by inheriting its flow" (引其源而广之, 承其流而作之) in *Qimo Xu* (《七谟序》), and Lu Ji (261-303) proposed "it should be renewed by inheriting the past,

or it should be clearer along the turbidity” (或袭故而弥新,或沿浊而更清) in *Wenfu* (《文赋》). All these indicate that we should learn from past writers, works and traditions, imitate and innovate.

Levels of “Wen” in *Huwen*

As a language unit, “Wen” could be at different levels in Chinese. It can be a single character, a word, a phrase, a sentence, sentence groups, a chapter, or the whole text. In short, the levels of “Wen” in Chinese language and literature reflects a strong thought of continuum, ranging from single characters to the whole text. As long as there are independent language components, it may be regarded as “Wen”.

It is precisely because the concept of “Wen” in Chinese tradition can cover all levels from single characters to texts, which leads to the difference between Chinese “huwen” and Western intertextuality. Although Western intertextuality is translated and spread in China with the name of “huwen” or “huwenxing”, the “Wen” in Western intertextuality theory refers to text, while “Wen” in Chinese traditional intertextuality is at different levels and does not specifically refer to text. Therefore, it reveals many language phenomena ignored by Western intertextuality theory between “Wen” at different levels.

1. *Huwen* at Character Level

Chinese characters, or Hanzi, belong to ideographic characters, which are generally combined characters. The character is composed of two or more parts, and these parts themselves are also ideographic. In this way, the combined character and related parts form huwen, resulting in different linguistic and referential meanings, which enriches the semantics. For examples:

何处合成愁，离人心上秋。（吴文英《唐多令》）

How to make a “sorrow”? An autumn in the hearts of those who are parting away.
(Liu Xiangyu, Trans.)

The character愁 means sorrow, it can be divided to the other two characters 心 and 秋. The character and the divided ones are related and complementary puns with implicit meaning.

2. Huwen at Word and Phrase Level

Huwen at the level of words and phrases refers to words or phrases that can be exchanged or explained to each other. For examples:

重岩叠嶂, continuous mountains. Semantically, 重 and 叠 share a same meaning of continuous and can be exchanged.

遮天蔽日, blot out the sky and cover the sun. 遮 and 蔽 share a same meaning of blot out and can be exchanged.

奇花异石, strange flowers and stones. 奇 and 异 share a same meaning of strange and can be exchanged.

深谋远虑, be circumspect and farsighted. 深 and 远 share a same meaning of far and deep; 谋 and 虑 explain each other and both mean plot and strategy.

祥风庆云, auspicious wind and clouds. 祥 and 庆 are mutually interpreted (both mean auspiciousness)

3. Huwen at Sentence Level

Take “Qi’ao” for example. It is one of the Songs of Wei in the Book of Poetry:

瞻彼淇奥，绿竹猗猗。有匪君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。
瑟兮僖兮，赫兮咺兮。有匪君子，终不可谖兮。

瞻彼淇奥，绿竹青青。有匪君子，充耳琇莹，会弁如星。
瑟兮僖兮，赫兮咺兮。有匪君子，终不可谖兮。

瞻彼淇奥，绿竹如簧。有匪君子，如金如锡，如圭如璧。
宽兮绰兮，猗重较兮。善戏谑兮，不为虐兮。（《诗经·卫风·淇奥》）

Behold the bay beside the Qi;
So many young bamboos you see.
My lord is elegant and wise,
As smooth as ivory neatly made,
As carefully polished as a jade.
My lord is solemn, quiet and grave,
Open, frank and always brave.
My lord is elegant and wise,
A perfect model before my eyes.

Behold the bay beside the Qi;
So many green bamboos you see.
My lord is elegant and wise;
His earrings are all made of jade.
His cap-gems gleam in brighter shade.
How grave and solemn is my lord!
How open and aboveboard!
My lord is elegant and wise,
Who always shines before my eyes.

Behold the bay beside the Qi;
So many thick bamboos you see.
My lord is elegant and wise;
Of pure and gleaming gold he's made;
He's smooth and polished as a jade.
How magnanimous and kind!
How broad and open is his mind!
Always humorous is his mood;
Yet his manner is ne'er rude. (Wang Rongpei, Trans.)

