

CULTURAL CROSSVERGENCE AND MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE

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Abstract: From the late Qing Dynasty and the early years of the Republic of China, the cultural crossvergence between Chinese and Western culture has begun. It is a complicated process which is full of painful and pleasant experiences, often both occurring at the same time. It has also formed a “cultural crossvergence” trend in both cultural thought and practice, and this trend is ubiquitous, long-lasting and inevitably complicated. Furthermore, it has an important effect on China’s literary phenomena. Since the beginning of the 20th century, with the development of this cultural crossvergence trend, it has formed a new type of modern culture with much more compatibility and diversity, thus creating a new phenomenon of literature. However, at the same time, there are also cultural collisions between east and west, and some people try to resist the “cultural crossvergence” trend. This thought has not only jeopardized the creation of modern culture but also negatively affected new century Chinese literature.

Introduction

From a cultural perspective, studying literature has become an essential form of academia in recent years. From the cultural and literary perspective, researching art development has also become an effective academic method. However, people constantly analyze the cultural trend based on radicalism or conservatism from a cultural binary point; and classify literature into realism, romanticism, and modernism. There is a cultural crossvergence process in the depth of all such idea trends; no matter what “-ism” the literati and the scholars believe in, they all hope to ardently achieve their cultural expectations through the conversation, interaction, and integration between different cultures. In this globalized world, scholars, no matter where they come from, whether China or Western countries, all emphasize “dialogue” and “interaction” between different cultures. Chinese scholar Huimin Jin pointed out that globalization is a new philosophy, “one can no longer speak only of the local, nor can one replace the local with the global.” (Jin, 2017, 36). In the field of culture, there should be not one culture replacing the other, not only a simple “integration” but a “cultural crossvergence.” This cultural crossvergence trend is not only a theoretical framework but also reflected in the creation of Chinese literature. More and more writers, in their works, are starting to reflect on the modern era and real life, which the Chinese people can feel. The language they use and the themes and thought sources they choose are all different from ancient Chinese literature. The outstanding features of such works are keeping the peace with the era and paying attention to the average person’s everyday life and concerns.

Most importantly, all the features are based on modern thought, which

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emphasizes absorbing the thoughts throughout the history of humankind. Although their cultural choices and formulas are different, the “modern literati” cultural identity cannot change. Under the circumstance of the modern cultural environment, they embodied their experience and thought about cultural crossvergence in a different dimension and extent.

I. The Formation and Embodiment of the Cultural Crossvergence

A cultural crossvergence between Chinese and Western cultures forms modern Chinese culture. We can find the development process of Chinese literature, which developed from Cultural collision to cultural integration between these two cultures.

The “dialogue” between China and the West has a zigzag process full of misunderstandings. Chinese civilization has a long history; in the most developed era, such as the Tang dynasty, Chinese people thought their culture was the best and that the capital, Changan, of the Tang dynasty, was the center of the world. “What strikes repeatedly is the immeasurable self-confidence that derives from thinking of oneself as the world” (Hall, 1985, 56). However, after the Qing dynasty, China became weak, and its culture was no longer the most developed in the world. So many Chinese scholars tried to learn Western knowledge, some mistakenly thinking only Western civilization could save China. Also, some Western countries have an “imperialism” attitude toward culture. Said believes “the Orient was almost a European invention, and has been, since antiquity, a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories, landscape, and remarkable experiences” (1). China’s culture, along with a number of Eastern countries, was severely misunderstood by Western scholars. Max Weber claimed that capitalism could not rise in China in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, Weber thought Confucianism to be a religion in China, which is a misunderstanding of Chinese culture.

Compared to Western scholars’ “imperialistic” attitudes toward culture, Chinese scholars and writers maintain a studious attitude toward Western culture. They tried to learn “new” things based on the “old” and “deep” Chinese cultural background. They were not just totally “replacing” Chinese culture with a Western one but tried to integrate these two cultures. This process was deemed not smooth, and two different cultures cannot just be combined; it must be a process of “crossvergence.” In this process, with the publication of the *New Youth* as the symbol, the cultural trend of the past century shows the cohesion and overflow of the cultural crossvergence trend in the early stages. Among them, the cultural idioms, which were based on Western cultures before and after the *May Fourth Movement*, are particularly memorable. In the early days, the cultural crossvergence trend was complicated. Some scholars used the phrase “cultural collision” to describe it. However, this is an inevitable choice for the evolution of ancient culture, showing the requirements of change from cultural conservative to cultural creation. It also implies that this historic choice, including the study of Humanism, Marxism, and Scientism, is always related to the reality of the survival and development of ordinary people.

