

Deng Xiaoping

Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth From Facts and Unite As One In Looking to the Future

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Comrades,

This conference has lasted over a month and will soon end. The Central Committee has put forward the fundamental guiding principle of shifting the focus of all Party work to the four modernizations and has solved a host of important problems inherited from the past. This will surely strengthen the determination, confidence and unity of the Party, the army and the people of all of China's nationalities. Now we can be certain that under the correct leadership of the Central Committee, the Party, army and people will achieve victory after victory in our new Long March.

The present conference has been very successful and will have an important place in our Party's history. We have not held one like it for many years. There has been lively debate here and the Party's democratic tradition has been revived and carried forward. We should spread this style of work to the whole Party, army and people.

At this conference we have discussed and resolved many major issues concerning the destinies of our Party and state. The participants have spoken their minds freely and fully and have boldly aired their honest opinions. They have laid problems on the table and have felt free to criticize things, including the work of the Central Committee. Some comrades have criticized themselves to varying degrees. All this represents marked progress in our inner-Party life and will give a big impetus to the cause of our Party and people.

Today, I mainly want to discuss one question, namely, how to emancipate our minds, use our heads, seek truth from facts and unite as one in looking to the future.

I. EMANCIPATING THE MIND IS A VITAL

POLITICAL TASK

When it comes to emancipating our minds, using our heads, seeking truth from facts and uniting as one in looking to the future, the primary task is to emancipate our minds. Only then can we, guided as we should be by Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, find correct solutions to the emerging as well as inherited problems, fruitfully reform those aspects of the relations of production and of the superstructure that do not correspond with the rapid development of our productive forces, and chart the specific course and formulate the specific policies, methods and measures needed to achieve the four modernizations under our actual conditions.

The emancipation of minds has not been completely achieved among our cadres, particularly our leading cadres. Indeed, many comrades have not yet set their brains going; in other words, their ideas remain rigid or partly so. That isn't because they are not good comrades. It is a result of specific historical conditions.

First, it is because during the past dozen years Lin Biao and the Gang of Four set up ideological taboos or "forbidden zones" and preached blind faith to confine people's minds within the framework of their phoney Marxism. No one was allowed to go beyond the limits they prescribed; anyone who did was tracked down, stigmatized and attacked politically. In this situation, some people found it safer to stop using their heads and thinking questions over.

Second, it is because democratic centralism was undermined and the Party was afflicted with bureaucratism resulting from, among other things, over-concentration of power. This kind of bureaucratism often masquerades as "Party leadership", "Party directives", "Party interests" and "Party discipline", but actually it is designed to control people, hold them in check and oppress them. At that time many important issues were often decided by one or two persons. The others could only do what those few ordered. That being so, there wasn't much point in thinking things out for yourself.

Third, it is because no clear distinction was made between right and wrong or between merit and demerit, and because rewards and penalties were not meted out as deserved. No distinction was made between those who worked well and those who didn't. In some cases, even people who worked well were attacked while those who did nothing or just played it safe weathered every storm. Under those unwritten laws, people were naturally reluctant to use their brains.

Fourth, it is because people are still subject to the force of habit of the small producer, who sticks to old conventions, is content with the status quo and is unwilling to seek progress or accept anything new.

When people's minds aren't yet emancipated and their thinking remains rigid, curious phenomena emerge.

Once people's thinking becomes rigid, they will increasingly act according to fixed notions. To cite some examples, strengthening Party leadership is interpreted as the Party's monopolizing and interfering in everything. Exercising centralized leadership is interpreted as erasing distinctions between the Party and the government, so that the former replaces the latter. And maintaining unified leadership by the Central Committee is interpreted as "doing everything according to unified standards". We are opposed to "home-grown policies" that violate the fundamental principles of those laid down by the Central Committee, but there are also "home-grown policies" that are truly grounded in reality and supported by the masses. Yet such correct policies are still often denounced for their "not conforming to the unified standards".

People whose thinking has become rigid tend to veer with the wind. They are not guided by Party spirit and Party principles, but go along with whatever has the backing of the authorities and adjust their words and actions according to whichever way the wind is blowing. They think that they will thus avoid mistakes. In fact, however, veering with the wind is in itself a grave mistake, a contravention of the Party spirit which all Communists should cherish. It is true that people who think independently and dare to speak out and act can't avoid making mistakes, but their mistakes are out in the open and are therefore more easily rectified.

