A Hitherto Unknown Version of the *San fa du lun* 三法度論 in Old Japanese Manuscript Collections: Potential and Problems*

Shoshun HAYASHIDERA

**Abstract:** An increasing number of Buddhist texts are being discovered among old manuscript collections extant in Japan that bear titles identical to the woodblock printed editions produced in China but that differ significantly in content. The discovery in recent years of such texts is helping to shed light on different aspects of the transmission of Buddhist texts, aspects that we would not have learned from the study of the woodblock editions alone. In this paper I would like to take up one such text, namely the text of the *San fa du lun* 三法度論 found in old manuscript collections. This hitherto unknown text diverges from the known editions, most notably in that it has an independent text titled ‘*San fa du jing ben*’ 三法度經本 by Vasubhadra in its opening. This paper discusses its considerable importance as a text as well as problems that the text raises which require further research.

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**1. Introduction**

The *San fa du lun* 三法度論 (Taisho no. 1506) is a treatise thought to belong to the Vātsīputriya, an influential school of Indian Buddhism.¹ The title refers to the three *dharmas* 三法 that form the basic framework of the treatise, namely the Good 德, the Bad 惡, and the Supports 依. The structure of the work is notable in that employs successive trichotomies in its exegesis of doctrine. For example, the three *dharmas* are each classified into three categories of their own. The Good is categorized as Merit 福, the Roots 根, and the Absence of the Bad 無惡, the Bad as Misconduct 惡行, Thirst 愛, and Ignorance 無明, and the Supports as the Aggregates 隱, the Elements 界, and the Domains 入, and these nine are further subdivided into threes.²

The Indian original of the *San fa du lun* has not been preserved, and there is no Tibetan translation, but there are two Chinese translations. One is the *Si a han mu chao jie* 四阿含纂

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Shoshun HAYASHIDERA: hayashidera@let.hokudai.ac.jp
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抄解 (Taisho no. 1505), translated in 382 CE. According to the preface (四阿含暮抄序), which is thought to be authored by Daoan 道安 (312–385), Daoan had Kumārabuddhi 鳳摩羅佛提 render the original work, which Zhu Fonian and others translated it into Chinese. The translation of the title does not directly reflect that of the original. Rather than choosing a word-for-word rendering, it seems that Daoan titled the work in accordance with the tradition that it presents the quintessence of the four-Āgama canon 四阿含暮. At the end of each section, the work mentions the original title, the San fa du 三法度. From this we know that it is a translation of the same original as the San fa du lun discussed below.

The other translation was completed about 10 years after Kumārabuddhi’s, in 391 CE. Its title, San fa du lun, is a faithful rendering. The preface, which was written by Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416), states that it was translated at Huiyuan’s request by the Indian monk Saṅghadeva 僧伽提婆. Saṅghadeva arrived in Chang’an 長安 in 383 CE, and was involved in the translation of the Apitan bajian du lun 阿毘曇八犍度論 and the Zunpoxuni pasa suoji lun 尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論 (Taisho no. 1549), after which, while studying with the Chinese monk Fahe 法和 in Luoyang 洛陽 for several years, he became proficient in Chinese. He began to notice deficiencies in translations that had been completed previously in Chang’an, and produced improved translations of several of these. Following this, around 391 CE, Saṅghadeva visited Mt. Lu, where he was asked by Huiyuan to translate the Apitan xin lun 阿毘曇心論 (Taisho no. 1550) and the San fa du lun. Both treatises had already been translated by Kumārabuddhi and others at the insistence of Daoan. I therefore conclude that these two works were retranslated at Mt. Lu for the purpose of remedying the perceived deficiencies and faults of the existing translations.

Huiyuan notes in his preface that the treatise comprises sūtras and a commentary on them. He states that the sūtras 章句 were authored by Vasubhadra 山賢 and the commentary 訓説 by a figure called Saṅghasena 僧伽先. Daoan, in his preface, states that the text uses the gloss 修治路 (a transliteration of sūtra) to make the 经本 (presumably meaning mūla-sūtra) distinguishable. The Si a han mu chao jie does in fact have the gloss 修治路 inserted in small letters throughout, making the distinction between the sūtra and non-sūtra portions clear. The San fa du lun, on the other hand, embeds the sūtras within the exegesis. As previous research has pointed out, even though the translation may be better, the San fa du lun does not make clear which parts are sūtras and which are commentary, hence in places it is more difficult to comprehend than the earlier translation.

