

# *Tuhaos with Hongbaos* are Going to the English World: Study on the Features of Chinese English Neologisms Based on Web

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## Abstract

This article discusses the features, reasons, and values of the mushrooming Chinese English neologisms (CENs). Generally speaking, CENs are a variety of English words, namely Chinese English words, some of which have entered Oxford English Dictionary (OED). Based on data from Web Corp Live, the author finds that: (1) CENs take on the grammatical and morphological characteristics of English words, such as inflection and derivation, which are not found in the previous related studies; (2) CENs belong specific semantic domains, which are closely related to China's latest social, economic, cultural development in the network era. CENs are the production of language contact between Chinese and English in the time of Internet. CENs possess important values to observe or understand Chinese new social phenomena and to promote the communications between the Chinese and the English world.

**Keywords:** corpus, Chinese English neologisms, language contact

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Chinese English Neologisms

Chinese English neologisms (CENs, hereafter) display the social and economic development, the popularization of the internet, and the frequent cultural communications in China. For example, the CENs *tuhao* ('nouveau riche') and *diaosi* ('underprivileged loser') reflect the economic and social gap between the rich and the poor in China; *Hongbao*, especially, the digital *hongbao* is the result of the popularization of the internet and social communication tools, such as Weixin ('微信') and Alipay ('支付宝') in China; *dama* ('middle-aged women') reflects the living status of the rich middle-aged woman in China. CENs like *tuhao*, *diaosi* and *dama* are widely used not only in China but also in the English world. According to the recent report *A Survey of Overseas Discourses on Chinese Discourse* (China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration, 2018), CENs or Romanized Chinese words in the form of pinyin are widely used by people in eight major English-speaking countries: Britain, the United States, Australia, Canada, South Africa, India, Singapore and the Philippines. CENs also attract the attention of lexicographers. It has been found that *hongbao* was recorded in Oxford Dictionary when we searched the online Oxford Dictionary for the above three neologisms ([en.oxforddictionaries.com](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com), 2017), and *Tuhao* and *diaosi* have entered the Urban dictionary ([urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com), 2017).

### 1.2 Literature Review

As a matter of fact, CENs are a sub-type of the vocabulary of Chinese English, which has been acknowledged by scholars (Xu, 2010; Eaves, 2011; Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Botha, 2014; Hu, 2016; Xu, et al, 2017). The terms, *China English* or *Chinese English* (CE, hereafter), mean "English with Chinese characteristics" (Pinkham, 2000). CENs can be classified into the 'inner circle CE lexis' of Xu (2010), which reflects the social change, economic development, Chinese culture, and shows the linguistic creativity of netizens. Though there are studies related to CE words (Yang, 2005; Xu, 2010; Xu & Tian, 2017), the inflection-morphological changes of CENs or romanized pinyin words are not noticed or observed. Based on 'mega-corpus', it can be found that the inflection-morphological changes of CENs are gradually emerging in recent years.

### 1.3 The Objective of the Research

Based on the corpora WCL, and iWeb, the article focuses on the three questions related to CENs: 1) What semantic domains do they belong to? 2) Do they have inflectional-morphological changes? 3) What influence do they have on English and Chinese? The author considers that CENs are semantically related to the new culture, economic and social phenomena of China; their forms are influenced by Chinese and English together and inflectional-morphological changes are emerging; they are the results of frequent contact between Chinese and English in cyber times. In the following sections, the author firstly introduces the methodology of the study, then discusses the semantic domain features and grammatical-morphological forms of CENs, and eventually analyses the influence and the values of CENs.

## 2. Research method

### 2.1 Object

The CENs of this research are taken from the following sources: (1) top 100 words of the report *A Survey of Overseas Discourses on Chinese Discourse* (ibid); and (2) top 10 internet catchwords of *Yaowen Jiaozi* (2010-2017), which is an authoritative journal on Chinese characters. From the above two resources, the author chooses the 10 shared CENs (see Table 1) to conduct this research.

