

Propagating Buddhism in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The teachings of the Buddha had served beneficial to all human beings. The Buddha taught people by means of oral tradition. Later that it was transmission several traditions and periods; the first period, it was the oral transmission from face to face from Buddha and his followers by journey and teach person by person, place to place by his own word. After his passing away, all his teachings were memorized by his disciples and they still kept with the oral traditional transmission until the third rehearsal of recheck the teaching of Buddha. The second period, it was the development of oral transmission into writing system in order to preserve the Dharma words of the Buddha, when the Fourth Rehearsal was conducted at in Sri Lanka. It started continually from the period of Aksoka till the third and fourth rehearsal in Sri Lanka. This period was the biggest changing from oral transmission to text palm leave to record the Buddha's teaching. The third period; it was started from the period of palm leaves to printing text book, which was the easier preserving and spread to many countries such as Europe and Western world as well as Asia. The fourth period; it was changed from text book to CD record and later on shortly, all teachings were uploaded to internet. This period was the biggest change of the Buddha's teaching, because all information of teachings was upload to world wide web where everyone able to study online and everywhere every time and any devices such as smart phones etc. All people able to access reading or practice Buddha's teaching by just connect with internet.

To teach or propagate Buddhism in the digital era will be the age of globalization of studying and very effective daily life, there is no barrage between people and information. There are several channels where can support us to spread and teach the Dharm of Buddha such as www.youtube.com, www.facebook.com, Line application, twitter etc. All these medias play very important role and useful to instructor as open class online. Thus, we should be mindful that as life online and offline become ever-more entangled, understanding religious life and practice will require serious engagement with both physical and virtual spaces.

Keywords : Propagation, Buddhism, Digital Age

Introduction

What will the propagation of Buddhism in the digital era look like? We really ought to know by now. After the enlightenment of the Buddha by himself, he turned back to the city in order to give a motivation of life liberation to people by giving the four noble truths and the eightfold paths to people for practicing, which is a path to be free from suffering the circle of life-rebirth. (Narada, Mahathera, 1974 : 95)

Buddha originally taught people by oral traditional transmission one by one, village to village, city to city and place by place by his own words more than 45 years. The Spread of the Dhamma Thereafter the Buddha spent the vassa at the Deer Park at Isipatana, sacred this day to over 600 million of the human race. During these three months of “rains” fifty others headed by Yasa, a young man of wealth, joined the Order. Now the Buddha had sixty disciples, all arahants who had realized the Dhamma and were fully competent to teach others. After his passing away all his teaching still transferred to people by oral teaching passing several hundred years before of his disciples. The teachings of Buddha were written down to the palm leaves and passing to the other countries such as south-east Asia and China after several years of his passing away. We will briefly in each period of teaching approach after the Buddha’s enlightenment till nowadays. We can be classified the teaching of Buddha into four periods of time as below; (Campbell, Heidi A, 2012 : 64-93)

The first Period, it was the oral transmission from face to face from Buddha and his followers by journey and teach person by person, place to place by his own word. After his passing away, all his teachings were memorized by Ananda, Ubbala and Mahākassapa and they still kept with the oral traditional transmission to the people who required to learn Buddhism until the third rehearsal or conference of recheck the teaching of Buddha.

The second Period, it was the development of oral transmission into writing system in order to preserve the Dharma words of the Buddha and other related matters in Pali Canon, thus entrusting the preservation to external objects. This started around B.E. 460, when the Fourth Rehearsal was conducted at Lokaleśa in Sri Lanka. It started continuedly from the period of Asoka till the third and fourth rehearsal in Sri Lanka. This period was the biggest changing from oral transmission to text palm leave to record the Buddha’s teaching.

The third Period; it was started from the period of palm leaves to printing text book, which was the easier preserving and spread to many countries such as Europe and Western world as well as Asia.

The Fourth period; it was changed from text book to CD record and later on shortly, all teachings were uploaded to internet. This period was the biggest change of the Buddha’s teaching, because all information of teachings was upload to world wide web where everyone able to study online and everywhere every time and any devices such as smart phones etc. All people

able to access reading or practice Buddha's teaching by just connect with internet.

