Imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty—research on Tianyige and the imitation and restoration of the seven libraries of Siku quanshu

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}  
This paper is a study of the seven libraries of Siku quanshu and Tianyige from the perspective of imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty. Firstly, this paper analyses Tianyige, the prototype of seven libraries, which is also the most ancient private library in China, and reveals the Tianyige’s basic situation, construction ideas, architectures and gardens. Secondly, this paper articulates the imitation of the seven libraries from the perspective of architectures and gardens with the characteristics of adapting to local conditions. Thirdly, this paper conducts the restoration research of three destroyed libraries in architectures and gardens combining the literature and relics for future research.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure.png}
\caption{Imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty.}
\end{figure}

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Purpose

Ancient China has a long history of library culture. The research on ancient Chinese library culture mainly consisted of the research on ancient Chinese book collecting history and library science. The book collecting history of China began in Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600–256 B.C.), which has continued for more than 3,000 years, with official collections as the main body and private collections flourishing. It has developed a series of methods for the book collection, preservation, utilization and inheritance, and has also established a variety of library buildings, which have played an important role in the development of Chinese culture.

Ancient Chinese library buildings were initially constructed as royal cultural facilities for the purpose of knowledge collection and political authority. Later, private library buildings gradually emerged for the management of private collections, which preserved many valuable books and promoted the academic research and intellectual prosperity of the society (Xie 1984a, 1984b).

The thought of ancient China library science was born in the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 B.C.).
In the late Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.–8 A.D.), Liu Xiang (劉向) and his son Liu Xin (劉歆) initiated the study of ancient Chinese bibliography and bibliographic classification through Seven Epitomes (Qi lue 七略), the first documented Chinese library catalog (Lee and Lan 2009). The regulations of text collation and organization established by Liu Xiang and Xin were summarized as jiao chou xue (校讎學) by later generations. After the perfection of woodblock printing in Song Dynasty (960–1279), knowledge organization in ancient China reached its peak in Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912). The Great Compendium of the Yongle Era (Yongle dadian 永樂大典) in Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the Comprehensive Collection of Books Past and Present (Gujin tushu jicheng 古今圖書集成) and the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries (Siku quanshu 四庫全書) in Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) are all nationwide book compiling activities by the government, profoundly reflecting the intellectual authority of the time.

With the intentions of propagating cultural education as well as prohibiting critics, Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799) of Qing Dynasty compiled Siku quanshu and built seven libraries by following the prototype of Tianyige (天一閣) to store the books. This paper is a study of the seven libraries’ imitation of Tianyige from the perspective of imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty, as well as the restoration research of three destroyed libraries.

The research on the seven libraries’ imitation of Tianyige will not only help the conservation of the present four libraries but also provide reference for the research and restoration of the destroyed three libraries. The result of the study is of great importance to the Chinese classical library research, as well as the imitation of imperial gardens in Qing dynasty.

1.2. Previous Research

The upsurge of contemporary researches on ancient Chinese library history started in the early 1980s. History of Ancient China Library Course (Lai 1990) by Lai Xinxia was published in 1990. Lai made a comprehensive investigation on ancient China library course by combining the history of Chinese text, bibliography and library together for the first time. In 2001, two great works on ancient Chinese library history were published almost at the same time. Chinese Book Storage Buildings (Ren 2001) by Ren Jiyu was compiled under the trisection of historical fact, theory and table. This work is a panoramic display of China’s book collection history for thousands of years, as well as the history of ancient Chinese libraries and book collectors. General History of Chinese Book Collection (Fu and Xie 2001) by Fu Xuancong and Xie Zhuohua...
comprehensively discussed the historical facts of ancient Chinese book collections and proposed a new science of Chinese book collection on the basis of systematic demonstration. It is obvious from the previous research that the compilation of *Siku quanshu* and the construction of seven imperial libraries was a big event in ancient Chinese library history, and Tianyige had also made great contributions to ancient China book collections as a private library.