Table 1. 10 CENs

CENs	Chinese	English meaning	in OED	in Urban Dict
tuhao	土豪	vulgar rich	×	√
diaosi	屌丝	underprivileged losers	×	√
dama	大妈	middle-aged woman	×	√
hongbao	红包	money-in-red envelope	√	×
hukou	户口	an official document	√	×
jiaozi	饺子	dumpling	√	√
guanxi	关系	social networks	×	√
renminbi	人民币	currency of China	√	×
shanzhai	山寨	mock production	×	√
geili	给力	giving strength	×	×

### 2.2 Corpus

In order to observe the inflectional-morphological features of CENs, the author use Web Corp Live (Note 1) (WCL, hereafter) and ‘iWeb: the Intelligent Web-based Corpus as corpus (Note 2)’ (iWeb, hereafter) for this research. There are a lot of advantages using the large web-corpus or super-scale online corpus to study the neologisms, especially the low-frequency neologisms: (1) super-large size, (2) dynamic, (3) openness and (4) diverse-genre sources.

The size of the corpus is very important to study the linguistic phenomena related to the low-frequency words or structures. Davies (2009) points “... that any corpus that is much smaller than the 385+ million word COCA (such as the 100 million words BNC) is certainly going to miss many of these very low-frequency items”.

WCL is a tool allowing access to the World Wide Web as a super-larger corpus from which facts about the language can be retrieved. WCL, which is different from search engines, such as *Google* and *Baidu*, is designed to retrieve linguistic data from the Web: lists concordance lines with the context where search words occur, which are more useful for linguistic research than raw data from search engines like *Google* and *Baidu*. The size of iWeb is 19 billion and it contains linguistic texts produced in 2017 from six English speaking countries: America, Canada, Australia, Britain, Ireland, and New Zealand, which is useful for verifying the claim that the use of the inflection of CENs is the English-native speakers. The size of WCL and iWeb is super-scale, which is useful for retrieving the low-frequency words or discovering the emerging linguistic phenomena. Consequently, the author uses the above two corpora to study CENs, especially to discover the emerging inflectional changes of CENs.

### 2.3 Procedures

Firstly, inputting the 10 CENs individually (see Table 1) in the search box of WCL and searching, the author obtains concordances, which are used to analyze the inflectional changes. Retrieving the 10 CENs individually, the author sets up the searching interface of WCL as follows: Case Insensitive “yes”, Span “50 characters”, Search Engine “FAROO”, language “English”. The retrieval time is on 22, February 2018, and after eliminating the unrelated concordances, the retrieval statistical results can be seen in Table 2. In order to verify that the plural forms of *tuhao*, *dama*, *hongbao*, *hukou*, *jiaozi* and *renminbi* are just used by English native-speakers, the author retrieves them in iWeb. See the results in Table 3.

Secondly, the analysis of semantic domains of CENs is based on the classification of the report *A Survey of Overseas Discourses on Chinese Discourse* (ibid) and based on the phenomena that are referred by the CENs.

Thirdly, analyze the grammatical and morphological forms of CENs.

Finally, the author explores the reason why the CENs take on inflectional-morphological features, the influence of CENs on English and Chinese, and the values of CENs.

## 3. Features

### 3.1 Semantic Domains of CENs

Many CENs are coined in the passing decade, resulting from China’s fast development economic, the popularity of the internet, and the increasing gap of the rich and the poor. According to the report *A Survey of Overseas Discourses on Chinese Discourse*, CENs mainly refer to the four semantic domains: social life, internet and economic, unique culture, and government policy and affairs. The CENs related to social phenomena, the internet and culture generally reflect social changes, thought change, internet technology development, and societal issues. For instance, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor gives rise to *tuhao*, *dama* and *diaosi*; the Chinese giant internet companies, such as Alibaba, Alipay, and TenCENst, gives rise to digital *hongbao*, which is widely and frequently used in the daily life of Chinese citizens; the widespread of mock productions in China gives rise to *shanzhai*. It is reported that 0.768 billion netizens are receiving and sending *hongbao* by Weixin during the 2018 Spring Festival (Note 3).