Through repeated chanting, this poem praises the lord in the poem from the aspects of appearance, talent and morality.

The underlined 切,磋,琢,磨 in the first chapter are four ways to process objects with different materials. It means that a gentleman should learn and cultivate himself, just as bone, jade and stone must be cut, discussed, carved and polished before they can become useful. He must listen to criticism and advice and improve again. The third chapter says gold and jade, which means that after hard improvement, the scholar has made achievements in knowledge and morality, just as gold is refined and more exquisite, just as jade stone is polished and becomes jade 圭 and 璧. It can be seen that the combination of the first chapter and the third chapter just outlines the process of a gentleman's learning and self-cultivation, that is, after training, he can become cultivated. It is “huwen” between them.

4. Huwen at Text Level

Another manifestation of “huwen” in ancient Chinese literary is the derivation of texts. Confucius' idea of “telling without creating” (述而不作) about writing has had a great impact on later generations. In Chinese history, a considerable number of scholars took the collation, editing, annotation, reporting and interpretation of previous works as their main career for life. Many texts in the history of Chinese literature, even some classic texts, are the product of this idea. In ancient China, when literary works were presented to readers in the form of books, whether it was a “separate edition” of only one work or a collection of multiple works, in addition to the literary works, there were always preface, postscript and other contents, as well as editors/revisers' notes and annotations. These additional elements constitute an organic part of the whole text and intervene in reader's interpretation of the text. The contents of preface, postscript, annotation and notes may be different between different versions of the same work, especially in some classic literary works. Those contents are constantly accumulated. Therefore, around a core text, there will be new texts, which can be regarded as derivative texts.

In the world literature history of various countries, there should be a phenomenon that some texts are derived from other classical works. However, due to the influence of the Confucius, this phenomenon is extremely prominent in the Chinese literature history. As an important feature of ancient Chinese literary texts, the derivation of texts is also an

important dimension to understand the huwen or intertextuality of ancient Chinese texts.

For example, in ancient Chinese language and literature, there are four levels of literary works: *jing*经, *zhuan*传, *zhu*注 and *shu*疏. *Jing*, is the name of the core works. *Zhuan* is usually the notes to *Jing*, so does *zhu* to *zhuan*, and *shu* to *zhu*.

Therefore, when using the concept of Western intertextuality from western postmodern text theory to talk about the characteristics of Chinese classical literary texts, the following differences should be taken into account: intertextuality of texts emphasizes the parody, collage and borrowing of previous texts by the current text, and the current text is actually on the same plane with other texts existing as reference texts. There is no hierarchy levels. For Chinese classical literary texts, there are strict hierarchical relationships between the current text and its reference text, as well as between different reference texts. This makes Chinese classical texts have strong intertextuality, while still maintaining a strict text order and hierarchical relationship.

Genre is an important focus of the research perspective of “influence research” in intertextuality study. Horizontally speaking, the literature of different countries usually shares the same genre. The similarity between genre determines this horizontal correlation, which is also an important aspect of intertextuality research. This kind of intertextuality is endowed by the characteristics of the text itself. So does Chinese traditional intertextuality, huwen in genre is also an important part of huwen at text level.

For example, the four famous literary works (四大名著) in ancient China, there is no doubt that they are novels. But other genres different from fiction, such as *shi*诗, *ci*词, *wen*文, *fu*赋, are inserted into them from time to time, which mixed of various genres. Take the intertextual relationship between novels and Chinese opera as an example. Chinese opera, as a stage art with high aesthetic value integrating *ci*, *qu*, color and rhythm, is derived from the folk songs and dances of primitive society. From the song and dance originally used for sacrifice to the *Youwu dance* in the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, *Baixi* in the Han Dynasty, the military drama in the Tang Dynasty and then the song and dance drama, Chinese opera gradually emerged from its subsidiary status and formed itself. In the process of historical development, Chinese

opera has become an independent genre with a mixture of poetry, dance, acrobatics, art, clothing and other elements. As a genre, Chinese opera appeared early but matured late in China. Due to the strong literary tradition of Chinese poetry, our dominant genre has always been lyrical. This powerful lyric tradition forms a kind of shielding and suppression to narrative literature, which makes the development of narrative-based genre relatively weak, such as the fate of novels and dramas. Even later, the development of drama has not been separated from the influence of lyric tradition, which is why we often use the reference of *Xiqu* when talking about ancient Chinese opera, because Chinese opera especially emphasizes music and lyricism. It did not emphasize narrative as ancient Greek drama did. Until the emergence of *Yuan zaju* 元杂剧, it marked the maturity of the development of Chinese opera.

