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Comparing the Open University Systems of China and India: Origins, Developments and Prospects

Abstract The national open universities of China and India are unique adaptations of the open university model that emanated from the UK. These institutions have expanded to become the largest universities in the world as measured by current enrollment of approximately four million each. This article comparatively analyzes how these open universities have differentiated themselves from the open university model and from each other amidst similarities of outcome and differences of approach. Historical contexts, national governance of higher education, institutional administration, curriculum and international operations are the foci of analysis. The article contributes to the literature on national and local forces that shape higher education systems and aims to spur collaborations between the institutions in question for mutual benefit.

Keywords open university, indigenization, Indian higher education, Chinese higher education, comparative education

Introduction

The national open university systems in China and India, otherwise known as the Open University of China (OUC) and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), are offshoots of the Open University (OU) in the UK that was established in 1969. The shared mission of these universities is to provide and enhance access to higher education using distance education for learning and liberal admissions policies for entry. For OUC and IGNOU this has proven largely successful as measured by approximately four million students currently enrolled at each institution (OUC, 2014; IGNOU, 2014b).

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As these institutions have grown, so too has the allure and expansion of distance education in the larger higher education sectors across China and India. The respective governments have added to the responsibilities of OUC and IGNOU by including the role of distance education in meeting lofty enrollment objectives nationally. China's *Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)*, (herein referred to as the National Outline; MoE, 2010b) and India's 11th and 12th Five Year Plans for higher education (Government of India, Planning Commission, 2006, 2013) place a focus on growing enrollment among adult learners by millions towards the end of the decade.

Although domestic growth through distance education is a priority for OUC and IGNOU, each institution has also asserted its place in an increasingly globalized milieu. Partnerships with hundreds of institutions that stretch from East Africa to Central Michigan characterize the international outlook of these universities. Faculty exchanges, branch campuses and cross-border program delivery have been ongoing for years.

The origin, domestic role and international moves of OUC and IGNOU illustrate significant commonalities. Notable differences include organization, degree of autonomy, language policies and curriculum. Taken together, there is an intriguing foundation for comparison based on early developments and contemporary operations of OUC and IGNOU. As this paper will illustrate, there is also rationale for greater exchange between these institutional behemoths and broader lessons to be learned for other providers of distance education in emerging world contexts.

Theoretical Considerations and Problem

In a globalized milieu, the concept of higher education is increasingly subject to reductionist narratives. Rankings, quality assurance and Western forms of internationalization support arguments that the model of higher education is increasingly a universal one and a reflection of Western origins and values (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, & Schofer, 2006). The global spread of the OU model would appear as a fitting example. Overlooked in these arguments are nationalist and cultural tendencies. Noted anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1994) contends that the origin—and values—of social phenomena that are absorbed into foreign

contexts are inevitably transformed (if they are not rejected) into new phenomena, or disjunctures, by indigenizing forces. Consider the two countries in which OUC and IGNOU are situated. No foreign model of higher education could convince China to teach in a language other than Mandarin Chinese. Today, China boasts of world-class universities that espouse Chinese characteristics (Mohrman, 2008), which hold their own among elite Western institutions. The British Raj implanted the model of the University of London to create universities in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata (Ashby, 1966) yet these universities now exist under the shadows of the elite institutes of technology. These products of Nehru's vision in the early 1950s have positioned India as an information technology dynamo.

The fact that OUC and IGNOU each enrolls upwards of four million learners—figures that dwarf the enrollment of the OU—reflects the strength and persistence of indigenous forces. As this paper moves forward, other reflections of the indigeneity of OUC and IGNOU will be illuminated.

Appadurai's concept of disjunctures will aid an understanding of the indigenization of higher education that has occurred in OUC and IGNOU. Analyses of these universities will demonstrate that their alignment to the OU is more oriented towards a philosophy than infrastructure, curriculum, administration or research. Their international outlook is also unique and reflects interest in disseminating values and ideas that are distinctly Chinese or Indian in origin. These outcomes should be of interest to other proponents, or providers of distance education in the emerging world. Complementing Appadurai's position on indigeneity is one that is directly related to higher education. Clark's (1983) Triangle of Coordination (see p. 143) conceptualizes how state regulations define the extent of autonomy, and even indigeneity, in the governance of higher education (see e.g., Jongbloed, 2003; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). Clark's Triangle, which includes the ideal types of state authority, academic oligarchy and the market, will be utilized as one lens to discern how OUC and IGNOU have differentiated from their British counterpart and from each other considering that each institution is governed under distinct political systems.

The first aim of this paper is to demonstrate that OUC and IGNOU are more indigenously oriented than their OU monikers make them appear, leading to the first of two questions: In what ways (and how far) did OUC and IGNOU diverge from the original British model of the OU? A corollary to this problem is to

describe and compare the adaptation of the OU model in China and in India. As will be re-iterated in this paper, these two Asian institutions are remarkably similar, despite marginal contact between them, differences in language, and their existence within distinct university traditions. The similarities and differences to be identified serve as points for mutual exchange, an opportunity neither institution has pursued with any zeal so far. Taking into account similarities of outcome and differences of approach, we arrive at the second question: How do these Asian universities compare to each other? In a broader picture, the description and analyses of these distinct models will be of interest to institutions that are aiming to reach large and/or dispersed populations through open and distance learning.

Organization

The paper will first describe the evolution of the OU and include its expansion overseas. This historical account will lend itself to understanding how China and India shared similar issues in the need to expand their own higher education systems and how they gained from the expertise of the OU. This approach to comparison is modelled on the work of Wilson (1990) who compared the transfer of the OU model to the Sukothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand and Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia and then compared the two Asian open universities. While the Wilson paper was a helpful model, this paper does less functional description and places more emphasis on the historical and international contexts in which these open universities originated and currently operate. Much of the information and analyses presented in this paper build on an empirical study carried out in 2008 and 2009. This study included analyses of policy documents and stakeholder interviews of faculty and administrators located at OUC and IGNOU (Perris, 2012).

The Origins of the Open University

Amidst its world class universities, the UK's larger higher education system was underdeveloped in the post-War context. In the early 1960s only 6%–7% of secondary school students pursued further studies after graduation (Rumble & Harry, 1982, p. 170). For adults, far fewer learning opportunities existed at the

degree and diploma levels.

