How can Japan overcome Two-fold Political Alienation?

- The Destabilization of the Middle Class and the Emptying-out of the Political Mainstream -

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As marked particularly by Britain's withdrawal from the EU and the election of Donald Trump in the US, the advanced nations have recently experienced successive groundswells of popular rejection of established politics. A two-fold political alienation – the destabilization of the middle class and the emptying-out of the political mainstream – lies at the root of these phenomena. The Fourth Industrial Revolution and globalization are exposing the middle class to anxiety over job security and economic stress. In the political arena, established politics is subject to relentless criticism, and the middle is being emptied out. As a nation that is in the vanguard with respect to its experience of issues afflicting, or that will afflict, the advanced nations, these phenomena are not irrelevant to Japan.

What prescription can we apply to the resolution of this two-fold political alienation? In response to the destabilization of the middle class, the author proposes "core citizens" as new central actors in Japanese society. By contrast with the conventional middle class, for which salary and career was the measure, the standard for the definition of core citizens is the degree of awareness in relation to life and society, and political and social functions. In response to the emptying-out of the political mainstream, it will be necessary to reorganize party politics, seeking to institute a party-based politics. Measures including fundamental reform of the bicameral system and the institution of a system that strengthens the character of the Diet as a deliberative assembly (while giving consideration to the election systems employed in other countries) should be tabled for consideration. What contemporary Japan needs is to mobilize its "core citizens" and to reorganize party politics, in order to create a Japanese approach to a "two-track model of democracy."

The Increasing Worldwide Insecurity of the Middle Class[1]

By marked contrast with the Japanese political scene, which is generally considered to be staid and predictable, in 2016 other advanced nations experienced a series of popular movements that rejected the existing political order. In the UK, the Brexit contingent won a referendum concerning the nation's EU membership; in Germany, the Merkel administration faced severe criticism for its acceptance of refugees; in Italy, the populist Five Star Movement gained momentum, emboldened by a referendum result that rejected constitutional reform; in France, the possibility of the far-right National Front being one of the parties in the second round of the coming presidential election was discussed. And in the US, Donald Trump, described by the New York Times as "the worst candidate ever," overturned predictions and won the presidential election.

It is all too easy to explain this away as a coincidence, with each instance arising from factors specific to the particular nation, or to consider only the surface level of the events, viewing them as representing the limit of established politics. The present author, however, cannot help but feel that a shared factor lies at the root of these phenomena, and that this factor is not irrelevant to Japan.

This shared factor is an insecure middle class. With the globalization of people, goods, money and information, in addition to the advance of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the middle class, previously a supporting pillar of the prosperous industrial societies of the developed nations, has been shaken up, and the feeling of agitation among their respective middle classes is surely a factor in events such as Britain's withdrawal from the EU and Donald Trump's upset presidential victory in the US.

The insecurity of the middle class can also be seen as the political alienation of the middle class. This alienation is a feeling that politics, the economy, and society are beyond one's control, and that one is actually at the mercy of uncontrollable forces. The rising sense of political alienation in the developed nations has been the subject of considerable discussion, being viewed, for example, as the "shadow side" of the prosperous industrial societies that developed in the postwar period. However, what is being experienced in the developed nations at present is a new form of alienation, the anxiety and dissatisfaction of members of a class that has conventionally expected to receive the benefits of prosperity but no longer feel themselves to be masters of their societies, and their loss of confidence in a politics that is unable to provide effective responses to this situation. It is populism, which judges established politics as the embodiment of vested interests and is the self-appointed protector of those who have been abandoned by the system, which has risen to embrace this feeling of political alienation (Jiro Mizushima, Popyurizumu to wa nani ka ("What is Populism?")).

In Saving Capitalism, Robert B. Reich delineates the situation as follows:

> (...) average working people in advanced nations like the United States have failed to gain ground and are under increasing economic stress: (...) globalization and technological change have made most of us less competitive. The tasks we used to do can now be done more cheaply by lower-paid workers abroad or by computer-driven machines.
>
> (Robert B. Reich, Saving Capitalism)

Naturally, opposition to globalization did not simply spring up last year, but many people have the sense that Britain's decision to withdraw from the EU and the election of Donald Trump, who loudly proclaimed his intention to scrap the TPP agreement and withdraw from the Paris Agreement, represent an upsurge of anger towards globalization.