Nowadays, technology has been applying to everyone. There are many forms of technology that human beings have to adapt their activities to the unstable tools for the convenience in the digital era. For example, we have been communicating to each other by face to face, but in the digital era, we communicate via the digital tools such as the smart phones, which make the way of communication changed. Technology has not only infinite benefits in the forms of social media that people consume every day, in contrast, it also would bring infinite penalties to harm people who are both intentional and unintentional purposes. The beneficial of technology makes people happy. Of course, the penalties from using technology make people unhappy. How would Buddhism apply for the digital era?

From the time of the Buddha until now we have depended largely on language, transmitted orally and in written form, to receive his teachings. In the past twenty years the development of digital techniques of storage have vastly expanded access to these teachings, allowing for reproduction at new orders of magnitude and dissemination, via the Internet, with little or no restriction. Exploration and preservation of sacred Buddhist sites is now also possible through digital means. In this sub-theme of the Vesak Day 2008 conference in Bangkok Thailand, holding by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, Buddhism in the Digital Age, our presenters offer a look at some of the projects that continue to bear fruit from these new technologies.

Lewis Lancaster offered the keynote address of this sub-theme with an overview of the history of Buddhist scholarship with regard to digital input, and he explores some of the implications of the new "sacredness of the digital form of the canon." He reminded us, amidst a summary of the history of the field, that we have not always had the quality tools that we have now for working with large bodies of texts, and that the tools we have now are in part thanks to the painstaking efforts of the early pioneers of text entry.

The Sangīti Sutta lists the four ways of answering a question (*pa-hā,vyākaraa*), which is repeated in the Anguttara Nikāya as the Pa-ha Sutta. Now, monks, there are those four basic ways of answering a question. What four?

There are 4 methods of answering the questions, which Buddha had chosen for his propagating as following;

1. There is the question which requires a direct answer;
2. That which requires an explanation (or analysis);
3. That which requires a counter-question; and
4. That which requires to be rejected (as wrongly put).

The Milindapañh provides examples for each of the four basic ways of answering a question, thus:

1. There is the question which requires a direct answer, that is, a categorical reply, or direct affirmation or negation; *Is form...feeling...perception...mental formation...consciousness impermanent?*

2. That which requires an explanation or analysis, that is, a discriminating reply or analytical reply:

But if form...feeling...perception...mental formation...consciousness is impermanent...?

3. That which requires a counter-question:

But not, is everything discriminated by the eye?

See the Ambattha Sutta (D no. 3) where the Buddha counter-questions Ambattha who arrogantly questions if the Buddha was a “great man” (*mahāpurisa*).

4. That which requires to be rejected (as wrongly put), that is, waiving the question as being wrongly put, or keeping silent:

These are the 10 unanswered or indeterminate propositions (*avyākata*) or questions set aside (*thapanīya*) by the Buddha. These propositions are listed in several suttas: Potthapāda Sutta Pāsādikā Sutta Mālunkya,putta Sutta Vaccha,gotta Sutta (M 72), the Vacchagotta Samyutta .

The traditional 10 unanswered propositions as given in the Pali sutras are as follows:

The world

1. Is the world is eternal (*sassato loko*)?
2. Is the world is not eternal (*asassato loko*)?
3. Is the world is finite (*antavā loko*)?
4. Is the world is infinite (*anantavā loko*)?

The soul

5. Is the soul is identical with the body (*tam jīvam tam sarīram*)?
6. Is the soul is different from the body (*annam jīvam annam sarīram*)?

The Tathāgata

7. Does the Tathāgata exist after death (*hoti tathāgato param maranā*)?
8. Does the Tathāgata not exist after death (*na hoti tathāgato param maranā*)?
9. Does the Tathāgata both exist and not exist after death (*hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato param maranā*)?
10. Does the Tathāgata neither exist nor not exist after death (*n’eva hoti na na hoti tathāgato param maranā*)?