A comprehensive two-year review entitled *The Robbins Report* recommended enrollment expansion within existing universities and to leverage the use of television to widen enrollment for studying by correspondence (Robbins, 1963). Models of standalone distance teaching universities were studied including those established in the Soviet Union and South Africa (Keegan & Rumble, 1982; Silk, 1974).

Deliberations among politicians led to the formation of the OU by official Royal Charter in 1969 (OU, 2013). The mission of this new university was to be barrier free. In simple terms, those without secondary school qualifications were required to complete two foundation courses before enrolling in a formal degree program (Wei, 2008, p. 47).

The OU was located in the young town of Milton Keynes, located one hour by road from London. When the OU opened in January 1971, enrollment was 25,000. Learning occurred via distance education with content delivered as television or radio lectures and complemented with print materials. Students would receive face-to-face support in a network of learning centers around the country with the main focus being on individual learning. The university also placed focus on research that was devoted to teaching and learning in the distance mode (Daniel, 2004, November).

An innovative product of the OU was the invention of the course team. Rather than individual academics being responsible for a course, teams of academics and other individuals congregated to design and develop courses. Daniel describes this as “one of the highest expressions of scholars being scholarly” (Daniel, 2001, p. 22). Among the innumerable variations within open universities, the use of the course team has persisted around the world.

A network of 13 regional and national centers provided physical access points around the UK. Today this serves an enrollment of 250,000. Approximately 600 courses leading to 250 types of credentials are currently offered through seven schools of study. Credentials range from short-term certificates to doctorate degrees. Online learning is widespread and through its research branch, the university engages in a variety of open educational resource projects. Its most recent undertaking is Future Learn, the first UK-Based Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) provider that was launched in October 2013.

The early successes of the OU drew interest from other countries, and OU faculty were willing collaborators. This led to the formation of the Centre for

International Co-Operation and Services (OUCICS; Wilson, 1990, p. 85). Its function was to provide policy and technical advice to new Distance Teaching Universities (Dodd & Rumble, 1984, pp. 247–248). Under these auspices, the OU aided 10 countries across four continents in the establishment of open or distance teaching universities (Wilson, 1990, p. 86).

Today demand for higher learning continues to be outpaced by supply, strengthening the potential for distance education and open universities, which are far less constrained by enrollment growth than campus-based universities. Almost universally, open universities are more affordable in regards to tuition than conventional universities and apply novel pathways for admissions in contrast to the rigidity of the larger higher education sector. Underlying these attributes is the adaptability of the OU model resulting in disjunctures, as Appadurai would attest, that have created institutions that are reflections of the societies in which they are situated. How well this has occurred will be the focus of the following sections in descriptions of the proliferation of OUC and IGNOU.

Development of Distance Education in China and the Open University of China

Distance education had firm grounding in China by the 1960s. At this time broadcast oriented universities in Beijing and other major cities were established (McCormick, 1982, p. 57; Ding, 2006, p. 28). Learning occurred generally by correspondence and reached thousands of learners.

Shortly after the Cultural Revolution, when formal four-year undergraduate programs resumed (Zha, 2006, p. 142), a mere 5% of secondary school graduates were finding placements in universities (Perraton, 2000). Millions more older adults, previously denied the opportunity to pursue higher education, comprised a significant proportion of the population. As part of former Premier Deng Xiaoping's four modernizations of agriculture, industry, national defense and science and technology, rapid industrialization was planned and a viable higher education system was integral to meeting national objectives.

The Establishment of the China Central Radio and TV University

During a visit to China in 1977, former UK Prime Minister Edward Heath met

with Premier Deng Xiaoping. Heath expounded on the successes of the OU, which had enrolled tens of thousands of learners by this point (Ding, 1994, p. 334). In China, the potential of TV and radio to reach masses for higher learning was highly appealing. Subsequent discussions with varying government sectors led to the State Council approving the idea of a broadcast-based university (McCormick, 1980). As part of planning, academics, policymakers and others from China visited the OU (Wei, 2008, p. 46). In February 1979, after only a year of deliberation, OUC began operations.¹

As a public university, OUC functions under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Many MoE employees are seconded to OUC for varying periods of time. The proximity to government is also illustrated by OUC's physical location. It is situated in central Beijing, along the main subway line and the Fourth Ring Road.

OUC has been identified as the world's largest distance teaching university system (Latchem, Abdulla, & Ding, 1999), which in actuality can be considered the largest university in the world. The core values of OUC are articulated as a ladder for ordinary people to upgrade skills, a means to demonstrate educational equity, and a depot for students to gain self-enrichment and motivation (OUC, n.d.).

Administrative Organization and Financing

Since its inception, OUC has interpreted distance education somewhat differently from the OU. Viewing teaching as central to learning, and seeing this as occurring best in social settings, OUC organized the learning environment in the form of remote classroom teaching. The majority of study time, however, occurs individually with print and increasingly, online. As is the case today, learners generally congregate on evenings or weekends to attend in-person or pre-recorded lectures. This occurs in teaching venues, which are the front line of a highly

¹OUC was originally known as China Central Radio and TV University or in Chinese, *zhongyang guangbo dianshi daxue* (中央广播电视大学), a reflection of the tradition in China to name universities after focus or discipline. A derivative to the original Chinese name, China Central Radio and TV University, is *dianda* (电大) and this is how the system is colloquially known in China. As part of the 30th anniversary celebration in 2009, the China Central Radio and TV University was re-branded as the Open University of China, or in Chinese *guojia kaifang daxue* (国家开放大学).

intricate system.

Mirroring the hierarchical structure of the Chinese government, OUC is organized by four levels of administration. At the helm is the central headquarters which operates under the jurisdiction of the MoE. OUC is mandated to organize curriculum, produce videos, set examinations and provide administrative support through a vast network of subordinate institutions (Ding, 1994, pp. 337–338). Operating under OUC are semi-autonomous Provincial Open Universities (POUs), of which 28 were established in 1979. This differs from the OU model which uses regional centers that operate as nodes of the central OU and classrooms where tutorials are scheduled. There are now 44 POUs, an outcome partially attributed to a 1983 World Bank loan worth 85 million USD (Hawkrigde, 1990).

