

A Study on Cultural Representation in PEP Compulsory Senior High School English Textbooks

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of increasingly close international exchanges and the urgent need to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence, this study conducts quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis on the three compulsory textbooks of Senior High School English (Compulsory 1–3, 2019 edition, People's Education Press version), based on the analytical framework for cultural representation in English textbooks developed by Zhang and Li. The findings reveal that in terms of cultural content representation, the three compulsory textbooks attach greater importance to the input of Chinese culture and international culture, followed by target language cultures, while insufficient attention is paid to cultures of other countries. Cultural practices and cultural products serve as the primary forms of cultural representation, whereas cultural perspectives, cultural figures, and cultural communities receive relatively little emphasis. Regarding the modes of cultural representation, cultural texts and pictures/introductions are most emphasized in the textbooks, succeeded by cultural expression; comparatively less attention is devoted to cultural comprehension, dedicated cultural knowledge sections, and background cultural information.

Keywords: Senior High School English; Senior High School Textbooks; Cultural Representation; Textbook Analysis

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of deepening globalization, intercultural communicative competence has become a core competency for international interaction. As a global lingua franca, English is valued not only for its linguistic communicative function but also for its crucial role in promoting cultural understanding, resolving conflicts between civilizations, and participating in global

governance [1] (Ministry of Education, 2020). This practical demand has directly driven the innovation of English education philosophy. The General High School English Curriculum Standards (Revised 2020) explicitly stipulates that English learning should “strengthen national identity and patriotism, broaden international horizons, and develop intercultural communication skills”, so as to achieve the integration of instrumentality and humanity. Cultivating intercultural communicative competence is the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching.

As the fundamental carrier of cultural instruction, textbooks exert a direct impact on the effectiveness of fostering students' intercultural communicative competence. As the most widely used national unified textbook series across China, the People's Education Press (PEP) senior high school English textbooks urgently require a systematic examination of the organizational logic, value orientation, and presentation strategies of their cultural content.

In view of this, based on the analytical framework for cultural representation in English textbooks established by Zhang and Li [2,3], this study takes the 2019 edition of PEP senior high school compulsory English textbooks as the research object, adopts the content analysis method to analyze cultural representation in these textbooks compiled in accordance with the new curriculum standards, and puts forward instructional suggestions for textbook compilers and teachers.

2. Literature Review

Scholars at home and abroad have developed multi-dimensional perspectives in the research on cultural representation in textbooks. Some scholars have conducted studies on cultural representation in college English textbooks. For instance, Zhang and Yu [4] found that the Chinese culture presented in college English textbooks mainly falls into two categories:

modern culture and traditional culture; Chinese culture in such textbooks is mainly represented implicitly, namely through translation and cloze exercises. Li [5] identified several characteristics of general college English textbooks: in terms of cultural regions, they reflect cultural diversity by emphasizing the integration of local culture, with target language cultures and international culture appearing with equal frequency; in terms of cultural themes, intercultural communication dominates, while general culture and country-specific culture account for the same proportion; in terms of cultural dimensions, cultural practices account for the highest proportion, followed by cultural products and cultural perspectives in descending order; in terms of cultural representation paths, cultural information is mainly conveyed through exercises. Wang and Li [6] took three mainstream college English textbooks in China as research subjects and conducted a comparative analysis of the presentation of Chinese and Western cultures. They found that both Chinese and Western cultural contents shared common problems such as low repetition rates and a lack of supporting exercises. In addition, Chinese culture was limited by concentrated presentation, insufficient coverage of sections, and monotonous modes.

Some scholars have focused on comparative studies of cultural representation across different English textbooks. For example, Rashidi and Meihami [7] compared English textbooks used in the UK, India and Iran, and found that all three sets of textbooks contain learners' native culture, target language culture, international culture and neutral culture to varying degrees. Yuen [8] analyzed the cultural types and regional cultural proportions in two sets of secondary school English textbooks in Hong Kong, revealing that cultural products accounted for a significantly higher proportion than cultural perspectives in both sets; geographically, target language cultures dominated in both textbooks, while Asian and African cultures accounted for relatively low proportions. Zhang [9] discovered that both domestic and foreign textbooks attach importance to international culture and native culture; in terms of representation modes, the numbers of incidental and indirect representations are roughly equivalent, while explicit representations are slightly fewer in domestic textbooks than in foreign ones. Both types of textbooks cover major issues of

