

Control and Resistance in A Young Adult Dystopian Fiction: A Foucauldian Reading of Marie Lu's Legend

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to discover how a young adult dystopian novel entitled *Legend* by Marie Lu portrays a totalitarian government controls its subject and the way young adult characters resist to it. This research employs Foucault's discipline technique and categorization of resistance. The findings show that the controlling strategies in the society within *Legend* reflect two of Foucault's techniques: geneses organization, and distribution system. Additionally, the controlling strategy is supported by terror and knowledge concealment. For the young adult resistance aspect, the characters' resistance acts are found to be directed towards subjection and domination. The resistance is manifested through actions which embody two major characteristics, aggressive or submissive. In addition, *Legend* also demonstrates the use of discourse as a device to revolt. Ultimately, *Legend* appears to inherit the didactic nature of young adult dystopian literature as it cast warning about absolutism of certain group, the danger of a certain policy in current society, and the importance of knowledge, individuality and freedom of choice.

Keywords: *control, resistance, discipline, dystopia, young adult literature*

INTRODUCTION

Dystopian literature first came into the frame around the late nineteenth century, and blossomed drastically in the twentieth century. Lyman Tom Sargent (1994) defines dystopian literature as a product of author's imagination of a society which is worse than the society the readers live in. The word "dystopia" itself means "bad place" in Greek language. The literal meaning suggests an idea which is a contrast to its opposite twin, utopia. While utopia generally portrays a society where "all conflicts of conscience and conflicts of interest are abolished," (Kateb, 1963, p. 17), dystopia portrays an undesirable nightmarish society controlled by a totalitarian government. Huntington (1982) adds that even though each of these genres project different principles, either happiness or unhappiness, to the imaginary societies, both explore social and political structure.

One of the definitions of dystopian society which personifies several core characteristics of dystopian literature is proposed by

Gottlieb (2001) who defines dystopian society as:

A hell on earth, an absurd, death-bound social-political system where the elite deliberately conspires against its own people, against the most universal principle of justice, with emphasis on nightmarish rigged trials, with make believe accusations followed by all-to-real sentences to hard labor or death. (18)

From Gottlieb's definition, it can be assumed that a dystopian fiction features an undesirable society controlled and oppressed by a totalitarian government which employs a hegemonic or coercive system upon the subjects. This kind of society can be found in many dystopian classics, such as George Orwell's 1984 (1949), and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932). In 1993, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry was published, and it starts a floodgate of dystopian fictions for young adults, one of them is Marie Lu's Legend (2011). As the number of dystopian novels grows rapidly, the attention they receive from researchers grows as well.

Considering the fact that dystopian literature is relatively

concerned with social and political issues, the focus of the dystopian literature studies often explore the governmental system ruling the dystopian society. Generally, analysis in this area includes acquisition or maintenance of power by the government. It usually is followed by the way the protagonists oppose the government's oppression. The notion about power manifestation to control subject and subject's resistance is discussed by Foucault in some of his works.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault proposes four discipline techniques to locate power manifestation of the officials in a society. These techniques are potentially convenient to locate power manifestation of a totalitarian government. Following Foucault's notion "where there is power, there is resistance" (1978, p. 95), the presence of totalitarian government is usually followed by the acts of resistance from some of the subjects. In some of his previous work, Foucault has also provided basic guideline concerning resistance: how it compiles to the existence of power dynamics, what

marks an act of resistance and its classification.

As a young adult dystopian fiction, Marie Lu's *Legend* (2011) also features both totalitarian control and act of resistance. Unlike its fellow contemporary young adult dystopian fiction like *The Hunger Games*, *Legend* has not gained much attention from researchers. *Legend* being relatively new released book is probably one of the reasons. However, up to this date, research on *Legend*—or any of Lu's work—is hardly found, especially ones in English. Considering the rarity of the research on *Legend*, then analysis towards the novel is still considered very organic and broad. Thus, *Legend* becomes a potential field for researcher to study. Also, another thing that makes *Legend* an intriguing subject of analysis is the dual narrator it offers. Unlike most dystopian novels, which tend to use one narrator only, *Legend* offers two sets of perspectives of seeing a dystopian world.