The POUs engage in course design and evaluation for locally relevant topics, administer enrollment and provide support to students and training to teachers at the branch schools. One clear policy is the concept of 60/40 whereby OUC is charged with the delivery of a minimum of 60% of courses, and POUs are permitted to design a maximum of 40% of courses for a particular program. Some compulsory courses set by OUC include computer science, English and politics (Perris, 2012). Under the POUs there are branch schools which number approximately 1,100. These are responsible for overseeing work stations which in turn oversee teaching venues (Ding, 1994, p. 335). Fig. 1 depicts the organization of OUC.

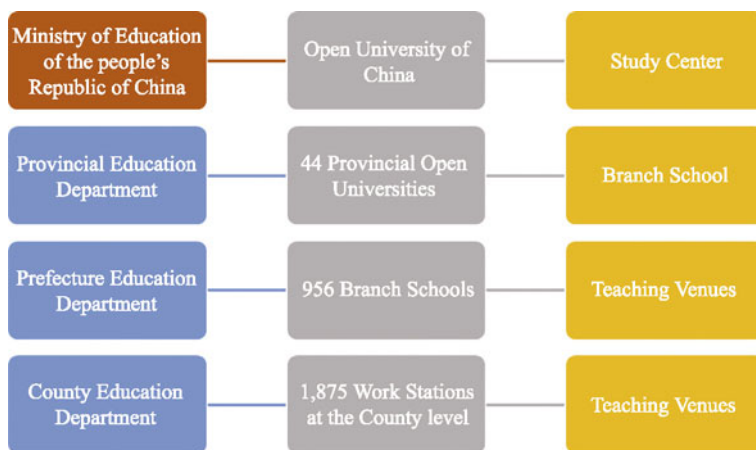


Fig. 1 Organizational Structure of OUC

Source: Adapted from OUC. (n.d.). *Structure*. Retrieved January 20, 2015, from <http://en.ouchn.edu.cn/index.php/about/structure>

The financial circumstances of the OUC system mirror the relationship to the Chinese government. As depicted in Fig. 1 there are four levels within the system and at each level, the corresponding level of government is expected to provide financing for the particular institution (Wei, 2008, pp. 51, 90). Other sources of funding are derived from student fees, the corporate sector and the work units where students are employed. This has been reported as 51.6% from government, 40% from students' employers, 5.1% from tuition fees and the remaining 3.3% from other unidentified sources (Zhang & Shin, 2002, p. 172).

Admissions and Credentials

The first programs were two or three years in duration; arts-based programs were two years, science-based programs were three years (Wei, 2008, p. 170). The credential was classified as a sub-degree or diploma. No degree programs were offered. Targeted learners were those working in factories, teachers and secondary school graduates, including army personnel. Programs were generally in-service and aimed to enhance knowledge and skills related to a particular profession (McCormick, 1982).

Admissions were, and remain, uniquely open, with the university administering its own entrance examination, credential and enrollment quotas (Wei, 2008, p. 51). This policy represents a distinct departure from the rigidity of the conventional system punctuated by the highly competitive national college entrance exam.

The provision of bachelor degree programs was instituted through a pilot project in 1996. Law, Computer Science and English were the first programs offered. OUC would issue the credential, but only a partnering conventional university, along with the MoE, were permitted to confer the degree, a practice that remains in place today.

In 1999 the Modern Distance Education Project was implemented where a greater focus was placed on online learning, which would usher in a larger number of learners as internet access grew (Perris, 2012). Today online learning is central to the operations of OUC, a reflection of the fact that China has over 600 million internet users in the country (Internet World Stats, 2014).

In OUC's first year of operation, enrollment reached 110,000 full-time students (McCormick, 1980). Current enrollment stands at 3.59 million, of which 1.09 million are undergraduate enrollment and 2.5 million are associate degree

enrollment² (OUC, 2014). A significant number of students who complete a sub-degree enroll in a bachelor degree program. The student body is mainly adults, although up to 35% have been reported to be school leavers (Ding, 1999, p. 52), and therefore fit within the typical age cohort of 18–23.

Academic Programs

At the academic level there are six faculties. They are listed as: Art & Law, Economics & Management, Teacher Education, Agroforestry & Medicine, Foreign Languages, and Engineering. Under these six faculties there are 45 discipline programs (OUC, n.d.). Not surprisingly, the language of instruction within the OUC system is Mandarin Chinese.

In the wider system, there are 57,100 full-time and 37,000 part-time teaching staff that provide instruction to the 3.59 million students studying in degree and sub-degree programs (OUC, 2011). There are also institutes or programs that target particular populations including the military, the disabled, the Tibetan region and village cadres.

OUC has adopted the course team model of the OU. Involved are notable academics of a particular discipline. These individuals usually originate from the particular joint university that confers the OUC degree, as identified in the previous section.

International Initiatives

The international affairs of OUC are diverse and include varying agreements with partner institutions. The most common agreement involves faculty exchange. The arrangement with the OU, for example, has OUC faculty visit the OU for several months allowing them to engage in a particular project. In turn, a faculty member from the OU is received at OUC to conduct a workshop or staff training. Other exchanges have occurred between groups of faculty from OUC and the Open University of Japan and the Korea National Open University. The lone exchange between OUC and IGNOU was referenced as a four week fellowship in India that was arranged by the Asian Association of Open Universities (OUC, 2009b).

² The associate degree is the current term that was earlier identified as a sub-degree or diploma program.

The other focus of international affairs of OUC has been to engage the international community with Chinese culture. Most notable is the partnership between OUC and Michigan State University, where the first online Confucius Institute was established in 2006. Online programs include language learning and information on Chinese culture (OUC, 2009b).

Overall, OUC has established cooperative relationships with 128 universities and educational institutions in 38 countries and regions. The focus of OUC's international initiatives has been eclectic and grounded in advancing knowledge for the benefit of the university, and also advancing cultural understanding of Chinese society which supports its mandate, "OUC aims to become an open university with unique Chinese characteristics and major international influence in the 21st century" (OUC, 2009a, para. 4).

