

The Value and Application of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education Thought in Vocal Music Teaching at Normal Universities in the New Era

Yanlong Guo*

Nanjing Xiaozhuang University, 211171, Nanjing, China

*Corresponding author: 179645585@qq.com

Abstract: Life education thought (tenets: "life is education", "society is school" and "integration of teaching, learning, and doing"), based on Chinese indigenous educational practices with adaptation to national conditions and academic reality have accumulated for one hundred years still full of vitality and guidance today. Cultivation of music teachers for basic education is the core task of vocal music teaching in normal universities, yet there are so many problems emphasize technique rather than comprehensive competence, emphasize stage performance rather than classroom teaching, focus on theory rather than practice, adopt Western approach over indigenous approach during the teaching practice. Disconnection between the teaching goals, content, and models from the requirements of positioning of basic education become ever more obvious. Based on that, this paper deeply analyses the core connotations of Tao Xingzhi's life education thought and systematically expounds his core values in rectifying the educational objectives of vocal music teaching in normal universities, optimize the curriculum content system, innovate classroom teaching models and improve the educational evaluation mechanism. Considering the features of vocal music teaching in normal universities, we build up the three-dimensional teaching application framework of "embracing life, comprehending life, and loving life". Explore the deep integration path of life education thought and vocal music teaching in normal universities aimed at solving the current teaching pain points and construct a new paradigm of vocal music teaching in normal universities which fits the development needs of basic education integrating both humanistic and practical qualities, providing theoretical references and practical supports for the high quality cultivation of basic music education teachers in the new era.

Keywords: Tao Xingzhi; life education thought; vocal music teaching in normal universities; teacher education; aesthetic education practice

Introduction

Mr. Tao Xingzhi is a great people's educator; A pioneer of educational reform and a forerunner of aesthetic education practice in modern and contemporary China who spent decades on rural education and mass education in China with an indigenous educational theory system suitable for the social development of China which is different from the Western educational system. Soong Ching-ling referred to him as a "model teacher for all ages", however, Guo Moruo highly affirmed his important place in the history of Chinese education by saying: "Confucius two thousand years ago, and Tao Xingzhi two thousand years later". Tao Xingzhi always preserved the original aspiration of saving the nation through education and love filling the world, he adheres to the idea that "teach people to seek truth in all teaching, and learning to be true persons in all learning"; rooted himself in grassroots educational practice throughout his life, holding a heart in hand, not taking a blade of grass, seeking the dawn for Chinese education and exploring a way out for Chinese education^[1] built up a complete educational theoretical system centered around "life education".

The course of vocal music in higher normal universities is the core curriculum for cultivating music teachers for primary and secondary schools. Different from the elite and stage-oriented vocational training mode of vocal music talent at professional conservatories of music, it cultivates compound basic education talents possessing vocal music professional ability, classroom teaching ability and aesthetic education capability; Its features are as follows: normal education orientation, practicability, and applicability. A survey of the status quo of vocal music teaching in normal universities throughout China shows that most institutions have copied the teaching system of professional art colleges for a long time, emphasizing the training of vocal singing techniques and performing highly difficult artistic

works, ignoring the cultivation of students' practical classroom teaching abilities, musical cultural literacy and aesthetic education sentiments, resulting in the capability gap of students, "can sing but cannot teach, value technique over substance, and understand their specialty but not education", and the adaptability of graduates to the requirements of music teaching positions in primary and secondary schools is far from being satisfactory, severely limiting the high-quality development of basic music education. The aesthetic education policy in the new era requires deep integration of art education into life practice, social culture, and the value of human cultivation. The life-oriented, practice-oriented, and humanistic educational concept promoted by Tao Xingzhi's life education thought fits well with the core direction of vocal music teaching reform in normal universities in the new era, and can properly solve the core issues of disconnect between the current teaching system and job adaptability, social needs, and the original educational mission. On this basis, we give an in-depth interpretation of the theoretical core of life education thought, explore its teaching value, find practical and replicable teaching application pathways, helping vocal music teaching in normal universities to go back to the essence of normal education, connecting with life practice, showing the value of aesthetic education.