Therefore, this research investigated the first book of Marie Lu's *Legend* trilogy, *Legend* (2011)

as a young adult dystopian novel. The research was focused on the aspects of totalitarian control and young adult character's resistance. The analysis of the research was guided by the following research questions:

(1) How does Legend depict the way the totalitarian government control the subjects in a dystopian world?

(2) How do the young adult main characters manifest acts of resistance within a dystopian society?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to examine the issue of control and resistance in Legend as a young adult dystopian novel, two sets of frameworks must be discussed: the characteristics of young adult dystopian literature and Foucault's view of power relation. Foucault's basic principle of power is the touchstone to the discipline technique and categorization of resistance which is convenient to the research.

Young adult dystopian literature basically embodies similar characteristic to classic dystopian literature for adults. It generally portrays the following topics: liberty

and self-determination, nature destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity and justice, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self (Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013). In a glance, young adult may seem out of place in a dystopian society. However, looking closely, young adulthood actually resembles dystopian society. In fact, aspects of dystopian society such as constant surveillance, domineering ruling rules, lack of freedom, and forced conformity are nothing new, banal even, in adolescent world (Ryan, 2014). While the weight of the oppression is highly different, for teenagers, constant supervision from parents and pressures in school might just feel like their own personal dystopia.

Baccolini (2004) states that dystopian literature is "bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope in the story" (p. 520). Within that, the protagonist can only be able to hope through act of resistance (Baccolini, 2004). The struggle or resistance of the young adult protagonist is aimed at the oppressive

officials who take a complete control of the society, which is achieved by various methods such as discipline and threat. The resistance emerges as an attempt for freedom from the forces of the dystopian regime (Basu, et al, 2013). The process is usually marked by awareness of the truth of how their society really works, either suddenly or gradually. Discovering that they have been living in a catastrophic society resembles a stage in an adolescent's life where they finally left childhood and exposed to the harsh reality of adulthood.

Amongst the aspects that emerge in the discussion about young adult dystopian literature is control and resistance. These aspects are also found in Foucault's basic principles of power. Studying Foucault's conception of power Mills (2003) collected several major points of Foucault's view of power. Firstly, power not possessed, but exercised. Secondly, it involves the individual that plays role in the power relation. In addition, Kelly (2009) claims that Foucault views power as multidirectional, strategic, and ignites with resistance. Foucault (1977) also

claims that power produces knowledge. Foucault states that power and knowledge point towards one another, and that "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." (1977, p. 27). In a situation where knowledge is controlled by a group of people in a society, oppression is highly possible. Foucault states that the real hazard is not the possible oppression but the fact that the people are "carefully fabricated in it" (Foucault, 1977). Thus, it contributes to the development of docile bodies.

Docile bodies is one of major topics in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) where Foucault discusses sifting modes of penalty in history: torture, punishment (imprisonment), and discipline. The purpose of these modes of penalty is to convert the people into docile bodies. In other words, to turn individual into subject so that disciplinary society can be formed. Foucault (1977) describes discipline as power to control people, aiming to constrain as well as enhance

their capabilities in order to produce a self-controlled, productive, advantageous, and docile bodies. Shapiro (2002) claims that generally there are two stage of process in discipline: made the body submissive, and then functional. Disciplinary society, Foucault (1977) claims, can be formed using the following techniques: (1) the art of distribution, (2) the control of activity, (3) the organization of geneses, and (4) the composition of force.

As for the aspect of resistance, in *History of Sexuality Vol 1: An Introduction* (1978), Foucault has boldly drawn the relationship between power and resistance. Foucault puts resistance as "irreducible opposite" (p.96) to power. In "Subject and Power" (1982), Foucault again explores the role of resistance within power analysis. Foucault uses a metaphor to define resistance as a "chemical catalyst" to power. Thus, in order to highlight, locate, and see the application and method of power relation, an analysis of the resistance is necessary. Foucault also provides three forms of struggle or resistance:

(1) against domination, (2) against exploitation, and (3) against subjection. Some other experts that develops resistance theory to seal the gap in Foucauldian view of resistance is James C. Scott. Studying Scott's resistance study, Vinthagen & Johansson (2013) concluded that Scott (1985) has suggested two categories of resistance: (1) publicly-declared resistance and (2) disguised or everyday resistance. Scott adds that resistance corresponds to three types of dominations: material, status, and ideological. (Scott, quoted in Vintagen & Johansson, 2013, p.5-6). Vinthagen (2007) adds that it is important to look into these aspects in analyzing manifestation of resistance: who acts, where, with which means (non-violent or military-based), organized how, and against what.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applies a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research is aimed to study things in their natural settings in order to make meaning, or to interpret phenomena trough definitions and elaborations (Denin & Lincoln, 2011). The design

of qualitative research with its descriptive nature is considered suitable for the research which employs a text analysis towards a literary work.

This research design is used to examine the narrations and dialogues from *Legend* which show the symptoms of totalitarian control, by drawing upon Foucault's discipline techniques. The identified, selected, and examined data are then compounded to see the most common control phenomenon occurred in the novel. The segment is then followed by elaboration and interpretation.

Furthermore, the research examines the narrations and dialogues that imply the way the main characters resist to a totalitarian control. When the act of resistance is located, it will be categorized under Foucault's classifications of resistance. The ending result of the resistance study in this research is expected to provide an elaborative answer regarding how young adult manifest act or resistance within a disciplinary environment, like depicted in a dystopian novel. The data that is collected after examining the narrations and

dialogues will then be analyzed descriptively by implementing Foucauldian perspective in order to make meaning of them.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis on the control aspect in *Legend*, two major strategies are found to be employed in the society: (1) subject filtration system, which reflects Foucault's geneses organization technique; and (2) distributing subjects and goods, which implies the use of Foucault's distribution technique. In addition, terror and knowledge concealment is also used to support the controlling strategies.

For the aspects of resistance, it is found that the young adult characters directed the action towards subjection and domination. They manifested the resistance through actions that embodies two main characteristics: aggressive, and submissive. Additionally, *Legend* also depicts the use of discourse as a device for revolting.

Strict subject filtration system

To filter means to enforce selection, in which the expected result is partition of the valuable and the less-valuable object. In Legend, the object being filtered is the body, whilst the sifter is in the form of inclusive programs designed by the government. The programs designed by the officials of the Republic are the Trial, the schools, and the plague. Each program is designed for certain purposes and enforced through certain methods.

Starting with the Trial as sifting program, the officials in the Republic obliges every individual with the age of ten years old to take the Trial. Ten is a considerably young age. This regulation is imposed under the consideration to implant the Republic's ideals into the body easily, remarking that young people's viewpoint has yet to form firmly.

The Trial is carried out throughout personal examination which covers three segments: written portion, physical portion and interview portion. There is no fatal information provided about the writing portion. The physical tier, on the other hand, is inclined to seek for

potential bodies for future profession which require physical skills. Assuming from the fact on how military plays a rather big role in the society, the physical skills are devoted to find potential military recruit. The notion is supported by June who finds out that the republic uses Day's tissue sample for collective advantages (p. 210).

The most important segment, however, is the interview portion. The questions in this segment cover the topic of basic knowledge of the country, personal interest, personal record, and personal perspective. This personality scanning method is used as a tool to reveal whether or not the body could fall into subjection. It is also a way to detect if the body's way of viewing things is in line with the parameter set by the official, and whether or not the body can be controlled under the official's guideline. In other words, the interview scans not only personality but also potential threat within the body. The interview result is the most influential factor to determine whether or not one will pass the trial. June finds it when she access Day's

trial document which says, "I see the separate scores for his interview and physical sections. Both are perfect. The only thing that's weird is a brief note written next to his interview score: Attention." (p. 187). The passage reveals that regardless of the score of the prior segments, if the outcome of the interview session reveals threatening traits within the body, the body will not pass the selection. It suggests that the Republic's main interest behind the selection system is to find bodies that they can control, to turn them from individual into subject. Thus, eradication of the bodies who are found uncontrollable or threatening is valued necessary in order to maintain the control that has already been employed in the system of the Republic.