Once people's thinking becomes rigid, book worship, divorced from reality, becomes a grave malady. Those who suffer from it dare not say a word or take a step that isn't mentioned in books, documents or the speeches of leaders: everything has to be copied. Thus responsibility to the higher authorities is set in opposition to responsibility to the people.

Our drive for the four modernizations will get nowhere unless rigid thinking is broken down and the minds of cadres and of the masses are completely emancipated.

In fact, the current debate about whether practice is the sole criterion for testing truth is also a debate about whether people's minds need to be emancipated. Everybody has recognized that this debate is highly important and necessary. Its importance is becoming clearer all the time. When everything has to be done by the book, when thinking turns rigid and blind faith is the fashion, it is impossible for a party or a nation to make progress. Its life will cease and that party or nation will perish. Comrade Mao Zedong said this time and again during the rectification movements. Only if we emancipate our minds, seek truth from facts, proceed from reality in everything and integrate theory with practice, can we carry out our socialist modernization programme smoothly, and only then can our Party further develop Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. In this sense, the debate about the criterion for testing truth is really a debate about ideological line, about politics, about the future and the destiny of our Party and nation.

Seeking truth from facts is the basis of the proletarian world outlook as well as the ideological basis of Marxism. Just as in the past we achieved all the victories in our

revolution by following this principle, so today we must rely on it in our effort to accomplish the four modernizations. Comrades in every factory, government office, school, shop and production team as well as comrades in Party committees at the central, provincial, prefectural, county and commune levels — all should act on this principle, emancipate their minds and use their heads in thinking questions through and taking action on them.

The more Party members and other people there are who use their heads and think things through, the more our cause will benefit. To make revolution and build socialism we need large numbers of pathbreakers who dare to think, explore new ways and generate new ideas. Otherwise, we won't be able to rid our country of poverty and backwardness or to catch up with — still less surpass — the advanced countries. We hope every Party committee and every Party branch will encourage and support people both inside and outside the Party to dare to think, explore new paths and put forward new ideas, and that they will urge the masses to emancipate their minds and use their heads.

II. DEMOCRACY IS A MAJOR CONDITION FOR EMANCIPATING THE MIND

One important condition for getting people to emancipate their minds and use their heads is genuine practice of the proletarian system of democratic centralism. We need unified and centralized leadership, but centralism can be correct only when there is a full measure of democracy.

At present, we must lay particular stress on democracy, because for quite a long time democratic centralism was not genuinely practised: centralism was divorced from democracy and there was too little democracy. Even today, only a few advanced people dare to speak up. There are a good many such people at this conference. But in the Party and the country as a whole, there are still many who hesitate to speak their minds. Even when they have worthwhile opinions, they hesitate to express them, and they are not bold enough in struggling against bad things and bad people. If this doesn't change, how can we persuade everyone to emancipate his mind and use his head? And how can we bring about the four modernizations?

We must create the conditions for the practice of democracy, and for this it is essential to reaffirm the principle of the "three don'ts": don't pick on others for their faults, don't put labels on people, and don't use a big stick. In political life within the Party and among the people we must use democratic means and not resort to coercion or attack. The rights of citizens, Party members and Party committee members are

respectively stipulated by the Constitution of the People's Republic and the Constitution of the Communist Party. These rights must be resolutely defended and no infringement of them must be allowed.

The recent reversal of the verdict on the Tiananmen Incident has elated the people of all of China's nationalities and greatly stimulated mass enthusiasm for socialism. The masses should be encouraged to offer criticisms. There is nothing to worry about even if a few malcontents take advantage of democracy to make trouble. We should deal with such situations appropriately, having faith that the overwhelming majority of the people are able to use their own judgement. One thing a revolutionary party does need to worry about is its inability to hear the voice of the people. The thing to be feared most is silence. Today many rumours — some true, some false — circulate through the grapevine inside and outside the Party. This is a kind of punishment for the long-standing lack of political democracy. If we had a political situation with both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness, there wouldn't be so many rumours and anarchism would be easier to overcome. We believe our people are mindful of the overall interests of the country and have a good sense of discipline. Our leading cadres at all levels, and especially those of high rank, should for their part take care to strictly observe Party discipline and keep Party secrets; they should refrain from spreading rumours, circulating handwritten copies of speeches and the like.