2. The San fa du jing ben 三法度經本 mentioned in the opening portion of a version of the San fa du lun found in old Japanese manuscript collections

A manuscript version of the San fa du lun that differs from the printed editions was discovered during onsite surveys of old Japanese manuscript collections as part of a project based at the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies. The opening portion of this previously unknown manuscript version differs entirely from the printed editions. To date, I have examined first-hand manuscripts of this text in the Nanatsudera 七寺, Kongō-ji 金剛寺, and Kōshō-ji 興聖寺 collections, and confirmed that the three manuscripts are in agreement from beginning to end. There is also a manuscript in the Jingo-ji 神護寺 collection, and while I was
only able to examine a photographic reproduction contained in a catalogue, it is clear from the photograph, which corresponds to the opening portion of the text, that this manuscript belongs to the same stemma as the above three manuscripts. 11 Unfortunately, the San fa du lun does not appear in the Dunhuang manuscripts, which frequently exhibit readings that are close to those of old Japanese manuscripts. The woodblock printed editions, including the Second Koryo edition 高麗再雕版 on which the Taisho edition is based, the Song 宋 (Sixi 思溪), Yuan 元, Ming 明, and Kaiyuan Temple 開元寺 (Imperial Household Library 宮内省圖書寮) editions used for critical comparison in compiling the Taisho edition, as well as the Qisha 磬砂 and Zhaocheng Jinzang Guangsheng 趙城金藏廣勝寺 editions, all belong to the same stemma.

The following are photographs of the beginning portions of the two versions, shown here to illustrate their differences. They are of the Nanatsudera Ms., which is representative of the manuscript version, and the Taisho edition, representative of the woodblock printed editions. Also shown is the portion of the Nanatsudera Ms. in which it begins to correspond with the Taisho edition, i.e. with the divergent portion omitted, the reason for which I discuss below.

The beginning portion of the San fa du lun in the Nanatsudera Manuscript (left: lines 113-121; right: lines 1-6)
The beginning portion of the San fa du lun in the Taisho edition (Vol. 25, 15c)

As shown above, in the Taisho edition, the title of the work, the translator, and chapter title are followed by verses of homage. The Nanatsudera Ms., on the other hand, begins not with homage verses, but with a passage whose meaning is not readily apparent. However, after the section that I have omitted from the photograph above, the same verses as the printed editions appear in the Nanatsudera Ms. The following is a part of the Nanatsudera Ms. shown against the Taisho edition for comparison. The numerals indicate the line numbers.

Nanatsudera Ms.  
1 三法度論德品第一卷上  僧伽提婆婆首道安於長安譯
2 德惡依覺善勝法門德者福根無惡福者
3 施戒脩施者法無畏財戒者身口二攝他不
4 娑嚩益勝者法無量無色禪者離欲觀喜

(Tlines 5 to 113 have been omitted for comparison purposes)

114 依品第三真度竟
115 知生苦無量 善寂趣彼安 用悲衆生故 輪轉於多劫 4 & 5 (Same)
116 捨己之妙善 爲一切説法 善知滅諸趣 稽首禮最覺 6 & 7 (Same)
117 開此三法門 功德之所歸 安快彼衆生 離於一切苦 8 & 9 (Same)
118 尊者婆薮跋陀撰 三法度經本竟
119 三法度德品第一
120 前禮於善逝 法及無上衆 今説真諦法 三三如其義 10 & 11 (Same)

The shaded part of the Nanatsudera Ms. beginning with line 115 consists of homage verses which correspond to with the part of the Taisho edition beginning with line 4. In fact, from the passage onward to the end of the text, the two are identical. Put differently, the opening portion
is the only place in which the two versions differ. As is stated in line 118, this opening portion consists of a sūtra titled the *San fa du jing ben* 三法度經本, composed by Vasubhadra 波藪跋陀 (山賢). It is this portion that forms the hitherto unknown text.

3. The textual significance of the old Japanese manuscript collection version

I argue that the *San fa du jing ben* appearing at the beginning of the *San fa du lun* discovered in old Japanese manuscript collections is significant as a textual source in three chief respects.

