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DIFFERENCE IS NOT INDIFFERENCE: CICERO AND MODERN JAPAN

Let me begin with an apology as it is customary for my fellow countrymen and countrywomen to preface a speech with an apology of whatever kind they can find on the occasion. This time, however, my apology is not perfunctory but real. Because what I have to say on this celebrative occasion about Cicero is not straightforwardly positive; it is rather a gloomy picture of Cicero's being systematically neglected in the process of Japan's modernization. That said, however, considering the fact that even his reception in the West, particularly in its modern period, has not been without ups and downs, it can be worthwhile to see if an analysis of the negligent reception of Cicero in modern Japan can be of relevant significance to the problem in general of Cicero and modernity¹.

1. The main reason for the negligent reception, in my diagnosis, lies in the peculiar nature and structure of Japan's modernity, a period which began in the late nineteenth century. It is a product of the revolution that was to accomplish a modernization by replacing the *ancien régime* of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1867) with the restored lineage of the Emperor-system. It is an invention of old indigenous tradition in the garb of Western modernity and, as such, is replete with contradiction. Karl Löwith (1897-1973)², who happened to come to Japan in its high modernity in 1936, made a terse observation, «Modern Japan is a contradiction in terms», meaning that beneath its outward modernization of the technological kind there remained a persistent undercurrent of native spirit or

¹ In what follows some might find it unjustifiable that a disproportionate amount of pages is dedicated to things Japanese. I myself have some doubt about this kind of approach but I should be grateful if the reader would see this as an experiment and an extreme case of reception studies that stands in sharp contrast to an extreme case of historical positivism.

² Karl Löwith is one of the so-called "Heidegger's children" but the first to revolt against Heidegger. Expelled from Hitler's regime, he happened to come to the prewar Japan, where he spent some years as an émigré teaching at Tohoku Imperial University until leaving for the United States before Japan's surprise attack at Pearl Harbour.

mind-set, which clearly defied the modern way of thinking and doing. And as it happened, the two ingredients that went into the composition of modern Japan – the restored native tradition and the imported modern West – were not congenial to Cicero's reception.

The Emperor-system, needless to say, falls under the category of monarchy. For those cultures that have happened to enjoy more or less the blessings of Roman heritage, the idea of monarchy comes naturally in an oppositional pair with that of republic. By republic I mean here not only «a state», as goes a dictionary definition, «in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch» but also, as students of Cicero will agree, a political constitution distinguished by its strong sense of opposition and antipathy against dictatorship. Regrettably, in Asia and particularly in East Asia, where such a republican idea has weaker roots/is harder to find, it can be often observed that what looks like a republic is actually a monarchy in disguise.

While we assemble here in central Europe to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of liberation from the totalitarian regime, the *annus mirabilis* of 1989, it is a curious coincidence to witness a couple of occasions for the same thirtieth anniversary in East Asia. One is the upsurge of liberation movement in Hong Kong, which seems especially intensified by the commemoration of the Tiananmen Square tragedy in 1989, exactly thirty years ago. This could be seen as a sad indication that East Asia is a lesser heir to that political ideal exemplified in the Ciceronian tradition of anti-despotism. But, obviously, this is not the place to go into such a touchy topic or a perilous terrain.

The second thirtieth anniversary celebrated in East Asia is far less known outside the region and strictly a domestic business of Japan. On April 30th 2019 the Emperor Heisei, eldest son of the well-known Emperor Hirohito, abdicated the imperial throne, to which Hirohito's grandson acceded as Emperor on May 1st. In accord with the old tradition, the imperial era-name was renewed from *Heisei* to *Reiwa*⁴. From that point on, every official document was to be duly dated in that new era-name. If the former Emperor's abdication had been accomplished with a series of al-

³ Oxford Dictionary of English, 2nd Edition Revised, Oxford 2005.

