

Academic Expression of a Chinese Master's Nursing Student in Proposal Defense in the Philippines: A Qualitative Analysis and Improvement Suggestions of a Case Study



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ABSTRACT: This case study explores the academic expression challenges faced by a Chinese nursing master's student during the thesis proposal defense in the Philippines. By analyzing recorded transcripts of the defense Q&A segment and panel feedback documents, the study identifies specific issues in academic expression, including vague definitions, unclear research objectives, and deficiencies in theoretical frameworks and research designs. The feedback from professors emphasizes the importance of a systematic research design, clarity in academic terminology, and adherence to academic writing standards. The study offers targeted suggestions for the student to enhance academic expression, such as improving content organization, enriching theoretical frameworks, refining data collection methodologies, and integrating diverse academic sources. Additionally, it provides universal recommendations for all international students facing similar challenges, including the significance of seeking continuous feedback, engaging in self-reflection, and developing effective academic communication skills. Overall, this research aims to provide valuable insights and strategies for international nursing students to navigate academic expression challenges in cross-cultural contexts effectively.

KEYWORDS: Nursing Education, Academic Expression, Thesis Proposal Defense, International Students, Qualitative Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized educational environment, students' academic expression abilities are increasingly emphasized. Research shows that students from non-native countries often face challenges in vocabulary usage, grammatical structure, and academic style during academic expression (Huang & Tuck, 2019). Approximately 70% of international students report difficulties in expressing their thoughts, especially in using language that meets Western academic standards. For nursing master's students studying in the Philippines, academic expression abilities are particularly important because they need to not only present academic insights in written form but also effectively communicate and demonstrate clinical skills during their defenses. This ability directly affects their academic performance as well as their interactions with patients and other professionals. Therefore, enhancing students' academic expression abilities will positively impact their learning experiences and career development.

This study aims to explore the academic expression abilities of this Chinese nursing master's students during his proposal defenses in the Philippines, focusing on the academic expression problems he present, the guidance and feedback provided by professors, and specific improvement suggestions addressing these problems. Academic expression refers to the ability of students to effectively communicate their ideas, research findings, and arguments in an academic context. According to a report by UNESCO (2021), the globalization of education requires students to communicate effectively on the international stage, especially in clinical knowledge and practice, where the clarity and accuracy of academic expression directly relate to professional development. Thus, in-depth analysis of nursing master's students' academic expression abilities is particularly important. This study adopts a case study method, as the researcher is a Chinese international student currently pursuing a doctoral degree in English in the Philippines and

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participated as a translator in the defense of the subject of study. This identity allows the researcher to understand the academic expression process from a unique perspective. Moreover, this study can not only improve students' academic performance but also provide theoretical references for Chinese international students in the field of nursing education in the Philippines, who face dual challenges of language and culture in academic expression. Therefore, enhancing their academic expression abilities is especially important.

Based on the above background, this study will analyze the students' defense performance and the guidance and feedback from professors, exploring the problems students face in academic expression and proposing targeted improvement suggestions. The following research questions aim to clarify key elements and provide effective improvement suggestions for improving academic expression abilities among Chinese international students in the international nursing education environment.

Research Questions:

1. What academic expression problems does this Chinese nursing master's student face during the proposal defense in the Philippines?
2. What guidance and feedback do professors provide during the defense to help the student overcome these problems?
3. What specific improvement suggestions can be proposed based on the student's academic expression shortcomings, along with general advice for other students to reference?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Related Research

The importance of academic expression abilities has been widely discussed in academic research both domestically and internationally. Studies show that academic expression encompasses not only oral and written communication but also non-verbal communication, which is particularly crucial for non-native students (Duncan, 2020; Wang & Gao, 2021). In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on the academic expression abilities of nursing students in an international context, especially regarding cultural adaptation and cross-cultural communication (Johnson & Latham, 2023). These studies emphasize that nursing students need to possess good language skills and cultural awareness to communicate effectively with patients and colleagues from different backgrounds (Lee et al., 2022).

