Shores of Matteo Ricci.
Circularity of visual and textual sources and the Interrelation of the missionary experiences in Europe, Japan and China.
Preliminary considerations

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Abstract

The integrated analysis of pictorial, textual and cartographic documents produced in China and Japan, in contexts connected to the Jesuit presence, highlights a remarkable and fecund circularity of meanings and interpretations between visual and textual sources. Even more importantly, this circularity concerns textual and cartographic sources drafted in China by Matteo Ricci, S.J., in collaboration with his Chinese interlocutors and, on the one hand, pictorial representations on nanban folding screens, designed by Japanese painters to describe or idealizing local contexts of interactions among the nanbanjin and Japanese people, and on the other, Jesuit textual sources on Japan. Despite current growing specialisms between the communities of scholars dealing with the Chinese and Japanese contexts, the vicissitudes and experiences occurred over the course of the 16th and 17th century, in particular the cultural mobility between Europe and East Asia, and viceversa, and within East-Asia, at the time of the European presence, led to a symbiotic development of concepts and ideas, expressed in both tangible and intangible cultural products. This paper highlights the need and opportunity that these connected contexts can be also studied from integrated perspectives pertinently, beyond limiting specialism. We do this by analyzing the migration and transformation of cosmographic and cartographic ideas and devices from Europe to China and Japan, showing their long-distance surprising transformative journeys, in space and time, from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Early Modernity.
は、これらの関連する文脈を、専門の枠を超えた統合的視点に立ち、適切に研究する必要性と機会を強調する。私たちは、ヨーロッパから中国や日本へ導入された宇宙図や地図製作の考えや装置の移行と変容を分析し、古代から中世、初期近代まで、空間と時間という点で、長距離の驚くべき変容の旅を検証することで、上記の主張へとつなげる。

**Keywords**  キーワード

Western cosmography and cartography in China and Japan
Aristotelian natural philosophy and Christianity
Ricci’s and Li’s planispheres in China and Japan
Nanban folding screens and world map folding screens
Inculturation of Christian faith


- probably a Japanese brother or maybe a dōjuku 同宿, an assistant of the mission - is bringing a cup of tea. Placed beside the nanban-ji there is a second building, the Jesuit residence as such. From inside a wooden grate window, a western Jesuit is talking with a Japanese middle-aged man, who is seated outside on the floor, wearing a kamishimo 袴 (vest and trousers) with a kosode 小袖 (a robe underneath them). Just beside, other four Japanese people, including a Japanese woman, are kneeling in the act of praying, and two of them, including the woman, are holding rosaries [Fig. 2].

As a whole, the pictorial representation captures a moment of serene daily life in the sociality of the missions in Japan, emphasizing the aspects of communication, dialogue, the “being together” among the Jesuits, their young Japanese acolytes as well as Japanese male and female adults, within the permeable and welcoming space of the Jesuit residence. The accent is also placed on shared cognitive objects: first of all, books, read and recited, but also a huge image hang on, or depicted on, a wooden panel placed on the left side of the external gate of the residence, facing the street outside of the wooden building [Fig. 3]. Decorated at the top with three indigo lotus flowers, the wall panel displays a huge geometric representation consisting of eight concentric circles that fully occupy the

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left gate wall. By keeping to the proportion of the objects represented in the byōbu, the size of the circles would indicate a huge, nearly square object, about two meters in size.

What could be the object depicted by the Japanese painter(s) with geometric care and taste? The peculiar geometry of the concentric circles – an unicum in nanban folding screens – could refer to a celestial geocentric map, an exemplification of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic universe (mundus). For nearly 2000 years, from Antiquity until at least the mid-seventeenth century, when Copernicus’, Galilei and Kepler’s heliocentric paradigm slowly and with difficulty overstretched the geocentric one, the latter remained the longest lasting and most influential scientific theory ever in Western science. On the basis of Eudoxus of Cnidos, Calippus of Cizicus (fourth century BC), Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) developed their most influential physical conceptions of the universe in which the immobile Earth, made of the element earth and water, surrounded by the elements air and fire – which all together composed the sublunary world – was surrounded by eight groups of crystalline spheres that transported the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars,
Jupiter, Saturn, and the fixed stars. From the twelfth century, following the translation from Arabic into Latin of the De caelo of Aristotle, the number of spheres in heaven became the subject of very heated theological disputes that impacted western natural philosophy over many centuries. This relevant dispute in the Christian theology of creation focused on two main issues: one concerning the number of heavens according to the Bible, and