For centuries, Chinese literature has had a strong sense of reality. From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the beginning of the *May Fourth Movement*, the writ-

ers have always wanted to resurrect modern culture, which was integrated by Chinese and Western culture (not foreign culture derived from the cultural idioms, but the national culture, which tends more to modern transformation) into the complex and diverse “text.” In the context of Chinese literature over the past hundreds of years, we can see all kinds of cultural factors, among which foreign cultural factors, obtained through cultural idioms, play a significant role, and the interaction between the cultural idioms and the cultural language has become an increasingly prominent cultural phenomenon. No matter whether it is emphasizing the “consciousness” and “enlightenment” of “human” existence or the “resistance” and “liberation” of the “people,” it embodies the exchange and cultural crossvergence trend between Chinese and Western cultures. It also indicates the Cultural Idioms, Creation, and Cultural Pursuit of Chinese literature for hundreds of years.

During the *May 4th New Culture Movement*, we can see the cultural idioms and pursuits in this positive sense. Moreover, this is the premise and motivation of cultural creation. The rise of the *May 4th New Culture Movement* has allowed us to develop a series of new cultural changes and achievements. In the following process, it formed the phenomena of the cultural crossvergence trend, activated the cultural and literary movement, developed new literary thought and criticism, and positively affected literary practice. Under such circumstances, the cultural resources during this period were based on reality. It produced an important influence on cultural and literary creation at that time and stimulated its subsequent development.

The main literature schools of the *May 4th New Culture Movement*, such as *Enlightenment literature*, *Anti-imperialist literature*, *Children’s literature*, *Female literature*, and *Labor Writing*, not only embody the performance of new culture and literature, they also reflect the so-called “new literary tradition” of later literature (Xia, 2010). From the perspective of cultural creation, this “new literary tradition” is the active construction of “modern national culture,” which has strongly affected literature from the new era until now. The cultural schools are also actively involved in cultural creation, and their creative contributions can be found from a cultural point of view. They developed all kinds of cultural and literary theories. For example, the magazine, *New Youth*, advocated “the macroscopic new cultural creation awareness,” the *Literary Research Society* stressed “the reform of social life consciousness,” the *Creation Society* emphasized the theory of “creation life,” the *League of Leftist Writers* pay attention to the idea of “revolution and public awareness.” *Yan’an Literary* and *Artistic School* both focused on the consciousness of “People’s Liberation.”

The new enlightenment of the new period literature and the pluralistic cultural creation consciousness of the post-new period literature have profoundly influenced the corresponding literary creation phenomenon. Among them, cultural and literary masters play a prominent role in cultural creation. In particular, our new cultural pioneers, including the revolutionary leaders. They had an apparent attitude and tried making cultural choices based on globalization and nationalization, which showed their valuable wisdom. Even cultural conservatives had their own “new ideas.” They tried their best to engage in “integrating culture between China and the West” (such as the famous *Xueheng School* and *Tongcheng School*) and obtained proper cultural integration and creation.

Since then, with the development of history, cultural conservatism has been transformed into sincere cultural constructivism at the level of cultural transmission and acceptance and has increased more extensive cultural influence (especially in the 21st century). The issue of effectively transforming the cultural status quo, which cannot adapt to the development of reality, is a severe problem that intellectuals must face since the *May 4th Movement*. Different cultural groups would give various improvements or cultural strategies. These strategies, to some extent, more or less, have the trends to maintain or contain the “integration” elements, the difference lying only in a particular time and space, and how to deal with the “traditional” and “Westernization” relationship, in other words, which is the dominant culture. So far, the problem is still controversial and a significant and challenging issue that has puzzled some people.

In fact, the cultural encounter between different cultures is based on historical circumstances; integration and collision always co-occur, and this is a very normal phenomenon.

