

Expanding the Concept of Traditional Printmaking in the Practice of Expanded Printmaking: A Study of the Go Block Vol. 7 Exhibition

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ABSTRACT

The development of contemporary printmaking has shown a change from a conventional understanding that emphasizes the production of printed editions through the use of blocks or matrices to a more open, experimental and interdisciplinary approach. Alternative printmaking allows printmakers to produce work that strays from the discipline's bounds while yet staying within its bounds. Go Block Vol. 7 serves as an important platform for redefining printmaking in Malaysia by expanding its material, conceptual, and presentation frameworks while maintaining connections to its traditional foundations. Therefore, this study aims to identify how the basic principles of traditional printmaking such as the concept of matrices, image transfer, re-application processes and visual traces are still maintained and reinterpreted in the exhibited works. The study uses a qualitative approach through visual and formal analysis of selected works, in addition to referring to exhibition documentation sources and writings related to contemporary printmaking. The study is expected to show that expanded printmaking does not reject the tradition of printmaking, but rather expands the possibilities of mediums, techniques and forms of presentation without neglecting the conceptual foundations of the discipline. This study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the development of printmaking in Malaysia and its role in shaping contemporary visual art discourse.

Keywords: Go-Block Exhibition, Contemporary Printmaking, Principles of Printmaking, Conventional



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1 INTRODUCTION

Printmaking is a visual art discipline based on the concept of transferring ink from a matrix to a receiving surface through certain processes such as woodblock printing, iron plate engraving, lithography and silkscreen. Traditionally, printmaking is often associated with the production of editions, the use of blocks or matrices, and elements of repetition in the process of producing works. However, the development of contemporary art has led to an expansion of understanding of this discipline through the emergence of the concept of expanded printmaking, an approach that goes beyond the limitations of conventional mediums and techniques without neglecting the basic principles of printmaking.

Since the 2000s, alternative printmaking in Malaysia has grown into a vibrant and cutting-edge industry distinguished by significant thematic engagement with social, cultural, and political themes, cross-disciplinary techniques, and material research. By fusing aspects of installation, digital media, and traditional crafts, artists are redefining the medium and making printmaking more relevant and approachable. Because of this, alternative printmaking is now a versatile and developing technique that

connects local identity with the discourse of contemporary art around the world.

In Malaysia, the Go Block exhibition series has become an important platform that challenges traditional perceptions of printmaking. Go Block, which began in 2009, has shown the tendency of local artists to explore the use of hybrid mediums, alternative matrices, installations and interdisciplinary approaches in printmaking practice. According to Zainal Abidin (2026), the development of Go Block shows a shift from understanding printmaking as a two-dimensional object to a practice that is experimental, conceptual and process-based. This change indirectly strengthens the position of expanded printmaking as an important discourse in the development of contemporary printmaking in Malaysia.

The Go Block Vol 7: The Contemporary Expanded Printmaking Exhibition, which take place in 2023 at Galeri Puteh, Kuala Lumpur, continues its efforts to expand the public's understanding of the printmaking discipline through works that combine various mediums, ideas and presentation strategies. This exhibition not only features innovations in formal and technical aspects, but also opens up a space for discussion about the continuity of traditional printmaking principles in the context of contemporary art. Therefore, through the paper, an examination of how the basic concepts of traditional printmaking are still maintained and reinterpreted in the practice of expanded printmaking through the works exhibited in Go Block Vol.7.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach thru visual analysis and documentation study methods to examine how the concept of traditional printmaking is expanded in the works exhibited in Go Block Vol. 7. Data was obtained from exhibition catalogues, curatorial writings, journal articles, and documentation of works related to expanded printmaking. The selected works are analysed using Erwin Panofsky's Iconology Theory, which emphasizes three levels of interpretation. The first level, pre-iconography, involves observing the formal aspects of the work such as medium, technique, form, composition, and visual elements that can be directly seen. The second stage, iconography, examines the themes, symbols, and imagery used by the artist and their relationship to the concept of printmaking. The third level, iconology, focuses on a deeper interpretation of meaning by considering the cultural, historical, and ideological contexts underlying the creation of the work. The use of this theory allows researchers to understand not only the visual aspects of the work but also how the fundamental principles of traditional printmaking, such as matrices, image transfer, traces, and repetition, are reinterpreted in the practice of expanded printmaking. Thru a combination of visual analysis and iconology, this study can elucidate the continuity between tradition and innovation in the development of contemporary Malaysian printmaking.