4 For the theory of the homocentric spheres in Plato, see Timaeus 31a, 36d; 38cd and 39a; in Aristotle, see for example De caelo 1.9, 277 b 27-29. Eudoxus of Cnidos, using a group of three or four concentric spheres for every planet, was able to explain the motion of Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn along the zodiac. Calippus of Cizicus (fourth century BC) introduced some extra spheres for the Moon, the Sun, and Venus and Mars. The resulting models were worked out by Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) in order to develop their physical conceptions of the universe. For a general study of the doctrine of the homocentric spheres see G. Schiapparelli, “Le sfere omocentriche di Eudosso, di Callippo e di Aristotele,” Memorie del Reale Istituto Lombardo, Classe di Scienze matematiche e naturali 13 (1875) (reprinted in Scritti sulla storia dell’astronomia antica; II, Bologna, 1926, pp. 126-141) and Duhem, Le système du monde, vol. 1, pp. 126-150.
another concerning the consistency of the Bible with scientific descriptions of the celestial world. In the context of the assimilation and systematization of the Corpus Aristotelicum that had been accomplished by the Dominican Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, among others, the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic theory of the concentric crystalline spheres was integrated into Christian theology and natural philosophy.5 The Augustinian Johannes de Sacrobosco’s De Sphaera (thirteenth century) – one of the most diffused and long lasting works of basic astronomy until the seventeenth century – popularized this doctrine.6

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, despite Copernicus’, Kepler’s and Galilei’s heliocentric visions, the majority of European scholars and natural philosophers kept conceiving the universe (mundus) as geocentric and generally assumed that there were ten or eleven celestial spheres placed above and around the sublunary world. As an example, both Christophorus Clavius’ edition of Sacrobsco’s De Sphaera (1st edition, Rome, 1570, a fundamental work for the scientific education of the Jesuits, in particular in the Roman College), and Alessandro Piccolomini’s La sfera del mondo (1st edition, Rome, 1540) display eleven and ten spheres respectively [Fig. 4].7 These books were quite important also in Jesuit missionary contexts, in particular in Asia: they were among the very few Western books materially available to Matteo Ricci in China, when he started his mission and began to draw planispheres and introducing Western cosmology and cosmography to the Chinese people, around 1585.

Notwithstanding the inaccurate correspondence between the number of circles in the image of the byōbu of the Nanban Bunkakan in Osaka and that in sixteenth-century cosmographic diagrams, we see in the peculiar circular geometric structure of the image a significant congruity and consistency with western geocentric maps of the world or - through a process of metonymy - to a map of the world that also displayed diagrams of the geocentric universe, normally in one of the four corners. This was the case of the monumental 坤輿萬國全圖 Kunyu wanguo quantu (Complete map of the myriad nations of the world) designed by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and the astronomer and mathematician 李之藻 Li Zhizao (1565-1630), printed with woodblocks in Beijing in 1602.8 This oval

planisphere, comprising six panels, measuring all together c. 200 × 400 cm, the most famous of the ‘Ricci’s maps’ and the only one to have been preserved (four copies and a fragment), displays a geocentric diagram in the upper right corner [Fig. 5; Fig. 6]. The Kunyu wanguo quantu was derived from several revisions of the first map of the world designed for Ricci with Chinese text and printed with woodblocks between 1584 and 1585 in Zhaoqing and entitled Yudi shanhai quantu (Complete map of the mountains and sea of the earth). The Kunyu wanguo quantu itself was later reprinted and also copied several times in manuscript form by Chinese, Japanese and Korean scholars. In particular, it circulated pervasively in Japan, in both manuscript and printed copies and became one of the principal sources of Japanese world map nanban folding screens, such as a pair magnificent folding screen also held at the Nanban Bunkakan, in Osaka [Fig. 7].