Researches on Tianyige and the seven libraries of *Siku quanshu* were carried out by various experts mainly focusing on the compiling and the preservation of the *Siku quanshu*. Only a few researches were carried out on the comparison among the Tianyige and the seven libraries on imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty.

Researches on imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty and measurements of historic buildings were carried out earlier by Tianjin University, which has collected a number of useful measurement drawings and research achievements. In the mid-1980s, Peng Yigang, professor of Tianjin University published the *Analysis of the Traditional Chinese Garden* (Peng 1986). He studied Chinese classical gardens with modern analysis methods, which could be applied to modern architecture practice. In the late 1980s, Wang Qiheng, professor of Tianjin University started the Chinese classical garden research, published *Studies on Several Problems of Imperial Gardens in Qing Dynasty* (Wang, Yang and Qin 1995) and pushed forward the research of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty.

### 1.3. Research Objects and Methods

The research objects of this paper are the Tianyige and the seven libraries (Figure 1). The seven libraries can be separated into northern four libraries and southern three libraries due to their different locations. Among these eight research objects, three imperial libraries were destroyed in Qing Dynasty. The Tianyige and other four libraries have survived until now for hundreds of years (Table 1).

Research methods of this paper contain literature survey, field survey and field mapping. This research firstly combined the Tianyige and the seven libraries together as a whole research aspect from the perspective of imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty and offered a specific case study for imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty. This research also became the first to

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**Table 1. Basic information of 8 libraries.**

| No. | Object | Original Site | Location | Completion | Age (Until 2020) | Current Condition |
|-----|--------|---------------|----------|------------|-----------------|------------------|
| N1  | Tianyige | Formal Villa of Fan’s Family | Zhejiang | 1566 AD | 454 | Existing |
| N2  | Wenyuan | The Forbidden City | Beijing | 1776 AD | 244 | Existing |
| N3  | Wenyuange | The Old Summer Palace | Beijing | 1775 AD | 85 | Destroyed in 1860 |
| N4  | Wenjing | The Mountain Resort | Hebei | 1774 AD | 246 | Existing (Rebuilt in 1954) |
| N5  | Wensuge | Shenyang Imperial Palace | Liaoning | 1782 AD | 238 | Existing |
| N6  | Wenzongge | Jinshe Mountain | Jiangsu | 1779 AD | 74 | Destroyed in 1853 |
| N7  | Wenhui | Grand Hall Palace | Jiangsu | 1780 AD | 74 | Destroyed in 1854 |
| N8  | Wenxian | Shengyinsi Auxiliary Palace | Zhejiang | 1783 AD | 237 | Existing (Rebuilt in 1880) |

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**Figure 2. General layout and restoration model of 8 libraries.**
restore the architectures and gardens of the destroyed three libraries by combining the literature and relics for future research (Figure 2).

2. Architecture and Garden of Tianyige

Tianyige (N1) is the oldest existing private library in China. Built in 1561–1566 AD, it originally housed the private book collection of Fan Qin (范欽), a high-ranking military official in the Ming Dynasty.

Tianyige is a brick-wood architecture with a double flush gable roof, whose height is 8.5 m. The first floor of Tianyige is 6 bays in width and 6 spans in depth, which is quite abnormal for Chinese ancient architecture, with both front and back corridors.

The second floor is one bay wide besides the stairs, separated by bookshelves. Borrowing an idea from the Book of Changes (Yi jing 易經), which suggested in “Heaven embodied in One gives birth to water, while Earth represented in Six makes it grow (天一生水, 地六成之)” (Zhu 1958), Fan Qin named this architecture “Heaven (tian 天) One (yi 一) Pavilion (ge 閣)” and used 6 bays and spans, hoping to protect the library against fire damage (Figure 3).

