

## The Great Mother Archetype of a Character in *Turning Red* (2022) Film

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the portrayal of Carl Jung's Great Mother Archetype in the Disney-Pixar film *Turning Red* (2022), focusing on the character Ming Lee. As a literary medium, film was often used to communicate moral values explicitly. The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative method and identified six scenes that depicted the Great Mother archetype, such as Ming scolding a convenience store guard, Mei's first transformation into a red panda, secretly monitoring Mei, controlling the red panda, the battle with the giant red panda, and the reconciliation with her mother in the spirit world. The study concluded that Ming Lee's over-controlling nature consistently represented the Great Mother archetype, where excessive control negatively impacted the growth of other characters.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Archetype theory by Carl Gustav Jung is a popular method to analyze characters in the field of personality in literary works (Ekaputri, 2019). Archetype is formed from two words derived from Greek, namely *arkhe* (primitive, original, origin) and *tupos* (model, pattern). Repeated experiences from ancestors form the original pattern (*arkhetupon*) (Hardanto et al., 2019). Jung often referred to archetypes as examples of our collective unconscious. Archetypes are very important, as they are the basis of the symbols we create in our dreams, fantasies, artwork, and literature (Jung, 1969). According to Relke (2007) archetypes are not always expressed in literal personal ways such as mother, grandmother, stepmother, mother-in-law, or nurse, but also in figurative forms such as garden, country, church, earth, God, sea, forest, and others. They have no physical form, but can be observed in the myths, dreams, and legends of different cultures and times.

According to Feist (2008), archetypes have eight main points, namely shadow, persona, anima, animus, great mother, wise parent, hero, and self. "Persona", which is the social mask one wears to conform to the norms of society, "Shadow" is the shadowy part of humanity or primitive impulses, "Anima" and "Animus" are the feminine side of man (Anima) and the masculine side of woman (Animus), and the terms Self and Hero refer to one's pursuit of unity and integrity, respectively, as well as one's journey through obstacles and achievement of goals. "Mother", who represents the qualities of protection and nurturing, and "Wise Old Man", a representation of experience and wisdom, are other examples.

In this research, the researcher focuses on one of the archetypes, namely The Great Mother Archetype. The Great Mother Archetype is a concept deeply rooted in psychoanalytic theory, particularly in the work of Carl Jung, and has become a widespread and multifaceted theme in literature and cultural symbolism. According to Jung (1954), The Great Mother Archetype is a symbol of a deeper mother figure that can manifest in various forms across cultures and individual psyches. In this context, The Great Mother Archetype is not only a symbol of ideal motherhood, but also a representation of the complexity of the mother-child relationship involving emotional, social and cultural aspects (Jung, 1969).

According to Jungian psychology, the Good Mother archetype is representative of the perfect mother's qualities associated with compassion, defense, and unwavering love. This archetype represents the loving and emotionally supportive feminine element, which is often portrayed as the source of fertility and life in mythology and folklore. The mythological Demeter of Greece, who protects the land and ensures her people survive, is a primary example. According to Jung (1996), the Good Mother plays an important role in psychological development as she provides her children with a sense of stability and security that encourages growth. In contrast, the Bad Mother archetype reflects unfavorable aspects of parenthood, such as emotional detachment, possessiveness, or neglect. This archetype may manifest as either overprotection or control that limits one's freedom. According to Jung (1996), those affected by poor mothering may feel fearful, inadequate, or rejected, which can have impacts on emotional boundaries and long-term relationships. In order to foster positive relationships with oneself and others, it is crucial for individuals to acknowledge and address the negative parts of this archetype to promote healthy growth.

Film as a part of literature is a form of art that has its own language and aesthetic style (Bordwell et al., 2010). This explains the fact that literature and film are media for expression with unique characteristics. This definition highlights the visual and dynamic nature of film, which like literature, can convey complex ideas, emotions and experiences. Literature, derived from the Latin word "littera" meaning letters, traditionally refers to the written or printed word expressing imaginative works. However, the term has evolved to encompass a wider range of creative expressions, including film, which is often analyzed by scholars for its narrative structure, character development, and thematic elements (Totawad, 2019). Film can be seen as a modern form of literature, as it uses a combination of visual and auditory elements to tell stories. This is evident in the way films present visual images to audiences, making the narrative more immersive and engaging compared to traditional literature.

