

Migration, Creativity and Integration among Iranian Musicians in the UK

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1. Introduction

Necessity, Intentions and Questions

Navigating through this research and looking for answers to my questions could be extremely complicated, but the core questions and arguments are very simple. Migration studies is as much about the migrants as it is about the host societies. Migration is not a moment, rather a process that may never end for some people. Towards the end of this presentation referring to the arguments of Thomas Solomon, I would even argue that the terminology of ‘migration’ addressing people moving from one place to another is even problematic.

The necessity for my research questions arises from the gap in the literature addressing the connection between creativity and personal experiences in the context of human migration, especially among musicians. Adding Iran to this equation, there appears to be no existing academic work on this subject. Beyond the literature gap, my professional intention was to reevaluate the concepts of migration, music-making, integration, and cultural communication and understand how they might correlate. As someone who grew up in Iran and later lived in the UK, my own experiences and encounters drove me to explore these questions also on a personal level.

The core question asks what the relationship between musical creativity and development of the subjectivities of migrant Iranian musicians in the UK in the context of their cultural integration and social inclusion in this society is. To answer this rather broad and complicated question, I came up with a set of sub questions, such as to what extent inclusion or exclusion are in play in the context of a cultural communication of migrant Iranian musicians in the UK?

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How the experiences expectations, presumptions and encounters of these musicians might have been transformed during the course of migration processes?

Scopes, Structure and Challenges

To address these challenges and respond to these questions, I draw from ethnographic interviews and observational methodologies, as well as engage with poststructuralist psychoanalysis. This approach represents an innovative shift within the established field of ethnomusicology concerning migration. By applying psychoanalytical frameworks to existing issues related to diasporic creativity, social integration, and multiculturalism.

Furthermore, my research explores a diverse array of literature encompassing migration studies, particularly focusing on creativity, art, music, and individuals from the Middle East in Europe. While this research is interdisciplinary in nature, I initially adopt ethnographic approaches. This means approaching the fieldwork without preconceived assumptions, allowing the theoretical framework to develop gradually. This development occurs organically as I process information gathered from interviews and observations and make connections with existing literature.

From the outset, psychoanalysis plays a pivotal role in informing our understanding of individuals, social settings, culture, migration, integration, and creativity. However, it's important to note that these conceptual frameworks are not imposed rigidly but rather evolve throughout the research process, starting from the fieldwork phase and expanding upon the literature. To move forward with the arguments, it is beneficial to examine the sociocultural structures of Iran.

The challenge in this research lies in finding a delicate balance between delving into the nuanced details of fieldwork while also striving to establish broader frameworks from the outcomes. Maintaining this equilibrium can be quite demanding. It's crucial to avoid falling into the trap of essentialism, which can occur if we focus solely on a specific reading of nationality, ethnicity, or political group when making general arguments about the interplay between creativity and subjectivity. Additionally, as I will discuss shortly, there have been further challenges in the fieldwork phase.

2. Context on Iran

Fundamentals

Iran's modern political borders encompass a land that has been part of many vast empires and seen the rise and fall of many civilisations. At times, Iran has expanded its influence, colonising areas that stretched to Europe and China. Conversely, it has also faced invasions and conquests, such as the Arab conquest during the rise of Islam and the rule of the Mongols in medieval times. Iran boasts a rich history of empires, a diverse population, cultural achievements, art, creativity, scientific discoveries, trade, military campaigns, and religions. Today, Iran is home to approximately 80 million people and hosts a mosaic of cultures and ethnicities. Among these, Persian is the official language, but there are seven major languages spoken across different ethnic and cultural communities. Iran, situated in the larger context of the Middle East and Central Asia, has witnessed significant human migrations throughout its history. These migrations have contributed to the intricate fabric of its society, shaping its social norms and political landscape.