(1) The demarcation of the sūtras

As noted above, the sūtras and commentary have been combined in the *San fa du lun* such that it is difficult to tell where a sūtra stops and the commentary begins, but the inclusion of the *San fa du jing ben* allows us to clearly identify the sūtras as such. For example, the phrase ‘德惡依覺善勝法門’ on the second line of the Nanatsudera Ms. appears as underlined below in the *San fa du lun*.

Unlike in the *Si a han mu chao jie*, there are no glosses in the *San fa du lun* demarcating the sūtras, so it is not immediately apparent from the given context that the underlined is a sūtra, yet because we now have the phrase ‘德惡依覺善勝法門’ in the *San fa du jing ben*, we can recognize it as such. The sūtra in our example is presented in the form of an answer to a question posed just before it, and is followed by an elaboration on the sūtra’s purport. The sūtras are most often quoted in the form of an answer to a question raised, as in the example above, though there are places in which they appear in ordinary, non-question-and-answer portions of the text. For this reason, without the insight offered by the *San fa du jing ben*, it is extremely difficult to identify with any degree of certainty the sūtra portions by looking the *San fa du lun* alone. Of course, it is possible to discern the sūtras if we make use of the *Si a han mu chao jie* which contains the gloss 修偈路 (sūtra), but in the case of the old Japanese manuscript version, the inclusion of the *San fa du jing ben* in its opening allows us to clearly distinguish between the sūtras and commentary without relying on an outside work, and in this respect the manuscript version is of significant textual value.

Upon comparing the *San fa du jing ben* contained in the old Japanese manuscript version, the text of the *San fa du lun*, and the 修偈路 glosses in the *Si a han mu chao jie*, and identifying all sūtras, I found them to number around 180.12 These 180 sūtras make up the portion authored by Vasubhadra, while the remaining portion comprises Saṅghasena’s commentary.

(2) The ascription of the sūtras to Vasubhadra

The beginning of the manuscript version not only clarifies the sūtra portion of the text, as line 118 (‘婆藪跋陀撰’) of the Nanatsudera Ms. makes clear, it also explicitly ascribes the sūtras to Vasubhadra. In this respect, there is agreement in terms of authorship with the prefaces by Daoan and Huiyuan I discussed in the Introduction above.

The beginnings of the woodblock printed editions give the following author and translator
information.

Taisho (the Koryō ed.): 東晋 僧寶三藏瞿曇僧伽提婆譯
Song/Imperial Household Library: 晋太治元年 僧伽提婆共慧遠譯
Yuan: 尊者山賢造 東晋太治元年 三藏僧伽提婆共慧遠譯
Ming: 尊者山賢造 東晋 三藏僧伽提婆共慧遠譯

All are in agreement in listing Sanghadeva as translator, but only the Yuan and Ming editions mention an author. Moreover, these two editions merely state ‘尊者山賢造,’ giving the inaccurate impression that Vasubhadra is the author of the San fa du lun as a whole. The Yuan, Song, and Imperial Household Library editions give the year ‘太治元年,’ but there is no era called ‘太治’ associated with the Eastern Jin Dynasty. This is simply an error for the Taiyuan 太元 era (376–396) in which the text was translated. From the above we can conclude that the Song, Imperial Household Library, Yuan, and Ming editions each contain inaccurate information. The Second Koryō edition contains no such inaccuracies, but it makes no mention of the author. In contrast, the old Japanese manuscript version clearly identifies Vasubhadra as the author of the sūtras.

(3) Separate authors of the homage verses

In the following I address an issue related to the point I made in (2) above. Namely, it can be inferred from the opening portion of the manuscript version that the homage verses have two distinct authors. The woodblock printed editions each open with the following four five-character eight-line verses.

