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## Beijing, “Legitimism” and the Paintings of Huang Binhong’s Senior Years

**Abstract:** The article is mainly focused on the dwelling ten years Huang spent in Beijing, to enter his senior year arts by bringing up the concept of “the second prosper stage of painting during Emperor Daoguang and Emperor Xianfeng”, to analyze the impact of “legitimism, a once popular painting genre, on Huang’s later works by going in depth of related documents whilst analyzing Huang’s painting style. It came to a conclusion that the turning point of Huang’s attitude toward “legitimism” was the “art of accumulated ink” he had comprehended in the art works of “Four Wangs”.

**Key words:** Beijing, “Legitimism”, the art works of Huang’s senior years

**BRING UP THE QUESTION** During his long life, Huang Binhong had been migrating from place to place, we can divide it into four stages based on his routes— He had been around places such as Xinhua, She county, Nanking, Yangzhou and Wuhu before turning 44 years old (1907), and then he had been living Shanghai during the age of 44 to 74(1907 to 1937), after that he lived in Beijing from 1937 to 1948(when he was 74 to 85 years old), and have led the lifestyle of a hermit in Hangzhou form 85 years old to 92 years old. If we were to talk about the impact each places have made on him, the most important two would be Shanghai and Beijing, at present the scholars value Shanghai’s impact a bit more than Beijing, Shanghai and Yuyang have discussed the problem based on different aspects such as “Shanghai style” and “The Renovation of Tradition”. However, not much attention was focused on Beijing, only a few words in Wang zhongxiu and Mei mo’s research being brought up. Wang believed that “When it comes to the earnest research of the art of brush works, if Huang focused on the brush stroke during his time in Shanghai then he had put more attention on ink, he had achieved a breakthrough because of that.” Mei had also made some assumption saying “I believe it must be the Beijing culture that made an influence on him. The impact of Beijing culture must have had some influence over his scholarship and art form, if not intentionally then subconsciously. Beijing culture has a sense of royalty, something magni-

ificent. I believe the magnificence in his later works is a reflection of that.” The problem of these words is that it’s rather vague on context and sensation, also lack of thorough proof.

There is no doubt that both Beijing and Huang are of great rich existence and ten years are hardly a short period of time, Wangzhongxiu believes the influence is mutual, he came up with a saying that “the northern style of painting had seen some changes because of Huang” during Huang’s teaching years in the traditional painting research room of antique display department in the Forbidden Palace, if that’s so, what changes have Beijing brought to Huang? It might be a complicated question, and this article is only going to talk about some personal opinions on the brought up concept of “the second prosper stage of painting during Emperor Daoguang and Emperor Xianfeng” as well as two new changes in Huang’s senior works.

**BEIJING AND “THE SECOND PROSPER STAGE OF PAINTING DURING EMPEROR DAOGUANG AND EMPEROR XIANFENG”** The concept of “the second prosper stage of painting during Emperor Daoguang and Emperor Xianfeng” is a problem brought up by Huang in regards to the latter years of Chinese painting history during his stay in Beijing. He wrote a letter to Zhu Yanyin saying “the famous painters during Xianfeng and Tongzhi era are of real and fake bureaucratic class, but among the real ones, they are of better artistic achievement than those in Mingxian era”, after research, Wang believed that this is probably the earliest discuss among the exist documents. The academic circle has paid heavy attention and come up with many results regarding to this topic since Huang had stressed on it many times in his senior years, I will not talk too much about that. I have made my research as well and came up with two main realization. The first one is that the “Second Prosperity” in brush work is really a combination of the “three ink law”—moist, thick, dark and “the way of writing on monuments”, the second one is that the famous painters during Daoguang and Xianfeng periods have used the artistic style of “Four Wangs and Wuhui, and the so called “Second stage of prosperous” came from a combination of “legitimism” and epigraphy to some extent.

