
RESEARCH ARTICLE

On the Translation of the Chinese Traditional Music Terms Guided by Skopos Theory

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ABSTRACT

With the development of globalization and the more frequent cultural exchange worldwide, people have more opportunities to enjoy music from different cultures. Chinese traditional music is the inherent characteristic music of the Chinese people. Therefore, it's getting more and more important to translate Chinese traditional music terms properly so as to promote Chinese culture. However, the difficulties of English translation still exist, including the standardization of Chinese traditional music terms. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this paper explores the translating methods of Chinese traditional music terms, which will be helpful for translators to achieve the different features of the Chinese traditional music terms in a structured way so as to improve cross-cultural communication ability and spread Chinese traditional culture.

KEYWORDS

Skopos theory; Chinese traditional music terms; semantic features of translation texts; translating methods.

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1. Introduction

The translation of Chinese traditional music terms is an important medium for the dissemination of Chinese traditional music. There are many achievements in the research of Chinese traditional music, but there are few works related to foreign translation and dissemination. Although more attention has been paid to the translation of traditional Chinese music in recent years, the dilemma of translation of traditional Chinese music still exists. Among them, there is the standardization of the translation of Chinese traditional music terms. The characteristics of Chinese traditional music terms are complex, diverse and historic. There are some lexical gaps in English translation. This paper divides the lexical vacancy phenomenon into three categories: complete vacancy, approximate equivalence, and convention. Skopos Theory is guided by three rules to help improve the cross-cultural communication process and the effectiveness of these terms. Therefore, from the perspective of Skopos theory, this thesis mainly studies the English translation classification of Chinese traditional music terms and discusses how different translation methods embody the three rules of Skopos Theory. This has a certain guiding significance for the cross-cultural communication of Chinese traditional music.

This paper mainly explores the English translation of traditional music terms, a large number of Chinese traditional music terms literature collation and induction, the translation of Skopos theory literature, especially the three rules of Skopos theory for research and deep understanding, translation methods such as transliteration, literal translation method analysis, explore how to reflect the rules of Skopos theory.

2. Skopos Theory

This chapter mainly describes the three rules of Skopos theory: the rules of skopos, fidelity and coherence. The three rules are an important part of it.

2.1 Skopos Rule

The most important rule in Skopos theory is the rule of Skopos. Skopos theory holds that translation should meet the needs of the context and culture of the target language so that the target language readers can accept it. The purpose of translation plays a decisive role in translation.

The purposes of translation activities are varied and can be roughly divided into three categories. For instance, it is the translator's communicative purpose in translation, such as bringing enlightenment to readers. The last type is to achieve a specific purpose through a translation method, such as literal translation, to show the syntactic structure of the translation in order to illustrate its syntactic structure. Simply put, the rule of skopos refers to the communicative purpose of the target language, namely the social background of the target language.

Therefore, the translator's first rule in translation should be to determine the translation purpose and then choose the corresponding translation method according to the purpose.

(1) 霸王卸甲

Version 1: The Emperor Discards/Removes His Armor

Version 2: Defeat of *Chu*¹ (楚) Emperor

The previous translation adopts the literal translation method. In order to better fit the charm and characteristics of traditional Chinese culture, the story of *Xiang Yu* (项羽) is kept as original and antique as possible. However, the latter uses free translation; its purpose is to take care of English readers' reading habits and understanding ability so that readers can read the story at a glance and will not have a sense of confusion.

2.2 Fidelity Rule

The fidelity rule, which emphasizes inter-textual coherence between the text and the translation, should be observed. It means that in the process of translation, the target text takes the original text as a reference as far as possible and is faithful to the content and form of the original text. However, the degree and form of the translation close to the original depends on the purpose of the translation and the translator's understanding of the original text.

(2) 百鸟朝凤

Version 1: *Bai Niao Chao Feng*

Version 2: Hundreds of Birds Singing in the Phoenix

The transliteration method of version 1 does not reflect the content of the text well. The free translation method of version 2 not only takes the images of birds and phoenixes as references but also keeps the content of the text smoothly and faithfully.