These propositions are divided into 3 parts as shown: the first dealing with the world or universe; the second with the soul; and the third with the Tathāgata. (*The teaching Methods of Buddha (A dynamic vision of Buddhist hermeneutics* (Helland, Christopher, 2000 : 12-17)

The teachings of Buddha were contained in the Tipiṭaka are also known as the Doctrine of the Elders [Theravāda]. These discourses number several hundred and have always been recited word for word ever since the First Council was convened. Subsequently, more Councils have been called for a number of reasons but at every one of them the entire body of the Buddha's teaching has always been recited by the Saṅgha participants, in concert and word for word. The first council took place three months after the Buddha's attainment of Mahāparinibbāṇa and was followed by five more, two of which were convened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These collective recitations which were performed by the monks at all these Dhamma Councils are known as the 'Dhamma Saṅgītis', the Dhamma Recitations. They are so designated because of the precedent set at the First Dhamma Council, when all the Teachings were recited first by an Elder of the Saṅgha and then chanted once again in chorus by all of the monks attending the assembly. The recitation was judged to have been authentic, when and only when, it had been approved unanimously by the members of the Council. What follows is a brief history of the Six Councils.

The First Council

King Ajātasattu sponsored the First Council. It was convened in 544 B.C. in the Sattapaṇṇī Cave situated outside Rājagaha three months after the Buddha had passed away. According to this record the incident which prompted the Elder Mahākassapa to call this meeting was his hearing a disparaging remark about the strict rule of life for monks. The monk Subhadda, a former barber, who had ordained late in life, upon hearing that the Buddha had expired, voiced his resentment at having to abide by all the rules for monks laid down by the Buddha. To avoid this, he decided that the Dhamma must be preserved and protected. To this end after gaining the Saṅgha's approval he called to council five hundred Arahants. Ānanda was to be included in this provided he attained Arahant hood by the time the council convened.

The Second Council

The Second Council was called one hundred years after the Buddha's Parinibbāṇa in order to settle a serious dispute over the 'ten points'. This is a reference to some monks breaking of ten minor rules. They were given to:

1. Storing salt in a horn.
2. Eating after midday.
3. Eating once and then going again to a village for alms.
4. Holding the Uposatha Ceremony with monks dwelling in the same locality.
5. Carrying out official acts when the assembly was incomplete.

6. Following a certain practice because it was done by one's tutor or teacher.
7. Eating sour milk after one had his midday meal.
8. Consuming strong drink before it had been fermented.
9. Using a rug which was not the proper size.
10. Using gold and silver.

Their misdeeds became an issue and caused a major controversy as breaking these rules was thought to contradict the Buddha's original teachings. King Kāḷāsoka was the Second Council's patron and the meeting took place at Vesāli due to the following circumstances. (Sathienpong Wannapok, 1984 17-19)

The Third Council

The Third Council was held primarily to rid the Saṅgha of corruption and bogus monks who held heretical views. The Council was convened in 326 B.C. At Asokārāma in Pāṭaliputta under the patronage of Emperor Asoka. It was presided over by the Elder Moggaliputta Tissa and one thousand monks participated in this Council.

One of the most significant achievements of this Dhamma assembly and one which was to bear fruit for centuries to come, was the Emperor's sending forth of monks, well versed in the Buddha's Dhamma and Vinaya who could recite all of it by heart, to teach it in nine different countries.

The Dhamma missions of these monks succeeded and bore great fruits in the course of time and went a long way in ennobling the peoples of these lands with the gift of the Dhamma and influencing their civilizations and cultures.

The Fourth Council

The Fourth Council was held in Tambapaṇṇi [Sri Lanka] in 29 B.C. under the patronage of King Vaṭṭagāmaṇi. The main reason for its convening was the realization that it was now not possible for the majority of monks to retain the entire Tipiṭaka in their memories as had been the case formerly for the Venerable Mahinda and those who followed him soon after. Therefore, as the art of writing had, by this time developed substantially, it was thought expedient and necessary to have the entire body of the Buddha's teaching written down. King Vaṭṭagāmaṇi supported the monk's idea and a council was held specifically to reduce the Tipiṭaka in its entirety to writing. Therefore, so that the genuine Dhamma might be lastingly preserved, the Venerable Mahārakhita and five hundred monks recited the words of the Buddha and then wrote them down on palm leaves. This remarkable project took place in a cave called, the Āloka lēna, situated in the cleft of an ancient landslip near what is now Matale. (U Ko Lay, 1990 : 2-3)

The Fifth Council

The Fifth Council took place in Māṇḍalay, Burma now known as Myanmar in 1871 A.D. in the reign of King Mindon. The chief objective of this meeting was to recite all the teachings of the Buddha and examine them in minute detail to see if any of them had been altered, distorted or dropped. (Homer, LB, 1986 : 7)

The Sixth Council

The Sixth Council was called at Kaba Aye in Yangon, formerly Rangoon in 1954, eighty-three years after the fifth one was held in Mandalay. It was sponsored by the Burmese Government led by the Prime Minister, the Honorable U Nu.

