

## Embedded Promotion: An Effective Path for Promoting Classic Reading in University Libraries—A Case Study of Southwest Jiaotong University (Postprint)

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] To explore effective pathways for classic reading promotion, impose certain constraints and management on college students' classic reading, and address the bottleneck issues in university library classic reading promotion.

[Method/Process] This study conducts an empirical analysis of the embedded classic reading promotion case at Southwest Jiaotong University Library, comprehensively demonstrating the embedded classic reading promotion model and its related issues through two forms—"embedding into faculty classroom teaching" and "embedding into student learning processes"—and three stages: "embedding preparation, embedding implementation, and embedding evaluation."

[Results/Conclusions] Embedded classic reading promotion has achieved effective management and control of college students' classic reading, positively contributed to general education curriculum construction, enhanced college students' reading abilities, and provided experimental exploration for the development of university library classic reading promotion and library services toward greater depth and precision.

### Full Text

### Preamble

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**Embedded Promotion: An Effective Path for Classic Reading Promotion in University Libraries—A Case Study of Southwest Jiaotong**

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**Abstract**

**[Purpose/Significance]** This study explores effective pathways for classic reading promotion, aiming to establish certain constraints and management mechanisms for college students' classic reading and to solve bottleneck problems in university library classic reading promotion. **[Method/Process]** The paper selects the embedded classic reading promotion case of Southwest Jiaotong University Library for empirical analysis. From two forms—"embedding in faculty classroom teaching" and "embedding in student learning processes"—and three stages of "embedded preparation, embedded implementation, and embedded evaluation," the entire process demonstrates the embedded classic reading promotion model and its related issues. **[Result/Conclusion]** Embedded classic reading promotion achieves effective control and management of college students' classic reading, plays a positive role in general education curriculum construction to a certain extent, promotes the improvement of college students' reading abilities, and conducts experimental exploration for the development of university library classic reading promotion and library services toward greater depth and precision.

**Keywords:** embedded classic reading promotion; embedded teaching assistant; large-class teaching with small-class seminars

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**1. Introduction**

In recent years, with rapid economic development and social progress, China has increasingly emphasized cultural soft power. As an important means to enhance national soft power, nationwide reading promotion has been elevated to an unprecedented level, being written into the government work report for five consecutive years since 2014 and becoming a national strategy. Against this backdrop, nationwide reading promotion has received widespread attention and participation from all sectors of society. "As national-level government pays increasing attention to the role of culture in national competitiveness, connotative development, and the preservation and development of national character, classic reading promotion has undoubtedly become an urgent topic for our time" [1], gradually becoming a new highlight and hot spot in reading promotion within university library circles.

University libraries have conducted many attempts and explorations in classic reading promotion, undertaking substantial work. However, as non-teaching

units, university libraries face numerous constraints in classic reading promotion, mainly manifested in two aspects: First, they have not truly entered the classroom and integrated into the university's curriculum construction, remaining on the periphery of undergraduate teaching and talent cultivation; second, "it is merely advocacy without any mandatory measures to constrain students" [2], making it difficult to assign, implement, check, and evaluate classic reading tasks for students. The absence of these management and control links prevents the "last mile" between library classic reading promotion and college students from being successfully bridged.

Therefore, how to conduct effective classic reading promotion that integrates into university teaching and talent cultivation processes, and how to establish certain constraints and management mechanisms for college students' classic reading so that classic reading promotion can truly be implemented, remain urgent problems to be solved in today's university library community.

According to the author's investigation, at the theoretical level, research on university library classic reading promotion pathways is abundant, including models such as classic recitation knowledge competitions [3], college student reading contests [4], three-dimensional reading [5], and micro-films [6]. However, the embedded classic reading promotion approach is rarely discussed. Although research findings on library services embedded in teaching are relatively rich, studies specifically addressing classic reading promotion embedded in teaching are scarce. Currently, only Qiu Caihong [7] briefly mentions the role of libraries in providing literature information services and reading guidance in Chinese language teaching in vocational colleges based on embedded reading teaching practice, though the discussion primarily focuses on the teacher's teaching perspective rather than the classic reading promotion perspective. At the practical level, although domestic universities have conducted many classic reading promotion activities, relevant cases of embedded promotion are limited, making this study strongly significant both theoretically and practically.