2.3 Coherence Rule

The coherence rule, also known as the consistency rule, holds that the translation must adhere to intra-textual coherence, that is, the correlation of the translation text and the culture of the target language, the acceptability and readability of the translation, so that readers can understand the meaning of the text in the context of the target language, and conforms to the context to a certain extent. Mainly speaking, coherence does not care much about the authority of the text. As long as the text reads in line with the translator's translation purpose, it is feasible for the translator to recreate the text and make the text conform to the understanding level of foreigners.

(3) 牌子曲

Version 1: *Pai Zi Qu*

Version 2: labelled piece

The former uses free translation to tell readers that it is a marked piece of music, and foreigners can understand it at a glance, while the latter uses transliteration, which cannot bring the sense of substitution in context and cultural background to foreigners, so naturally, it cannot resonate.

¹ The italicized words are the form of pinyin in Chinese.

3. Semantic Features of Translation Texts in Chinese Traditional Music Terms

Under the unique historical conditions and special geographical conditions, Chinese traditional music has developed a unique music culture. It is very different from the Western music system. This phenomenon is called the lexical gap phenomenon, which leads to unclear or featureless translation. Based on previous studies, the author divides the translation modes of Chinese traditional musical terms into three categories: complete vacancy, approximate equivalence and convention.

3.1 Complete vacancy

Complete vacancy refers to the unique things and words in Chinese traditional music culture which cannot be replaced by corresponding words in English culture. In terms of instrumental art, there are *Guzheng* (古筝), *Konghou* (箜篌), *Yueqin* (月琴) and other traditional Chinese Musical Instruments. In opera, there are five methods. In terms of music theory, there are etc. The following is a study on the English translation methods of Chinese traditional music terms with complete vacancy:

Guzheng is a term of Chinese traditional musical instrument and one of the most important national musical Instruments in Chinese history. Its translation has gone through four stages: translation error, free translation, transliteration plus annotation and transliteration.

(4) 古筝

Version 1: a 21-or 25-stringed plucked instrument

version 2: Chinese plucked instrument

Version 3: *Guzheng*: a zither with stringed plucked instrument

Version 4: *Guzheng*

Version 1 and Version 2 embody the basic elements of the *Guzheng*, namely the Chinese instrument the plucked instrument, but other Chinese instruments that fit these characteristics are the Chinese lyre with 7 strings, the chimes and so on. Therefore, these two translated names do not have the uniqueness and readability of translation, which will make foreign readers confused.

Version 3 is the most popular translation after these two translations. Finally, due to the collision and exchange of Chinese and Western strengths in the field of music, the transliterated name *Guzheng* has been accepted and loved by a vast number of foreign people, which also shows the charm of transliteration and the strength and confidence of Chinese culture.

(5) The five Methods: *Shou, Yan, Shen, Fa and Bu*

(五法：手、眼、身、法、步)

The specifications and methods of the five techniques of Chinese opera. Finger gestures eye refers to the eyes; body refers to the body; step refers to the stage; law refers to the opera performance can not deviate from the law. This kind of text cannot correspond to the English text, so the translation method of transliteration and annotation can be adopted.

Shou (手) : gesture to show emotions

Yan (眼) : the expression of eyes such as joy, anger and sorrow

Shen (身) : Body and mind become one, with a beautiful figure

Fa (法) : Rules and regulations of opera performance

Bu (步) : Footsteps with rhythm and rhythm

Transliteration and annotation can not only restore the meaning of the source language but also make the text more readable and easier for the target language readers to understand.

(6) *Wuyin* (五音)

Wuyin refers to the five major tones of traditional Chinese music. There is no foreign standard for the division of rhythm. It is feasible to adopt literal translation and annotation.

Wuyin: Five tones of Chinese scales such as *Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi and Yu*

(宫, 商, 角, 徵, 羽)

To sum up, the word complete vacancy should be transliterated and annotated or literal translation annotated.

3.2 Approximate Equivalence

Approximate equivalence refers to the specific phenomenon of Chinese traditional music terms, which cannot be matched by exactly the same words in English. Only similar words can be found, but the associative meaning and cultural artistic conception are completely different. For example, wild geese alighting on the sand(平沙落雁), *Sheng Sheng Man*(声声慢) such as *Qupai*(曲牌) name; Names of music institutions such as *Yuefu* (乐府) .

