The Truth, the Buddha's Words, and Inference: Bhāviveka's Theory of Two Truths

by

Masaki Tamura

Introduction

The Buddhist truth, which was directly realized by the Buddha, is beyond verbalization in itself. For it is precisely his personal, direct experience of reality. The Buddha, fully aware that the truth is ineffable, taught it to us by resorting to words. No Buddhist can deny the authority of the Buddha's words. But the critical problem has arisen that they are susceptible to divergent interpretations. The following serves as an example. In the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* the Buddha states that the three realms are mind-only (*cittamātra*).[1] According to Bhāviveka, the Yogācāra school interprets the statement to mean that an external object does not exist independently of the mind,[2] while the Mādhyamika school interprets the same statement to mean that the self (*ātman*) serving as agent of an action and as enjoyer of the fruit of the action does not exist independently of the mind.[3] The question comes up: What is the means for arriving at a real understanding of the Buddha's statement? According to Bhāviveka, it is scripturally based inference or the inference (*amunāna*) which follows the Buddhist scriptures (*āgamānuvidhāyin*).[4] Bhāviveka argues that the truth is beyond the reach of inference and that inference plays the role of removing the misconception about the truth which arises from the Buddha's statement. The aim of this paper is to show how Bhāviveka considers the determination of the truth to be linked with its self-realization (*pratyātmavedya*) within the framework of the two truths theory.

It is to be noted that Bhāviveka uses the term *anumāna* "inference" without making a clear distinction between *svārthānumāna* "inference for oneself" and *parārthānumāna* "inference for others," a distinction established by Dignāga. In this paper, accordingly, I will also render the term *anumāna* used by Bhāviveka as "inference" without specifying what the term means in a given context.

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[1]   DBhS 98.8–9: *cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam /*

[2]   VimśV 3.2–4: *mahāyāne traidhātukaṃ vijñaptimātraṃ vyavasthāpyate / cittamātraṃ bho jinaputrā yad uta traidhātukam iti sūtrāt / … / mātram ity arthapratiṣedhārtham /*

[3]   MHK V 28cd: *sūtreṣu* cittamātroktiḥ kartṛbhoktṛniṣedhataḥ**//* (*sūtreṣu] L1, L2, Ec; *sūtre ca* H, S; *ś[ā]streva* SG; *śastreva* Ms. ***cittamātroktiḥ kartṛbhoktṛniṣedhataḥ*] L2, H, S, SG; *cittamātroktikartṛbhoktṛniṣedhataḥ* L1, Ec, Ms.)

[4]   It is well known that Dharmakīrti divides inference into two types: inference which functions by the force of reality (*vastubalapravṛttānumāna*) and inference which is based on scripture (*āgamāśritānumāna*). While the former is the inference whose object is imperceptible (*parokṣa*), the latter is the inference whose object is completely imperceptible (*atyantaparokṣa*). What Bhāviveka means by the term *āgamānuvidhāyanumāna* is the inference which functions only within the framework of the Buddhist *āgama* and which is in perfect accordance with it. On Dharmakīrti's concept of *āgamāśritānumāna*, see Tillemans (1986; 1990: 23–35; 1999).

1. When to use inference

1.1   Bhāviveka begins the fifth chapter of the *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* by giving the outline of the Yogācāras' view of the nectar-like truth as emptiness of the grasped-grasper duality. After expounding the theories of "mind-only" (*cittamātra*), of *asallakṣaṇānupraveśopāya*, and of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), Bhāviveka states the following *kārikā*.

> MHK V 7: *prajñāpāramitānītir iyaṃ sarvajñatāptaye /*
>
> *na tūtpādanirodhādipratiṣedhaparo nayaḥ*[5] *//*
>
> This doctrine propounded by the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*s [as interpreted by the Yogācāras][6] leads to the attainment of omniscience, while the doctrine as it is taken to intend to deny arising, cessation, and so forth does not.

An important point to note here is: Bhāviveka states that the Yogācāras' view of emptiness and the Mādhyamikas' view of emptiness are equally derived from the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*s, which consist in the words of the Buddha. The Yogācāras might argue that only their view of emptiness can lead to the attainment of omniscience and that the Mādhyamikas misunderstand the Buddha's words.