⁴ Heisei and Reiwa stand for something like "peace and ripeness" and "order and harmony" respectively. While the former derives from ancient Chinese writings, as it had long been the custom, the latter, perhaps for the first time, was taken from a Japanese classic.

legedly hereditary rituals, the new Emperor's succession ceremony likewise comprised an elaborate series of rites and rituals, both exoteric and esoteric. Among them, particularly noteworthy is one reminiscent of fertility rituals, which was performed in late November as the climax of the year-long enchanting procession. On this special occasion it is incumbent on the new Emperor to take a vigil in the specially built pavilion, praying for a good harvest and for the good of the nation. As a strictly secret ritual, all who were allowed to be with him inside were limited to an unnamed deity (imagined invisibility) and a couple of vestal virgins, the ritualistic symbol of purity or purification reminiscent of the ancient Roman priesthood. Its function, however, is not the same: while ritual purification in the Roman instance inevitably implies the symbolic expulsion of the Tarquinian sexual/political abuse and hence the beginning of republican Rome, in the Japanese case there are no such sexual/political complications.

Throughout the festive year of dynastic succession, strange as it may seem to outsiders, something ineffably euphoric was felt in the air in Japan. Considering the high-tech postmodernity in which Japan has long since found itself, it is not easy for its people to have an objective understanding of the situation. However, for those who have lived through the events of 1989, which were just as strange, this mysterious feeling is not unfamiliar, though perhaps less euphoric.

On January 7, 1989 Emperor Hirohito passed away. This imperial demise, the first of its kind in the postwar period, had been preceded by an extended critical moment and brought about a variety of unexpected anomalies, social and otherwise. As luck would have it, Norma Field, a noted American scholar of Japanese literature, happened to stay in Japan and left a detailed report on this extraordinary phenomenon in her book, *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor* (1991). Almost every social function was affected and virtually came to a halt for no less than four months from the Emperor's collapse on September 19, 1988 through to his death on January 7, the following year. «Daily reverential reporting on the body of the emperor throughout the island nation – she writes – both provoked and reinforced a massively orchestrated exercise in "self-restraint", or *jishuku*, a newly popularized word»⁵. Tacitly forbidden throughout the nation were any felicitous greetings in public media, the alcohol for toast

⁵ Field 1991, 21.

in social gatherings and even wedding ceremonies. As one of the eyewitnesses to these social abnormalities, I was hard put to describe the unbelievable situation I was in: the image I could manage to come up with was a scenery of the dying king in the Arthurian legend in medieval Europe, where everything, ranging from nature and society to a single individual, is destined to undergo the osmotic effects of the dying king.

The medieval legend that came up by association is not so far-fetched when we look into the nature and status of the Emperor's body at the burial. What is applicable here is the medieval theory of the "king's two bodies," the view that the king possesses two bodies, one natural and the other divine. The theory has become a common scholarly currency thanks to the monumental study by Ernst Kantorowicz (whose relations with Poland, as I found out, are too delicate to allow for any brief remarks)6. Now Emperor Hirohito's reign lasted for sixty-four years from 1926 to 1989, not only undergoing but also surviving the total defeat in the Second World War. Much to our surprise, just after the war (on January 1st 1946) he came to issue what is called «the declaration of renunciation of divinity»: the statement by which he divested himself of divinity (he used to assume) and resumed his humanity. And ten months later he was defined in the new Constitution as «the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people» (Chapter 1. Article 1)⁷. The word "symbol" can be problematic in that it is not a legal term, and yet it was an ingenious invention in view of the extreme complexities of domestic as well as international political conditions of the time. But the potentially problematic nature of the declaration came to the fore at the burial of this Emperor, half of whose life was lived as a divinity: how could and should one think of and deal with the Emperor's body at the burial ceremony in 1989? The solution the government came up with - public debate was, of course, out of the question - was of the eclectic kind that combines the postwar natural body with the prewar body divine, as Norma Field beautifully puts it, «an elaborate dance representing [new] constitutionality and [ancient] mystery»8. Such an eclectic solution, however, has since then resulted in helping to keep intact the magical undercurrent of pri-

⁶ Kantorowicz 1957.

⁷ «The Emperor of Japan shall be the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power».

⁸ Field 1991, 20.

meval forces of nativism, the cultural unconscious that is inseparably bound up with the peculiar system of monarchy.