3 PRINCIPLES OF TRADITIONAL PRINT

Traditional printmaking refers to the production of images through the process of transferring an original surface or matrix to another surface such as paper. This principle distinguishes printmaking from other art disciplines such as painting, drawing or sculpture because the work is not produced directly on the final surface, but rather through an intermediary process. According to Gabor F. Peterdi (1969), printmaking is an art form that produces images through various multiplication techniques under the direct supervision of the artist, and each print produced is considered an original work even if it exists in large quantities.

One of the most important principles in traditional printmaking is the concept of the matrix. The matrix is the original surface that carries the image to be printed, such as a wooden block in a woodcut, a metal plate in an intaglio technique, a lithographic stone or silk fabric. The image produced on the matrix is then transferred to another surface through pressure, touch or the use of a specific tool. According to the UNSW Making Centre, the matrix is the basis of all printmaking processes and allows the production of multiple images from the same source.

The second principle is image transfer. In printmaking, images do not appear directly but through the process of transferring ink from a matrix to a receiving surface such as paper. This process can occur manually or using a printing press. City Lit (2023) explains that image transfer is a fundamental principle of printmaking because it involves a change from one physical form to a new visual form. In most traditional techniques, the resulting image will also appear in reverse or mirror image with respect to the original matrix.

The third principle is repetition and the production of editions. Unlike paintings which are usually single, printmaking allows the production of multiple copies from the same matrix. However, each print in an edition is considered an original work because the artist is directly involved in the entire production process. According to Gabor F. Peterdi (1969), fine art prints are multiple original works, while the number of editions only determines the commercial value and not the level of authenticity of the work.

In addition, traditional printmaking also emphasizes the relationship between process and product. Each technique involved in the concept of printmaking such as relief printing, intaglio printing, lithography or silkscreen printing has its own visual properties based on the materials, tools and methods used. Therefore, a printmaking artist not only produces an image but also needs to understand the nature of the material and the technical processes that influence the final form of the work. This process makes printmaking a discipline that combines aspects of creativity, technical skills and material experimentation.

In conclusion, principles such as matrix, image transfer, repetition through edition and emphasis on process are important foundations in understanding traditional printmaking. These principles not only shape the identity of the printmaking discipline, but also serve as a reference point in assessing the development of expanded printmaking practices today. Although the medium and form of presentation are increasing, these conceptual foundations still remain relevant in determining the nature and position of printmaking in the context of contemporary visual arts.

4 EXPANDED PRINTMAKING CONCEPT

The concept of expanded printmaking refers to the development of printmaking that goes beyond the limits of traditional techniques, mediums and formats. Conventional printmaking is often associated with the production of two-dimensional images through the use of certain matrices such as wood blocks, metal plates or silk fabrics, but with the existence of expanded printmaking it opens up space for the use of hybrid mediums, three-dimensional objects, installations, performances and digital technology. This approach does not necessarily reject the basic principles of printmaking, but rather expands the possibilities of how the concept of print can be translated in the context of contemporary art.

According to Rosalind Krauss (1979), this development can be linked to the idea of “expanded field” which she introduced in her essay entitled “Sculpture in the Expanded Field. Rosalind Krauss explains that the discipline of printmaking is no longer bound to a fixed formal definition, but rather it develops through cross-relationships between various mediums and contexts. With this contextual approach it allows artists to adapt principles such as matrices, image transfer, repetition and reproduction into more experimental and interdisciplinary forms of practice.

Mursyidah Zainal Abidin, Sabzali Musa Kahn, Nurhasliza Abdullah and Jehaabdullah Jehsorhoh (2026) stated that expanded printmaking in Malaysia has shown a change from the understanding of “print as image” to a practice that includes hybrid media, alternative matrices, spatial presentation and publication based on art programs. Their study found that this development not only involves the use of new materials but also changes the language and methods of printmaking presentation in the local context. The Go Block exhibition series is one of the main platforms that has driven this development by encouraging experimentation, collaboration and exploration of broader printmaking concepts.