1.2   To this objection, Bhāviveka answers as follows:

> MHK V 8–9: *atrocyate pramāṇaṃ naḥ sarvaṃ tāthāgataṃ vacaḥ /*
>
> *āptopadeśaprāmāṇyād bhadro hi pratipadyate //*
>
> *nāgamāntarasaṃdigdhaviparyastamatiḥ paraḥ /*
>
> *tasmāt tatpratipattyarthaṃ tanmṛgyo yuktimannayaḥ //*
>
> We will answer to this objection as follows. Since the teaching of a credible person (*āpta*) is authoritative, all the words of the Tathāgata[, who is a credible person,] are authoritative for us [Buddhists]. Indeed, a good person (*bhadra*) accepts all the words of the Tathāgata, while our opponent does not. For, the latter, under the influence of other traditions, holds that [what the Tathāgata states is] doubtful and wrong.[7] Therefore, the [good person] must seek for a reasonable argument so that the opponent may accept the [Tathāgata's words].

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[5]   *-pratiṣedhaparo nayaḥ*] H, S, SG, Ms; *-pratiṣedhaparāyaṇā* L1, L2, Ec.

[6]   The *Tarkajvālā* explains how the Yogācāras' doctrine is derived from the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*s. TJ ad MHK V 7 [D202b1; P222b4–5]: *sems de ni sems ma yin no zhes gsungs pa des ni gzung ba dang 'dzin pa med par bstan to //* ("The statement 'That mind is not the mind' (*tac cittam acittam*) means that there does not exist [the duality of] the grasper and the grasped (*grāhyagrāhakābhāva*).") APS 3.18: *tac cittam acittam /*

[7]   Previous studies render the term *āgamāntarasaṃdigdhaviparyastamatiḥ* as follows. Iida 1966: 83: "[Our] opponent, whose judgement is confused and perverted by other *āgama*(s)." Hoornaert 2000: 90: "Others who have doubts and erroneous ideas from other scriptures." Eckel 2008: 227: "the opponent, whose mind is confused and misled by other traditions." Krasser 2012: 546: "The other one, whose mind is in doubt and confused by other scriptures."

There are a few points to note here. First, the Tathāgata is characterized as a credible person (*āpta*) and hence his teaching must be authoritative.

Secondly, there are two types of hearers of the Tathāgata's words: one is "a good person" (*bhadra*) and the other is a person who is dubious of what the Tathāgata states and who conceives of it as wrong. The latter is under the influence of *āgama*s other than the Buddhist. It is important to note in this connection that Bhāviveka uses the term *bhadra*, which refers to a Bodhisattva who confers a benefit on others.[8] According to the *Tarkajvālā*, Buddhist disciples are classified into four groups: (1) those who properly understand their own *āgama*s; (2) those who doubt what they state; (3) those who incorrectly understand what they state; (4) those who have insufficient intelligence to understand what they state.[9] A Bodhisattva called *bhadra* belongs to the first group. Interestingly, Bhāviveka professes to be a *bhadra* who is bound to lead the second and third groups to the Great Enlightenment (*mahābodhi*), treating Yogācāra Buddhists as such groups of disciples.

Thirdly, the *bhadra* is said to be requested to seek for a reasonable argument (*yukti-mannaya*) in order to lead the disciples of groups (2) and (3), referred to by the word *para* "opponent" in the *kārikā*[10] and characterized as those who are dubious of what the Tathāgata states and who conceive of it as wrong, to a correct understanding of the Tathāgata's statement. The reasonable argument, according to the *Tarkajvālā*, consists in a three-membered inference, comprised of a thesis (*pakṣa*), a reason (*hetu*), and an example (*dṛṣṭānta*). The *Tarkajvālā* says:

> TJ ad MHK V 9 [D203a1–2; P223a6–8]: *de'i phyir de dag sgrub tu gzhug pa'i phyir / smra ba po rigs[11] pa dang ldan pa'i tshul phyogs dang / gtan tshigs dang / dpe'i skyon med pa gzhan gyis smras pa'i nyes pa'i gnas su ma gyur pa'i mtha'i rigs pa'i lam btsal bar bya'o //*

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8   See, for example, AvŚ I.184.2–4.

