

# Investigation and Research on Teacher Occupational Burnout Issues from the Perspective of Resource Conservation

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to investigate teacher burnout by drawing on research findings from both domestic and international sources. Through the lens of the Conservation of Resources theory, a survey research is conducted to examine the status of occupational burnout among urban and rural front-line teachers. The paper analyzes the manifestations of teacher burnout and its underlying causes, and finally proposes feasible strategies to alleviate teacher burnout, with the aim of promoting the sustainable and healthy development of the education sector.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher, Occupational Burnout, Survey Research*

## 1. Background of the Survey

With the increasing competition in society, people are facing greater and greater levels of pressure. When the professional pressure exceeds an individual's threshold, occupational burnout occurs. As a special kind of helping profession, teachers are among the most stressed occupational groups. Therefore, teachers have become a high-risk group for occupational burnout.

The theory of resource conservation states that individuals have a tendency to protect and acquire resources, and the loss of valuable resources can lead to distress. One of the sources of psychological pressure is loss, and occupational burnout occurs when the depletion rate of necessary resources for work exceeds the replenishment rate. Therefore, when teachers invest more resources into their work than they gain, or when they experience anxiety, tension, and psychological strain due to the loss or lack of valuable resources, they are prone to experiencing feelings of burnout. Teacher occupational burnout has a significant negative impact on both the mental and physical health of teachers, as well as the quality of education and teaching, which can ultimately affect the growth and development of students.

In light of this, in order to understand the causes of teacher occupational burnout, from the perspective of resource conservation theory, we conducted a survey and research on the occupational burnout of teachers in urban and rural areas of our county. We analyzed the current manifestations and causes of teacher occupational burnout. Finally, we proposed constructive suggestions.

## 2. Survey Content and Methods

To understand the current situation of teacher occupational burnout in our county, we conducted a representative sample survey in one urban and one rural middle school and primary school. Referring to the "Maslach's Teacher Burnout Inventory" (MBI), we developed a sampling survey questionnaire called "Questionnaire on Occupational Burnout among Primary and Secondary School Teachers." This questionnaire consisted of 8 basic questions related to subjects taught, professional title, age, and school attributes, as well as 22 targeted stress test questions.<sup>[1]</sup> The survey used a 4-point scoring method, ranging from "never" to "frequently," with scores of 1 to 4 assigned respectively. The questionnaire survey was conducted on 200 teachers of different age groups, teaching different subjects. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, with 193 returned and 192 valid questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 96.5% and a valid questionnaire rate of 96%. The basic information of the surveyed teachers is as follows:

According to Table 1-1, the survey on teaching experience of teachers in urban areas shows that teachers with over 10 years of experience account for 77.92% of the total, while those with less than 10

years of experience account for 22.38%, indicating a clear trend towards aging. The survey table on teaching experience of teachers in rural areas (Table 1-2) shows that the ratio of teachers with less than 10 years of experience to those with over 10 years of experience is close to 1:1. Teachers with 1-3 years and over 20 years of experience each account for slightly over 10%, indicating a relatively reasonable age structure. However, whether in urban or rural areas, the scores for the three dimensions show that the scores for the burnout dimension, depersonalization dimension, and sense of accomplishment are all very high. Only 8 out of 200 people have a slight sense of accomplishment.

*Table 1-1: Years of Teaching Experience of Interviewed Teachers in Urban Areas.*

Years of Teaching Experience	Number of Teachers	Percentage
1-3	5	6.58%
4-10	12	15.80%
11-20	14	18.42%
Over 20 years	45	59.50%

*Table 1-2: Years of Teaching Experience of Interviewed Teachers in Rural Areas.*