In the practice of expanded printmaking, it is no longer focused solely on the printed product, but it also focuses on the process, spatial experience, audience interaction and conceptual value of the work. The use of techniques such as frottage, cyanotype, pyrography, monoprints and the incorporation of installation elements are one example that shows how the principles of printmaking can be translated through a more open approach. Although the physical form of the work may be different from traditional prints, elements such as impression transfer, matrix and visual traces are still the basis for the formation of meaning in the work.

In the Malaysian context, this concept can be clearly seen through the exhibition Go Block Vol. 7: The Contemporary Expanded Printmaking Exhibition. This exhibition brings together artists who combine conventional techniques with alternative mediums to showcase the potential of printmaking as an ever-evolving discipline. Therefore, expanded printmaking can be understood as an approach that maintains the conceptual identity of printmaking while expanding the technical, material and presentational boundaries to align with the development of contemporary visual art.

5 ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ARTWORKS IN GO BLOCK VOL.7

The analysis of the artworks aims to examine how the artists in the Go Blok Vol. 7: The Contemporary Expanded Printmaking Exhibition have expanded the definition of printmaking through the exploration of new mediums, materials and conceptual approaches. Contemporary printmaking is different from traditional printmaking which is usually focused on the production of two-dimensional images on paper, the works in this exhibition show a tendency to combine elements of sculpture, objects, installations and the use of alternative materials. However, this development does not mean a rejection of the principles of printmaking. On the contrary, principles such as matrix, image transfer, visual trace and repetition can still be identified in various more experimental forms.

Through the analysis of the selected works, namely Juhari Said, Samsudin Wahab, Faizal Suhif and Shahrul Jamili, it can be observed that the expanded printmaking approach in the Malaysian context is more of a visual expansion of printmaking than a replacement for tradition. These works present various issues such as cultural identity, social criticism, personal history and societal value systems which are translated through innovative printmaking strategies. This analysis is also important to show that contemporary printmaking is not just dependent on the printed product, but also emphasizes the process, material experience and the formation of meaning in the work.



Figure 1 Juhari Said collaborated with Masnoor Ramli Mahmud, Katak Tua Nak Jadi Lembu (2023) (Source: Galeri Puteh, 2023, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

The work "Katak Tua Nak Jadi Lembu" (2023) is a collaboration between Juhari Said and Masnoor Ramli Mahmud on a series of Malay proverbs, specifically the theme "the frog wants to become a cow," which is a satire on individuals who try to imitate or become something beyond their capabilities and original identity. This work utilizes hybrid imagery between a frog and a cow, a visual approach that has long been a significant feature in Juhari Said's exploration of proverbs. The surreal combination of animal images produces rich symbolism and invites the audience to examine questions of identity, ambition, power, and social change.

At the formal level, this work displays the form of a hybrid animal that combines the features of a frog and a cow. Elements of bold lines, prominent carving textures, and the use of black-and-white contrast or monochromatic tones highlight a strong graphic quality. The composition focuses on the main figure that dominates the visual space. Organic forms, textured surfaces, and clear carving effects reveal a close relationship with the visual language of relief printmaking.

At the iconographic level, the images of the frog and the cow can be identified as a direct reference to the Malay proverb "katak hendak jadi lembu." In Malay culture, this proverb refers to someone who tries to imitate those who are more powerful, wealthy, or influential to the point of losing their original identity. The combination of the two animals creates a visual symbol that conveys elements of social satire, criticism of greed, the desire for higher status, and the human tendency to compare oneself with others. The use of animal imagery as a metaphor makes this work easily relatable to local narrative traditions and proverbs.

At the iconological level, this work can be interpreted as a reflection on the state of contemporary society, which is often influenced by a culture of materialism, social competition, and the desire to achieve a higher status. The phrase "old frog" adds a new layer of meaning that may refer to individuals or groups who are still striving for status and power even they are at the end of their life journey or experience. Thru the symbol of the hybrid animal, this work not only critiques individual behaviour but also comments on broader social phenomena, including issues of identity, cultural transformation, and obsession with success. This approach aligns with Panofsky's view that works of art reflect the values, thoughts, and cultural conditions of society in their time.

