

A Study of the Event-Based Idealized Cognitive Model of Japanese Passives

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Abstract: This study investigates Japanese passive sentences within the theoretical framework of the Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM). The analysis demonstrates that the Japanese passive prototype is the direct affected passive, characterized by an obligatory agent (ni-phrase) and a processual event structure (“Patient affected + Agent performs action”), diverging from the stative focus of English/Chinese passives. The extension of Japanese passives—particularly indirect passives—relies on metaphorical expansion of the “Affectedness → Influence” gestalt, enabling subjects to include indirect patients and predicates to incorporate intransitive verbs. Unlike stative-oriented English/Chinese passives, Japanese indirect passives emphasize processual events, requiring additional clauses to express resultant states. Neutral passives, influenced by Western languages, are excluded as non-native constructions. The findings highlight that Japanese passives align with Croft’s causative event view rather than the stative view, underscoring a fundamental cross-linguistic divergence in passive conceptualization.

Keywords: Japanese passive constructions; Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM); direct affected passive; causative event view; cross-linguistic comparison

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1. Introduction

The passive voice, as one of the most distinctive syntactic constructions in human language, has long been a focal point of linguistic inquiry. As the field of linguistics has evolved from traditional sign-based approaches to cognitive frameworks emphasizing conceptual functions, passive constructions have similarly undergone a cognitive turn in research methodology. This paradigm shift has yielded significant cognitive-oriented findings, including Hu’s (2010) demonstration of passive voice as a product of logical thinking rather than objective-world representation^[1], Peng’s (2006) Gestalt-theoretic analysis of Russian-Chinese passive commonalities^[2], and Song (2024) argues that in Chinese bei-constructions, grammatical markers such as bei not only introduce the agent but primarily function as subjective markers, highlighting the speaker’s unfavorable attitude. From the perspective of empathy^[3], Lu (2025) further examines the target of empathy in bei-constructions and its specific manifestations^[4]. Zhang and Zhang (2009) and Zhang (2011) applied the billiard-ball model to Japanese active-passive alternations, analyzing them as sequential versus flashback event representations, respectively^[5,6].

The theoretical foundation for this study emerges from two pivotal cognitive models: Lakoff's (1987) Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM)^[7] and its specialized application in Croft's (1993) Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM)^[8]. Within the EICM framework, Croft established crucial correspondences between stative event perspectives and passive constructions. Subsequent research by Xiong and Wang (2001, 2005) identified agentless stative passives as prototypical in English and Chinese^[9,10], while Deng and Zeng (2011) further developed the extension mechanisms from these prototypes^[11].

Although EICM-based analyses have significantly advanced our understanding of English and Chinese passives, Japanese passive constructions remain remarkably understudied within this framework—a surprising oversight given Croft's explicit incorporation of Japanese in his universal linguistic hypothesis. To bridge this gap, the present study investigates three fundamental questions: (a) To what extent does the Japanese passive system conform to or diverge from EICM predictions? (b) What represents the prototypical Japanese passive within this model? (c) What developmental pathways characterize extended passive forms? Through a systematic EICM analysis of Japanese passives, this study not only addresses a critical theoretical lacuna but also reevaluates prevailing assumptions in passive typology.

2. The Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM)

Lakoff, in his seminal work *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987), proposed the Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM), defining it as a structured system for organizing knowledge^[7]. He identified four principal types of ICMs: the propositional model, image-schematic model, metaphoric model, and metonymic model. These models demonstrate strong explanatory power for categorization, prototypical phenomena, and prototype effects. As Lakoff (1987:135) emphasized, cognitive models serve as vital tools for interpreting semantic phenomena, particularly in explaining prototypical patterns^[7].

Building upon Lakoff's ICM, Croft (1993) developed the Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM) to analyze verbal representations of events in human language^[8]. The EICM's core postulates can be summarized as follows (Croft 1993:91-92)^[8]:

- (a) A simple event constitutes a node within the causal network of the objective world;
- (b) A simple event involves force-dynamics between entities (i.e., transmission of energy);
- (c) A simple event is self-contained, maintaining independence within the causal network;
- (d) Force transmission exhibits asymmetric properties;
- (e) A simple event forms an unbranched causal chain;
- (f) The event structure comprises a causal chain with three components: cause-become-state;
- (g) Events are endpoint-oriented: verbs may encode either (1) state alone, (2) spontaneous become + state, or (3) full causative sequence (cause-become-state).