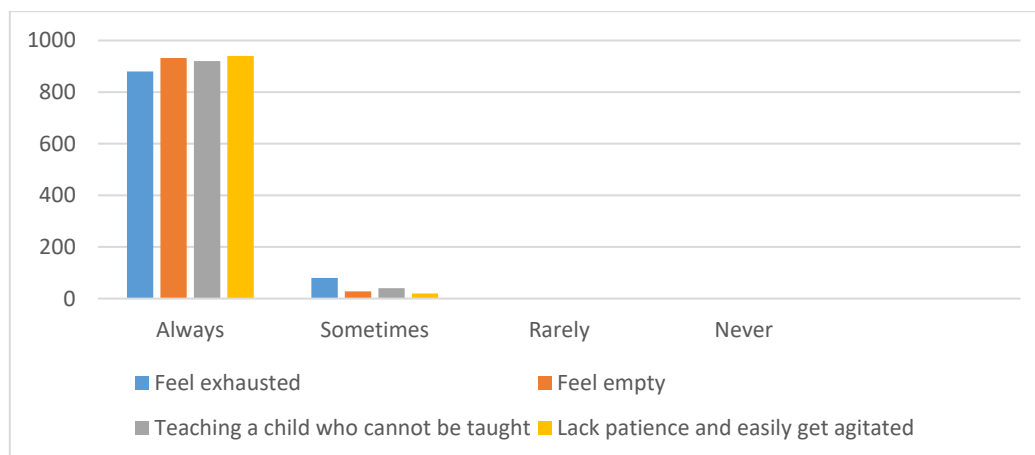
Years of Teaching Experience	Number of Teachers	Percentage
1-3	15	12.10%
4-10	45	36.29%
11-20	46	37.10%
Over 20 years	18	14.52%

This indicates that the overall teacher workforce is experiencing excessive psychological pressure and severe occupational burnout. The problem of occupational burnout among primary and secondary school teachers is urgent and imminent.

### 3. Causes of Teacher Occupational Burnout

#### 3.1. Discrepancy between High Input and Low Return

According to survey data on emotional exhaustion, over 96.67% of respondents reported feeling "always" exhausted after a day of school work, feeling "emptied out" as if mechanically working, having a sense that students are unteachable, and lacking patience, easily getting excited. The remaining 3.33% selected "sometimes," with no responses for "rarely" or "never." (See Figure 1) It can be seen that teachers experience high levels of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. Teachers put in a lot of effort in their work. They not only have to teach, but also have to educate students. Their daily working hours are much longer than those of other professions. The challenges brought by various activities and competitions under the concept of quality education, as well as the slow progress of educational work, create immense pressure for teachers. The main cause of teacher occupational burnout is the discrepancy between high input and low return.



*Figure 1: Survey data on the emotional exhaustion dimension.*

**3.2. Imbalance between Importance and Resource Allocation**

Questionnaire 2, the first question, is a ranking question that asks respondents to rank the importance of various resources. As shown in Figure 2, interpersonal relationships and salary rank first and second in terms of importance, while vacation ranks last. From this, we can see that salary, representing material benefits, and interpersonal relationships, representing social resources, are the most important resources that teachers care about.