(7) *Sheng Sheng Man* (声声慢)

Sheng Sheng Man is in the Northern Song Dynasty, the good use of overlapping words. The names of *Ci* (词) and *Qu* (曲) of the songs can be sung and can be freely translated into song. Similarly, the ending of *Ling* (令), *Man* (慢), *Zi* (子), *Yin* (吟) and so on, the name of *Ci* (词) or *Qu* (曲) can be translated in this way, such examples are:

长恨歌 : A Song of everlasting regret

将军令: Song of the general

得胜令 : The victory song

箜篌引 : Song of Konghou

渔歌子 : Song of fisherman

(8) *Yu Zhou Chang Wan* (渔舟唱晚)

Yu Zhou Chang Wan is a famous piece of traditional Guzheng playing music. In the translation of Chinese traditional music, we should pay attention to the literary characteristics of its emphasis on artistic conception. *Yu Zhou Chang Wan* is one of the representative songs of Guzheng music, which is a well-known song recognized by Chinese and foreign music circles. This song depicts the fishermen's singing and rich fishing harvest in the sunset glow with a beautiful melody, expressing the author's love for the motherland and praise for nature.

Version 1: fisherboat with song in the night

Version 2: Fisherman singing in the fisherboat at night

"Fisherboat with song in the night " means " all boat with song in the night ", so we use the free translation because it cannot accurately express the actor's happiness of coming home late from fishing on a fishing boat in the sunset.

Here are some translations of other similar songs:

高山流水 Friendship like high mountains and running water

汉宫秋月 Autumn moon over the cold palace

出水莲 clear lotus

3.3 Convention

In addition to the above two categories, there is also a set of terms for the translation of Chinese traditional music to foreign English. Conventional terms refer to some terms that have been negotiated and discussed by both parties many times to explore the boundaries of terminology use and are eventually cultivated into idioms to be used in certain situations. Some terms are quite controversial and worth further discussion, such as *Kun Opera*(昆曲). In fact, the word opera in English refers to a kind of Western art that combines instrumental music, poetry and dance and is very important in Western art history. Chinese traditional opera is a performance-based art form that combines singing and dancing, acrobatics and fine arts. Therefore, this translation is not semantically accurate, but since it has been widely spread and used by Eastern and Western cultures, in order to avoid cross-cultural communication barriers, we decided to continue to use the original translation. So, they are not the focus of this chapter.

4. Translating Methods Guided by Skopos Theory of Chinese Traditional Music Terms

After exploring the methods of English translation classification, this chapter describes how the translation methods of traditional Chinese music terms reflect the three rules of Skopos Theory.

4.1 Transliteration

The transliteration method is based on the Chinese pronunciation, also known as *pingyin*(拼音), which finds a similar pronunciation in the target language. Transliteration, in a broad sense, refers to transliteration and transliteration annotation. It is used when translating proper nouns or when there is no equivalent between two languages. Such words can be called culturally loaded words. It conveys the nation's values, way of thinking, local customs, lifestyle and traditional customs, religious beliefs and other information. In the Skopos theory, which emphasizes that the purpose of translation is cross-cultural transmission, the adoption

of transliteration in the translation of some culturally loaded words is culturally appropriate, first, to fill the phenomenon of lexical gaps and, second, to prevent cultural misunderstandings caused by improper translation. If the title of a song has nothing to do with the content of the music, the free translation will make the performance of the music better for Western readers.

The transliteration method can be adapted to “the names of songs, instruments, musicians and institutions, and other musical terms.”^①

For the name of songs, which has nothing to do with the content of the poem and the artistic conception, the transliteration and annotation method can be used. The reason is that it is not only faithful to the form and phonological beauty of the term itself but also can make readers realize the meaning of the song name through annotations.

(9) *Ba Ban* (八板)

Ba Ban: a song which is relative to rhymes, and its content cannot be known from the name of the song. It is plenty of song names similar to *Ba Ban*, such as:

- Jiejiegao*(节节高): the *Qu Pai* of a kind of Beijing Opera played by Chinese instrument
- Changpai*(长拍): the *Qu Pai* of a song played by long beats
- Duanpai*(短拍): the *Qu Pai* of short beats
- Ji Ji Feng*(急急风)

Ji Ji Feng is commonly used in the Beijing Opera drums classics, associated with the literal meaning is not appropriate interpretation, so it can be translated into transliteration.

