

An Analysis of Chinese Xi Qu vocal Techniques in Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya's Opera “Wildfire Spring Wind Fights the Ancient City”

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ABSTRACT

Chinese Xi Qu has developed over a long period of time and has developed a unique way of performing. Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya are outstanding composers in the Chinese music industry. Their operas make extensive use of Chinese Xi Qu vocal techniques, such as Run Qiang, Yunbai. This study attempts to analysis the Chinese Xi Qu vocal technique used in the opera “Wild Fire Spring Wind Fighting the Ancient City” and analyzes the singing methods of the techniques in combination with actual scores, so as to provide more abundant singing references for vocal music and opera lovers.

Keywords: Chinese Xi Qu singing skills; Joey Wong and Zhang Zhuoya; “Wildfire Spring Wind Fights the Ancient City”

INTRODUCTION

Although there are significant differences between Chinese Xi Qu and traditional Chinese theater in terms of content and themes, the vocal techniques of Chinese opera arias draw inspiration from the unique techniques of traditional Chinese theater. The distinctive charm of theatrical vocal styles has become an advantage unmatched by other forms of musical expression. Composers Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya have made clever use of Chinese Xi Qu elements in their operas. Their works are based on Chinese national characteristics, starting from the aesthetic perspective of the Chinese people, and they are brave in exploring and innovating in music creation. Therefore, their operas have received high attention and influence. At present, there are relatively few studies on incorporating Chinese Xi Qu singing into opera arias, especially the in-depth research on the specific practices and works of Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya's operas. This study takes practice-based as the research method to explore the Chinese Xi Qu vocal techniques in "Wild Fire Spring Wind Fighting the Ancient City".

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Zheng (2018), the origin of Chinese Xiqu can be traced back to the ancient art of singing, dancing

and rapping, a comprehensive stage art with a long history. Another research that is Yao (2013), Chinese Xi Qu began to sprout since the introduction of Western opera in the early 20th century. Western opera is a dramatic art form that combines music, text, and acting to create a performance. It's a part of the Western classical music tradition. During this period, Chinese Xi Qu was mainly based on imitation and borrowing from Western opera, thus Chinese Xi Qu began a journey of integration with traditional Xi Qu and Western musical theatre, and artists began to explore the creation. With its unique musical language and narrative form, Chinese Xi Qu has continuously absorbed the creative techniques of Western musical theatre, while integrating traditional Chinese cultural elements to form opera works with distinctive national characteristics (Zhang & Li, 2016). Li (2017) pointed out that the development of Chinese opera arias is inseparable from the inheritance and development of traditional singing methods. The vocal techniques and performance styles in traditional Xi Qu, folk songs and other art forms provide rich artistic nutrients for opera arias. Cui (2008) pointed out that Chinese Xi Qu vocal techniques are famous for their beautiful melody and long-lasting charm. The artists used unique vocal techniques and timbre changes during the singing process, making the melody of the singing ups and downs, full of unique charm. Xie (2010) pointed out that the Chinese Xi Qu singing style has distinct characteristics of intonation and pronunciation, and has a unique charm. Artists pay attention to the accuracy and strength of pronunciation during singing, making the singing more appealing. Wang and Zhang created "Wild Fire Spring Wind Fighting the Ancient City" in 2007, which won the Excellent Product Award of the Tenth China Spiritual Civilization "Five One Project" and was rated as one of the top ten excellent repertoires of the National Stage Art Excellent Project in 2006-2007. The classic excerpts in this opera are widely sung, and many arias are included in the vocal music textbooks of colleges and universities, becoming the reserved repertoire for professional learners to compete or perform.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods are the tools that a researcher uses to validate a hypothesis and, in many cases, refine the process of scientific research in order to discover new phenomena, propose new theories and ideas, and reveal the internal laws of things. Candy, L.(2006) thought the term practice-based is widely used to describe a research methodology where the practice itself serves as the primary mode of inquiry, and the outcomes of this practice are regarded as legitimate research outputs. These outputs do not require the mediation or explanation of a text to be recognized as valuable contributions to knowledge. However, in her later research, she gave a new interpretation to the concept: Practice-based research is a principled approach that integrates research and practice as interdependent and complementary processes. This methodology leads to the generation of new and original forms of knowledge through the act of practice itself (Candy, L. et al., 2021).

