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## Foreignization in the miniature of School of Isfahan: A cultural approach

Zahra Masoudi Amin\*

### Abstract

This paper aims to identify the influence of cross-cultural communications on the formation and development of the miniature of School of Isfahan. The main findings of this paper explain and describe the method of foreignization and the influence of cultural changes on the emergence of this method. In other words, in the process of developing foreign relations during the reign of the Safavids, and by the entrance of European artists to Iran and the familiarity of Iranian artists with Western painting styles, a new course of events happens in the Persian miniature as foreignization affected by the aesthetic methods and techniques of non-Iranian painting. The results of this study have shown that cross-cultural communication has deeply influenced the emergence of new artistic and non-Iranian practices in different ways including economic, political and cultural relations. And therefore foreignization for us is a dynamic aesthetic system. That's why we have explained and illustrated the course of events related to the foreignization of artworks analysis of this period with descriptions and analysis by using applied research methods.

### Keywords

Foreignization, Miniature, Culture. Foreign relation, Aesthetics.

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\*. Ph. D. in Art Research. Assistant Professor, Alzahra University. [masoudiamin@alzahra.ac.ir](mailto:masoudiamin@alzahra.ac.ir)

## Preface

Regarding the history of Persian miniature, its historical changes, its different schools and also its unique artists, it has some features that makes us look into it with newer approaches. In this paper, while the theoretical foundations of intercultural communication are outlined, the process of impressionability of Persian artists from Western paintings in the Safavid era are discussed with the analysis of an example of the school of Isfahan paintings that had a profound influence on the course of visual arts, especially in Iran. The main question of this paper is that among the different factors, what factors have been the most important reasons for generating the technique of foreignization? On one hand, it seems that the formation of foreignization method, have been a tendency towards the innovation and change in aesthetic and technical aspects. As the inclination of Mohammad Zaman, Reza Abbasi and some of his students towards school of Isfahan painting is a reason for this claim. This paper can be discussed in three main sections. In the first part, we turn to the theoretical issues related to the intercultural relations and then we will consider its role in changing the mechanism of creating artistic texts. In the second part we turn to the formation of foreignization method during the Safavids era and in the third part we review an example of artworks by proposing findings and technical analyses.

Hypothesis: It seems that the most important factors of the formation foreignization methods are cultural and social changes of its time.

## Literature review

In case of the studied subject in this paper, no research has been carried out with the cultural approach thus far, in the meantime we can only mention the article of Jaqub Azhand (2000) called innovation and modernization in the Safavid art. In this paper, the approach and tendency to modernization and its contrast with the tradition of Persian miniature have been evaluated and the factors, causes and different aspects of modernity and innovation have been discussed. Also from this author, the book *School of Isfahan* (2006) a chapter titled foreignization, has considered this method the historically and aesthetically. In addition, an article has been written by Sadeq Rashidi (2013) titled the interaction of discourse signs, separation and connection in painting system that has considered this subject by a semiotic approach.

## The role of cultural factors in the formation of foreignization

Culture is one of the broad concepts that one cannot provide a clear, definite and absolute definition. In fact, this concept has been changed over time and it has always a social-historical aspect as well. However, in general refers to a set of customs, beliefs and social acts of a community or nation. In this case, Taylor writes: "Culture should be considered as a connected set of beliefs, customs, forms of knowledge, art and the like that people acquire them as members of a particular community, and this set can be studied scientifically and as as a complex school» (Thompson, 1999: 159). We can say that culture is a system, a system of different elements that the community has not created it all at once. It has always existed throughout history. On one hand, "Culture is the practices and processes of creating a meaning with texts that we face in the course of everyday life." (Storey, 2003: 3).

Hence believing in a universal culture causes the isolation of a culture and the lack of expressing its meaning and identity. However, the existence of many meanings and definitions for culture, has various causes and justifications that indicates as much richness, breadth and complexity as possible of this concept.

Culture is a complex and multi-dimensional topic, with deep value and scientific connotation which has been covered by the layers of uncertainty and ambiguity. Culture, is one of the expressions that refers to the broad and complicated accumulation thinking about human affairs. In fact, being culturalized is the coordination and conformity of an individual to all cultural conditions and characteristics and it usually occurs in two ways. First in the natural and gradual way which is the growth of people in specific cultural conditions.