As it is only natural that some opinions expressed by the masses should be correct and others not, we should examine them analytically. The Party leadership should be good at synthesizing the correct opinions and explaining why the others are incorrect. In dealing with ideological problems we must never use coercion but should genuinely carry out the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend". We must firmly put a stop to bad practices such as attacking and trying to silence people who make critical comments — especially sharp ones — by ferreting out their political backgrounds, tracing political rumours to them and opening "special case" files on them. Comrade Mao Zedong used to say that such actions were really signs of weakness and lack of courage. No leading comrades at any level must ever place themselves in opposition to the masses. We must never abandon this principle. But of course we must not let down our guard against the handful of counter-revolutionaries who still exist in our country.

Now I want to speak at some length about economic democracy. Under our present system of economic management, power is over-concentrated, so it is necessary to devolve some of it to the lower levels without hesitation but in a planned way. Otherwise it will be difficult to give full scope to the initiative of local as well as national authorities and to the enterprises and workers, and difficult to practise modern economic management and raise the productivity of labour. The various localities, enterprises and production teams should be given greater powers of decision regarding both operation and management. There are many provinces, municipalities and

autonomous regions in China, and some of our medium-sized provinces are as big as a large European country. They must be given greater powers of decision in economic planning, finance and foreign trade — always within the framework of a nationwide unity of views, policies, planning, guidance and action.

At present the most pressing need is to expand the decision-making powers of mines, factories and other enterprises and of production teams, so as to give full scope to their initiative and creativity. Once a production team has been empowered to make decisions regarding its own operations, its members and cadres will lie awake at night so long as a single piece of land is left unplanted or a single pond unused for aquatic production, and they will find ways to remedy the situation. Just imagine the additional wealth that could be created if all the people in China's hundreds of thousands of enterprises and millions of production teams put their minds to work. As more wealth is created for the state, personal income and collective benefits should also be increased somewhat. As far as the relatively small number of advanced people is concerned, it won't matter too much if we neglect the principle of more pay for more work and fail to stress individual material benefits. But when it comes to the masses, that approach can only be used for a short time — it won't work in the long run. Revolutionary spirit is a treasure beyond price. Without it there would be no revolutionary action. But revolution takes place on the basis of the need for material benefit. It would be idealism to emphasize the spirit of sacrifice to the neglect of material benefit.

It is also essential to ensure the democratic rights of the workers and peasants, including the rights of democratic election, management and supervision. We must create a situation in which not only every workshop director and production team leader but also every worker and peasant is aware of his responsibility for production and tries to find ways of solving related problems.

To ensure people's democracy, we must strengthen our legal system. Democracy has to be institutionalized and written into law, so as to make sure that institutions and laws do not change whenever the leadership changes, or whenever the leaders change their views or shift the focus of their attention. The trouble now is that our legal system is incomplete, with many laws yet to be enacted. Very often, what leaders say is taken as the law and anyone who disagrees is called a law-breaker. That kind of law changes whenever a leader's views change. So we must concentrate on enacting criminal and civil codes, procedural laws and other necessary laws concerning factories, people's communes, forests, grasslands and environmental protection, as well as labour laws and a law on investment by foreigners. These laws should be discussed and adopted through democratic procedures. Meanwhile, the procuratorial and judicial organs should be strengthened. All this will ensure that there are laws to go by, that they are observed and strictly enforced, and that violators are brought to book. The relations between one enterprise and another, between enterprises and the state, between enterprises and individuals, and so on should also be defined by law, and many of the

contradictions between them should be resolved by law. There is a lot of legislative work to do, and we don't have enough trained people. Therefore, legal provisions will have to be less than perfect to start with, then be gradually improved upon. Some laws and statutes can be tried out in particular localities and later enacted nationally after the experience has been evaluated and improvements have been made. Individual legal provisions can be revised or supplemented one at a time, as necessary; there is no need to wait for a comprehensive revision of an entire body of law. In short, it is better to have some laws than none, and better to have them sooner than later. Moreover, we should intensify our study of international law.

