Kanzo Uchimura's Christian Faith as "パウロ道(Paul-Dou)"

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“パウロ道 (Paul-Dou)”

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Abstract: The Japanese word or (Chinese) character “道,” which can be pronounced either “Michi” or “Dou,” means “way” (or “road,” “street,” etc.) and has very special meanings. We Japanese have many “道”’s, like “剣道 (Ken-dou),” “柔道 (Ju-dou),” “茶道 (Sa-dou),” etc. Kanzo Uchimura himself also liked this word/concept “道 (Michi/Dou).” But for him, it is more conscientious, namely more moralistic, than the traditional Japanese one and the true “道 (Michi/Dou)” must be the most religious. He wrote straightforwardly that “Christianity is the “道” of God.” He favored also the word/concept “武士道 (Bushi-dou)” (the 道 [way] of the warrior) in particular, all through his life. For him, “武士道” is the most important traditional Japanese “道,” the only one that leads to the true “道,” namely the Christian faith. So, for Uchimura, Paul and even Jesus himself end up being “武士”’s, who embody the most respectable Japanese “道,” “武士道.” And also it is impossible to fail to see his virtual preference for Paul’s “途 (Michi)” (road) over Jesus’ for the true “道 (Michi).” He wrote “The faith of Paul is my faith.” Therefore I would like to conclude that Uchimura’s Christian faith is the “道 (Michi/Dou)” and also suggest that we can even call Uchimura’s Christian faith “パウロ道 (Paul-Dou)” (The Way [道] of Paul). But this conclusion is not only a kind of word-play. If we scrutinize many more literary aspects, I would like to say, idiosyncratic styles of Uchimura’s discourses, as I discussed in this paper, then we are sure to find the answer to my ultimate question of how we Japanese become Christians.

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Preface

For this journal I have already written two papers about Kanzo Uchimura, one of the most famous Christian thinkers in the Meiji era (1867–1912) of Japan, who left an enormous amount of writings for us¹. In my first paper, I focused on his interpretations of some biblical verses, especially those of the Gospel of John²; and in the second, on a few particular words or Chinese characters and concepts that he liked very much to use in order to express his thoughts³. These two papers are the first steps in my far-reaching project to ultimately make it clear how we Japanese have accepted the Christian faith until now, treating Uchimura as a representative but also as a typical example of we Japanese Christians. In this third paper of mine on Uchimura,
I will discuss another traditional Japanese word/concept “道 (Michi/Dou)” that I think is one of his most favorite words/concepts. But it is not a trivial element in his huge discourses. Rather it holds a fundamental place in his Christian thoughts as whole, so it must be a key to understanding his Christian faith as I will demonstrate below.

1. 道 (Michi/Dou) in Japan and Uchimura’s 道

The Japanese word or (Chinese) character “道,” which can be pronounced either “Michi” or “Dou,” means “way” (or “road,” “street,” etc.). I think that even in English the word “way” (or “road”) can have some connotative meanings. But in Japanese this simple word/character “道” has very special meanings. A scholar describes “道 (Michi/Dou)” in the following way:

In ancient Japan, some particular teachings and manners, which had come from the continent (namely China) or the peninsula (namely Korea) and been formed by their influence, were called “仏の道 (Hotoke no Michi)” (the way of Buddha), “神の道 (Kami no Michi)” (the way of the gods), “天の道 (Ten no Michi)” (the way of heaven). So to undertake such teachings and manners came to be called “入道 (Nyuu-dou)” (entering the way) and more broadly some particular professional areas came to be called “管弦の道 (Kangen no Michi)” (the way of [orchestral] music), “弓矢の道 (Kyuushi no Michi)” (the way of the bow and arrow), “学びの道 (Manabi no Michi)” (the way of studies). . . . In the Edo era, these “諸芸諸能の道 (Syogeisyonou no Michi)” (the ways of arts and abilities) as professional areas were much more articulated and as many “諸道 (Syo-dou)” (ways) as could be thought of, such as “武道 (Bu-dou)” (the way of the warrior), “文道 (Bun-dou)” (the way of literature), “色道 (Shiki-dou)” (the way of erotic love), “書道 (Sho-dou)” (the way of letters), “華道 (Ka-dou)” (the way of flowers), and “香道 (Kou-dou)” (the way of scent), came to be developed and pursued. Even “仏道 (Butsu-dou)” (the way of Buddhism), “儒道 (Ju-dou)” (the way of Confucianism), and “神道 (Shin-tou)” (the way of Shintoism) were “諸道 (Sho-dou)” (ways) for the general public.