The causal network described in (a) and (b) constitutes the foundational level of event conceptualization and linguistic encoding. The principle of self-containment in (c)—that “verb-represented events are self-contained”—can be understood alternatively as Croft (1993:93) suggests: such events inherently contain both a cause and a result. This dual-aspect nature defines what we term a teleonomically complete event^[8]. The self-containment hypothesis represents the second level of event conceptualization, where grammatical subjects and objects encode the initiator and endpoint of the verbal event, respectively, while oblique noun phrases denote other event participants. This second-level conceptualization serves as Croft's core premise for analyzing voice within the ICM framework.

The internal structure of events, as outlined in (f) and (g), follows a tripartite sequence: cause → become → state. This structure gives rise to three distinct event views in verbal encoding: the causative event view (expressing the full cause-become-state sequence), the inchoative event view (expressing only the become-state sequence), and the stative event view (expressing only the resultant state).

The causative event view consists of three components: “cause-become-state”. In this construction, the subject encodes the cause while the object represents the result. The subject, as the starting point of the event, functions as the controller, whereas the object serves as the affected patient^[8].

The inchoative event view comprises two elements: “become-state.” Here, the subject assumes a dual role as both the affected entity of the action and the controller (i.e., the starting point of the self-contained event). This configuration alternatively indicates that the subject operates independently of external causation^[8].

The stative event view contains a single component: “state.” In this perspective, the predicate presents the subject as simply existing in a particular state. Crucially, the subject in stative events does not function as a prototypical controller. Rather, it demonstrates equivalent control potential relative to other nominal elements in the clause^[8].

3. Passive Voice and the EICM

Croft (1993) establishes a theoretical link between the Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM)^[8] and Klaiman’s (1988) voice framework^[12], showing how causative/inchoative/stative event views correspond to active/middle/passive voices. Though both analyze the cause-become-state structure, they use different grammatical approaches. This analysis focuses on the stative-passive relationship.

Croft’s (1990) cross-linguistic study of English, French, Japanese and Korean establishes unmarked stative events as prototypical expressions of intrinsic properties - states independent of external causation^[13]. This aligns with Lakoff’s^[7] view of unmarked categories as cognitively basic. Such “internal properties” denote states not resulting from specific causal processes.

The theoretical framework nevertheless accommodates the stative construal of typically action-oriented events with external causes, what Croft (1993:110) terms “stative passives” (e.g., “The window is broken”)^[8]. These constructions present significant analytical challenges in English, as they inherently resist agent phrases while remaining difficult to distinguish from pure stative or inchoative event views. Their classification as passive forms relies on the theoretical assumption of an implicit external cause distinct from the grammatical subject. The potential inclusion of reason phrases (e.g., “...thanks to your son”) in such constructions reveals their intermediate status - while approximating ideal stative events, they simultaneously deviate from this prototype, much like how the modifier “adoptive” qualifies the prototypical concept of “mother”.

Within this theoretical continuum, we may identify three distinct but related constructions: prototypical stative events expressing intrinsic properties without external causation; quasi-prototypical stative passives that closely resemble these prototypes while permitting reason phrases; and non-prototypical agentive passives that substantially deviate from EICM parameters through their explicit inclusion of agents.

Croft’s (1993) diachronic analysis shows stative constructions evolving to include agent markers, shifting focus from states to processes^[8]. This involves: agent emergence, patient subject demotion, and verb retransitivization - with cross-linguistic variation in object incorporation (especially English vs. Asian languages).

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, this evolution represents a fundamental transformation from self-contained agentless passives through transitional agentive passives to fully developed causative constructions. Crucially, as Croft (1993) emphasizes, agentive passives constitute non-conforming elements within the EICM framework, serving instead as pivotal transitional forms that facilitate the reinterpretation of stative/inchoative events through causative lenses^[8].