common human concern and reflect multicultural and social identities. Zhang Hong, Chang and Su [10] compared two sets of senior high school English textbooks from China and Germany. Regarding cultural regions, Chinese textbooks emphasize the integration of native culture more than German textbooks, whereas German textbooks attach greater importance to target language cultures and present more diversified cultures of other countries. In terms of cultural forms, cultural products account for the highest proportion in both sets, with similar proportions of cultural practices and cultural figures; German textbooks allocate higher proportions to cultural perspectives and cultural communities than Chinese textbooks. As for representation modes, Chinese textbooks are dominated by implicit representation with fewer explicit representations and lay more emphasis on cultural comprehension, while German textbooks employ explicit and implicit representations in roughly equal measure and focus more on cultural expression. Other scholars have devoted themselves to developing analytical frameworks for cultural representation in English textbooks. For example, Zhang and Li [2] constructed the Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation in English Textbooks, which comprises two core dimensions—cultural content and representation modes, each containing multiple sub-dimensions with different weights assigned according to distinct representation methods. On this basis, the two scholars later conducted a cultural representation analysis on a certain set of senior high school English textbooks and found that the textbook maintains an appropriate proportion of cultural representation across regions, with representation intensity in descending order: target language cultures, international culture, Chinese culture and other countries' cultures. It features diverse cultural forms, with more representations of cultural products, cultural figures and cultural practices than cultural perspectives and cultural communities. In terms of representation modes, the textbook generally prioritizes cultural texts and cultural comprehension exercises; specifically, target language cultures and other countries' cultures focus more on cultural comprehension, while Chinese culture emphasizes cultural expression. In summary, existing studies have analyzed cultural representation in foreign language textbooks from various perspectives, yet

research on cultural representation in the compulsory PEP senior high school English textbooks remains insufficient. Therefore, this study analyzes cultural representation in the compulsory PEP senior high school English textbooks based on the analytical framework for cultural representation in foreign language textbooks established by Zhang and Li [2,3].

3. Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation

In this study, the author adopts the analytical framework for cultural representation in foreign language textbooks developed by Zhang and Li [2,3] to analyze cultural representation in the textbooks. The framework consists of two main dimensions: one is the analytical framework for cultural content representation, and the other is the analytical framework for cultural representation modes. This section mainly elaborates on these two dimensions.

3.1 Analytical Framework for Cultural Content Representation in Textbooks

The analytical framework for cultural content representation in foreign language textbooks is divided into two parts based on the dimensions of region and form (e.g., Table 1).

The regional dimension consists of four categories: target language culture, learners' native culture, cultures of other countries, and international culture. In this paper, target language culture refers to the culture of native English-speaking countries, mainly European and American countries such as the United Kingdom. Learners' native culture denotes Chinese culture, which mainly includes three types: traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and modern culture. Cultures of other countries refer to the cultures of the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle consisting of all non-English-speaking countries. International culture refers to universal and shared global culture [2].

The formal dimension comprises four categories: cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, and cultural figures. Cultural

products are creations made by humans to meet their needs for survival and development, such as daily food, clothing, and other items. Cultural practices refer to the lifestyles, codes of conduct, festival customs, etiquette norms, and other patterns followed by people in daily life. Cultural perspectives refer to abstract concepts such as values and beliefs that underpin people's lives, which play a decisive role in shaping cultural products and cultural practices. Cultural figures refer to influential and well-known individuals within a specific cultural group, who exert a profound impact on culture through their words, deeds, ideas, or achievements and thus become important representatives of that culture. Cultural community refers to a cultural collective formed at the national or ethnic level, characterized by collective or identity recognition [2].

Table1. Analytical Framework for Cultural Content Representation in Textbooks

Region	Form
Target Language Culture	Cultural Products
Learners' Native Culture	Cultural Practices
Cultures of Other Countries	Cultural Perspectives
International Culture	Cultural Figures
	Cultural Community

3.2 Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation Modes in Textbooks

Cultural representation modes are mainly divided into explicit and implicit types, specifically including the following five categories: cultural texts containing cultural information, dedicated cultural knowledge sections introducing specific cultures, pictures or quotations conveying cultural information, embedded background cultural information, and activities and exercises involving cultural information (Table 2). Each corresponds to a different carrier with a different weight.