OUC and Its Role in Chinese Higher Education

OUC plays a significant, though understated role in China's higher education system. The national focus remains on China's 211 and 985 projects, aimed at advancing the standing of China's top universities globally through research, faculty exchanges, and graduate studies (MoE, 2010a, p. 21). Despite its status as an alternative institution for higher learning, OUC maintains partnerships with prestigious universities such as Beijing Language and Culture University and the University of International Business and Economics (Perris, 2012, p. 249). Further, the proliferation of programs offered through distance education in conventional universities reflects positively on the accomplishments of OUC.

In July of 2010, the government released the National Outline. Its enrollment objectives are outlined in Table 1.

By 2020, the aim is for the total number of people with higher education to reach 195 million, and enrollment in continuing education to reach 350 million. Both figures are at least double 2009 figures. Not surprisingly, the open university system has been identified in the National Outline as being integral to the fulfillment of the strategic goal for continuing education (MoE, 2010b, p. 23).

Before moving to the next section, it is useful to reflect briefly on some aspects of indigenuity, relative to Appadurai, and governance, relative to Clark. The most obvious example of indigenous policies was language of instruction. The original institutional name, China Central Radio and TV University, is a less obvious, but

noteworthy departure from the OU. It captured the purpose of the institution, which was an alignment to how many other universities have been named in China. The use of remote classroom teaching seemed philosophically linked to the importance of socialization in learning. Linkages to work units and the limitations on conferring degrees exemplify the oversight of the state authority, relative to Clark's Triangle. In combination, it would appear that the OU model was significantly overhauled to create OUC, an outcome Appadurai would claim was essential to ensure the new phenomenon would adequately function in the cultural context. The presentation of IGNOU's development will aid more in the application of Appadurai and Clark in the comparative section, located in the final third of this paper.

Table 1 Enrollment Objectives in Chinese Higher Education (2009–2020)

Timeframe	2009	2015	2020
Regular higher education institutions	29.8 million	33.5 million	35.5 million
Absolute/% increase	n/a	3.7 million/12.4% ↑	2 million/6% ↑
No. of people with HE	98.3 million	145 million	195 million
Absolute/% increase	n/a	46.7 million/47.5% ↑	50 million/34.5% ↑
Continuing Education	166 million	290 million	350 million
Absolute/% increase	n/a	124 million/74.7% ↑	60 million/20.7% ↑
% received higher education (20–59 years of age)	9.9%	15%	20%
Total new entrants	n/a	174.4 million	112 million

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MoE). (2010b). *Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)*. Retrieved December 7, 2014, from https://www.aei.gov.au/news/newsarchive/2010/documents/china_education_reform_pdf.pdf, pp. 11–12.

Development of Distance Education in India and the Origins of the Indira Gandhi National Open University

In 1961, the same year as the formation of the Robbins Committee, India's Central Advisory Board of Education convened to discuss varying issues including enrollment in higher education, which was at the time abysmally low. It was measured at approximately 500,000 (Idiresan & Nigam, 1993, p. 334) out of a population of 458 million (World Bank, 2014).

Like the Robbins Committee, the Central Advisory Board of Education looked abroad to borrow models that supported expansion in higher education. Recognizing the success of correspondence education in Japan, the Soviet Union and the US, the Board commissioned the University of Delhi to commence correspondence courses in 1962. The objectives were to widen access through cost-effective provision, open access policies and flexible study that would enable individuals to balance work and life commitments. Soon other universities started to offer degree and diploma programs through this mode of learning, predominantly through branch divisions that were designated as Correspondence Course Institutes (Swamy, 1991, p. 115).

By 1970, news of the UK's OU had spread far and wide. That year India's Department of Education³ held a seminar with UNESCO and experts from the OU to explore the prospect of expanding higher education opportunities through distance education such as a self-governing national open university. Creating a new university, however, proved to be far more complicated than opening Correspondence Course Institutes in existing institutions, of which 20 existed by 1980 (Perraton, 2000, p. 86). Progress stalled for over a decade.

Establishment of the Indira Gandhi National Open University

By 1983 momentum was revived. The State of Andhra Pradesh upstaged the Union government by opening the Andhra Pradesh Open University⁴ (Swamy, 1991, p. 112). It is believed that this was one impetus to re-engage with this project on a national level. Subsequently in March 1985, a committee headed by the Vice Chancellor of the Andhra Pradesh Open University was appointed by the Department of Education. The task was to ascertain the feasibility of a national open university. By late 1985, the Indira Gandhi National Open University Act was passed in the Indian parliament. Like China, India looked to its own traditions in naming universities, one which tended to honor notable figures by naming institutions after them. With the assassination of Indira Gandhi in the previous year, it was decided to

³ The Ministry of Human Resource Development oversees education in the country. It is comprised of two factions: The Department of Higher Education and The Department of School Education and Literacy. The Department of Education was originally under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, but was disbanded when the Ministry was reorganized.

⁴ In 1991 the Andhra Pradesh Open University changed its name to B. R. Ambedkar Open University.

name the country's national open university after its fallen Prime Minister.

The suggestion to emulate the British model of the OU was deliberated and varying aspects were borrowed such as administrative structure and some curriculum. One deviation was a faculty rather limited in size in comparison to the OU which began operations with approximately 80 staff (OU, 2014). If and when enrollment and programs grew this would be adjusted accordingly. Another proposed deviation was to decentralize the administrative and academic responsibilities through a network of state open universities. This was a novel idea that was grounded in the idea of supporting India's immense linguistic diversity that is roughly segmented by state boundaries. The Central Advisory Board on Education subsequently made a recommendation for all states to establish their own open university, an outcome that has been fulfilled, at present, in 13 of 28 states. This slow adoption may be attributed to the development of IGNOU's regional centers, which proliferated as demand for enrollment grew.

Although the Indian government has played a significant role in the establishment of IGNOU, there has been little policy guidance, particularly in comparison to the more proximate relationship between the Chinese government and OUC. India's higher education system is governed by the University Grants Commission, which includes 15 professional councils. One professional council is the newly formed Distance Education Board⁵, which provides accreditation to the distance education programmes in the country (Prasad, 2013). It presides over IGNOU, 13 state open universities, and 183 distance education institutes located in conventional and private institutions across India.

Like OUC, IGNOU is located in the administrative capital of the country. By contrast, however, IGNOU headquarters are located in a suburb of south Delhi adjacent to an ecological reserve, as compared to the more urban location of OUC. IGNOU has been identified as the largest university in the democratic world (Times of India, 2009, July 4; Kanjilal, 2013, p. 221), an interesting way of distinguishing itself from OUC.