1. Analysis of the Core Connotations of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education Thought

Tao Xingzhi's life education thought is an indigenous educational theory developed by criticizing the malpractices of feudal education and the pragmatist educational philosophy as well as local practical innovation on China's rural education and mass education; it was born out of Tao Xingzhi's educational practice in Tao Xingzhi's Xiaozhuang Experimental Rural Normal School, and has become a complete theoretical system after being formed over decades of teaching exploration, school reform and social practice, with the trinity of "life is education, society is school, and the integration of teaching, learning, and doing", which are related and progressive: defining the essence of education, the field of education and the methods of teaching respectively form a complete pedagogical logic for life education.

1.1 Defining the Essence of Education with "Life Is Education"

"Life is education", this is the core and cornerstone of Tao Xingzhi's life education thought, it changes the dialectic relationship between education and life, overthrowing the narrow traditional concept of "education is equivalent to book teaching and campus instruction". Tao Xingzhi said clearly in *Life Is Education*: "Life education is the education that is inherent in life, self-managed by life, and necessary for life"^[2] "Education is not an exclusive activity away from life; education is a natural behavior which permeates all processes of human life. Essence of education is life, the form of life determines the quality of education.

Life decides education but education nourishes life. Originated by life: All human's knowledge, skills, emotions, cognition come from daily life and social practice. Without life, there would be no education which becomes an empty theory indoctrination. But education also transform and improve life. The existence of good quality education brings about a positive life attitude, cultivate positive life ability, construct elegant life aesthetic, however, poor education restrict cognition, limit horizons, weakens life literacy." Whatever is life is education, and whatever is not life is not education; good life is good education, bad life is bad education; artistic life is artistic education"^[3].

Core guidance for vocational music aesthetic education in normal universities: The origin of vocal music art is from labor life, folk life, and emotional life—the emotional core, cultural depth, and artistic expression of all vocal works lie in a certain scenario of life and the life of its time. Vocals music education is not just vocal technique training – it's an aesthetic education based on life, interpreting life and elevating life. Only with vocal music teaching based on life can we allow our students to truly understand music, interpret emotions, and express the power of aesthetic education.

1.2 Expanding the Educational Field with "Society Is School"

"Society is school" extending the thought of life education and revolutionize the educational field is complementary with "life is education". Mainly means that: The whole society is the place of life and it's a comprehensive, all-time educational place; Campus is only a part of the education field, however all scenes in society such as social life, folk customs, public cultural activities, grassroots educational practices are also vibrant educational classroom at the same time. Embodies the core thoughts of emancipating nature, lifelong learning, public aesthetic education, there is no boundary to education

and no limit on learning times, conforms to the development trend of lifelong education and aesthetic education for all in the new era.

"Vocal music teaching in normal universities", "Society is school". Vocal music learning goes out of one-on-one instructions and stage performances in the campus into real social scenes such as classroom for primary and secondary schools, community cultural and artistic activities, fieldwork on folk music, grassroots aesthetic education volunteer services etc., where they can hone their teaching competence and acquire an artistic literacy in a true educational and artistic life.

1.3 Innovating Teaching Methods with "Integration of Teaching, Learning, and Doing"

Integrating teaching, learning, and doing has been the heart of life education thought as well as the way to teach any subject tackling the core pain point of traditional teaching – separate teaching, learning, and doing. As Tao Xingzhi said: "Teaching, learning, and doing are one thing, not three. We should teach by doing and learn by doing"^[4] This concept completely breaks down the traditional teaching mode where teachers unidirectionally inculcate knowledge into their students who passively receive them, redefines the relationship between teachers and students and the teaching logic – Doing is the core carrier of teaching and learning, teaching occurs via doing and learning happens via doing. No longer do we see teachers giving theoretical explanations or demonstrations on how to perform tasks, but precise teaching done while performing. No longer do we see our students just listening, imitating, and mechanically exercising, but now they internalize knowledge, master skills, and enhance abilities with hands-on practices. So what does Tao Xingzhi mean when he talks about doing? It's not a mere mechanical operation, but a comprehensive intellectual and practical activity which includes life practice, teaching practice, artistic practice, and social practice, its core goal is to achieve the union of knowledge and action, so that what you have learned can be applied practically.