Just as what Xue Yongnian once said, “Huan is a painter of close relationships with publishing industry who doubles as a collector and connoisseur of painting and calligraphy artifacts. Thanks to that, he was able to set out from the amount of artifacts he had witnessed and combine them

with documents to discuss the whole picture about the changing styles of Chinese paintings throughout the ages without outside disturbance.” That is why there is a definite close connection between the numbers of paintings he had seen and the concept of “Second prosperous”. Based on the memory of Song Ruoying, Huang’s wife, he had pay attention to the correlation between paintings and epigraphy during Emperor Daoguang and Xianfeng’s reign in an early stage—when he was still an editor of “art series” in Shanghai. “Art Series” is a rich reference book for art theories made by Huang and Deng shi. The original ones were printed on polished paper , the western style ones were being tempered hence why a lot of the materials from Jaiqing and Daoguang periods were missing. Huang speaks highly about the painters and calligraphers at that time and believed it was a time of abundant epigraphical discoveries where paintings are influenced by, creativity flowed from each artistic school.

In the letter Huang wrote to Liu Zuochou in 1954 it mentioned “The second prosperous stage of paintings occurred in the Daoguang and Xianfeng period, painters in the Yuezhong province (nowadays southern Guangdong ) such as Xie Lifu, Wu Hewu, Song Guangbao, Meng Litang and the ones in Jiangnan region like Boa Shenbo, Zhao Huishu, Weng Songchan, Wu Kezhai are all very talented with various of unique artistic styles, and there are hundreds of them. I want to edit them into a book and let the world know their works, it can also uplift our artistic aesthetic. However, it’s shame that after tens of years of war, so many were destroyed and only the ones in Beijing and Shanghai is still up for appreciation.” Those words have shown that Huang had seen a lot of paintings during those periods in Beijing and Shanghai, and he mentioned again the letter he wrote to Gu Feishu in 1943, “It’s normal to see some antiques from south to north, however northern collectors have plenty more master pieces than I have seen in Shanghai.” It shows that compared to shanghai, Huang had seen more favorites in Beijing, it might be an important reason why he brought the concept of “ Second prosperous stage” up in Beijing—quotes from the letter he wrote to Chen Zhu in 1940 are “to see the paintings of recent painters Wu Hewu and Boa Shenbo, don’t ever criticize the more recent art works for the sake of phrasing the old ones I have also seen the ones which the creators were not at all famous in the north.” He mentioned it once again in the letter he wrote to Huang Just in 1948 that “ I have lived in Peking for ten years

now and dedicated in the research of paintings and calligraphy as well as well as epigraphy (and have noticed there are a lot master pieces) I have also gathered documents of such nature throughout the history.” Then, why were the art works of “Famous painters in Daoguang and Xianfeng periods more popular in Beijing?

Huang Hongbin have been running back and force from Beijing to Shanghai since 1936 to evaluate paintings in the Forbidden Palace, as awestricken as the paintings are in number— 4636 pieces, the quality is oddly disappointing, in the letter he wrote to Xu chengyao it said” I have almost went through a thousand paintings stored in the Forbidden Palace, most were works of the cheesy kinds.” Song Ruoying have reflected memories on how Huang found lots of works of “Daoguang and Xianfeng painters” in Colored Glaze Factory (Liulichang) in Beijing:

The art dealers in Liulichang always bring art works with them for Huang to evaluate. He was close with some local famous gentlemen who are generally economically shy, people in Liulichang have the ancient value of looking up to poor scholars hence why he was respected there, of course it was for the need of commerce. A painting could be very popular among buyers and sold for higher price as long as the work was evaluated by Huang the dealer would guarantee that “It is definitely real because Huang said it was”. He only took two to three days after a painting was sent to him to mimic the essence of its brush work and style, it was seen as an exercise to strength his wrist pressure. During his stay in Beijing he paid extra attention to the pieces made in Jiaqing and Daoguang period because it was the time when ,massive antique were discovered and the style of epigraphy immersed in painting which brought renovation to the painting styles of Qing Dynasty, the reason why the paintings then were full of creativity. He spoke highly of the works done by a painter named Song Guangbao. The painter had a very raw and provocative art style and was not appreciated in his time. He signed to me:” I’m in similar shoes as Song Guangbao once in—unappreciated.”