During the defense process in nursing programs, students need to demonstrate their clinical knowledge and problem-solving abilities, while also facing the dual challenges of language barriers and cultural differences (Brown, 2021; Harrison et al., 2018). Feedback from professors plays a crucial role in this process, helping students identify their shortcomings while providing specific suggestions for improving academic expression abilities (Chen, 2023). The literature indicates a close relationship between academic expression abilities and academic achievement, with good communication skills regarded as one of the key factors for success among students in nursing education (Smith et al., 2019; Zhang & Li, 2022). Moreover, the feedback given by professors during defenses is considered an essential basis for students to improve their academic expression abilities, helping them recognize deficiencies and foster growth (Brown, 2021). Studies have shown that language barriers and cultural differences are significant factors affecting nursing students' expression abilities (Hsieh & Li, 2021).

Existing literature has explored how effective teaching strategies can enhance students' communication skills and academic expression abilities (Harrison et al., 2018; Chen, 2023). These studies highlight the importance of cross-cultural communication, particularly in multicultural contexts, where nursing students need to overcome language barriers and cultural differences to communicate effectively with patients and colleagues.

However, there is relatively little research focused on nursing, particularly regarding the specific problems nursing students face in academic expression within an international educational environment (Cameron & Harkness, 2020). Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill this gap, to explore the problems in academic expression by analyzing this student's defense performance and professors' guidance and feedback, and to provide corresponding suggestions for improvement, so as to promote the relevant research in the field of international nursing education.

B. Research Gap

Despite existing research providing important insights into academic expression and the defense process, studies specific to

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the nursing profession are still lacking. Most research focuses on the academic expression abilities of domestic students, with relatively scarce studies targeting international students, particularly nursing master's students in the multicultural context of the Philippines. Additionally, while research has explored the impact of professor feedback on student performance, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of specific cases, which limits understanding of feedback effectiveness in actual teaching contexts.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on Chinese nursing master's students in the Philippines' proposal defenses, directly addressing this specific group. By analyzing these students' academic expression abilities, this study will provide practical improvement suggestions to help them communicate more effectively and present academic achievements in international settings. Furthermore, this study will focus on common problems in academic expression, exploring the interactions during the defense process and professor feedback. This qualitative analysis contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the multiple challenges students face in academic expression, including language barriers, cultural differences, and interactions with professors. As the researcher is a Chinese international student and served as a translator for many Chinese international students' defenses in the Philippines, this study can deeply understand the academic expression status of students from the perspective of cultural adaptation and language communication, enhancing the depth and breadth of the research.

In summary, research on the academic expression of Chinese nursing master's students in an international context is relatively scarce, particularly in the specific context of the Philippines. This study will provide new theoretical foundations and practical guidance for this field, promoting improvement and development in nursing education while filling existing literature gaps. By focusing on a specific group and employing in-depth analysis, this study aims to provide constructive strategies and theoretical support for enhancing the academic expression abilities of Chinese nursing master's students in international nursing education environments.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Case Selection

This study focuses on a Chinese master's student in nursing studying in the Manila region of the Philippines, aiming to explore the academic expression problems faced during their thesis defense process. The experiences of this student are representative of the common challenges encountered by many Chinese master's students in nursing studying in an international environment. After obtaining a nursing diploma in China, the student pursued a master's degree in nursing in the Philippines. Throughout the learning process, he encountered problems such as language barriers and cultural adaptation, with his native language being Chinese, which made expressing himself in English in academic settings particularly challenging, especially in demonstrating professional knowledge and clinical skills.

Prior to the defense, the student went through multiple stages of guidance and training, during which the advisor provided systematic instruction with the researcher's assistance as an interpreter, covering academic expression skills and effective interaction with the panel. This process helped identify specific problems the student faced while preparing for the defense. However, due to limited English communication skills, the student was unable to engage independently, leading the advisor to request the hiring of a translator to assist in communication during the defense. This situation is common among Chinese international students in the Philippines, reflecting the language problems faced by international students in a multicultural environment. Through an in-depth analysis of this case, this study aims to investigate the specific academic expression problems faced by Chinese master's nursing students during the thesis defense process in the Philippines, and to propose improvement suggestions based on professor feedback. The findings of this research will provide important theoretical support for understanding the academic expression challenges encountered by Chinese master's nursing students during their thesis defense process in the Philippines and offer beneficial references and guidance for other international students in nursing education environments to enhance their academic expression abilities.