Second in the meeting of the two cultures which may happen in different ways. Culture includes all the things that we learn from other people and almost human actions arises from culture directly or indirectly and they are influenced by it. Rashidi (2011) quoted from Hall (1991: 44) writes, "Identity always needs another view. The "self" is considered in the other one's view, a concept that breaks the borders inside and outside, borders between those who belong and those who do not belong there. "In this respect, many of the cultural and artistic phenomena like the structures made by man and artworks like buildings and paintings in two diachronic levels that

have regained their form in the process of association with cultural components. However, in any case, resistance to the other one has always existed in different ways, but it can be said that the history of art has shown that this resistance has been unstable (Rashidi, 2011: 214).

Because “no cultural system can be separated from other cultures and become isolated, cultural contact between the cultural systems is inevitable.” (Yousefian, 1989).

This instability is mainly due to the changing factors such as rebellion, revolution or the spread of a dominant culture and thought through various ways. In fact, spreading, is a process in which cultural issues and components are transferred from one society to another, sometimes it happens indirectly i.e. “It is done by a third party, most businesspeople take a feature of one society and transfer it to another” (Asgari Khaneqah, 1993). Therefore, this mechanism can be clearly observed in a part of history, culture and art of Iran, especially Safavid era. Iranians used to communicate in the Safavid era with European people through economic and cultural exchanges such as the presence of European artists and presenting European painted pictures to kings. So we can say that social, political and historical changes are the important factors in the establishment of relationships and breaking boundaries and this leads to the confluence of cultures that eventually this results in the production and the creation of newer cultural texts.

Therefore, any artwork that is made in the context of a culture, sometimes contains the signs of other cultures and it is considered as the center of the confluence of cultures. And its aesthetics is indebted to this confluence and combination of cultures. Because even on another level it may attract audiences from different cultures, for example, “Is Taj Mahal an Indian monument? Whether Iranian or Mongolian? The first answer is that it belongs to India, because it is located in India, but more accurately we can say that this building is Indian, Persian, Mongolian, i.e. the center of cultural synthesis” (Sojoodi, 2009).

Therefore, the result of this confluence is the creation new texts and works of art that contains juxtaposition of its components and the components of another. Based on this, a culture before being affected by other cultures or before affecting other cultures is considered an independent system, but when it combines with other cultures and becomes dependent on them and enters a dynamic, changing and multifaceted field.

## Foreignization

Foreignization is an “artistic expression that refers to the incomplete modelling of European painting. This kind of modelling is free from deep point of view in a way that imitating the style of European motifs is done on a surface level. This technique of modelling has been prevalent among the ancient artists of Iran and India nearly for two hundred years and from the mid-eleventh century to the early years of the fourteenth century. (Pakbaz, 1999:371).

“During the Safavid era naturalism of European painting entered Iran because of many reasons and drew the attention of Iranian artists to itself in a way that they modeled the principles and methods of this style of painting and it was from this time onwards that the title of “foreignization was given to a kind of style which used to apply European painting elements such as stereograms, perspective (graphical) and European motifs. This style was started from the time of Shah Abbas the Great and was flourished especially during the time of Shah Abbas II (1052-1077 BC) “(Azhand, 2006: 185). Mohammad Zaman is one of the famous artists of this style. With the aim of creating a change in the mechanism and structural techniques of Persian painting, he created works of art which can be considered and studied in terms of aesthetics and visual techniques.

In literary and historical sources, artists who have imitated European paintings and their methods have been mentioned, such as the Sheikh “Mohammed Shirazi” who used to work in the library of Shah Ismail Mirza (6) (984-985 AD , 1576- 1578 AD), and then he used to be in the employ of Shah Abbas. Western art did not influence the Iranian painting quickly. At the beginning this influence was on the field of choosing subjects and more on the secrets and details of art of the moment, as far as we can say, Iranian painters have adopted the methods of European artists and imitated them in many things. But Iranians have not taken the things that are worthy to be mentioned. Especially in paintings of manuscripts they have followed the old methodology. Painting also had lost its original grandeur and importance, and many technical specialists could not add something new to it. The History of painting in Iran, (Hassan, 1978: 156). According to historical documents, it should be noted that cultural, economic and political interactions have been very effective in the development and continuity of the aesthetic of aspects of art, especially painting. Based on the theoretical basics of this paper, we