In Biggs' view, the hypothesis of research is first based on experience, rather than the content of cognition after reflection through practice. This is the connotation of practice-based research (Biggs, 2004). From this point of view, experience is the initial condition for conducting basic practice research. Inspired by experience and practice, researchers discover problems and find solutions to them, thereby acquiring new knowledge and skills. The scope of this research belongs to artistic practice, which is the exploration of the field of art through practice. Research conducted with artistic practice as its base and artistic practice as its object generates knowledge and understanding through original research on artistic goals and creative processes. In another view, the key to the practice-based is the relationship between practice and theory, practice and language (Borgdorff, 2012), and creation and practice are the key to this method. Therefore, the knowledge in practice can be analyzed and explained as an empirical and observable phenomenon, and the environment, language, tools, etc. required for practice are all our practical resources. From this point of view, creation is the key to practice. Creation is a practice-based on experience and is one of the ways of artistic practice. Practice-based

research is supposed to be a research methodology that is tailored to the needs of different researchers, this is very different from other research methodologies in that it focuses on practice, and the researcher has to be open-minded because any methodology can be used as long as it can deal with the subject matter effectively, and the answers can be varied. However, there are different views, Aziz, T. (2009) pointed out:

The requirement to consider ‘process’ has led to a distinction being made between art making that purely develops individual professional practice and creative output or practice undertaken as an integral part of research that advances the subject area or discipline as a whole.

Gherardi, S. (2008) through “Practices, therefore, are modes of ordering which acquire temporal and spatial stability from provisional and unstable agreements in practice”. Translating a problem that has been previously repeated in the brain into a concrete solution through practice, knowing that the problem can be solved completely. Through some of the above views on the basis of practice we can distil these key messages: experience, practice, reflection, and combined with the actual situation of this study, the researcher summaries that the practice-based is carried out on the premise of experience, in practice, continuous reflection, and in practice, the problem from instability to stability of a creative process. Therefore, it is easy to see from the views above that practice is heavier than theory and is the main form of using practice-based research methods.

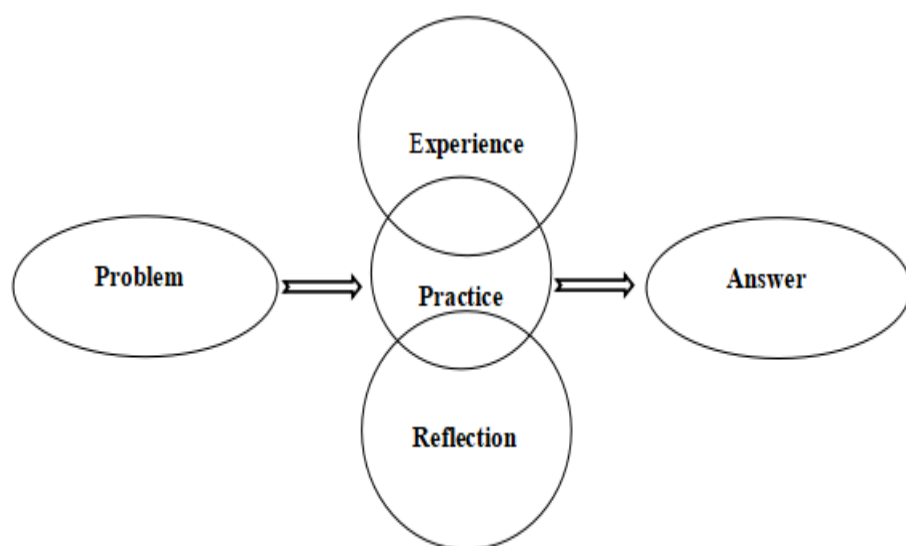


Figure.1 Framework for practice-based research

The above is the theoretical framework of practice-based research, and the whole process is like a ‘food processing plant’, where the raw materials of the problem, experience, practice, and reflection are the transfer stations for processing the raw materials and ultimately getting the answer to the problem. The theoretical framework is based on the concepts and ideas underlying the practice-based research methodology and was co-designed by the authors of this paper in 2024. For this study, the research question is divided into three areas: one, is what are the Chinese opera vocal techniques? Through the researcher's experience and querying various materials to collect and organize, such as literature, audio-video materials, etc.; Second, what are the artistic characteristics of Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya's operatic excerpts? By consulting the biographies of the authors in various aspects, researcher have a certain understanding of their creative styles and areas of expertise, and then illustrate the artistic characteristics of their works through specific examples of their opera excerpts; thirdly, based on the previous two questions, how are the vocal techniques of Chinese opera applied in the opera excerpts of Wang Zugai and Zhang Zhuoya? What changes have the use of these singing