2. Modern Japan came to be, in large measure, through its encounter with the imminent threats of colonization by the so-called Great Powers (Britain, France, Germany, Russia and USA), to which a good part of South East Asia as well as neighbouring China had already succumbed. It was natural under these circumstances for Japan to follow the model of Western imperialism in building a modern nation state. Its project of retrospective imperialism, as it turned out, aligned well with the great waves of global imperialism. This small emerging empire was fortunate enough to overcome its first and great crisis by winning victory in the war with the Russian Empire in 1905. Since then its self-complacent megalomaniac aspiration, resulting in due course in ultra-nationalism, had ran its course by the time it met with total defeat in the Asia-Pacific War.

In such a fervour of retrospective imperialism, the place and fate of Cicero was difficult to secure. In the general lack of the idea of "republicanism" as against "monarchism", it was next to impossible to conceptualize such an entity as the "republican empire" that was Ciceronian Rome. In contrast, Caesar indiscriminately taken in both the proper and symbolic sense his name had acquired was regarded as a dominant figure that could represent the image of imperialism. This was a time when the republican ideal was hotly discussed under the influence of Rousseauist ideas, but it was short lived due to the government's suppression and eventually dissipated. There was thus scarcely a place left for Cicero.

There was a further impediment to Cicero' reception, this time, in the form of an article imported from the West. For this we have a symbolic case in Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903): it is no doubt difficult to find more scathing, prejudiced, and even malignant remarks in the history of Cicero's reception than in Mommsen's *The History of Rome*. As an authoritative text in Roman historiography, it helped establish a negative picture of Cicero among the general reading public. Furthermore, the impediment was not limited to such individual cases but emerged from a much wider cultural trend, which Eliza Marian Butler (1885-1959) called

⁹ One may well surmise that Virgil could have had a good chance of gaining popularity, but that did not happen. To be sure, the global endorsement of a patriarchal imperialism seems to have been a perfect fit for the new regime but the kind of imperialism Japan aspired to could not be a foreign product, but one made in Japan, i.e., a renovated version of the ancient monarchical tradition. Also cf. Takada 2014.

The Tyranny of Greece over Germany¹⁰. This refers to the cultural phenomenon of the excessive valorization of Greek over Latin and its deep saturation in the overall German scholarship of the nineteenth century. And it was in the midst of the process of Japanese modernization that this peculiar complicity of Greek antiquity with German nationalism was introduced. The way this trend was imported into Japan was peculiar insofar as it is no exaggeration to say that it was almost singularly accomplished in the person of Raphael von Koeber (1848-1923)¹¹. Invited by the government of Japan as one of the special foreign instructors, this German of Russian descent, if virtually unknown to the world, was going to leave his mark in the intellectual history of modern Japan as the missionary of philology and classical scholarship. The classical scholarship here, however, must be characterized - unlike what is attributed to Shakespeare's «small Latin and less Greek» - as «mainly Greek and little Latin». How influential his presence was to the subsequent course of Japanese classical studies could probably be seen in a typical list of recommended readings for a student of Western civilization, up until, say, the 1970s: Homer's two epics, Plato's dialogues and Thucydides' *History* were on, while Virgil's Aeneid, Cicero's works and Livy's History scarcely made the list. Since then, needless to say, things have regrettably been getting worse¹².

3. All in all, therefore, between Cicero and modern Japan there seems to be neither a noteworthy link nor a relevant point of reference that is of any worth. Nevertheless, in view of the fact, on the one hand, (a) that by and large Cicero's reception in modern Europe itself is not as favourable as it could be, but is often put in a negative light as in the instance of the nineteenth-century German philhellenism and, on the other, (b) that Japan (modern as well as pre-modern) and ancient Rome happen to

¹⁰ Butler 1935.

¹¹ For von Koeber and his influence, cf. Takada 2009.

¹² Since the translation of *De amicitia* (1938) and *De senectute* (1943), no other works had been added until the almost miraculous project of the translation of Cicero's major works was initiated in 1999 and accomplished in 2002. For a monograph study, there are only a few, including my own (Takada 1999). There has been, however, a significant change, as I have recently come to learn much to my surprise, in the academic powerbalance between Greek and Latin studies in the major universities. About two decades ago, the predominance of Greek over Latin in the number of chairs and scholars was indisputable but it has now turned out to be the opposite! It is delightful as such but at the same time too extreme to be auspicious.

have in common the religio-cultural foundation of polytheism, which must have been out of Europe's reach of ever since late antiquity, I wonder if it is possible to find a path – of whatever kind –, through which to traverse these two apparently disparate and distant worlds.