The whole garden was designed to have water available to dismiss fire and protect the books. In front of the library lies a pool which was intended to protect the library against fire. On the back there is a flower bed with grass and tall bamboos. The overall layout is a common compact design due to the cramped space. The small platform in front of the Tianyige links the architecture and the garden together as a transition space. Facing the library there is the main rockery, being the major scenery of the garden. It was constructed with precipitous cliff and narrow caves, small but exquisite so that one can climb up and down by a crooked path. Some vivid rockwork in the rockery resembles nine lions and one elephant, corresponding to the Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou. There is also a pavilion and a platform on the rockery with different heights as the main viewpoints. Another pavilion besides the rockery was newly built in 1934. A small island linked with the
main rockery by a small stone bridge stands inside the Tianyi pool, which cannot be landed on, embodying the ancient construction idea as immortals’ islands (Figure 4).

For protecting Tianyige and the books in the long term, Fan Qin had also set up strict rules and regulations of book management. For example, on one plaque inscribed “Tobacco and Wine are Strictly Forbidden in the Building (煙酒切忌登楼)”, and one family rule said “the offspring should never separate the books, and the books should never be taken away from the library (代不分書, 書不出閣)” (Luo 1980). Owing to the great effort made by the descendants of Fan’s family, Tianyige could be well preserved till now. During the compilation of Siku quanshu in Qing Dynasty, the Fan’s family contributed 641 species of books. The long history and rich collection of Tianyige

Table 2. Architectural configuration of 8 libraries.

| No. | Object    | Floor Area | Width | Depth | Height | Bay Number | Span Number | Floor | Roof Type     |
|-----|-----------|------------|-------|-------|--------|------------|-------------|-------|---------------|
| N1  | Tianyige  | 276.78 m²  | 22.95 m | 12.06 m | 8.50 m | 6          | 6           | 2     | Flush Gable Roof |
| N2  | Wenyuange | 606.60 m²  | 34.14 m | 17.77 m | 19.39 m | 6          | 5           | 3     | Gable and Hip Roof |
| N3  | Wenyuange | 265.35 m²  | 22.22 m | 11.94 m |        | 6          | 5           | 3     | Flush Gable Roof |
| N4  | Wenjinge | 365.89 m²  | 26.02 m | 14.06 m | 14.79 m | 6          | 5           | 3     | Flush Gable Roof |
| N5  | Wensuge  | 391.90 m²  | 25.84 m | 14.76 m | 15.68 m | 6          | 5           | 3     | Flush Gable Roof |
| N6  | Wenzongge|            |       |       |        | 6          | 5           | 3     | Flush Gable Roof |
| N7  | Wenhuige |            |       |       |        | 6          | 5           | 3     | Flush Gable Roof |
| N8  | Wenlounge| 323.44 m²  | 24.54 m | 13.18 m |        | 6          | 5           | 3     | Flush Gable Roof |
Figure 6. Outdoor and indoor photos of Wenyuange (N2).

Figure 7. Central bay section of N2 & N5.

Figure 8. Ground floor plan of N1, N2, N4, N5.
impressed Emperor Qianlong, and it was finally designated as the prototype of the seven libraries of *Siku quanshu* (Figure 5).¹

**3. Architectural Configuration of the Seven Libraries**

The seven libraries completed and stored the *Siku quanshu* at different times. Although the seven libraries imitated the Tianyige in architecture and gardens, there are still some differences in some aspects and between each library (Table 2).

Below it is the analysis of architectural configuration of the seven libraries, for which Wenyuan in the Forbidden City (紫禁城) in Beijing will be taken as an example (Figure 6) (Ogawa 1906).

| No. | Object      | Garden  | Wall Types | Building | Stone Tablet Pavilion | Pavilion and Platform | Outdoor Platform | Water | Rockery | Towering Peak | Flower Bed |
|-----|-------------|---------|------------|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------|---------|---------------|------------|
| N1  | Tianyige    | Private Garden | Semi-closed | 1 | None | 2 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| N2  | Wenyuan     | Imperial Garden | Semi-closed | 1 | 1 | None | ○ | ○ |
| N3  | Wenyuan     | Imperial Garden | Closed | 2 | 1 | 2 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| N4  | Wenjinge    | Imperial Garden | Closed(Curved) | 3 | 1 | 2 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| N5  | Wensuge     | Imperial Garden | Closed | 7 | 1 | None | ○ |
| N6  | Wenzongge   | Imperial Garden | Open | 1 | 1 | None |
| N7  | Wenhuige    | Imperial Garden | Open | 1 | 1 | None | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| N8  | Weniarnge   | Imperial Garden | Closed | 3 | 2 | 2 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Wenyuan (N2) has two floors in appearance and three floors internally, making it bigger and taller than Tianyige. The gable and hip roof and brackets can only be seen in Wenyuan, raising the imperial rank of the building. Based on the mapping data of the current four libraries, the bay of Wenyuan is apparently wider than the other three libraries, probably due to the big size of Wenhuadian in front of Wenyuan. Wenyuan has no platform ahead the architecture but a high foundation and nine steps (Figure 7). The other three current libraries all have a platform as a transition space between indoor and outdoor.