## 2. Theoretical Basis and Practical Conditions

The development of embeddedness theory and embedded disciplinary services (or embedded library services), along with the gradual implementation and advancement of general education in some domestic universities, provides new ideas for classic reading promotion.

Embeddedness theory encompasses various embedding types such as cognitive embedding, structural embedding, inter-organizational embedding, and two-way embedding. The principle of embedded knowledge—embedding individuals, tools, and networks—provides theoretical guidance and methodological direction for librarians to integrate into users' decision-making, research, and learning processes, and to embed into physical spaces, virtual spaces, organizational structures, and social networks to develop embedded services [8]. Embedded disciplinary services (or embedded library services) organically combine

library resources and services with user needs by embedding librarians into user processes and scenarios. At user demand points, librarians proactively provide immediate, effective, and in-depth information services and knowledge according to users' research and teaching needs, directly supporting users' research and teaching, establishing partnership relationships with users, and fully realizing library functions and values [9]. The theoretical foundation of embedded classic reading promotion derives from embeddedness theory and library embedded service concepts, with its operation and implementation rooted in and guided by the development of library embedded service concepts. Embedded classic reading promotion actively moves from the library domain into the classroom and curriculum domain, actively participating in teachers' teaching processes and students' learning processes. The provision and construction of reading resources, guidance on reading methods, and instruction on reading retrieval techniques are all based on user positions, user thinking, and user perspectives, truly solving information and resource needs in users' teaching processes. Therefore, it is essentially a form of embedded disciplinary service (or embedded library service).

Since the late 1990s, China has vigorously promoted the massification of higher education on one hand, and through the implementation of the "211 Project" and "985 Project," actively supported and guided some qualified research universities to pursue connotative development centered on quality improvement, building world-class universities. Against this backdrop, research universities such as Peking University, Fudan University, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhejiang University, and Nanjing University have successively launched general education reforms, making important contributions to actively exploring general education models that meet the requirements of the times and China's actual conditions [10]. Domestic universities with strengths in science and engineering, such as Tsinghua University, National University of Defense Technology, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Harbin Institute of Technology, and Southwest Jiaotong University, have also begun reform attempts in general education. As defined in the *Harvard Redbook on General Education*: general education is not a vague education about "general" knowledge; it is part of students' entire education aimed at cultivating students to become responsible persons and citizens [11]. Various humanities classics in human civilization history, especially classics from classical periods, are the focus of general education. It is through reviewing history and reading classics that general education fulfills its goal of inheriting human civilization and cultivating students' sound personalities [12]. As the literature and information resource center of universities, university libraries' main functions are educational and information service functions. They should play important roles in college student cultivation in the new era and new environment. This is one of the important issues for university libraries to adapt to higher education development, highlight their status, and expand their services and operations. The concept of general education and its advocacy for classic reading provide practical and feasible conditions for embedded classic reading promotion.

Based on the continuous development of embeddedness theory and embedded

services, as well as the reality that some domestic universities have successively implemented and promoted general education, the Southwest Jiaotong University Library (hereinafter referred to as “SWJTU Library”) has explored embedded classic reading promotion, effectively solving bottleneck problems in university library classic reading promotion, broadening effective pathways for classic reading promotion, and opening new horizons for classic reading promotion.

### 3. Case Study and Analysis of SWJTU Library’s Embedded Classic Reading Promotion

#### 3.1 Background and Context of SWJTU Library’s Embedded Classic Reading Promotion

Southwest Jiaotong University is a century-old institution with distinctive advantages in rail transportation education. In recent years, besides strengthening professional ability cultivation, SWJTU has particularly emphasized the cultivation of college students’ reading quality and even humanistic qualities. The university has established the “Five-Have” talent cultivation goal for SWJTU students: “having social responsibility and sound personality, having professional ethics and expertise, having humanistic feelings and scientific literacy, having historical perspective and global vision, having innovative spirit and critical thinking” [13]. In 2014, centered on this talent goal, the university formulated the “Transportation Under Heaven” general education overall plan and curriculum system, creating an atmosphere of university-wide emphasis on general education and increasing general education efforts. Based on this, SWJTU Library actively explored classic reading promotion suited to the university’s actual conditions.