Just as the country must have laws, the Party must have rules and regulations. The fundamental ones are embodied in the Party Constitution. Without rules and regulations in the Party it would be hard to ensure that the laws of the state are enforced. The task of the Party's discipline inspection commissions and its organization departments at all levels is not only to deal with particular cases but, more important, to uphold the Party's rules and regulations and make earnest efforts to improve its style of work. Disciplinary measures should be taken against all persons who violate Party discipline, no matter who they are, so that clear differentiation is made between merits and demerits, rewards and penalties are meted out as deserved, and rectitude prevails and bad tendencies are stemmed.

III. SOLVING OLD PROBLEMS WILL HELP PEOPLE LOOK TO THE FUTURE

This conference has solved some problems left over from the past and distinguished clearly between the merits and demerits of some persons, and remedies have been made for a number of major cases in which the charges were false or which were unjustly or incorrectly dealt with. This is essential for emancipating minds and for ensuring political stability and unity. Its purpose is to help us turn our thoughts to the future and smoothly shift the focus of the Party's work.

Our principle is that every wrong should be righted. All wrongs done in the past should be corrected. Some questions that cannot be settled right now should be settled after this conference. But settlement must be prompt and effective, without leaving any loose ends and on the basis of facts. We must solve these problems left over from the past thoroughly. It is not good for them to be left unsolved or for comrades who have made mistakes to refuse to make self-criticisms, or for us to fail to deal with their cases properly. However, we cannot possibly achieve — and should not expect — a perfect settlement of every case. We should have the major aspect of each problem in mind and solve it in broad outline; to go into every detail is neither possible nor necessary.

Stability and unity are of prime importance. To strengthen the unity of people of whatever nationality, we must first strengthen unity throughout the Party, and especially within the central leadership. Our Party's unity is based on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Inside the Party we should distinguish right from wrong in terms of theory and of the Party line, conduct criticism and self-criticism and help and supervise each other in correcting wrong ideas.

Comrades who have made mistakes should be urged to sum up their experience and draw the necessary lessons, so that they can recognize those mistakes and correct them. We should give them time to think. Once they improve their understanding of cardinal issues of right and wrong and conduct self-criticism, we should make them welcome again. In dealing with people who have made mistakes, we must weigh each case very carefully. Where there is a choice, it is better to err on the side of leniency, but we should be more severe if the problems recur. We should be somewhat lenient with rank-and-file Party members, but more severe with leading cadres, especially those of high rank.

From now on we must be very careful in the selection of cadres. We must never assign important posts to persons who have engaged in beating, smashing and looting, who have been obsessed by factionalist ideas, who have sold their souls by framing innocent comrades, or who disregard the Party's vital interests. Nor can we lightly trust persons who sail with the wind, curry favour with those in power and ignore the Party's principles. We should be wary of such people and at the same time educate them and urge them to change their world outlook.

People both at home and abroad have been greatly concerned recently about how we would evaluate Comrade Mao Zedong and the "cultural revolution". The great contributions of Comrade Mao in the course of long revolutionary struggles will never fade. If we look back at the years following the failure of the revolution in 1927, it appears very likely that without his outstanding leadership the Chinese revolution would still not have triumphed even today. In that case, the people of all our nationalities would still be suffering under the reactionary rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, and our Party would still be engaged in bitter struggle in the dark. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that were it not for Chairman Mao there would be no New China. Mao Zedong Thought has nurtured our whole generation. All comrades present here may be said to have been nourished by Mao Zedong Thought. Without Mao Zedong Thought, the Communist Party of China would not exist today, and that is no exaggeration either. Mao Zedong Thought will forever remain the greatest intellectual treasure of our Party, our army and our people. We must understand the scientific tenets of Mao Zedong Thought correctly and as an integral whole and develop them under the new historical conditions. Of course Comrade Mao was not infallible or free from shortcomings. To demand that of any revolutionary leader would be inconsistent with Marxism. We must guide and educate the Party members, the army officers and men and the people of all of China's

nationalities and help them to see the great services of Comrade Mao Zedong scientifically and in historical perspective.