9   In MHK IX 155 Bhāviveka makes the same point. MHK IX 155: *skyon med rjes su dpag pa yis // rigs sam mi rigs ma dpyad par // blo ni gzhan gyis bskyed pa'i phyir // lung gzhan dag la the tshom za //* (Lindtner 1999: 295: "If one does not investigate what is logical and what is not logical by means of an *anumāna* free from faults, then one's understanding will be formed by other [traditions] and therefore one will be in doubt about other traditions (*āgama*).") TJ ad MHK IX 155 [D317a7–b2; P363a5–8]: *slob ma ni rnam pa gsum yod de / lung gzhan mthong na 'di ltar yin nam / ma yin zhes the tshom za ba'i blo can dang / lung gcig la rab tu zhugs shing zhen par gyur nas gzhan la sems kyis* (D; *kyi* P) *sdang* (D; *ldang* P) *bar gyur cing phyin ci log tu zhugs pa'i blo can dang / lung thams cad la rigs pa yin nam / rigs pa ma yin zhes dpyod par mi nus pa'i rtogs pa dang bral ba'i blo can no // de la lung gzhan gyis* (D; *gyi* P) *the tshom bskyed pa'am / phyin ci log tu zhen par gyur ba'i blo gang la yod pa de dag ni rjes su dpag pa med par rigs sam / mi rigs zhes dpyod par nus pa ma yin no //*

10   Krasser 2012 argues that the word *para* here refers to Dharmakīrti for the reason that the concept of *āgama* introduced by Bhāviveka (i.e., *āptopadeśaprāmāṇya*, which echoes Dignāga's definition of *āgama*: *āptavādāvisaṃvādasāmānyād anumānatā*) is not shared by Dharmakīrti. I do not agree with him. This is still being debated, though. See also Hoornaert 2000: 90, n.1. There is no question that in the fifth chapter of the *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* Bhāviveka focuses on refuting the Yogācāra doctrine propounded only by Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and Dignāga. Incidentally, Krasser 2012: 546 gives the following translation of the *kārikā*s in question: "To this (*pūrvapakṣa* of the Yogācāra) we reply: All the words of the Tathāgata are authoritative [*pramāṇa*] for us, because the teachings of a reliable person are authoritative. A good one puts (these) into practice. The other one, whose mind is in doubt and confused by other scriptures, does not. Therefore the path of reasoning [*yuktimannaya*] should be followed by him in order to put these into practice."

11   *rigs*] D; *rig* P.

Therefore, for an opponent to accept the Tathāgata's words completely, a proponent must seek for a reasonable argument, that is, a final logical method which has no faults in the thesis, the reason, and the example, and with which others find no fault.[12]

Needless to say, the argument in question is of the type *parārthānumāna*. The following is an instance of such a reasonable argument:

MHK V 36: *tasyālambanatā ceṣṭā tadābhamatihetutaḥ /*

rāgavad bādhyate tasmāt pratijñā te 'numānataḥ //

[Thesis:] The [color and form in the form of an aggregation of atoms] are an objective basis;

[Reason:] because they are the cause of a cognition in which they appear;

[Example:] like in the case of desire.

Therefore, your thesis is refuted through this inference.

Bhāviveka here intends to refute the theory of "mind-only" which the Yogācāra school establishes by means of introducing counter-arguments against the atomic theory.[13] In this connection, it is important to note that, according to Dignāga, *parārthānumana* is what makes what one has seen known to others (*svadṛṣṭārthaprakāśana*), and what serves to give true information to others.[14]

2. Role of inference

Then what role can inference play in this context? First of all, Bhāviveka specifies that the truth is beyond the sphere of inference.

MHK V 104: *tattvasyātarkagamyatvāt*[15] *tadbodho nānumānataḥ /*

nātas tarkeṇa dharmāṇāṃ gamyate dharmateti cet //

[Objection:] The truth is not realized through logical reasoning (*tarka*). [For] it is said [in the *āgama*] that the real nature (*dharmatā*) of existential factors is not realized through logical reasoning. Accordingly, there does not occur the understanding of the [truth] through inference.