From 2009 to 2013, the first stage of SWJTU Library’s reading promotion, five consecutive years of “Reading Day” activities created a favorable reading environment, allowing college students to fully enjoy the right and pleasure of reading and laying a good foundation for the next stage of reading promotion. Beginning in 2014, SWJTU Library publicly released the *SWJTU Classic Reading Recommended Bibliography* to all faculty and students for the first time, marking the formal beginning of a new stage in the library’s reading promotion history—the classic reading promotion stage. Subsequently, the bibliography has been adjusted annually according to principles of generality, classic status, readability, compatibility, and timeliness, as well as feedback from the university’s college students, making the classic bibliography more compatible with students’ reading habits. The library also opened general education courses such as *Reading and Appreciation* and *Guide to Classic Masterpieces* to provide direction and methodological guidance for college students’ classic reading.

At the same time, since 2014, around “World Book Day on April 23” and “Confucius’ Birthday on September 28,” as well as during longer holidays such as winter and summer vacations, SWJTU Library has closely centered its work on classic reading promotion, cooperating with the university’s Youth League Com-

mittee, Academic Affairs Office, and various schools to co-organize university-wide classic reading promotion series activities. Excellent reading notes and reflections generated from these activities have been compiled and published as the *SWJTU Classic Reading Series*, with eight volumes published so far, striving to create a distinctive Jiaotong reading culture of “respecting classics and combining reading with writing.”

To further advance classic reading promotion, SWJTU established the “Reading and Writing Center” in July 2016, with the library responsible for its operation and management, coordinating teaching, activities, faculty, and resources related to classic reading promotion across the university, and building its own network platform, the “SWJTU Reading and Writing Center.”

SWJTU Library has conducted many explorations and attempts in resource construction, environment creation, and atmosphere building for classic reading promotion, making classic reading a common practice on campus. Consequently, how to make classic reading promotion enter the classroom and contribute to general education curriculum construction, and how to effectively manage and control college students’ classic reading, have become new challenges and problems facing SWJTU Library. Therefore, since the second half of 2016, relying on the Reading and Writing Center, SWJTU Library has cooperated with the Academic Affairs Office to explore embedded classic reading promotion, integrating classic reading promotion into general education curriculum construction and college student talent cultivation.

### **3.2 Implementation and Analysis of SWJTU Library’s Embedded Classic Reading Promotion**

Since the beginning of its practice in fall 2016, with one semester as a cycle, SWJTU Library’s embedded classic reading promotion has been piloted for four semesters, exploring effective embedding forms and processes. The following describes and analyzes SWJTU Library’s embedded classic reading promotion from these two aspects.

**3.2.1 Embedding Forms** SWJTU Library’s embedded classic reading promotion mainly adopts two forms: embedding in faculty classroom teaching and embedding in student learning processes. Embedding in faculty classroom teaching refers to librarians designing and embedding classic reading content related to the curriculum in coordination with general education course instructors’ teaching outlines and course plans, jointly completing 2-3 class sessions with teachers. Embedding in student learning processes refers to embedded librarians, with the assistance of embedded teaching assistants, continuously tracking and serving embedded objects, helping students solve practical difficulties encountered during classic bibliography reading, reviewing students’ completion progress of reading tasks, and ensuring the completion of students’ reading tasks. It should be noted that these two forms are used interactively during the implementation of embedded classic reading promotion.

**3.2.2 Embedding Process** The embedding process of embedded classic reading promotion is divided into three stages: “embedded preparation, embedded implementation, and embedded evaluation,” with the basic process shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]. The following describes and explains each stage and its specific contents.

**(1) Embedded Preparation.** This includes three aspects: preparation of embedded personnel, preparation of embedded courses, and preparation of embedded content.