At the same time, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by technologies such as the IoT and AI, has also been advancing. While technological innovation will generate new jobs, it will also eliminate a large number of existing jobs. According to Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, there is a possibility that 47% of all jobs in the US could disappear within the next 10 to 20 years. Even if a substantial proportion of the jobs that are lost are replaced by new jobs, Japanese economist Kiyohiko Nishimura believes that the former medium-skilled workers will be overwhelmed in the market by low-skilled workers (whose productivity will have been increased by technological innovation), and the majority of the middle income stratum that previously made up the middle class will be cast aside as "losers" (Kiyohiko Nishimura, Nihon keizai - Miezaru kouzou tenkan ["Japan's Economy: The Invisible Structural Transformation"]). Many more people than have historically been replaced by machines will unavoidably lose their jobs or be forced to find new jobs, and will be exposed to the stress of dramatic changes in their communities. The frustration and anxiety for the future resulting from this situation well up and find expression in elections and referenda, the most readily available modes of political participation.

Unceasing Criticism of Established Politics and the Emptying-out of the Political Mainstream

It is widely considered that it was the anger of poorly-educated white males that won Donald Trump the presidency in the last US election. Exit polls showed that among white male voters who had graduated from college or taken higher degrees, Trump and Clinton were evenly matched; among white male voters who did not have a college education, however, the figure was seven to three in favor of Trump. Certainly, low-income earners did not vote for Trump en bloc; but the typical profile of the "angry white male" is a worker in the manufacturing or coal industries, earning slightly more than the minimum national average, and resident in states such as Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, which swung to Trump in the election.

In Britain, it has been the prevailing orthodoxy that there are clear differences in individuals' class consciousness depending on the type of work that they perform. Hierarchical categories based on job type have even long been in use in British government statistics. However, the results of a survey published in 2013 by the independent British think tank British Future

showed that 46% of individuals falling into the upper echelons, who would traditionally be regarded as middle class, actually consider themselves to be working class (British Future (2013), State of the Nation). It has been indicated that this collapse of self-identification as middle class, combined with anti-immigrant sentiment, was a factor that led to Brexit.

What is even more serious is the fact that political alienation is not only spreading among the general public, but also among leading politicians. This can also be termed "the loss of the mainstream." In the face of the social changes stemming from technological innovation and globalization, the legitimacy of the political "mainstream," as represented by the postwar consensus until the 1970s, neoliberalism in the 1980s, and the Third Way in the 1990s, has been called comprehensively into question; criticism of established politics is unceasing, and the emptying-out of the mainstream is occurring before our eyes.

Will President Trump, who espoused the destruction of established politics, save the US from its deadlock? He has promulgated an "America First" stance, and has been emphatic in claiming that he will save the waning US coal industry by easing the environmental regulations that were strengthened under the Obama administration, and the stagnant US manufacturing sector by renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Francis Fukuyama, however, believes that while globalization is involved in the spread of disparities in the US, technological innovation is a greater factor. Since 2008, he points out, the US manufacturing industry has expanded; automation is the reason that this expansion has not led to increased employment. The cause of the decline of the US coal industry should be sought in the shale gas revolution brought about by fracking technology, rather than in the environmental protection policies of the Obama administration. Fukuyama's perspective is that because the advance of technological innovation is unstoppable, even if Trump implements his campaign promises, they will not effect any fundamental solution to the issues that the US is facing (Francis Fukuyama, "Trump and American Political Decay," Foreign Affairs).