Administrative Organization and Financing

Like the OU, IGNOU originally established regional centres, located in 28 states

⁵ The Distance Education Board is the successor of the defunct Distance Education Council, which was housed on the IGNOU campus.

and seven union territories. Regional centers provide administrative support and carry out some teaching duties. There are 67 regional centers which oversee approximately 3,000 study centres (IGNOU, 2014b). Study centres primarily serve teaching and mentoring functions for students.

The regional centres of IGNOU are comparable subunits to POUs of the OUC system. The fundamental difference between these subunits is that regional centers do not carry out curriculum design. It is also noteworthy to point out that state open universities and distance education institutes found in conventional universities purchase and use IGNOU's course materials.

IGNOU receives funding from the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India. The amount of funding equals approximately 15% of operating costs (IGNOU, 2014c). The difference is generated internally and includes tuition fees, sales of IGNOU course materials and other institutional partnerships. Tuition from programs varies widely. The MBA and computer applications programs, for example, charge tuition that is comparatively higher than other programs. This is justified based on higher operating costs and the more affluent demographic that generally enroll in these programs. Such a strategy functions to offset costs in other programs. Overall, IGNOU charges tuition that is markedly lower than conventional universities.

In the broader picture, the most recent financial data indicates that in the 12th Five Year Plan, the Indian government will invest 18 billion USD in the higher education sector. IGNOU should receive a share of finances directed to central universities, amounting to 5.9 billion USD, and open and distance learning amounting to 114 million USD (University Grants Commission, 2013, p. 122).

Admissions and Credentials

The pioneering staff at IGNOU sought to prioritize admissions and minimize the existing barriers to accessing higher education, which were primarily centered on those who did not have secondary qualifications. Much like the OU, it was decided to create a pathway to entry whereby prospective students could take foundational courses in social sciences and commerce (Perris, 2012). Entitled the Bachelor Preparatory Program, successful completion allowed individuals to enroll in a bachelor degree program in commerce, arts or social work (IGNOU, 2013).

Academic Programs

Internally, IGNOU is organized rather intricately containing comparatively more divisions and schools of study than OUC. The Schools of Study are the foundations of the university and carry out the major tasks of teaching and curriculum organization. Like OUC, IGNOU has adopted the innovative model of the course team that was invented by the OU.

In 1987 when the university opened it offered only two programs; a diploma in Management and one in Distance Education. This drew a first-year enrollment of 4,500 (Perraton, 2000). Having celebrated its 25th jubilee in 2010, IGNOU re-branded itself with the accompanying tagline of *The People’s University*, fitting if measured by its current enrollment of four million (IGNOU, 2014b). Its demographic is a mix of adult learners and school leavers, though official data is unavailable.

IGNOU operates 21 schools, compared to the OU which has 14 schools and OUC which has six schools. The array of schools, as depicted in Table 2, is another reflection of the mantra of decentralization that has governed the university since its inception.

Table 2 IGNOU Schools of Study

School of Agriculture	School of Journalism and New Media Studies
School of Computer and Information Sciences	School of Law
School of Continuing Education	School of Management Studies
School of Education	School of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Engineering & Technology	School of Sciences
School of Extension and Development Studies	School of Social Sciences
School of Foreign Languages	School of Social Work
School of Gender and Development Studies	School of Tourism and Hospitality Service Management
School of Health Sciences	School of Translation Studies and Training
School of Humanities	School of Vocational Education and Training
School of Inter-Disciplinary and Trans-Disciplinary Studies	

Source: Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). (2014). *Schools*. Retrieved October 15, 2014, from <http://www.ignou.ac.in/ignou/aboutignou/school>

Interestingly, the School of Foreign Languages offers a certificate program in

Chinese Language. The diploma in Distance Education under the School of Education includes a module on OUC.

In academic terms there are 420 faculty and 36,000 counselors. They oversee the curriculum and teaching duties in nearly 500 programs which lead to a certificate, diploma, bachelor degree, master's degree or doctorate degree. Like OUC, IGNOU has programs that cater to distinct groups that include the military, farmers, and rural inhabitants. There are also quotas in most programs for applicants who are identified as members of lower castes and other disadvantaged groups.

International Initiatives

Another interesting component of IGNOU is its international division which plays a unique and vital role for the university. It was established in 1997 and functions to promote the academic programs of IGNOU outside of India, license the materials of IGNOU to foreign institutions, and co-ordinate training programs of personnel at open university institutes outside of India.

Through this division, IGNOU has collaborations with 67 international institutions of higher learning located in 40 countries spreading across South Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Central Asia and the UK. Priority areas target the Indian diaspora and include member states of the Commonwealth, the Persian Gulf, and SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member countries.

There are 82 programs that lead to a certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree or master's degree. Cumulative enrollment has surpassed 35,000 and revenue has increased gradually from 500,000 USD in 2004 to 2.2 million USD in 2013 (IGNOU, 2014c).

The website for the International Division describes a fourfold approach to growing its operations. This is listed as "collaboration," "coordination," "cooperation" and "competition"; a slogan that, by comparison to the international outlook of OUC, is less nationally specific, and more direct in its objectives (IGNOU, 2014a).

IGNOU and Its Role in Indian Higher Education

IGNOU plays a significant and highly visible role in India's higher education

system. It is regularly cited in Indian newspapers when offering new programs, partnerships or achievements. It is also consistently singled out in the government's five year plans.

The government working paper on higher education as part of the 11th Five Year Plan (2006–2011) directly references the role of IGNOU and India's open and distance learning system. In particular, there was the expectation that these institutions would account for enrollment of 6.7 million (or 30%) of the expected 22 million enrollment in higher education (Government of India, Planning Commission, 2006, p. 96).

Although the 12th Five Year Plan focuses less on the open and distance learning system, one objective is to achieve an additional enrollment of one million through open and distance learning. IGNOU is again singled out, noting that it will receive increased support, "to expand access particularly for those beyond the normal schooling age" (Government of India, Planning Commission, 2013, p. 101).