B. Data Collection

The data collection for this study was primarily conducted through the following steps:
Collection of Recorded Transcripts: During the proposal defense process, the researcher acted as an interpreter, responsible for facilitating language conversion between the student and the defense panel. With the permission of the defense panel, the Q&A

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segment of the defense was recorded. These recordings provided a real textual basis for subsequent analysis, ensuring that the researcher could accurately capture the student's academic expression and the panel's questions.

Comments and Feedback of the panel: After the defense concluded, the defense panel provided comments feedback to the student. The researcher analyzed the professors' feedback, including evaluations of the student's performance and suggestions. These feedback texts provided important contextual information for the research, helping to understand the challenges the student faced during the defense and the strengths and weaknesses of his performance.

Observation and Notes: As the interpreter, the researcher conducted detailed observations during the defense and took relevant notes. These observational records included not only the student's academic expression performance but also the interactions between the student and the professors, as well as the dynamic responses during the defense process. These notes provided in-depth insights for subsequent analysis, enhancing the depth and breadth of the research.

Through the above methods, this study was able to comprehensively collect data related to the student's academic expression abilities and professor feedback, providing a solid foundation for subsequent analysis.

C. Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis as the primary qualitative analysis method. First, the researchers used Otter.ai software to convert the defense Q&A segment recordings into text to ensure data integrity, which will be noted as Defense Q&A Segment Recorded Transcripts. After organizing the transcripts, ATLAS.ti software was utilized for analysis. The researcher first thoroughly read the transcripts to identify core content relevant to the research questions, focusing on the student's academic expression problems and the professors' feedback. Subsequently, the researcher employed open coding to mark relevant themes, such as "unclear variable definitions" and "ambiguous research objectives," to capture important information and potential patterns in the text. The researcher then inductively refined the coding, identifying academic expression problems such as "lack of logic" and "incomplete research design." Ultimately, these themes were categorized into two major classes: "Problems" and "Professor Guidance and Feedback," further subdivided into subcategories such as variables, definitions, intervention methods, and theoretical background. This analytical framework provided clear guidance for identifying areas for student improvement, aiding in the enhancement of their academic performance.

After completing the analysis of the recorded transcript, the researcher examined the feedback document provided by the defense panel to comprehensively understand the professors' guidance, suggestions, and identified problems. This analysis clarified the student's deficiencies in academic expression and demonstrated how the professors' guidance supported the student in overcoming these challenges. These findings not only provided evidence for understanding the specific problems the student encountered during the defense but also offered empirical support for the effectiveness of the professors' guidance in improving the student's performance, thereby addressing Research Questions 1 and 2.

Through a combined analysis of the transcript and the professors' feedback documents, along with observations and notes taken during the defense, the researcher formulated improvement strategies for the student's academic expression, thereby responding to Research Question 3.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

This study generated a total of 110 codes through the coding analysis of the two main datasets: Defense Q&A Segment Recorded Transcripts and Panel Feedback Document.

A. Coding Analysis of the Defense Q&A Segment Recorded Transcripts

The coding results of the recorded transcripts contain 74 codes, divided into two main categories: "problems" and "Professor Guidance and Feedback," which are further subdivided into 11 themes. These themes include:

- Descriptions with inappropriate level of detail
- Unclear definitions and scope
- Ambiguity in research objectives and significance
- Unclear theoretical framework and concepts
- Deficiencies in research design and experiments

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- Vague terminology and expressions
- Unclear data collection and processes
- Ambiguous hypotheses and hypothesis expression
- Improper use of person and tense
- Inclusion of unnecessary content
- Grammar and formatting problems

B. Coding Analysis of Panel Feedback Document

The coding results of the feedback document contain 36 codes, primarily divided into two main categories: "problems" and "Professor Guidance and Feedback," and further divided into 8 themes. These themes encompass:

- Improvement of research design and methods
- Clarity of theoretical framework and literature review
- Explicitness of research objectives and significance
- Rationality of variables and experimental design
- Accuracy in expression and terminology usage
- Clarity of hypotheses and hypothesis testing
- Normativity in grammar and formatting

C. Comprehensive Explanation of the Main Research Questions

1) Main problems Faced by the Student During the Defense Process:

The student primarily exhibited the following problems during the defense: overly broad and detailed descriptions leading to unclear information transmission; vague definitions and research scope lacking precision; unclear expression of research objectives and significance failing to adequately articulate their importance; an unclear theoretical framework and related concepts affecting the effectiveness of theoretical support; insufficient rationality in research design and experiments, failing to reasonably arrange experimental steps and timing; ambiguous terminology usage impacting the accuracy of academic expression; unclear data collection and processes leading to non-standard implementation of research methods; unclear hypothesis statements lacking necessary background information; improper use of person and tense causing problems in academic writing format; redundancy affecting expression conciseness; and deficiencies in grammar and formatting, particularly in adhering to APA format requirements, impacting the overall expression quality.

2) Guidance and Feedback Provided by Professors During the Defense:

The feedback from professors mainly focused on the following aspects: suggesting the student clarify research design and data collection processes to increase the systematic nature of the research; pointing out deficiencies in the theoretical framework and literature review, requiring the student to enhance the application of theoretical support and clarity of definitions; emphasizing the need for consistency in research objectives and significance while enriching expressions from multiple perspectives; proposing improvements regarding the rationality of variables and experimental design to ensure clear inclusion and exclusion criteria for research subjects; advising the student to enhance clarity in expression and accurate use of academic terminology while eliminating redundancy; indicating that hypothesis statements and testing need to be clearer to strengthen the logic of the research; and finally, suggesting the student pay attention to grammar and formatting problems, strictly adhering to APA format standards to improve the overall academic writing level.

3) Specific Academic Expression Improvement Suggestions for the student:

- **Content Organization and Clarity:** Thoroughly organize the research content, ensuring a clear understanding of each part to accurately convey core information.
- **Clarification of Objectives and Significance:** Clearly articulate research objectives and their significance, ensuring logical clarity and structured expression.
- **Enrichment of Theoretical Framework:** Conduct in-depth research on relevant theories to enhance the understanding and application of the theoretical framework, increasing the credibility of the argument.
- **Rationality of Research Design:** Develop a detailed research plan with clear experimental steps and timing to ensure systematic

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execution.

- Precision in Terminology Usage: Accurately use academic terminology, avoiding vague expressions to improve the effectiveness of academic communication.
- Systematized Data Collection and Processing Protocol: It is recommended to utilize flowcharts to clearly outline the steps and methods of data collection, and to establish stringent data processing standards and quality control measures to ensure the scientific rigor and reliability of the data collection process.
- Strengthening Hypothesis Statements: Clearly state hypotheses, ensuring each hypothesis is supported by sufficient theoretical background.
- Adherence to Academic Writing Norms: Strictly follow grammar, tense usage, and APA format requirements to enhance the professionalism and accuracy of overall expression.

4) General Recommendations for International Students:

Based on the researcher's experience in translating defenses for Chinese international students, the following general recommendations are compiled to help those who have not yet defended to prepare and perform more effectively:

A. Preparation

- Adequate Preparation and Mock Defenses: Conduct multiple mock defenses to ensure equipment setup, check materials, and confirm venue arrangements, boosting confidence.
- Understanding Panel's Expectations: Research the background and research areas of panel members in advance, adjusting defense content to highlight relevant sections.
- Questions: Consider potential questions that may arise and prepare answers in advance to demonstrate a profound understanding of the research.
- Maintaining Flexibility: Be prepared to adapt communication strategies to unexpected situations, such as unforeseen questions or technical problems.