Western Encounters

In contemporary times, encounters between Iranians and the West didn't begin with Iranians migrating to the West. Rather, starting from Western encounters within Iran itself. These interactions trace back to the European colonial campaigns, notably by the Portuguese and the British, as well as Russian involvement — all of which failed. Furthermore, the aftermath of both world wars and subsequent political developments involving the United States in the region since the 1960s played a significant role in expanding these encounters. Since this period, a larger proportion of the Iranian population and the general public had direct contact with Western culture. This marked a departure from the previous century when only the elite had the opportunity to travel to Europe or North America for purposes such as politics, diplomacy, education, business, and leisure. While the West often viewed the region through a geopolitical lens, Iranians began contemplating changes within their social and cultural settings as a result of these encounters. This shift mirrored similar trends in neighbouring countries like Egypt and Turkey, where modernisation and an inclination towards Western models in economic, social, political, and cultural spheres emerged. In summary, the influence of the Western world had already taken root among the Iranians and their predecessors before their migration to the UK.

Contemporary Dilemmas: An Example

To gain a perspective on contemporary developments, it's essential to consider the era under the secular Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979). A notable event in this context is the Tehran International Congress of Music in April 1961, organised by UNESCO. This Congress was concerned with the preservation of the traditional forms of learned and popular music from both the Orient and Occident. Musicologists from the West were invited to participate in discussions that revolved around notions of authenticity, tradition, and originality within classical Iranian music of that time.

The 1960s marked a period characterised by a deep engagement with the "problem" of traditional oriental music being diluted with Western classical music. Many papers and discussions centred on the challenges associated with preserving traditional music in a broader sense. During this era, the discourse of "authenticity" and the call for a "return" to traditional values gained prominence. The Ministry of Culture, in alignment with these trends, organised conferences around the theme of "authenticity", further reinforcing the hegemonic discourse.

Consequently, the concepts of authenticity and tradition became closely intertwined, reinforcing the idea that embracing "traditions" was synonymous with embracing "authentic" values. This perspective took root at various formal institutions, including higher education, especially at the University of Tehran, as well as within Radio and Television and the Ministry of Culture. Numerous cultural organisations also contributed to disseminating the advantages of this hegemonic discourse.

One notable development during this period was the establishment of a new institution within the national television, known as the Centre for the Preservation and Propagation of Music. This institution aimed to counterbalance the prevailing focus on national orchestral music in radio and instead emphasised improvisation, solo instrumentalisation, and gave less attention to harmonisation when combining instruments.

The shift towards valuing traditionalism and authenticity did not merely manifest as "nationalism" but also carried religious undertones. In 1979, a traditional and retrogressive discourse gained hegemony, fuelled by the social conflicts and ultimately overthrown the dynasty to establish the Islamic Republic of Iran. This shift towards continual antagonism not

only aimed to restructure Iranian society but also had implications for international relationships.

3. On Methods and Frameworks

Migration is a complex phenomenon encompassing social change, integration, and communication dynamics. Additionally, it involves transformations in creativity and the field of migration studies is inherently linked with host studies, reflecting the multifaceted nature of this subject. Therefore, it is essential to challenge essentialism and uncover what discourse might be concealing. By doing so, we can gain deeper insights into the complex interactions and experiences of migrant musicians.

The existing body of ethnomusicological research on migration provides valuable perspectives on hybridity, multiculturalism, and social integration. However, it predominantly focuses on forced migration or diaspora from specific past colonies, with limited attention to the intricate relationships between musicians' subjectivity and their creative expression. It is precisely within this gap that Lacanian psychoanalysis assumes significance, as it highlights the mutual constitution of the subject and the social. Yet, Anglophone literature examining the connections between psychoanalysis and music has primarily concentrated on musical structures, offering limited insight.

Rather, the focus should shift towards understanding the creative processes and the encounters that lead the subject closer to experiences of loss and emptiness within psychoanalysis. Meanwhile, exploring postcolonial and international ethnomusicological arguments put forth by scholars such as Solomon and Alajaji helps illuminate facets of these encounters, including the creation of social meaning, the dynamics of subjectivity, the articulation of "multiple belongings" within diaspora communities, experiences of loss, power relations, and the inequalities inherent in hybridity and social integration.

4. Parallel Emerging Themes

Within the realms of ethnomusicology, psychoanalysis, and migration studies, several parallel themes emerge, intersecting with the focus of this research. First and foremost, the act of making music extends beyond the mere production of sound; it's a practice deeply entwined with a musician's life, a process that involves not only composition but also the integration of

personal interpretations into their musical performances, even when playing pieces not of their own creation or from their cultural backgrounds. This process mirrors the Lacanian perspective, which views the development of subjectivity as an ongoing process since childhood.

