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One art/media form not given much attention in Philippine scholarship, especially outside the Philippines, is comic art. That is not surprising as cartooning has not been given much consideration academically anywhere, occupying the same back seat in the humanities and social sciences that mass communications did thirty or fewer years ago.

But that should not be the situation, especially in the Philippines where cartoons and comics have played significant roles in politics, the performing arts, and development/social conscientization campaigns.

Editorial Cartooning

Editorial cartooning in the Philippines dates at least to the end of the nineteenth century. National hero Jose Rizal, credited with drawing the first cartoon, "The Monkey and the Tortoise" (1886), used caricature in his propaganda against the Spaniards (Marcelo 1980, 18), as did satirical magazines, such as *Te con leche, El tio verdades, Biro-Biro,* and *Miau,* which appeared between 1898 and 1901, designed mainly to lampoon both Spaniards and Americans (Esteban 1953, 7–8). The anonymously-edited, weekly *Miau,* named after a worldly cat which knew everything, consisted of fifty percent cartoons.

During the early American occupation, other magazines, some satirical, containing two-toned cartoons and caricatures, appeared (Marcelo 1980, 18; Lent 1982). Among these, four published in Manila were prominent—*Lipang Kalabaw, Philippines Free Press, Telembang,* and *The Independent. Lipang Kalabaw* premiered on 27 July 1907, as the weekly voice for independence radicals affiliated with the Nationalist Party, delighted in satirizing American do-goodism and Fili-

pino parrotism, both in text and cartoon. *Lipang Kalabaw* closed because of political pressures after thirty-three issues. In its second life, begun a month after its demise, the paper emerged as the only genuine Filipino satirical magazine, employing a number of trained artists (all using pen names). *Lipang Kalabaw*, which was named after a poison ivy-type plant that leaves a severe rash, was critical enough to suffer closure again in 1909. Under different names, it was revived in July 1922 for two years, and in 1949 for less than a year.

Cartoons in the *Philippines Free Press*, also begun in 1907, were inspired by American political cartoons. Although the magazine was generally pro-American and pro-establishment, it attacked corruption in the U.S. occupation government. *The Independent*, published from 1915 to 1931 by the radical Vicente Sotto, featured cartoons drawn by Jorge Pineda (1879–1946) in a free and loose linear style. Pineda is credited with first using "Juan de la Cruz," a simple young man in slippers, as the national symbol. Before that, cartoonists in *Lipang Kalabaw* and elsewhere depicted the Philippines as "Filipinas," a demure woman. In depicting U.S.-Philippine relations during the first decade of the century, cartoonists liked to show Uncle Sam as a "troll-like old man using his cunning to pay court to the virginal figure of Filipinas." As one writer interpreted, Uncle Sam was brash, while Filipinas was coy enough to let him feel he might succeed while withholding her affections.

The most famous of the early political cartoonists was Fernando Amorsolo (1892–1972), who was briefly with *The Independent*. Later honored with a national artist award, Amorsolo drew some of the Philippines' angriest and most racist pre-World War II cartoons. Because he was a draftsman for the Bureau of Public Works and chief artist for Philippine Commercial Co., he often tried to please his buyers, earning criticism that his work was too saccharine.

Another major political cartoonist was Jose Pereira (1901–54), whose cartoons became an institution in the *Free Press*. Pereira set the style for other cartoonists with painstaking cross-hatching in pen and ink.

During the American occupation, political cartoonists often relied on jobs other than their chosen profession to put meals on the table, since political cartooning was both personally risky and not financially profitable. Pineda, Amorsolo, and Pereira were all professional painters, self-taught, working for Manila's illustrated weekly newspapers. And their work was considered important. The carefully-executed lead cartoons in *Lipang Kalabaw*, *The Independent*, and the *Free*

Press set the tone for entire issues. All identification within cartoons and balloons was in both English and Spanish, often making for cluttered panels.

For years, editorial cartooning continued to thrive in the Philippines, to the extent that until the 1970s, the country stood almost alone in Southeast Asia in maintaining a free and open atmosphere for political caricature. This changed during the Marcos dictatorship, when editorial cartooning was severely subdued; it has never fully recovered its former vibrancy.