The Great Mother Archetype phenomenon in Disney-Pixar's *Turning Red* (2022) is highly visible through the character of Ming Lee, the mother of the main character, Mei Lee. Ming Lee emerges as a protective, loving, yet dominant and demanding figure. The close bond between Ming Lee and Mei Lee during Mei Lee's exploration of several identities in the film illustrates how an imam is viewed as a guardian angel and a source of moral guidance in many cultures. This passage is consistent with Carl Jung's essay on the archetype of the mother, which emphasizes the importance of the mother as a significant figure in the development of an individual's identity. This film depicts Ming Lee's persistent efforts to explain Mei Lee's choices and actions, highlighting the strong side of her protective yet authoritarian stereotype.

Ming Lee, a character in Disney-Pixar's *Turning Red* (2022), embodies the Great Mother archetype. As Mei's mother, Ming exhibits a strong protective manner and becomes highly involved in her daughter's life, even to the point of restricting Mei's independence and ability to express her personality. The movie portrayed the emotional strain and generational pressure a child faces under her mother's domination through the metaphor of Mei's metamorphosis into a red panda. The duality of the Great Mother archetype is shown in this setting where Ming Lee is portrayed as demanding and domineering alongside being a caring mother. The main conflict of the movie shows the interaction between a mother's desire to maintain control and her child's yearning for independence. This centers on the tension between individual freedom and parental expectations. Here, the Great Mother archetype highlights the need to strike a balance between independence and love and the need to appreciate and understand generational variations in mother-child relationships. This transformation is symbolized by her turning into a giant red panda, representing both the nurturing aspect of The Great Mother Archetype and the struggle for autonomy (Jung, 1959).

The film's exploration of The Great Mother Archetype as described by Carl Jung highlight's themes of intergenerational trauma and the complex relationships between mothers and daughters, adding another layer of depth to its narrative (Jung, 1959). *Turning Red* (2022) film was chosen because there have been previous studies that discuss this film, but no one has discussed The Great Mother Archetype. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will add insight into archetype research, especially in *Turning Red* (2022) film research. Furthermore, this movie is also very interesting, because it contains many moral messages and uses symbols related to a culture in delivering messages.

The film *Turning Red* (2022) offers lessons for parents and children alike on the importance of listening and understanding each other's perspectives. The film portrays a mother-daughter relationship where both characters are learning to navigate their roles and boundaries. For example, Mei's mother Ming is initially portrayed as strict and controlling, but as the story progresses, her character evolves to show a more vulnerable side. This evolution highlights the importance of empathy in parenting, where understanding one's child's perspective can lead to more harmonious relationships (Romano, 2023). Conversely, Mei learns to assert herself while also showing compassion towards her mother. This research analyzes how Ming Lee's character in *Turning Red* (2022) is portrayed using Jungian Archetype theory.

Based on the background that has been mentioned, the researcher has a research question regarding research on analysis of Ming Lee's character in *Turning Red* (2022) film using a psychology literary study.

The problem formulated is ‘How is the mother archetype portrayed in the *Turning Red* film (2022)?’. By paying attention to the problem that has been formulated, the purpose of this research is to portray the great mother archetype in Ming Lee's character in the film *Turning Red* (2022).

Carl Gustav Jung's archetype theory has been applied to the previous film character analysis. After analyzing the character Smeagol in *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, Hardanto, Natsir, and Kuncara (2019) found five main archetypes, with trickster being the most common. In their analysis of the movie *The Three Stooges*, Bahri, Simbolon, and Sitanggang (2024) identified the archetypes of self, persona, ego, and shadow in each of the three main characters of the movie. Muthalib, Amelia, and Achmad (2019) did not use the archetype technique when analyzing the characterizations in *Turning Red* using Boggs and Petrie's (2008) methodology. Using Tzvetan Todorov's narrative theory, Hanifah et al. (2023) examined the dynamics of family communication in the film *Turning Red* (2022), emphasizing the dialectical conflict between stability and change. Using Jung's archetype theory to analyze the characters of R and Julie in *Warm Bodies*, Rizakiah, Sili, and Kucara (2018) found six main archetypes. The shortcoming of this study is that it does not address the Big Mother archetype represented by Ming Lee's character in the movie *Turning Red* (2022) as was done in previous studies. While previous studies have successfully applied archetype theory to various characters in various films, this article aims to explore how the Great Mother archetype, as embodied by Ming Lee, contributes to the thematic depth of *Turning Red* (2022). By addressing this overlooked archetype, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive analysis of maternal influence and generational conflict in the film.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