Buddhist studies or Buddhist education, no less than biology and physics, is faced with the challenge of the new information technology. Buddhist studies in modern European and North American scholarship has been primarily a part of the humanities, as it has also been in Asia. While social science has addressed problems that focus on particular Buddhist practices, the detailed studies of the tradition itself have been textual in nature. In part, because of this tradition, we do not find scholars who have been interested in dealing with the impact of technologies on Buddhism. That is, there is little in the way of research on the effects that resulted from and of the technological developments in the history of the religion. For example, we have little research on the changes that resulted in Buddhism when the technology of writing was introduced and written texts began to take the place of oral recitation. Prior to the beginning of the activities that produced the Chinese Buddhist canon, writing, one of man's most important technologies was found in both China and India. As a number of scholars have indicated, writing was an instrument of power, since it immediately separated the literate from the illiterate, and provided the former group with a skill that allowed them to keep records and communicate with one another over long distances. All of the significant texts needed by the court were written down and transmitted through manuscripts. Buddhism coming from India and the nomadic regions to the South East Asia and West of China represented both oral and chirographic cultures. Missionaries who provided the Indian texts for the translations into Chinese or other languages, sometimes simply recited the material from memory. At other times, they read out the scripture from palm, and possibly birch bark, manuscripts. Without writing, we cannot imagine the form that Buddhism would have taken within the East Asian environment.

A number of scholars have explored the issue of why humanists tend to marginalize technology. Landow in his study of the current developments which he characterizes as "hypertext", tries to explain technophobia among humanists and refers to Eisenstein's statement that it is a "venerable tradition of proud ignorance of matters material, mechanical or commercial.

The use of the word "hypertext" is often confusing; it means in this sense "non-sequential writing." The most important example of this is the World Wide Web that functions as one continuous linked electronic discourse. It has been described as the "most complex written artifact every produced." We are still trying to understand the significance of this use of the written word. The importance of the emerge of manuscripts within Buddhist history has been little studied and yet we are now called upon to evaluate the impact of the "hypertext" in our own time. This lack of interest in the nature of writing in Buddhism is unfortunate since it is difficult to trace the development of Mahayana, the spread of the tradition into Central Asia and China, and the history of the Theravada without reference to written manuscripts. While the oldest form of Buddhist teaching and preservation was maintained orally, in time, this gave way to the written word. As far as extant evidence is concerned, it was King Asoka who first used writing within the India. From him time forward, the use of writing had an increasingly crucial impact on the religions of South Asia.

While India has had a long history of careful preservation in oral tradition of such materials. The orality of the early Buddhist teachings was formulaic, patterned, and mnemonic. With the advent of writing, the age of commentaries came into existence and what is of more importance; these commentarial thoughts have persisted through time in the written texts. If there had been no writing, the persistence of the analysis and appraisal of the oral teachings would have long since been "simply a passing thought." In particular, the commentaries to Theravada texts do not lend themselves to oral transmission. Before, we dispatch orality for the primacy of the written words; some reflection on the ancient Greek philosophers may be in order. Pierre Hadot from his prestigious position at the College de France, points out that Socrates did not believe that knowledge was a set of data that could be memorized and passed along in texts and commentaries.