This study adopts the weighting method developed by Zhang and Li [2,3]. Each cultural representation carrier is assigned a distinct weight, and the representation intensity of different cultures in the textbooks is finally obtained by multiplying frequency by weight.

Table 2. Analytical Framework for Cultural Representation Modes in Foreign Language Textbooks

Cultural Representation Mode	Carrier
Cultural Texts	Monocultural text
	Dominant culture in multicultural text
	Two or more cultures with equal weight in multicultural text
	Secondary culture in multicultural text

	Monocultural text in exercises
	Dominant culture in multicultural text in exercises
	Two or more cultures with equal weight in multicultural text in exercises
	Secondary culture in multicultural text in exercises
Cultural Knowledge Sections	Monocultural knowledge section
	Dominant culture in multicultural knowledge section
	Two or more cultures with equal weight in multicultural knowledge section
	Secondary culture in multicultural knowledge section
Pictures or Quotations	Pictures/quotations presented in non-exercise sections
	Pictures/quotations presented in exercise sections
Background Cultural Information	Background cultural information in texts and cultural knowledge sections
	Background cultural information presented in exercise sections
Activities/Exercises	Cultural comprehension exercises
	Monocultural expression
	Multicultural expression
	Language exercises

4. Research Design

This section consists of five parts: research questions, research subjects, research methods, research instruments, and research procedures.

4.1 Research Questions

What are the characteristics of cultural content presentation in the compulsory editions of the PEP Senior High School English textbooks?

What are the characteristics of cultural presentation modes in the compulsory editions of the PEP Senior High School English textbooks?

4.2 Research Subjects

This study selects three compulsory volumes of the 2019 PEP Senior High School English textbooks as research samples. The reasons are as follows: first, the textbooks are widely used across China; second, there is insufficient research on cultural presentation in the new edition of PEP compulsory senior high school English textbooks. The three compulsory volumes include 15 units in total, with 5 units per volume except for one preparatory unit in Compulsory Volume 1. Among all units, 7 involve cultural presentation, namely Unit 5 (Compulsory 1), Unit 1, Unit 4, Unit 5 (Compulsory 2), Unit 1, Unit 2, and Unit 3 (Compulsory 3). Therefore, this study analyzes cultural content and cultural presentation modes in these seven units.

4.3 Research Method

This study adopts content analysis. Content analysis is an objective, systematic, and quantitative research method used to analyze educational document contents and draw factual

judgments on relevant educational phenomena [11]. It enables objective recording and description of data, high-level summarization, quantifiable results, and accurate evaluation by combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, making it a vital method in educational research. Accordingly, this study uses content analysis to examine the three 2019 PEP compulsory senior high school English textbooks. Based on the analytical framework for cultural content and presentation, the study locates and counts culture-related materials, obtains quantitative data, conducts data analysis, and then performs qualitative interpretation to summarize the features of cultural content and presentation in the textbooks.

4.4 Research Instrument

This study employs the analytical framework for cultural presentation in foreign language textbooks developed by Zhang and Li [2,3]. The analysis is divided into two major dimensions: cultural content presentation and cultural presentation modes, each with several sub-dimensions. The study calculates the weight of each sub-dimension in the target textbooks and uses the weight assignment method to process the data, obtaining the intensity of each dimension ($\text{Intensity} = \text{Weight} \times \text{Frequency}$). The results are then analyzed systematically.

4.5 Research Procedures

First, based on the analytical framework for cultural content and presentation, the study identifies culture-related contents in the three PEP compulsory textbooks and codes them according to seven categories: country/region, location, presentation form, position in the textbook, textbook title, page number, and

presentation mode. Discrepancies or uncertainties during coding are resolved through discussion; if no consensus is reached, two additional textbook analysis researchers will be consulted until agreement is achieved [3]. Next, the intensity of different cultural contents, forms,

and presentation modes is calculated using the weight assignment method (e.p., Table 3) and analyzed. Finally, corresponding teaching suggestions are provided for senior high school English teachers.