By and large, Cicero's fate in modern Europe is closely bound up with the general cultural trend that first saw the separation of philosophy from rhetoric and the subsequent decline of the latter. As for the separation, we know, it was not a new phenomenon but had already been deplored by Cicero himself (in the De oratore), but notably in modern Europe it was to be systematically carried out. After a short golden age in the Renaissance when the ideal of the orator doctus (a harmonious combination of rhetor-philosopher) was celebrated, the Cartesian moment of clarity and distinction virtually sounded the death knell of the philosophical side of the Ciceronian project. The modern kind of philosophical speculation tends to prefer truth to the probable. This aspiration toward the absolute truth, not least enhanced under the impacts of the Reformation as well as scientism, has largely corroborated the transcendent and transcendental mode of thought, which, while characterizing modern European philosophy, offers little help to the understanding of Cicero the philosopher; it is, in fact, a hindrance¹³. The same can be safely said of the rhetorical side of Cicero. Although he is better known as a man of eloquence, his fortune in this respect in modern Europe is at one with the fate of rhetoric in general, which is marked by a trajectory of constant decline. There was no shortage of resistance against Cartesianism from the camp of rhetoric like Vico's - the preference of certum to veritas - but under the hegemony of truth-oriented scientism and absolute-oriented transcendentalism there has been little room for development and innovation of the rhetorical tradition, especially the Ciceronian dialectic of *in utramque partem*, the platform of pragmatistic skepticism.

If the intellectual and religious background of Ciceronian Rome is largely described as a coexistence of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism, that of modern Japan – or, for that matter, Japan almost throughout its entire history – offers a similar cohabitation of Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The triadic homology is just an expediency, but what is particularly important and striking about both is the underlying prin-

 $^{^{13}}$ Cf., for instance, Powell 1995, 1: «As Cicero reached his 2,100th birthday [in January 1995], his philosophical works are being taken more seriously by scholars than they have been for generations».

ciple of co-existentiality: any school of either triad may be critical of any other, but it will never go to any lengths to eradicate or annihilate any other. Under such polytheistic conditions personhood – not the individual - takes shape first and foremost in and through social relations. This stands in sharp contrast to what happens in monotheism, where the individual is to be formed through a personal commitment to the transcendent deity. It is thus that "faith" in the former, for example, is always a horizontal business within a group or community and, therefore, in the event of one's faith being divided between more than two groups a dilemma must needs arise in default of any absolute means of mediation. What this often entails is instances of aesthetics of loyalism with no regard to justice. "Faith" in the latter, on the other hand, is formed by an absolute, transcendent principle that determines, vertically and from without, the ultimate order and value in one's inner world and hence can even transcend any type of community to which one belongs. And, as a matter of course, one tries in vain to find an equivalent of the Judeo-Christian faith in ancient Rome, as well as in Japan¹⁴.

4. Just as Cicero was struggling to secure and establish his own native ground under the overwhelming influence of Greek thought and culture, even so were the prominent intellectuals of modern Japan awash with the advancing waves of European thought and culture. If in Cicero's case the cultural inferiority complex may have been more or less mitigated by a sense of Roman military superiority over Greece, Japanese intellectuals were destined to suffer from a double inferiority complex. Cicero's travels to Greece (notably Athens and Rhodes) were occasioned, according to Plutarch, by either an ailment affecting his voice or an unintentionally incurred political difficulty. But, I believe, there must have been a third reason, i.e., to round out his knowledge and practice of philosophy and rhetoric in the home of their origin. Otherwise, the episode in Rhodes, as told by Plutarch, would make little sense: on hearing Cicero's oration in Greek, Apollonius the son of Molon showed himself much bemused because its excellence persuaded him of the successful transfer of Greek eloquence and culture to Rome¹⁵. It can be read as an implicit manifestation of the underlying cultural inferiority complex and its happy and triumphant dissipation. Cicero knows, however, that such a triumph is but

¹⁴ For this distinction between the two models of world picture, cf. Takada 2019.