Although this work is a result of contemporary collaboration, it is still closely related to the principles of conventional printmaking. First, the use of images based on the carving process and matrix formation directly refers to the woodcut technique or block printing, which is Juhari Said's expertise. Secondly, the emphasis on lines, textures, and clear carving effects is a key characteristic of traditional printmaking. Thirdly, the concept of image production thru a reproducible matrix maintains the foundational philosophy of conventional printmaking even when the work is expanded into the form of installations or collaborations with new media. Therefore, Katak Tua Nak Jadi Lembu can be seen as an example of expanded printmaking, which is a work that extends the function and presentation of printmaking without abandoning the basic principles of traditional printing such as matrices, engraving, image repetition, and graphic visual language.



Figure 2 Samsudin Wahab, *Gerbang Kayangan* (2023)
(Source: Galeri Puteh, 2023, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

The work *Gerbang Kayangan* is produced using mixed media with changing dimensions, demonstrating Samsudin Wahab's tendency to combine elements of Nusantara mythology, popular culture and personal imagination in his work. Visually, this work invites the viewer to explore a symbolic space that connects the real world with the metaphysical realm. The use of organic forms and fantastical imagery creates an atmosphere of mystery and a visual experience rich in layers of meaning.

At the first stage, this work can be observed thru formal elements such as shape, line, texture, space, and composition. The title *Gerbang Kayangan* evokes the existence of a door or pathway to the celestial realm, often associated with Malay cosmology. Visual forms that are organic, figurative, or hybrid, which are common in Samsudin's works, create an atmosphere of fantasy and mythology. The use of layered images, overlapping spatial structures, and textural effects creates a visual experience reminiscent of a repetitive printing process and image transfer.

At the iconographic level, the symbol "Gerbang" can be interpreted as a sign of transition between the real world and the supernatural world. The term "Kayangan," on the other hand, is related to the Malay cosmological belief referred to as the high realm or the realm of gods and spirits. In this context, the work uses images rooted in folklore, myths, and local cultural heritage. This approach aligns with the artist's tendency to often adapt elements of Malay culture, proverbs, and folk narratives into contemporary visual language.

At the iconological level, *Gerbang Kayangan* can be understood as a reflection on the search for identity, cultural memory, and the human connection with Malay cosmological heritage in the contemporary era. The gate is not just a physical structure, but a metaphor for the journey between the past and the present, between reality and imagination. This work illustrates how traditional myths remain relevant as a medium for understanding contemporary social and cultural changes. Samsudin elevates local cultural elements not merely as nostalgia, but as a form of critique and reflection on the position of Malay identity in the modern world.

Despite being created within the framework of modern art, *Gerbang Kayangan* maintains a close relationship to the fundamentals of traditional printmaking. First, the emphasis on visual texture, strong tonal contrasts, and predominant use of lines are reminiscent of relief printing methods like woodcut and linocut. The image's structure, which is constructed from layers of lines and graphic patterns, reflects a visual way of thinking that comes from the printmaking discipline, where the image is created by transferring, carving, and repeating forms.

Furthermore, Gerbang Kayangan's storytelling style and use of intricate symbols are similar to the conventional printmaking tradition, which is frequently employed to share cultural values, myths, and legends with the community. This piece demonstrates the continuity between the visual language of traditional printmaking and modern art practices because of Samsudin Wahab's training as a printmaker and his participation in initiatives to advance printmaking through collectives and print studios. The basic elements of printmaking, such as visual images, structured composition, and an emphasis on process, are still evident in this piece even though the medium and presentation may have changed.



Figure 3 Faizal Suhif, *Titian Riwayat* (2023)

(Source: Galeri Puteh, 2023, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Titian Riwayat work uses a combination of monoprints, 3D print-casting, cement plaster, offset printing ink and cotton. The use of various materials reflects Faizal Suhif's interest in the relationship between memory, history and the transient nature of human experience. The title of the work, which means "bridge of life", hints at the individual's journey through various phases of life, where each experience leaves its own impact and trace.