As regards vocal music teacher education in normal universities, the integration of teaching, learning and doing is suitable with the characteristics of normal education: emphasis on practice, application, cultivate people; It is essential for vocal music teaching to teach students to sing by "doing"(trial lectures, teaching design, classroom practice, aesthetic education practice, etc.) , to teach students to teach singing, to educate people, to transmit aesthetic values so as to improve both their singing ability and teaching ability at once.

2. The Contemporary Value of Integrating Tao Xingzhi's Life Education Thought into Vocal Music Teaching in Normal Universities

Aesthetic education reform in basic education in the new era is getting deeper. According to the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era: The requirement of basic education positions should be followed by aesthetic education teaching in normal universities; emphasis should be placed on practicality, life-orientation, and education-orientation so that teachers who are competent and have educational sentiments can be cultivated to teach aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools. Because there exist all sorts of dilemmas about vocal music teaching in normal universities (vague educational objectives, unbalanced teaching content, rigid teaching models, single evaluation system) while Tao Xingzhi's life education thought fundamentally guides the reform of vocal music teaching in normal universities from the aspect of its essence, field, method, and value, which has great practical significance and contemporary relevance.

2.1 Rectifying Educational Objectives and Returning to the Core Orientation of Normal Education

The goal of vocational music teaching in normal universities is to train qualified music and aesthetic education teachers for primary and secondary schools, whose students should have the ability to sing vocally, teach classes, interpret works and conduct aesthetics education. Most normal universities in China hold misconceptions about "elite-oriented teaching", blindly copying the teaching mode of professional conservatories of music, taking singing awards, stage performance and technical difficulty of students as the main training objectives, closely linking its own teaching performance, professional title evaluation and merit assessment with the result of student's professional competitions. The "normal education orientation" of vocal music education in normal universities weakens at this time, the "professional orientation" has been one-sidedly amplified; teachers only concentrate on pure technical training such as breath, vocalization, resonance, diction during the teaching process without

cultivating students' core normal abilities like teaching design, classroom organization, analyzing students' learning conditions and giving them aesthetic education guidance or artificially separating these two aspects which finally leads to graduates who can "sing professionally although they are not competent in classroom teaching" and unable to adapt to routine music classroom teaching, class aesthetic education activities and campus art club guidance in primary and secondary schools.

The Life Education thoughts of Tao Xingzhi can correct the educational objectives: "Live what life, receive what education"^[5], because the future professional life of vocal music students in normal universities is music teaching practice in primary and secondary school; its main life scenes are classroom teaching, aesthetic education and cultural dissemination instead of professional stage performance. Vocal music teaching in normal universities should give up the wrong orientation of elitism and stage-centeredness, rebuild the system of educational objectives according to the life needs of basic education position: cultivate aesthetic education teachers for basic education as the core, pay attention to vocational musical skills, practical classroom teaching ability, music cultural dissemination capacity and life aesthetic education guidance ability so that vocal music teaching serve their future professional life, aesthetic life and educational life, fully distinguish themselves from the professional vocal performance talent training mode, return to the essence of normal education.

2.2 Rectifying Teaching Content and Constructing a Localized and Life-Oriented Curriculum System

Under the influence of the modern educational trend that Western learning spreads to the East, the modern and contemporary professional vocal music education in China is based upon the Western bel canto system which has dominated the teaching content system of vocal music in normal universities for a long time. Syllabus, assessment standard and repertoire selection of the current vocal music curriculum in normal universities emphasize the Western works and ignore the Chinese ones. This teaching content system will cause some problems as follows: On the one hand, advocating too much the Western vocal system and weaken the education of excellent traditional Chinese music culture leading to lack of cultural confidence among students and weakness in indigenous music literacy; on the other hand, severly disconnected with the real life of music education in primary and secondary schools. Most of the Chinese folk songs, popular aesthetic education songs, local characteristic music and red music works are included in primary and secondary school music textbooks at present but there are very few Western high-difficulty art works involved. Normal university students practice professional works disconnected from the reality of basic education throughout their study period, they can't quickly adapt to the teaching content of primary and secondary schools when taking up their posts, thus create an awkward situation of "disconnection between learning and application".