We Japanese have formed so many “道 (Michi/Dou)” with relation to so many arts and abilities up until now, like “剣道 (Ken-dou)” (the way of the sword), “柔道 (Ju-dou)” (the way of Yawara [柔]), “茶道 (Sa-dou)” (the way of tea) etc., including those “道”s mentioned above.

As is well known, “剣道” and “柔道 are sports. So, for example, “剣道 (Ken-dou)” (the way of the sword) might be understood by English-speaking people, in the same manner as if I called baseball “the way of baseball.” But Japanese “道” (the way) has, I think, considerably complicated implications. We have even a word/concept “皇道 (Kou-dou)” (the way of the Emperor). In the Japanese Christian society, even now, we call would-be Christians “求道者 (Kyuu-dousya)” (seekers of the way [道])⁶. The Japanese concept of “道 (Michi/Dou)” also has some idiosyncratic aspects. This scholar continues:

In China and Korea, “道” was grasped cosmologically and metaphysically as norms and areas having no forms and was thought to be interchangeable with “理 (Ri)” [reason]. But
in Japan, “道” is usually grasped as practical workings by specific and individual subjects [people], and it is unusual that it is represented as objective having no relation with any subjects [people] or as a kind of universal principle that everybody must obey [italicized by Sasaki].

According to this explanation, the Japanese concept of “道” is very practical and subjective. Uchimura himself also liked this word/concept “道 (Michi/Dou).” When he was forty years old, he wrote a short essay titled simply “道.” He asked directly:

What is “道”?

“道” is never vacant nor vague. It is never like riding on clouds up to the heavens. It is clear and exact, unbiased, No and Yes. This is “道.” Any other way than this is “邪道 (Ja-dou)” (the evil way). Yes, it is sin.

Thou shalt not steal, not tell a falsehood, not commit adultery, respect people and not exploit them. . . . The “道” is just like this, cannot allow any ambiguity nor obscurity, and its clearness and doubtlessness is beyond the heavens and the sun.

So the road [途 (Michi); another character to mean a way/road] to reach “道” is no other than walking on this clear and fair road [途] audaciously and straightly. . . .

. . .

Recognizing “道” is serious work and it must be pursued with ablutions. It must not be sought for with reading books, but gained after hard labor. It cannot be mastered otherworldly with meditations, but searched for with keen interest in the brilliant daylight. Precisely because “道” belongs to the heart, not to the brain, to practices, not to speculations.

Here we can see that Uchimura’s concept of “道” is the same as the traditional Japanese one. For example, his “道” is also very practical or pragmatic. But at the same time, he gave it some of his own flavor. He uses it to criticize the established Japanese religions and thoughts at that time. He wrote:

One who regards enlightenment in some way as a kind of technique is truly a devil, because he expels morals from the practical world, and makes people of the world think he is a clever man though he is not merciful and call him a gentleman though he is not diligent. He is just like a master actor who regardless of his great technique has no morals. But if one is immoral regardless of how much technique he uses, he cannot become a moralist. . . . [emphasized by the author]

. . .

Be circumspect to the “道” that those types of false scholars, wicked persons, idle fellows, and vulgar guys, can enjoy without having guilty consciences. Zen Buddhism that has anesthetic effects on the consciences of the masters of cunning, missionary-oriented Christianity that infuses love with blind passion into many hypocrites and men of weak character, and make them dream of achieving peace of mind, the low-grade discipline of Lao-tse and Chuang-tse that makes many minions, who pretend themselves to be oriental larger-than-life
figures, drink too much, play too much, and discuss affairs of state, but never supply even one grain of rice to society, misunderstand that they are the great experts, . . . , these all bewitch people, ruin the nation, and impede the progress and developments of the truth. How badly they pretend that theirs is the true "道," and how recklessly they make improper use of that precious name "religion," which they claim is theirs, and Oh! The diligent people who keep trying to reach the holy land of truth, are dazzled and blinded by their beautiful names, so we should not leave the fate of these people’s souls to this seductive guidance.