¹⁵ Plutarch 1919, Cic. 4, 4-5.

momentary because his ultimate task lies in the cultivation of a cultural home ground on which to build his own native tradition.

If we search in the process of Japan's modernization (i.e., Westernization) for the moment when it more or less attained its end and became aware of the need for a cultural home ground on which to assert its native identity, it falls without doubt on the interwar period of 1920-1940. By this time, the *élite* students who had received their education from Koeber –who taught in Tokyo between 1893 and 1923 – began to distinguish themselves in various fields. Among them were two philosophers who cannot be ignored not only for their general importance in the modern history of Japanese philosophy but also for the useful reference they may provide for our comparative deliberations.

Tetsuro Watsuji (1889-1960) is best known as the author of a monumental work, Ethics, which was written in the ambitious spirit of rewriting the whole tradition of "ethics" as is conceived and developed in the West. Naturally, it is neither possible nor necessary here to give a whole picture or even a succinct summary of his achievements¹⁶: what I would like to focus on is Watsuji's foundational concept of "man/human", which is crucial to his theoretical system-building and its historical elaboration. One of the most erudite intellectuals almost equally well-versed in the Eastern and Western cultural traditions, Watsuji was able to secure, as it were, a vantage point for his comparative reflections. And what his philosophical acumen led to was the concept of "man/human". While is generally conceived as the "individual" in the West, notably in modern Europe, it is almost always represented in the East as "a personhood in the community". The observation is reflected in the letters and usage of the Japanese language: the Chinese ideographs (pronounced as ningen) for humans visibly represent the "human between/among humans". In a similar vein, the ideograph "(a)human(s)" – in principle there is no basic distinction in form and content between singular and plural in Japanese nouns - and the ideograph for "another person or others" are indistinguishable in sound in an ordinary parlance as they are pronounced exactly the same (as hito). By taking a close look at the actual phenomenon of common and ordinary use of language, Watsuji was convinced that "human relationships" rather

¹⁶ For further information, cf. Watsuji 1996.

than "the individual" comprised the foundation, ontological as well as ethical, of the cultural tradition of Japan and largely of the East¹⁷.

This broad distinction between Western individualism and Eastern collectivism gains a further dimension when overlaid with the prime binary opposition of time and space. Legend has it that after reading Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927) on its appearance in Germany, where he happened to stay, Watsuji realized European philosophy's ineradicable attachment to "time and the self", which was, as he saw it, ironically made visible in Heidegger's desperate efforts to overcome it. At the same time, this insight brought him to recognize the importance of "space and community" as a seminal ground for an alternative philosophy, ethics among others, of his own. After having constructed its basic theory (*Ethics as a Study of Human between Humans*) in 1934, Watsuji dedicated more than two decades to the accomplishment of his magnum opus (*Ethics*), which came out in 1949.

The other figure, who also took upon himself the generational mission of overcoming European modernity, is Shuzo Kuki (1888-1941). His knowledge of and experience in Europe are extraordinary: having finished under Koeber's supervision a thesis, Die geschichtliche Entwicklung des Problems von Glauben und Wissen im Mittelalter, in Tokyo, he was extraordinarily allowed to take a kind of extensive Grand Tour (under the auspices of the government) mainly in Germany and France (1922-1928). During this period he conversed with such philosophers as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Bergson. Unlike Watsuji, virtually a traveller, Kuki left his scholarly footmarks in Europe: while mention is made of his presence as discussant in Heidegger's Unterwegs zur Sprache, the lectures he delivered at Pontigny, Paris, in 1928 (La notion du temps et la reprise sur le temps en Orient and L'expression de l'infini dans l'art japonais) were published as a booklet titled *Propos sur le temps* in Paris. This brief look at his career is probably sufficient enough to show that he was engaged and negotiating with European philosophy with an eye to constructing an alternative philosophy of his own. What he had been aiming at eventually materialized in two works, Structure of "Iki" (1930) and Problems of Contingency (1935).

¹⁷ He was not unaware of the Aristotelian idea of men as "social animal" or the Hegelian sublation of the individual, but all in all he was convinced that the pivotal ground of Western philosophy, particularly as it was conducted in modern Europe, was the individual self.