In the upper right corner of the Kunyu wanguo quantu, and in Japanese world map screens derived directly or indirectly by it, there are geocentric diagrams of the mundus,
derived from Clavius’s edition of the De Sphaera of Sacrobosco. The image with the concentric circles depicted on the gate of the Jesuit residence, in the nanban byōbu – that we interpret as a reference to a western geocentric map of the universe – constitutes an important documentary visual testimony that matches with textual narratives developed in archival textual sources written by the Jesuits to describe their missionary practices in China and Japan. In particular, it provides a visual dimension to Matteo Ricci’s descriptions of his use of maps and cosmography in the development of his missionary practices in several Chinese cities, since at least 1585 as well as also to similar practices brought forward in Japan, in particular by Carlo Spinola, S.J., and documented in the Anna of 1606.9

Matteo Ricci described his vicissitudes and the complex encounter with the Chinese civilization and people in a manuscript, written in Italian, entitled Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina (On the entrance of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China). After Ricci’s death in Beijing in 1610, this work was eventually brought to Rome by Nicolas Trigault S.J, and despite serving as one of the major sources of Trigault’s De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu. Ex P. Matthaei Ricci eiusdem Societatis commentariis Libri V (Augsburg, 1615),10 it remained forgotten for


10 De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu. Ex P. Matthaei Ricci eiusdem Societatis commentariis Libri V: Ad S.D.N. Paulum V. In Quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges, atque instituta, & nove illius Ecclesiae difficultina primordia accurata & summa fide descripturar (The Christian Expedition among the Chinese undertaken by the Society of Jesus from the commentaries of Fr. Matteo Ricci of the
four centuries until Pietro Tacchi Venturi, SJ, discovered it in the Archivum Romanum
Societatis Iesu (Jesuit Roman Archive) in 1909 and published it in 1911. Ricci’s account
was again published by Pasquale D’Elia, S.J., in 1942 as the first volume of the
Fonti Ricciane, and republished in 2000.

same Society, in five books: dedicated to Pope Paul V. In which the customs, laws, and principles of
the Chinese kingdom and the most difficult first beginnings of the new Church there are accurately
and with great fidelity described authored by Fr. Nicolas Trigault, Flemish, of the same Society).

Augsburg, 1615.

Macerata: Giorgetti, 1911.

Fonti ricciane; documenti originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l’Europa
e la Cina (1579-1615), 3 vols. Ed. e commentati de Pasquale M. d’Elia sotto il patrocinio della Reale
In *Della entrata*, the 與地山海全圖 *Yudi shanhai quantu*, designed in 1585, was described by Ricci as ‘the best and most useful work that could be done in that time, to persuade China to give credit to the things of our holy faith.’ From this description it becomes clear that the meaning of the large printed planispheres designed by Ricci went beyond the geographical and scientific contents which might be (mis)understood as their main significance in today’s paradigms. The words used by Ricci to describe his cartographic endeavors call for a fresh reconsideration of the Christian educational and spiritual significance of cosmography that can perhaps better explain the work of Ricci and his European and Chinese confrères. At the same time, they help to understand why the Japanese painters depicted the object with the concentric circles with such a great prominence, to the point of connoting the Jesuit residence.

**Circularity of meanings and interpretations**

From the theoretical point of view, we observe here a remarkable and fecund circularity of meanings and interpretation not only between visual and textual sources, but also, and even more importantly, between sources drafted in missionary contexts in...
China by a Catholic missionary and representations designed in Japan by local painters to describe, imagining, idealizing local contexts of interactions and sociality among the nanbanjin and Japanese people.

Cosmography was a relevant part of Christian natural philosophy. Thomas Aquinas, in the first part of the *Summa theologiae*, distinctly defined these connections among cosmography, natural philosophy and Christian dogmas: “The very order of things created by God shows the unity of the world. For this, world is called one by the unity of order, whereby some things are ordered to others. But whatever things come from God, have relation of order to each other, and to God Himself, as shown above.” According to a tradition that persisted until the beginning of the modern age and was revitalized in missionary contexts, in particular in Asia and by the Jesuits, the composite field of knowledge of cosmography included and integrated elements of Christian cosmology (the Earth situated within the creation story), astronomy and Ptolemaic astrology (the Earth placed in relation to the heavenly world of planets and stars), Aristotelian natural philosophy (the Earth placed in relation to other elements of the sublunar world, i.e. water, air and fire), and universal geography.