At the pre-iconographic stage, the researcher identifies visual elements that can be seen directly. *Titian Riwayat* features an arrangement of organic shapes resembling roots, leaf veins, plant networks, or natural pathways. The surface of the work displays layered print effects, rough textures, and organic marks produced thru the monoprint technique. The presence of seeds as physical materials adds a three-dimensional aspect and imparts a material quality closely related to nature. The use of earth tones and natural textures creates a calm and reflective atmosphere.

At the iconographic stage, visual elements are interpreted based on their conventional meanings. The title "*Titian Riwayat*" can be understood as a metaphor for the journey of life or the continuity of human experiences from one generation to the next. Seeds symbolize the beginning of life, the potential for growth, and the hope for the future. Interconnected network forms suggest the relationship between humans, nature, and history. This work raises themes of sustainability, memory, and the relationship between humans and the land as a source of life, in line with Faizal Suhif's approach, which often uses elements of nature as symbols of life experiences and spiritual reflection.

At the iconological level, this work can be interpreted as a philosophical reflection on the relationship between humans and their origins. *Titian Riwayat* not only depicts the physical growth of plants but also symbolizes the journey of human life, which is constantly evolving, changing, and interconnected with the environment. The use of seeds as the main element shows that every life begins from a small point that eventually shapes history and identity. This work also reflects ecological awareness that emphasizes the importance of maintaining the relationship between humans and nature

in a modern world that is increasingly detached from its traditional roots.

The use of the monoprints technique in this work is very significant because it maintains the unique element of print even within the framework of expanded printmaking. The combination of 3D printing technology with building materials such as cement also shows the evolution of printmaking towards the exploration of space and objects. Although the medium used is contemporary, the basic principles of printmaking such as imprint, pressure and image transfer can still be identified in the structure of the work. Therefore, Titian Riwayat can be seen as a clear example of how tradition and innovation can be united in current printmaking practice.

Titian Riwayat's creation is still based on the principles of traditional printmaking, despite being classified as a contemporary piece of art that employs a variety of mediums. A key idea in traditional printmaking is the transfer of images from the matrix surface to the substrate, which is maintained through the employment of offset printing ink and monoprints processes. This piece explores the visual language of printmaking, which has long been used in methods like woodcut, etching, and lithography, through the use of textural effects, layering of images, and repetition of visual messages.

In addition, Faizal Suhif pushes the limits of printmaking by using unusual materials including cotton, stainless steel, and seeds. This method shows how the conventional principles of printing can develop into expanded printmaking, in which prints are used to create three-dimensional objects and installations rather than only two-dimensional images. Titian Riwayat thus illustrates the link between the more experimental and multidisciplinary methods of modern printmaking and the legacy of traditional printmaking.



Figure 4 Shahrul Jamili, *Darjah Menang Kehalalan (DMK)* (2023)
(Source: Galeri Puteh, 2023, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Shahrul Jamili's satirical series, which also contains *Darjah Kebesaran Kehalalan (DKK)*, includes *Darjah Menang Kehalalan (DMK)* (2023). This piece has the shape of a medal of honour, which is fashioned from materials like ribbons and stainless-steel engravings. It resembles official prizes that are usually presented by organisations or authorities. This work exposes cultural difficulties in society that frequently associate social legitimacy and religious principles with status, respect, and power through

the employment of halal symbols and the form of honours.

At the formal level, this work features three-dimensional objects in the form of medals accompanied by ribbons and official storage boxes. The shiny metal material, symmetrical arrangement, and the use of symbols resembling the halal logo create an image easily recognized as a symbol of honour or award. The visual elements remind one of the insignia of honour typically worn by high-status individuals at official ceremonies.

At the iconographic level, the symbols in the work can be identified as a combination of halal icons and a system of honours. The halal symbol, which usually refers to purity, adherence to Sharia, and religious legitimacy, has been transformed into a "medal of victory." This symbol conveys a critique of society's tendency to pursue social recognition or honorary titles, as if such status were the primary measure of a person's worth. The use of the honorific degree format makes this work a metaphor for the culture of status and authority worship.

At the iconological level, this work can be interpreted as a social critique of the phenomenon of commodification of religious symbols in contemporary society. Shahrul Jamili uses the concept of "halal" not merely as a religious reference, but as a symbol of legitimacy often employed to validate power, status, or specific interests. By combining the halal logo and honorific titles, he questions how spiritual values can transform into tools of social prestige. This work contains an element of irony because something that should be related to ethics and sincerity has been presented as a trophy of victory. Thru this satirical approach, the artist invites the audience to reassess the relationship between religion, power, status, and the culture of recognition in modern society.