Verse 1: 知生苦無量 善寂趣彼安 用悲衆生故 輸轉於多劫
Verse 2: 捨己之妙善 爲一切說法 善知滅諸趣 稽首禮最覺
Verse 3: 開此三法門 功德之所歸 安快彼衆生 離於一切苦
Verse 4: 前禮於善逝 法及無上衆 今説眞諦法 三三如其義

As shown in the photograph above, the manuscript version contains verses identical to those above, but inserted between Verses 3 and 4 there is a line (line 118 of the Nanatsudera Ms.) stating ‘尊者婆薮跋陀撰 三法度經本竟,’ or “the San fa du jing ben composed by Bhadanta Vasubhadra finishes [here].” In other words, the manuscript version treats only the preceding three verses as Vasubhadra’s. If all four verses were by Vasubhadra, then the line above belongs after Verse 4.

In terms of content as well, it is reasonable to view the authors of the Verse 3 and Verse 4 as distinct. Verse 2 concludes with ‘稽首禮最覺,’ a statement of refuge in the Buddha, yet Verse 4 is also a formula of refuge, specifically in the Three Jewels (‘前禮於善逝 法及無上衆’). Furthermore, the latter uses the phrase ‘前禮’ (“pray first to”), so it is unlikely that it was written by the same person who had already “bowed [his] head” (“稽首禮”) at the end of Verse 2. Furthermore, the phrase ‘開此三法門’ (“open the gate of these three dharmas”) is appropriate in terms of content for the author of the sūtras, while the line ‘今説……三三如其義,’ indicating that the author is about to interpret “the meaning of this” (‘其義’), i.e. the sūtras, is more befitting the author of the commentary. As a side note, the Si a han mu chao jie has no translation corresponding to the first three verses. There is only a translation corresponding to Verse 4.13 It is unclear why the first three verses are missing, but the very fact that they are missing suggests some kind of distinction between the first three and the fourth.
Again, based the opening portion of the manuscripts found in old Japanese manuscript collections, of the four verses that appear contiguously in the woodblock printed editions, it can be concluded that the first three are by the sūtra author Vasubhadra, while the fourth is by Saṅghasena.

4. Problems posed by the manuscript version

In the above I have noted several ways in which the San fa du jing ben at the beginning of the manuscript version is significant as a text. At the same time, however, there are several problems associated with it.

(1) Different translators listed

Most of the woodblock printed editions indicate that the work was “translated by Saṅghadeva with Huiyuan” (‘僧伽提婆共慧遠譯’), yet the manuscript version states that it was “translated by Saṅghadeva with Daoan in Chang’an” (‘僧伽提婆共道安於長安譯’; line 1 of the Nanatsudera Ms.). The printed editions and manuscript version are in agreement that it was translated by Saṅghadeva, but differ as to whether the Chinese co-translator was Huiyuan or Daoan. I mentioned above, Daoan was involved in a separate translation of this work, titled Si a han mu chao jie. The following is a summary of the translator information provided so far.

(a) Translated by Saṅghadeva and Huiyuan: San fa du lun (woodblock printed editions)
(b) Translated by Saṅghadeva and Daoan: San fa du lun (manuscript version)
(c) Translated by Kumārabuddhi at the request of Daoan: Si a han mu chao jie

As shown by the underlined names, the translator names do overlap, but if we assume for the moment that these three texts correctly identify the translators, it would mean that Daoan separately directed Saṅghadeva and Kumārabuddhi to translate the same original, and also that Saṅghadeva translated the work at the behest of both Daoan and Huiyuan. It can be shown, however, that this strange overlap is the result of confusion over translator names.

I have discussed this problem elsewhere, so here I shall merely summarize my conclusions. The characterization in the manuscript version of Saṅghadeva and Daoan as translators is an erroneous ascription seen in the Zhongjing Catalogue 衆經目錄 (the Fajing Catalogue 法經錄, compiled in 594). It most likely stems from the fact that the Si a han mu chao jie, a title chosen by Daoan, was also known by its original title of ‘San fa du’ (preface to the Zhong a han jing 中阿含經), and that the San fa du lun and the Si a han mu chao jie were not properly recognized as different translations of the same work, among other factors.14

With the exception of the San fa du jing ben at the beginning, the translation of the manuscript version is the same as woodblock print editions of the San fa du lun. For this reason, it is inconceivable that Daoan was involved in the translation of the text of the manuscript version. Accordingly, the woodblock print editions are correct in naming Saṅghadeva and Huiyuan as translators. It is unclear why this erroneous ascription appears in the old Japanese manuscript collection version.
(2) Minor differences in the sūtras of the San fa du jing ben and the sūtras appearing in the San fa du lun

The sūtras in the San fa du jing ben of the manuscript version can be traced to the San fa du lun, but there are minor differences in wording between the two, albeit small in number. The following are two examples.