In summary, Croft’s analysis establishes clear theoretical distinctions between three types of stative expressions: the prototypical unmarked stative event denoting intrinsic properties without external force; the quasi-prototypical stative passive sentence; and the non-prototypical agentive passive, which effectively transforms stative events into processual events and represents an intermediate stage in the reinterpretation of event views. This systematic examination reveals how passive constructions occupy varying positions within the EICM framework, ranging from core stative representations to transitional forms that bridge stative and causative conceptualizations.

4. Japanese Passive Voice from the EICM Perspective

Based on the foregoing analysis, this paper will examine the prototype and its extended forms of Japanese passive sentences within the theoretical framework of the EICM.

4.1. Classification of Japanese Passive Sentences

The Japanese passive construction exhibits significant semantic complexity, with its classification long debated in linguistics. Two major traditions dominate its analysis: the Matsushita School and the Mikami School. Matsushita (1930) first distinguished adversative from neutral passives^[14], later reframed by Masuoka (1982) as affected vs. demoted passives^[15]. Both systems analyze (a) syntactic agent marking via the *ni*-particle and (b) semantic subject affectedness. Masuoka and Cheng (2016) further refined this into affected passives (subject experiences agent influence) and neutral passives (no such affectedness)^[16], as shown below:

(1) *Ippon totta gakusei wa... refurī ni teishi sare, otonashiku natta.*

(The student who scored a point... was stopped by the referee and became quiet.)

(Shiba Ryōtarō, *Nanban no Michi*)

(2) *Tokidoki soko ni tamuro shite iru jimoto no ojiisan-tachi ni sugoku tsumetai me de jiro tto mirareru koto ga aru.*

(Sometimes, I am stared at with very cold eyes by the local old men who loiter there.)

(Murakami Haruki, *Uten Enten*)

(3) *Kokuritsu Minzokugaku Hakubutsukan no shodai kanchō, Umesao Tadao no shucho “Nihon Tanken” ga Kōdansha Gakujutsu Bunko kara shuppan sareta.*

(The principal work “Exploration of Japan” by Umesao Tadao, the first director of the National Museum of Ethnology, was published by Kōdansha Academic Library.)

(*Asahi Shimbun Evening Edition*, 2014.10.27)

(4) *Kon teireikai de wa, 53 gian ga kaketsu saremashita.*

(In this regular session, 53 bills were approved.)

(“*Uji Municipal Newsletter*”, March 2015)

(5) *1672-nen, Nihonkai kara Setonaikai keiyu de Edo ni itaru “Nishimawari Kōro” ga Kawamura Zuiken ni yotte kaitaku sareta...*

(In 1672, the “Western Sea Route” from the Sea of Japan to Edo via the Seto Inland Sea was developed by Kawamura Zuiken...)

(*Asahi Shimbun Evening Edition*, 2015.5.16)

A clear distinction emerges between the two passive constructions in both syntactic and semantic terms. Sentences (1) and (2) exemplify affected passives, while (3)-(5) demonstrate neutral passives. Syntactically, affected passives obligatorily mark their agents with *ni*-phrases, whereas neutral passives either omit agent marking altogether or optionally employ compound markers such as *kara* or *ni yotte*^[16]. This contrast reveals a fundamental grammatical difference: the *ni*-phrase agent constitutes an essential argument in affected passives, while agent-marking remains peripheral in neutral constructions.

The semantic dimension requires particular clarification regarding Masuoka’s specialized use of “affectedness”. While passive subjects are universally analyzed as affected entities in linguistic theory^[8], Masuoka’s framework operationalizes this notion differently. Crucially, the degree of patient affectedness directly correlates with the subject’s suitability for passive constructions, as evidenced by the following contrast:

(6) *Tāmen zhēngfú le gāoshān. → Gāoshān bèi tāmen zhēngfú le.*

(They conquered the mountain. → The mountain was conquered by them.)

(7) *Tāmen dēngshàng le gāoshān. → *Gāoshān bèi tāmen dēngshàng le.*

(They ascended the mountain. → *The mountain was ascended by them.)

(8) *Jūnduì gōngrù le cūnzhuāng. → Cūnzhuāng bèi jūnduì gōngrù le.*

(The army invaded the village. → The village was invaded by the army.)

(9) *Jūnduì jìnrù le cūnzhuāng. → *Cūnzhuāng bèi jūnduì jìnrù le.*

(The army entered the village. → *The village was entered by the army.)