The next program developed by the officials to control its subject is done through governmental institution. In Legend, the model institution is Drake University, June's school. It is mentioned that Drake University produces students that will most likely to be recruited by the military. This shows how the military,

which is the upholder of the country, influences the mechanism of the institution. The military influence is also visible from a routine which is enforced by the institution to its students: afternoon drill. June's sentence to describe the afternoon drill "the drill room is packed with students" (p.16) suggests that the pupils are enthusiast to join the military. The Republic plants the thought in order to ignite the students' enthusiasm on developing their own skill. The outcome of the process would be a highly-skilled cadets. Less effort is done, but the outcome is immense. This marks the supporting usage of one principle in the control of activity technique: efficiency. The afternoon drill itself is a strategy in the form of exercise. Exercise employs repetitive, varying, yet progressive action in constructing bodies (Foucault, 1977). Foucault (1977) asserts that pedagogy functions as mind-constructing tool, which is fatal to construction of docile bodies.

The last program created by the government to filter the subject is the plague. At the early stage of the

plot, the plague functions as media to demonstrate how the people are dependent on the official. In the second half of the plot, June found her dead brother's secret blog which contain the truth about the plague. It is clearly stated that "They use the plagues to cull the population of weak genes, the same way the Trials pick out the strongest. (p. 246)." It can be seen that the Republic's interest is to scrap the weak ones from the mass, leaving only the strong ones. The idea is extracted from the fact that the officials take a chance to poison its own people to make sure the people remaining are the strongest ones.

Enforcement of distribution system

This strategy is vividly reflecting Foucault's discipline technique: the art of distribution. In Legend, two types of distributing cases are found. Although both manifest distributing technique, the objects being distributed are different.

The first distributing technique is used to distribute objects. In this case, the objects being distributed are the plague virus, the plague cure, and electricity. This

might not be the perfect manifestation of Foucault's the art of distribution technique. However, it still implies the basic principle of the technique, and it is also acted out using methods which are embodied by the technique. This strategy can also be called value-based distribution noting that the object are distributed according to the contribution of the receiver to the society. In other words, whether or not the people in the Republic will receive the objects, is determined by their value in the eyes of the party who rule the society. Electricity and plague cure are made accessible for the upper class, while the plague is distributed to the lower class.

The second strategy is the distribution of people. As mentioned in the preceding segments, the Republic uses the Trial as one of the selecting methods to filter the subjects. What comes after the selection program is subject distribution. Drawing upon the result of the Trial, the subjects are to be distributed to spaces where their skills are most beneficial. Their privilege and roles are also determined by the

Trial result which is believed to reflect their quality.

In the Republic, the strategies is focused on disciplinary institution in the form of school. The school, which applies spatial control, enforces enclosure, partitioning and rank system to create spaces between individuals. It is then followed by constant yet subtle implementation of belief. In this process, the subjects are made to be a part of social machinery. Thus, the result is distanced subjects without unnecessary interaction, but at the same time is able to move in sync with the other part of social machinery when it comes to benefiting society's interest. The distributing tactic is employed in order to maximize the control concentration in the society within Legend. Through making the space as small and as specific as possible, the bodies will reach spatial order. Through spatial order, locating as well as supervising bodies and objects articulation are made easier. Therefore, maximum quality labor can be produced with much less disturbance from inconvenient elements.

Concisely, with majority of geneses and distribution control, the officials can authorize a large part of each individual's life. Legend provides two different narrators as outcome models of successful and failed application of disciplinary control. Day is a case where the control cannot be applied, thus making him exterminated from the society (after the Republic make full use of his being for communal purpose). Day is valued uncontrollable because of his curiosity and brazen nature, also he appears to have a large interest in history, which is a fatal aspect in dystopian society for it is most of the time concealed from the society. To display the uncontrollable self of Day, he is portrayed as a fast and agile thief with clean capture record. June, on the other hand, is a demonstration of a successful construction of docile body, albeit it lasts only until the first half of the story. June is depicted as a skilful cadets for the country's military. Even when June performs rebellion to some rules, it is claimed that the reason behind it is for self-advancement which will be dedicated

for the Republic. At the early stage of the story, June never questions the Republic's rule and regulations. June is a capable and dedicated subject, a final product expected from every developing subject in the country.