With the development of modern society, cultural crossvergence between different cultures is inevitable. Moreover, most importantly, the positive development trend is that most countries accepted cultural crossvergence and used it to develop and create their own culture. So they create useful diplomacy and a good environment to enable the development of cultural crossvergence. In academic circles, universities, periodicals, scholars, and students from different cultural backgrounds contribute to cultural crossvergence and set interaction platforms for cultural integration. This cultural crossvergence eventually forms and leads to the creative transformation of national culture.

The famous scholar Lin Yusheng advocates “the transformation of Chinese tradition” and emphasizes the status of “tradition” in modern culture. He advocates that it is necessary to inherit the tradition and integrate it with other cultures, especially Western culture, and must adapt to modern society. Only when we base the consciousness of accepting the cultural crossvergence trend and taking it in a useful way to develop our own culture can we then have a chance to build national and cultural confidence? Lin Yusheng also pointed out that “the more admiration for the West, the less profound the understanding of it, and the more they lose the indispensable self in cultural creation” (Lin, 1994, 249-250). We can see that even in these days of globalization, some people are still keen to emphasize cultural confrontation, conflict, and collision and make cultural decisions on this basis. Worst of all, these individuals always give a single cultural value judgment as either this or that.

In fact, every culture is formed by historical accumulation, has its own unique features, and its cultural characteristics cannot be compatible with others. Our analysis of culture cannot just fall into two different types based on binary opposition and form a hostile relationship between different cultures. As Chinese, we have all learned that cultural and military conquests could happen simultaneously. We all have bad memories of cultural and military imperialism in our history, an extremely prominent phenomenon in 20th-century China. However, at the same time, we should not forget the principle of “no discord, no concord.” Chinese and western cultures met under “hostile” circumstances, and they obviously collided. However, we should also notice that there is a cultural crossvergence

process happening at the same time. The process has significant influence but is also a difficult journey.

In China, while the invasion of "imperialists" captured the attention of our people, many other "-isms" during the *May Fourth Movement* period also brought the people a vibrant cultural inspiration. Such as *Marxism* brought the thinking method of historical and dialectical materialism, the method of "specific analysis," and "seeking truth from facts." Such thought and methods are suitable for the development of the history and reality of China during that time. As a foreign idea, it finally built its largest acceptance club in China and has a profound and lasting effect on China and the global society.

From the perspective of a cultural view, the premise of cultural integration is no other than its opposite: the conflict between the different cultures and the need for integration between them precisely reflects the conflict between cultural concepts and the cultural environment.

In recent years, there has been much criticism of the *May Fourth Movement*, which is intended to deny its positive effect completely. The intentions behind this critical voice are complex; it embodies compassion for the return to the ancient culture and is a typical reflection of the cultural violence of our era. However, generally speaking, we all know that the *May Fourth New Culture Movement* results from the collision of several types of cultures, foreign and domestic, even between the same culture, such as the collision between the ancient and modern Chinese culture. Even the oldest cultural heritage in our country may have been reconstructed during the May Fourth Movement.

As some scholars have pointed out, "in the historical context of the *May Fourth New Culture*, there is a broader 'May Fourth cultural circle' consisting of proponents of new cultures, doubters, opponents, and other discussants. Their relationships are far from the tensions and apprehension of ideological confrontation. Their tearing and collision with each other, together with the 'Republic of China mechanism' that Chinese society has seen since the *May Fourth Movement*, ensured the energy and stability of the development of modern Chinese culture, and belonged to our review of the *May Fourth Movement* legacy" (Li, 2009, 64-74).

It means that in addition to being part of the new culture of the *May Fourth Movement* with the Western culture, the new culture of the *May Fourth Movement* also has its issues with the traditional culture. Chinese traditional culture also reflects the new development trend in adapting to the times. For example, the transformation of Chinese calligraphy culture typically reflects this new development trend. On the one hand, the writers of the *May Fourth Movement* did not give up the traditional writing instruments and writing methods; on the other hand, they gradually adapted to the changing demands of writing activities proposed by the times and began to make contact with "hard pen" calligraphy and adjusted to it.