Ji Ji Feng: fast beat, music of Beijing opera, which is the transliteration plus annotation method.

Also, the Transliteration of opera names is beneficial to convey the Peking Opera culture. On this basis, adding annotations to explain that the content of the Peking Opera is as consistent and faithful as possible to the original text, which embodies the rule of skopos and fidelity.

With the development of cross-cultural communication, people gradually accept words like *erhu* (二胡) as a convention for communication. However, there are still many instruments that need to be annotated in a way that indicates the instrument and the essential elements of the instrument. Here are many examples of these instruments:

- Xiangban*(响板): a Chinese plate instrument usually including three plates
- Guqin*(古琴): a plucked instrument with seven strings similar to the zither
- Xiao*(箫): a vertical bamboo flute
- Se*(瑟): a twenty-five-stringed plucked instrument

For the musician and musical instrument, they can be divided into official and unofficial categories. As Chinese traditional music has a long history, there is a great difference between different kinds of music. In the field of Chinese traditional music, it is official music and unofficial music. According to the formal level of music, the former comes from government agencies and figures of higher classes, so it is more formal. The latter is the most authentic expression of people's emotions, especially those at the bottom, so it comes from unofficial institutions. Therefore, the translation of musicians and music institutions can be based on the purpose of conveying this cultural connotation to divide them into official and unofficial categories. For official musical institutions and musicians, more formal words, such as bureau and organization, should be used in the translation process. Therefore, it is best to use transliteration and annotation methods, on the one hand, to restore the history and originality of the text; on the other hand, it can facilitate readers to understand the literature. Therefore, it is best to use transliteration and annotation methods, on the one hand, to restore the history and originality of the text; on the other hand, it can facilitate readers to understand the literature.

(11) *Taichangsi* (太常寺)

Taichangsi is a palace music institution, which can be translated as Taichang Temple, musical bureau deriving from *Sui* (隋) and *Tang* (唐) dynasty.

(12) *Yue Fu*(乐府)

Yue Fu: an official music institution set up in the Han Dynasty(汉朝). It is worth mentioning that *Yue Fu* and *Tai Yue*(太乐) belong to two administrative systems, and there was a general clear division of labor in functions at the beginning. Therefore, *Tai Yue* can be translated into *Tai Yue*: a music bureau in charge of the suburban temple of music is passed down from the previous generation of ancient music.

(13) *Da Yue Shu* (大乐署)

Da Yue Shu: *Da Yue Department*, which was dedicated to managing elegant music and *Yan*(燕) music. It belongs to the transliteration plus annotation. It is beneficial to retain the official attributes of the music institution, as well as the historical background of the institution, so that foreigners can understand the extensive and profound musical history of China with readability and accuracy, conducive to promoting the cultural exchange of Chinese and Western music, in line with the rules of skopos, coherence and authenticity. Besides, there are a lot of examples.

Jiao Fang(教坊): a music department which was dedicated to managing folk music used by the court②

Li Yuan(梨园): a music department dedicated to studying Chinese opera③

In a word, transliteration is suitable for the translation of a large number of traditional Chinese music terms because it can preserve the characteristics of the text while giving readers readability and accuracy.

4.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation is a technique of translating without changing the form or meaning of the original text. Of course, literal translation addition is also a kind of literal translation.

A literal translation may be used for the names of songs that contain words that can be transliterated, or for the types of instruments that can be transliterated, as determined by the official nature of the musical institution, or for the names of musicians that have parts similar to English culture. Literal translation can be applied to the translation of song names, instrument names, musicians and other terms.

For the names of songs, literal translation can preserve the form of Qu name to the greatest extent and restore the poetry of the text.

(14) *Jasmine flower*(茉莉花)

By using the literal translation, it can be presented vividly with the picture of the *Jasmine flower*, which is the topic of the poem, to show how the author adore nature and love for purity. Also, readers can feel the specific text content, meet the needs of cross-cultural communication, and be faithful to the text theme, which complies with the rules of skopos, fidelity and coherence.