As for economic fast development, government policy and affairs, there are *yuan*, *renminbi*, and *hukou*, which are catchwords in China and have entered OED. Other Chinese-unique-food CENs includes *baozi* ‘A Chinese steamed bread roll with a filling of meat or vegetables’, and *jiaozi* ‘dumpling’, which are recorded in the OED. So it can be said that: (1) CENs promptly reflect the social change, the economic development, internet change and culture of China; (2) Some CENs are going to the English world, even the global, and they are welcomed by English speakers, especially the English speaker netizens. This statement is also verified by the reCENstly issued report *A Survey of Overseas Discourses on Chinese Discourse*, which lists the top 100 Chinese Pinyin words with the highest cognition degrees in the English world.

### 3.2 Inflectional-morphological Forms

Table 2. The inflectional-morphological changes of 10 CENs

CENs	Concordance	inflection	POS	Derivation form
tuhao	tuhao: 216(Note 4); tuhaos: 4	-s	N, adj.	×
diaosi	116	×	N, adj.	×
dama	dama: 60; damas:68	-s	N	×
hongbao	hongbao: 125; hongbaos: 4	-s	N	×
hukou	hukou: 554; hukous: 5	-s	N, adj.	×
jiaozi	jiaozi: 1453; jiaozis:7	-s	N	×
guanxi	guanxi: 323	×	N	×
renminbi	renminbi:953; renminbis (Note 5): 77	-s	N	×
shanzhai	169	×	N, V	post- <i>shanzhai</i> (Note 6)
geili	9	×	V, adj.	<i>geili</i> -vable (Note7)

With the increase of Chinese pinyin words into the English world and frequent use, pinyin words, namely CE vocabulary, or CENs called in this article gradually take on the grammatical and morphological features of English. As a matter of fact, there is no morphological change for Chinese characters or words in Chinese texts (Lin, 2013). It is known that the Chinese words or Pinyin don't exist grammatical and inflectional-morphological changes when they are used in Chinese sentences. However, with the increase of using frequency in internet communications, newspapers, or journals by CE speakers, some inflectional-morphological features of CENs are gradually emerging. Though the grammatical and inflectional-morphological features of CENs are emerging, the occurrence frequency is rare. Hence, the grammatical and inflectional-morphological features of CENs can not be easily observed or detected without the 'mega-corpus' like WCL or iWeb. For example, Xu & Tian (2017) claim that there are no inflectional changes in China English Vocabulary (CEV), such as *tuhao*, *dama*, *hongbao*, *yuesao*, and so on. They said: "the form of almost all transliterations, or pinyin versions of Chinese words, is fixed without any inflection (Xu & Tian, 2017)". The statement that CEV doesn't exist inflection in Xu & Tian (2017) has resulted from the two major reasons: (1) the corpus size is not larger enough, though they use the *China Daily* website as the web-corpus; (2) the majority of users of the CEV are from Chinese journalists and they may use the CEV according to the Chinese rules so that the inflectional changes of CEV in *China Daily* website can not be retrieved.

When the author uses the WCL to retrieve the 10 CENs, which can supply diverse usage origins and super-large language materials, it can be found that 6 out of the 10 CENs in Table 1 exist the obvious plural inflection: *tuhaos*, *damas*, *hongbaos*, *hukous* and *renminbis*. To the 6 CENs nouns, there are obvious usage differences in the singular and plural forms. See the following concordances which are retrieved in WCL.

- (1) ...On Saturday internet users ridiculed *another tuhao* who proposed to his girlfriend by splashing out.
- (2) ...\$83.2 million sale 6:03 PM, Wed, 13 Nov 2013 *tuhaos* have become the chief target of ridicule on the...
- (3) ...to give me the money! At the critical moment, *a dama* who was a cleaner in the bank attacked the mad...
- (4) ...changing that. They surveyed more than 1,000 *damas* across the country between 2012 and June this...
- (5) ...It's not just the cost of the *hongbaos*, but I also have to travel to see all my family...
- (6) ...of its roughly 14 million residents have urban *hukou* classification. After a quarter century of...
- (7) ...favored urban residents; holders of agricultural *hukous* were unable to access these benefits and were...
- (8) ...is that China's authorities have long wanted the *renminbi* to gain a coveted status as a global reserve...
- (9) ...Citic Bank has launched time deposit rates in *renminbis* offering up to 1.8% a year, and more local banks...