There reasons why painters of Daoguang and Xianfeng period was popular in Liulichang, Beijing are double fold, the first one being the painters are under the influence of Legitimism which happened to be favorite for the art circle there, Fu Yanghua once pointed that “the influence Four Wangs have brought to Beijing surpass they did in southern China where they came from.” The researchers have traced it back to the beginning of

Qing Dynasty when the rulers promoted Four Wangs for the need of political, psychological and cultural control to a point it was the dominating influencers of royal court painting. Lords followed what rulers fancy, when they create painting and calligraphy pieces after their civil obligations, it was the style of Four Wangs they turned to. Jiang Baoling have written that “We Qing Dynasty have more artists than Ming, the last dynasty. Painters are flowing from places ever since the junior lordship Zhao of Taiyuan Yanke and Langya mansion, Ruo Shigu, Yushan and Lutai were all taught personally who became the direct descendent in Southern Style, the house of Wang Qinzhong and Yun Zhengshu have declared that the Song and Yuan Dynasty sketch were of legitimacy, it passed down from generation to generation and never cease to come up more excellency. Hence why we lost count on the lords who mimic the art styles of artists such as Wang and Yun during Emperor Qianlong and Jaijing’s reign.” Being the most densely populated city of lords, Beijing became the home base of “Legitimism”, Xue Yongnian have observed that the art circle towards the end of Qing Dynasty are “mostly lordships who work in Beijing speak highly of carry on to legitimacy, yet the artistic style have a trace of epigraphic influence.” The painters of Daoguang and Xianfeng period are mostly lordships of every level, there are 9 high-ranking lords and 5 middle ones during the 38 painters, the rest are 9 low-ranking lords, 3 counselors, 8 local scholars, 3 professional painters. There is one painter whose identity remains unclear, many of them have been working for the royal court or travelled to Beijing. The situation didn’t change much during the period of Republic China, Chen Duxiu observed: “Tan Jiaotian’s Beijing melody and Wang Shigu’s painting are two cults in Beijing.” It’s especially so when the sole person of Beijing’s art circle Chenshi published an article named “The Value of Scholars’ Painting” in 1921 in which he intentionally promoted scholar painting yet in fact further strengthened the status of legitimacy in Beijing. It was written in the letter Huang Hongbin wrote to Huang Jusu that “There are more paintings in northern China that illustrate royal court and markets and more painting of natural beauty in the south.” To link that with a quote from “A Review on the painters of recent decades”— “I supposed that most painters of the royal court and city fancy Four wants, Tang Yifen and Dai Xi, and the ones who illustrate natural beauties fancy Qing Xiang and Xuege.” we can figure out that the “paintings of royal court and markets” are really the ones of Four

wang and Tang, Dai. According to the researches done by Huangxiaogeng, the most popular pieces serves the role of collections in the antique& paintings markets toward the end of Qing Dynasty were the ones made by “Four Wangs and Wuhui.” Corresponding to a lack of appreciation of legitimism and a favor over Shanghai Style in Shanghai. Huang made his observation noted in his article “A Note on the Antique Market of Shanghai” that “Before the revolution, the gentlemen always talk about popular artists of the time whom I have never heard of before. That is why within the recent decades of art history in Shanghai, a painter from Xiaoshan whose name is Renxiong and styled by Weichang and another one name Chen Laotian are very famous in the works of portrait, flowers and natural wonders, they reside in Wumen, and during their rare visits to Shanghai, many people are keen to have their works. Hence why Ren’s works are very popular. I didn’t dare to take the liberty of relaxation and went through many markets and visited plenty of collectors and only have found few authentic works of Four Wangs and Tan, Dai. Freelance painters copy those paintings days and nights.” Such different styles in those two cities makes it less strange that Huang had seen more paintings of Daoguang Xiangfeng painters and works of different styles of legitimism. However legitimism was bashed by Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu at around the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, the academic world had taken it further and titled the style of 19 century “Four Wang” as “decay itself”. For Huang to detect a trace of renovation in their paintings we need to talk about how his view on “Legitimism”.

#### **LEGITIMISM AND HUANG’S SENIOR YEAR PAINTINGS**

Huang had the tittle of being both a painter and an art historian, the implementation of painting have helped him grow an unique sense in the history of art, Langshaojun have once pointed out that “The rule of comparison lays under brush strokes, it was quite different from other historians and critics.” As for Huang’s art work itself, the academic world has the agreement of it being “non-legitimate”—an idea being explicitly explained by Langshaojun in his work of figuring out the origin of “The Four Traditional Houses”.