The “cultural revolution” should also be viewed scientifically and in historical perspective. In initiating it Comrade Mao Zedong was actuated mainly by the desire to oppose and prevent revisionism. As for the shortcomings that appeared during the course of the “cultural revolution” and the mistakes that were made then, at an appropriate time they should be summed up and lessons should be drawn from them — that is essential for achieving unity of understanding throughout the Party. The “cultural revolution” has become a stage in the course of China’s socialist development, hence we must evaluate it. However, there is no need to do so hastily. Serious research must be done before we can make a scientific appraisal of this historical stage. It may take a rather long time to fully understand and assess some of the particular issues involved. We will probably be able to make a more correct analysis of this period in history after some time has passed than we can right now.

IV. STUDY THE NEW SITUATION AND TACKLE THE NEW PROBLEMS

In order to look forward, we must study the new situation and tackle the new problems in good time; otherwise, there can be no smooth progress. In three fields especially, the new situation and new problems demand attention: methods of management, structure of management and economic policy.

So far as methods of management are concerned, we should lay particular stress on overcoming bureaucratism.

Our bureaucracy, which is a result of small-scale production, is utterly incompatible with large-scale production. To achieve the four modernizations and shift the technological basis of our entire socialist economy to that of large-scale production, it is essential to overcome the evils of bureaucracy. Our present economic management is marked by overstaffing, organizational overlapping, complicated procedures and extremely low efficiency. Everything is often drowned in empty political talk. This is not the fault of any group of comrades. The fault lies in the fact that we haven’t made reforms in time. Our modernization programme and socialist cause will be doomed if we don’t make them now.

We must learn to manage the economy by economic means. If we ourselves don’t know about advanced methods of management, we should learn from those who do, either at home or abroad. These methods should be applied not only in the operation of enterprises with newly imported technology and equipment, but also in the technical transformation of existing enterprises. Pending the introduction of a unified national

programme of modern management, we can begin with limited spheres, say, a particular region or a given trade, and then spread the methods gradually to others. The central government departments concerned should encourage such experiments. Contradictions of all kinds will crop up in the process and we should discover and overcome them in good time. That will speed up our progress.

Henceforth, now that the question of political line has been settled, the quality of leadership given by the Party committee in an economic unit should be judged mainly by the unit's adoption of advanced methods of management, by the progress of its technical innovation, and by the margins of increase of its productivity of labour, its profits, the personal income of its workers and the collective benefits it provides. The quality of leadership by Party committees in all fields should be judged by similar criteria. This will be of major political importance in the years to come. Without these criteria as its key elements, our politics would be empty and divorced from the highest interests of both the Party and the people.

So far as the structure of management is concerned, the most important task at present is to strengthen the work responsibility system.

Right now a big problem in enterprises and institutions across the country and in Party and government organs at various levels is that nobody takes responsibility. In theory, there is collective responsibility. In fact, this means that no one is responsible. When a task is assigned, nobody sees that it is properly fulfilled or cares whether the result is satisfactory. So there is an urgent need to establish a strict responsibility system. Lenin said, "To refer to collegiate methods as an excuse for irresponsibility is a most dangerous evil." He called it "an evil which must be halted at all costs as quickly as possible and by whatever the means".

For every job or construction project it is necessary to specify the work to be done, the personnel required to do it, work quotas, standards of quality, and a time schedule. For example, in introducing foreign technology and equipment we should specify what items are to be imported from where, where they are going, and who is to take charge of the work. Whether it is a question of importing foreign equipment or of operating an existing enterprise, similar specifications should be made. When problems arise, it doesn't help just to blame the planning commissions and Party committees concerned, as we do now — the particular persons responsible must feel the heat. By the same token, rewards also should go to specific collectives and persons. In implementing the system according to which the factory directors assume overall responsibility under the leadership of the Party committees, we must state explicitly who is responsible for each aspect of the work.

To make the best use of the responsibility system, the following measures are essential.

First, we must extend the authority of the managerial personnel. Whoever is given responsibility should be given authority as well. Whoever it is — a factory director, engineer, technician, accountant or cashier — he should have his own area not only of responsibility but of authority, which must not be infringed upon by others. The responsibility system is bound to fail if there is only responsibility without authority.