Through depicting society which system is heavy with totalitarian control, Legend voices the importance of freedom of choice. The people in the Republic has very few options to live their lives. Most of the aspect of their lives are fundamentally determined by the officials, limiting their spaces to choose. The most extreme case is the filtration system. Looking at the bad outcome of the policy, the depiction of filtration system, the Trial, might be an agent to voice Lu's critique towards the dangerous of policies directed for children in current society. Also, the policy does not only limits the people's choices, but it also prevents identity from forming because all the decision is made by the government not individual. This is the way Legend depicts the horrid possibility if one group has too much power in a society. The fact that freedom of choice and personal space is invaded

also implies a message which marks the importance of individuality.

Terror and knowledge concealment

In addition of discipline techniques, two types of strategies are found to be employed in the Republic: knowledge concealment, and terror. The people in the Republic are concealed from the truth of selected information such as history and the fate of the failed Trial-takers.

The people's knowledge of history seems to be limited by the officials. The people are made to remember certain discourses, especially ones that flatters the current system or the current leader. For instance when Day is reminded to refer to the Elector as their "glorious father" (p. 195). However, beyond that, information of the past are strictly forbidden. This case implies one of the concept of Foucault's power relation theory: power produces knowledge. Foucault (1977, in Mason, 2014) asserts that knowledge can be gained from observing people, and that is what the officials of the Republic do through the Trial, the plague, and the routine

inspection. Also, based on Foucault's notion that knowledge produces power, the fact that the people are kept from knowledge of their past and current system of their country infers a violation. It means that by concealing the knowledge, the Republic conceals its own people to access power. True, that Foucault values power as something exists everywhere and not possessed by certain groups. However, by limiting access to knowledge, the people is made less aware of their own capability to resist. With people's willingness to have their future controlled, yet without history to be a touchstone, the society will be submissive and static. Hence, the ideal situation in the society to employ disciplinary control is formed. Through this case, Legend infers the importance of knowledge for individual in a society.

In stance of discipline technique, another case is found to use terror. The case of terror finds in Legend is Day's public execution. In a society that owns an intact system of disciplinary control, using such primitive mode of punishment is

considered a massive degradation. Public execution is popular in society of monarch, but is certainly not a common practice in a postmodern society. Foucault (1977) state that "The public execution is to be understood not only as a juridical, but also as a political ritual." (p. 47). The "political ritual" revered is reaffirmation of the official's power. Day's crime is considered assaulting the official's power in the eye of the public. Therefore, the officials feels the dire need to display to the public that they still superior in the society. Basically, in controlling method of terror, crime is a form of an insult to the state's power and is a seed of rebellion. Hence, terror functions as, not only as a presentation of the state's power, but also as a suppressant of resistance.

Young adult's resistance

The acts of resistance are manifested by young adult character in Legend through two major ways, aggressive actions such as public crime and law breaking, or subtle actions such as hateful thought. The cases are located through Foucault's

concept of resistance which claimed that resistance is a natural response to power dynamics. Foucault provides three types of oppressing power that were used to categorize the resistance cases in Legend: against domination, subjection and exploitation. In Legend, however, struggle against exploitation are absent. Legend is found to construct the eerie effects of a dystopian world not through exploitation, but through domination and subjection. This indicates that as a dystopian literature which is didactic in nature, Legend provides a warning about the significance of oppression people, especially young adults, should be aware of.

In the cases of resistance that is against domination, the manifestation is mostly aggressive-natures. Whereas for the resistance that is against subjection, submissive manifestation are mostly found. There is also a noticeable difference in the character's tendency of acting out the resistance. June is found to manifest more disguised resistance, whilst Day is found to perform more public resistance. Considering the fact that the two protagonist as well as

narrators come from opposing background, such contrast are predictable.

Act of resistance found which is considerably aggressive are as following: rule and law breaking (Day's robbery), provocation (Day's vandalism and insulting gesture), verbal and physical opposition (June questions her supervisor), and shifting side (June helps Day). While ones that are considered subtle are: hateful thought, questioning system, rebooting belief and hacking. All of them, except for questioning system, are performed by June.