Uchimura’s "道" is practical, but it is not too technical. And we can say that, for Uchimura, it is more conscientious, namely more moralistic, than the traditional Japanese one.

"道" should directly appeal to our consciences. And such a kind that makes people to cast around for itself in vain should not be called "道." What "道" should directly awaken is people’s feeling of shame of their own sins. So the "道" that cannot awaken a deeply repentant sense in people first is "邪道 (Ja-dou)" (the evil way)."

For Uchimura, therefore, the true “道 (Michi/Dou)” must be the most moralistic and, I think we can say, the most religious.

2. Uchimura’s 道 and Christianity

From just the few writings mentioned above, we can see that Uchimura favored the word/concept “道 (Michi/Dou).” Moreover, he connects it with Christian faith in a very interesting manner. First, he wrote straightforwardly that “Christianity is the "道" of God.” This is the beginning sentence of his essay titled “武士道とキリスト教 (Bushi-dou to Kirisutokyou)” (The 道 [Way] of the Warrior and Christianity), which he wrote 28 years after the above-cited article. The amount of time alone that passed between the writing of these two essays demonstrates his favor of the word/concept “道.” And also we should take note that he likes this title very much. Three other writings, which have the same title “武士道と基督教” but were written respectively in different periods (1918, 1923, 1928, and 1929), are included in his 40-volume complete works. Now from this fact, it is crystal clear that he favored the words/concepts “道” and “武士道 (Bushi-dou)” (the 道[way] of the warrior) in particular, all through his life. And for Uchimura, “武士道” is the most important traditional Japanese “道,” the only one that leads to the true “道,” namely the Christian faith.

After World War II, Japanese Christianity became almost thoroughly pacifistic. Due to this fact, this kind of theme, namely the relationships between Christianity and “武士道” is rarely talked about at the present time and it appears to me that Uchimura’s discussions about “武士道” became a kind of taboo not to be mentioned anymore by any Japanese Christians. But at this point, I’m not so interested in these so-called ideological aspects of Japanese Christianity nor in Uchimura’s warrior-like tendency. Naturally he was also subconsciously bound by the currents of thought in that period and it is understandable enough that he had a warrior-like vocabulary during the Meiji era, since it was the nationalistic-militaristic age just after the samurai (warrior)-
period, the Edo era (1603–1867). Here in this discussion, I am mainly interested in Uchimura’s preference of the word/concept “道.”

So in “武士道とキリスト教 (Bushi-dou to Kirisutokyou)” (The 道 [Way] of the Warrior and Christianity) he continues after that sentence:

Christianity is the “道” of God and “武士道 (Bushi-dou)” (the 道 [way] of the warrior) is the “道” of human beings. It goes without saying that the “道” of God is perfect and the “道” of human beings is imperfect. And the more the “道” of human beings becomes similar to the “道” of God, the more perfect the former becomes. “武士道” is the “道” of the Japanese and it is not a mistake to call it the Japanese moral. And it is a really precious “道” for us Japanese and before we encountered the “道” of God [namely Christianity; by Sasaki] it had been the peerless “道.” However, just like “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” [1 Corinthians 13:10; by Sasaki], it cannot but appear that the perfect “道” of God is come and the imperfect “武士道” is done away”.

So, for Uchimura, it is Christianity, namely the “道 (Michi/Dou)” of God, that will make “武士道,” namely the “道” of Japanese morals, perfect or complete. He even wrote the following:

... “武士道” is not only hara-kiri and revenge, but has many noble teachings like those of Christianity. Here is the reason why we Japanese are strongly attracted by Christianity once we encounter it for the first time. Because it appeals strongly to Japanese hearts and because on many points we can regard Jesus and his disciples as models of the “武士” [warrior] [italicized by Sasaki].

And Uchimura enumerates the virtues of “武士道.” “武士道” holds honesty in high regard.” "武士道” reminds us of courage immediately.” For Uchimura, Jesus is a person of great courage above all else. He wrote:

... If there is a womanly Christianity, there is a manly one against it. The savior, Jesus Christ, is not such an epicenec person that he only pities sinners, overlooks all of their sins, and only saves them earnestly.