Preparation of embedded personnel includes the selection of embedded instructor librarians and embedded teaching assistants. The selection criteria for the former require candidates to possess strong information retrieval and literature retrieval literacy, have professional backgrounds or learning experiences compatible with the embedded courses, and be familiar with the classic bibliographies of the embedded courses. The latter selection focuses on candidates’ organizational abilities, psychological qualities, communication skills, and sense of responsibility. Currently, SWJTU Library’s embedded instructors are mainly young librarians, totaling 16, with majors in library and information science, economics, design, literature, history, politics, management, sociology, civil engineering, and English, holding master’s degrees or above, with good information literacy and reading literacy. Embedded teaching assistants are recruited from current master’s and doctoral students across the university by the Reading and Writing Center, totaling 50, distributed across science, engineering, and liberal arts fields. Before embedding, the Reading and Writing Center conducts training for teaching assistants through conferences, lectures, and group work meetings to ensure the quality of the teaching assistant team. Currently, each embedded course is equipped with 2-3 teaching assistants to organize small-class discussions and teaching assistant-led tutorials.

Preparation of embedded courses refers to determining course types and course lists. Currently, SWJTU’s general education curriculum system includes “general education required courses + freshman seminars + general education lectures + general education elective courses” [13], with approximately 230 general education courses offered annually. Freshman seminars were established beginning in fall 2015, with a class size of 30 students per class. As a form of freshman education, freshman seminars originated at Harvard University in 1959, primarily aimed at assisting freshmen in smoothly transitioning to the university environment and adapting to university resources and services. This type of course provides an excellent intervention platform for library embedding services. In view of this, embedded classic reading promotion selects freshman seminars as the breakthrough point and pilot for classic reading to enter general education classrooms and curriculum construction. Before each semester, the library contacts instructors based on the freshman seminar course directory provided by the Academic Affairs Office to understand their willingness to accept embedding services and determines the list of embedded courses. For example, in fall 2017, SWJTU Library’s classic reading promotion was embedded in five

freshman seminars: *Genetic Code—Life and Nature, Perspectives and Methods of Literary Reading, Globalization and Chinese Culture, Chinese Characters and Culture, and New Perspectives on Social Governance in the New Era.*

Preparation of embedded content refers to in-depth communication and information exchange between embedded librarians and course instructors in advance. Embedded librarians fully understand the embedded courses' teaching objectives, content, difficulties and key points, teaching progress, and assessment requirements. Course instructors also need to have detailed knowledge of embedded librarians' embedding purposes, methods, means, processes, and plans. On this basis, embedded librarians provide course instructors with a certain number of classic bibliography lists, from which instructors determine the final embedded bibliography lists according to course needs. The classic bibliographies provided by embedded librarians for each embedded course generally include two categories: required readings and selected readings, with approximately 10 required titles and 20 selected titles. After instructor selection, generally 5-6 required titles and 8-10 selected titles are retained. After determining the classic bibliographies, embedded librarians and course instructors negotiate to determine the specific number and timing of classroom embedding sessions. Simultaneously, the library integrates the classic bibliographies needed for course learning into its self-built network platform, facilitating student access, guiding students to understand and use relevant literature and resources, providing a virtual space for teacher-student communication and discussion, and enhancing students' classic reading abilities and effectiveness.

**(2) Embedded Implementation.** Embedded implementation adopts the “large-class teaching with small-class seminars” approach. So-called “large-class teaching with small-class seminars” refers to natural classes of no more than 30 students, where “small-class seminars” are established alongside “large-class teaching,” grouping students and assigning guidance personnel to organize discussions around issues involved in “large-class teaching” during extracurricular hours to improve student learning effectiveness [15]. In SWJTU Library's embedded classic reading promotion, “large-class teaching with small-class seminars” is divided into two stages: The first stage is large-class teaching, mainly completed jointly by embedded librarians and course instructors. Through 2-3 classroom teaching sessions, classic bibliography contents are introduced, supplemented with corresponding reading method instruction, specific reading tasks are assigned, and clear assessment methods are proposed. The second stage is small-class seminars, mainly completed through cooperation between embedded librarians and embedded teaching assistants, organizing and implementing reading tasks, improving students' reading abilities, and strengthening their awareness of independent reading and autonomous learning.