The technology of writing itself was subject to technological advances. Up to the late 20th century, the most significant development was the replacement of hand written script with printing. Lewis R. Lancaster addressed the issue of the influence of information technology on Buddhism, but he still has not had a full study of the impact of printing more than a thousand years ago in China. There are a number of excellent studies of typological and chirographical cultural patterns that have been produced by writers who focus primarily on Europe. Unfortunately, the study of printing in Europe often gives little credit to the Chinese inventors of paper and the technique of reverse image transfer. These European studies cannot be used to understand what happened to Buddhism as a result of printing. It was the invention of paper by the Chinese that permitted most of the advances in typological developments in Europe. Since reverse image printing on paper occurred in Asia before it was used in Europe, knowledge of the history of that printing is

essential for a full comprehension of the role of printing in history. The study of the role of printing in Europe has been done by scholars such as Roger Chartier, especially in his volume translated into English as *The Culture of Print: Power and Uses of Print in Modern Europe*. Elizabeth Eisenstein in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* also deal with some of the same issues of print technology in determining the patterns of European life. Even before the printing press came on the scene, the cultural patterns associated with writing itself have been studied by many and a summary of that material can be found in Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*.

Today, Buddhism along with all of the religious traditions is faced with the advent of information technology that goes beyond writing and printing. Our scripts have been put into computer coding and can be used to create display of letters. We are able to store in electronic format these coding and reproduce identical versions of our writing when we wish. For most scholars, the computer is a “smart” typewriter and little more. The internet is considered to be of little use because the content is not reviewed or judged. For the publisher, the computer is a “smart” printing press and allows for cheaper and faster printing. We are hesitant to take the step that goes beyond well-established practices. Therefore, for most scholars, publishers, librarians, and students, the information technology is simply a convenient system for performing the tasks that are recognized and valued. Buddhist groups are learning that the internet can provide an avenue for advertising and communication that goes beyond the news bulletin and distributed paper information sheets. In most ways, we have only achieved a primitive use of the technology and have little insight about what is happening to our personal world of experience.

Lewis began to work toward a database for the Chinese Buddhist canon and in 1990 set up an input group in Shanghai. In order to give some cohesion to the various projects, he established the Electronic Buddhist Text Initiative (EBTI) at a meeting in Berkeley. Since those early days of the attempts to create digital versions of the Buddhist canons, great progress has occurred. It is an indication of how fast changes have come upon us that all of this has happened with the last 15 years. Today, the Chinese Buddhist canon is available on the internet, there are four versions of the Pali canon on CDs and the internet, the Korean edition of the Chinese canon is on CD and soon to be on the internet, the Tibetan canonic input is progressing on CDs. Their great need is to proceed with the creation of a Sanskrit database for Buddhist materials.

To propagate Buddhism online or social media are easier and faster way to approach all people. Therefore, there are so many websites are available on the internet or applications. There are nine steps to quality

teaching in a digital age. We are assuming that all the standard institutional processes towards program approval have been taken, although it is worth pointing out that it might be worth thinking through A.W. (Tony) Bates's nine steps outlined below before finally submitting a proposal. His nine steps approach would also work when considering the redesign of an existing course. The 'standard' quality practice for developing a fully online course would be to develop a systems approach to design through something like the ADDIE model. Puzzi ferro and Shelton (2008) provide an excellent example. To get a sense of the difference in approach to a 'standard' systems model, the ADDIE model wouldn't kick in until around Step 6 below. However, we have already pointed to some of the limitations of a systems approach in the volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous digital age and in any case, we think that we need a process that works not only for fully online courses but also for face-to-face, blended and hybrid courses and programs. So we are aiming for a more flexible but still systematic approach to quality course design, but broad enough to include a wide range of delivery methods.

Furthermore, it is not enough just to look at the actual teaching of the course, but also at building a complete learning environment in which the learning will take place. So, to provide a quality framework, we will outline nine steps of A.W. (Tony) Bates, although they are more likely to be developed in parallel than sequentially. Nevertheless, there is logic to the order;

Step 1: Decide how you want to teach

Step 2: Decide on mode of delivery

Step 3: Work in a Team

Step 4: Build on existing resources

Step 5: Master the technology

Step 6: Set appropriate learning goals

Step 7: Design course structure and learning activities

Step 8: Communicate, communicate, and communicate

Step 9: Evaluate and innovate (Teaching in a Digital Age: A.W.

(Tony) Bates)

Digital learning technologies help people, teachers, scholars and students:

Learn more efficiently: Digital assessments offer people rapid feedback on their understanding, allowing both learners and instructors (who can access this information) to concentrate their efforts on where further understanding is most needed. Adaptive hinting, which provides guidance to incorrect responses, corrects misperceptions immediately and helps students to figure out problems real-time.

