

A Comparative Study on the Intercultural Adaptation of Chinese Companies' British Websites

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Abstract: The cultural values of a company's websites tend to converge with those of its own country, but overseas users have a local preference for them, which requires the company to adjust them according to the target countries' culture. However, few previous studies have investigated the intercultural communication of Chinese companies' overseas websites. Therefore, the current study investigates how and why Chinese companies adapt their British websites to the British culture by making a quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis of British local websites', Chinese local websites' and British websites' cultural values in the five cultural dimensions of individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and harmony based on a complementary cultural typology drawn from Hofstede's and Schwartz's theories. It is found that Chinese enterprises with little awareness of overseas websites' intercultural adaptation, deeply influenced by Chinese culture of collectivism and low harmony, have successfully adjust their British websites only in the dimensions of masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance, but fail to adjust them successfully in the dimensions of individualism and harmony.

Keywords: Chinese Companies; Corporate British Websites; Intercultural Communication

1. Introduction

With the development of China's economy, more and more Chinese enterprises are seeking overseas development. Corporate development cannot be achieved without the support of corporate communication and corporate websites are one of the most important channels for corporate communication where cultural values shown on the websites play a crucial role. Generally, the cultural values of an enterprise's website tend to be similar to those of its own country, but overseas users expect the overseas websites of international enterprises to show their local cultural values and are more likely to give positive comments to this kind of websites^[1], which requires international enterprises to adapt their overseas websites according to the cultural characteristics of the target country while conducting international communication. In this regard, what is the current status of Chinese companies' intercultural adaptation on their overseas websites? What are the causes of this situation?

At present, although Chinese enterprises are striding forward in the global market, researches on the intercultural adaptation of Chinese enterprises' overseas websites are still scarce. Therefore, this study will focus on the British websites of Chinese enterprises and study their current situation of intercultural adaptation and its causes. The UK is China's largest investor in the European Union and there are significant cultural differences between China and the UK, so it is instructive to study the current state of intercultural adaptation of Chinese companies' British websites. Specifically, this study will take the British websites of Chinese enterprises as the research object and compare them with the local websites of Chinese enterprises and British enterprises. The intercultural theories proposed by Hofstede and Schwartz will be employed to analyze the cultural values displayed on those companies' websites in order to answer the following two questions: (1) How do Chinese companies interculturally adapt their British websites to the British culture? (2) Why do they make such an intercultural adaptation? The discussion of these questions will not only help people understand the current status of Chinese companies' intercultural adaptation on websites, but also can explore more effective approaches of intercultural communication for Chinese companies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Corporate websites and their cultural values

Corporate websites are web platforms set up by for corporate promotion or marketing. Their designs and content are crucial in the corporate website's construction as they not only present companies' information, but also reflect cultural values. Corporate cultural values converge with those of their own country, and the cultural values displayed on corporate websites usually present the cultural characteristics of their own country, so cultural values presented on corporate websites differ from country to country. For example, Baack *et al.* studied the content and designs of corporate websites in 15 countries and found that there were significant differences in the cultural values of these websites in terms of collectivism and power distance [2]. Besides, Choon *et al.* confirmed that cultural values displayed on corporate websites can have a great impact on the corporate intercultural communication by studying the opinion of Australian users and Hong Kong users to an online bookstore and find that users are more likely to give positive feedback to websites that present local cultural values [3]. Therefore, companies need to pay attention to the cultural preferences of overseas users when communicating internationally and make intercultural adaptations to their overseas websites according to the target country's culture.