B. Presentation Skills

- Clear Visual Aids: Use concise PowerPoint presentations or other materials, avoiding excessive text while emphasizing main points.
- Confidence and Expression Skills: Maintain good posture and eye contact, and use appropriate body language to enhance confidence.
- Question Response Techniques: Stay calm when faced with panel questions, and if uncertain, openly express this while proposing considerations.
- Attention to Non-verbal Communication: Be mindful of body language and facial expressions, and dress appropriately to enhance professional image.
- Mastering Time Management: Ensure content is concise and practice time management.

C. Cultural Considerations

- Understanding and Adapting to Cultural Differences: Gain a deep understanding of the cultural habits of the host country and academic community, including communication styles, academic etiquette, and audience expectations, to present more naturally during the defense. Adjust your expression to fit the audience's communication habits, using culturally neutral language and avoiding potentially confusing terms.
- Respecting and Explaining Cultural Backgrounds: In the defense, if the research involves specific cultural backgrounds, ensure that all cultural viewpoints are respected, and provide relevant information to help the panel understand the background and significance of the research, promoting mutual understanding.
- Cultural Sensitivity: Avoid sensitive topics, use neutral language, and minimize potential cultural conflicts.
- Addressing and Seeking Feedback: During the defense, if faced with cultural conflicts or misunderstandings, remain calm, politely explain your perspective, and try to find common understanding.

V. DISCUSSION

This study delves into the academic expression problems faced by a Chinese master nursing student during his thesis proposal

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defense in the Philippines, along with the guidance and feedback from professors. Through the analysis of a specific case, it provides valuable references for students in international nursing education to effectively enhance their academic expression during defenses.

A. Factors Influencing Academic Expression Ability

Firstly, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are significant factors affecting the student's academic expression ability. In a multicultural environment, students must not only adapt to new academic requirements but also overcome language barriers. Research indicates that non-native students often face more challenges in academic expression, particularly when using language that aligns with Western academic standards (Huang & Tuck, 2019). The ambiguity and vagueness in the student's expression are manifestations of cultural adaptation difficulties and insufficient language expression capabilities. Therefore, enhancing students' language skills and cultural awareness will help improve their academic expression levels. Furthermore, differences in educational systems may also affect students' understanding and application of academic expression. The curriculum design and teaching methods in international nursing education should consider these factors to provide the necessary support and guidance for students.

B. The Importance of Panel Feedback

Secondly, the feedback provided by panel during the thesis defense plays a crucial role in the academic growth of students. The results of this study indicate that the professors' feedback primarily focused on areas such as research design, theoretical frameworks, and objectives and significance—specific problems that students often encounter in academic expression (e.g., insufficient theoretical support, vague objectives). According to relevant research, timely feedback helps students identify their shortcomings and offers effective improvement suggestions (Brown, 2021). For instance, the professors emphasized the systematic and scientific nature of research design, which directly addressed the student's lack of clarity regarding the research process and data collection strategies in their expression. Such guidance not only affects students' performance during the defense but also has profound implications for their subsequent thesis writing, aiding students in better constructing theoretical frameworks and research designs, thus enhancing their overall academic level.

In nursing education, professor feedback is particularly important, as this field emphasizes the integration of theory and practice. Effective feedback encompasses not only technical guidance but also emotional support, which is vital for nursing students to build confidence and enhance their academic expression abilities. By creating a positive feedback environment, educators can significantly enhance students' academic capabilities, helping them approach their future academic paths with greater confidence. Especially during the thesis proposal defense stage, this support is crucial for the successful implementation of subsequent research and clinical practice for master's nursing students. In summary, emphasizing the necessity of professors' guidance and support in nursing education is fundamental; providing students with clear feedback is not only key to improving academic capabilities but also lays the foundation for cultivating future nursing professionals.

C. Strategies for Improving Academic Expression Ability

The specific improvement suggestions proposed in this study, such as organizing content, clarifying research objectives, and enriching theoretical frameworks, address the academic expression problems identified during the thesis defense, providing useful references for students in international education to enhance their academic expression effectively during defenses. The study found that students often face problems such as vague descriptions, insufficient theoretical support, and unclear expressions during defenses. Therefore, strategies such as thorough preparation, conducting mock defenses, and deeply understanding the expectations of panel members will assist students in better organizing their thoughts and clearly conveying core content during actual defenses.