Descriptive qualitative methodology is used in this study to elucidate the ecocritical concerns brought up. By this, the qualitative approach focuses on narrative, description, and comprehension analysis (Amelia, 2016; Kasih, 2018). A qualitative research examines phenomena that exist in the public (Creswell 2013). The data source used in this research was obtained from *Turning Red* (2022) film. The qualitative methods focus on objects, the results are in the form of words (Rido, 2015; Kuswoyo & Susardi, 2016). Therefore, the scope of this study is The study aims to portray the character of Ming Lee in the film *Turning Red* (2022) through the lens of the Great Mother Archetype as described by Carl Jung. This analysis will delve into how Ming Lee embodies the qualities associated with the Great Mother, including nurturing, love, compassion, and protection, while also examining the potential negative aspects such as possessiveness, dependency, and enmeshment.

In this study, the author obtained primary data source from a film entitled *Turning Red* (2022) film directed by Domee Shi. Therefore, the researcher applied the qualitative descriptive technique as the researcher mainly focuses on the identification of the great mother archetype in Ming Lee's character in the film *Turning Red* (2022), where the data is in the form of dialogues. Dialogues from the film *Turning Red* (2022), which explored the great mother archetype, thus provided the data.

The researcher took several steps to collect data from the film *Turning Red* (2022).

1. Watch the film *Turning Red* (2022) several times, then understand the great mother archetype in the film.
2. Taking note of the dialog about the great mother archetype based on Carl Jung's archetype theory.
3. The next stage is selecting and choosing data that is relevant to the research topic.
4. Conducting the analysis stage where researchers match the data findings with the theory used.
5. The last step is to draw conclusions on the data that has been generated from the analysis process.

## 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The discussion of this part will show Ming Lee's character revealing the Great Mother Archetype in *Turning Red* (2022) film. After conducting an analysis and observing the scenes and dialogues that happened from character to character in the animated film *Turning Red* (2022), the researcher finally found 6 scenes portraying the great mother archetype contained in the film *Turning Red* (2022) by Ming Lee's character in protecting her child. The following are six scenes that have been collected and analyzed by researchers using The Great Mother Archetype by Carl Jung:

### 3.1. Ming Scolds the Store Keeper (Devon)

The first scene that has been analyzed is when Ming scolding Devon in *Turning Red* (2022), can be seen as symbolic of the Great Mother archetype, specifically her controlling and overprotective side.

*Time: 00:12:25-00:13:10*

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| Ming Lee | : “This is what happens when you don't wear sunblock and do drugs all day!” |
| Ming Lee | : “She's just a sweet, innocent child.”                                     |
| Ming Lee | : “How dare you take advantage of her (Mei Lee)?!”                          |
| Mei Lee  | : “Mom, no!”  |

When Ming saw the drawings Mei made in this scene, he immediately concluded that Devon, the convenience store employee, was the main reason behind Mei's actions. After that, Ming confronts Devon at work and punishes him in public, making Mei feel very uncomfortable in front of her friends. These actions show how the Great Mother can be over-controlling, intrusive, and protective.

Ming personifies the “Devouring Mother” aspect of the Great Mother archetype, which is characterized by a mother's over-protectiveness and tendency to overstep her child's personal boundaries and independence-building tendencies. In the dialogues “**She's just a sweet, innocent child.**” and “**How dare you take advantage of her (Mei Lee)?!**”, Ming Lee portrays herself as a mother who overprotects Mei, not admitting her child's growth or independence. The devouring mother aspect refers to mothers who restrict or overprotect their children to the point of stunting their personal growth and freedom. By thinking of Mei Lee as a “sweet and innocent child”, Ming Lee does not give Mei the space to show her more mature self. In addition, in the second sentence, Ming Lee blames external parties for Mei's changes or behaviors, without understanding that Mei herself has the right to explore, make decisions, or act as she wants. This reflects an excessive control that wants to keep Mei in a vulnerable and less independent position. This is an expression of the negative side of the Great Mother, when protection becomes a form of control that inhibits personal development. Characters who overprotect other characters they believe to be vulnerable embody the archetype of the Overly Controlling Mother, according to Berezhna (2023). On the other hand, Ming's actions are also motivated by love and kindness. As an example of a caring mother, she tries to protect Mei from “harm” or bad influences, but her activities cross the child's emotional boundaries and ruin their relationship.