The ratios of the end bay of the seven libraries are all smaller than those of Tianyige. For one reason, a smaller end bay is more constant for the axial symmetry of a six bay architecture. For another reason,

![Figure 9. Overall layout of N2 & N5.](image)

¹Illustrations by courtesy of Ningbo Tianyige Museum.
a smaller end bay in the seven libraries only serves as a staircase, unlike Tianyige.

The extant four libraries are all crowned with black glazed tiles in the middle and green glazed tiles on the edge of the roof, which also imitates Tianyige and means water to protect the library. The central bay of the front corridor all extends one span into the interior space in Wenyuan (N2), Wensuge (N5) and Wenlange (N8), emphasizing the trend of the outer space into the interior space. On the contrary, the back corridor rather than the front corridor of Tianyige extends one span into the interior space (Figure 8).

4. Overall Configuration of the Seven Libraries

The seven libraries can be divided into two types according to their locations and overall configuration: libraries in imperial palaces and libraries in imperial gardens and auxiliary palaces. Wenyuan (N2) and
Wensuge (N5) are located in imperial palaces, while the other five libraries are located in imperial gardens and auxiliary palaces. Since Tianyige has the main characteristics of gardens in eastern China, the overall configuration of the seven libraries all imitated Tianyige to various extensions (Table 3).

4.1. Libraries in Imperial Palaces

Wenyuange (N2) is located at the bottom of Wenhuadian Group in the Forbidden City. With a relatively small site and solemn atmosphere of the surrounding architectures, it’s quite difficult for Wenyuange to imitate the features of gardens in eastern China. In spite of this, a small pool in front of the library, a small rockwork behind the building and the surrounding trees all show the garden features of Wenyuange without destroying the Wenhuadian Group. Although the Wenyuange Group isn’t an independent yard, but the complete group still corresponds to the features of Tianyige Group (Figure 9).²

Wensuge (N5) is located at Shenyang Imperial Palace (瀋陽故宮). Without a previous detailed planning, Shenyang Imperial Palace was built from the eastern part step by step, so there is no river system in the palace. The result is that Wensuge is the only library without any pool and rockery around. The western part of the palace was all built around Wensuge, ensuring Wensuge a large site area and a relatively

²Illustrations by courtesy of The Palace Museum and The First Historical Archives of China.
spacious distance between every two buildings. The Wensuge Group is a “three-jin (進)" courtyard (containing three yards in line) and compromises with the solemn atmosphere in the palace (Figure 10).

4.2. Libraries in Imperial Gardens and Auxiliary Palaces

The existing libraries in imperial gardens and auxiliary palaces are Wenjinge (N4) in the Mountain Resort (避暑山庄) and Wenlarnge (N8) in Hangzhou. The overall layout of Wenjinge is closest to that of Tianyige among the seven libraries (Figure 11). For one reason, the building of Wenjinge was the earliest among the seven libraries, without any other reference but Tianyige. For another reason, the general features of Tianyige can all be found in Wenjinge, such as the architectural configuration, platform, stone tablet pavilion, pool, rockery and flower bed.

Wenjinge (N4) was built in a small island in the river, with a curved courtyard wall following the edge of the island, which is unique among the seven libraries. This curved courtyard wall not only adapts to the unique local conditions but also embodies its free layout style, corresponding with the overall layout of the Mountain Resort.