In the first stage of classroom teaching activities, embedded librarians mainly provide content guidance for required classic bibliographies, teaching students methods and approaches to use electronic resources and databases to find learning materials related to classic bibliographies. The instruction of information

retrieval knowledge aims to facilitate students' independent extended reading. Course instructors introduce the diachronic and synchronic status and value of each required bibliography among similar books based on the disciplinary system and curriculum system, assign specific reading tasks, and propose assessment requirements. Assessment methods for classic bibliography reading tasks include oral presentations and written reports, with no fewer than 5 oral presentations and no fewer than 1 written report of no less than 2,000 words. The main purpose of this stage is to: through curriculum integration and task assignment, draw students' attention to classic bibliographies; and through the integration of information literacy knowledge, cultivate students' abilities for independent reading and autonomous learning.

In the second stage, based on the actual number of embedded teaching assistants, students enrolled in embedded courses are divided into 2-3 small classes. Embedded teaching assistants organize small-class seminars, and under their guidance, students design seminar formats and organize member cooperation themselves. Typically, each teaching assistant guiding 10-15 students is optimal. Each embedded course is required to have no fewer than 5 small-class discussions involving no fewer than 5 classic bibliographies. For reading seminars, embedded librarians and course instructors do not make rigid regulations on seminar time and location. Embedded teaching assistants can organize according to the basic conditions of their guided students, maintaining certain flexibility and autonomy. However, reading seminars must be consistent with instructors' teaching progress to ensure the timeliness of classic reading for classroom teaching effectiveness. Before seminars, embedded teaching assistants design topics based on each reading task, and each student independently completes reading tasks to prepare for presentations. During seminars, students make approximately 5-minute presentations based on topics and classic bibliographies read, with teaching assistants recording and providing appropriate comments and summaries on students' language organization abilities and seminar design situations. After seminars, embedded teaching assistants promptly feedback the seminar situation to embedded librarians so that embedded librarians can have detailed knowledge of the implementation of classic bibliography reading tasks. The main purpose of this stage is to: through topic design, cultivate students' awareness of conducting inquiry-based reading independently; and through seminar presentations, improve students' critical abilities, language organization abilities, social skills, and teamwork capabilities.

**(3) Embedded Evaluation.** Embedded evaluation refers to effectiveness assessment of embedded classic reading promotion activities. Effectiveness refers to the impact of an activity on end-users' behavior, attitudes, knowledge, and skills [16]. Regarding library services, so-called effectiveness assessment refers to evaluating library service quality and effectiveness by analyzing users' perceptions of library services. Specifically, for library reading promotion activities, it means using readers' reading perceptions and expectation satisfaction as two important indicators to assess activity effectiveness. In SWJTU's embedded classic reading promotion activity effectiveness assessment, embedded librarians use

questionnaire and interview methods to investigate embedded course instructors and enrolled students, understanding the difficulty level of classic bibliographies and their actual utility in students' course learning and instructors' classroom teaching. Subsequently, embedded librarians evaluate the adaptability of classic bibliographies to embedded courses and their actual utility, optimizing and adjusting embedded strategies for classic reading promotion.

**3.2.3 Effectiveness and Shortcomings** Since implementation began in September 2016, SWJTU's embedded classic reading promotion has been embedded in 19 freshman seminars, recommended 254 classic titles, benefited 568 students, received nearly 800 written reading task reports from students, with a total word count of 1.7435 million. Students' classic bibliography reading volume averaged 786,700 characters per student per semester, averaging 4.6 books per student per semester. To further demonstrate embedding effectiveness, survey results from the fall 2017 embedding effectiveness are illustrated in Table 1 .

**Table 1** Survey Results of Embedded Classic Reading Promotion Effectiveness, Fall 2017

Item	Positive Effect	No Obvious Effect	Cannot Judge
Classic bibliographies' effect on student learning	86.0%	10.0%	4.0%
Classic bibliographies' effect on faculty teaching	85.7%	9.5%	4.8%

As shown in Table 1, among 150 surveyed students, over 86.0% believed classic bibliographies played a positive role in course learning, while only 4.0% could not judge whether classic bibliographies played a positive role. Among 21 surveyed instructors of embedded courses (most fall 2017 embedded freshman seminars were team-taught, with an average of 4.2 instructors per course), over 85.7% believed embedding played a positive role for students and courses, while only about 4.8% could not judge whether embedding played a positive role. 81.0% of instructors believed classic bibliographies played a positive role in improving their teaching levels, while only 4.8% believed they did not play a positive role. This demonstrates that SWJTU Library's embedded classic reading promotion has, to a certain extent, positively affected the classroom teaching effectiveness of embedded general education courses and partially promoted the improvement of students' reading abilities.