2.2 Corporate websites' intercultural adaptation

Presently, scholars' researches on corporate websites' intercultural adaptation can be divided into the three categories. First, employ intercultural communication theories to study the differences of cultural values on different companies' international websites and study their current status of intercultural adaptation. For example, Singh develops a cultural value framework for website analysis and applies it to the analysis of American companies' local websites and Chinese websites, which raises a wave of studying corporate websites' intercultural adaptation [4-5]. Among them, a few scholars study Chinese companies. For example, Dai Xin *et al.* analyze the designs and cultural adaptation of Chinese Fortune 500 companies' international generic English websites and find that most companies' intercultural adaptation was not complete [6]. Xu Wenjuan *et al.* use Hofstede and Schwartz's intercultural theory to analyze three types of corporate websites and find that only a small part of Chinese companies interculturally adapt their American websites [7]. Second, study the impact of websites' intercultural adaptation on website users. For instance, Singh studies the relationship between intercultural adaptation and consumers' attitudes towards websites, confirming that they influence with each other [8]. Third, study companies tend to use standardized strategies or localized strategies in corporate websites' intercultural adaptation. The former means that companies present similar information on their domestic and overseas websites with translating but not changing headlines, illustrations or text [9]. The latter means that companies tailor the information on their overseas websites according to the target country's culture, media availability and industry structure. [10]. Scholars like Singh contend that localized strategies can better satisfy users' demands [11] while Levitt *et al.* are more supportive of standardized strategies [11].

Although previous studies on intercultural adaptation of corporate websites have achieved certain success, they have mainly focused on the corporate websites of developed countries such as the UK and the US but only a few scholars have studied Chinese corporate websites. Among these studies, some scholars study the intercultural adaptation of Chinese enterprises' international English websites but they ignore the cultural differences among different countries in the overseas market. This study argues that there are still significant differences in cultural values among countries overseas despite the accelerating globalization process. It requires international companies to use localized strategies to adapt their overseas websites, which helps companies develop their websites' effectiveness and usability. Actually, some scholars study the current status of Chinese corporate websites' intercultural adaptation based on localized strategies but they don't analyze its causes. Therefore, this study will analyze the current state of the intercultural adaptation of Chinese enterprises' British websites and its causes, which may provide a reference for the formulation of Chinese enterprises' intercultural communication strategies.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory includes six dimensions---individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, self-indulgence and restraint [12]. The first four dimensions are highly related to corporate websites' cultural values, so they are widely used by scholars in the researches. However, some scholars

argue they cannot comprehensively cover corporate websites' cultural values [13]. With the deterioration of global climate, sustainable development has become an important topic on corporate websites. Based on it, Baack *et al.* adds the harmony dimension of Schwartz's cultural theory [14] to Hofstede's theory and uses them to analyze corporate websites' cultural values [2]. Because there are obvious differences between Chinese culture and English culture in most cultural dimensions, this study will analyze Chinese companies' British websites from the aspects of individualism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and harmony. Table 1 lists the scores or rankings of China and the United Kingdom in the above five dimensions.

Table1 Chinese culture and British Culture in Hofstede's and Schwartz's theory

Dimension Nation	Individualism	Power Distance	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Harmony(ranking)
China	20	80	66	60	12
U. K.	89	33	66	48	3

Individualism and Collectivism mainly measure whether a society puts emphasis on individual interests or collective interests. In an individualistic society, people put more emphasis on individual interests and interpersonal relationship is loose. People tend to develop and display their personalities and have rights to choose their own organization. In contrast, In a collectivist society, people pay attention to intra-ethnic relations and tend to define individual identities through collectives [12]. As shown in Table 1, the U. K. is much more individualistic than China. Power distance refers to how people are tolerant of the unequal distribution of social power. In countries with high power distance, people accept the unequal distribution of power and value hierarchy, authority and social influence. In countries with low power distance, people advocate reducing or even eradicating inequality in power distribution and status [12]. As shown in Table 1, China is more tolerant of the inequality of power distribution than the U.K. Masculinity and Femininity measure whether a society is more masculine or feminine. In masculine societies, people value success, competition and ambition. In feminine societies, people value cooperation and peace [12]. As shown in Table 1, both China and the U. K. are more masculine. Uncertain Avoidance measures the degree to which people avoid uncertain factors. In a society with more uncertainty avoidance, people emphasize seniority, age, etc., establish and abide by formal rules, and seldomly tolerate extreme views and behaviors. In a society with less avoidance, people are more tolerant of abnormal behaviors and opinions, and have fewer rules and regulations. [12]. As shown in Table 1, China's degree of uncertainty avoidance is much higher than the U. K's . Harmony means people's willingness to live in harmony with nature. In a more harmonious country, people respect nature and value environmental protection. In a less harmonious country, people think that humanity is superior to nature and value human's transformation of the natural environment [14]. As shown in Table 1, the U.K is more willing to coexist with nature than China.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Coding Table and Coding Rules