Except for Wenyuange (N2) and Wenzongge (N6), other five libraries all have a small platform in front of the building. Among these five libraries, the platforms of four libraries link the library with the pool as a transition space, besides Wensuge (N5), which has no pool. The platform of Wenjinge is closest to Tianyige in size and scale (Figure 12).

Among the seven libraries, Wenjinge (N4), Wenyuange (N3) and Wenlarnge (N8) contain a pool in front of the building. Other three libraries are all close to a river nearby, which are Wenyuange (N2), Wenzongge (N6) and Wenhuige (N7). Only Wensuge (N5) has no water around.

\(^3\)Drawn on the illustrations by courtesy of School of Architecture, Tianjin University.
The pool of Wenjinge (N4) is also close to Tianyige (Figure 13). Firstly, the size of the pool in Wenjinge is close to the scale of Tianyige. Secondly, Tianyige pool is separated by the rockery, embodying the Chinese classical garden layout of “A Lake With three Hills (蓬萊瀛洲方丈)” as immortals’ islands. Wenjinge has three pools which are close to each other and similar in scale. Wenyuarnge (N3) also has three pools, but they are far

Illustrations of Wenjinge photos in Figure 13, 14, 15 and 16 by courtesy of Liu Tongtong, School of Architecture, Tianjin University.
from each other and distinct in scale. While Wenlarnge (N8) has only one pool.

A spectacular rockery stands in the south side of the Wenjinge (N4) pool, which is the biggest rockery among the seven libraries (Figure 14). Wenlarnge (N8) rockery is in the front patio, which is not the same patio with the library. Although Wenlarnge rockery is small, it also has lower caves and upper platforms, which is similar to Wenjinge and Wenyuarnge (N3). A poem (Qian 2007b) of Emperor Qianlong expressed his slender displeasure against the Wenlarnge rockery for blocking the view of the West Lake.

A towering peak stands in the central rockery against the library in Tianyige as the highest focus of the garden, which also blocks the view of the building from the rockery as an implicit aesthetic appeal. Wenjinge (N4) also adopted this unique technique. In Wenyuarnge (N3) the towering peak was placed in the lake, which is an initiative advance among the seven
libraries. The approach of Wenyuange peak was later adopted by Wenlarnge (N8) (Figure 15).

In Tianyige a pavilion and a platform were originally built on the rockery as main view points. This approach was firstly adopted in Wenjinge (N4). In addition, Wenjinge also imitated the configuration of Baojinzhai (寶晉齋), a private villa of the celebrated calligrapher Mi Fu (米芾) of Song Dynasty (960–1276 A.D.). The other libraries all imitated this layout with subtle changes, which can be seen in Wenlarnge nowadays (N8) (Figure 16).

Wenjinge (N4) has another imitation of Tianyige which is the flower bed and small rockery behind the building. This is also unique in Wenjinge as an evidence of its earliest building fact.

5. Restoration of Wenyuange, Wenzongge and Wenhuige

The destroyed three libraries are a major obstacle for the research of the seven libraries that cannot be ignored. Historical relics, literature and images are the remaining research data.

The relic of Wenyuange (N3) has been lying in the Ruins of Old Summer Palace (圓明園) for nearly 150 years until now. After recent rediscovery and conservation, the
relic of Wenyuanme has regained its historical value for research. Fortunately, the site map and design map (Figure 17) of Wenyuanme were found in the manuscripts of Yangshi Lei (樣式雷) Family (Guo 2016), an architect family in charge of imperial architecture planning and design for more than 200 years in Qing Dynasty, which are very helpful in the restoration research. Throughout restoration (Figure 18), Wenyuanme was found to be similar with Wenjing (N4) in the pool, rockery, pavilion and platform, but it originally set a towering peak in the pool which was imitated by Wenlarmge (N8).

Although Wenzongge (N6) and Wenhuige (N7) only survived for sixty or seventy years in the world, valuable historical literature and images still exist to this day. Wenzongge (N6) was built in Jinsnhan (金山) Mountain, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu. The original site of Wenzongge was nowhere to be found on account

Figure 21. Reading in Wenhuige.