techniques brought to opera? Therefore, the aria is used as the subject of this study to illustrate the changes that the fusion of the two has brought about in individual operas. The research process of this study is summarized according to the practice-based framework.

FINDINGS

Run Qiang is a unique technique in China Xi Qu. Its purpose is to modify and polish the Xi Qu singing, making the singing more gentle and pleasant, thereby enhancing the artistic expression and appeal of Xi Qu (Guo, 2019). Most of the techniques of Run Qiang are not shown on the score, and performers need to add them according to their understanding of the song and their own professional ability. This study is based on this approach, marking the places where embellishment needs to be added on the score and performing them in concerts. Therefore, Fang (2014) said that Run Qiang is an important bridge to turn “dead score” into “living melody”. In Guo's view, Run Qiang is not only a means of organizing musical materials, but also a means of re-creation. This means of organization and re-creation is centered on emotional expression, and expresses unique charm and polish based on the appropriate emotional color. Due to the above advantages and functions, Run Qiang has been widely used in many Chinese vocal works, such as operas, folk songs, musicals, etc.

Shuai Qiang

Shuai Qiang refers to a decorative technique that suddenly inserts a reverse upward and then downward melody when the melody is descending. There is usually no mark on the score. The use of Shuai Qiang is relatively free, generally, the singer uses it reasonably according to the melody, lyrics content, and emotional needs to increase the dramatic effect (Fang, 2014). The word Shuai is a unique word in Chinese, similar to the meaning of “throw out” in English. In simple terms, Shuai Qiang means to sing with this feeling. Shuai Qiang is a technique in singing, by modifying the original score of the song, the song is made more vivid, the character's personality is more distinctive, and it has a unique style and emotional expression. This vocal technique makes the singing more dynamic and expressive by fine-tuning and decorating the melody (Pang, 2022).

There are two types of Shuai Qiang forms, one is long Shuai Qiang and the other is short Shuai Qiang, and the way of differentiation is the beat timing. Shuai Qiang is a complement to the intonation and tone of voice, and the lyrics are further played out and unfolded to make the emotion more expressive (Ji, et al., 2019). The expressive power of the Shuai Qiang is quite flexible and malleable, and it can even express completely different feelings of sadness and joy sometimes. When people are in a particular mood, sometimes they do not have a single emotion, they often have a mixture of love and hate, anger and love, or even a mixture of sadness and sobbing, etc., all of which can be expressed through the contrasting tones of the Shuai Qiang (Hong, 1983). Shuai Qiang is mainly found in places where it is necessary to highlight the emotions of the characters, create a specific atmosphere, deepen the conflicts of the plot, or highlight the climax of the plot. In China Xi Qu, this technique can effectively create the necessary stage atmosphere and mood for the development of the plot, providing important support and help.

Shuai Qiang is a unique vocal technique in China Xi Qu. There are certain differences between the singing techniques of L and S. It is mainly reflected in the fact that the L accent generally expresses lyrical and soft feelings, and the use of breath is mainly in the form of coherence and gradual strength. The S is mainly used to express anger, excitement, sadness, and feelings with big ups and downs, their training focuses on language sense training and breath strength. (The music scores used in this study were taken from the collection of

works by Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya, titled “我心永爱 My Heart Will Forever Love”, published by Shanghai Music Publishing House in January 2007).