Cross-linguistic evidence from human cognition demonstrates that the degree of patient affectedness in examples (6) and (8) markedly exceeds that in (7) and (9). This differential explains why passivization proves grammatically natural in the former cases but unacceptable in the latter.

Masuoka's conceptualization of "affectedness" specifically pertains to the speaker's perspectival alignment with the passive subject (patient). As established in Masuoka's (1991, 2009) framework, when speakers adopt the patient's viewpoint and subjectively construe the event as personally experienced, they employ an internal perspective that encodes genuine affectedness - what Masuoka terms an "affected event",^{[17][18]}. Conversely, an external perspective emerges when speakers maintain an observational stance, objectively describing events without adopting the patient's experiential viewpoint, resulting in what Masuoka characterizes as "non-affected" event representation.

This theoretical distinction parallels the dichotomy proposed by the Mikami School, where Mikami (1953) first differentiated between prototypical "true passives" and pragmatically marked "adversative passives"^[19]. Teramura (1982) subsequently refined this classification into "direct passives" versus "indirect passives", based on two criteria features: (a) syntactic correspondence with active constructions, and (b) the directness versus indirectness of patient affectedness^[20]. While sentences (1) and (2) exemplify direct passives, the following illustrate indirect passive constructions:

(10) Y-shi wa yūjin ni saki ni bungakushō o jushō sareta.

([Mr. Y was adversely affected because] his friend received a literary prize before him.)

(11) Sono tame uka uka to shinarete shimaimashita.

(Because of that, [I was adversely affected as] that person carelessly died.)

(Matsumoto Seichō, Ten to Sen)

Japanese indirect passives exhibit a distinct syntactic-semantic configuration wherein the grammatical subject, while not serving as the verb's direct patient, nevertheless experiences indirect affectedness from the denoted action or event. As extensively documented in the literature^[16], this construction type conventionally conveys negative affective valence, a characteristic noted by numerous scholars.

Building upon these observations, Masuoka and Cheng (2016) synthesized both theoretical traditions to propose a comprehensive taxonomy of Japanese passives^[16]. This unified classification system comprises two primary categories with three subtypes: Affected Passives, further subdivided into Direct Affected Passives and Indirect Affected Passives; and Neutral Passives. The complete typological framework is presented in **Figure 1**.

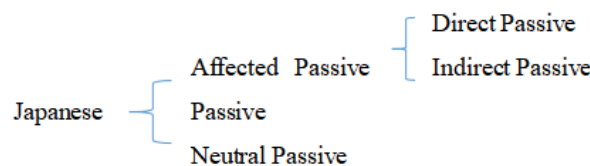


Figure 1. Classification of Japanese Passives (Masuoka and Cheng 2016)

4.2. Prototype of Japanese Passive Sentences from the EICM Perspective

Scholarly consensus regarding passive constructions has been significantly influenced by Croft's (1993) theoretical proposition^[8] that event views correspond to basic voices. Following this framework, several researchers have posited that the semantic prototype for English and Chinese passives consists of a "patient + state" configuration, wherein agentless stative passives represent the prototypical form^[9,11]. This perspective finds support in Keenan and Dryer's (1981) cross-linguistic study of passive constructions, which similarly identified the "basic passive" - exemplified by sentences like (12) "John was slapped (by Mary)" —as the prototype^[17]. From a syntactic perspective, such basic passives demonstrate subject alternation and argument reduction relative to their active counterparts, while maintaining semantic equivalence in terms of argument roles^[16].

However, this theoretical framework proves inadequate when applied to Japanese passive constructions. The crucial

distinction emerges from diachronic evidence concerning the relationship between affected and neutral passives in Japanese. Matsushita's (1930) seminal work established that neutral passives constitute non-native elements in Japanese^[14], a position subsequently developed by Kinsui (1991, 1993, 1997) through his demonstration that adversative (affected) passives represent indigenous Japanese constructions^[21,22,23]. This historical linguistic evidence suggests that affected passives, as native constructions naturally aligned with Japanese cognitive models of event representation, constitute the genuine prototype in Japanese, whereas neutral passives represent later developments influenced by Western linguistic structures.