Yuan zaju is a kind of Chinese opera. Its story, such as theme and content, mostly follow the previous generation, especially the Tang Dynasty Tales. Li Mingyan (2021, p.144) found that almost all famous Tang Dynasty Tales was adapted by the later generation writers into opera, like “Lihunji”(离魂记) was adapted into “Qiannyu youhun” (倩女幽魂), “Changheng zhuan” (长恨歌传) into “Wutongyu”(梧桐雨), “Zhenzhong ji” (枕中记) into “Handan ji” (邯郸记), “Huo Xiaoyu zhuan” (霍小玉传) into “Zixiao ji” (紫箫记) and “Zichai ji” (紫钗记), “Nanke taishou zhuan” (南柯太守传) into “Nanke ji” (南柯记), “Liwa zhuan” (李娃传) into “Xiuru ji” (袖襦记) and “Zheng Yuanhe fengxue da wuguan” (郑元和风雪打瓦罐), “Yingying zhuan” (莺莺传) into “Romance of the West Chamber” (西厢记), “Liu Yi zhuan” (柳毅传) into “Liu Yi chuanshu” (柳毅传书)... Almost all Chinese operas draw nutrients from the novel, showing an obvious follow-up relationship in terms of character setting, plot setting and theme. In other words, Tang Dynasty Tales, which belongs to the novel, and Yuan zaju, which belongs to the opera, have formed an intertextual relationship for a long time.

In the middle and late Qing Dynasty, after the confluence of Hui and Han schools, under the influence of folk songs, based on Hui tune, Han tune, Kunqu Opera and Qin opera, through the dynamic process of integration, melting, enrichment and improvement, a new opera with Xipi and Erhuang tune as the main singing style was born in Beijing, so it is called Peking Opera. Peking Opera has inherited the profound

heritage of traditional opera culture and become the representative of Chinese opera. Peking Opera in the Qing Dynasty also has a deep relationship with traditional novels, and there are countless plays adapted from the novel of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*), forming a huge “Sanguo series”. There are also plays adapted from the stories in the novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihu zhuan*), which also form an obvious “Shuihu series”. By the end of the Qing Dynasty, Liaozhai series, *The Dream of Red Mansions* series and detective series were added to the repertoire, all of which came from novels. It can be said that the development history of Chinese opera is the history of novel adaptation.

Chinese Traditional Intertextuality and Western Intertextuality

There are three views about the relationship between Chinese and Western intertextuality.

The first is that Chinese and Western intertextuality is just a coincidence in translation, which belongs to the phenomenon of the same name and different reality. They are completely different and have no room for dialogue. For example, Lei (2007, p.75) believes the critical concept of intertextuality in western academic circles is completely different from the Chinese *huwen* discovered and named by Zheng Xuan in the Han Dynasty. Hua (2012, p.22) asserts that intertextuality, which is concerned by many contemporary western disciplines, has the same Chinese name but is actually different from that of traditional Chinese figures of speech.

The second is that there are essential differences between Chinese and Western intertextuality, and the dialogue space is small. For example, according to Chen (2001, pp. 283-284), “in Chinese rhetoric, intertextuality (*huwen*) has three meanings. However, no matter which meaning is, it is related to the clarity of interpretation intention. This is just opposite to the deconstruction intention of Western intertextuality theory.” Dong (2010, p.120) also believes that: “the ancient Chinese concept of intertextuality focuses on the internal relationship within the text, while the modern western concept of intertextuality pays more attention to the organic relationship between different texts.” Qin (2004, p.29-30) on the one hand believes that the Chinese translation of intertextuality as

huwen coincides with the rhetorical term huwen that existed in the Han Dynasty. First of all, it should be recognized that there is no intertextual relationship between the two terms, nor is it a concept at the same level. “ But he also pointed out that “it can be imagined that Barthes, or Genette, or Derrida, who is very sensitive to rhetoric and structure, would not have nothing to say if they knew that China had an intertextual figure of speech based on the principle of economy (provincial language) two thousand years ago (and this word can indeed be accurately translated back into intertexture or *intertextualite* in French).”