One would have expected a boom time for editorial cartooning since the 1986 People's Revolution, but this has not been the situation. About thirty cartoonists work for the more than two dozen Manila dailies, and, according to *Bulletin* cartoonist Norman Isaac (Interview by author, 16 July 1992), all but a very few of them face difficulties with low pay and heavy work loads. One cartoonist, Deng Coy Miel of the *Star*, said, "We have to do jobs outside to make a living; we're spread out and can't focus on our work any longer." Since then, Miel has joined at least six other Philippine editorial cartoonists who have moved to Singapore. They have opted for Singapore's better wages and living conditions over the Philippines' relatively higher degree of freedom.

But, as already indicated, that level of freedom has been significantly eroded in recent years, attributable to economic expediency down the line. Government authorities and big business media conglomerates team up to keep out "dreary" cartoons that could drive away foreign investment opportunities or hurt their vested interests. Cartoonists abide by the decisions, practicing very dangerous self censorship, again for economic reasons. As Miel said, "Self censorship is rampant. We have families to keep; if we don't go along, we don't have jobs. I know the frame of mind of the powers-that-be. They tell me a topic; I know what they want. There's a pattern and we follow it. That's why I do a lot of environment cartoons. It's the only topic they allow me to do alone" (Interview by author, 16 July 1992).

Jess Abrera, editorial and strip cartoonist for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, would agree in part. Although he can choose issues and topics, the views in his cartoons must match those of his paper's management. He said caricature is not well accepted as Filipinos feel they are made to look ugly (Allison et al. 1994, 12).

The guidelines cartoonists are expected to follow are generally well understood, stick to illustrating the editorial; show positive aspects;

refrain from dealing with vested interests of the media owner; avoid unflattering caricature; "criticize the system, not the individual; the bureaucracy, not the bureaucrat"; and reflect society, not politics (Interview by author, 16 July 1992).

Main cartoonists on two of the largest and most stable dailies believed the situation has grown worse than it was in the Marcos years. Isaac of the *Bulletin*, owned by Emilio Yap, a shipping and banking magnate, said cartooning is now "balancing act," adding:

> It has gotten worse since 1989. Generally, the situation is not worse than Marcos times but it is on our paper. I could do hard hitting cartoons then. I did not have to read the editorial for my idea as I have to now. Now we are just illustrators of the editorial (Interview by author, 16 July 1992).

Showing how sensitive newspaper owners are, Isaac related an incident that occurred the day before I interviewed him. He had drawn a cartoon entitled, "David and Goliath," for the *Bulletin's Panorama* magazine, casting President Fidel Ramos as David, and "big ugly poverty" of the Philippines as Goliath. Isaac said:

> The owner personally stopped it, pulled it out. The paper was already on the press being printed when the order went out to pull the cartoon. I had to make another more positive cartoon. The owner even does stick figures and gives them to us to draw cartoons from, especially topics dealing with banking. He is a bank owner.

The Philippines' foremost cartoonist, Nonoy Marcelo of the *Chronicle*, agreed that the cartoonist's role had deteriorated. He explained:

> Lately, there has not been a change for the better. Before, everyone ganged up on the old man (Marcos), and they had good reasons. But now, there are not many politicians worth hitting, and the whole system is drifting here and there [not giving cartoonists clear targets] (Interview by author, 17 July 1992).

Marcelo reserved his strongest criticism for the big business orientations of the press. He said newspapers hypocritically espouse truth and justice goals, when in reality, they are merely businesses protecting their interests. "Those who work for business houses are their house organ cartoonists," Marcelo said. At the *Chronicle*, a daily whose ownership switched in 1994, from one giant business combine

(Lopez) to another (Robert Coyiuto, Jr.), Marcelo consults with both the publisher and editor about cartooning. He acknowledges that the space is not his; it is the paper's space. As he put it: "You can't fuck with that space. If you want your own say-so, you do it under your byline. That's why I do 'Marcelo's View'; I was in a scrape when they had said to me, 'It's not your space'" (Interview by author, 17 July 1992).

Marcelo added that cartoons follow the editorial of the day at the *Chronicle*, and that the paper's other cartoonists shy away from poking fun at President Ramos, Vice President Estrada and other top leaders. Perhaps because of his status in the profession, Marcelo does caricaturize these figures and "not prettily."