In the context of the Catholic missions in Japan and China, within competitive interactions developed locally with both Buddhist monks and Confucian literati, the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic-Christian cosmography – I quote from Hui-Hung Chen – “paved the way for the comprehension of the Creator’s significance. It was an embodiment of the Renaissance tradition of cartography as the graphical representation of the universe, which included the idea of understanding nature through mathematical science as well as of


understanding Heaven by visualization and sensibility.17 This way, Aristotelian-Ptolemaic natural philosophy provided the epistemological basis on which the conception and discernment of the Christian Deus as Creator could be grounded.

Together with the notions and dogmas of the existence of the immortal soul, and the history of salvation and resurrection, the notion and explanation of the Creation – in the form of the scholastic-Aristotelian theory – was one the three pillars of the selective Christian theological and philosophical discourse brought forward within the Jesuit missions of Japan and China.18 The main objective of the missionaries was the evangelization and the salvation of the Japanese and the Chinese, but profound cultural and philosophical differences opposed to an immediate transmission of the Christian religion. Christianity had its roots in the very notion of creation of the universe, from which all other dogmas and articles of faith were deduced. Instead, Japanese and Chinese cultures, Confucianism and Buddhism, do not recognize a creator.19

Matteo Ricci’s, Pedro Gomez’s, Fucan Habian’s, Carlo Spinola’s presentations and explanation of the round Earth within the spherical heavens composed of several celestial spheres – the core of the very notion and understanding of the universe, created by God – stand both at the center of their criticism either of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, or Shinto, while at the same time being one the pillars of their negotiation of the Christian message with these systems of beliefs.20 According to the missionaries, Buddhism, Daoism, or Shinto, and even Confucianism – despite its moral consistency, according to


19 Huan Ping, Matteo Ricci: Si yuan xing lun (Trattato sui quattro elementi); Rì qiu da yu di qiu, di qiu da yu yue qiu (Il disco solare è più grande del globo terrestre e questo è più grande del disco lunare); jìng tian gai (Trattato sulle costellazioni); Bian xue yj du (Dispute postume). PhD Dissertation, Università degli studi di Macerata. Facoltà di lettere e filosofia 2010, pp. 10-16.

Ricci quite compatible with and similar to Stoicism\textsuperscript{21} – were likely incapable of explaining the foundations and origins of the universe. Their unclear understanding of the notion of the spherical earth placed at the center of the spherical universe was among the reasons that brought missionaries to regard these local beliefs intellectually poorer and totally incapable to lead human beings to salvation. Within a circular way of arguing, by lacking a clear understanding of the origins and shape of the universe, ignoring that the universe had been created by God, and adding that they were also weaker, if not entirely wrong, in explaining and detailing from a mathematical perspective the way the heavens functioned (with severe distortion of the calendar), to the Catholic missionaries Buddhism, Daoism, or Shinto were manifestly idolatries that originated from the devil to confuse and divert men from salvation. According to Ricci, Confucianism was instead a form of natural religion that, tough incomplete and distorted, provided the ground for a solid foundation of a new Christianity.