... [Uchimura cites the famous verses, John 2:13–16, describing the narrative in which Jesus Christ cleansed the Temple of Jerusalem; by Sasaki].

This is not gentle Jesus, but wrathful. Jesus is different from Amitabha. He showed the so-called “rage of the lamb.” He was not afraid of people when he cleansed the Temple for the noble cause of justice.

How macho Uchimura’s Jesus is He doesn’t stop describing this machismo Jesus:

... Japanese people have the spirit that values justice and truth above life. Encountering this spirit, we cannot but be in sympathy with the self-sacrificial spirit of Christianity. If they leave their prejudices about it, forget its bad reputations, and approach Christianity,
Japanese “武士” are naturally attracted to it and cannot but become *loyal vassals* [italicized by Sasaki] of Jesus. *So in an early age of the Meiji era, many Japanese “武士” became believers in Christ on the grounds of this spirit* [italicized by Uchimura himself]... They became his vassals, attracted to Jesus’ “武士気質 (Bushi-katagi)” (the character of the warrior)23.

Uchimura’s comparison with “武士” does not end with Jesus, but continues on to Paul.

Paul also chose death over shame. He had never hung his head down if not for noble reasons. He was the Jewish “武士” which corresponds to the Japanese “武士.”24

This essay seems to have been based on his sermon or lecture which he delivered at Sapporo Independent Church a few months before writing it down. Sapporo is the fondly-remembered place where he had spent his youth and where he founded this church with his friends. So Uchimura, who had already reached the advanced age of 68, may have not been concerned with restraining his expression, which sounds slightly scandalous for us, today’s Japanese.

Already since about 1903, Uchimura had taken the position of absolute pacifism25. But for him, the logic cited above didn’t seem to contradict his pacifism, rather his comments show how strongly he insisted on the affinity between “道” and Christianity. For him, Christianity is a kind of “道,” no, the most perfect “道” in order to complete “武士道,” the best of traditional Japanese morals.

3. Paul’s Road [途＝Michi] and Jesus’ Road for Uchimura

For Uchimura, Paul and even Jesus himself end up being “武士”s, who embody the most respectable Japanese “道,” “武士道” as we saw above. We can find a very interesting explanation from Uchimura about Paul’s road and Jesus’ road, the title of which is “キリストに到るの二つの途 (Kirisuto ni itaruno hutatsu no *Michi* [italicized by Sasaki])” (The Two Roads [or Ways] Leading to Christ) but using a different character “途” instead of “道,” since both have the same pronunciation “Michi” in Japanese. He wrote:

We have two roads [or ways＝途 (michi)] leading to Christ, one of which is through Jesus and the other through Paul. The former is done with tender actions, the latter with *courageous* faith. The former is just like walking through a green field, the latter is just like climbing a high and steep mountain. The former has the advantage of picking up some precious stones on the road, the latter of arriving directly at the top. We can choose both of these two roads if we want to reach Christ. But you have to pay close attention to that the former being so comfortable that it holds the danger of making us avert from “道 (Michi)” [Caution! Not “途”! italicized by Sasaki, too], and the latter is so precipitous that it holds the danger of falling off26.

At a glance it seems that Uchimura strikes such a superb balance that it is nearly impossible
to attach too much importance to only one of the two. To be fair, Uchimura did attempt to draw people's attention to this:

Paul is one aspect of Jesus and one of his important facets, but not all of them. We cannot know Jesus without knowing Paul but we cannot know Jesus only through Paul. People who want to know Jesus without Paul would commit an error but, at the same time, people who want to know Jesus wholly only through Paul would also commit an error. The whole is bigger than its parts. If you want to know Jesus completely, you must study him through all of his disciples, and especially from Jesus himself.²⁷

But I think that it is impossible to fail to see his virtual preference for Paul's “途 (Michi)” (road) over Jesus' for the true “道 (Michi).” Take careful note of the tiny but deliberate change of the characters from “途” to “道”! in the above citation. Relevant to this point, we can find an even more definitive statement, in which he wrote “The faith of Paul is my faith.”²⁸

By the way, the title of Uchimura’s lecture that was given at his last public appearance was “パウロの武道 (Paul no Bushi-dou)” (Paul's Way [道] of the Warrior [武士])²⁹, the content of which we cannot know exactly because it has not survived. But from some of my citations above, it may be easy to guess the content.