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[12]   See also MHK V 109.

[13]   According to the *Tarkajvālā*, the theory is also contradicted by the Buddhist *āgama*. TJ ad MHK V 36 [D210a1; P232a4]: *rnam par shes pa'i tshogs lnga'i gnas dang / dmigs pa ni bsags pa yin no zhes gsungs pa'i lung dang yang 'gal lo //* ("[Your thesis] contradicts the scripture also which says that the supporting faculties and the objective basis of the five sense consciousnesses are aggregations [of atoms].")

[14]   PS III 1ab: *parārtham anumānaṃ tu svadṛṣṭārthaprakāśanam /*

[15]   *-tvāt*] L1, L2, H, S, Ec; *-tvā* SG, Ms.

According to Bhāviveka, the truth cannot be understood through inference. Nonetheless, Bhāviveka does not absolutely deny that inference plays a certain role in understanding the truth. Referring to the Buddhas, he states:

> MHK V 105–106: *ihānumānān nirdoṣād āgamānuvidhāyinaḥ* /
>
> *kalpitāśeṣavividhavikalpaughanirākṛteḥ*[16] //
>
> *sakalajñeyayāthātmyam*[17] *ākāśasamacetasaḥ* /
>
> *jñānena nirvikalpena buddhāḥ paśyanty adarśanāt* //
>
> [Answer:] In our [Mādhyamikas'] view, the Buddhas, after negating a flood of conceptions of what has been conceptually constructed, through inference which has no fault and which accords with the Buddhist *āgama*, become those who have a mind like space.[18] Then they see, by way of non-seeing, the true nature of all objects to be cognized, by means of a non-conceptual cognition.

Bhāviveka here shows the process through which the Buddhas come to get an intuitive insight into the real nature of things. According to Bhāviveka, there are two stages. At the first stage the Buddhas resort to inference in order to get rid of a flood of conceptualizations. The inference is with no defects and accords with the Buddhist *āgama*. At the second stage they, with minds pure as space,[19] intuitively, by way of non-seeing, grasp the real nature of things.

An important point to note is that Bhāviveka introduces inference in this way in the context of the realization of the truth. Clearly, for Bhāviveka inference, which consists in being *svārthānumāna*, has as its object not the truth itself but conceptualizations of what has been conceptually constructed. Hence he says the following:

> MHK V 107: *ato 'numānaviṣayaṃ na tattvaṃ pratipadyate* /
>
> *tattvajñānavipakṣo yas tasya tena nirākriyā* //
>
> For this reason, the truth is not understood to be within the sphere of inference. That which is opposed to the knowledge of the truth is removed through inference.

Bhāviveka here specifies the role of inference. The role of inference is to rule out the opposite of the knowledge of the truth, that is, the conceptualizations of what has been conceptually constructed.

Suppose that one makes the assertion "A certain thing is such and such" and another the assertion "The thing is not such and such." If the two assertions obtain, there arises a doubt about the thing: Which assertion is true? Thus one must resort to inference.

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[16] *-nirākṛteḥ*] L1, L2, H, S, Ec, SG; *-nirākṛte* Ms; *bsal mdzad nas* Tib (TJ: *bsal bar mdzad nas de'i 'og tu*).

[17] *sakala-*] L1, L2, H, S, SG. Ms; *akala-* Ec.

[18] The mind which is free from conceptual construction is likened to space in pureness. See Tamura 2013.

[19] See the footnote above.

MHK V 109: *pratijñāmātrakeṇeṣṭā*[20] *pratipakṣanirākriyā* /

aniṣiddhe vipakṣe ca nirvikalpā matiḥ kutaḥ //

How can one admit that what is opposed to [the knowledge of the truth] is negated by mere assertion? In addition, if what is opposed to [the knowledge of the truth] is not negated, how can there arise a non-conceptual cognition [of the truth]?