The third believes that there is a broad dialogue space between Chinese and Western intertextuality. Xia (2005, pp.108-109) believes that the relationship between Chinese and Western intertextuality is reflected in three aspects: “both should be with the rhetorical characteristics of linguistics”, “both with poetic significance” and “be similar of thinking mode”. Yang (2010, pp.27-31) holds the view that there are differences in the name and connotation between the intertextuality theory and the rhetoric huwen of Chinese poetics, but their internal poetic spirit is interlinked. According to Ma (2010, p.21), intertextuality being translated into “huwen” in Chinese actually reflects the coincidence of thinking between China and the west when recognizing language phenomena. Both of them believe text is a superposition of differences and a relationship of mutual reference and complementarity.

Zhu (2010, pp.9-10) made an outstanding exploration in trying to reveal the relationship between Chinese and Western intertextuality. He believes that the translation of the core term “intertextuality” of Western intertextual theory into “huwen” is not a coincidence or word game. Chinese ancient scholars named huwen as the phenomenon of “participation and mutual writing, unity and meaning” and Chinese scholars also translated intertextuality into huwen, showing that there is a strong psychological reality and theoretical basis between them. Chinese traditional intertextuality and western intertextuality can fully launch a dialogue between history and reality, and guide the scholars to grasp the structural relationship between text and text more deeply. In essence, Chinese traditional intertextuality rhetorically is a kind of mutual implication structure intertextuality shared by components, which is an interactive structure intertextuality on the premise of each other’s existence, while Western intertextuality

also emphasizes its structural concept of mutual involvement and interaction, and focuses on the generation of multi-dimensional interactive text structure. It also profoundly points out that as a common ideological basis, psychological reality and family similarity of structural types, the Chinese rhetorical intertextuality structure accommodates and strongly supports the settlement and roots of Western intertextuality in Chinese academic circles, while the Western intertextuality enriches the methods of traditional discourse analysis with its unique spatial structure level and relationship consciousness.

To sum up, we can find that huwen of Chinese traditional intertextuality and Kristeva's intertextuality in the west are the same in etymology of the root "text/wen". Both of them regard "text/wen" as a fabric, which reflects the commonality of Chinese and Western thinking. The formation of fabric requires the interlacing of lines, and the shape of fabric is like a network. Therefore, fabric has become the most vivid metaphor of "text/wen". It directly leads to the similar cognitive mechanism of intertextuality in China and West. Therefore, Chinese readers can accept the concept of intertextuality faster.

However, the connotations of "text" and "Wen" are different. The level of "text/wen" in Chinese traditional intertextuality is more detailed, ranging from characters and words to sentences and works. In contrast, the "text/wen" of Western intertextuality focusing on the inter-text and intra-text at the very beginning.

The two also have different development directions. Chinese traditional intertextuality has always been regarded as a rhetorical device in literary. Kristeva's intertextuality is not only a literary theory of broader sense, but also an important theory of semiotic study. Both of them could learn from each other for a better development.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can find that huwen of Chinese traditional intertextuality and Western intertextuality are the same in etymology of the root "text/wen". Both of them regard "text/wen" as a fabric, which reflects the commonality of Chinese and Western thinking. The formation of fabric requires the interlacing of lines, and the shape of fabric is like a network. Therefore, fabric has become the most vivid metaphor of "text/wen".

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The two also have different development directions. Chinese traditional intertextuality has always been regarded as a rhetorical device in literary. Western intertextuality is not only a literary theory of broader sense, but also an important theory of semiotic study. Both of them could learn from each other for a better development, which is beneficial to both western and Chinese scholars. The study of Huwen and Western intertextuality from an integrated perspective, could not only avoid the monism of local theory research in western and China, but also provide an otherness perspective for each other.

This study enriches the study of intertextuality It may contribute to the construction and development of the metaverse concept. Intertextuality should have attracted more attention from scholars.

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