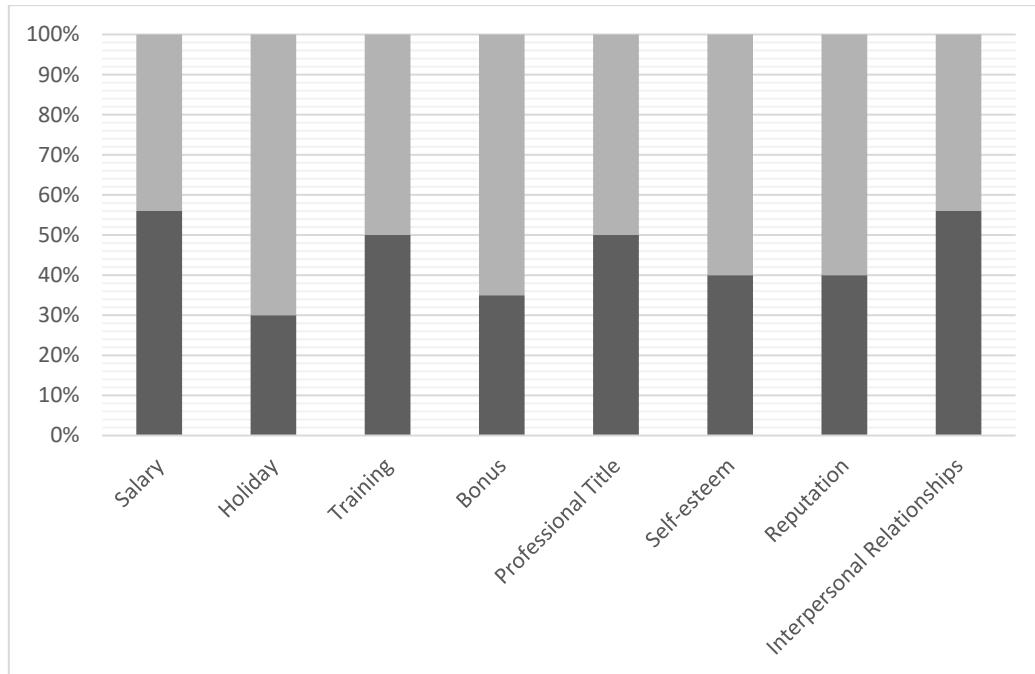


Figure 2: The importance of various resources.

We also conducted a test on the dimension of material resources, which includes 14 questions. We collected and analyzed the factors influencing material resources from subjective and objective perspectives, mainly including evaluation mechanism, salary, self-learning, and ability level of teachers.

Table 2: Dimension of Material Resources

Question	Option A (Satisfied)	Option B (Neutral)	Option C (Dissatisfied)
How is your salary?	29	146	17
Do you feel your job's efforts balance with your income?	68	109	15
Have you received any training since you started working here?	45	147	0
How is your rest time?	12	153	27
Do you think the current evaluation system for teachers is scientifically reasonable?	21	32	139
Does the diversification of students' channels of obtaining information have a big impact on you?	122	62	8
Do you think it is fair for schools to adopt a student grading system for teachers?	12	26	154
Do you feel competitive pressure?	146	32	14
How has educational reform, such as teaching innovation, affected you?	77	79	16
Do you have many opportunities to go online and contact new media in your daily life?	2	32	158
Do you hope that every student in your class gets good grades?	168	16	8
Are you willing to help students and others around you selflessly, even beyond your own abilities?	13	99	80
Do you think it is all your responsibility if the students' grades in your class are not good?	89	83	20
Do you feel that you don't have enough time and feel overwhelmed?	18	55	128

Table 2 shows that the impact of the diversification of students' channels of obtaining information, the unscientific and unreasonable evaluation system for teachers, and the imbalance between the efforts and income of teachers have led to a significant contrast between the sacredness of the teaching profession and its actual social status. The high expectations of society and parents make teachers emphasize their professionalism, often generating unrealistic expectations in their hearts. On the one hand, they carry themselves under the yoke of perfectionism, and on the other hand, they face the frustration of low economic income and limited social connections. Long-term psychological burdens and conflicts can easily lead to mental problems. When the workload, psychological pressure, and emotional stress exceed the limit that one can bear, the body will rebel and enter an irreversible state.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 3.3. Frustration from Slow Knowledge Updates and Low Sense of Achievement

With rapid development of the times, teachers' knowledge updates are slow, which leads to a decline in their power of speech. Especially with the media sensationalizing the "bestly teachers" to attract attention, it has tarnished the reputation of the teaching profession. This has resulted in a low sense of achievement among teachers in their careers (see Table 3).

Table 3: Sense of Achievement Dimension

Title	Option A (Satisfied)	Option B (Neutral)	Option C (Dissatisfied)
Do you think the social status of primary and secondary school teachers is currently?	9	66	112
Do parents question or question your work?	5	78	119
Do you feel the current atmosphere of respecting teachers and valuing education?	26	49	119
Do you think the expectations of teachers by society are reasonable?	12	58	122
What is your relationship with people around you?	55	69	68
Do you usually participate in activities with your friends?	59	67	66
Do you care about your words and actions, in order to avoid becoming a target of public opinion?	171	19	2
Do your family members understand your work?	39	89	64
Do you think the teaching profession is fundamentally different from other professions?	97	49	46

The teachers presented in Table 3 are not very enthusiastic about activities in their social circles and have a normal relationship with the people around them. Due to the unique nature of the teaching profession, teachers are overwhelmed by teaching, educational research, various inspections and evaluations, as well as various group activities. They rarely have time to teach, engage in professional research, or further their studies. Over time, this can lead to an awkward situation of "modern people teaching future generations with knowledge from the past". The busy schedule leaves teachers with no clear start and end times for work. Many teachers stay up late, grade papers during wedding banquets, or even review exams while receiving intravenous fluids for illness. They have limited time to take care of their family life and expand their social circle, which means that teachers have limited social resources. At the same time, the effectiveness of education and teaching requires long-term practice to manifest. Teachers live in a "walled city" in their lives, cannot find a "breakthrough" in their learning, and are constantly in a state of achievement. These feelings of frustration and imbalance affect teachers' enthusiasm for work and radiate into their actions and thinking, making it easy for them to lose interest in their profession.