### 3.2. Mei Turns into a Red Panda for the First Time

The moment when Mei initially transforms into a red panda can be seen as a metaphor of the Great Mother archetype. This metamorphosis represents a transformation in identity and emotionality in addition to a transformation of the body. In terms of the Great Mother archetype, the red panda represents power and protection, which reflects the mother's resilient and deep qualities.

*Time: 00:15:45-00:16:37*

Mei Lee : “Don't come in here!”

Ming Lee : “Mei-Mei, what's going on, honey? Are you sick?”

Ming Lee : “Is it a fever? A stomach ache? Chills? Constipation?”

Mei Lee : “No!”

One might interpret the red panda as a symbol of Mei's inner power and motherhood instincts. The tension between her desire to be herself and the expectations and wishes of her family—especially her mother, Ming—is reflected in her transformation. Mei Lee experienced a significant physical and emotional transformation in her life. Mei Lee's scream, “**Don't come in here!**” signifies the beginning of her transformation and struggle for personal autonomy. It also reveals her need to be alone all along. This can be seen as the point at which her body and emotions begin to change and she starts to realize that she is no longer completely under her mother's control. Ming Lee's scared response and assumption that Mei is sick is a reflection of her ignorance of Mei's changes. Instead of realizing that this is a normal growth that Mei is experiencing towards adulthood, Ming Lee feels that something is physically “wrong”, showing that she has not acknowledged or accepted the psychological and physical transformation that her daughter is undergoing. This metamorphosis also shows how such intense emotional experiences—whether it is excitement, worry, or anger—can bring out one's hidden qualities, just as a mother shows fortitude in the face of adversity. As a result, this scene represents Mei's quest to understand her identity and her bond with her mother, emphasizing the nature of the Great Mother archetype, which offers receptivity and protection to the deeper aspects of the self. Mei's attempt to achieve a balance between her unique desires and her parents' expectations is exemplified by her metamorphosis into a red panda. This issue is particularly relevant when considering mother-daughter interactions.

### 3.3. Ming Keeps an Eye on Mei at School

Another good example of the Great Mother archetype in this scene is when Ming Lee silently monitors Mei Lee at school. Ming Lee was reprimanded by the school guard for acting like a stalker, but Ming Lee ignored this.

*Time: 00:22:50-00:23:58*

School guard : “Hi! Uh, Ma'am!”

Ming Lee : “My child goes to this school.”

School guard : “Why don't you come to the front office?”

Ming's actions in this situation express a strong sense of oversight and protection as she tries to ensure Mei is safe and is capable of adjusting to her environment. This deep concern reveals strong feelings

of responsibility and affection, the qualities often associated with mother characters in this archetype. However, there are still possible conflicts that may arise despite these noble intentions. Deep anxiety and concern for Mei's wellbeing. Ming Lee, as an overprotective mother, feels the need to make sure that Mei is safe at school as reflected in the dialog between Ming and the school guard **“My child goes to this school.”**. Her actions in going to the school directly shows the characteristics of a mother who actively monitors and seeks to protect her child from potential danger or situations that she does not fully understand. Mei may feel restricted and oppressed by Ming's overprotective behavior, which shows another aspect of the Great Mother that can be tyrannical and restrict a child's freedom. This exchange exemplifies the deeply nuanced relationship between a child's curiosity and a mother's drive to give protection. In this context, the moment shows not only a mother's affection, but also the difficulty in balancing protection and independence, leaving room for Mei's personal development. As a result, the relationship between Ming and Mei has a deep, nuanced and complicated quality, embodying the image of a great mother in a contemporary setting.

### 3.4. Red Panda Control Ritual

The following scenario portrays a red panda control ritual that integrates aspects of self-acceptance, caregiving, and control. The ceremony symbolizes the protecting and authoritative qualities sometimes associated with mother figures, and also affords Mei and her family the means to control the power of metamorphosis into a red panda.

*Time: 01:06:00-01:10:50*

- Mr. Gao : “Just follow my directions and breathe. Now don't move from the circle. You understand? For as long as the red moon shines, the astral realm will be open, and this circle is the door.”
- Mei Lee : “What are they saying?”
- Mr. Gao : “The door will open only if we sing from our hearts. It doesn't matter what. I like TonyBennett, but your grandma, uh, she's from old school. Now, focus on their voices. Let them guide you.”
- Mr, Gao : “Oh, Sun Yee, revered ancestor, hear us now. Guide this girl through her inner storm. Louder! Louder! And return the red panda spirit from where it came!”