The influence of “Nan Song” style was very popular ever since the beginning of Qing Dynasty and it was righteous to speak highly of the styles under the guidance of “Four Wangs and Wuhui.” the quality of those

imitations is worsen by time and became quite soft and less of a character. At the same time a bunch of painters such as “Four Monks”, different houses of Xinan and the style of Yangzhou as well as Shanghai style came into being, filled with rebellious character and free from restrain, they make their livings by selling paintings and have formed a non-legitimate style that focus on life experiences and free of expression. The four masters of traditional painters in the 20th century—Wu Changshuo, Qi Baishi, Huang Binding and Pan Tianshou were under the influence of painters such as Zhang Daqian, Fu Baoshi who got inspirations from western art form yet still maintains a rather traditional style and kept their untraditional style flowing (mostly known by the name of “the style of innovalution”)

There are also researchers who have noticed the correlation between Huang Binding and “Legitimism”, such as Xuj Jianrong who believes Huang was heavily influenced by Yun Shouping and his work were really a combination of legitimism and non-legitimism. “Huang’s work is similar to Wang Yuanqi’s on image but of different brush stroke, the image came out being legitimism and his brush stroke free from bond, he used free style to compose legitimism.” Chen Zizhuang have even made assertion that “Mr. Huang promote magnificence which is the point of view hold by legitimism and I am a fun of “innocent and nada” which is free style.”

Maybe each scholars had their point since Huang’s painting is ever changing, Zhang Daqian remembered when he wrote on Huang’s piece” The Picture of Emei Daozhong”—Mr. Binhong cofounded “Brilliant and Romantic Club” with my second brother Shanzi, Binhong was the oldest among them so he was the leader of that club,the club was at my brother’s apartment in Road Ximen, not one day the place was not filled with his words and laughers, at that time his work were similar to the ones made by his fellow countryman such as Dengwen, Zheng Yizi and Muqian, he was as much a Shanghai style painter as Cheng Sui, and there might be misunderstandings of him being the teacher of Mr. Cheng. Then he went to Sichuan Province where he teaches at an art school, his style changed overtime after traveling all over the province, after that he had went back to Shanghai and stayed with me. When the war stared, he came back to Sichuan with his family and I didn’t see him for eight long years. At the beginning of our surrender he went to Peking and his style had changed once more. This painting was one of his Sanxia works, it has a different style from the

ones he made during his senior year stay in Hangzhou.” There are different logics behind different styles, when he first begins to paint he was the student of Ni Yifu, a famous painter from Xiaoshan, and because: “Mr. Ni doesn’t show up much, I could only observe the art works he collects in his household from time to time. He has got painting albums of Mr. Qi Baishi, his work on natural wonders have very detailed brush strokes and I have tried to learn that non-stop for ages.” He stared from mimicking the art works of Ming Dynasty artists and visited famous painter Zheng Shan during his travel to Qian Mountain at the age of 28, he presented his works for further guidance and Zheng replied “I only have 12 words for you— the easiest is the actual scene and difficulties lays in the vagueness. You should take this in heart, I learnt it from his lordship Wang Pengxin” Wang Penguin is Wang chen, the great grandson of Wang Yuanqi, however that time his work still doesn’t have much correlation with legitimism, Luo Jianqun said “some believe Huang’s early work has under the influence of “four wang” it makes sense because it was the dominating trend till the end of Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China. But what’s more obvious for us to see was that he might be more certain about maintaining an art form passed down by Ming people—Wumen style and Xinan style—to avoid being overshadowed by the four wangs. However Wu Ruoying recalled that he was very confident towards the pieces of simple bleakness he made in his senior year and stressed that “artworks must be authentic”

Please note that Huang said “authentic” instead of “legitimate”, as researchers have noticed that there is a so called “authentic” in his personal art historic view which made its debut in the article”. The Differences in Characteristics Between Painters” —The authenticity of Chinese painting could be roughly divided into three categories, the first one being scholars work of engraving and epigraphy, the second being the works of famous painters that are different in styles by northern and southern. the last one being masters who each have their own advantages and not under restriction of any style. The “authentic” being brought up here was rather broad since it included fainters of almost every historical stage, and when he mentioned it once more in his article made in 1934 called “The Key Factors of How to Paint” the idea didn’t change despite a shift in words—from “the authenticity of Chinese Painting” to “the authenticity of paintings”, however the idea changed to “Dong Xuanzai was born in Ming Dynasty and promoted