It is considered impossible, in an economy that centers on tertiary industry, to simultaneously realize budgetary restraint, maximization of employment and income equality (the "trilemma of the service economy") (Torben Iversen and Anne Wren, "Equality, Employment, and Budgetary Restraint – The Trilemma of the Service Economy," World Politics). Britain and Germany have traditionally placed their focus on the first of these (the least likely to attract votes), and striven to come to terms with the other two. After taking power in 2010, former British Prime Minister David Cameron pushed through a large-scale program of budgetary tightening from which not even the social security budget was exempt. Initially, Cameron's popularity declined to the extent that he was said to be certain to lose power at the next general election. Nevertheless, in his five-year term as Prime Minister, he was successful in rebuilding the economy, and with this achievement behind him, won the 2015 general election. However, the Cameron administration crumbled all too readily with the result of the Brexit referendum. The May administration that was its successor identified the reason for the majority "Leave" vote in the referendum as rising economic disparity, and has significantly eased fiscal discipline, postponing the realization of a budgetary surplus into the future. Meanwhile, the Merkel administration in Germany, which can be considered the voice of budgetary restraint in the EU, has faced opposition in the form of anti-

immigrant sentiment, allowing the rise of Alternative for Germany as a new political force. In Italy, the Democratic administration of Matteo Renzi sought constitutional reform in order to allow it to more flexibly pursue economic reform, but was met with relentless criticism from entities including the Five Star Movement, and Renzi ultimately resigned from power.

Two-fold Political Alienation in Japan

If one takes a medium- to long-term perspective, these events are certainly not irrelevant to Japan. Rather, the disease can be considered to be the more deep-rooted to the extent that the symptoms do not manifest immediately. In addition to shared issues such as globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Japan can also be seen to be facing a set of issues in advance of the other nations under consideration, including a declining birthrate, an aging and declining population, and an enormous public debt resulting from spiraling social security expenditure.

In Japan, however, low crude oil prices and a weak yen have improved corporate performance, and the decline in the working population is reducing the unemployment rate. Nevertheless, if we take employment as an example, problems are already becoming manifest, in the increase in the rate of unstable irregular employment and in the long working hours that characterize regular employment. From the medium- to long-term perspective, the spread of AI will also presumably make numerous workers redundant.

Globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution cannot be stopped, and in fact must be promoted in order to gain the first-mover advantage. At the same time, it is also essential to respond to the dissatisfaction and anxiety of those left behind by globalization and technological innovation. However, the satisfaction of this condition will necessitate the direction of even more resources towards addressing the issues of a declining birthrate and an aging population which Japan is experiencing at present, and Japan's public finances, in the face of a towering debt, cannot be expected to provide the necessary resources.

Putting it bluntly, the Japanese public will be forced in the not-too-distant future to swallow the bitter pill of reduced wages and an increased financial burden, with a difference only of degree resulting from whether or not the nation's much-hoped-for economic growth actually eventuates.

By rights, this pain should be spread broadly and shallowly throughout the middle class. However, this margin of safety once available to Japanese society is steadily sinking beneath the waves.

The Public Opinion Survey on the Life of the People conducted by the Cabinet Office has not shown any change in the ratio of citizens self-identifying as middle class, or in the level of citizens' satisfaction with their lifestyles. However, if we look more closely we find an increase in the percentage of citizens experiencing anxiety and worry in their daily lives and concern for the future, for instance regarding the future outlook for their lifestyle, in addition to a tendency towards a reduction in the percentage of respondents indicating a belief that public opinion is reflected in government policy (Cabinet Office, Public Opinion Survey on Social Awareness). Alienation is building up in areas which are not shown in the government's job approval rating.

As exemplified by Yasusuke Murakami's identification of a "new middle mass" in 1980s

Japan, because there has never been a clear definition of the outlines of the middle class in Japan, a process of elimination has created a society in which 90% of the public sees itself as middle class, with no "upper" or "lower" classes (Yasusuke Murakami, Shin-chukan taishu no jidai ("The New Middle Mass Era")). This means that the awareness of being "the middle" is presumably stable, but it also means that this class lacks an awareness of itself as the mainstream and a sense of agency that would see its members position themselves as the central actors in Japanese society.

Politically, the sense of insecurity engendered by a lack of certainty over one's social and economic positioning and even basic preferences, in combination with the sense of stagnation produced by a long-term economic slump, drive voting behavior in pursuit of some type of "change" (despite the lack of a guarantee of policy continuity) – now to Koizumi's structural reform, now to a DPJ administration, or to Abenomics, or the rapid reform of administrative structures sought by Toru Hashimoto's Nippon Ishin no Kai, or Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike's Party of Hope (Masaki Taniguchi, "The 2009 Change of Power," 2010 Britannica International Yearbook).