find that the influence of intercultural relations have been involved on the formation of artistic themes, techniques and aesthetic aspects. While noting that this has been a conscious influence to the extent that “philosophy and mysticism of the Safavid era can be seen continuously in paintings of that period. But in the Iranization part of paintings, in fact, it must be said that in the Iranization method, principles and methods of Iranian painting was prevailed, but some elements of foreignization had been entered in it. “(Azhand, 2006: 186). The tradition of painting in Iran from the middle of the eleventh century onwards, i.e. in the time of Reza Abbasi’s students passes through new stages. Painters by recovering and reconstructing of foreignization patterns and discovering its themes and techniques give new meaning to the Persian miniature. And some of them pull it down on the level of nudism. On one hand this inclination gives a new structure and order to the Iranian miniature and prepares and unlimited end in a way that little by little, especially in the era of Zand dynasty and early Qajar dynasty, in the field of foreignization it will be realized as an artistic process. (Ibid: 244). Europeans in the time of Shah Abbas the Great who sought to gain advantages for their country, used to bring presents including Western artworks and canvases for the king, In the meantime even the European artists occasionally were invited to work in the court of Safavid kings ... that these effects can be seen in three groups of painting schools of Isfahan as follows: “First, in a few numbers of single-sheet designs that generally was created by famous painters as Reza Abbasi, Abbasi Shafi, Afzal al-Husseini, Mohammad Zaman and Aligholi Jabadar. Second in the series of frescos of Ali Qapu Palace, Chehel Sotoun and some places related to Safavid era in Isfahan and New Julfa and the third in the series of oil paintings in natural size of men and women dressed in Iranian clothes like the people in the second half of the eleventh century” (Javani, 2006: 137). Some people believe that Europe has more influenced the subjects of painting rather than the style of painting, but it must be said that “Europe’s influence on the painting of the Safavid era should be expressed with reference to painting techniques not by their subjects and, in this field the new design, increased use of natural tones and underdeveloped and preliminary attempts to patterning must be emphasized. Even artists such as Muhammad Qasim and Muhammad Yousef Hussein that had been working based on traditional patterns, by using the patterning of forms and light and shade

effect, have indicated a degree of Europe influence on their artworks” (Azhand, 2006: 189).

If we want to look for the influence of European painting on Persian miniatures, whatever these influences are, undoubtedly they have created newer aesthetic and thematic process. It is worth saying that the economic efflorescence of Iran based on the silk trade, the wealth of citizens of Isfahan, new technical innovations of Europe and their entrance in Iran, and development of maritime trade routes and strengthening and accelerating the transportation of goods such as art was effective in the development of foreignization monographs. These monographs describes the existing world and its unlimited varieties (Ibid: 245). In the next part of this paper, we will turn to some artworks by analyzing our case studies. The images that have been chosen for this part are related to the course of foreignization in the Safavid era, which its origin has already been explained.

Due to the historical and aesthetic developments in the field of miniature and the course of foreignization and being influenced by European paintings in the process of intercultural communication, we are faced with artworks that in general, have several important issues indicators. If you look closely at Figure 1, which is one of the frescos of Chehel Sotoun palace, we separate two fundamental components that interact with each other, which we call them culture and nature, culture includes human personality in relation to objects around him and nature includes natural and realistic landscaping, like a stream of water and trees. But the main element in this picture that has allocated the internal part of space to itself is an Iranian woman in European or foreign clothing. Other elements are things such as pergolas and also a part of the wall or building decorations that the picture is designed on it. Therefore in this figure we are faced with the relation of general to specific and specific to general, that have formed the generality of this artwork in fact we can say that pergola as a specific component of a homogenous combination of European clothing has been situated in another cultural atmosphere that this cultural space is the Persian miniature tradition, So this relationship (specific to general) have changed the previous and ordinary expectations to some extent and has created a new atmosphere by combining the Iranian woman and her image.