This study makes a quantitative and qualitative analysis on corporate websites' cultural values. After reviewing the related literature, this study initially nails down the cultural elements that embody the six dimensions. Then, after investigating local websites of Chinese enterprises and British enterprises, a coding table including 5 cultural dimensions and 23 cultural elements is figured out as shown in Table 2. This study takes websites' homepages including texts, pictures and videos as the research objects. Besides, this study employs the 5 Point Likert Scale to measure the display of cultural values on the websites and its measurement criteria are shown in Table 3. Then, the coders will analyze corporate websites' cultural values according to the two tables.

Table 2 A Coding Table of Corporate Websites' Cultural Values

Cultural dimension	Cultural element	Details	Source
Individualism	Product uniqueness	Present unique selling points and differentiated functions.	Singh, Zhao and Hu, 2005; Baack and Singh, 2007; Kim,
	Personalized	Emphasize customers' personal favor and	

	service	provide personalized services.	Coyle and Gould, 2009
	Privacy protection	emphasize the protection of users' privacy.	
	Personal realization	emphasizes personal achievement.	
	Personal enjoyment	Present information on personal enjoyment.	
Masculinity	Competition	emphasizes competition among individuals or industries.	Hofstede, 1991; Gudykunst, 1998; Cheng and Schwartz,1996; Baack and Singh, 2007; Kim, Coyle and Gould, 2009
	Realism	pictures or videos tend to show the real world.	
	Hard sales	presents in formation on products' attributes or special offers like discount.	
	Ambition	shows enterprises' great visions or missions.	
	Male roles	Companies' important positions are held by men and there is a clear labor division between men and women.	
Uncertainty Avoidance	Website security	value website security.	Hofstede, 1980; Gudykunst, 1998; Baack and Singh, 2007; Kim, Coyle and Gould, 2009
	Price and quality assurance	emphasizes the guarantee of product price or quality.	
	Customer service	presents customer service information such as FQA and customer service telephone.	
	Website Guidance	provides good website maps, hyperlinks and other settings to improve website communication.	
	Available Information	Companies' annual report and other information can be freely downloaded by website visitors.	
Power distance	Horner	presents information on company ranking, certification or awards.	Hofstede, 1980; Gudykunst, 1998; Baack and Singh, 2007; Kim, Coyle and Gould, 2009
	Famous persons or institutions	present the names or pictures of authoritative leaders, institutions or celebrities.	
	Public announcement	Equip with official settings such as notice and announcement.	
	Corporate hierarchy	Present corporate leadership structure chart.	
	Enterprise-and-customer relations	Company maintains contact with customers or partners in various ways.	
Harmony	Beautiful nature	Present information on beautiful nature.	S. H. Schwartz, 2008; Xu Wenjuan, Shi Xingsong, 2020
	Environmental protection	Present information on environmental protection.	
	Community responsibility	promote the harmonious development of society.	

Table 3 Measurement criteria of corporate Websites' cultural values

Grade	Grading standards
1	No presentation
2	Rare presentation (Texts appear in the corner of the website and in a font which is smaller than an average one)
3	Average presentation (Texts appear in the corner of the website and in an average font)
4	Frequent presentation (Texts, images or videos appear in the middle of the website and in an font which is mildly bigger than an averages one)
5	Usual presentation (Texts, images or videos appear in the middle of the website and in an font which is quite bigger than an averages one or is highlighted with eye-catching colors.)

4.2 Coding Reliability and Validity Test

In order to test the coding table's reliability, the study randomly selects 10 British companies and 10 China companies from the Fortune Global 500 ranking in 2021^[15], and analyzes their website homepages two times (one month before and after). After coding, the study tests the consistency of the results by SPSS' weighted KAPPA. It is found that the coding on each cultural element is greater than 0.4 (medium level), and the coding reliability meets the requirements.