The literary texts of the *May Fourth* writers (manuscripts) also embody the characteristics of this cultural crossvergence. The "new literature" is characterized in content and form; it is the product of cultural crossvergence. Another example is whether they are *May Fourth* new culture pioneers or conservative scholars, they all have great enthusiasm for "Cultural Creation." In pursuing the literary revolution and creating new literature, the *New Culture School* fully em-

bodies the spiritual features of the *Enlightenment of the New Culture Movement*. Therefore, it also constitutes a rather radical transformation of the old culture and literature and has become a new term, discourse, and grammar. As a result, “writing in the modern Chinese language” has become the cultural trend, and the modern cultural form has gradually replaced the ancient culture

We can find the cultural construction function of the new culture in many ways, such as the *Enlightenment Literature* and the *New Sanli* paradigm advocated by *Lu Xun* (J. Li, 2013), the *Human Literature* advocated by *Zhou Zuoren*, and the *Literature for Life* advocated by the *Literary Research Society*, as well as the *Creation Society* which advocates romantic literature and stresses the idea of individual liberation. Cultural conservatism has also entered the context of cultural integration between China and foreign countries and explored other ways of cultural exchanges; even if only an “improvement” and a limited reference, it is also highly cherished. For example, although having experienced many problems, *Lin Qinnan’s* translation works spread the acceptance of foreign culture and literature in modern China.

Some scholars pointed out: “throughout the history of western literary theory over the centuries, it can be found that deconstruction as a powerful trend has always existed and continued to play its role” (Zhang, 2015). Differing from this trend of “deconstruction” in the West, China’s more powerful ideological movement is to emphasize the “crossvergence” trend. Even if there is friction or suffering in the process, the objective of pursuing integration and harmony is evident in the development of Chinese culture.

Although theory and practice are not always in tune, and the road of the convergence between Chinese and foreign culture zigzags, it is a significant development today. The entry of world culture into China and the opening of Chinese culture to the world have become everyday cultural phenomena. At the same time, the theory of “cultural crossvergence” has also gradually replaced the once-popular “cultural collision” theory, which has risen from a hidden cultural pursuit to a theoretical and cultural self-consciousness.

II. Cultural Crossvergence and Broader Modern Literature

This cultural crossvergence trend also has a profound and significant impact on the occurrence and development of modern Chinese literature. From the cultural-philosophical level, cultural crossvergence reflects the contradictions and reunification between ideal and real cultures. Only by engaging in continuous and extensive cultural exchanges can heterogeneous cultures make new changes, sublimate to the new cultural realm, and then reach a new stage of cultural development. Dialectical materialism holds the idea that the existing contradictions are the fundamental driving force for the development of culture. It also means that the contradiction between the expectation of new culture and the contradiction of reality is the driving force behind the development of national culture. It will inevitably promote the development of the national culture based on the original foundation.

However, the solution to the cultural contradictions is a process of cultural crossvergence; contradiction is the process, and integration is the purpose. Especially in modern culture, it is more important to emphasize cultural

integration rather than a cultural collision; the former is the primary trend of the transformation from ancient to modern culture and a positive way to solve cultural collisions. In this way, it is necessary to adhere to the principles such as multi-dialogue and non-confrontation, insisting on promoting the coexistence of cultural consensus and diversity. We should have an open cultural attitude to learn and integrate the cultures of all ethnic groups in the world.

Only by cultural crossvergence could our culture have the chance to achieve this "modern" feature. In China, the so-called "broader-modern" is compared to what is commonly referred to, in academic circles, as the "modern three decades" (1919- 1949). Moreover, the "broader-modern" refers to the modern period from the early Qing dynasty to the present, a long history of China's modernization.

It is well-known that it is not easy to construct a "broader-modern" literature in China. Before and after the Opium War, many cultural pioneers who aspired to the movement became martyrs or traitors, many scholars having escaped traditional closed barriers while dribbling or sighing. Even today, the construction of the "broader-modern" literature is still a far-reaching historical mission.

For example, constructing democratic culture and literature has not yet been completed, though it is the most promising prospect. The people-centered cultural theory and the theory construction of culture and creative practice also changed constantly. So far, it is still far from fulfilling the big goals of "revolutionary realism" and "revolutionary romanticism" that have been promised. As another example, the *Silk Road literature* from ancient times ushered in a new stage in the process of "modern transformation." In the background today, the topic of "the culture and literature of the silk road" is apparently lacking in the consciousness of literature, whether the ancient silk road literature or the modern one, writers and critics must pay more attention and recreate. Furthermore, the neo-roots-seeking literature has a new national cultural consciousness after the root-seeking literature. This situation embodies the type of literature which focuses on national spirit, which has made a significant development. It also means that the method to discover and write the advantages and disadvantages of national culture is still a cultural theme to grasp.