The thing which is important in the method of foreignization and paintings of school of Safavids and Qajar is the Iranian atmosphere and the presence

of Iranian culture that is more attractive than cultural influences. In fact the method of foreignization is a kind of compound and eclectic style of art that its Iranian image is strong and pleasant because of the aesthetics of Persian painting. As this identity in every part of the world is unique and recognizable. Iranians have always dissolved foreign culture and its influences in their own culture and with special tact and skill they have changed everything to the form of Iranian culture and we can say that they have Iranized them. Intellectual taste and talent of Iranians throughout the history to accept new ideas and beliefs (religion, philosophy, mysticism) imported art and architecture, decorative and symbolic elements, crafts and even in dealing with other customs and cultures has been in a way that they have refined them and finally they have presented an Iranian product and however, it is compound and eclectic but the Iranian nature of the artwork is quite obvious. This phenomenon can be clearly seen in the art and culture of the era of Qajar and the first king of the Pahlavi dynasty because of its architecture and decorations and other arts, especially painting school of Qajar (Masoudi amin, 2014); (Fig. 1).

“One of characteristics of real frescoes is the inseparability of it from the wall, so the frescoes of the Safavid era have been created on the main wall of the building and with the materials at the same time.” (Javani and Aqajani Isfahani, 2006: 15). The relation and combination of elements belonging to another cultural atmosphere has created a new and dynamic combination with the elements of Iranian pictures. Therefore, in this aesthetic we are not faced with the separation or segregation of elements. (Rashidi, 2013). It means although the elements of this artwork belongs to two different cultural worlds, but they are situated in the context of a homogenous and coherent combination. The presence of Western elements and interaction with Persian miniature tradition and in general elements of traditional Iranian culture in this artwork including a woman, water-bottles, landscaping and even decorations of the walls, that painting are drawn on it, makes us be faced with evasion from criteria and breaking the predetermined models. This image because of the combination of different cultures are dynamic, changing and fluctuating. Because these are the aesthetic events that will completely change in subsequent periods and determines the styles of painting in the next periods (Fig. 2).

In terms of aesthetics, composition of fig. 2 more or less is similar to the compositions of Western

painters of the Renaissance, which is more manifested in Fig. 3. That is to say that geometrical and triangle frames that are considered different as an aesthetic indicator. In fact, “The aesthetics system of Iranian ancient miniature, which was broken off in the school of” Isfahan” will be replaced by an incomplete naturalism in paintings of Mohammad Zaman. He uses the achievements of the Renaissance artists in an arbitrary and artificial way and therefore his artworks lack accurate principles of perspective, perspective (graphical) of atmosphere, adjusting light and shade and the anatomy. On the other hand,