Komiks

In December 1928, Antonio Velasquez was working for magazine magnate Ramon Roces when the publisher asked if he would fill in for a senior cartoonist commissioned to create a cartoon character. "I told him I'd try," Velasquez said (Interview by author, 26 September 1988).

The result was "Kenkoy," the first comic strip in the Philippines. Initially used as a filler in the Roces magazine, *Liwayway*, the four-frame strip rather quickly spawned a number of imitators. When I interviewed Velasquez in September 1988, he was still writing the scripts for "Kenkoy," although someone else was doing the drawings.

In the post-World War II era, Velasquez took another big chance, again sparked by Roces. Not deterred by the financial failure of the Philippines' first comic book in 1946, Roces, the following year, lured Velasquez away from his advertising business to give the medium another try. "He asked if I wanted to start a new business—comics magazines. I was flattered," Velasquez remembered. With only a month's deadline, Velasquez brought out *Pilipino Komiks* on 14 June 1947.

About the same time, Velasquez was also working on what would have been another first, a Filipino animation film, but the backer pulled out. Velasquez takes delight in recalling that he told the sponsor he planned to keep the $5,000 advance.

Ace Publications, the company Roces and Velasquez established in the '40s, gave others the idea to enter the comic book (*komiks*) field: by 1950, four publishers had a total of seven titles. Throughout that decade, the komiks found their niche. It was the golden age of the

medium, according to veteran strip, gag, comic book, and animation artist Larry Alcala (Interview by author, 26 September 1988).

Artists did their best work; "they had love for their work.," he said. Decrying the overly commercialized scene today, Alcala traces its origins to the early sixties when Ace closed because of labor troubles. "When that happened, a lot of contributors put out their own books, and with this proliferation, quality went down," Alcala said.

Because the comics were considered an American-originated medium, and with the Philippine propensity to copy all things American, Filipino komiks publishers set up a code for the profession at the same time the self-generated Comics Code was developed in the U.S.

It started when Ace Publications established house rules on sexual and other taboos in 1955 but, not content with self-censorship, also convinced other komiks publishers to establish the Association of Publishers and Editors of Philippine Comic Magazines (APEPCOM) for the development and enforcement of a code of ethics. APEPCOM later joined with a Catholic committee for decency, which turned the procedures from self-monitoring to external restricting. After Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972, a new group of komiks publishers and editors (KPPKP) was established, adopting the APEPCOM code and expanding it to make komiks publishers partners with the Marcos government in national development. Aspects of the APEPCOM code are no glorification of crime or evil; no use of vulgar or obscene language; no depictions of homosexuals, nudity, or lovemaking; favorable portrayals of marriage, the church, and citizenship. KPPKP guidelines emphasize protection of the government and its leaders and values, and prohibit incest, nudity, "the sex act," rape, sex perverts and perversions, or sex orgies. The code also proscribes depictions of love between the very old and very young, use of "cuss" words (certain words are listed), portrayals of clergy or government officials involved in sex affairs, and sadism, brutality, and extreme violence. Under the KPPKP code, presentation of "horrifying creatures," crime and criminals, and deadly weapons is to be toned down, stories about the military require approval of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and science fiction must rely on scientific facts and accepted theories.

Obviously, much of this is regularly ignored by komiks writers and illustrators. Violence abounds, as do sexual overtones. Ateneo Professor Soledad Reyes, who has studied komiks, explained that the preoccupation with sex in komiks mirrors a society pervaded by

sexual violence. "We're a strange society—in fact, schizophrenic. We have taboos on the one hand and ventilation of everything on the other," she said (Interview by author, 24 August 1986).

As for the "horrifying creatures" the code condemned—well, there's the moving skeletal hand, the flying elephant boy, the woman with two demonic creatures on her breasts, the villains with snakes on their heads, the three-headed girl, and more.

Despite extreme commercialization and the code, komiks have become one of the most important media of the Philippines, read more than any other medium, used regularly as the basis of movie scripts and as a vehicle in national development and election campaigns.

Called at times the "national book," komiks sold more than 2.5 million weekly in the 1980s. The actual readership is much higher because of widespread trading and renting. Various estimates have shown that from a fourth to a third of all Filipinos are avid komiks readers.