It was reported that Uchimura mentioned “武士 (warrior)” a few times even on his death bed in his very last days.³⁰

From all of these pieces of information, I think, it is obvious enough that Uchimura had favored the word/concept “道 (Michi/Dou),” especially “武士道” which he regarded as the most traditional and noblest Japanese moral, and insisted on being a “武士” who embodies the “道.” And it is also certain that he thought we should go through the way [Michi=“道” and “途”] of Paul, as the “Jewish “武士 (warrior),” to reach Christ. Uchimura’s Christian faith is to follow Paul’s Way [“道”] faithfully.

Therefore I would like to conclude that Uchimura’s Christian faith is the “道 (Michi/Dou)” and also suggest that we can even call Uchimura’s Christian faith “パウロ道 (Paul-Dou)” (The Way [道] of Paul).”

Conclusion and Further Investigation

I would like to propose calling Kanzo Uchimura’s Christian faith “パウロ道 (Paul-Dou)” (The Way [道] of Paul). But immediately I can expect that this conclusion of mine would attract some criticism, for example, that my conclusion is only a kind of word-play, which does not examine the essence of Uchimura’s thoughts on Paul, which are crystallized in his 『羅馬書の研究』 (The Studies on Romans)³¹ written in his later years. In this lecture series, later put in book form, he expressed his very Western authentic and authoritative theological thoughts as well as evangelical Protestant ones, for example, about some dogmas of the Trinity, justification by faith and so on.³² But this is exactly the point I would like to keep my eyes on because he had talked and written of such traditional Japanese words/concepts, may I even say, idiosyncratic thoughts,
mentioning “道 (Michi/Dou)” before writing this book. And even after that he still continued to do so. But it doesn’t seem that he felt any sort of contradictions between these two.

At least for me, these two aspects of Uchimura’s thoughts which contrast, I think, keenly to each other, are curious enough that we should scrutinize them. One reason is people like 松村介石 (Matsumura Kaiseki, 1859–1939), who was once a Christian, even a pastor, but left Christianity and founded a very idiosyncratic and syncretistic new religion, the name of which is just “道会 (Dou-kai)” (the Congregation of “道[Dou/Michi]”)31. It seems that Matsumura had had some connection with Uchimura but in the end went in a different direction from Uchimura. What is the difference between them despite their common emphases on “道 (Michi/Dou)”?

As I was writing this article, I found an important clue to answer this question. It has to do with comparing Uchimura’s The Studies on Romans, with Karl Barth’s Der Römerbrief34. As everybody knows, Karl Barth (1886–1968) is the most famous and important systematic theologian of the Western world in the 20th century and one of his representative books is Der Römerbrief (1919 and 1922 [completely revised 2nd edition]), which was written during almost the same time period as Uchimura wrote 『羅馬書の研究』 (The Studies on Romans, 1921–1922). This fact alone is interesting enough to invite us to compare these two books35.

Here I can only give some hints of what we may find. First, these two books have the strikingly same tone of emphasizing Western orthodox evangelic-Protestant theological thought, but at the same time they have conspicuous differences, especially in their literary styles of descriptions. And these differences are never only literary, but highly concerned with the very core of both thoughts. I am expecting that the considerations on these differences would help to answer my ultimate question that I presented at the beginning of this paper and as the title of my first paper on Kanzo Uchimura, “How We Japanese Become Christians.” And here, with a promise to make a detailed explanation of these points next time, I lay down my pen at this time.