Table 3. Example of Coding for Textbook Analysis

Content	Region	Country	Representation Form	Presentation Location	Textbook	Page Number	Representation Mode	Weight	Frequency	Intensity
Unit Cover Image	International Culture	/	Cultural Practices	Unit Cover	B1U4	P59.	Picture	2	1	2
Quotation from Frank Smith	International Culture	/	Cultural Perspectives	Unit Cover	B1U4	P59.	Quotation	2	1	2
Match countries with the heard languages	Cultures of Other Countries	France, Russia, Germany, India, Spain, Canada	Cultural Products	Listening and Speaking 1	B1U4	P60.	Picture in Exercises	2	6	12
Different languages are spoken in different countries	Cultures of Other Countries	France, Russia, Germany, India, Spain, Canada	Cultural Products	Listening and Speaking Listening Text	B1U4	P60.	Multicultural Text	8	1	8

5. Research Findings

This study mainly adopts the analytical framework for cultural representation modes in foreign language textbooks developed by Zhang and Li [3], uses charts and textual descriptions to statistically analyze the cultural content and its representation modes presented in the textbooks, then evaluates these two dimensions and puts forward improvement suggestions for teachers.

5.1 Cultural Content Representation

Cultural content representation involves two dimensions: cultural regional representation and cultural form representation. This section analyzes these two dimensions with tables and textual descriptions to explore the characteristics of cultural content presentation in the three volumes of compulsory senior high school English textbooks (Book 1 to Book 3) published by People’s Education Press (PEP).

5.1.1 Cultural regional representation

By analyzing the cultural coding data of the textbooks, this study finds that the three volumes of PEP senior high school English compulsory textbooks attach greater importance to the input of Chinese culture and international culture, followed by target language cultures, while cultures of other countries receive relatively less attention.

From the perspective of cultural regions, the

research data shows that among the three volumes of PEP senior high school English compulsory textbooks, international culture ranks first, with a score of 297, accounting for 34.30% of all cultural content. International culture can help students understand the “common culture” of the world [12], which is conducive to cultivating students’ intercultural communicative competence, global vision and an open and inclusive mindset. It enables students to recognize the vastness of the world and the diversity of cultures, and understand the historical development paths of different countries and nations as well as common challenges such as global environmental protection.

Allowing students to learn to view issues from different cultural perspectives and understand the rationality of the existence of differences can also cultivate students’ attitude of respect, understanding and tolerance for different cultures, so as to become responsible global citizens. It encourages students to think critically when comparing and contrasting different cultural phenomena, without blindly worshipping or belittling any culture. For example, Music, Unit 5 of Compulsory Book 2, takes music as the core to design activities and texts, emphasizing the role of music as a universal language around the world, helping students recognize the friendship and

commonalities among people of all countries, and providing support for cultivating students to become global citizens.

Chinese culture ranks second, with a score of 289, accounting for 33.37% of all cultural content. This indicates that Chinese culture receives the greatest attention in the three volumes of PEP senior high school English textbooks. Among them, traditional culture is the most prominent, with a score of 185, accounting for 64.24% of Chinese cultural content; modern culture scores 103, accounting for 35.76% of Chinese cultural content, and none of the three volumes involves revolutionary culture. From the cultural regional data, Chinese cultural content far exceeds that of other regions, which shows that textbook compilers deliberately highlight the core position of Chinese culture and regard English learning as a tool to tell Chinese stories well in a foreign language. This reflects that textbook compilers focus on responding to the new curriculum standard's requirements for cultural confidence, guiding students to deepen their understanding and recognition of local culture through English learning, and preventing English education from becoming a one-way input of Western culture.