Another striking parallel between music and psychoanalysis relates to the performance and interpretation of music, reflecting how individuals, as agents, engage with the world. These parallel narratives highlight the nuanced ways in which subjectivity is performed and interpreted, much like musical performances. In the realm of ethnomusicology, and often overlooked in Anglophone literature, lies the intricate aspect of musical form—a highly detailed abstraction. Similar to subjectivity, music is not a linguistic structure but shares a structure "like" that of language. Musical form is akin to subjective form in psychoanalytical terms, emerging during the evolution of subjectivities due to inherent drives.

Furthermore, parallels emerge when considering the dynamics of social inclusion and cultural integration among migrants and their intersections with Lacanian post-structuralism and musical creativity. Both subjectivity and creativity exhibit fluid, non-predetermined natures, as subjects can never fully attain their subjectivity, mirroring the complexity of integration and inclusion. These multifaceted experiences cannot be reduced to simplistic cultural policies, demanding exploration of how diverse case studies address hegemonic desired subjectivities and notions of multiculturalism or interculturalism within specific sociocultural contexts and times.

Additionally, a connection is drawn between creativity and the concept of 'anxiety' which is not central to this presentation today. Nevertheless, the core contribution from psychoanalysis would direct attentions to the subjectivity as a concept communicating between the individual and the social and as a process similar to creativity.

5. Lacanian Perspectives on Subjectivity

As a pioneer of post-structuralist thought, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan delved into the concept of "the subject" ("sujet" in French). He characterised it as a realisation embedded within an individual's history, emphasising that it exists not as a past definite entity, nor as a perfect representation of what has been, but as a future anterior state representing what the individual will have become, given the ongoing process of self-formation (Lacan 2006, 300).

In the realm of cultural studies, subjectivity is understood as a culturally constructed phenomenon, devoid of fixity and timelessness. Subjectivity is the product of social processes that mould individuals into subjects. Subjects are not born but are forged through immersion in culture. Subjectivity represents the condition enabling us to recognise ourselves as subjects or persons, synthesising both conscious and unconscious life experiences. Consequently, subjectivity isn't a substance; instead, it's a dynamic interplay between the individual and the social, continually shaped by discourses, power dynamics, cultural structures, and creative processes and experiences.

Integrating these perspectives on subjectivity and the social realm leads to the understanding of their mutual construction. Lacanian thought sheds light on the interconnectedness of the social and the individual, emphasising the blurred boundaries between the two.

Lacan's perspective aligns particularly well with ethnography due to its inherent root in medical practice. Lacan highlighted Freud's insight regarding the incompleteness of psychoanalytic instruction and the tendency of established thought patterns to oppose psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis differs from conventional humanities in its examination of the social projections onto the individual as well as the individual's projections onto the social. It doesn't aim to provide a comprehensive worldview or philosophical framework; instead, it centres on the subject, reorienting individuals towards their inherent dependence on signification (Lacan 1998).

In both this ethnographic project and medical analysis, the view of the subject emerges case by case. Psychoanalysis serves as a gateway to comprehending the mechanics and limitations of subjectivity. As Lacan aptly expressed, "even though the entirety of analytic experience may allow us to identify certain general forms, analysis proceeds only from the specific to the specific" (Lacan 2006, 386).

6. Context on the fieldwork

Networking and Access

As mentioned previously, I've been engrossed in the realm of music since my Master's studies, where my dissertation, thesis, and research projects paved the way for a network of scholars, musicians, policymakers, and individuals within the music industry. Additionally, I've established connections with media professionals covering musical events, both within the

diaspora and inside Iran. Over the years, this network has granted me a level of access and trust, allowing me to transparently convey my research objectives and intentions.

Furthermore, my personal experience includes my involvement in rock and alternative music during my twenties. This firsthand engagement has provided me with valuable insights into the practices and experiences of being a musician in Iran. However, despite my extensive connections and experiences, I still encounter certain challenges because of the political landscapes set as an aftermath of the 1979 revolution, particularly concerning Iranians residing outside Iran.

During my time living and studying in London from 2014 to 2020, I found it somewhat challenging to establish trust and bonds with aspects of the second generation and onward Iranian diaspora community. This challenge stems partly from the other side as well—some individuals among my case studies exhibited hesitation regarding my social, cultural, and political standing.