Example of the use of the Shuai Qiang in selection opera by Wang & Zhang:



Example 1 思儿 Longing for Son

This selection expresses a mother's joy for her son's contribution to the country and her hatred for the invaders, and the Shuai Qiang here is different. Need to be based on the actual situation one by one targeted training. The first is the exercise of vocal cord tension, specifically the use of the vocal cords to express the sense of language, this sense of language training is to rely on the vocal cords themselves to produce sound, through repeated training so that the vocal cords to adapt to the sense of language to be expressed in the Shuai Qiang. The second is to practice the instantaneous explosive power of breath, try to simulate actual dramatic situations in singing, and apply the Shuai Qiang to specific emotional expressions to enhance the actual effect of the technique.



Example 2 胜利时再闻花儿香 Smell the Flowers Again when Win the War

The aria's Shuai Qiang characteristics are able to express Jinhuan's pain of losing her family, her determination to avenge her family, and her hatred for the invaders more clearly. Key points for practicing the Shuai Qiang:

one, training on the change of sound intensity, because the Shuai Qiang is often accompanied by the sudden increase and decrease of the sound. Practice how to control the change of sound in a short period of time so that this technique can be used naturally when singing. Two, the training of the Shuai Qiang usually needs to be combined with the practice of staccato, because both techniques are the use of the instantaneous explosive power of breath, and in order to enhance the expressiveness, the swinging tune usually has short and powerful staccato. Three, the Shuai Qiang is an important technique for singing Chinese Xi Qu. It pays special attention to the correct pronunciation (meaning that each word has a standard pronunciation, and there can be no dialect or non-standard pronunciation), so the pronunciation of the Shuai Qiang must be particularly clear, and the combination of lyrics and pronunciation can be clearly heard.

However, after practice and watching video footage of opera excerpts, it seems that in addition to the examples above, the Shuai Qiang is often used in the operas of Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya. But in summary, it has a lot to do with the sense of language, that is, as long as the language and emotions of the characters in the play can be expressed, the Shuai Qiang can be expressed naturally. Therefore, the Shuai Qiang vocal technique is inseparable from the specific plot of the opera and the emotional expression of the characters, and these two points are also the core techniques of mastering the Shuai Qiang.

Ku Qiang

Ku Qiang is a unique vocal technique in China Xi Qu that imitates the sound and emotion of crying to express the character's need for sadness, pain or sorrow. It is an important artistic tool in China Xi Qu, which serves to enhance emotional expression and is more likely to resonate with the audience, it mainly conveys a character's inner pain through vocal changes and emotional rendering. The singer imitates the sound of real weeping by controlling the breath and vocal cords to give the voice a quivering, staccato and choked effect. Ku Qiang is basically rarely used on its own, as it is difficult to use it alone to good artistic effect, and is most often used in conjunction with Shuai Qiang and trill. When singers use the Ku Qiang, they must also coordinate facial expressions and body movements, such as sobbing and covering their faces, to make the performance more vivid and contagious. It is precisely because of these characteristics of the Ku Qiang that it is particularly suitable for expressing characters. It is used very frequently in operas, especially in the operas of Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya, where the use of Ku Qiang is very common.



Example 3 永远的花样年华 Forever in the Mood for Love

This soprano aria is one of the most classic soprano arias in opera of Wildfire and Spring Wind Fighting the Ancient City', expressing the spirit of a revolutionary soldier who is ready to die. It uses a wealth of Chinese

Xi Qu vocal techniques to portray the character, and the Ku Qiang vocal technique is used in two changing notes, which not only expresses the fluctuations in the character's heart, but also appears unique and appealing.

The Ku Qiang vocal technique is used in the word “照 Zhao” in m32. First of all, this word is composed of two notes, the second note is a changing note, and their interval relationship changes from major third to minor third. This change corresponds to the lyrics, the Ku Qiang here mainly expresses the inner yearning for a better life and nostalgia for the world. Vocal techniques: First, the core of Ku Qiang lies in the true expression of emotion, sincere emotional input can make the sound more infectious. Second, Ku Qiang need to use nasal resonance, through frowning, wrinkling the nose and other actions, so that the sound resonance in the nasopharyngeal cavity position, expanding the sound resonance space, so that the tone is brighter. At the same time to strengthen the vocal practice song ‘Heng’ training and in the process gradually into the lyrics and phrases. Third, the voice tone and strength control, here the voice to soft mainly to avoid the vocal cords and breath force too much, thus destroying the delicate sense.