In order to test the coding table's validity, this study conduct an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) on the coding results by SPSS. As shown in Table 4, each cultural dimension's KMO value is bigger than or equal to 0.6, and P value of the Bartlett Test is less than 0.05, which means that the data is suitable for factor analysis. In addition, the cumulative variance explanatory percentage of each dimension is more than 50%, and the factor loading value of each cultural element is more than 0.5, which indicates that the validity of the coding table meets the requirements.

Table 4 Test results of coding reliability and validity

Factor	Cultural element	KMO value	Pvalue of the Bartlett Test	Cumulative variance explanatory percentage	Factor loading value	Coding credibility value
Individualism	Product uniqueness	0.700	0.001	64.488%	0.651	0.535
	Personalized service				0.780	0.667
	Privacy protection				0.580	0.701
	Personal realization				0.604	0.626
	Personal enjoyment				0.610	0.450
Masculinity	Competition	0.635	0.01	61.527%	0.675	0.587
	Realism				0.619	0.624
	Hard sales				0.595	0.455
	Ambition				0.650	0.590
	Male roles				0.537	0.490
Uncertainty Avoidance	Website security	0.716	0.001	56.494%	0.825	0.503
	Price and quality assurance				0.776	0.595
	Customer service				0.760	0.737

	Website Guidance				0.717	0.370
	Available Information				0.671	0.701
Power distance	Horner	0.761	0.001	66.899%	0.897	0.519
	Famous persons or institutions				0.862	0.642
	Public announcement				0.858	0.444
	Corporate hierarchy				0.651	0.545
Harmony	Beautiful nature	0.626	0.000	72.831%	0.845	0.757
	Environmental protection				0.831	0.655
	Community responsibility				0.509	0.492

4.3 Sample Selection and Coding Process

In order to make the samples representative, this study selects 30 Chinese enterprises with British websites from the Fortune Global 500 in 2021 and the Top 30 Overseas Brand Building in China in 2021 [16]. Their British websites can be identified by the domain names (such as “com.uk/gb”) or country names (such as “Huawei United Kingdom”). The sample websites are English websites specially set up for British users and are in a normal updating and visiting state. Besides this study also randomly selects 30 British sample enterprises from the Fortune Global 500 list in 2021 as shown in Table 5[15].

Table 5 Sample Chinese enterprises and British enterprises

Chinese enterprises	British enterprises
Huawei, ZTE, Alibaba, Haier, Lenovo, China Construction Bank, SF Express, Bank of China, SAIC, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Changhong, Tsingtao Brewery, China Southern Airlines, Xiaomi, GREE, China International Airlines, Midea, TCL, Hisense, Anta, China Agricultural Bank, Hainan Airlines, Cheetah Mobile, Vanke, China Oil and Gas Company, Dongfeng Motor, Evergrande Group, Country Garden, Greenland Group, Poly Group	BP, Tesco, HSBC Holdings, Legal & General Group, AVIVA, Unilever, Prudential, Vodafone Group, Rio Tinto Group, GSK, Lloyds Banking Group, J. Sainsbury, Barclays, British American Tobacco, Anglo American, Phoenix Group Holdings, BT Group, Linde, Centrica, AstraZeneca, Compass Group, Bae Systems, Landover, Burberry, PWC, Johnnie Laker, BBC, Dyson, Shell, Sky

Finally, the study analyzes the above 60 enterprise websites’ cultural values according to the coding table and criterion.

5. Results and Discussion

In order to investigate Chinese enterprises’ intercultural adaptation in their British websites, this study makes MANOVA analysis on the average scores of Chinese companies’ local and British websites and British companies’ local websites in five cultural dimensions. As shown in Table 6, in terms of individualism, three kinds of websites present obviously different culture values (Mean Chinese enterprises’ local websites=13.800, Mean British enterprises’ local websites=11.733, Mean Chinese enterprises’ British Websites=11.767, F=3.542, p=0.033<0.05). The individualistic content displayed on the local websites of the British enterprises is significantly more than that of the local websites of the Chinese enterprises and the content of the British websites of the Chinese enterprise and the individualistic content of British local website is significantly more than that of Chinese enterprise local website. Chinese companies’ British websites are similar to their local websites (p=0.975>0.05), but are different from British companies’ local websites (p=0.025<0.05). This is