(a) In the San fa du jing ben, rūpa 色 of the five skandha 五蕴 is characterized as ‘大可見不可見,’ while in the San fa du lun, it is said to be ‘四大及四大所造可見不可見’ (Taisho Vol.25, 25b). In other words, as the underlined part shows, in the sūtra of the San fa du jing ben, the phrase corresponding to ‘四大及四大所造’ in the San fa du lun is simply rendered as ‘大’ (mahābhūta). However, the four mahābhūta 四大 and their upādāya-rūpa 四大所造 are not the same, and rendering them the single descriptive ‘大’ is imprecise doctrinally. In this respect, the translation appearing in the San fa du lun is more precise. In the Si a han mu chao jie, the corresponding passage is not treated as a sūtra.

(b) In a discussion of the rūpa-dhātu 色界, the following sūtra appears: ‘有喜者有覺無覺少觀’ (Ibid., 28b). On the meaning of this ‘少觀’, the San fa du jing ben gives the following sūtra: ‘少觀者大梵天.’ This sūtra, however, is not found within the San fa du lun. There are two passages that are close, namely ‘少觀者是初[二]中間’ and ‘大梵者由少觀生’ (Ibid., 28c), yet they are not the same. Again, in the Si a han mu chao jie, the corresponding passage is not treated as a sūtra.

There are a few other similar examples in addition to the two given above. It is an extremely small number given the 180 sūtras that make up the whole, but there are instances such as the above in which the sūtras in the San fa du jing ben that differ slightly in wording from those that appear in the San fa du lun. The reasons for these differences are unclear and deserve further study.

(3) Corrupted text in the San fa du jing ben

There is an instance in the San fa du jing ben in which passages are given out of order. Because this corruption is common to the Nanatsudera, Kongō-ji, and Kōshō-ji manuscripts, it can be deduced that corrupted readings existed in an ancestor text common to these three manuscripts. The corruption consists of eight characters from Sūtras 18 and 19 being interchanged with eight characters from Sūtras 28 and 29. The original, correct readings of the sūtras and the corrupted readings in the manuscript version are as follows.

The original, correct readings:
- Sūtras 18 and 19: ‘由者具方便果’ ‘具者善損伏根近行禪’
- Sūtras 28 and 29: ‘上止者進念定’ ‘進者信勤不捨’

The readings in the San fa du jing ben at the beginning of the manuscript version:
- Sūtras 18 and 19: ‘由者具 念定’ ‘進者信勤不捨 根行禪’
- Sūtras 28 and 29: ‘上止者進 方便果’ ‘具者善損伏’

The correct, original readings can be recreated by transposing the eight shaded characters of the San fa du jing ben. It is unclear why only the eight characters above have been corrupted, but it was probably an error in copying. As the sūtras are quite terse and difficult to compre-
hend independently of other text, it is likely that the corruption went unrecognized as such and was transcribed repeatedly.

5. Conclusion

In the above I have examined the textual significance of and problems with a manuscript version of the San fa du lun, with particular attention to the San fa du jing ben contained in the opening part of the manuscript.

Its significance lies in the following. First, the manuscript makes it possible to identify the sūtra portions of the text, which are combined with the commentary in the body of the San fa du lun. Second, the manuscript clearly states that Vasubhadra is the author of the sūtras. Third, it can be inferred that of the series of homage verses in the text, three of them were authored by Vasubhadra himself. Each of these findings is impossible to arrive at with just the woodblock printed editions of the San fa du lun.

Among the problems are that it misidentifies the translators, stating that the work was “translated by Saṅghadeva with Daoan in Chang’an,” that there are minor differences in wording between the sūtras that appear in the San fa du jing ben portion and those that appear in the body of the San fa du lun, and that there is a corruption of eight characters within the text.