The Ku Qiang vocal technique is used in the word “看 Kan” in m36, but there are some differences here from m32. First of all, the changing tone and the previous tone form a minor second interval, this change expresses the change of mood, which is gloomier, the lyrics change from moon to starlight, there is a difference in the degree of the two. Therefore, the Ku Qiang here expresses more euphemistic and sad emotions, the heroine seems to have felt that her life is quietly leaving this world. Practice points: One, increase chest resonance to a certain extent, but still mainly with nasal and head cavity resonance, and chest resonance as a supplement. Appropriate chest resonance can add thickness to the sound, and also give the audience a low and gloomy effect. Two, practice in combination with trill techniques to achieve the fusion of the two techniques.

Trill

The trill in China Xi Qu is formed by the repeated alternation of the original sound and the adjacent sound. When singing trill, the vocal cords must be quite sensitive, and the airflow and air pressure must be adjusted appropriately to match the sensitivity of the vocal cords, so as to achieve an accurate and flexible trill vocalization state (Fang, 2014). trill generally includes fast trill, slow trill, long trill, short trill, upper trill, lower trill" and so on. These trills are mainly distinguished by the speed and the location of occurrence. In the works of Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya, slow trill is mainly used. This study focuses on analyzing its vocal techniques. Slow trill is an effect in music or sound, refers to repeated or changing pitch trills at a slower speed, which is widely used in string instruments and human voices. It can increase the expressiveness and emotional depth of music and give the audience a lyrical or warm feeling.



Example 4 永远的花样年华 Forever in the Mood for Love

This section expresses the last confession of Jin Huan, a female revolutionary who is about to pass away. This lyrical aria with sincere emotion and soothing melody is a true expression of Jin Huan's inner peace and unwillingness to give up before she is sacrificed, full of attachment to life and unwillingness to give up the motherland and the world, and expresses the regrets that her ambition has not yet been fulfilled. The vocal technique is: first of all, the resonance method is mainly head cavity resonance, followed by oral cavity and chest cavity resonance. Secondly, vibrato is mainly produced by real voice, but there is also a mixture of real and false voices. The way to distinguish them is the pitch. The higher the pitch, the more falsetto. The intervals of the trill mostly use the second and third intervals above or below the dominant as helpers to form the trill, and in general, the intervals of the pitch fluctuations are smaller in range and slower in speed. For example, in this sentence “让流水梳我的秀发”, the trill three words “让”, “水” and “发” are used, the trick here is to use such a technique.