Concordance (1), (3), (6), and (8) indicate that *tuhao*, *dama*, *hukou* and *renminbi* are the singular form, while Concordance (2), (4), (5), (7), and (9) indicate that *tuhaos*, *damas*, *hongbaos*, *hukous* and *renminbis* are the plural form by adding the plural inflection *-s*.

There are more than one kind of part of speech for some CENs. For example, *tuhao* and *hukou* can be used as noun or adjective:

- (10)...they decried as the latest example of a Chinese "*tuhao*" with more money than sense.
- (11)...since I have four long legs. But that seems too *tuhao* so I kept it down to two, which totally fits my...
- (12)...and urban citizens called hukou. While urban *hukou* get a number of social benefits, including...
- (13)...be given for ethnicity, gender or religion. The *hukou* registration system was specifically mentioned.

In the concordance (10) and (12), the CENs *tuhao* and *hukou* are used as noun respectively while in (11) and (13) *tuhao* and *hukou* are used as an adjective.

Some CENs even have derived the derivatives, such as *shanzhai* → **post-shanzhai**, *geili* → **geili-vable** in the following concordance:

- (14)...Shanzhai manufacturing is witnessing the advent of a new **post-shanzhai** era.
- (15)...In this year, "**geilivable**" had been recognized by the use of some official media in china, such as People's Daily.

In (14), *-shanzhai* is a suffix, and in (15) *-geili* is a prefix.

Another grammatical and morphological feature of CENs revealed by corpus data is that the inflection-morphological changes are mainly used by English-native speakers while Chinese and Chinese officials seldom use. The 6 CENs with the plural form: *tuhaos*, *damas*, *hongbaos*, *hukous*, and *renminbis* can not

be retrieved in the typical CE website *China Daily* (Note 8) while they can be retrieved in the corpus iWeb. See Table 3 for the retrieval results. Hence the author can say the inflection-morphological changes of CENs are mainly shaped and used by English native speakers and CE speakers from China hardly use the inflectional changes.

Table 3. Plural form and frequency of 6 CENs in iWeb

CENs	plural forms	Frequency (in 2017)
tuhao	tuhaos	1
dama	damas	31 (Note 9)
hongbao	hongbaos	5
hukou	hukous	4
jiaozi	jiaozis	2
renminbi	renminbis	30

### 3.3 Difference between CENs and Chinese Pinyin

There are several differences between CENs and Chinese pinyin. Firstly, CENs are a kind of CE words, which take on a grammatical and morphological change of English, while the Chinese pinyin which is just a part of Chinese to record the pronunciation of Chinese characters, does not have grammatical and morphological change. In fact, the major function of Chinese pinyin is to record or teach the pronunciation of Chinese characters or words.

Secondly, Chinese pinyin is not used in writing or daily communications; one form of pinyin can match more than one Chinese characters or words; usually, the Chinese pinyin is used together with the symbol of the tone of intonation, such as ‘ā’ in *lā*, ‘á’ in *lá*, ‘ǎ’ in *lǎ*, and ‘à’ in *là*. However, one of the major functions of CENs is used in the writing or daily communications, not in recording or teaching the pronunciation; the meanings of CENs are clear and fixed, usually one form with one meaning; there are no symbols of the tone of intonation like pinyin.

Thirdly, another important difference between CENs and pinyin is that the pronunciation of CENs is different from the pronunciation of pinyin of the corresponding Chinese characters or words. For instance, the CENs, *jiaozi* is read as /'dʒaodzi/ (en.oxforddictionaries.com, 2018), while the pinyin for Chinese characters ‘饺子’ is *jiǎo zi*. Meanwhile, the CENs are the carriers of social phenomena, culture and government policy that particularly belong to China.

The author can say that with the increase of using frequency, the grammatical and morphological features of CENs are gradually emerging, and then further enrich and shape the vocabulary of CE.

## 4. Discussion and Implication

The CENs mainly come from the internet and the media; the original Chinese of CENs initially are created and used by Chinese netizens or grassroots; and they are used and accepted by the English speakers or journals through the internet and the media. More and more CENs are coined and entering the English world; the CENs has great influence on English and Chinese. The CENs will play a much more significant role in introducing China policy, culture and social phenomena and also CENs are a key window for the English world to know the “modern” China. These will be discussed in the following.