As I have shown here, the extant versions of the San fa du lun belong to two groups, i.e. the old Japanese manuscript collection version, and the printed version. The question that we should consider next is this: which more faithfully preserves the original form of this text? I have suggested elsewhere that the manuscript version likely better represents the original form, in part because it makes the distinction between the sūtras and commentary clear, but in considering again both the virtues and defects of the manuscript version, I feel more than before that a more careful consideration is necessary before concluding that the manuscript more closely reflects the original. Conversely, there are many questions that require cautious examination before assuming that the printed version is closer to the original, including the issue of who texts such as the manuscript version were compiled by, the manner in which they were compiled and many more such questions.

Just how these two groups of versions of the San fa du lun formed, and which version is closer to the original, are issues I hope to address in the future.

Notes

1 Yin Shun was the first to argue that the work should be attributed to the Vātsiputriya. Yin Shun 1968, pp. 455–465. Thiền Châu seems to have advanced the same argument in his dissertation (submitted 1972, Université de Paris III), but as there is no mention of Yin Shun’s research in an English translation of that dissertation, we can assume that they arrived independently at the conclusion that the San fa du lun belongs to the Vātsiputriya tradition. See Thiền Châu 1984, pp. 7–8; 1999, pp. 83–85. For a discussion of Pudgalavāda doctrine as it relates to this work, see Priestley 1999. See also Okano 2001 for the doctrinal relationship between this work and Sāṃskṛtiya works.

2 See Hayashidera 2014.

4 The preface to the *Si a han mu chao jie* states ‘有阿羅漢，名婆索跋陀、抄其骨譜，以為一部’(Taisho Vol. 25, la). There is also a note below the title of *Si a han mu chao jie* indicating that ‘此土篇目皆在首。是故道安為斯題’(Ibid., 1b).

5 See Unebe 1971 for an account of Saṅghadeva’s life and his translations of Buddhist works. Willemen also provides a concise overview of Saṅghadeva’s works as a translator of Buddhist texts. See Willmen 2006, pp. 5–8.

6 There is no extant copy of Kumārabuddhi’s translation of *Aptan xin lun*.

7 Huiyuan’s introduction (Taisho Vol. 55, 73a) relates the name ‘山賢’ yet there is the question of whether the *vasu* of the Sanskrit name Vasubhadra can be translated as ‘山.’ Existing research has yielded much discussion on this question. For a review of this issue, see Hayashidera 2014, p. 61, note 8.

8 ‘章法修路者、其人注解、別經本也’(Taisho Vol. 55, 64c). It should be noted, however, that we cannot definitively say that ‘其人’(‘that person’) refers to the commentator Saṅghasena. This preface indicates that the commentary was produced after consulting with ‘其人’ as to numbers and things. Hence, ‘其人’ could refer to Kumārabuddhi. If that is the case, it is conceivable that Daoan himself mistook the non-*sūtra* passages to be commentary by Kumārabuddhi.

9 See Ui 1956, p. 154.

10 See Hayashidera 2007. As part of the project, I was entrusted by Prof. Toshinori Ochitai (the project leader) with research on these manuscripts, but I have not yet been able to elucidate them sufficiently. That said, in addition to providing an overview of the manuscript version of this work, I have in the past investigated in some detail one of the problems associated with this version (namely the problem of translator ascription outlined in 4 (1) of this paper. Note that portions of these old Japanese manuscript collections, of which this work is a part, have already been digitally archived in the Old Japanese Manuscripts Database (http://koshakyo-database.icabs.ac.jp/index.seam) of the Library of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies, and plans are in place to add more images to the database on a gradual basis.

11 See Bunkacho ed. 1998, p. 531. The single photograph of the opening portion of the work shows a flyleaf illustration and nine lines of text. These nine lines of text are in agreement with the manuscript version found in old Japanese manuscript collections.

12 There are places in the roughly 180 *sūtras* that are not always in agreement with the *sūtras* in the *Si a han mu chao jie*. A proper version would require giving the text of both translations, which I intend to do in a future paper. For a study that partially compares the two translations and attempts to decipher the text, see Hurvitz 1967.

13 ‘前禮普通法眾壞有衆（禮三尊業終餘雜也）當說所欲略述義說’(Taisho Vol. 25, 1b). It does not, however, take the form of a verse. Furthermore, the translation of *saṅgha* as ‘壞有衆’ is an odd. This may be the result of a translation relying on an etymology based on *sa-ghāta* (‘having destruction’) or similar lexical items.


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