These assumptions and their political-religious epistemology spread and even turned into a literary trope in Jesuit letters and reports, like in this eloquent “Annual letter from Japan” of 1605. Carefully studied by Daniele Frison, it reports a cosmographic theatrical dispute that took place among the Jesuits (probably, Carlo Spinola and the Japanese Christian convert Fukan Habian, the author of the Myōtei Dialogues in 1605 and, after his recantation of Christianity, of Deus Destroyed in 1620, the hidden main characters\textsuperscript{22}), the shogun Tokugawa Hidetada and some bonzes. These are a few passages, translated into English from the original manuscript in Portuguese:

With the arrival to Miaco [Kyoto] of the son of the Kubō [Tokugawa Hidetada, son of the Kubō 公方 Ieyasu] from Quantō [Kantō 関東] to take the rank of Xogun […] there were numerous visits to our homes [the missions], especially in that of Miaco [Kyoto], moved out of curiosity, as already mentioned, to see new things and some instruments we have in the house to show the movements of the planets and other European instruments ever seen in Japan; and with this occasion many of them listened to us and were baptized. […] The Japanese listen to us

\textsuperscript{21} See Ricci’s “On friendship” (\textit{Dell’amicizia}), composed by Ricci in Nanchang, in November 1595, originally in Italian and later translated and printed in Chinese. Modern edition (Chinese and Italian): Ricci, Matteo, \textit{Dell’amicizia}. Ed. by Filippo Mignini. Macerata : Quodlibet, 2005. This work aims at showing the moral compatibility and similarity between Greco-Roman and Christian Humanism with the Confucianism. It’s worth recalling Ricci’s definition of Confucius as “another Seneca”. “On friendship” was written in the very moment in which Ricci decided to assume the posture, habits and status of a Confucian \textit{literatus}, literally taking off the clothes and abandoning forever the posture of Buddhist bonze that for almost fifteen years, with Michele Ruggieri had kept, since their entrance in China in 1579 and 1582, respectively. See also Ricci, Matteo, \textit{Dieci capitoli di un uomo strano ; seguito da, Otto canzoni per manicordo occidentale}. Ed. by Filippo Mignini. Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010. The \textit{Dieci capitoli} was originally conceived and printed in Chinese in 1608.

with great interest and curiosity about astrology and mathematics and they take us into great consideration; and this causes great discredit and loss of earnings to their *bonzes* [Buddhist monks], because the things that we teach about the movement of the Sun, the Moon and the planets, the representation of the elements, and other teaching dealing with methereology, thus being in complete accordance with reason and experience, *just* make them fall into the truth of these and *make* them realize how absurd are the opinions and stories of their *bonzes*.23

The reference to the shogun Tokugawa Hidetada invites one to reconsider the complete veracity of the episode, in favor of a probable emphatic literary transformation through which the Jesuits active in Japan aimed at communicating to their *confrères* in Europe the prestige of their interlocutors and therefore, implicitly, the success of their mission. Nevertheless, while also taking into account a certain degree of literary construction, it is relatively simple to recognize in this passage of the *Annua de Iapam* the same circular argument that links through a red line Buddhist scientific, eschatological and moral inconsistencies, a trope also developed by Ricci to contrast his Chinese Buddhist interlocutors.

At the same time. It is still worth recalling that, in Japan, cosmographic concepts whipped up great debates not only in the period of the Jesuit presence, but also after their expulsion in 1614, as exemplified in a work such the *Kenkon Bensetsu* 乾坤弁説 (Commentary on the Heavens and Earth), a treatise on Aristotelian cosmology and cosmography, translated into Japanese in 1643 by a former Portuguese Jesuit, Christóvão Ferreira (1580-1650), who apostatized and took the Japanese name of Sawano Chūan.24 The treatise, recently studied into details by José Miguel Pinto dos Santos and Henrique Leitão, was translated on the orders of Inoue Masashige (1584-1661), Inspector General against the “Pagans,” that is the Christians, was also commented on by Mukai Genshō (1609-1677), a distinguished Confucian scholar of Nagasaki, who discussed and compared Aristotelian theory in the light of Confucianism.25