The life education thought of Tao Xingzhi stresses "the origin of educational content comes from life" it is a guide to optimize the teaching content. Originated from life, Chinese vocal art originated from the working life, folk life and local life of the masses. Folk songs and other vocal works are the carriers of art that are most imbued with the spirit of life and best suited for public aesthetic education. Correct the deviation of content according to the need of life, transcend the rigid pattern dominated by Western works, optimize the course content system based on local life, indigenous culture and the life of basic education classroom. Particularly for universities located in Nanjing, vocal works such as Jiangsu folk songs and southern Jiangsu folk songs have its roots in the local people's life, they not only have regionality but also have aesthetics education value, very suitable for the aesthetic education teaching needs of regional primary and secondary schools. They should be the core contents of life-oriented vocal music teaching in normal universities so as to make the teaching content deeply aligned with real life, job requirements and local culture.

2.3 Enriching Teaching Models and Creating a Practical and Open Classroom Ecology

The present teaching mode of vocal music in normal universities is very rigid, limited in closed practice room and on campus stage, as well as it is a one-way model of teacher demonstration - student imitation - technical error correction - repeated practice. Three major shortcomings include: Firstly, there's a gap between the teaching scene with real classroom situation in primary and secondary school that results in lack of practical classroom experience among students; Secondly, the teaching style is monotonous by splitting core normal skills like vocal music, piano impromptu accompaniment, music teaching methodology, classroom teaching design etc., resulting in weak comprehensive teaching ability among students; Thirdly, this method emphasizes learning instead of doing, practicing instead of applying, violates the practical education concept of integration of teaching, learning, and doing so

students can only master singing skills but not teaching skills.

Tao Xingzhi's "society is school", "integration of teaching, learning, and doing" breaks the limit of traditional closed teaching mode, providing a new way to innovate teaching models. All education is social life, the essence of teaching is implementation of practice. The vocal music teaching in normal universities should break the single physical boundary of practice rooms and stages, and build a three-dimensional teaching scene: "campus practical training + classroom practice + social practice"; on campus, combining vocal singing, impromptu accompaniment, and teaching methodology course for simulated classroom teaching; outside campus, organizing practical activities such as classroom observation at primary and secondary schools, teaching assistant trial, aesthetic education volunteer teaching, and community cultural performances in stages; building simulated teaching scenes with the help of information technology to simulate emergency and differentiated teaching scenarios in primary and secondary classrooms. Implement the concept of "teaching by doing and learning by doing", changing the emphasis from "teaching students to sing" to "teach students to teach", integrating normal practical parts like classroom teaching design, work explanation, adaptation to students' learning conditions, aesthetic education guidance into vocal music class, enabling students to improve both their professional ability and normal quality simultaneously through singing practice, teaching practice, and social practice, completely solving the pain points of traditional teaching, i.e., emphasizing skills, neglecting practice, lacking application.

2.4 Optimizing the Evaluation System and Establishing a Humanistic and Diversified Educational Orientation

Traditional evaluation system of vocal music teaching in normal universities is very singular: It takes only pure professional technical standards (intonation, rhythm, timbre, technique, stage performance); Most evaluation subjects are one-way evaluations by teachers; Evaluation results are mostly depending on mid-term and final singing examination, completely ignore students' core normal abilities like emotional expression, cultural interpretation, teaching ability, aesthetic education literacy etc., this kind of evaluation which emphasizes technique and results make students unilaterally pursue ultimate perfect of singing techniques but neglecting the life connotations, emotional value and educational significance of vocal art, reduce the vocal music aesthetic education into just a skill training, lose its essence of aesthetic education.

Essence of Life Education Thought serves life, shapes personality, enlightens life give us a new perspective for the reform of teaching evaluation. Vocal music teaching evaluation can't only rely on technical level but it depends upon life experience, emotional expression, cultural heritage, educational ability, life growth form diversified, process-based, humanistic evaluation system in consideration of technical competence, life perception, cultural literacy, teaching practice, and value shaping (transfer from "evaluating technique" to "evaluating competence, evaluating practice, and evaluating education").

3. Three-Dimensional Application Pathways of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education Thought in Vocal Music Teaching in Normal Universities

To solve this practice dilemma of vocal music teaching in normal universities according to the core connotations and contemporary value of life education thought, and the development demand of vocal music teaching in normal universities for life orientation, emotional engagement and educational cultivation; we build an application system which is progressive at three dimensions: embracing life, comprehending life and loving life so as to realize the deep integration of life education thought throughout the whole process, all aspects and every level of vocal music teaching, thus building a new paradigm of vocal music teaching in normal universities in the new era.