The source of this hesitancy can be traced to my ability to travel back and forth between Britain and Iran, a privilege often unavailable to many due to the associated dangers and travel restrictions, especially for those holding British passports. This situation has led to presumptions about people's backgrounds in Britain, rooted partially in essentialism. The ability to travel more freely to Iran could mistakenly imply connections with the Iranian establishment. Therefore, certain levels of mistrust still linger between me and some of my case studies.

I hope that as my research progresses and its outcomes are published, trust can be built more effectively with various segments of the Iranian diaspora, particularly British individuals interested in this kind of research. Considering the challenges some British Iranians have faced in the past regarding travel to Iran, it's understandable that some case studies may not wish to be extensively involved in my research, particularly when it pertains to publication. Their concerns may arise from fears of potential consequences and profiling within a research context dealing with the politics of identity and international relationships through culture.

Diversities and Arrangements

The criteria for selecting case musicians to study were broad and inclusive to gain a comprehensive understanding of their migration experiences and creative output. The first

criterion involved whether these musicians identified themselves as Iranians. This encompassed individuals born in Iran who migrated to the UK. Additionally, I considered those born in the UK but into families with historical Iranian connections, as they also identified partially as Iranian.

Furthermore, I examined their family, social, and educational backgrounds, and their musical preferences in terms of both consumption and production. As a result, I categorised musicians into four general groups: Western classical music in its broader sense, Iranian classical music in its broader sense, popular music (encompassing chart pop to more alternative and indie genres), and avant-garde, art, and electronic music. Some cases shared characteristics across these categories, which I assessed on a case-by-case basis.

During the planning phase, I considered time and budget constraints, as well as the accessibility of the selected cases. Consulting with individuals in my network and drawing from my academic experience, I compiled a confirmed list of 31 individuals – mostly musicians but also those involved in music production or engaged in the academic study of music. I conducted interviews and observed the practices of a subset of these individuals.

While these individuals were located across the UK, the majority were based in London. Notably, there were four cases in Scotland — one in Edinburgh, two in Glasgow and one in Aberdeen. However, one musician from Edinburgh had relocated to London temporarily. Additionally, there were musicians from Cambridge, Manchester, Oxfordshire, and Bristol, further diversifying the research's insights. The rest of the 23 individuals live in London.

Conducting Fieldwork as a Process

The process of shaping the fieldwork drew from a fusion of influences, with elements from ethnomusicology and psychoanalysis coming together to form a unique approach. This holistic approach to fieldwork allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perspectives of a diverse array of individuals, shedding light on the multifaceted relationship between musical creativity, subjectivity, and migration.

In this approach, I aimed to create an environment where the subjects felt comfortable opening up about their experiences and needs, rather than adhering to predefined, rigid sets of questions. Crafting such an approach presented its own set of challenges, but meticulous preparation was key. Following ethics approval, I embarked on months of reaching out to

potential case studies, building relationships where necessary, and gaining insight into their priorities, concerns, passions, and challenges, before conducting the interviews.

To ensure that each session was tailored to the specific case, I designed different sets of open questions and objectives. However, one of the most significant challenges was executing this approach within the constraints of budget and time. Navigating between London and various locations across the UK, I had to account for travel time and necessary preparations between different sessions, all while diligently documenting field notes.

The culmination of these efforts materialised after 36 days, with 31 individuals participating in the research. Now, as I stand at this juncture, it's an opportune moment to delve into the findings of this fieldwork and explore their implications within the framework I've been developing.

7. Fieldwork Outcome

Diversity and Creativity

As I continue to work on publishing the outcomes of my fieldwork, I want to offer a glimpse into the significant findings and insights that have emerged during this research journey. The current focus of my analysis revolves around the discourses and conceptions of multiculturalism, interculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and how these concepts intersect with migration, creativity, social integration, and cultural inclusion. These insights aim to bridge existing gaps in our understanding.