Among politicians themselves, despite the emphasis on making some "change," and in particular on the destruction of the established regime that is the necessary first step towards this "change," the will to present a medium- to long-term vision that would provide an alternative plan (delineating, in relation to the Fourth Industrial Revolution and globalization, what type of society we seek to create, and what path we can take to the achievement of this goal) is often lacking.

The political scientist Taichiro Mitani has coined the term "two-fold political alienation" for this state of Japanese politics, in which not only the public but also politicians, and in particular politicians centrally involved in government, lack a sense of agency. He writes, "I believe that there is a sense of political alienation in the current administration led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in that it believes that postwar Japan is not the real Japan, which is to say that Japan following the war, and today's Japan, which bears its traces, is an alienated form of the real Japan. Hence Prime Minister Abe's frequent assertion of the need to restore…the real Japan" (Taichiro Mitani, The Past and Present of Postwar Democracy in Japan).

This is not limited to Prime Minister Abe. It is also true of the opposition, which has long lost any vision for governing. Both the opposition and ruling parties have lost the will to squarely face criticism of established politics and stand as entities central to the realization of democratic politics in Japan, working to overcome the challenges represented by globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in addition to a declining birthrate and an aging and declining population. Even if individual politicians were to possess an appropriate awareness of the issues, the machinery is not in place to enable such an awareness to be taken up as an ongoing political agenda. For example, the "conservative mainstream" (although there is no logical reason that conservatives should monopolize the term "mainstream") is an endangered species in today's LDP, and for the DPJ the descriptor is nothing more than a banner for intra-party conflict.

The two-fold political alienation of public and politicians, or, in other words, the expanding turmoil in the middle class generated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and globalization and a politics that can propose no proactive and effective initiatives in response, is not a phenomenon restricted to other countries. The only difference between those countries and Japan is that they have variously faced flashpoints in refugee crises, public referenda, and the election of Donald

Trump.

Cultivating "Core Citizens"
– Restoring the Public Sphere to the People

What prescription can we apply to alleviating this two-fold political alienation?

First, we must prepare ourselves for the fact that the insecurity of the middle class (the middle class as defined by its economic ascription) is at present irreversible. At the same time, the advanced nations, and in particular Japan, possess the asset of social maturity, which has ripened under the conditions of prosperous industrial societies. Would it not be possible, then, to project the existence of a new main actor in Japanese society, based on its level of awareness in relation to life and society, or its political and social functions, rather than a middle class defined on the basis of income?

This new actor is the group of "core citizens" advocated as a focus of attention by the authors of NIRA Opinion Paper No. 12 (Shigeki Uno, et al, "Chukakuso no jidai ni mukete [Towards the Era of the Core Citizen]"). The designation "core citizens" points to individuals who independently select their own way of living, who consider what is best for society, and who possess a sense of responsibility and pride in seeking to actively support society.

Unlike the middle class, core citizens are not determined by the size of their income or the job they perform. Clearly, given the condition that core citizens are individuals who have autonomously chosen their way of life, it would presumably be a relatively easier matter for individuals with a stable financial base to become core citizens. However, a NIRA survey has shown that there are a considerable number of core citizens leading autonomous lives and possessing the will to participate in the forming of society among low income earners and individuals who self-identify as "lower" class. A specific socio-economic status is not an essential condition for inclusion among core citizens (NIRA, "Questionnaire Survey Research concerning Core Citizens and the Society of Trust").

The concept of core citizens, it should be pointed out, does not extol a worldview of slavish devotion to the government. As symbolized by the idea of "open governance," citizens and municipal administrations working together to solve regional issues, or by the idea that "public opinion" is the opinion of all and not the government or official perspective, the public sphere is the concern of all, not something monopolized by the government or those in authority. Core citizens are individuals who seek to use the experience and wisdom – the practical knowledge – that they have gained in developing their personal lifestyles as individuals, as family members, and as workers, to benefit society.

Further, core citizens do not represent a small elite. 20% of respondents to the survey discussed above answered "Yes" to the questions "Do you actively resolve difficult problems that you face in your life in your own way?" and "Do you contribute to the resolution of social problems in order to make society a better place?" These are core citizens. Adding in the respondents who answered "I can't really say" to one of respondents can be termed core citizens in the broad sense (or potential core citizens).