In the author's opinion, it is crucial to create novels that include the ambition to explore the advantages and disadvantages of our national culture. Meanwhile, they should also embody positive energy and people's life situations. It can achieve a cultural balance through cultural dialectics and recover our national cultural confidence. Nevertheless, at the same time, it should also avoid falling into binary opposition and cultural destruction again (J. Li, 2013, 4-11).

For hundreds of years, Chinese literature has developed a series of characters, from "new literature" to "broader-modern" literature. As an outstanding literature phenomenon, it embodies the multi-cultural convergence from ancient times to modernity. It also could be taken as the cultural product developed from the crossvergence between Chinese and Western cultures. Whether it is the *Late Qing Dynasty literature*, *Yan'an literature*, or even *Republic literature*, the process of naming and exploring them is reflected in "the scholar's way to handle the history." In fact, we should realize that although it is a complicated process of cultural crossvergence between China and the West throughout hundreds of years, it has created and is creating a miracle and a glorious result in culture. It means the cultural creation of Chinese literature over the hundreds of years has happened be-

tween the crossvergence process of Chinese and Western culture. This trend is a prominent phenomenon in a particular history. This cultural creation embodies its eternal charm through “new literature,” which reflects the intense identity and vigorously promotes “the spirit of cultural creation.”

Under the “broader-modern” cultural level and literature pattern, more plentiful and complex cultural phenomena are bound to emerge. For example, numerous genres and styles have emerged in literary and art circles with the integration of Chinese and Western cultures. Also, these schools have different “cultural formulas” and doctrines, so it will also create various cultural forms. Hence, the multi-culture from the *May Fourth Movement* to later times reflects the plentiful development of the historical culture. Only in this way has the cultural spectacle of Chinese literature in the present century emerged.

Broader modernity consists of the cultural characters from ancient to modern times and from abroad to domestic. Such modernity has to be based on multi-culture construction. It should also be inclusive and contain all kinds of cultural patterns.

III. Cultural Crossvergence and the Development of New Century Literature

Since the 21st century, with the in-depth development of culture and more multicultural compatibility and diversity, Chinese literature has brought out various literary forms in the new century. It shows a new atmosphere regarding capacity, cultural awareness, literary and cultural innovation, etc. At the same time, however, it is hard to avoid the dualistic cultural trend of thought. A tendency towards “tradition” and persistence in “deconstruction” confront the trend of cultural crossvergence. This tendency is harmful not only to the creation of modern culture but also to literary creation.

Chinese literature in the new century shows a new atmosphere. Ideas such as “esteem the past over the present” or “worship the abroad but depreciate domestic” delusion and pessimism based on the so-called “pure literature” position are unnecessary. In recent years, academic circles are still debating many cultural phenomena, which have not reached an agreement. The binary oppositional mode of thought is still deeply rooted and affected. In particular, the “Retro School” remarks have been particularly popular, leading to new misunderstandings and arrogance in cultural confidence. Therefore, it is necessary to possess the pragmatic spirit of historical materialism and the wisdom of dialectical materialism to grasp the culture. More than a century of Chinese history proves that we need to stress the great principle of “survival of the fittest” and the absolute principle of “modernization.” Since entering the new century, the good news is that many scholars in China have a great interest in cultural studies and have conducted many discussions. In particular, they have achieved a new development in the research of Chinese literature and cultural creation by the writers. However, there are still many disagreements on how to view the achievements and values of Chinese literature in the past hundreds of years. Some criticism is more from the perspective of political interpretation, and others have given more criticism from the perspective of Western art, diminishing and mocking Chinese literature as an imitation of Western culture. In severe cases, opinions such as “modern literary is junk” and the “death of literary” have

become more popular. Even though *Mo Yan* won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012, the voices of doubt still exist. At the same time, there is a tendency to blind optimism or even boast of Chinese literature. There still needs to be more in-depth research on the cultural creation of Chinese literature over the past hundred years, including the value of literary creation and the crucial roles prominent writers play in cultural undertakings.