The *compositio loci* and the roots of the Jesuit cosmographic mind

As a conclusion to these brief and preliminary reflections, there is a further and crucial element that deserve to be highlighted, or at the least mentioned. The sixteenth century was marked by the development and deployment of spiritual practices that were rooted in the tradition of spiritual exercises, largely inherited from antiquity and the Middle Ages. Geography and cosmography were mobilized within these meditative practices and this was also done through references to maps and globes. Spiritual meditation found a key instrument in globes and maps of the world, especially with respect to Saint Ignatius' *compositio loci* (composition of place), a form of visual and spatial imagination for facilitating the meditation and the personal encounter with Jesus and the mysteries of the Catholic faith. Maps could help to locate the stories narrated in the Bible, to visualize the vicissitudes of Christ and the apostles. Following examples derived from Antiquity, for instance Macrobius' commentary on the *Dream of Scipio*, they also make it possible to look at the world from above through the construction of a point of view, of a high observatory, that permits a distant view of the things of the world. This latter practice tends to generate a moral perspective, either in the form of the vanity of worldly matters or in the form of contemplation of the creation. Well beyond their geographical or technical contents, these ideas transformed cosmography and cartography into powerful meditative tools, especially for the concretization of the *compositio loci*.

A brief consideration of some passages from the ‘Second week’ of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola clearly shows the use of contemplation of the world within the practice of *compositio loci*, a key part of the contemplative practices developed by Saint Ignatius to help people deepen their relationship with God.

26 Nicolas Standaert eloquently writes: ‘At the start of the first meditation in the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius advises that one should ‘see the place’, and he calls this ‘prelude’ or preliminary the ‘composition’. He describes the process as follows: “It should be noted here that for contemplation or meditation about visible things, for example a contemplation on Christ our Lord (who is visible), the “composition” will consist in seeing through the gaze of the imagination the material place where the object I want to contemplate is situated. By “material place” I mean for example a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or our Lady is to be found-according to what I want to contemplate. Where the object is an invisible one, as is the case in the present meditation on sins, the composition will be to see with the gaze of the imagination, and to consider, that my soul is imprisoned in this body which will one day disintegrate, and also my whole composite self (by this I mean the soul joined with the body), as if exiled in this valley among brute beasts”. (Exx 47).’ Cf. Nicolas Standaert, ‘The Composition of Place: Creating Space for an Encounter’, *The Way*, 46/1 (Jan. 2007), 7-20 (7-8). See also Michel de Certeau, ‘L’espace du désir ou le “fondement” des Exercices spirituels’, *Christus*, 77 (1973), 118-28; and Pierre-Antoine Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola: Le Lieu de l’image: Le problème de la composition de lieu dans les pratiques spirituelles et artistiques jésuites de la seconde moitié du XVle siècle*. Paris: Vrin, 1992.

[102] Here, it is how the Three Divine Persons looked at all the plain or circuit of all the world, full of men, and how, seeing that all were going down to Hell, it is determined in Their Eternity, that the Second Person shall become man to save the human race, and so, the fullness of times being come, They sent the Angel St. Gabriel to Our Lady.

[103] Second Prelude. The second, a composition, seeing the place: here it will be to see the great capacity and circuit of the world, in which are so many and such different people: then likewise, in particular, the house and rooms of Our Lady in the city of Nazareth, in the Province of Galilee.

The terms ‘circuit of the world’ (a translation of the Spanish expression ‘redondez de todo el mundo’, in Latin, orbis terrarum) clearly refers to the Earth as observed from above but at the same can refer to a map of the world, such as Ortelius’ Typus orbis terrarum, or Ricci’s and Li’s Kunyu wanguo quantu. In this context, it is important to underline that until very recent times, planispheres and globes were the only cognitive objects that allowed the visual contemplation of the entire Earth, created by God: for this reason they both constituted privileged vehicles of meditation.

Here it is not at all suggested that, in the contexts of the Jesuit missions of China and Japan maps and cosmography were a form of spiritual exercises. It is instead suggested that they could be better understood when considered from the perspective of being at the same time cognitive objects transmitting geographic and scientific knowledge and a meditative viaticum. It is a theme that goes back very far into the history of Christian medieval preaching and more importantly informed the meditative practices of the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus.

Ricci and his Chinese collaborators and interlocutors, Pedro Gomez and Spinola, and their Japanese interlocutors, the Japanese painters that depicted the magnificent Jesuit residence in the nanban folding screens in the Nanban Bunkakan of Osaka, all seems to show awareness of the importance of cosmographical concepts and images as identitarian viaticum on which the inculturation of the Catholic Christian faith in God creator of the universe could be grounded or at least attempted.

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