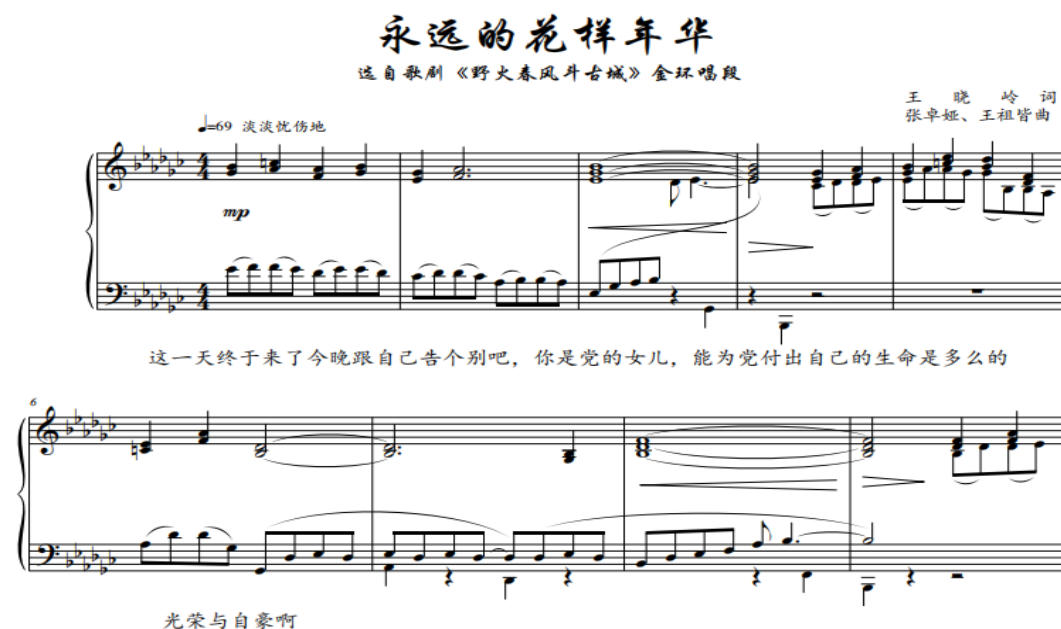
Yun Bai

In addition to singing out the inner monologues and dialogues of characters in China Xi Qu, Yun Bai is also sung out in the form of singing. Singing and reciting are the two major components of opera vocal techniques. Yun Bai uses rhythm and intonation to express the lines, making the language not only meaningful but also musical. This performance technique can enhance both drama and artistry, and is an important part of traditional Chinese culture. It is an important means of expressing characters in China Xi Qu. Usually, there is no fixed pitch and melody, but Yun Bai combines the changes of rising and falling tones and pitch, and the intonation is varied. This change can enhance the expressiveness and appeal of the lines, making it easier for the audience to be moved by the plot. It gives the performers ample room to play, which is very different from the recitative in Western opera.

永远的花样年华
选自歌剧《野火春风斗古城》金环唱段

王 晓 岭 词
张卓娅、王祖皆曲

$\text{♩} = 69$ 淡淡忧伤地



这一天终于来了今晚跟自己告个别吧，你是党的女儿，能为党付出自己的生命是多么的
光荣与自豪啊

Example 5 永远的花样年华 Forever in the Mood for Love

Combined with the many practices of this study, in general, the vocal techniques of Yun Bai can be summarized in the following aspects: First, be regular and rhythmic, Yun Bai has special singing and rhythmic requirements, according to the content of the lines and the structure of the phrases, the rhythm needs to be reasonably arranged,

so that the recitation of the Yun Bai is both fluent and full of changes. Simply put, it is to form a unity with the rhythm of the music, so as to achieve the purpose of better performance of the characters. Second, diction must be standard and clear, Yun Bai diction accuracy is the prerequisite, in addition to this also need to do a pronunciation and spitting power training, through the combination of the skills with vocal training in this area, so as to achieve the Yun Bai pronunciation control of the ability of the word. Third, delineation of the Yun Bai passages of the focus of word and light words, one by one to target the key words, one by one for practice, that is, performer should Yun Bai need to say heavy and light words divided out of practice, through the ups and downs of the tone of voice, volume changes and other means, so that Yun Bai with a distinct sense of rhythm. Fourth, emotion and Yun Bai to maintain consistency in reading Yun Bai need to be invested in the feelings of the characters, can't do the consistency of the 'drama' feeling is easy to appear. If performer don't do it consistently, ones will easily get the feeling of 'out of the scene', which makes the audience feel that it is not real enough and too deliberate. Therefore, performer should be familiar with the plot to understand the inner feelings of the characters before practicing the rhyming dialogue, should go through the training of rhyming dialogue with the state of immersing oneself in it.

CONCLUSION

This study takes practice-based as the research method, by studying the Chinese Xi Qu singing techniques commonly used in Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya's opera "Wildfire Spring Breeze Fighting Ancient City". After analyzing the audio and video recordings, it was concluded that the two main techniques used in their operas were Run Qiang and Yun Bai, and among the Run Qiang techniques, Shuai Qiang and trill were the most used. Combined with the specific segments of melody in opera arias, practical research is conducted to summarize the key points of vocal techniques. Research has found that each opera vocal technique is not a single, but a fusion of various techniques. In the operas of Wang Zujie and Zhang Zhuoya, Chinese Xi Qu vocal techniques have a common feature, which is to combine the language characteristics and the emotions of the characters. The status of emotions is even more important than language, because in practical research, it is found that as long as the emotions are expressed in place, these Chinese Xi Qu vocal techniques can be used naturally. On the contrary, if one only focuses on the training of techniques and ignores the emotions of the characters, it is difficult for these techniques to be skilfully applied to the opera. All in all, the Chinese Xi Qu vocal techniques studied above are all for the service of expressing characters in operas, and as long as this principle can be taken as the basic reference in the process of practice, then these techniques can be mastered after many times of training in the correct practice methods.

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