the artistic style of Nan Song Dynasty specifically and favored Zhaozuo and Shen Shichong as authentic. Painters such as Lou Dong Yu Shan took over his view and promoted even more. That artistic style still exists after three hundreds of years if you search it through places.” in an article published at July 1st, 1937, named “The Ups and Downs of Paintings Throughout History” Lou Dong Style was created by Wang Yuanqi and Yu Shan style by Wang Jiang, both were seen as the representation of authentic paintings—that means “authentic” and “legitimism” is basically of same meaning in Huang Binhong’s historical view. It’s not a new concept to be honest, to describe a painting as “authentic” was another way of putting “legitimate” in Qing Dynasty, just as Hua Yilun once said “One could never paint with bad habit, once it appears the paintings are filled with cluster. The ones made by Shitao and Jin Dongxin were great examples since was not authentic, it’s such a strange thing that those paintings were up in prices. Other painters who copied their styles were infected by their bad habits and draw for the sick of earning money.” Huang’s opinion was merely a selection of some of his point and kept the saying alive, he said in the letter he wrote to Fu Lei that “Painter Dong Yuan who lived in the Five Dynasties practiced summon Gaint with long brush strokes and Juran who copied his styles used short strokes. Yu Shan and Wang Shigu’s brush stoke are clumsy and soft, Lu Tai loathed it very much, art critics fancy summon Gaint made by brush works that resembles rain that fell down on the window. Even though Dai Luchuang have works that were seen as authentic, it was quite different from the ones made in ancient days and doesn’t bare much resemblance.” To say it was quite different from the ones made in ancient days was to say he wasn’t impressed by the representers of the 19th century “legitimism. He wrote in a postscript that turned to phrase unknown painters who lived in the Daoguang and Xianfeng period “When talk about paintings illustrating natural beauties, Jin Hao and Guan Quan have took the essence of the artistic styles of Wang Mojie and Two Lees, they combined dark ink and scarlet, aqua blue that made it authentic and very popular during Daoguang and Xianfeng period. The more recent artist who made similar paintings is Bao Anwu.” A clear key point of authentic was made connecting Dongyuan, Dong Qichang, Lou Dong and Yu Shan to the painters who lived in Daoguang and Xianfeng period. Huang wrote to Huang Jusu that “after Ganjia, even though epigraphic artists could comprehend the concept yet

they can't present it into their work. Wu Changshuo is of terrible style." He described Wu's work as terrible style which is the reference of non-legitimate made by legitimism artists during Qing Dynasty. Wang Yuanqi have said that "The worst terrible style that incorporate bad habits was Zhejiang Style, to a point where the famous artists of Wumen style and Yunjian style such as Wenches, maters such as Dong have counterfeits that flow in the market and strengthend the bad idea to a point of popularity, there is not much differences between the dirty works done in Guanglin (nowadays Suzhou area) than the ones in Zhejiang. Artists who have aspirations to become masters must avoid that painting style." Northern artist Zhang Zuyi wrote in the postscript to Wu Guandai that "the so called Shanghai style artists who came into being since the first deal made in Jiangnan region and Shanghai are all terrible ones whose work I don't bare to stare at." To make sure a painting is authentic is to make sure that it was legitimate, it's apparent Huang Binding sees himself as a legitimate painter in his senior life and it was normal for him to take notice in the works done by painters who lived in the Daoguang and Xianfeng period. If that's so, how did the change of avoiding influences of four wangs to believe "one has to paint authentic works" took place?

As far as the existing documents suggest, he was quite assure about Wang Shimin and Wang Yuanqi in his article "A Short Thesis of Ancient Paintings" saying "Yuanzhao's work is especially unique since the brush stroke is a bit more solid compared to the soft ones who life their brush yet doesn't seem to put pressure on it. I believe it is much more brilliant because of the little pressure paid, his work is always of solid stoke, when he draw forms the paintings are rather traditional and very similar to the original yet still have his personal touches, it is no doubt that his work is one of the best scholars who learned after soft strokes such as his grate grandson Wang Yuanqi everything is point on where the brush stroke is light yet still of rich color, the image is solid but still presents poetic sensation, the artisanal impact it made is way beyond its color and images the stones and mountains he draws is boundless, stretching far with a hint of green, brilliantness lays in the way he presents the scenery as fairy land, his brush work free from restriction." Being said so the real change occurs in the article he wrote in 1937 "the ups and downs of ancient paintings" saying "Lou Dong, Yu Shan took over legitimism." he was living in Beijing at that time. If we were to