Figure 22. Restoration model of Wenhuige (N7).

\[Illustrations\ by\ courtesy\ of\ National\ Library\ of\ China.\]
of the changes of the land and rivers near Jinshan Mountain. Fortunately, Jinshan Temple (金山寺) was rebuilt many times, and the existing main buildings of Jinshan Temple can help locate the general position of Wenzongge. The Wenzongge Picture (Wen zong ge tu 文宗閣圖) can be found in local records (Figure 19) (Ji, Shan and Fang 2015). According to the records, Wenzongge was surrounded by double floor corridors, facing the water and back to cliffs. The unique site and the precipitous view embodied its freedom of design and the characteristics of adapting to local conditions (Figure 20).

Wenhuige (N7) was located in Grand Hall Palace (大観堂行宮), on the west side of Tianning Temple (天寧寺) in Yangzhou, Jiangsu. Blending into the surrounding trees and rivers, Wenhuige had no courtyard wall like Wenzongge, different with other libraries according to the Reading in Wenhuige (Wen hui du shu 文蕙讀書) (Figure 21) (Lin 1984). One of the most distinctive features is that the usual pool in front of the building was replaced by a swastika river throughout the imperial garden. Another feature is that the stone tablet pavilion was not placed on the east side of the library as the other libraries, but was placed facing the building on the other side of the swastika river. Due to the destruction of Grand Hall Palace, only part of Wenhuige can be restored (Figure 22).

6. Conclusions

This paper fully articulates the imitation of Tianyige among the seven libraries of Siku quanshu. Firstly, by putting together Tianyige and the seven libraries as overall research objects and integrating the distributed previous research of these eight objects, this paper has built a systematic structure from the perspective of imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty. Secondly, the comparison of architectures and gardens of Tianyige and the seven libraries is also the comparison of the south gardens and north gardens, as well as the private gardens and imperial gardens, which can be in common with other traditional Chinese garden research. Thirdly, the restoration research of the three destroyed libraries based on the literature and field investigation is also an important and innovative achievement in this paper.

Throughout the research of the seven libraries’ imitation of Tianyige, conclusions can be summarized as follows.

1) As the prototype of the seven libraries, the construction ideas, architectural configurations and overall layout of Tianyige were adopted by the seven libraries to various degrees. The book culture of Tianyige has had profound influences on the seven libraries and other ancient Chinese libraries.

2) In terms of architectural configuration, the seven libraries adopted the main features of Tianyige like six-bay structure and two-floor appearance and had some initiative advances corresponding with the imperial ranks and atmosphere, such as a bigger size, a smaller end bay and three-floor inner space.

3) The overall configuration of the seven libraries not only imitated the Tianyige but also distinguished the seven libraries with different values with the characteristics of adapting to local conditions. The garden spaces of the seven libraries were also deeply influenced by Tianyige Garden with southern private garden features.

4) The restoration of the destroyed three libraries is mainly based on the traditional literature and field investigation. Some rarely known features of the destroyed three libraries were revealed throughout the restoration, such as many close parallels between the Wenyuang writes (N3) and Wenjing (N4), the unique site location and the precipitous landscape of Wenzongge (N6) and the main feature of fitting the environment of Wenhuige (N7) and so on.

The compilation of Siku quanshu and the construction of seven imperial libraries was a big event in the ancient Chinese library history, marking the peak of ancient China library course. The four existing libraries of Siku quanshu are the best-known imperial libraries that have survived to this day. Tianyige is the oldest existing private library in China as well as one of the three oldest family libraries in the world. Overall speaking, the seven libraries’ imitation of Tianyige is a successful case in imitation of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty and has become one of the highest peaks in the construction of imperial gardens in Qing Dynasty.

As for the future work, the further preservation of current libraries and the study and restoration of the destroyed libraries can be of great importance. Furthermore, the cultural value of Tianyige and the seven libraries is also worthy of attention. The book collecting history and its spiritual values should be well improved and developed towards the world.

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