Looking into the collection of data under each category, it is found that when facing domination, the young adult characters tends to perform tangible resisting actions. On the other hand, resistance against subjections are rather subtle. Legend suggests that under domination, an oppressed young adult's revolt through words and actions that are rather aggressive. It also demonstrate ways to liberate self if an individual realizes that they are subjected, just like June. It is to start with the sublime way: to be aware and not to swallow

information provided by institution right away without processing it. Foucault's concept and categorization of resistance are found to be effective to locate and collect the cases from the book. Yet, since it focuses on the oppressive power it against, it does not tell much about the action of resisting itself. However, the findings are actually in line with Scott's categorization of resistance: publicly-declared resistance and disguised resistance.

As a young adult dystopian novel, *Legend* demonstrates how the act of resistance resembles issues in young adulthood. Day and June's rebellion is a representation of teenager's rebellion stage where they put some self-expectation and feel that adult does not provide them enough space to explore self. Day's fondness to his family marks that he still unwilling to let go of his childhood, and it is taken forcefully by the Republic as the military kills his family members. This resembles cases where young adults are demanded or forced by society to adjust themselves to the real world, regardless the fact that they are ready

or not. The resistance functions as a mirror of their experience as a young adult exposed to adulthood. In *Legend*, this phase is marked by the protagonist awareness of the truth about their country, which is horrifying, like how adulthood is for teenagers. Some other cases like June's sifting side and rebooting belief marks a point in young adult's life where they are demanded to make a crucial choice in their lives. Their resistance towards sovereign power are just like resistance towards domestic everyday surveillance in young adult's life. It is also an agent to make the young adult realize their limitation. Through making an attempt to revolt, they will know to what extent they can stretches their privilege, freedom, or capability.

Writing as revolting device

The case of writing functions as a marking of revolt or resistance is not a newly-found case in dystopian literature studies. This type of case is discovered previously in Tyner's (2004) study of Orwell's 1984 and Gerhard's (2012) study of Artwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Zamyatin's

We. In her study, Gerhard and Tyner finds that writing allows characters in dystopian literature to liberate self. It also enables them to achieve self-autonomy which automatically redeem their freedom from the totalitarian upholders, which is why writing is often banned in such repressive society. In addition, it is also said that characters who revolt through writing will undergo drastic change.

Legend demonstrates the use of writing as a device for revolt. However, rather than the process of writing, Legend focuses more on the influence of its product, the discourse. Also, the actor of the action is neither of the main characters, but a supporting characters. These differences might be due to the fact that Tyner and Gerhard's study are done towards adult dystopian novel. Looking at the influence of writing, Legend implies an agreement towards Gerhard and Tyner's judgment on the influence of writing a dystopian literature. Acknowledging the power or writing, Legend finds the young adult characters unable to accomplish that height of rebellion yet, which is

why Metias, as an adult character, is there as an agent to provide June a discourse to revolt.

CONCLUSION

Legend managed to portrays a successful dystopian society through highlighting totalitarian control which is opposed by the protagonists. It also follows the tradition of young adult literature which highlight hopes, which is depicted by gaps in the totalitarianism which allows the protagonist to resist. Hope is also invers by the open ending where the protagonists are heading towards a new journey.

The totalitarian control depicted in Legend functions as a caution of the worst case scenario that could happen if collectivism is taken into extreme level, and the importance to be aware of numerous choices an individual, especially young adult, actually possess to control their own lives. Legend depicts the choices by using two narrators with two different fortunes. The choice depicted in the novel is through manifesting act of resistance. This marks Legend's view on the

prominence of young adult's role in the society. Day and June start with resisting for personal interest. As they grow to be an adult and a member of the society, the struggle is appointed against society's issues. The more they grow, the more their existence is made significant to the society. For instance, Day's personal rebellion which ignites mass of rioters who agrees with his way of life. This marks Legend's view on young adult's prominence in the society. That the people root for Day implies that the people made him a role model, a leader, a role society expected young adults to be in the future.

Overall, Legend hints at the danger of a particular procedure, danger of having a certain group possessing too much power, the importance of knowledge and truth, and the importance of individuality and freedom of choice. The cautions and suggestions dictate that Legend faithfully carries the didactic heritage of young adult dystopian novel which provides warning against both social-political issues as well as personal issues.

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