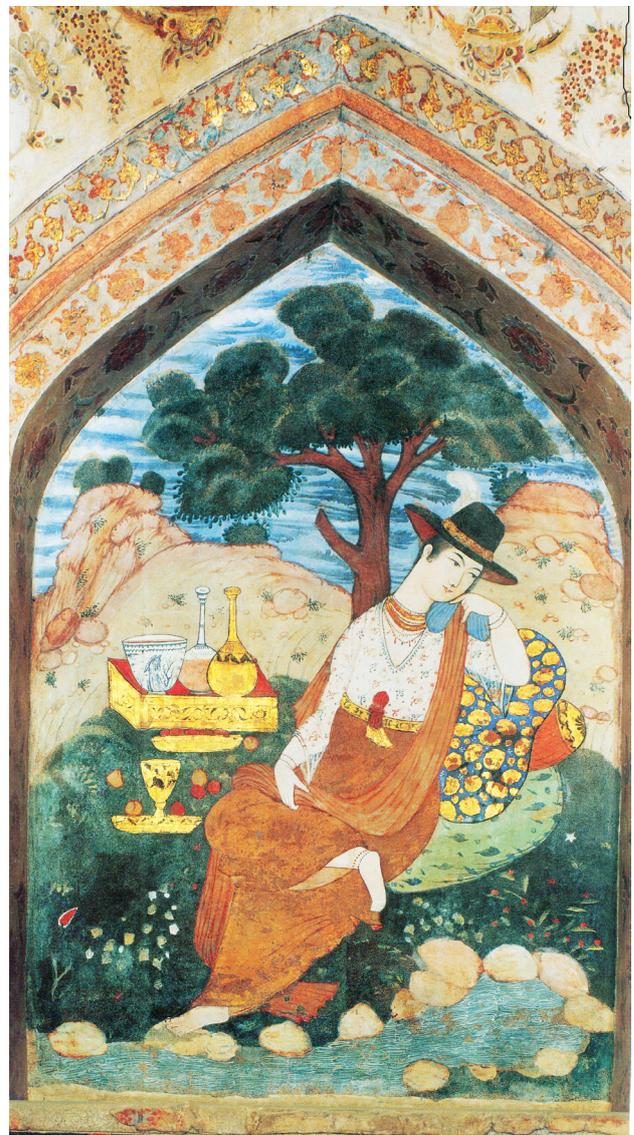


Fig. 1. Fresco, Chehel Sotoun Palace, School of Isfahan. Source: Javani and Aqajani Isfahani, 1386.

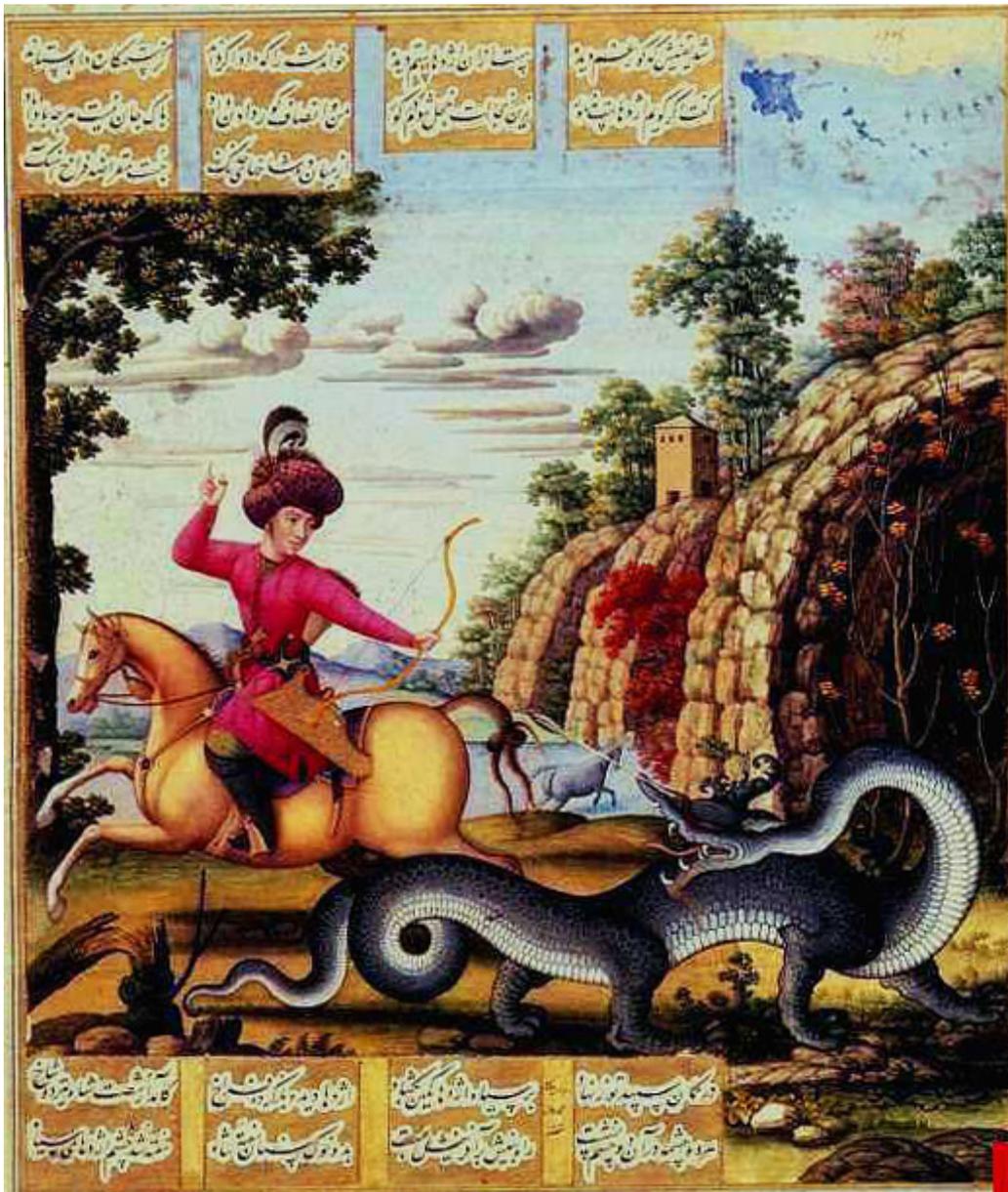


Fig. 2. Bahram Gur Killing a Dragon, by Mohammad Zaman, the School of Isfahan. Source: Pakbaz, 2009.