(15) 粉红莲

Version 1: *Fen Hong Lian*

Version 2: *Pink Lotus*

Similarly, the translation of *Pink Lotus* is more appropriate than that of *Fen Hong Lian*. The former adopts the literal translation method, which not only fits the image of the text and visually presents the scenery but also cuts into the text in the English cultural context so that English readers can imagine the image beauty of Chinese poetry.

(16) 绣荷包

Version 1: *Xiu He Bao*

Version 2: *Embroidering the small bag*

Xiu He Bao is not as good as a literal translation of *embroidering the small bag*. This is a folk song, which way of literal translation makes it look more simple, revealing simple and, pleasant and relaxed emotions.

For the instrument, literal translation allows foreigners to quickly compare the role of Chinese Musical Instruments with the known context. Plucked instruments can be translated into lute, such as a Chinese lute(琵琶), which is a literal translation, and the benefit

is the cultural affiliation of this instrument, which is clear to foreign readers and can be easily understood, so it conforms to the rule of skopos and fidelity.

(17) 编钟

Version 1: *Bianzhong*

Version 2: Chime

Chime has a common context in Western culture, meaning bells that make a harmonious sound, in line with the text context.

For translation musicians, literal translation can find the common parts of English and Chinese without breaking the original structure.

(18) 李白

Version 1: *Li Bai*

Version 2: Lee White

Li Bai can be translated into Lee White, which is the literal translation for the same parts of Li and Lee. Bai in Chinese means white. In this way, the Chinese and English cultures complement each other in context and are easy for foreign readers to understand, which fits the rule of skopos, and it can be readable and loyal to the original text to insist on the rules of coherence and fidelity.

For these examples, the use of literal translation means that, on the one hand, the content of the original text and the similar context in the target language are preserved to the maximum extent; on the other hand, the translator is highly efficient in the process of translation. This translation is conducive to the target language readers' acceptance and understanding of the specific cultural details of Chinese music, instruments and institutional musicians. It conforms to the rule of skopos, that is, to maximize the influence of traditional Chinese music, and also conforms to the rules of fidelity and coherence, which maximizes the retention of the original features and essence.

4.3 Free Translation

Free translation is a translation method that focuses on the content of the original text without preserving the form of the original text.

The free translation can be applied to the translation of music names and instrument names. For the translation of the song names, free translation can correctly deal with the profound artistic conception and background of the song names, which is unable to be achieved by transliteration and literal translation.

(19) 二泉映月

Version 1: *Er Quan Ying Yue*

Version 2: Moonlight sheltered in the Er Quan spring

Er Quan Ying Yue can be translated into the moonlight sheltered in the Er Quan spring, which is a free translation. The reasons for this are as follows. First, it is the work of composer A' Bing (阿炳), also known as Hua Yanjun (华彦钧). A' Bing was gifted in his early years and led a privileged life until he became blind to opium. On the one hand, sheltered means the moon hiding in the Er Quan spring. On the other hand, it implies the emotion that A' Bing wants to be sheltered when he is in exile and shows loneliness and suffering. Under the skopos theory, Free translation can enable foreigners to have a better understanding of the lament in the heart of the Chinese composer A' Bing and the sorrow of the time and have a deep empathy with the emotion of the song, so it can actually let foreigners see the profound Chinese culture and the profound sense of Chinese history behind a song. At the same time, it is both faithful to the text and coherent.

(20) 平沙落雁

Version 1: *Ping Sha Luo Yan*

Version 2: Wild Geese alighting on the sands

In the case of Ping Sha Luo Yan, although many people use the transliteration method to make it Ping Sha Luo Yan, that wouldn't make it culturally beautiful, but Wild Geese alighting on the sands would be better than that. After all, these specific words in English culture can set off an imaginary picture and let people feel that geese are flying in the evening, landing on a white beach, and looking at their friends in the sky, which is a kind of open-minded artistic conception of beauty.

(21) 空山鸟语

Version 1: *Kong Shan Niao Yu*

Version 2: Tranquil hills echoing birds' singing

Besides, tranquil hills echoing birds' singing, and using tranquil can display a quiet and peaceful scene; echoing can give a performance that birds' singing can be always listened to clearly to indicate the solitude of the mountains.

(22) 霸王卸甲

Version 1: The king abandoned his equipment

Version 2: The king of Chu: Xiang Yu's defeat

The king of Chu: Xiang Yu's defeat not only emphasizes the main characters in the poem but also explains the trend and development of the story, showing the poem's historical character at a glance.