The high readership of komiks also makes them ideal scripts for movies. Directors interviewed in 1986 estimated that as many as half of the moved industry' scripts emanate from the komiks. "It is understandable to use komiks as it is a presold audience," the late Lino Brocka said. The nearly incestuous relationship between movies and komiks mutually benefits both, according to Brocka, providing cinema a ready-made audience and directors the money to finance better quality, festival-bound films (Interview by author, 20 August 1986).

Director Romy Suzara of Viva Productions minced no words, emphatically claiming, "If you want a box office hit, you have to get the story from komiks or radio" (Interview, 1988). Suzara's studio and others monitor komiks, purchasing blockbusters from the writer sometimes even before the serialization ends. Scripts from known komiks writers can cost P 70,000 to P100,000 ($3,500 to $5,000). Actor Jimmy Fabregas said conversions take place in a number of ways: movie personnel develop scripts from plots they read in komiks, or plant stories in komiks that are made into films before the serialization ends. "Some producers will do a story from scratch—make the character in the komiks look like a movie star, and then commission the star to play the movie role," Fabregas added (Interview by author, 21 August 1986). Nonoy Marcelo, prominent in all comic art categories, discussed the latter method, pointing out its negative consequences for artists: "In the Philippines, we cartoonists will make a character look like Dolphy (popular movie comedian), for an example, and the movies will buy the komik. The director tries to follow

the komik script as closely as possible. Who loses? The artist who gets very little money. The writer and the movie people share the money" (Interview by author, September 1988).

Producers often buy komiks serials and pay scriptwriters to provide the endings, often giving the komiks and film versions different conclusions. But scriptwriter Jose "Pete" Lacaba said such practices hurt scriptwriting. "Some writers specialize in adapting komiks, and their presence limits scriptwriters who are forced to compete; they have to use this same formula adapted from komiks that the audience has grown used to," he said (Interview by author, 22 August 1986). Another veteran scriptwriter, Ricky Lee, said he does not like komiks but realizes their prevalence must be acknowledged (Interview by author, 22 August 1986).

The use of komiks for developmental and social conscientization purposes goes back to the 1960s at the University of the Philippines Institute of Mass Communications, the Population Center, and the governmental National Media Production Center. The latter two published the komiks, while the University of the Philippines unit tested ways to use them and their effectiveness. Commercial publishers also used family planning articles in their komiks. After martial law was declared in 1972, the government stepped up efforts to ensure the komiks editors published stories with developmental thrusts. Many of these books were not popular because of the poor quality of illustrations and the bluntness of messages. As a result, Marcos authorities hired top komiks writers and artists to use a more subtle approach in presenting governmental messages promoting family planning and the Green Revolution, and stemming the exodus to the cities. The developmental komiks had an effect if some of the research studies are to trusted. One reported that families with high exposure to the komiks had a more positive attitude toward family planning.

Other Philippine government agencies developed komiks to warn against pollution and drug taking and to promote nuclear power. Concerning the latter, the National Corporation of Electricity published *Napocor Nuklear Komiks*, assuring fishermen, among others, that nuclear plants had not polluted streams. Among other developmental komiks were "One Bottle of Hell," explaining alcoholism, and "Venus de Milo," issued during the beauty pageant season to attack the penchant to judge women solely by their physical appearance. The Communications Foundation of Asia, located in Manila, publishes komiks to explain the roles of elected officials and to propagandize the services offered to communists who surrender.

A large segment of komiks has remained in the hands of Ramon Roces since he solicited Velasquez's help in 1928. The Roces company owns six komiks companies, the largest two in 1992 being Graphic Arts and Atlas with thirty-seven and twenty titles, respectively. Of seventy-one komiks published in the Philippines, sixty-two come from Roces companies.

The largest four, all Roces products, are published twice weekly and have circulations of 200,000 and 250,000 each. The average komik is a thirty-two to forty-eight-page weekly selling for US17 to 20 cents. Typically, a book will contain several *wakasans* (short stories complete in the issue) and serialized *nobelas* (novels), as well as puzzles, gag cartoons, prose, and advertising. Each wakasan and nobela is given four pages.