There are a number of types of core citizen. I follow the authors of NIRA Opinion Paper No. 12 in defining the following three categories as a concrete image of the group:

① The "innovator," who exercises ingenuity in attempting to make circumstances better and more convenient for others based on knowledge and experience gained from work or life experiences

② The "networker," who ties together various innovations and nodes (see below), creating organic linkages across a wider area

③ The "community node," who functions as a nodal point in society, providing care for individuals in a variety of contexts and acting to knot together networks.

We can consider child-raising to provide examples. Making use of experience in negotiating with the local government office and carpentry skills, an innovator might create an athletics field on local unused land, providing children living in the city with the opportunity to play in nature; a networker might create a mailing list, bringing together the parents of children attending the same elementary school, in an effort to stimulate more detailed exchanges of information regarding the school and the local community; the older male or female "busybodies" who ask around regarding any isolated children in the neighborhood are, by another name, community nodes. If one looks around local communities, schools, or workplaces, or seeks out examples in areas such as care for the elderly or community-building, one will surely find individuals who match the image of one of these types of core citizen.

The types are not mutually exclusive. To continue with the example of child-raising, the case of an individual who launches a service that checks via email on children who are home alone from the time they leave school until their parents arrive home from work, and sends pre-registered volunteers to visit if any problems have arisen, is an example of one person encompassing each of the three core citizen types. The results of the NIRA questionnaire survey discussed above showed that almost 40% of respondents who could be classed as core citizens straddled at least two types.

The resources able to be provided by the national and local governments are diminishing, but it would be unrealistic to seek a substitute in the idea of the type of traditional community that existed in the distant past. To take advantage of the fact that the number of citizens who do not define themselves through affiliation with a single organization or group has grown, and to offer core citizens the opportunity to flourish in contexts that transcend the company or group, would be to restore the public sphere to the people, or in other words, to overcome alienation. Core citizens will not be manufactured as a class by the government; core citizens are already ubiquitous in society as people of ability acting outside official positions.

How Can We overcome Criticisms of Established Politics?

The other alienation that we must overcome is alienation among politicians. The greatest fear today is not that power will be seized by an opposition party that positions itself along the axis of conflict between the left and the right, but that a political movement that spreads criticisms of established politics, without an alternative that can actually be realized, will render

administration by democratic institutions impossible.

Japan has no room for hesitation in the face of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and, given the challenges represented by fiscal crisis and the declining population, the range of policy options available to the nation are limited. Whether desired or not, Japan will not be able to avoid reducing the effective corporate tax rates and increasing the flexibility of the labor market in order to attract human resources and capital and increase productivity. At the same time, it will also be essential to incorporate a "livelihood security" strategy, which does not simply abandon workers who have been let go by a company, but ensures that they are able to receive practical job training at a guaranteed decent wage, and are able to be re-employed in an industry and a job for which labor demand is high, and a "work-life balance" strategy, which is organized around a stringent adherence to working hours regulations, in order, on the side of the company, to increase the ability to secure labor power and ensure the productivity of labor, and on the side of the worker, to enable a diverse range of work styles to suit different life stages.

With this medium- to long-term awareness of the issues and general policy package orientation shared among political parties, we should encourage competition between parties as to whether, for example, they focus on the management side, or position the employee side as their highest order of priority. It would be essential to institute measures to ensure that parties share a concern with avoiding polarization in relation to fundamental national strategy, while also allowing differences in terms of the social foundations that each of the parties stands upon and their basic worldviews to remain.

The following two points are the most important in terms of concrete system design:

First, we should aim not to return to the candidate-based politics that characterized the period prior to the political reforms of the 1990s, in which there was competition between the personal interests of individual politicians, but rather aim towards a party-based politics. While heated argument is perfectly acceptable within the context of the policy planning process, for example at party conventions, ultimately the party must take responsibility, and each of its lawmakers must be ready to thoroughly fulfill their duty of accountability to constituents as the representative of the party within their region.