3.1 Embracing Life: Realizing the Life-Oriented Transformation and Systemic Reconstruction of Vocal Music Teaching in Normal Universities

Basic dimension for implementing life education thought: embracing life. Essence lies on breaking away from the separation between teaching and life; Align all content, scenarios and evaluation of vocal music teaching with real life, job reality and social practice, realize the life-oriented reconstruction of the teaching system, return education back to the source of life.

Selection and expansion of teaching content oriented towards life According to the classroom life of basic education and public artistic life, we need to reconstruct the vocal music teaching repertoire;

discard the over-specialized Western arias with high difficulty that is disconnected from the actual teaching practice of primary and secondary schools, and increase teaching content which are rich in life spirit, culturally profound and suitable for basic aesthetic education: Chinese folk songs, local folk vocal works, red life-oriented vocal works, and campus aesthetic education songs as the main teaching materials. Explore regional life-oriented music resources like folk songs, include people's working life, folk festivals, local customs, feeling for family and country into vocal music teaching.

Secondly, extend and open up teaching scenes for life orientation. Practicing the idea of "society is school", we should break out from the closed boundary of campus teaching, create staged and progressive life-oriented practice scenarios: focusing on life perception in the freshman year; organizing students to do fieldwork on local folk songs, experiencing original musical life and accumulating life aesthetic experiences; focusing on teaching practice in the sophomore and junior years, often organize classroom observation at primary and secondary schools, teaching assistant training and simulated teaching to train their classroom teaching ability; focusing on job practice in the senior year integrate into basic education life with educational internship and aesthetic education volunteer teaching, achieve the connection between learning and application. Promoting the integration of various courses (such as vocal singing, impromptu accompaniment, teaching design), which fits the reality of real classroom teaching life.

Thirdly, optimize and improve the teaching evaluation oriented towards life: Build up a diversified evaluation system of "technical indicators + life expression + practical ability". Keep the basic evaluation indicators of intonation, rhythm, and vocal technique; add evaluation elements including emotional expression in life, life-oriented interpretation of works, practical classroom teaching competence, effectiveness of social practice. The combination of process-oriented evaluation and summative evaluation, multi-subjects (teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, evaluation by practice institutions), focus on whether they can interpret works with their life experiences, adapt to life scenarios for conducting aesthetic education teaching, serve social life via vocal art etc., completely abandon the single evaluation standard which is only technique-oriented.

3.2 Comprehending Life: Deepening Emotional Experience and Cultural Interpretation in Vocal Music Teaching in Normal Universities

Deepen the implementation dimension of life education thought, practice the idea: "Education can only exert its power and become true education through life."^[6] The charm of vocal art lies not on the brilliant techniques, but on the authenticity of emotion, the depth of culture and the resonance of life. Vocals music teaching in normal universities should break out of the constraints of technical training, understand the connotations of works, interpret cultural depths and empathize with artistic emotions via their life experience so as to achieve an upgrade from "singing with voice" to "singing with emotion, singing with culture, and singing with life."

But on the contrary, according to our life experiences, we should train emotional empathy in vocal music. The emotional core of all the vocal works comes from real life; when teachers teach they have to give up just correcting technical errors, do some preliminary life guidance by connecting the background of the works to a certain life scenario awakening their life memory and emotional resonance. There is no such life scenarios for students, therefore empathize training needs to be done via creating scenarios and role-playing so as to correctly understand the emotional tone of the works, ensure technique serving emotion and emotion aligning with life.

But when we trace the origin of life, we need to enrich the cultural interpretation of vocal works. Each vocal work is a microcosm of the life of an era, society, and folk customs. The teaching of vocal music in normal universities must involve the cultural interpretation throughout the whole process of work instruction, leading students to trace the cultural foundation of works from the perspective of life. In the teaching, we should pay attention to distinguishing the cultural differences between Western and Chinese vocal music: Western vocal works are based on Western humanism and classical artistic life that focus on expressing individual emotions ultimately while Chinese vocal works are based on China's rural life, collective culture, and folk traditions focusing on the pursuit of the artistry of harmonizing heaven and humanity and integrating emotion with scenery. Pay special emphasis to interpreting the excellent tradition of Chinese music culture. Interpretation of corresponding regional life, folk culture, and labor scene of folk songs, sort out the social changes and spiritual connotations of the times behind contemporary songs. By tracing the cultural origins by means of interpretation of life, students will acquire humanistic literacy, establish their cultural confidence, as well as mastering the method of cultural interpretation and aesthetic education penetration for music classes in primary and

secondary schools.