One of the most striking aspects of my case studies is the diversity they represent, both in terms of their personal backgrounds and musical practices. These differences were reflected in their responses during our sessions, shedding light on distinct experiences and perspectives. Notably, a significant finding emerged when considering two distinct groups: those born in Iran and those born elsewhere. This distinction highlighted the intricate link between social settings and the development of subjectivity. Musical creativity, in particular, seemed to manifest differently for individuals born in Iran compared to those born in the UK or other parts of the global North. Their approaches to integration and communication also followed distinct trajectories, shaped by their origins and the social contexts they identified with.

Furthermore, it became apparent that individuals with an interest in classical Iranian music demonstrated remarkable creativity and innovation in their efforts to communicate this genre to British audiences. Their methods transcended traditional boundaries, adapting to diverse backgrounds within the British audience. Similarly, individuals from the western classical music sphere surprised me with their creative compositions, reimagining the meaning and role of music in their lives and as an art form.

Conversely, those from the popular music scene often found resonance with Iranian audiences and faced challenges connecting with the British audience. Rock and pop musicians, especially the younger generation, who had spent part of their lives outside Iran, possessed a broader creative palette, allowing them to engage with a more diverse audience, including both Iranian and British listeners.

Lastly, individuals with backgrounds in electronic, avant-garde, and art music exhibited a strong connection to global citizenship. They navigated the demands of the British niche audience, market, and cultural settings with a keen understanding of what their creative output should entail.

As I move forward, my aim is to select a subset of cases that align with the project's criteria, individuals who are willing to be identified and who are eager to participate in various project activities, including performances, talks, and public events. These case studies will further enrich the ongoing exploration of the intricate relationship between musical creativity, subjectivity, and migration within the context of multiculturalism, interculturalism, and cosmopolitanism.

Creativity and Integration

The intention of this research is not to establish rigid rules for specific musical genres, but rather to provide a framework for understanding the intricate relationship between social integration and musical creativity. These initial observations have illuminated the dynamic interplay between the two, shedding light on how they mutually shape their own sets of norms and conventions.

Studying these cases, I encountered a spectrum of intentions and attitudes regarding the concept of integration. This spectrum ranged from isolation, where individuals sought to distance themselves from British society and cultural practices to ultimate assimilation,

where they aimed to fully adopt the cultural norms of their new environment. Everything in between was also explored. These varying perspectives prompted me to reevaluate and refine the initial framework I had in mind concerning the concepts of multiculturalism, interculturalism, and cultural complexities.

It is fascinating to observe how the diversity and differences among cases contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how migration patterns and backgrounds can influence attitudes and subjective relationships within the context of British society and community belonging. Conflict resolution, representation, reinterpretation of one's subjectivity, identity, and sense of belonging all play a central role in this research. Additionally, it is essential to consider which musicians, based on their backgrounds and reasons for migration, are inclined to seek integration, collaboration, or communication with various communities they have joined in the UK, and what motivates their choices.

As I delve into these complex dynamics, it becomes evident that the questions surrounding integration, creativity, and social and cultural settings are more multifaceted and nuanced than I imagined. This complexity encourages a thorough examination of the notions of multiculturalism, interculturalism, and cosmopolitanism, as they pertain to the experiences of creative individuals within the context of migration and cultural adaptation. While my focus remains on creative individuals, these inquiries offer a broader perspective on the intricate fabric of multicultural societies.

8. Migration and Integration

Issues with Integration Models

Discussing multiculturalism, integration, and interculturalism, it's essential to address some inherent issues within these models that are pertinent to the central themes and scope of this research.

Multiculturalism was conceived as a response to the post-9/11 cultural landscape, marked by growing antagonism towards Muslim populations, particularly in the UK and the US. The principle of multiculturalism aims to protect the cultures of minority groups by proposing that different cultural groups can coexist side by side. However, this model oversimplifies and generalises the dynamics of cultural interaction. It assumes that cultures are unwilling to collaborate or communicate to the extent that it might alter the foundations of the participating cultural groups. Additionally, it perceives culture as static, treating it as a

product rather than a dynamic and evolving process. While my representation is also a generalisation, it encapsulates the core principle of multiculturalism.