Second, we must select personnel wisely and assign duties according to ability. We should seek out existing specialists and train new ones, put them in important positions, raise their political status and increase their material benefits. What are the political requirements in selecting someone for a job? The major criterion is whether the person chosen can work for the good of the people and contribute to the development of the productive forces and to the socialist cause as a whole.

Third, we must have a strict system of evaluation and distinguish clearly between a performance that should be rewarded and one that should be penalized. All enterprises, schools, research institutes and government offices should set up systems for evaluating work and conferring academic, technical and honorary titles. Rewards and penalties, promotions and demotions should be based on work performance. And they should be linked to increases or reductions in material benefits.

In short, through strengthening the responsibility system and allotting rewards and penalties fairly, we should create an atmosphere of friendly emulation in which people vie with one another to become advanced elements, working hard and aiming high.

In economic policy, I think we should allow some regions and enterprises and some workers and peasants to earn more and enjoy more benefits sooner than others, in accordance with their hard work and greater contributions to society. If the standard of living of some people is raised first, this will inevitably be an impressive example to their “neighbours”, and people in other regions and units will want to learn from them. This will help the whole national economy to advance wave upon wave and help the people of all our nationalities to become prosperous in a comparatively short period.

Of course, there are still difficulties in production in the Northwest, Southwest and some other regions, and the life of the people there is hard. The state should give these places many kinds of help, and in particular strong material support.

These are major policies which can have an effect on the whole national economy and push it forward. I suggest that you study them carefully.

During the drive to realize the four modernizations, we are bound to encounter many new and unexpected situations and problems with which we are unfamiliar. In particular, the reforms in the relations of production and in the superstructure will not be easy to introduce. They touch on a wide range of issues and concern the immediate interests of large numbers of people, so they are bound to give rise to complications and problems and to meet with numerous obstacles. In the reorganization of

enterprises, for example, there will be the problem of deciding who will stay on and who will leave, while in that of government departments, a good many people will be transferred to other jobs, and some may complain. And so on. Since we will have to confront such problems soon, we must be mentally prepared for them. We must teach Party members and the masses to give top priority to the overall situation and the overall interests of the Party and the state. We should be full of confidence. We will be able to solve any problem and surmount any obstacle so long as we have faith in the masses, follow the mass line and explain the situation and problems to them. There can be no doubt that as the economy grows, more and more possibilities will open up and each person will be able to make his contribution to society.

The four modernizations represent a great and profound revolution in which we are moving forward by resolving one new contradiction after another. Therefore, all Party comrades must learn well and always keep on learning.

On the eve of nationwide victory in the Chinese revolution, Comrade Mao Zedong called on the whole Party to start learning afresh. We did that pretty well and consequently, after entering the cities, we were able to rehabilitate the economy very quickly and then to accomplish the socialist transformation. But we must admit that we have not learned well enough in the subsequent years. Expending our main efforts on political campaigns, we did not master the skills needed to build our country. Our socialist construction failed to progress satisfactorily and we experienced grave setbacks politically. Now that our task is to achieve modernization, our lack of the necessary knowledge is even more obvious. So the whole Party must start learning again.

What shall we learn? Basically, we should study Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought and try to integrate the universal principles of Marxism with the concrete practice of our modernization drive. At present most of our cadres need also to apply themselves to three subjects: economics, science and technology, and management. Only if we study these well will we be able to carry out socialist modernization rapidly and efficiently. We should learn in different ways — through practice, from books and from the experience, both positive and negative, of others as well as our own. Conservatism and book worship should be overcome. The several hundred members and alternate members of the Central Committee and the thousands of senior cadres at the central and local levels should take the lead in making an in-depth study of modern economic development.

So long as we unite as one, work in concert, emancipate our minds, use our heads and try to learn what we did not know before, there is no doubt that we will be able to quicken the pace of our new Long March. Under the leadership of the Central Committee and the State Council, let us advance courageously to change the backward condition of our country and turn it into a modern and powerful socialist state.

(Speech at the closing session of the Central Working Conference which made preparations for the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party that immediately followed. In essence, this speech served as the keynote address for the Third Plenary Session.)

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