Until recently, each komik featured a "super" nobela that established its reputation. Some went on for years, such as Jim Fernandez' "Anak Ni Zuma" which ran in 500 episodes over more than a decade. Emmanuel Martinez, Graphic Arts editor, said the trend in the nineties is to carry more short stories, because the poor economy does not encourage readers to purchase a komik week after week to find out one story's ending (Interview by author, 18 July 1992).

Love stories are the most popular komiks. A 1992 survey reported that of 122 nobelas and wakasans in the top ten komiks, love and romance accounted for more than fifty-three percent. Describing the popular genres, Martinez said Filipinos like their love stories to have a pleasant mood with happy endings and their fantasy and macabre to be very horrifying with blood, gore, and ugly characters.

The mushier love and romance komiks are, the better. Usually these books lightheartedly pit forces of good against evil with a requisite happy ending. Stories abound of the long-suffering mother, the daughter who gives up personal happiness to serve the family, the woman victimized by her lover, and the orphan persecuted by her stepmother.

For years, fantasy tales were the most popular type, popularized in the fifties by Mars Ravelo. His most famous stories were "Dyesebel," about a mermaid who fell in love with a human, and "Darna," about a barrio girl with supernatural powers.

Fantasy stories feature victims of life's cruel jokes who gain magic powers (a magic stick or golden gun or a magic piggy bank) and seek acceptance by society. According to Reyes, the fantasy komiks try to "rectify nature's neglect and contemporary society's lack of concern by empowering the crippled, the ugly, the sickly and the

poverty-stricken with marvelous gifts ranging from a magical typewriter, ballpoint pen, or winnowing basket, to the more standard folk amulet." (Reyes 1980)

Gracing komiks over the years have been "Phantomanok" (part phantom, part rooster), women with snakes and rats as twins, a three-headed girl, and "The Hands," the latter a popular tale revolving around a pair of super-strong, telekinetic, chopped off, one-eyed hands.

Writers and illustrators of komiks are prolific, hard-working, poorly paid, and part of a rather select group. The amount of work that many of them undertake is mind-boggling. Carlo Caparas used to write regularly thirty-six weekly series, but slowed to fewer than ten by the nineties. Three women are among the most productive writers—Elena Patron, Nerissa Cabral, and Gilda Olvidado. In the eighties, each cranked out fourteen episodes of continuing novels weekly. Some illustrators also accomplish prodigious volumes of work, drawing five to eight weekly series. But none has yet duplicated the feat of Mar Santana, who has manage seventeen series (eighteen episodes) each week. Santana oversees a production assembly line, sketching and outlining faces and leaving dialogue, ink details, and background to others.

Some critics believe the quality of komiks has declined because of the speed with which some writers and artists work. This has been a concern of ten-year-old United Artists of the Philippines, which has taken upon itself the task of improving standards. Of course, the manner and amount komiks producers are paid have forced them to do high volume. "The more stories they do, the more payment they receive," Martinez said (Interview by author 18 July 1992).

The Funnies

Although newspaper and magazine strips (funnies) go back to Velasquez's 1928 conception of "Kenkoy," and a number of others followed in pre- and post-World War II, they really had their heyday after the 1970s. The reasons are the existence of more tabloids, and demands by Samahang Kartunistang Pilipinas ("the cartoonists" group) for "chances to do our own strips" according to Alcala (Interview by author, 26 September 1988). A few came out before then, such as "Sanoy" by Pol Galvez, "Sablo" and at least six other titles by Edgar Soller, "Islaw Palitaw" (1946–48), "Congressman Kalog"

(1966–72), and "Mang Ambo" (1963–72), but the bulk of the titles were post-martial law creations. In fact, many were published in Marcos-owned and -controlled dailies such as *Express, Times Journal,* and *Bulletin Today,* leading one to suspect the strips were part of the dictator's package of diversionary and pacifying tactics.

One of the old strips was "Tisoy," started by Nonoy Marcelo in 1963. It had a lapse when Marcelo went abroad for about eight years, and was restarted in 1977, then featuring "Aling Otik" as a street sweeper for the government. In 1979, Marcelo created "Ikabod," one of the most read contemporary strips. It was to act as a "balance to the heavy repression during the Marcos years as it was against the big fat cats," Marcelo said. He further explained that, "The cat has three mice under him—fisherman, politician, business mice. I keep hitting this theme because even though Marcos left, the establishment is still intact and still corrupt" (Interview by author, September 1988).