On the other hand, interculturalism places excessive emphasis on the idea of cultural communication between groups. It often focuses on cases where individuals or agencies act as intermediaries in bridging cultural gaps. This model assumes that culture remains unchanged during communication, preserving core beliefs and principles. Interculturalism, to showcase its arguments often refers to limited and time-bound cultural exchanges, such as festivals, which, like multiculturalism, still treat culture as relatively static. While interculturalism allows for reinterpretation of culture to facilitate communication, it fails to recognise culture as an evolving process. Neither multiculturalism nor interculturalism views cultural practices as mutually constitutive of subjectivities, where the very meaning of cultural practices evolves over time, shaping human activities and identities.

In summary, all these models, including their sub-models, offer valuable insights based on their observations of specific groups. However, their major shortcomings lie in their treatment of culture as a static entity rather than a dynamic process and in their assumption that individuals cannot transition between cultural groups. These limitations extend beyond issues of migration and minority cultures and have been observed throughout the Western discourses, too. Even the cosmopolitanism model, rooted in liberal ideology, falls short in adhering that a cosmopolitan environment does not necessarily lead to cosmopolitanism within every cultural group and community.

Thomas Solomon and the Terminological Mess

Thomas Solomon examines several terms commonly used interchangeably in discussions of music and displacement, including "diaspora," "migration," "exile," and "refugee." These terms can be further classified into sub-types, such as "labour migration," "forced migration," and "transit migration," adding complexity to the discourse. Additionally, they are intricately linked with concepts like "ethnicity," "ethnic groups," "minorities," or "ecumene." Solomon's work involves a meta-theoretical exploration of these displacement terminologies, aiming to understand their broader definitions and their application within ethnomusicological literature over the past two decades.

In his research, Solomon offers a tentative mapping of these concepts, highlighting where they diverge, intersect, and complement one another. This terminological analysis prompts essential questions, including whether the terms used not only describe but also construct the phenomena they refer to. Furthermore, it raises inquiries about the benefits of maintaining strict distinctions between these terms versus allowing boundaries to overlap or blur, potentially giving rise to fresh layers of meaning.

In conclusion, Solomon refrains from advocating for a rigid typology that rigidly separates these various terms. Instead, he suggests that the intricacy within this discourse can be productive, provided that researchers consistently reflect on the implications of their chosen terminology and remain aware of the consequences when using such terms to represent the experiences of others.

Brenda Yeoh and Decentring Migration Studies

From another point of view, as Brenda Yeoh argued, recent decades have seen a number of paradigm-shifts in the sociology of migration, reflecting mutually constitutive interests in the role of human agency, subjectivity and ability to act in migration processes and the impact of rapidly changing geopolitical, sociocultural and economic environments. This recent emphasis on 'time and temporality' in migration studies places migration and its antonym (non-migration) in a closer relationship rather than as contradictory phenomena. By specifically focusing on time and temporality in migration trajectories, we become more aware that migration is not always about trans/national mobility.

She underlines the importance of theorising from the South, rather than using the South as a testing ground for theories based on Northern experiences. Yeoh outlines the background of transnational migration in Asia and suggests moving away from paradigms that focus on assimilation, acculturation, and integration. She encourages a form of democratic comparativism that pluralises key references and cultivates theory-building in specific contexts.

9. Final Marks

Subjectivity indeed plays a pivotal role in understanding the complex interplay between the individual and the social realm. It bridges the gap between personal experiences, beliefs, and

the broader cultural context. By recognizing subjectivity as a central aspect, researchers gain insight into how individuals perceive and engage with the world around them. This perspective aligns with the fluid and constructed nature of the self.

Viewing conflict as a natural internal process rather than an external dilemma is a profound insight. It acknowledges that individuals grapple with conflicting emotions, desires, and identities as part of their subjective experiences. This perspective aligns with psychoanalytic theories that explore the unconscious and the ways in which individuals navigate inner conflicts. It also underscores the idea that conflict, when managed constructively, can lead to personal growth and adaptation.

The connection between creativity and communication is a fundamental aspect of human expression. When creativity is seen as a form of communication, it highlights how individuals use various mediums to convey their experiences, emotions, and perspectives. This perspective aligns with the idea that art, music, literature, and other creative outlets are channels through which individuals engage with and contribute to the broader cultural and social discourse.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Brenda Yeoh's insights underscores the need to broaden perspectives and recognize the diverse experiences and look into the concealed reasons behind the discourse of integrity and the necessity of re-evaluating dominant paradigms.

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