combine the argument made by Wang Zhongxiu saying “the focus and breakthrough were made within his brush strokes” then it’s free to say maybe brush stroke is the key point in this question. Huang believed that “Dong Xuanzai’s work was under the influence of Dongju at first then learned from Ni Huang, the brilliance in his brush work is rather unique and free, his work vivid and the color bold, like a breath of fresh air that comforts people, everyone in China followed his style such as Shen and Wen style. Lou Dong, Yu Shan have valued Xuanzai as the creator of that style and it never cease to trend till this day and age.” Which means he have realized those two painters have followed the brush styles of Dong Qichang and then wrote in the letter he wrote to Huang Jusu saying “When I pay close attention to brush works I have realized there are little masters of this aspect during Ming and Qing Dynasty.” Trough the research I’ve done I believe that brush work he mentioned means “art of accumulated ink”, but where did that come from? From the documents which mentioned this problem in the book “The collection of lectures” he wrote from 1937 to 1940 pointed out that “one of them is the art of accumulated ink first brought up by Dong Ju and reached climax by Wu Zhonggui, Wang men and Wang yi also have some influences. It is mainly done by accumulating ink and bring the split ends together to compensate what’s lacking in the brush itself.’ Huang have brought the technique back to the age of Dong Ju and mentioned later painters like Wu zheng, Wang men and Wang Jian are all familiar with the technique. He also said that “secondly, the Four Wangs have used this technique frequently. Those paintings are normally done by brushes that are damp at the end hence why not much ink is used and accumulated ink appeared in every painting, used brushes sank in ink then bath it in water which could give an effect of ink hue around their brush strokes.” Four Wangs have the most representative techniques of accumulated ink. Just as what Wang Zhongxiu have pointed that “it was made, or created by Huang Binhong, setting from the inspiration he got the Four Wangs and have personal breakthroughs then promoted it throughout the art circle, some of the works he have done in his later years are indeed the world of accumulated ink.” the influenced that technique had brought to Huang is self-explanatory, Lianghong believed that “to look back on his journey of art, it’s easy to figure out there has been a leading aspect—incorporated the art of calligraphy into painting and spotlight on dots, leaded by the technique of accumulated ink and created an



Fig.1 *The Natural Beauty of Shuzhong, the Center of Sichuan Province*, Huang Binhong

Ink on paper, 90.7cm × 31.6cm

Zhejiang Province Museum

unique characteristic based on the above.” Just as presented down below the art of accumulated ink was used in the work he made in 1952 named “The Natural Beauty of Shuzhong, the Center of Sichuan Province” the accumulated inks of mountains seems to bare the power of understucktible. Maybe the art of accumulated ink is an important reason why he changed his mind on “Legitimism”

**CONCLUSION** As argued above that Huang Binhong brought up the concept of “ the second prosperous stage of painting in Daoguang and Xianfeng period” in a time when legitimism was popular in Beijing, he got inspired by the art of Four Wangs and created the technique of accumulated ink that brought differences to his senior year works. Even though it was impossible to come up with every little details of Huang Binhong’s humble living style in Beijing but an inner logic is under the correlation between his senior works and legitimism. Tan Shengguang have noticed the flourishing art overshadowed by “artistic revolutionism” during the beginning of Republic China. Xu Beihong noted that “Despite being the birth place of May 4th revolution, Beijing is the most stubborn and federal city in the aspect of art, a place without much changes to be exact since the new art has nothing to do with the old ones.” To say it was the “most stubborn and federal” is mainly because of a dislike towards legitimism and the opposite is probably Shanghai style and Lingnan style as well as “leftwing art” that revolutionized the field later. What’s interesting is Huang discover a “second prosperous” during the time when the artists believed Beijing is the most conservative city, and as he implemented fully in his senior works that the vitality of legitimism didn’t die out as the researchers claimed to be, as a matter of fact, it was future advanced in 20th century cultural atmosphere.

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