In the bigger picture, India will need to rely more and more on its open and distance learning system. The 12th Five Year Plan indicates that enrollment in the higher education sector stands at approximately 24 million or one-fifth of the 120 million potential enrollment (Government of India, Planning Commission, 2013, p. 90). To capture the enormity of this problem imagine building 100 new institutions, each of which would have the capabilities to enroll one million learners. Clearly, India will need both to devote more resources to expanding existing institutions, and to building new ones. For reasons of cost-effectiveness and efficiency, IGNOU, the state open universities and the other distance education institutes will continue to be integral to addressing the immense demand for higher learning in India.

The adaptations that have distinguished IGNOU from the OU occurred largely after the institution established itself in India. As it matured, along with the larger open and distance learning system in the country, greater diversity in languages of instruction and in programs appeared. IGNOU's autonomy, facilitated by the University Grants Commission, is a similar governance structure to the OU and fits within Clark's conception of the academic oligarchy. On the surface, it would appear that IGNOU has been less influenced by indigenous processes than OUC. In the discussion the relationship between these universities and the theoretical considerations of Appadurai and Clark will be considered in more detail.

Discussion

This paper first set out to trace the origins of OUC and IGNOU. A cursory review of the higher education systems of China and India, as they relate to barriers to access, provided justification to consider, and eventually embrace distance learning in the form of standalone distance teaching universities. Among other models that existed, both countries were drawn to emulating the OU.

Appadurai's (1994) concept of indigenization was employed to elucidate how social phenomena that move transnationally, may be successfully adapted and become woven into the cultural fabric of a society. This was supported by utilizing Clark's (1983) Triangle of Co-ordination, which served to interpret the strength of state involvement in the development of both OUC and IGNOU.

Building on China's and India's distinct adaptations of the OU model, and seeking to understand how the differing approaches to the development of OUC and IGNOU were similarly impactful, a comparative account of these institutions is now presented under the following questions:

- In what ways (and how far) did OUC and IGNOU differentiate (diverge) from the original model of the OU?
- Amidst similarities of outcome and differences of approach, how do these Asian universities compare to each other?

Each question is addressed in sequence.

Differentiation of the Open University Model in China and India

A starting commonality between China and India was that the formation of an open university was sanctioned by the national government. In the UK and in China, the head of state led the establishment of the OU and OUC, respectively. China went a step further and authorized OUC to be an extension of the MoE. In India, IGNOU was established by an Act of Parliament and thereby enshrined in the Constitution. It has since been governed by the country's University Grants Commission, and its subsidiary, the Distance Education Board.

Situating OUC and IGNOU in the nerve centers of Beijing and Delhi connoted the importance of each institution to the development objectives of each country. Ascribing the name of a fallen Prime Minister in the case of IGNOU, and locating OUC centrally and among the most powerful institutions in the country

strengthens these inferences. The relatively remote location of the OU and its de-contextualized moniker was not appealing to Chinese and Indian technocrats. For OUC and IGNOU, being located in Beijing and Delhi respectively has meant being proximate to state ministries and elite universities. This has served the dual purposes of accessing academic expertise and receiving policy guidance, both of which have been to the benefit of each institution. The concept of the course team has enabled prominent academics to work closely with OUC and IGNOU staff and faculty, and desired policy changes are likely moved through more quickly in the capital regions.

OUC and its relationship with the MoE is a classic example of the state authority in Clark's Triangle. Personnel of the MoE are closely intertwined with OUC. Degrees attained from OUC are conferred by an adjoining conventional university and the MoE. Other policy initiatives commonly originate from the government. In India, the University Grants Commission provides a contrasting exemplar of the academic oligarchy in Clark's Triangle. It operates to distribute government funding and regulate the higher education institutions in the country. The autonomy bestowed on IGNOU is reflected in the array of disciplines and programs offered through 21 schools of study enabling the university to accommodate the immense diversity in the country. Some distinguishing features of the early developments of OUC and IGNOU will now be considered in comparison to the OU.

Administration

The administration of OUC and IGNOU was distinct from the OU in terms of geographical reach, administrative capacity and localization of programs. The decision to create POUs under the OUC system was an effective means to de-centralize the vast administrative duties of the system. The POUs have operated with a degree of autonomy and oversee two additional subordinate branches demonstrating the localization and distribution needed in China's vast geographical landscape. The autonomy of POUs to design up to 40% of curriculum is another deviation from the regional centers of the OU, which operate as extensions of the main campus in Milton Keynes.

IGNOU utilizes a similar three tier structure to the OU. To accommodate the administrative duties of a significantly larger and distributed enrollment, IGNOU

has created many more regional centers across its vast territory. The expansive system of regional centers also mimics the higher education system within India. Dating back to the early colonial period, the few universities that were established under British rule created networks through a college system (Ashby, 1966), an arrangement that remains today. Universities organize curriculum, administer exams and administer the colleges that serve as extensions of the university.

The localization piece for the OU is comparatively non-existent. As it functions to serve a consolidated territory with a far smaller population than China or India, meeting demographic needs is more manageable than it is for OUC and IGNOU.

Programs and Credentials

OUC's narrow offering of programs and credentials was another distinguishing feature from the OU. To be successful in its early days when it enrolled hundreds of thousands of learners, strategies of efficiency and effectiveness were required. This was particularly important considering the integral role and investment from the central government. Tying enrollment to work units and attending classroom sessions in groups were pointed strategies. This would have engendered accountability and a support network among co-workers to complete their studies, and likely contributed to building institutional legitimacy.

The manner of conferring credentials sanctioned by the MoE and in collaboration with a conventional university, was another approach that was different from the OU, which offered its own degrees from the outset.

The use of Mandarin as the language of instruction is an obvious policy for OUC. The fact that curriculum had to be planned, designed, developed, or in some cases translated, to cater to distance learners however, further supports the efficiency of establishing the OUC system in only one year.

By comparison, IGNOU, in its early years, appeared more cautious. Starting with a small faculty and modest enrollment, the institution seemed less certain of the popular interest and perhaps even legitimacy of its programs. Like OUC, IGNOU began operations by only awarding diplomas in two programs. The language of instruction was English, but the institution eventually established itself as bilingual, offering more and more programs in Hindi. Its delivery of content was a mixture of print and television based delivery. Learners were not obligated to attend classroom sessions, but tutoring was available. In this case,

IGNOU followed a similar approach to that of the OU, and in fact, used some of its television programs early on. IGNOU also embraced similar policies to the OU in regards to admissions. The Bachelor Preparatory Program is similar to the foundational courses offered to prospective students at the OU who lack formal secondary school qualifications. OUC took a different approach, requiring that all learners have secondary school qualifications. OUC's associate degree program, however, has operated as a bridging option to enter a bachelor degree program.