### 4.1 Sources and Record of CENs

The major source of CENs is from the internet and media. CENs have the origin of corresponding Chinese words so that CENs are initially widely used in the grassroots daily internet communications, and then are accepted by the Chinese official media such as *China daily* website (china daily.com.cn) and *people’s daily* website (en.people.cn) in articles, and comments. After high frequently using in China, CENs are gradually used in the English native speaker’s websites, newspapers, journal articles, blogs, video reports, and so on. With the increase of the using frequency of some CENs in the English world, some CENs have to be added to the authoritative English dictionaries, such as OED. It is reported that there are more than 120 Chinese pinyin words or CENs that have been recorded in OED (Note 10). See Table 1 for recording details about the 10 CENs. However, some of the Chinese pinyin words or CENs are not frequently used by the Chinese netizens or accepted by English native speakers after a period of their coinage. For example, *no zuo no die* is popular in China in 2014, and after reaching the peak, the using frequency is decreasing and even vanishes at last, see Figure 1 for details. However,

*no zuo no die* can not be retrieved in WCL so that it suggests that the pinyin word *no zuo no die* ('not do stupid things') is not used or accepted by native English speakers. Whether pinyin words can become CE words and accepted by English-native speakers or ELF speakers, they must be tested by time.



Figure 1. The diachronic using change of *no zuo no die* in China, from baidu index

#### 4.2 Reasons for the Emergence and the Inflection

There are three major reasons for the emergence of CENs in recent years. Firstly, with the fast economic development and the increasing gap between the poor and the rich, some new social phenomena, concepts and issues are emerging in China, which produces many Chinese neologisms. Many of the Chinese neologisms are transliterated into English words so CENs are produced. Secondly, with the progress of science and technology, and the popularity of internet communication tools and the mobile communication tools in China, the netizens or grassroots can freely express their ideas, point views, by creating new neologisms. Thirdly, the language contact and cultural communication between China and English speaking countries are much more frequent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and then there are many internet neologisms emerging each year in China. The content or signifier of the Chinese neologisms is introduced to English-native speakers by transliteration so that many a CENs related to the Chinese neologisms appear and are popular in the English world. All in all, fast internet communication has changed the previous situation: the traditional Chinese conceptions of social realities were mainly introduced by official or scholar translation, but now the new conceptions and ideas are vastly introduced by netizens through the internet so that a great number of CENs are emerging and diffusing in the English world. With the increase of CENs, many of them vastly spread in the English world and are frequently used by English-native speakers. According to English grammar, the noun is divided into singular form and plural form, and the inflectional suffix *-s* is added to the plural form of nouns. Hence, it is natural that some CENs are added the plural inflectional suffix, such as *-s*, when English native speakers use CENs. Therefore, the inflectional changes of some CENs are gradually emerging when they are used in the sentences. Based on the retrieval results of the 10 CENs from WCL and iWeb, the author can say that some CENs gradually take on the inflectional morphological features.

#### 4.3 Influence on English and Chinese

With the increase of CENs, they will have a great influence on English and Chinese. English belongs to alphabetic systems while Chinese is a hieroglyphics system. English is intrinsically different from Chinese. Before *Ma Jianzhong's Grammar* (Ma, 1983), Chinese and English independently developed because of the limitation of language contact between Chinese and English. However, with the development of communication tools, especially the internet and mobile phones, the language contact between Chinese and English is much more frequent, which results in the fusion of the two languages to some extent, which means that Chinese and English can acquire each other features to certain degrees. Zhou & Feng (1987) had noticed the trends of Englishization of Chinese and nativization of English, which occurred in morphological, semantic and syntactic levels. With the much more frequent language contact between Chinese and English in cyber times, CENs will further promote the dynamic and interactive process of Englishization of Chinese and Chinesization of English in the lexical level: (1) the emerging inflectional changes of CENs (such as *tuhao*→*tuhaos*, *hongbao*→*hongbaos*, *jiaozi*→*jiaozis*) suggest that the romanized Chinese words (pinyin words or CENs or CEV(Note 11)) acquire the inflectional features of English; (2) Some acronyms (such as *GDP*, *NBA*, *WTO*) vastly enter the official Chinese texts and documents (Note 12) and are read according to the English pronunciation, which suggest Chinese is affected by English in words level and phonological level; (3) the English-Chinese internet hybridized neologisms (such as *打call*, *hold住* and *word哥*) further demonstrate the deep fusion of English and Chinese in lexical level in cyber times. CENs also reflect some features of Chinesization of English: the concepts or origin of CENs is Chinese, the word pronunciation of CENs is quite

similar to their corresponding Chinese words, which might further shape the pronunciation features of CE.