Building upon the established understanding that passive subjects universally constitute affected entities^[8], with the degree of affectedness directly correlating with their suitability as passive subjects, we observe a crucial distinction in Japanese passive constructions. Indirect passives feature subjects that, while not serving as the verb's direct patients, nevertheless experience mediated affectedness from the event. This stands in marked contrast to direct affected passives, where subjects function as immediate patients, undergoing direct impact from the verbal action. This fundamental opposition strongly suggests that direct affected passives represent the prototypical form within the Japanese passive system.

The syntactic configuration of these prototypical direct affected passives reveals two essential characteristics: first, the obligatory presence of an agent marked by a *ni*-phrase; second, the canonical structure [Subject + WA + *ni*-NP + V-rareru auxiliary]. Croft's (1993) framework positions such agentive passives as transitional forms that reinterpret stative/inchoative events through a causative lens, thereby expressing processual rather than stative events^[8]. The Japanese data substantiates this analysis, as the *ni*-phrase agent proves indispensable in canonical cases (notwithstanding certain pragmatic exceptions), yielding the semantic prototype:

[Patient directly acted upon by agent → resulting affectedness]

This configuration demonstrates a critical typological distinction: whereas English and Chinese passive prototypes emphasize self-contained states (patient + state), the Japanese prototype encodes a dynamic process of affectedness. The underlying idealized cognitive model (ICM) can be formally represented as:

[Patient affected] + [Agent's action] + [Direct action upon patient]

Or more concisely: Affectedness-Influence.

4.3. Extended Forms of Japanese Passive Sentences from the EICM Perspective

4.3.1. Extension of Japanese Passive Sentences

Building upon Sections 4.1 and 4.2, this section analyzes the extension phenomena in Japanese passive sentences. Japanese passives have gradually expanded through long-term linguistic usage. The indirect passive discussed earlier exemplifies this extension. In Japanese indirect passives, the subject is not the direct patient of the verb but is indirectly affected by the action/event. The semantic and syntactic extensions are detailed below:

Table 1. Extension of Japanese Passive Constructions

Feature Prototype (Direct Affected Passive)		Extended Form (Indirect Affected Passive)
Subject	Direct patient	Indirect patient
Predicate	Transitive verb directly acting on subject	Transitive/intransitive verb not directly acting on subject

Examples from Section 4.1:

(1) *Ippon totta gakusei wa... refurī ni teishi sare, otonashiku natta.*

(The student who scored a point... was stopped by the referee and became quiet.)

(Shiba Ryōtarō, *Nanban no Michi*)

(2) *Tokidoki soko ni tamuro shite iru jimoto no ojisan-tachi ni sugoku tsumetai me de jiro tto mirareru koto ga aru.*

(Sometimes, I am stared at with very cold eyes by the local old men who loiter there.)

(Murakami Haruki, *Uten Enten*)

(10) Y-shi wa yūjin ni saki ni bungakushō o jushō sareta.

([Mr. Y was adversely affected because] his friend received a literary prize before him.)

(11) Sono tame uka uka to shinarete shimaimashita.

(Because of that, [I was adversely affected as] that person carelessly died.)

(Matsumoto Seichō, *Ten to Sen*)

The syntactic and semantic properties of these passive constructions reveal systematic patterns of patienthood. In examples (1) and (2), which represent direct passives, the nominal subjects *gakusei* (“student”) and the implied first-person agent function as direct patients of the transitive verbs *teishi suru* (“to stop”) and *miru* (“to look at”), respectively. This contrasts markedly with example (10), where while the literary award serves as the direct patient of *jushō suru* (“to receive”), the subject *Y-shi* occupies the role of an indirect patient, experiencing mediated affectedness from the event. A parallel configuration appears in (11), featuring the intransitive verb *shinu* (“to die”), which by its lexical nature cannot assign direct patienthood; consequently, the subject receives only indirect affectedness from the denoted event.

4.3.2. Cognitive Motivations for the Extension of Japanese Passive Constructions

The extension of Japanese passives is grounded in Rosch’s (1973) prototype theory^[24], which posits gradience rather than discrete boundaries in categorization. As Section 4.3.1 demonstrates, Japanese passives exhibit radial structure, with prototypical extensions in subject argument structure (direct → indirect patients) and verbal predicates (transitive → intransitive verbs expressing indirect affectedness).