Second, we need mechanisms that give greater consideration to both careful deliberation and decision-making than has been the case up to the present. A process of careful deliberation that takes into consideration a wide variety of opinions is an important factor for a politics that is unable to avoid the adoption of policies that result in a burden on the public. Even if one's own opinion ultimately fails to be adopted, if a process has been engaged in which that opinion has been given adequate consideration, the sense of alienation can be controlled. We must pursue a politics that is able to produce results following careful deliberation, without falling into inconclusive debate.

Relevant to this is the idea, which a large number of commentators have considered in recent years, of limiting the right to dissolve the Diet, fixing the terms of office of Diet members, or, in other words, allowing Diet members to grapple with long-term issues without being concerned about the rise or fall of their rate of support. However, even if the terms of office of members of the House of Representatives was set at four years, Japan holds elections for the

House of Councillors every three years. Excepting items such as the nomination of the Prime Minister, the ratification of treaties, and the passing of the budget, bills do not enter into effect unless passed by both houses (i.e., unless they are passed again, with a two-thirds majority, by the House of Representatives). This measure would therefore not fundamentally change the nature of politics as a state of eternal battle-readiness for the next national election (national elections being held once every several years). Unless we engage with the problems of the bicameral system, which were not taken up in political reforms in the 1990s, we will be unable to break free from a politics that focuses only on the next election.

If it was possible to make a fresh start, we might increase the dominance of the House of Representatives to enable it to override the decisions of the House of Councillors based on a House of Representatives majority, and, following this, position a system of proportional representation at the center of the electoral system for the House of Representatives; this would create a Diet system that encompassed both decision-making and careful deliberation. If, theoretically, only the dominance of the House of Representatives was increased, it would invite criticism of a politics that was excessively decision-oriented; if, alternatively, only the degree of proportional representation was increased, it would have no effect but to increase the number of members with veto power. The two must come as a set, and cannot be negotiated separately. If it is complained that a system of proportional representation makes it impossible to vote for an individual (unaffiliated candidates, etc.), a system of mixed member proportional representation, like Germany's, is available; if the concern is that such reforms might lead to fragmentation into small political parties, options include the allocation of "bonus seats" (previously, in Italy's lower house, the party that won the majority of votes was granted a majority of seats) and the introduction of an election threshold (in Germany's federal elections, it is a principle that a party that receives less than 5% of the vote cannot receive a seat). It will be objected that the House of Councillors will not implement reforms that weaken its own powers, but in Italy the upper house did pass a constitutional reform bill that considerably reduced its powers, despite the fact that it had been rejected by a public referendum; the possibility cannot be considered to be simply a pipe dream.

If a fundamental reform of the bicameral system cannot be realized, it would be possible to introduce a unified system based on the existing system. For example, a system of small electoral districts could be introduced for the House of Representatives. The introduction of a two-round voting system as employed in France (if no candidate within a specific electoral unit receives a specified amount of votes, the top two candidates go to a second round of voting), or a preferential voting system as employed in Australia (voters mark down an order of preference for candidates within their electoral district when they cast their ballots) would facilitate the formation of a majority, and enable the election of candidates who satisfy a greater number of voters than is the case at present. Alternatively, it would be possible to introduce a system of proportional representation for the House of Councillors, making the House a forum for careful deliberation in which the opinion of the minority is reflected.

Any electoral system has both strong points and shortcomings, and the above discussion is intended only to indicate possible examples. The point I would like to emphasize is the fundamental concept – the necessity of seeking an orientation for a politics that takes

responsibility and produces results as a party system (not merely as an individual party), to ensure that we do not reach a point at which our political landscape is made up of an opposition between established political parties and alienated members of the public. We have the relatively recent example of the agreement between Japan's ruling and major opposition parties regarding integrated tax and social security reforms to indicate that the argument of this paper, which seeks to provide systemic backing for such initiatives, is more than simply armchair theory.

By encouraging core citizens, whose experience of social participation has given them an understanding of a variety of ways of thinking regarding issues in the public sphere, to strike deep roots in our society, we can reorganize the opinion aggregation and political socialization functions of the political parties, making democracy more robust. Habermas suggests that debate in civil society (the second track) can supplement political decision-making by parliament (the first track) (Jurgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms). The mobilization of core citizens and the reorganization of party politics advocated in this paper can be considered a Japanese approach to this "two-track model of democracy."

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