The increase of CENs will facilitate the trend of the Chinesization of English at the lexical level. CENs can more accurately and phonetically introduce Chinese special food, culture, thought and some experience to the English world. For example, the CENs *jiaozi* which was translated dumplings before can more directly and phonetically express the original meaning of the Chinese word ‘饺子’, which can make the communication between Chinese and English more friendly and more convenient.

So the author can say that Englishization of Chinese and Chinesization of English are interactive in the cyber era, which are inevitable results of language contact of Chinese and English. So it is natural that the inflections change of CENs emerges.

#### 4.4 Values of CENs

There are some significant values of CENs. Firstly, CENs are one of the important windows for the English world to understand Chinese new social phenomena, Chinese new cultures, Chinese new conceptions, and new social changes, which are usually coded, expressed or popularized by Chinese neologisms. CENs are directly transliterated from Chinese neologisms so that CENs can more accurately and directly reflect Chinese reality than the traditional translated words from Chinese by scholars or official authorities.

Secondly, CENs can further promote communication between each other. Though CENs result from the frequent language contact between English and Chinese, the increase of CENs in turn facilitates the communication and understanding between Chinese and English world. From the research of *A Survey of Overseas Discourses on Chinese Discourse*, there is the trend that there will be more CENs in the English world, which are used to talk about China, to express China, or to understand China.

Thirdly, CENs are important carriers of Chinese culture, thought, social change, or new social phenomena. Language is the carrier of culture so that Chinese is the carrier of Chinese culture. CENs are transliterated from Chinese so that they are also carriers of Chinese culture and social phenomena. The CENs such as *hongbao* carries the Chinese traditional culture that the elders give the young money presented in a red envelope during Spring Festival. The other English words or expressions such as ‘money in red envelope’ can not phonetically and economically express the Chinese meaning of ‘红包’, like the CENs *hongbao*.

Finally, the emerging inflectional trend of CENs can further enrich and shape features of CE at the lexical level.

### 5. Conclusion

With the development of internet communication tools and high frequent language contact between English and Chinese, more and more CENs are emerging, are being used in the English world and are entering OED. Based on the concordance evidence from WCL, the inflection-morphological features of CENs are gradually emerging. CENs play an irreplaceable role in understanding Chinese social phenomena, Chinese culture, and social change. CENs also reflects some features of the Chinesization of English at the lexical level so that CENs will further shape the features of CE at the lexical level.

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### Notes

Note 1. See [www.webcorp.org.uk/live/](http://www.webcorp.org.uk/live/)

Note 2. See <https://corpus.byu.edu/iweb/>

Note 3. See [http://city.shenchuang.com/city/20180222/838465\\_2.shtml](http://city.shenchuang.com/city/20180222/838465_2.shtml)

Note 4. The number indicates the frequency of the word form retrieved in WCL.

Note 5. The plural form *reminbis* is retrieved by the WCL in the search engine 'bling'.

Note 6. 'post-*shanzhai*' is retrieved by the WCL in the search engine 'bling'.

Note 7. See [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-01/28/content\\_11930450.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-01/28/content_11930450.htm)

Note 8. China Daily website is the most influential English website, and the English articles are from Chinese journalists or Chinese officials so that the English in this website represents typical CE.

Note 9. Only calculate the plural forms related to the meaning '(Chinese) middle-aged ladies'.

Note 10. See [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2013-12/12/content\\_17170787.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2013-12/12/content_17170787.htm)

Note 11. See Xu & Tian (2017).

Note 12. In the Chinese Central Government Website, acronyms like those can be vastly retrieved by the interface

'<http://sousuo.gov.cn/s.htm?t=goval&advance=false&n=&timetype=&mintime=&maxtime=&sort=&q=>'

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