Note

1 See Bibliography.
2 Kei Sasaki, “How We Japanese Become Christians.”
3 idem, “Kanzo Uchimura’s ‘Insistence on Purity’.”
4 The article “道” was written by Makoto Kurozumi in Iwanami Tetsugaku Shisou Jiten, p. 1544. This is my English translation from Japanese.
5 One of the representative Japanese liberal thinkers after World War II, Masao Maruyama (丸山真男: 1914–1996) wrote about “Kou-dou (皇道)” in his book Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics in the following way: “Social scientists were animated in their inquiries by one big question: what were the internal factors which drove Japan into her disastrous war? How was it that Japanese intellectuals, who for decades past had been absorbing Western scholarship and techniques and ways of life, who were more familiar — or at least believed themselves more familiar — with Western than with Japanese of Asian traditions, proved in the end so willing to accept, or at least so impotent to halt, the crush of a blindly nationalistic militarism inspired by the crudest beliefs in the mythology of uniquely Japanese ‘Imperial Way [皇道]’?” (xii, italicized by the author). Uchimura died before World War II, but he must have been one of the “Japanese intellectuals” described by Maruyama quite aptly above. It is useless to speculate about how he might have reacted to that war, but it is not only interesting but also very important to guess what attitude Uchimura would have had if he were still alive at that time. Of course we know he chose absolute pacifism against the Russo-Japanese War, but also, just like this paper shows, his vocabulary, for example “道” or “武士道” and their concepts are very Japanese, I want to say, even militaristic. He himself
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didn’t think it was a contradiction. But I think that to scrutinize these aspects of those “Japanese intellectuals” can contribute to answering the question Maruyama asked in the above citation. So, also in this sense, we have a great reason to continue to study such “intellectuals’” discourse like Uchimura’s minutely.

6 It is very interesting that the so-called “Meiji-Yaku” (translated during the Meiji era) Bible (1880) translated “logos = word” in the Gospel of John 1: 1ff. to the character “道.” However, the translators specifically wrote the pronunciation of “Kotoba” (word) over the character “道.” This pronunciation is quite unusual for even the Japanese language itself. Uchimura often translated the biblical verses from Greek original into Japanese by himself, but he used this, I think, a slightly strange translation of the Greek word “logos.” I think that Uchimura rather liked this translation because his favorite word/concept “道 (Michi/Dou = Kotoba)” was used. See also my paper “How We Japanese Become Christians,” p. 43 n. 51.

7 Iwanami Tetsugaku Shisou Jiten, p. 1544. This is my translation.

8 On Uchimura’s insistence on “clear(ness)” or “purity,” also see my paper “Kanzo Uchimura’s ‘Insistence on Purity’.”

9 Uchimura, Uchimura Kanzo Zensyu, Vol. 8, pp. 77f.

10 Some scholars point out that the practical or pragmatic aspects in Uchimura’s thoughts are very prominent. Relevant to this, the word “実験 (experiment/experience?) is important to analyze further. See Norihisa Suzuki, Meiji Syuukyou Sichou no Kenkyuu, p. 187 and Michelle La Fay, “Uchimura Kanzo’s Method of Biblical Commentary,” pp. 39–54.

11 It is well known that Uchimura hated missionaries and their Christianity. See my paper, “Kanzo Uchimura’s ‘Insistence on Purity.’” Especially p. 44.

12 Uchimura, Uchimura Kanzo Zensyu, Vol. 8, pp. 78f.

13 ibid., p. 78.

14 ibid., Vol. 31, p. 292.

15 See “解題 (Exposition)” in Uchimura Kanzo Zensyu, Vol. 31, p. 404.

16 See my papers, “How We Japanese Become Christians” and “Kanzo Uchimura’s ‘Insistence on Purity’.”


18 ibid., p. 293.

19 ibid.

20 ibid., p. 294.

21 ibid.

22 See my papers, “How We Japanese Become Christians” and “Kanzo Uchimura’s ‘Insistence on Purity’.”


24 ibid., p. 296.


26 Uchimura, Uchimura Kanzo Zensyu, Vol. 17, p. 333.

27 ibid., pp. 234f.


29 Suzuki, Uchimura Kanzo, p. 201, idem, Uchimura Kanzo Nichiroku 12, p. 354, and Hyoei Ishihara, Mijikani Sesshita Uchimura Kanzo, p. 266.

30 Ishihara, Mijikani Sesshita Uchimura Kanzo, pp. 267, 270, 289, and 291.


32 We can see such kind of descriptions on almost every page of 『羅馬書の研究』 (The Studies on Romans). See Uchimura, Uchimura Kanzo Zensyu, Vol. 26, pp. 16–448.


34 See Bibliography.

35 Already John Howes has suggested this comparison. See Howes, Japan’s Modern Prophet, p. 297.

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