Although *Darjah Menang Kehalalan* (DMK) is presented in the form of a three-dimensional object rather than a traditional two-dimensional print, this work still has a strong connection to the principles of conventional printmaking. In traditional printmaking, images or symbols are produced thru a matrix that allows for repetition and the creation of editions. DMK also employs this concept thru the production of works in the form of multiple editions, which is a fundamental principle in the practice of printmaking.

In the context of printmaking, the use of engraving techniques on metal surfaces is directly related to the intaglio tradition, which is one of the oldest printmaking techniques. Although this work is presented as a three-dimensional object, the concept of matrix and edition is still maintained through the production of 22 uniform units of work. This situation shows that printmaking is not only determined by the final form of the work, but also by the process, production structure and conceptual thinking underlying it. *Darjah Menang Kehalalan* (DMK) thus shows how the principles of traditional printmaking can remain relevant in the context of contemporary art through the expanded printmaking approach.

6 THE CONTINUITY OF TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY PRINTMAKING

The development of contemporary printmaking is often considered a change that is different from traditional printmaking, but the change is actually more transformational than a break with tradition. Although contemporary artists use new mediums such as installations, three-dimensional objects, digital technology and alternative materials, the basic principles of printmaking such as matrix, image transfer, repetition and edition are still maintained as the conceptual basis in the production of works. In this context, tradition is no longer understood as a literal repetition of old techniques, but as a continuation of the ideas and processes that become the identity of printmaking.

According to Rosalind Krauss (1979), the development of art in an "expanded field" allows a discipline to expand beyond its formal boundaries without losing its original identity. This approach can be seen in contemporary printmaking as artists adapt traditional principles into more experimental

forms of practice. Printmaking is therefore no longer defined solely by the use of wooden blocks, metal plates or printing presses, but by the existence of the concepts of matrix, transfer and reproduction that form the basis of the discipline. This approach allows printmaking to remain relevant in the current visual art landscape.

In the Malaysian context, the continuity of this tradition can be clearly seen through the Go Block exhibition series. Hamidi Abdul Hadi (2019) explains that Go Block has introduced various forms of alternative printmaking that go beyond conventional interpretations but are still rooted in the thinking and process of printmaking. This exhibition proves that Malaysian artists have not abandoned the printmaking tradition but rather expanded the potential of the medium through the exploration of new materials, technologies and presentation strategies.

In Zainal Abidin's (2026) recent study also shows that the development of expanded printmaking in Malaysia occurs using hybrid media, alternative matrices, artist books, spatial performances and experimental publications. Although the forms of work are increasingly diverse, the matrix element and process experimentation are still the main features that connect contemporary practice with the printmaking tradition. This development shows that the identity of printmaking does not lie in the medium alone, but in the structure of thought and production methods inherited from previous traditions.

The Go Block Vol. 7: The Contemporary Expanded Printmaking Exhibition is a prime example of this continuity. Works by Juhari Said, Samsudin Wahab, Faizal Suhif and Shahrul Jamili show how the principles of traditional printmaking are reinterpreted in the form of objects, installations, sculptures and mixed media. For example, the use of edition in Shahrul Jamili's *Darjah Menang Kehalalan* (DMK) still maintains the concepts of reproduction and matrix, while *Titian Riwayat* by Faizal Suhif maintains the elements of trace and transfer through a combination of monoprints and three-dimensional printing technology. This situation proves that contemporary printmaking does not reject tradition but rather expands its interpretive space to suit the development of current visual culture.

In conclusion, the continuity of tradition in contemporary printmaking can be understood through the maintenance of the basic principles of printmaking despite changes in terms of medium, technique and presentation form. Tradition functions as a conceptual foundation that allows artists to explore new possibilities without losing the identity of the discipline. In the context of Malaysia, the development of expanded printmaking through the Go Block series shows that the relationship between tradition and innovation is not an opposition, but rather a complementary process in ensuring the survival and relevance of printmaking in the 21st century.

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