Learn more fully: Rapid assessment, simulations, visualizations, games, annotation technology, and videos with multiple instructors provide a richer learning environment toward a fuller understanding of concepts.

Annotation technologies, discussion boards, and online support provide additional forums for discussion, debate, conjecture, and edification.

Learn with mastery: The ability to pace learning to one's preference, to review material, and to be assessed on a section before moving to another lead to mastery learning.

Learn the best way: Active engagement, hands-on experiences, discussions and flipped classrooms allow students to experience learning that applies best practices and directly employs current theories of learning.

Learn anytime, anywhere: Asynchronous classrooms allow students to "go to school" where and when they are most ready to learn. This helps graduate student's access advanced information needed for their thesis research when they need it. It gives flexibility to undergraduates to study abroad or pursue an internship. And, it allows lifelong learners to continue to pursue an education, while meeting work and family commitments. Digital learning makes education more accessible and affordable to students on campus and also worldwide.

Digital learning technologies help instructors to propagate Buddhism as below:

Leverage time better: Digital learning provides quick feedback to instructors on where students are struggling, allowing teachers to provide additional instruction and answers to common questions, either online or in person. Automation eases or eliminates routine grading, freeing course teams to spend more face-to-face time with students.

Spread knowledge widely: Digital platforms allow instructors to reach more students, often by orders of magnitude than via on-campus courses. Instructors can disseminate new ideas more quickly, touching more people and impacting more lives.

Engage a worldwide audience: Digital platforms allow instructors to meld worldwide participants into campus teaching, creating global conversations – resulting in richer teaching experiences, from architecture and entrepreneurship, to climate change and innovation, and beyond.

Build learning modules quickly: Digital learning empowers instructors to build courses using the best content previously developed by other instructors and colleagues, whether within the same department, or even at other institutions. This "digital abstraction" for modular learning content is the real meaning behind the "digital" of digital learning.

Improve instructional techniques: Through evidence-based research, instructors can measure how people learn most effectively and respond with scientifically grounded strategies for educating students.

As addressed above of the important role of technology which is two ways of communication in the age of digital are more and more powerful to people daily life because everyone able to buy and own smart phones along

with internet Wifi. This is the new age of propagating Buddhism in the new era of human beings. (Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto, 2002 : 56-67)

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would love to suggest that, motivated by the powerful new communications technologies now available, such a system might best promote the democratization of learning of Buddhism, where the incautious use of technology. As in the age of high-speed internet connections expand and portable internet access via smart phones, tablets, and other devices is increasingly commonplace, the boundaries between time, place, and religious practice on- and offline are dissolving. The very notion of 'being offline' is increasingly challenged as smart phone technologies connect their users and in increasingly disparate regions of the earth. Similarly, Buddhist internet resources collapse many of these boundaries, allowing participants from any time zone or geographic location to connect in the same virtual 'shrine room' for communal study and practice. There are more and more people from around the world using free software to gather together via their laptops, mobile phones, desktops, tablets, and other devices for a live video-conferenced religious practice would have been close to unimaginable. Today, on websites such as Buddhist internet resources, this is a daily reality as the capabilities of the internet expand, the ways in which people use it for the study and practice of religion will also. Moreover, virtual spaces of religious life and practice will increasingly become online sites of negotiation where questions of authority, participation, and access continue to shift and be renegotiated. Ultimately, as internet capabilities and global interconnections grow and the internet becomes increasingly ubiquitous and integrated into all aspects of daily life, the distinction between life on- and offline will grow increasingly blurry. Therefore, propagate Buddhism in the age of digital kids think of information and communications technology as something akin to oxygen: they expect it, it's what they breathe, and it's how they live. They use ICT to meet, play, date, practice, and learn. It's an integral part of their social life; it's how they acknowledge each other and form their personal identities.

To teach or propagate Buddhism in the digital era will be the age of globalization of studying and very effective daily life, there is no barrage between people and information. There are several channels where can support us to spread and teach the Dharm of Buddha such as www.youtube.com, www.facebook.com, Line application, twitter etc. All these medias play very important role and useful to instructor as open class online. Thus, we should be mindful that as life online and offline become ever-more entangled, understanding religious life and practice will require serious engagement with both physical and virtual spaces.

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