Although there was alignment to the philosophy of using distance education and other measures (e.g., admissions), the establishment and early development of OUC and IGNOU were largely divergent from the OU. This ranged from the selection of the institutional name, to the degree of autonomy of the nodes of each institution. For OUC the creation of provincial subsidiaries, language of instruction, limitations on programs, conferral of credentials, and state-centric governance are all distinct from the OU model.

In its establishment, IGNOU appears to have borrowed more from the OU in regards to administration (e.g., regional centers), programs and utilizing English as a language of instruction. Clearly, the colonial linkages between India and the UK have persisted and are evident in this comparison. India's University Grants Commission, by which IGNOU is governed, is a vestige of British India.

Yet, if we consider the larger system of state open universities in India, a different story emerges. The expansion of the state open universities, which were planned in unison with IGNOU and rely on its expertise, represents purposeful efforts to localize programs and curriculum. All state open universities utilize regional languages and offer localized programs such as agriculture and village governance (Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, 2014). By comparison, OUC has devised programs that cater to the Tibetan minority, but there are 55 other designated ethnic groups in China. How far OUC has made efforts to accommodate some of these smaller groups, either through enrollment quotas or curricular content, is unclear. For further study it would be of value to uncover how POUs design curricular content for its local populations.

We may conclude in this section that OUC and IGNOU differentiated from the OU model in distinct ways. Whereas the concept of regional centers is shared between OUC and IGNOU, the creation of state open universities has enabled greater indigeneity of content, and therefore access, in India. Under OUC, POUs represent a hybrid of regional centers and state open universities in India. The

POUs are extensions of the headquarters in Beijing, yet are bestowed some flexibility to localize content. These novel creations are sound examples of disjunctures identified by Appadurai. OUC and IGNOU favored decentralizing policies to accommodate vast land masses, and large populations. In the process they created new forms of institutional governance applicable to the OU model. At the same time, local staff and academics have created content for populations that are far removed from Milton Keynes, where the OU is located. We may conclude that the binding element between the OU and OUC and IGNOU is philosophical, and oriented towards access through distance education, an outcome all three institutions have done admirably well.

Comparing the Developments of OUC and IGNOU

Although the aforementioned comparisons revealed similarities and differences between OUC and IGNOU, the main purpose was to outline how early developments of each institution differentiated from the OU model. The next section will focus on the growth and maturation of each open university and draw comparisons between them based on similarities of outcome and differences of approach.

Development of Academic Programs

Not surprisingly, the curricular approach of OUC and IGNOU has evolved over time. Since modest beginnings of only a few basic programs within each institution, OUC and IGNOU have differentiated course offerings and utilized varying technologies, over time, for delivery.

OUC has grown its programs more modestly; six faculties offer a total of 45 discipline-based programs. Credentials that are offered are diplomas and degrees, the latter of which require a joint partnership with a conventional university, and the authorization of conferral by the MoE. Although it offers far fewer programs than IGNOU, it has placed emphasis on greater use of online learning, an outcome that has reached nearly all programs at OUC.

IGNOU is organized academically through 21 schools which combine to offer almost 500 programs. Credentials range from certificates to doctorate degrees and are under the authority of IGNOU to confer.

The comparison of faculties or schools and range of programs is stark and there are arguments to be made in favour of OUC regarding efficiencies and impact in this area. Focusing on a narrow range of courses has been a draw to learners who have sought alternative pathways to acquire a university degree. IGNOU, on the other hand, has demonstrated a more haphazard approach. Enrollment cannot be evenly distributed among 500 courses and the value of offering many programs in both English and Hindi may not be evident. One outcome has been that revenue generating programs subsidize other programs. Investment in online learning has been another curiosity at IGNOU. Having re-launched a handful of online programs in 2008, there has been very little growth since; a reflection of only 15.8% of the population in India, at the end of 2013, who have internet access (Internet World Stats, 2014). Because of uneven internet access in the country, some of these online programs are also offered through conventional print-based correspondence.

If the wider enrollment objectives of each country are considered, there is opportunity for some mutual benefit from each institution's academic programming. IGNOU's breadth of 500 programs seems suitable to the objectives of OUC, and the larger domestic higher education system, in regards to expansion in continuing education. If OUC is to share in bringing millions of learners into some form of higher learning a wider offering than 45 programs will be essential. How IGNOU manages this administratively and academically could prove tremendously useful to OUC if and when it will expand its programs. Interestingly, the narrow program offerings of OUC may be a useful strategy for IGNOU. Concentrating fewer programs on mass enrollment in undergraduate education, for example, could be a positive contribution to alleviating the reported 100 million individuals seeking enrollment in higher education. In a similar vein to the previous point, IGNOU may gain on how OUC co-ordinates a course that has enrollment of several hundred thousand.

International Influence

The international ventures of OUC and IGNOU are widespread, and as such, this distinguishes them from other providers of distance education within China and India and from many of their open university counterparts abroad.

Each institution engages in initiatives that seem to serve differing purposes.

IGNOU's penetration abroad has been extensive and diverse, with efforts to engender a degree of localization in its overseas programs. In this sense, there are interesting contours to these operations that would greatly contribute to the literature on internationalization for several reasons. First, internationalization has generally been one-sided. Whether the curriculum has been delivered abroad, or students study in a destination country, the trend has been that non-Westerners are recipients of Western oriented education or expertise. IGNOU's operations counter the prevailing trend. Not only is it a non-Western institution that engages in south-south partnerships, it is also outside the sphere of the elite in India's higher education landscape. IGNOU appeals less to elites in other countries, and instead to those seeking access points that are unavailable to them domestically. In this sense IGNOU is serving its domestic mandate of widening access to higher education in an international milieu.

Like IGNOU, the efforts of OUC to engage abroad are expansive and diverse. OUC has or has had relations with over 100 institutions located in 38 countries or regions. It has differed from IGNOU by focusing more on creating research partnerships and engaging in staff training. Delivery of its programs has been a proportionally smaller focus in its overseas portfolio.