3.3 Loving Life: Implementing Value Guidance and Life Enlightenment in Vocal Music Teaching in Normal Universities

Sublimation dimension of implementing life education thought: Loving life. Based on Tao Xingzhi's educational philosophy—"True education is an activity of heart-to-heart communication; only what comes from the heart can reach the depths of the heart."^[7], this dimension raises the level of vocational training in vocal music teaching from being trained as professionals to valuing shaping, personality cultivation and life enlightenment which conforms to the requirement of educator spirit education in the new era. Educator spirit in the new era requires educators to have ideals and beliefs of serving the country with utmost sincerity, educational wisdom of teaching according to students' aptitudes, benevolent heart of loving education and students, and pursuit of enlightening people through culture. Vocals music, as a core course of aesthetic education in normal universities, is not merely about imparting singing and teaching skills but also an important venue for cultivating students' educational sentiments, their love for life and breadth of life vision. Vocal art emerges out of life and surpasses life. It expresses its positive attitude towards life by means of beautiful melody, sincere lyric and vivid artistic image, value pursuit of advocating virtue and goodness, and a life-loving sentiment.

We should follow the life education thought in our teaching practice by integrating value guidance into every aspect of our teaching. Lead students to perceive the life of the times when teaching red vocal works, cultivate deep patriotic feelings and strong sentiments towards country and family; lead them to love their local life when teaching local folk songs, inherit regional culture; lead them to perceive the beauty of life when teaching lyrical aesthetic education works, form a positive mindset...At the same time, according to the educational mission of normal universities, we lead students to deeply understand the professional value of music teachers: Music Education in primary and secondary schools is not just about teaching singing, it's even more important to convey the love for life through vocal art, inspire students' life growth, cultivate their aesthetic personality, nourish their spiritual quality. Gradually forming the professional sentiment of loving life, being willing to educate others, being devoted to serve, educating through beauty after long-term immersion in life-oriented aesthetic education, they are not only with solid vocational skills and teaching ability in vocals, but also have the spiritual qualities of an aesthetic education teacher in the new era. They can use vocal art as a way to convey the beauty of life, the beauty of culture, the beauty of life itself in their position in basic education in the future, thus realizing the ultimate value of aesthetic education.

Conclusion

The life education thought of Tao Xingzhi, which is based on the reality of Chinese education, rooted in life, anchoring in practice and people-oriented, offers solid theoretical basis and concrete path for the reform of vocal music teaching in normal universities in the new era. Vocal music teaching in normal universities are at an important turning point that is going from elite-oriented technical training to life-oriented aesthetic education. Wrong goals, unbalanced content, rigid models, superficial educational cultivation has greatly restricted the high-quality development of basic music education teacher training. Introducing life education thought into the whole process of vocal music teaching in normal universities – embracing life to reconstruct the teaching system; comprehending life to deepen the connotations of aesthetic education; loving life to elevate the value of education can effectively solve the key dilemmas of disconnecting teaching and life, balancing professionalism with teacher education, fragmenting technique and humanities. Facilitate three fundamental changes in vocal music teaching in normal universities: change from "single vocal technique training" to "cultivate life-oriented aesthetic education literacy," change from "closed stage performance training" to "open educational application practice;" change from "passive textbook knowledge learning" to "active social life inquiry and study." The educators in vocal music teaching in normal universities need to deeply understand Tao Xingzhi's life education thought under the background of aesthetic education in the new era, stick to the original mission of teacher education, rooted in life, root in practice, and educate through beauty. Carry out continuously the life-oriented, practice-oriented, and humanistic reform of vocal music teaching, striving to cultivate a new generation of basic music education teachers who have professional competence, teaching literacy, cultural confidence, and educational sentiments, so as to make vocal music aesthetic education truly return to life, serve education, and enlighten life, thus providing continuous impetus for the high-quality development of basic music education and the innovation of aesthetic education in the new era.

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