The structure envisaged by Bhāviveka is such that, when different understandings of the truth arise from the Buddha's words, its real understanding is arrived at by means of removing its unreasonable understanding through inference; what is assumed to be a real understanding of the truth is simply its conceptual understanding, so that it must be denied to get an intuitive insight into the truth.

The following *kārikā* is interesting in that Bhāviveka explains why Buddhists, who follow the Buddha's teaching, can have different views concerning the truth.

MHK V 108: *āgamāntarabhedena bhedāyātāsu buddhiṣu* /

abhede 'py āgamasyānyaḥ[21] *kaḥ parīkṣākṣamo*[22] *vidhiḥ* //

Even if there is no difference in *āgama* among Buddhists, they have different understandings by the influence of a variety of *āgama*s other than their own. In this case, what else than inference could be the means to investigate the truth?

Buddhists follow the Buddhist *āgama*. But, if they are influenced by *āgama*s other than their own, they may have different views. In order to deny an opposite assertion, one must resort to inference; otherwise, a doubt about the truth could not be banished. The inference in question is one that is effective among those who accept the same *āgama*, that is, it is the inference that is scripturally based.

3. The truth, the Buddha's words, and inference

3.1 Two truths

In this way, an assertion different from one's own is refuted by means of resorting to inference, and thus one's own assertion turns out to be justified. Even then, the assertion obtains only in the sphere of conceptualization. For the assertion reflects only a conceptual understanding of the truth. Therefore Bhāviveka continues to bring in the viewpoint of the two truths theory.

MHK V 110: *satyadvayam ataś coktaṃ muninā tattvadarśinā* /

vyavahāraṃ samāśritya tattvārthādhigamo yataḥ //

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[20]   *pratijñāmātrakeṇeṣṭā*] em.; *pratijñāmātrakā neṣṭā* L1, L2, H, S, Ec, SG, Ms; *dam bcas tsam gyis ji ltar 'dod* (**pratijñāmātrakeṇeṣṭā kutaḥ*) Tib.

[21]   *-ānyaḥ*] L1, L2, H, S, Ec; *-ādyaḥ* SG, Ms.

[22]   *-kṣamo*] L1, L2, H, S, Ec; *-kṣayo* SG, Ms.

> And, since the truth is realized in reliance on verbalization (*vyavahāra*), the
> Muni, who sees the truth, taught two truths.

The given context clearly reveals that the term *vyavahāra* refers to the Buddha's verbalization
of the truth, that is, the Buddha's words about the truth, or the Buddha's statement of the
truth.[23] The Buddha taught two truths. This must mean that there is one truth beyond and
one within language.

Bhāviveka goes on to state that the understanding gotten from the statement of the truth
is false since it has the truth for its objective basis.

> MHK V 111: *sālambanatvād vitathā tathatālambanāpi dhīḥ*[24] /
>
> *svapnādidhīvat tadgrāhyaṃ nātas tattvaṃ ca yujyate* //
>
> [Thesis:] A cognition that has thus-ness as its objective basis (*ālambana*) is
> erroneous;
>
> [Reason:] because it has an objective basis (*sālambanatvāt*);
>
> [Example:] like a dream-cognition and so forth.
>
> Thus, it is not tenable that the truth is what is grasped by such [a cognition].

In Bhāviveka's view, a cognition which has an objective basis is a conceptual cognition,
and is thus based on the dichotomy between a cognition and its object, and consists in
judging.[25]

The following *kārikā* is important in that Bhāviveka points out that the Buddha himself
denies the truth within language.

> MHK V 112: *agrāhyo 'nabhilāpyaś ca dhīpracāravivarjitaḥ* /
>
> *dharma ukto munīndreṇa sa caivaṃ sati bādhyate* //
>
> The truth (*dharma*), which is beyond the sphere of cognitive activities, cannot
> be [conceptually] grasped or expressed in words. But the great sage speaks of
> the truth. This being the case, it is denied [by himself].

The reason that the Buddha denies the truth as it is spoken of is that the cognition stemming
from the verbalization of the truth is merely conceptual, so that it grasps the truth only
partially and not in its entirety. In reality the truth is beyond conceptualization and language.