Structure of "Iki" is an attempt to grasp a cultural entity called iki, which may be tolerably translated as chic, geschickt or raffiné but is essentially untranslatable as an expression specifically embedded in the history, culture and ethnicity of Japan¹⁸. To deal with such an entity, the methodology matters; and Kuki searched far and wide for an appropriate approach best suited to his objective by looking into those which were then fashionable. As for the process to find a method, Kuki writes something to this effect: Husserl's "Ideation" must be put aside in favour of Bergson's way, because the former's idealism retains, like medieval Realism, essentialist elements, whereas the latter, like medieval Nominalism, tries to grasp concrete singularities as they actually exist. What one must seek after, Kuki says, is existentia rather than essentia. Here he seems to have taken advantage of one of the characteristic traits of his cultural tradition, i.e. the epistemological tendency to focus on temporary minutiae (hic-et-nunc) and ignore a broader and long-term perspective, not to mention the transcendent.

Kuki's analysis of *iki* is conducted in the spirit of anti-essentialism or anti-universalism. So for instance, the three distinguishing features he specifies as the main constituents of the sense of iki, coquetry, pride/honour, and resignation, are all conducive, either singly or in combination, to the perception of an entity characterized by contingency, transience and duality. The first constituent, coquetry, which is defined as a specific kind of eroticism emerging from a psychic tension between men and women, as a matter of fact, serves as the ontological basis of his philosophical discussion. The true business of philosophy, Kuki would like to assert, must be conducted on the mundane ground of binary relationship of sexuality, not on the supranatural basis of the individual, be it man or woman. The second and the third, pride/honour and resignation, deriving as they do from the traditional ideas of bushido and Buddhism respectively, in effect, negate each other, as the positive will to a discipline (the former) is to offset the negative acceptance of self-resignation (the latter). In the world of iki there is no room for the metaphysic of presence and hence no need for deconstruction, no possibility for the Hegelian Aufhebung and hence no need for Marxian social optimism. What is at stake is a moment of ephemeral beauty, emerging out of a tension

¹⁸ Cf. Kuki 2004.

made up of duality and antinomy. Nothing is farther than the transcendent idea of unity and the eternal¹⁹.

5. Cicero's rediscovery at the very beginning of modern Europe (the Renaissance) was accompanied by Petrarch's lamentation over the Roman hero's lack of personal integrity. It never occurred to the humanist poet, an Augustinian in spirit, that the ancient Romans could have had a totally different mentality. Petrarch, of course, is not to blame judging from the general poverty of historical sense at that time. But later on, when we witness Theodor Mommsen, well after the Enlightenment and right in the midst of the age of scientific historicism, uttering inconceivably abusive language against Cicero, we must take to heart the difficulty of freeing ourselves from the prejudices that have accrued in the cultural, as well as individual, unconscious. And if nothing is harder to crack than the cultural assumptions under which we are situated, then we must be attentive to the clue or cue that could help us recognize them as such. And both in theory and practice, the clue or cue only comes from outside since it is impossible to objectively see one's own culture through the eye that is embedded in the culture itself. An intervention from different cultures is in order.

In the case of Cicero, whose study and reception have for the most part been done in the West, that is to say, in the cultures under the inveterate tradition of Christianity, it is perhaps not a bad idea to look abroad, once in a blue moon, for a heuristic clue or cue. If Europe can hardly approach pagan antiquity without its Christianized spectacles – and since *ars oblivionalis* is not readily at hand – it would be wise to seek alternative perspectives. My suggestion is that Japan and its modernity offers just such an option.

To carry coals to Newcastle – to use an idiom learnt in school but never used till now – allow me to remind you of the existence of a good example of such a cultural intervention in Classical studies. Namely, E.R. Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) would not have been what it was had it not been for Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946). The chrysanthemum here, a symbol for the Emperor and Imperial family, can be taken to have referred to the then Emperor who deceased thirty years ago.

¹⁹ My hunch is that there can be an affinity in epistemological perspective between Kuki's *iki* and Cicero's *pinguis Minerva* (*Lael.* 19) in his dealing with *amicitia*.

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