consistent with its qualitative analysis. There are many words and pictures that highlight collectivism on the local and British websites of Chinese enterprises. For example, on the homepage of Huawei's British website, there are not only many words that emphasize win-win cooperation, such as "innovation leads to win", "Extend Connectivity Drive Growth" and "envisioning and defining 6g together", but also many collectivist photos. For instance, when promoting a global conference with "Technology for Inclusive and Innovative Education" as its theme, the website presents pictures of children from different countries studying together [17]. In contrast, the local websites of British enterprises show more individualistic information such as "customization" and "enjoy your life". This study holds that the following three reasons can account for it: (1) Chinese enterprises are deeply influenced by China's collectivism culture; (2) Chinese enterprises fail to understand corporate websites' intercultural adaptation in the terms of individualism; (3) In recent years, affected by the epidemic, trade protectionism is on the rise and poses a threat to international trade, which makes many Chinese enterprises emphasize win-win cooperation on their overseas websites to promote overseas cooperation.

In the terms of masculinity, as shown in Table 6, there is no significant difference in the cultural values displayed by the three types of websites (Mean Chinese enterprises' local websites=16.767, Mean British enterprises' local websites=15.033, Mean Chinese enterprises' British Websites=16.100, $F=2.094, p=0.129>0.05$), but Chinese enterprises' British websites are significantly different from their local websites ($p=0.215>0.05$), compared with British local websites ($p=0.046<0.05$), which means the intercultural adaptation in this dimension is fully adjusted. Those three types of websites not only present information on products, preferential policies, but also display company's achievement. For example, on Huawei's British website, it often adopts hard sale strategies, presenting products' high quality, such as "Huawei Free Buds Pro2. Dual-speaker | Pure Voice I Intelligent AMC 2.0, 30 Off Coupon, 169.99", "HUAWEI Mate Xs 2, Ultralight, Ultraflat, Super Durable, True-Chroma Foldable Display, True-Chroma Camera System, From RM 7999.00", "Building the best, future-oriented networks: Simplified, resilient, intelligent", "FUTURE TECHNOLOGIES, Envisioning and Defining 6G Together" [17]. This paper holds that it is due to the fact that both China and Britain pursue success and admire competition. And increasingly fierce international competition makes enterprises promote hard sale strategies.

In terms of uncertainty avoidance, as shown in Table 6, there are significant differences in cultural values displayed on three types of websites (Mean Chinese enterprises' local websites=15.200, Mean British enterprises' local websites=12.467, Mean Chinese enterprises' British Websites=13.700, $F=7.707, p=0.001<0.05$). And Chinese enterprises' British websites are apparently different from the local websites ($p=0.00<0.05$), but they are similar to British enterprises' local websites ($p=0.080>0.05$), which means the intercultural adaptation in this dimension is successful. In Chinese enterprises' local websites, there are often information on websites' safety and stability, but similar contents rarely appear in British enterprises' local websites and Chinese enterprises' British websites. For example, in Huawei's local website, there are not only many information about safety and quality, such as "Safe, credible and continuously innovative products and services. Based on more than 30 years of technology precipitation, protect your application system and data security in the cloud.", but also provides many technical supports and customer service [17]. However, in its British website, those information seldomly appear. This study holds that it is because China enterprises deeply understands corporate websites' intercultural adaptation in the terms of uncertainty avoidance.

In terms of power distance, as shown in Table 6, there are significant differences in the cultural values displayed on the three types of websites (Mean Chinese enterprises' local website=11.233, Mean British enterprises' local website=9.467, Mean Chinese enterprises' British website=7.900, $F=13.605, p=0.000<0.05$). And Chinese enterprises' British websites are greatly different from their local websites ($p=0.02<0.05$), but are similar to British companies' local websites ($p=0.084>0.05$), which means that the intercultural adaptation in this dimension is successful. There are often much honor information such as "Fortune 500" and pictures of leaders or celebrities in the local websites of Chinese enterprises. However, their British websites and British enterprises' local websites prefer presenting information of companies' employees and customers. For example, in the middle of Huawei's local website, there are not only some words and pictures about Huawei's honor, "Full-service intelligent router won the Japanese Interop Award", "F5G small all-optical solution won the Japanese Interop Award", but also pictures of superstars like Jackson Yee [17]. In contrast, there is little information like that in its British website. This paper holds that this is because China enterprises are highly sensitive to intercultural adaptation in terms of power distance.