The online Confucius Institute in Michigan has had impressive enrollment and likely generates some revenue for OUC. The purpose, however, has been to widen and improve understanding of Chinese culture abroad, with emphasis placed on language acquisition. The success of the online Confucius Institute is occurring in unison with a growing trend for online learning in Chinese. Outside of this discipline area, there are limitations on how far OUC may pursue teaching and learning abroad. Nevertheless, OUC is well positioned to leverage its expertise in online learning for language instruction.

OUC's main role internationally has been to target more middle and high income countries, compared to IGNOU which has focused more on middle and low income countries. OUC's objective seems related to self-improvement by acquiring best practices from foreign institutions.

In comparison, IGNOU might have more to learn from the international initiatives of OUC than the other way around (the market to study disciplines in arts and science in Chinese, for example, is limited). Where IGNOU stands to gain is to engage, like OUC, in partnerships to augment staff training and research, for example, with the objective of advancing its internal operations.

In the broader picture, it would be interesting to know of the original impetus for each institution to engage internationally. OUC and IGNOU are part of a larger movement that was initiated by the OU. It seemed to have an overseas mandate from its inception and it can be suggested that few institutions have been more global in their outlook. The OU, and its offshoots, create and maintain links around the world. Annual or biennial conferences held by the Asian Association of Open Universities, the International Council for Open and Distance Education, and the Commonwealth of Learning are some examples of events that highlight the global appeal of the OU model. This is starkly different than the conventional system where academics, rather than institutions, are drawn to conferences based on discipline as—compared to conferences based on a pedagogical philosophy that is embodied by well-functioning and sizeable institutions.

In relation to OUC and IGNOU, and by extension, their respective countries, their overseas initiatives demonstrate confidence in its academic abilities, and how this fits with the interests of international partners.

Domestic Role

The millions of past and present learners who have studied at OUC or IGNOU represent a positive domestic role for each institution. OUC has approximately 10% of domestic enrollment in China. IGNOU has approximately 20% of domestic enrollment in India. As noted from each country's planning efforts, there are domestic expectations regarding enrollment of both institutions towards the end of the decade.

IGNOU and its affiliates will be expected to enroll an additional one million learners by the end of the 12th Five Year Plan. Considering the expectation is an additional enrollment of 10 million by 2017 across the sector, it is likely that the share of learners enrolling in distance education has been underestimated. Conventional institutions will simply find it too difficult to absorb so many new learners in a relatively short span. Considering India enrolls only one-fifth of a potential 120 million learners in higher education, it is also a likely outcome that emphasis will continue towards entry level programs that lead to a diploma, associate degree or bachelor degree.

As India goes through growing pains with regard to widening access, China is aiming to create a universal system of higher education. The 2010–2020

National Outline reveals that undergraduate enrollment will taper off and increase only marginally by 2020. Focus will be re-directed towards continuing education with expectations to reach 350 million enrollment by 2020, more than doubling figures from 2009. Clearly distance education will continue to be a focal point to achieve these ends and no institution has a comparable infrastructure to OUC.

As noted under the section, *Development of Academic Programs*, this represents another intersection of overlap between OUC and IGNOU where there is potential for mutual exchange.

The similarities between OUC and IGNOU are numerous. Enrollment is the most visible, but there are many more layers to consider. Including the administration of such enrollment, the policies of decentralization, and international mandate reveal other similarities. Others include evaluations, localization of content and quality assurance. Under these occurrences, it can be concluded that no other universities are better positioned to share experiences and best practices with each other. The extensive administrative infrastructure and successful international initiatives are other commonalities. Differences should also be a point of mutual exchange. Greater autonomy to regional centres, as is the case for the POUs, may be worth consideration to alleviate the absence of state open universities, which reside in only 13 of 28 states in India. Having a sense of the relationship between IGNOU and the University Grants Commission may be worthwhile to OUC if it seeks greater autonomy from the MOE.

Concluding Remarks

OUC and IGNOU differed in their early adaptations of the OU model. IGNOU started conservatively with a small enrollment and few programs. OUC was comparatively bold. The institution was swiftly established and accommodated an exceptionally large first cohort. As both institutions grew, the organization of the OU, relative to administration, was inadequate. The proliferation of regional centers and POUs proved necessary additions. Another notable deviation from the OU model was language of instruction. English was clearly impractical in the case of OUC and inadequate in the case of IGNOU.

It is important to reflect on the history of distance education, and the larger higher education context within each country, around the time each open

university was established. Had there not previously been broadcast universities in China, or correspondence course institutes in India, the open university concept may have been met with more skepticism in either country. Exceptionally low enrollment was also a determining factor for each government to experiment with the OU model.

Appadurai's conception of disjunctures articulated that the absorption of social phenomena into new cultural settings encounters historical, political, geographical, and economical forces that are intricately woven into a particular society. The forces inevitably alter the phenomena to align with the cultural setting. In this conversation it would appear that OUC and IGNOU are disjunctures that differentiated significantly from the OU in the UK. Existing and ongoing changes within their respective populations dictated many adaptations. Interestingly, the similarities in China and India of low enrollment 30 years ago, and large populations spread over vast territories has resulted in institutions that look remarkably similar, despite differing models of university governance. At the same time, they are also reflections of their domestic settings. The preservation of language, rural outreach, and even outlook internationally, are occurring with Indian and Chinese characteristics. Distance education providers in other emerging world settings can gain from the advancements these institutions have made.

In comparing the two Asian open universities, we find that they have operated and flourished under completely different political systems. The close involvement of the government accurately depicts the governance of OUC, whereas IGNOU is bestowed comparatively more autonomy. Clark's Triangle has done less to clarify the better form of institutional governance than to illuminate the strength of adaptability of the OU model.

In the international space, IGNOU will retain an advantage over OUC in the delivery of academic programs, as English is the language of instruction for its overseas ventures. How far this may grow, and how IGNOU has marketed itself would be of interest to any other universities with similar aspirations and capabilities. OUC appears more focused on cultural diplomacy and academic development, a strategy that IGNOU may consider including as a larger portion of its international portfolio.

Undeniably, both institutions will continue to expand and innovate and thereby impact the higher education sectors in their respective societies.

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