3.2 The Buddha's words and the Mādhyamikas' understanding of the truth

The main intention of the fifth chapter of the *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* is to oppose the
Yogācāras' understanding of the Buddha's words about the truth. Bhāviveka ends the fifth
chapter as follows:

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[23]   Hoornaert 2003: 168 and Eckel 2008: 296 render the term *vyavahāra* here as "conventional [truth]"
        and "conventional usage," respectively. I do not think that they catch the point.
[24]   *tathatālambanāpi dhīḥ*] L1, H, S, Ec, SG, Ms; *tathatālambanād api* L2.
[25]   See Tamura 2011: 111–115.

> MHK V 113: *ato yuktyāgamopetaṃ tattvaṃ yat prāgudāhṛtam |*
>
> *parīkṣyamāṇaṃ yuktyaivaṃ tad evāvyāhataṃ sthitam ||*
>
> For this reason, the truth which has been described before[26] and which is well founded on logical reasoning and *āgama* remains undenied even if it is investigated through logical reasoning in this way.

Let us note that there are two different domains where we are involved in the understanding of the truth. In one domain logical reasoning based on *āgama* works and in the other the truth is beyond conceptualization and language and independently realized by way of non-seeing. Bhāviveka states here that in the former domain the truth as conceived of by the Mādhyamikas cannot be invalidated.

It is important to note in this connection that the *Tarkajvālā* cites MHK III 266 in commenting on the present *kārikā*.

> MHK III 266: *jñeyasya sarvathāsiddher nirvikalpāpi yatra dhīḥ |*
>
> *notpadyate tad atulyaṃ tattvaṃ tattvavido viduḥ ||*
>
> Those who know the truth call "the unequalled truth" the truth with reference to which there does not arise even a non-conceptual cognition since an entity to be cognized is absolutely not established.

The Buddha verbalized the truth into which he had achieved intuitive insight. From the Buddha's statement referring to the truth the Mādhyamikas, though at a conceptual level, correctly understand the truth, which is well founded on logical reasoning and *āgama*. To the extent that the truth as the Mādhyamikas understand it accords with the truth as the Buddha speaks of it, the Mādhyamikas' view of the truth cannot be disputed by the Yogācāras. Needless to say, the truth which the Buddha saw directly consists in *svabhāvaśūnyatā*, namely that all existential factors are empty of an intrinsic essential nature.[27]

4. Conclusion

Buddhism originated in the Buddha's verbalization of the truth that he directly experienced. This is why for Buddhism the two truths theory, that there is one truth beyond and one within language is a logical necessity.

In common to all Buddhists is the acceptance of the Buddha's words. But it is not always the case that the same statement brings about the same understanding of its meaning. According to Bhāviveka, a Buddhist, even if following the Buddhist *āgama*, is subject to the influence of *āgama*s other than the Buddhist. Thus Buddhists have different understandings of what the Buddha stated. The Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools hold different views of the truth, emptiness, even though both base themselves on the Buddhist *āgama*. Bhāviveka explicitly states that he feels it is necessary to give the Yogācāras a clear understanding

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[26]   According to the *Tarkajvālā*, Bhāviveka describes the Mādhyamika truth in the third chapter of MHK. See TJ ad MHK V 113 [D227a5–6; P253b4–6].

[27]   MHK III 115: *svabhāvaśūnyatābodhān … /*

of what the Buddha states (*pratipattyartham*), and that there is no other means than infer-ence for achieving this purpose. In his view, the function of inference is just to rule out misunderstandings of the Buddha's statements and not to give an intuitive insight into the truth. Bhāviveka never says that inference is a means to know directly the Buddhist truth of emptiness. If the Yogācāras' understanding of the Buddha's statement is refuted, the Mādhyamikas' understanding of it alone will remain as the only one true to the Buddhist *āgama*. Furthermore, it is said that in Bhāviveka's time a sectarian consciousness began to develop among Buddhists. It is in this context that Bhāviveka brings in the concept of *āgamānuvidhāyyanumāna*, the inference which works within the framework of the Buddhist *āgama*.

References and abbreviations

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