After all, how should we fully consider Chinese literature in the new century? This article only highlights the following points:

Firstly, literature in the new century can raise relevant knowledge and find and accumulate the “positive energy” of cultural construction. Literature is an integral part of the culture, and writers are vital forces in cultural creation. In the past hundreds of years, Chinese literature, including new-century literature, has greatly improved during the collision between ancient and modern culture, abroad and domestic. It is undeniable that it made a significant impact on spiritual culture creation. Especially in the process of cultural development, from cultural idioms to cultural creation, from cultural collision to cultural adaptation, from cultural manufacture to cultural production, new-century literature has entered a new historical stage. While fulfilling and enriching spiritual life, more literary works have been created and reflect the development of modern China. The rise of online literature has also promoted the popularization of literature, and the development of literature has entered a more modern and universal stage.

Secondly, Chinese literature in the new century has fruitful values on literature and culture, embodying the spirit of cultural creativity. From the perspectives of social culture, especially behavioral culture, we can see that Chinese writers in the new century are still actively engaged in creating works, portraying and revealing the various aspects of reality in modern society. From the ongoing hard work of these writers, we can not only see their “literati behaviors” and the diverse cultural activities they engage in and feel the cultural creativity they keep. From the realistic needs of contemporary culture construction and promotion of cultural soft power, combined with the general trend of the great rejuvenation of Chinese culture, we can see that under the influence of the “Cultural crossvergence” trend, the reconstruction of “studies of ancient Chinese civilization” and the “New Chinese” pattern has gradually appeared.

Thirdly, developing Chinese literature in the new century can strengthen the discipline's construction and academic status. Drawing on the research methods of culturology, creatology, and axiology, we can conduct a broader study on the meaning of cultural creation and construction of Chinese literature in the past hundred years and lay a foundation for the discipline of modern Chinese literature, highlighting the new pattern of “broader-modern” literature. Furthermore, the research on Chinese literature in the new century shows that the deepening development of Chinese literature can effectively reinforce the awareness and status of this young “emerging discipline” in discipline construction.

Conclusion

Reviewing the history of Chinese literature over a hundred years from the perspective of the “cultural crossvergence” thought, we could find that cultural

creation and construction will inevitably lead to the discovery of many theoretical questions and literary history issues that have been overshadowed or overlooked. Therefore, it can provide theoretical support and a realistic basis for a deeper re-study of Chinese literature. Besides literary and cultural studies, scholars could also expand their thinking space and academic horizons and explore the other cultural creation of the writers. From the perspective of academic culture, it is more closely related to the actual life of modern Chinese writers and is also conducive to teaching relevant subjects. However, the relationship between modern writers as a teacher and humanistic education is also worth studying. “Writer is a teacher” is a serious proposition, even only by looking at the writers from everyday life, and we cannot ignore the “teacher” as a cultural identity.

Indeed, culture cannot be fixed, and literature cannot be stereotyped. Culture must be developed from the theoretical or ideological level, and literature also needs innovation. It is an objective law and a universal phenomenon. In recent years, the thought of social and academic circles has been quite active, but it is also quite chaotic. In the meantime, the binary opposition mode of thinking is still often applied and exerted by some people. In fact, in cultural practice, people’s opinions can differ, but the expectation and the pursuit of cultural crossvergence and cultural creation are common. Over the past hundred years, the “cultural crossvergence” trend has become increasingly popular and influential. It will continue to benefit China and promote construction of a more distinctive modern Chinese culture and literature.

Lastly, we must emphasize that cultural crossvergence needs a dialogue premise, an open attitude toward different cultures, and a critical-thinking spirit. In the process of cultural crossvergence, we should insist, “Let other be other, and let myself be other as well, let both of them, as limited and concrete subjects, move inter-subjectivity towards ‘inter-otherness’ and ontological ‘interculturality.’ Only by so doing can cultural studies in the era of globalization support a ‘dialogue’ in its real sense, the consequence of which is for each interlocutor an incessant self-surpassing, self-negation, and self-construction.....” (Jin, 2017, 46).

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