Key to this extension is metaphorical mapping (Lakoff 1978), an Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) type^[7], which explains prototype effects and categorization. Direct passives reveal a gestalt structured around an “Affectedness → Influence” schema, serving as the conceptual basis for metaphorical extension. When an event involves dyadic participants (agent X and affected Y), even without direct physical interaction, this gestalt activates, linking such structures to the passive prototype via metaphorical projection.

This process shows that Japanese passive syntax applies whenever agentive action X influences entity Y, regardless of direct transitivity, reflecting a shift from concrete to abstract causation. Since the prototype only partially represents such event causation, these constructions are grammatically classified as “indirect passives.”

4.3.3. Japanese Indirect Passives from the EICM Perspective

This study analyzes Japanese indirect passives using Croft’s Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM), building on prior findings that the Japanese passive prototype is processual rather than stative (Section 4.2). Results show these constructions deviate significantly from EICM’s stative event view.

Indirect passives display unique syntactic and semantic features: their subjects participate in events indirectly and contingently, not through direct or necessary involvement. This structure strongly correlates with their tendency to (a) express undesirable events and (b) require syntactic support, seldom appearing as independent clauses^[25]. They appear most typically in causative serial-verb constructions, functioning exclusively as causal clauses.

(12) Chō-kun wa chichioya ni shinarete, daigaku ni ikenaku natta.

(Because Zhang was affected by his father’s death, he could not go to university.)

In contexts where causality is pragmatically recoverable, the result clause may be ellipted, though its semantic presence remains obligatory for complete interpretation:

(13) Kaimono no kaerimichi, ame ni furareta.

(I got caught in the rain on my way back from shopping [and suffered inconvenience].)

This syntactic behavior demonstrates three crucial theoretical points. First, indirect passives serve solely to establish causation, requiring additional clauses to express the subject’s resultant state. Second, the affectedness of the subject cannot be compositionally derived from the verb’s semantics alone, due to the lack of direct verbal linkage. Third, and

most significantly, indirect passives mandatorily include agent phrases, exhibiting stricter requirements than their direct passive counterparts.

From an EICM perspective, these properties create substantial theoretical tension. The obligatory presence of agents triggers a categorical shift from Croft's (1993) self-contained stative events to non-self-contained processual events^[8]. Consequently, Japanese indirect passives display: (a) markedly stronger processual characteristics, and (b) substantially weaker stative properties compared to direct passives. Their fundamental inability to inherently express resultant states - requiring instead supplementary clauses for complete interpretation - positions them as peripheral members within the stative event category, challenging core assumptions of the EICM framework.

5. Conclusion

This study's application of the Event-based Idealized Cognitive Model (EICM) yields significant insights into the typological distinctiveness of Japanese passive constructions vis-à-vis their English and Chinese counterparts. The EICM analysis reveals that while agentless stative passives are frequently regarded as quasi-prototypical instantiations of the stative event view in English and Chinese (and consequently treated as passive prototypes in these languages), Japanese passives exhibit fundamentally different characteristics.

Our findings demonstrate that both prototypical and extended Japanese passive forms constitute agentive constructions that are more accurately analyzed as processual events within the EICM framework. Three key observations emerge from this analysis:

First, direct affected passives in Japanese occupy an intermediary position between stative and causative event views, displaying hybrid characteristics that challenge traditional EICM classifications. Second, indirect affected passives show even more pronounced processual qualities, being fundamentally incapable of expressing stative meanings without additional clausal support. Third, neutral passives - being Western-influenced innovations - represent non-native constructions that lie beyond the scope of indigenous Japanese passive semantics.

The extension mechanism underlying this system derives from metaphorical projection based on the "Affectedness → Influence" experiential gestalt. This cognitive operation facilitates the semantic expansion from concrete action causation to more abstract event causation within Japanese passive constructions.

Although the EICM framework successfully accounts for these cross-linguistic variations, it leaves unresolved the deeper cognitive and historical factors that initially generated these divergent developmental paths - a question that presents important avenues for future research.

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