In terms of harmony, as shown in Table 6, there are obvious differences among the three types of websites (Mean Chinese enterprises' local websites=7.500, Mean British enterprises' local websites=8.667, Mean Chinese enterprises' British websites=5.667, $F=6.597, p=0.002<0.05$). Among them,

Chinese enterprises' local websites are similar to British enterprises' local, ($p=0.165>0.05$), which is inconsistent with the previous research results (Schwartz, 2008). In addition, Chinese companies' British websites are significantly different from the two kinds of websites mentioned above ($p_1=0.03<0.05$, $p_2=0.001<0.05$), which means that the intercultural adaptation in this dimension is not successful. Local websites of Chinese enterprises and British enterprises present many pictures related to natural scenery, and often mention such information about environmental protection and maintaining global peace such as "Let science and technology coexist with nature" and "make the world a better place". This paper holds that this is mainly because in recent years, the Chinese government attaches great importance to the development of circular economy and encourages Chinese enterprises actively participate in and implement the work of sustainable development. By 2020, 70.8% of enterprises in China indicated that they had taken relevant practical actions. Therefore, many Chinese enterprises show related information on their local websites. However, those information does not appear on their British websites. For example, in the middle of Lenovo's local website, there are many information about public welfare projects, such as "Smart Cloud Classroom breaks the educational digital divide and makes wisdom support educational equity."; "Lenovo helps Weifang Special Steel to accurately promote green and low-carbon transformation with big data."^[17], but these information does not present on its British website. This paper holds that it is because Chinese enterprises fail to completely understand the intercultural adaptation of harmony dimension on websites.

Table 6 MANOVA test results of sample websites

Website	Chinese enterprises' local websites		British enterprises' local websites		Chinese enterprises' British websites		Fvalue	Significant difference (Sig.)
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation		
Individualism	11.733	3.483	13.800	3.316	11.767	3.530	3.542	0.033
Masculinity	16.767	3.298	16.100	4.122	15.033	2.236	2.094	0.129
Uncertainty Avoidance	15.200	2.809	13.700	2.507	12.467	2.776	7.707	0.001
Power distance	11.233	2.670	7.900	2.187	9.467	2.515	13.605	0.000
Harmony	7.500	3.071	8.667	3.800	5.667	2.708	6.597	0.002

6. Conclusion

To analyze the current situation of intercultural adaptation of Chinese enterprises' British websites and its cause, this study adopts the intercultural theories of Hofstede and Schwartz to analyze and compare the differences and similarities of cultural values on Chinese companies' British websites and local websites and British companies' local websites in five cultural dimensions---individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and harmony. The findings are as follows: (1) Influenced by their own culture and national policies, Chinese companies' and British companies' local websites show significantly significant different cultural values in the dimensions of individualism, uncertainty avoidance and power distance, but there are similar in the dimension of masculinity and harmony; (2) The British websites of Chinese enterprises have only undergone a complete intercultural adaptation in the dimensions: of masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance, but fail to make a complete intercultural adaptation in the dimensions of individualism and harmony. It can be accounted for by the following reasons. First, Chinese enterprises are deeply influenced by its traditional culture of collectivism and low harmony. Secondly, Chinese companies understand little about the intercultural adaptation of websites in these two dimensions. Third, the world is now undergoing great changes. With a surge of uncertainties, increasingly fierce international competition and the rise of trade protectionism make Chinese enterprises promote win-win cooperation.

This study also confirms that the overseas websites of enterprises display certain cultural value which tend to converge with their domestic cultural values. However, it is difficult to satisfy the demands of overseas users, which requires enterprises to attach great importance to the intercultural communication strategies of their overseas websites. The current situation of intercultural adaptation of Chinese enterprises' overseas websites needs to be improved, especially in the dimensions of individualism and harmony. In this regard, while building their overseas websites, Chinese companies should first investigate the market of the target country to understand its cultural characteristics. Then, based on target website users' cultural values preferences and demands, they should make corresponding intercultural adaptation to their websites.

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