(23) 阳春白雪

Version 1: *Yang Chun Bai Xue*

Version 2: Snow in Early Spring

Besides, there are similar examples such as Snow in Early Spring, which is the free translation, of which the expression is the beauty of the revival of all things in early spring; snow in Early Spring can easily enable readers to understand the beauty of artistic conception and the beauty of obscurity in Chinese poetry.

Generally speaking, the most important rule in Skopos theory is the skopos rule, and the rule of coherence and fidelity are subordinate to the skopos rule. The translation should strive to be faithful to the original text and use the advantages of the target language to restore the original character. English is characterized by its accuracy, while Chinese is characterized by more vagueness.

(24) 梅花三弄

Version 1: Plum Blossom Melody

Version 2: Three Plays of Plum Blossom

Plum Blossom Melody and Three Plays of Plum Blossom. Both of them are free translations. The former is not as good as the latter. The former does not translate as well as the latter because nong(弄) is a special technique of Guqin that requires playing in the same position three times. The former does not reflect the specific characteristics of the latter, so the translation of the latter is actually closer to the authenticity of the text and more in line with the English requirements of specific and accurate expression habits and behaviors.

For the translation of musical instrument names, paraphrasing can be adopted to classify the same basic attributes of Musical Instruments. Different from the title of the song, the translation of Chinese traditional Musical Instruments should conform to the independent development of Chinese traditional music and various cultural characteristics. The skopos of doing so is to accumulate cultural heritage and publicize traditional Chinese Musical Instruments. On the one hand, the basic elements and attributes of Musical Instruments can be understood, and on the other hand, the background and characteristics of Musical Instruments can be explained.

(25) 琵琶

Version 1: *pipa*

Version 2: a Chinese lute or a zither: 4-stringed

(26) 二胡

Version 1: *erhu*

Version 2: a Chinese fiddle: two stringed

(27) 唢呐

Version 1: *suona*

Version 2: a Chinese flute: very loud voice

(28) 腰鼓

Version 1: *yaogu*

Version 2: a Chinese waist drum

All in all, if it is a plucked instrument, it is called a lute or a zither. If it is a bowstring instrument, it is called a fiddle. If it is a wind-instrument, it is a flute, and a percussion instrument with a striking face is a drum. They all have their equivalents in Western culture.

Compared with pure transliteration, it is helpful for foreign readers to understand the role of the instrument and to have a thorough understanding of the panorama of the Chinese traditional instrument system by summarizing the attribute name of the instrument. The transliteration method emphasizes the characteristics of Musical Instruments and the uniqueness and accuracy of translation.

In short, free translation can dig deep into the content of the original text without being too limited to the form of the text, so as to play a better cross-cultural communication effect and let foreigners dig deep meaning and rich connotation of Chinese culture in the text.

5. Conclusion

This paper has first introduced the three rules of Skopos Theory, i.e. skopo rule, fidelity rule and coherence rule. And then summarized the semantic features of translation texts of Chinese traditional musical terms, including complete vacancy, approximate equivalence and convention. In order to achieve different semantic features, it has finally explored the functions of transliteration, literal translation and free translation under the guidance of the three rules of Skopos theory, that is, how transliteration, literal translation and free translation conform to the skopos rule,,,,,, fidelity rule and coherence rule. Generally speaking, the skopos of translation refers to the communicative purpose of the target text. In terms of spreading Chinese traditional music culture, the translation of Chinese traditional music terms is the main means to realize the translation skopos and the translation skopos is to publicize Chinese culture and show the soft power of Chinese culture.

This study may give instructions to the researchers in linguistics, translation and music, and culture. When the semantic and cultural meanings are better understood and conveyed with proper translating methods, the communication between Chinese traditional music and world music will be promoted. Therefore, more people in the world will know about Chinese music and Chinese culture.

However, the study is a pilot study in terms of Chinese traditional music. In the future, the study can be expanded to a larger corpus of Chinese music terms and a contrastive study between Western and Chinese music terms.

Notes

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- ③ 中国音乐词典[Z]. <http://www.shijiuhuacha.com/show-250-778-1.html>.

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