Of course, SWJTU Library's embedded classic reading promotion also has shortcomings, mainly manifested in the failure to establish effective incentive mechanisms to better mobilize the enthusiasm and participation passion of enrolled students and embedded teaching assistants. This will be a key focus for strengthening exploration in the future.

**3.2.4 Effectiveness Analysis** SWJTU Library's attempts and practices in embedded classic reading promotion have, to a certain extent, positively affected the classroom teaching effectiveness of embedded general education courses and partially promoted the improvement of college students' reading abilities. This conducts experimental exploration for the development of university library classic reading promotion toward greater depth and precision. In summary, there are two key experiences to share:

- (1) **Adopting “large-class teaching with small-class seminars” is a key link in embedded classic reading promotion.** As previously mentioned, the difficulty in classic reading promotion lies in the inability to truly enter the classroom and integrate into the university's curriculum construction. “Large-class teaching with small-class seminars” provides a methodological approach to solve this difficulty: formulating classic bibliographies according to general education course needs, closely coordinating with course progress, providing both content guidance and skills instruction, both method explanation and task requirements, eliminating the distance between classic reading and courses and students, and truly achieving effective integration.
- (2) **Introducing “embedded teaching assistants” is a necessary means for controlling the embedded classic reading promotion process.** The purpose of embedded classic reading promotion is to enable students to truly engage in classic reading, thereby helping students successfully complete course learning and promoting comprehensive growth. Therefore, checking students' reading tasks is the joint responsibility of embedded librarians and course instructors. However, due to various limitations in time, personnel, and energy on both sides, this responsibility cannot be fulfilled. The introduction of embedded teaching assistants effectively solves this problem. The flexibility of embedded teaching assistants' working time and location, as well as their competence in organizational abilities, psychological qualities, communication skills, and sense of responsibility, make the implementation and checking of classic bibliography reading tasks possible.

Classic reading promotion is an indispensable basic form for universities to conduct general education and one of the service areas that university libraries need to continuously improve and deepen. By adopting “large-class teaching with small-class seminars” and introducing “embedded teaching assistants,” SWJTU Library has explored and attempted embedded classic reading promotion pathways, achieving effective control and management of college students' classic reading, playing a positive role in general education curriculum construction to a certain extent, helping improve college students' reading abilities, and promoting the development of university library services toward greater depth and precision. This demonstrates that university libraries, as basic guarantee institutions and important positions for classic reading promotion, can not only create new situations for classic reading promotion but also inject new momentum into

embedded disciplinary services (or embedded library services) through active exploration of new classic reading promotion pathways, thereby better manifesting university libraries' educational, information, and cultural functions.

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## Author Contributions

**Liu Yun:** Proposed the core research ideas and structure, drafted the outline, and revised the paper;

**Gao Fan:** Guided paper writing;

**Yang Yong:** Collected and organized materials and wrote and proofread the paper;

**Li Ying:** Conducted data processing and paper proofreading.

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**Abstract:** [Purpose/significance] The paper aims to explore an effective path of classical reading promotion and form certain restraint and management for college students’ classical reading to solve the bottleneck problem of classical reading promotion in university libraries. [Method/process] The case of embedded classical reading promotion in the library of Southwest Jiaotong University was selected for empirical analysis, ranging from embedded teacher classroom teaching and embedded student learning process to embedded preparation, embedded implementation, and embedded evaluation. The whole process demonstrates the embedded classical reading promotion model and its related problems. [Result/conclusion] Embedded classical reading promotion has achieved effective control over the classical reading of college students, played a positive role in the construction of general education courses to a certain extent, promoted the improvement of students’ reading ability, and made experimental exploration for the development of classical reading promotion in university libraries and library services to depth and precision.

**Keywords:** embedded classical reading promotion; embedded teaching assistant; large class teaching with small class seminar

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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