By the nineties, Philippine dailies contained a total of about fifteen to twenty local strips. Some of the oldest and most prominent were "Siopawman" by Alcala, started in 1972 and published in the *Manila Times;* "Baltic and Co." by Roni Santiago, published in the *Bulletin* since the seventies, and "Kusyo at Buyok" by Tito Milambilang in the *Bulletin* (Interview by author, 16 July 1988; Roxas 1984, 143).

Marcelo said there are not more local strips because dailies can get U.S. syndicated ones cheaply. In 1986, Marcelo's newspaper, *Chronicle,* dropped all local strips because it could obtain foreign ones for fifty cents each. A local comic costs two to four times more (Interview by author, September 1988). The dailies use only freelance cartoonists for the cartoons according to Alcala (Interview by author, 26 September 1988).

Animation

Although some pioneers in Philippine cartooning dabbled in animation, the genre did not prosper. In the fifties, Jose Zabala Santos and Larry Alcala animated product advertisements; Santos for Philippine Manufacturing Company in 1952, and Alcala for Caltex and Darigold Milk in 1956 (Alcala's Caltex characters were two eager-beaver gas station attendants). Throughout the sixties, Alcala experimented with animation in title sequences for TV programs. In 1972, he organized a course in film animation at the University of the Philippines. But, he said, the great expense of animation soon killed

the domestic industry. "It was cheaper to receive cartoon films from the U.S.," he said (Interview by author, 26 September 1988).

As television became entrenched in Filipino society, so did foreign cartoons, usually leased from the U.S. and Japan. The only local input was voice dubbing, but even that limited opportunity to work with animation was lost in 1979 when then-President Marcos banned all robot cartoons on TV as a "harmful influence on the youth." Marcos claimed cartoons such as "Voltes V," "Striker Force," "Balatak," and "Danger Force" glamorized violence and promoted a warlike spirit. In late 1995, the head of the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board, Jesus Sison, ordered television executives to delete violent scenes from animation shows "to help children grow up properly—physically and mentally" (Manila 1995).

The eighties saw the first real development of local animation. The versatile Nonoy Marcelo, who created the newspaper strips "Tisoy" and "Ikabod," produced "Da Real Makoy," an animated documentary of Marcos' youth, and has maintained his interest in animation, which he describes as "the ultimate end of all cartooning." Miguel and Juan Alcazaren work in clay animation, producing such pieces as "Hari," a satirical power struggle; "Huling Trip," a futuristic ride into the radioactive era; and "Juan de la Cruz," about human degradation.

Burbank Animation of Sydney, Australia, incorporated in the Philippines in 1983. Four Australians put up $50,000 to establish the subsidiary, although it's listed as 100 percent Filipino-owned. By 1987, Burbank posted $1 million in exports (four times its 1985 total) to the U.S., Belgium, France, New Zealand, and Australia. Most of their films are educational, but include a fifty-minute "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," a twenty-minute funny animal series, and a science fiction series. Burbank's major problem was that the local industry lacks trained artists to supply 900 meters of footage weekly, a difficulty that led Marcelo to claim that the Philippine animation industry was virtually dead by 1988.

In the 1990s, animation has been revitalized in the Philippines through the efforts of about ten production houses, most competing for the product, corporate, and industrial advertising, as well as audiovisual production business.

The largest studio is Fil-Cartoons, a subsidiary, of Hanna-Barbera in the U.S., which produces many of the American shows of that company. It epitomized a trend developing in the Philippines of enticing foreign animation because of low labor costs, abundant artistic talent, and the Filipino's cultural and linguistic affinity to the U.S.

Conclusion

No country in Asia (besides Japan) has the comic art tradition found in the Philippines. A few factors explain this phenomenon. With the exception of the Marcos days, the Philippines exercised a type of Western democracy that permitted criticism and lampooning of political leaders and social mores, while cultural values and dictatorships in many parts of Asia did not; as a colony for forty-eight years, the Philippines adopted American media practices, including political cartoons and comic strips; usually a media-rich nation, the Philippines had the means to support a comics tradition; finally, the Filipino peoples' ability to laugh (including at themselves) and their need to escape sometimes harsh conditions fit in very well with the aims of most comics art.

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