## 4. Strategies and Suggestions

### 4.1. Creating an atmosphere conducive to teaching for teachers

In order to attract and retain excellent talents, it is crucial to improve the working conditions for teachers. Currently, the salaries for primary and secondary school teachers are relatively low, which remains a pressing issue. When compared to other countries, the average salary for teachers in most countries is higher than that in other professions. For example, in the United States, the salary for primary and secondary school teachers is generally 25%-35% higher than that of the average employee in other

industries, ranking sixth among the 13 major industries nationwide. In France, the average salary for primary and secondary school teachers is nearly double that of skilled workers. In the UK, the average salary for primary and secondary school teachers is 35% higher than that of the average employee. In neighboring Japan, teachers are classified as civil servants, and the salaries of elementary school teachers are required to be higher than the standard salary for civil servants. The average salary for elementary school teachers is approximately 16% higher than that of other industry employees who graduate during the same period. In South Korea, teachers enjoy the best benefits and receive respect from society, making teaching a highly coveted profession.

The top five countries with the highest teacher salaries globally			
Rank	Country	Teacher salary levels (in US dollars)	Teacher salary levels (in Chinese yuan)
NO. 1	Canada	7196	49440
NO. 2	Italy	6955	47785
NO. 3	South Africa	6531	44871
NO. 4	India	6070	41704
NO. 5	America	6054	41594

Figure 3: The top five countries with the highest teacher salaries globally.

The bottom five countries in terms of teacher salaries globally			
Rank	Country	Teacher salary levels (in US dollars)	Teacher salary levels (in Chinese yuan)
NO.1	Armenia	538	3697
NO.2	Russia	617	4239
NO.3	China	720	4947
NO.4	Ethiopia	1207	8294
NO.5	Kazakhstan	1553	10672

Figure 4: The bottom five countries in terms of teacher salaries globally.

Among the countries listed in this ranking, the top five are mostly economically developed countries, where the overall wage level is relatively high. Therefore, it is normal for teacher salaries to be higher than ours. However, it is surprising that they exceed ours by more than ten times, and Chinese teacher salaries rank among the lowest, only higher than Armenia and Russia. This situation must be thought-provoking. (See Figures 3 and 4: Global Education Survey by international organizations.)

According to the "Teacher Blue Book: China's Development Report for Primary and Secondary School Teachers (2014)", in 2013, about one-third of high school teachers in Beijing had an annual income of less than 60,000 yuan, half had incomes between 60,000 and 80,000 yuan, and one-fifth had incomes higher than 80,000 yuan. According to the "Comprehensive Development Index of Chinese Cities 2016" compiled by the National Development and Reform Commission's Development Planning Department, Beijing had the highest housing prices in the country in 2016, with an average transaction price of 38,200 yuan per square meter for newly built residential properties in December. A primary school head teacher in Chaoyang District, Beijing, with a monthly salary of 5,000 yuan, would need 44.5 years to buy a two-bedroom, one-living room apartment of 70 square meters without eating or drinking.

How can we attract and retain the best talents in the education industry with such working conditions?

As early as 1977, Comrade Deng Xiaoping pointed out: "If we want to catch up with the advanced level of the world, where should we start? I think we should start with science and education." "If we want to achieve modernization, the key is for science and technology to advance. Without focusing on education, we cannot develop science and technology." Defense and education are the areas where a country should invest the most money. Defense safeguards the security and existence of a country, while education ensures the spiritual development of a nation.

Only when the treatment is truly improved will teachers have a respected status, which will attract the best high school graduates to apply to teachers' colleges and retain excellent teachers. Without worries for the future, teachers can wholeheartedly shape the future of the country and the nation.

#### ***4.2. Creating an atmosphere conducive to teaching for teachers***

In addition to improving the level of compensation for teachers, creating a favorable working environment for teachers is also essential for attracting and retaining excellent talents in education.