Target language cultures rank third, with a score of 144, accounting for 16.63% of all cultural content, involving four countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Ireland. Among them, American and British cultures account for a large proportion. American culture has the highest presentation intensity, with a score of 62; followed by British culture, with a score of 42. The presentation intensity of British and American cultures accounts for about 72.2% of the total intensity of target language cultures, while Canada and Ireland account for 3.22% and 1.38% of all cultural content respectively, totaling 27.8% of target language cultures. These cultural presentation data indicate that among target language cultures, British and American cultures receive the greatest attention from textbook compilers. The cultural content of the United States (62 points) and the United Kingdom (42 points) almost monopolizes the representation of the English-speaking world, invisibly strengthening the single cognitive framework of "English = British and American culture", which may make students ignore the attribute of English as a multicultural carrier of a global lingua franca. Although countries such as Canada (3.22%) and Ireland (1.38%) are also

important English-speaking countries, their cultural presentation is seriously insufficient. This gap exposes that the textbook's presentation of the inner-circle cultures of native English-speaking countries only focuses on the cultures of politically and economically powerful countries, weakening the attention to other English-speaking countries (such as Ireland's Celtic traditions), resulting in a flat perception of the English-speaking world among students.

Cultures of other countries have the lowest presentation intensity, with a score of 137, accounting for 15.82% of all cultural content, involving 11 countries including Russia. The textbook ignores very important cultures of other countries such as the development model of BRICS countries, the religious integration in Southeast Asia, and the modernization dilemma in the Middle East. This tendency may lead to students' lack of understanding of the "Belt and Road Initiative", resulting in intercultural competence being reduced to an exclusive tool for communication between China and European and American countries.

5.1.2 Cultural form representation

According to data analysis, this study finds that among the three compulsory volumes of PEP senior high school English textbooks, cultural practices (279 points) and cultural products (260 points) together account for 67.6% of the total intensity, making them the main forms of cultural representation. In contrast, cultural perspectives (136 points), cultural figures (43 points), and cultural communities (20 points) together account for only 24.3% of the total intensity.

From a regional perspective:

In target language cultures, cultural products show the highest intensity. Cultural products such as traditional festivals score 49 points, accounting for 39.52% of all cultural forms in this region, far exceeding any other cultural form and ranking first. The proportions of cultural perspectives, cultural figures, cultural practices, and cultural communities are relatively close, at 18.55%, 16.13%, 13.71%, and 12.09% respectively. This indicates a structure dominated by cultural products, supplemented by cultural perspectives, figures, practices, and communities. A possible reason for this design is that cultural products such as festival symbols and traditional festival activities can be closely integrated with vocabulary and grammar

teaching and provide authentic contexts for students to learn in situ. Festivals are closely related to students' daily lives, and students already have some knowledge of various festivals, which reduces learning difficulty, avoids anxiety caused by completely unfamiliar practices or concepts, and stimulates students' interest in learning.

In Chinese culture, cultural practices and cultural products rank the highest, with scores of 117 and 95 respectively, accounting for 81.85% of the regional intensity. Cultural figures account for 8.88%, cultural perspectives 7.34%, and cultural communities 1.93%. This shows a pattern centered on cultural practices and products, supplemented by cultural figures, perspectives, and communities. It reflects that the compilation of PEP compulsory textbooks is close to students' daily lives, focusing on experiential cultural practices such as festival customs and tangible cultural products such as the pipa and paper cutting. The design aims to lower the threshold of cultural understanding through concrete objects.

In cultures of other countries, cultural products show the highest intensity, followed by cultural practices and cultural perspectives in descending order. Cultural products score 68 points, accounting for 60.18% of all cultural forms in this region; cultural practices score 39, accounting for 34.51%; cultural perspectives are rarely mentioned, with only 6 points (3.51%). Cultural figures and communities are not mentioned at all, possibly because students lack understanding of unfamiliar cultural figures and communities from distant cultures. Most cultural products are tangible, and using material cultural carriers as the main form of introducing regional cultures is easier for students to comprehend. Cultural practices involve lifestyles, which students may be curious about and find relatively understandable. Since students mostly encounter Chinese culture, international culture, and target language cultures in daily life and teaching, they have little knowledge of non-English-speaking cultures (i.e., outer-circle cultures). Therefore, the limited coverage of cultural perspectives in this section aligns with students' cognitive level. In international culture, cultural practices rank highest in intensity, followed by cultural perspectives, cultural products, and finally cultural communities. Cultural practices score 101, accounting for 41.74% of all cultural forms in this region; cultural perspectives score 88,

accounting for 29.63%; cultural products score 48, accounting for 16.16%. Thus, cultural forms in this region are dominated by cultural practices and perspectives, supplemented by cultural products and communities.