because he inclines towards the visualization of the three-dimensional space and objects, and using of local and natural colors, he abandons the coloring method of previous. But he is faithful to the tradition of adornments and he offers his specific solutions for the harmony of visual and decorative elements. In addition to the specified things in some faces, clothes, plants and flying birds, the overall influence of Mughal painting can be discerned in the artwork

of Muhammad Zaman” (Ramadan Mahi, 2012). Therefore the gradual entrance of European elements, changing and instability of painting style are all the reasons that determine the aesthetic evolution of painting in more recent eras. Thus, in the context of aesthetic principles and features in Persian miniature, as a cultural atmosphere, we see the presence of foreign elements that have been combined with the artist’s skills in painting that have created a dynamic

and new artwork and they are always convergent and in association with the generality of the artwork and its other components and elements which form and shape it. This point about the Iranization of paintings was mentioned earlier.

### Summing-up

According to what has been described, it can be said that cultural relations through social ways and various social factors such as wars and conquering other countries, political and economic relations have an important role in shaping and creating elements of aesthetics and technical structures of Persian miniature in the Safavid era. This process mainly occurs historically and in a developmental way, during which in the confluence of cultures, they accept some elements and reject some of them. So this will lead to the change or generation new cultural texts. In case of the selected example of this paper of the way of forming elements and aesthetic structures of painting and generally the method of foreignization, have been affected by the intercultural confluence of Iranians in the Safavid era and Europeans. And other hand fundamentally the world view and the influence of foreign culture elements in the Safavid era and Western painting techniques and inclination towards monographs like the artworks of Mohammad Zaman in aesthetic representation of the artworks related to this era and their structures have had a main and profound influence on the evolution of artworks. While the main foundations of Persian miniature or painting in most cases remain stable, that this feature is the sign of the strength of intercultural interaction that Iranians have always dealt in the best way with it.



Fig. 3. European women, the artwork of Ali Quli Juehdar. The late seventeenth century. Source : Pope, 2004.

### Conclusion

According to the proposed findings in this paper and regarding the history of foreignization, it can be claimed that foreignization is a kind of developed aesthetics in Iranian painting that is the product of outside factors such as cultural and social relations. Understanding and examining the process of structural and visual metamorphosis and evolution of Persian miniature in the Safavid era require recognizing and considering the cultural and social aspects and political changes during the formation of foreignization methods in school of Isfahan. In fact cross-cultural confluence and communications whether in the course of its history or its current form, leads to the creation and formation of new cultural phenomena that has aesthetic structure, compound and dynamic language and expression. But what is considered among the important conclusions of this paper is that even in ancient times, although the main part of artistic achievements of Iranians have been adopted and have been a combination of aesthetic techniques and elements of neighboring civilization but these achievements are so unique that we cannot give them any title except being Iranian. That's why the method and measures which Iranians follow intellectually to coin and adopt elements and components of other nations and to refine Iranize them have always been the strong point of the culture and civilization of Iranians. In case of the subject of this paper also the refinement and adoption important aesthetic components of the art of Western nations in

the dynamic process of accepting and rejecting and localizing them can be seen very well in the new methods of Iranian painting and miniature of the Safavid era. Thus, foreignization and techniques of such methods in Iranian art, indicates the highest degree of knowledge and attention to maintain the nature and content of noble Iranian culture and also represents the process of logical and dynamic artistic and cultural relation of its time very well. According to the proposed hypothesis in this paper, cultural and social factors are considered as the most important and fundamental factors in the formation of these various artistic consequences in the Safavid era, and the primary grounds for any aesthetic and technical change in art and artistic achievements of different periods are the results of these social and cultural factors.

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