##### ***4.2.1. Creating an atmosphere where teachers can teach peacefully.***

A survey shows that the average actual working hours of primary and secondary school teachers is 54.5 hours per week. In some areas, high school teachers can work up to 16 hours a day, far exceeding the legal limit. "The heavy burden on teachers in the basic education stage is an undeniable fact."

"Tasks that occupy teachers' working hours are not all related to education and teaching. The time actually dedicated to teaching and related preparations is less than one-fourth of the total working time, with the remaining three-fourths being non-teaching tasks that are more time-consuming and labor-intensive."

The main job of teachers is to teach and educate, that is, to give good lessons and manage students. However, in addition to teaching and educating, current school teachers are also required to undertake various inspections, fill out various forms, and submit various activity materials. Various departments like to collaborate with schools, making the "small hands" of children hold the "big hands" of parents, and everything needs to "enter the campus" to facilitate the implementation of various tasks. Any superior department can conduct inspections and evaluations at schools, and every inspection and evaluation is taken "seriously" and "actively participated in" by the school. Each department also has to organize several large-scale activities every semester, and the school receives urgent documents that need to be implemented every day.

When teachers' main job is taken up by non-teaching tasks for the majority of their time, it not only sacrifices their time but also affects their mood and even their sense of identity with the teaching profession.

To create a quiet atmosphere for teachers to teach and provide enough space for their growth, teachers need ample time to think, explore how to improve teaching, how to conduct in-depth research on teaching, and how to cultivate students. Only then can students' healthy growth be possible.

##### ***4.2.2. Creating a platform for teachers' personal growth***

Just as education should be tailored to students' needs, teachers' growth should also be tailored to their individual needs. Each teacher has a different personality, knowledge, and literacy, and different subjects have different teaching rules. Therefore, teachers' professional growth naturally exhibits various characteristics, and their growth needs also vary greatly.

Each teacher is a rich source of knowledge, and teachers of different age groups have their own strengths and weaknesses. For example, newly graduated young teachers have strengths in information technology and communication with students. Their new perspectives, as well as their confusion and perplexity, are valuable resources in this educational ecosystem. However, their confusion and perplexity need professional guidance to promote their rapid growth. Similarly, most middle-aged teachers can handle teaching and educational management well, but without providing them with opportunities for improvement, they are prone to stagnation and professional burnout. And what about retired teachers? How can we better use their wisdom and experience to become the giants supporting the growth of young teachers?

Therefore, it is important to respect the characteristics of each teacher and meet their needs, striving to make each teacher a provider of resources for teachers' professional growth, rather than just consumers as traditionally seen. This directly determines the health level of the educational ecosystem.

#### ***4.2.3. Ensuring the continuous improvement of teachers' educational authority***

Throughout history, China has always held a tradition of "respecting teachers and valuing education." Teachers, as disseminators of knowledge, have been given a high authority in the education process. However, the development and changes in society and culture, as well as the impact of the internet, have weakened the dominant position of teachers as cultural representatives and transmitters. Faced with cultural changes, educational reforms, and the development of the internet, the reasonable reconstruction of teachers' authority urgently requires the help of teachers and social forces.

First of all, teachers themselves need to continuously improve their own personality, improve and enrich themselves in various aspects, enhance their personal cultivation, and regain the dominant role of teachers in classroom teaching management. Secondly, it is necessary to improve relevant laws and regulations to ensure the traditional authority of teachers. Teachers should not be allowed to be interfered by anyone entering the school and make them lose faith in education. At the same time, society needs to promote the social atmosphere of "respecting teachers and valuing education" again. Only when society gives teachers the proper status, the law provides them with corresponding protection, and parents give teachers the corresponding respect, will students naturally learn to respect their teachers. "Respecting teachers and believing in their teachings," students will achieve better learning outcomes and teachers will have a stronger sense of professional well-being, thereby promoting better development of education.

#### ***4.2.4. Finding Debugging Strategies to Prevent Occupational Burnouts***

The education department should establish an institution to scientifically formulate a teacher professional check-up plan and regularly conduct "professional status" check-ups on teachers. The professional examination is not aimed at teachers' physical health, but at their professional psychology, guiding teachers to protect their gradually worn out and damaged professional mentality in their work, guiding teachers to form a reasonable positioning of their own teacher professional roles, in order to relieve teachers' work stress.