5.2 Modes of Cultural Representation

According to the research data, in terms of intensity, the three compulsory volumes of PEP senior high school English textbooks attach the greatest importance to cultural texts (398 points) and pictures/quotations (188 points); followed by cultural expression (116 points), while cultural comprehension (48 points), cultural knowledge sections (30 points) and background cultural information receive relatively little attention with lower intensity.

In the representation modes of target language cultures, cultural texts rank first with the highest intensity (87 points), far exceeding other modes. Cultural texts enable learners to understand target cultures in a more detailed and systematic way, and students can interpret the cultural logic embedded in the texts through textual analysis. Pictures and quotations come second (32 points); for instance, unit cover images and quotations help students quickly identify the unit theme, and text illustrations provide clues for guessing the main idea of passages. Cultural knowledge sections account for a small proportion (12 points), indicating that the textbook tends to let students learn cultural knowledge in context through texts, or integrate such knowledge into observable pictures and quotations.

In the representation of Chinese culture, cultural texts (114 points), cultural knowledge sections (18 points) and pictures/quotations (70 points) show the highest intensity among all regional cultures. This indicates that the textbook highly values the visual presentation of Chinese culture. The textbook also emphasizes cultural expression related to Chinese culture (54 points), which ranks third in the representation modes of Chinese culture and second among all regional cultural representation modes. Textbook compilers may assume that students, after sufficient input from cultural texts and daily life, are competent enough to conduct cultural expression. Emphasis on this mode may also aim to meet contemporary demands for international communication and the dissemination of Chinese culture. In cultures of other countries, cultural texts (65 points) are the most intensive mode, greatly surpassing others. Since students

have relatively little exposure to other countries' cultures, compilers may intend to help students acquire systematic knowledge of such cultures through this mode.

In international culture, cultural texts (132 points) rank first among all regional cultural texts, showing that compilers emphasize conveying shared international cultural practices and perspectives through texts. Pictures and quotations (60 points) rank first among all regions and second within international culture; cultural expression (59 points) ranks first among all regions and third within international culture. These three modes each take the lead in their respective categories, fully reflecting the importance attached to international culture. Equal emphasis on the three embodies the concept of promoting exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations: massive input is first provided through abundant cultural texts, pictures and quotations, followed by adequate cultural output via cultural expression exercises, so as to effectively cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzes the cultural representation in the seven volumes of the 2019 edition of PEP senior high school English textbooks, based on the research framework for foreign language textbooks developed by Zhang and Li. The findings show that in terms of cultural content, the three compulsory volumes emphasize the input of Chinese culture and international culture, followed by target language cultures, while cultures of other countries receive insufficient attention. Cultural practices and cultural products serve as the dominant forms of cultural representation, whereas cultural perspectives, cultural figures and cultural communities are given relatively low priority. In terms of cultural representation modes, the three compulsory volumes attach the greatest importance to cultural texts and pictures/quotations, followed by cultural expression. Cultural comprehension, cultural knowledge sections and background cultural information receive less attention.

The above findings provide certain implications for English textbook compilers and frontline English teachers. First, textbook compilers should increase the proportion of cultures of other English-speaking countries besides the UK and the US within target language cultures, so that students can understand diverse cultures

within the inner circle. Second, the coverage of other countries' cultures should be expanded with more modern content, such as the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, to enhance students' understanding of other cultures and achieve genuine global cultural exchanges. Frontline teachers should continuously expand their knowledge, improve their own cultural literacy, and deepen their understanding of world cultures so as to satisfy students' curiosity and desire for knowledge about different cultures. Teachers may flexibly deal with various cultural representation modes based on their own understanding and knowledge. They should also enhance their professional competence to better cultivate students' cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. In addition, teachers should make flexible use of various media resources, and supplement cultural explanations with videos, pictures and other materials in classroom teaching.

This study only examines cultural representation in three compulsory volumes of PEP senior high school English textbooks, so the conclusions may not be comprehensive. Future research may conduct a full-set analysis of all PEP senior high school English textbooks to more accurately identify the characteristics of cultural representation in this textbook series.

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