Additionally, based on the researcher's experience translating defenses for Chinese international students in Manila, generalizable recommendations have been formulated. These suggestions include conducting multiple mock defenses prior to the formal defense to build confidence; understanding the background of panel members to highlight relevant aspects of their research; anticipating potential questions and preparing thoroughly; and using concise and clear visual aids to ensure effective communication of information. These strategies not only provide practical guidance for individual students but also offer theoretical foundations for the practical development of all international students across various academic fields.

Furthermore, educational institutions should consider establishing dedicated academic expression training courses, particularly addressing the needs of non-native students. Such courses can focus on aspects such as research design, theoretical frameworks, and the articulation of objectives and significance, helping students master the language expression skills and academic writing norms

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required for thesis defenses. Through these targeted trainings, students can improve their performance in academic activities like defenses, thereby laying a solid foundation for their subsequent thesis writing. This comprehensive strategy not only enhances students' academic expression abilities but also supports their development in their respective academic fields.

D. Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

Although this study provides valuable insights into enhancing the academic expression abilities of Chinese master's nursing students in international education, particularly in the context of thesis proposal defenses, several limitations remain. Firstly, this research focuses solely on a single case study of one student; therefore, the results may have limitations in generalizability and representativeness, making it challenging to fully reflect the problems and needs of all international students in academic expression. Future research should consider expanding the sample size to explore common academic expression problems among more students across different disciplinary backgrounds, thereby providing more comprehensive and systematic theoretical support for related fields.

Secondly, integrating quantitative research methods could provide deeper analysis of the various factors influencing the enhancement of academic expression abilities. This includes comparative studies of students from diverse backgrounds, language abilities, and cultural adaptability, aimed at identifying the primary obstacles encountered in academic expression and their causes. By quantifying these influencing factors, researchers can propose more targeted improvement strategies, offering empirical support for international students in nursing education and other related disciplines.

Additionally, future research could investigate how to effectively integrate curriculum design in educational institutions with academic expression training to better meet the actual needs of non-native students in academic activities. This approach would not only help improve students' academic performance but also provide teachers with more effective tools and methods for guiding students. Through these efforts, the teaching quality and student development in international nursing education and other disciplines could be further advanced, creating a more conducive environment for students' academic growth.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the problems faced by Chinese master's nursing students regarding academic expression during their thesis defense in the Philippines, along with the feedback from professors, providing concrete insights for enhancing students' academic performance.

The findings indicate that students often encounter obstacles related to cultural and linguistic backgrounds during the defense process, which makes it difficult for them to articulate ideas and engage in logical reasoning. Addressing this issue, enhancing language skills and cultural adaptability is particularly crucial, as it not only helps students convey their research content more clearly but also strengthens their adaptability to the academic environment.

The feedback from professors is equally vital for students' academic growth. The research discovered that timely and targeted feedback can effectively help students identify and rectify shortcomings, especially during the thesis proposal defense, where such feedback provides clear guidance for their subsequent research and writing. Therefore, establishing an effective feedback mechanism is particularly important in nursing education, as it can facilitate continuous improvement throughout the students' academic journey.

Additionally, the improvement strategies proposed in the study, such as content organization, clarification of research objectives, and enhancement of theoretical frameworks, demonstrate strong applicability and can provide valuable references for students in other international nursing education contexts. Educational institutions can develop corresponding training programs based on these recommendations to enhance students' academic expression abilities. Moreover, the study offers additional experience-based suggestions, including thorough preparation and mock defenses, understanding the expectations of panel members, anticipating potential questions, and using clear visual aids. These strategies not only help students feel more confident and composed during their defenses but also provide practical guidance for international students seeking to improve their academic expression capabilities.

Finally, a limitation of this study is its focus on a single case. Future research should consider expanding the sample size to explore a broader range of common problems and incorporate quantitative analysis to strengthen the empirical foundation. It is hoped that this research will provide effective guidance for international nursing students in educational environments, assisting

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them in enhancing their academic expression abilities and overall academic performance.

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