The professional characteristics of teachers have formed strong psychological characteristics of self-esteem, enterprising spirit, and sense of honor. Schools should provide setback education to teachers who encounter setbacks, helping them summarize their experiences, draw lessons, encouraging them to face failures correctly, and quickly free themselves from self-blame and pain, and regain confidence to engage in efficient and passionate work. Teachers themselves should also learn to properly channel their emotions, find ways to vent and release them reasonably. They can also find ways to shift their focus from events that generate negative emotions to things they are interested in and find a sense of achievement and confidence in their strengths and expertise.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### ***4.3. Selecting High-Quality Seeds - Strictly Control the Threshold for Teacher Employment***

Good seeds are the prerequisite for a good harvest and important means of production.

Teachers should "provide students with a cup of water while having a bucket of water themselves", and it should more become a "continuous flow of water", "learning to be a teacher", and "exemplifying righteousness". A good teacher is a good education. Strictly controlling the "entrance gate" of the teaching profession is the fundamental way to improve the overall quality of the teacher workforce, enhance the quality of education and teaching, and run a good education system.

In the early 1980s, in order to alleviate the severe shortage of rural teachers, the country implemented the recruitment of middle school graduates to study at secondary normal schools nationwide. Teacher education was free, and after graduation, the allocation system was implemented. It followed the path of elite teacher education. The teacher recruitment interview, priority admission system for early exams, and strict control at all levels ensured a good threshold for entry. The expectation of "non-agricultural majors for agricultural students" attracted a large number of outstanding "children from poor families" to embark on the path of educating and teaching. They were good at singing and dancing, excelled in calligraphy and painting, had dreams and aspirations, and were willing to dedicate themselves, supporting half of the rural primary education.

After 1999, various regions across the country successively abolished secondary teacher education. Higher education developed rapidly, and major universities expanded enrollment. Teacher training colleges no longer conducted early admissions. At the same time, due to the hardships of teaching work and changes in the status of education, the number of top students applying for teacher training decreased, and almost every batch had low-scoring students. According to relevant statistics, there are 112 universities in China designated as "211 universities", with 39 of them included in the "985 Project".

Among these 112 "211" universities, there are only 8 normal universities, with only 2 of them being included in the "985 Project". In the recently announced list of 42 "Double First-Class universities", Beijing Normal University and East China Normal University are the only two normal universities on the list. Looking at the entrance scores for universities each year, out of the 138 normal universities nationwide (including independent colleges), only the admission scores for 18 key normal universities such as Beijing Normal University and East China Normal University are above the threshold for admission to the first-tier universities, while the admission scores for the other 120 normal universities are at the second-tier level. The difference between universities determines that the admission scores for normal colleges are significantly lower than those for key comprehensive universities.

This low admission threshold has led to a situation where many normal school graduates, even those with undergraduate or master's degrees, do not possess the expected professional competence. In addition, factors such as the cancellation of large classes, establishment of new schools, and the two-child policy have resulted in a shortage of school teachers and tight staffing. Many schools are facing a shortage of personnel, and public schools are experiencing a wave of substitute teacher recruitment. Every summer vacation, QQ groups and WeChat moments are flooded with notices for substitute teacher recruitment. Some schools even struggle to find substitute teachers before the start of the school year, let alone talk about being strict in the selection process.

The lack of faculty, shortage of high-quality teachers, and the unreasonable structure of teachers seriously affect the progress of education. If teachers have good inherent qualities and a favorable nurturing environment, the problem of teacher burnout can naturally be solved.

Teacher burnout is a common psychological phenomenon among primary and secondary school teachers in China. Teachers' burnout directly affects the cultivation of national talent, so it is worthy of attention from the whole society. Education is the foundation of a nation's century-long plan, and teachers are the foundation of education. Having a high-quality professional teacher team with noble professional ethics, outstanding expertise, reasonable structure, and full of vitality is the cornerstone of education development, national rejuvenation, and national prosperity. Therefore, society, schools, families, and teachers themselves should work together to actively prevent and effectively alleviate teacher burnout, so that our teachers can overcome burnout and actively achieve success in their careers.

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