In the film *Turning Red* (2022), Mr. Gao appears in the red panda control ritual sequence that follows. Besides the biological mother, the Great Mother archetype often describes a caring person or thing with strong ties to the natural world, spiritual forces and family traditions (Jung, 1990). Ceremony in this case represents both the conventional and spiritual aspects of the archetype.

The dialogue **“Oh, Sun Yee, revered ancestor, hear us now. Guide this girl through her inner storm.”** emphasizes the maternal aspect of the Great Mother archetype, where mother and ancestor figures collaborate to guide the next generation as they learn about themselves and gain mastery over their inner energies. This shows how ancestors and masters work together to support Mei Lee on her spiritual journey. The traditional mother role is represented by Sun Yee, the great ancestor, who is called upon to guide and support Mei as she faces her energetic and emotional challenges. This is in line with the custom where ancestors, acting as Great Mother figures, assist their offspring in discovering their own inner strength and overcome obstacles as they grow up. The spirituality and rhythm of these conversations also highlight how the Great Mother figure can transcend generations and embrace aspects of the supernatural, helping people overcome intense inner tensions. The Great Mother archetype's central subject of cross-generational care connects with Mr. Gao's perspective on ancestors and the value of tradition. Calling on “Sun Yee, revered ancestor” to lead Mei illustrates how ancestors - especially female figures such as Sun Yee - are representations of spiritual direction and protective power. It shows how the power and importance of mother figures are transmitted spiritually through connections with previous generations in addition to their presence in the material world.

### 3.5. Battle with Giant Panda (Ming)

The concept of the great mother archetype also occurs in the scene of Ming le arguing mixed with emotion at the concert venue. Mei Lee expressed her wish that was never realized because she wanted to be a good filial daughter.

*Time: 01:15:25-01:17:50*

- Mei Lee : “All I wanted... was to go to a CONCERT!!!”
- Ming Lee : “I never went to concerts! I put my family first! I tried to be a good daughter!”
- Mei Lee : “Well, sorry I'm not perfect, sorry I'm not good enough, and sorry I'LL NEVER BE LIKE YOU!”

In this dialogue, the conflict between two generations of women is depicted, where Ming Lee's role as a mother represents the usual definition of a Great Mother who not only meets the fundamental needs of

his family, but also ensures that the society's conventions and values are upheld for future generations. A woman who puts her family first and will actually sacrifice herself to fulfill social expectations and obligations, as seen in Ming's sacrifice of willingly giving up her personal pleasures in order to fulfill her obligations as a daughter devoted to her mother and, subtly, to be a good mother to Mei. When Ming Lee says, **"I put my family first! I tried to be a good daughter!"** she shouts, showing her belief that women have a filial role to play—a characteristic of the traditional mother archetype who upholds and organizes the family order. It is also an illustration of the social pressures experienced by women in a patriarchal society, where gender roles are often related to the social and moral need to prioritize family over personal interests. While Mei Lee embodies a younger side that yearns for freedom and independence, demonstrates how many modern families are experiencing generational breakdowns as children desire increased independence and autonomy to follow their own goals and aspirations. **"Well, sorry I'm not perfect... and sorry I'LL NEVER BE LIKE YOU!"** is her response to her mother's unreasonable expectations and desires. Mei's outcry of disappointment also highlights the conflict between the high expectations placed on young people who reject conventional roles and their own aspirations to step out of their parents' shadows. The tension between the child's quest for self-discovery and the mother's drive to protect them both represents the great mother archetype in a strong way in this conflict. Fundamentally, family responsibility, traditions and expectations of women have developed significantly over the centuries, and these conflicts are a mirror of broader societal changes. Therefore, this dialog portrays two sides of the Great Mother archetype: the rebellious and freedom-seeking side of the child and the loving and selfless side of the mother. This conflict emphasizes the difficulty in finding a balance between tradition and individuality and is an important aspect of the emotional journey between mother and child.

### 3.6. Reconciliation with Mother in the Spirit Realm

In the subconscious scene Mei meets Ming when he was her age. Ming uttered several sentences of regret as well as disappointment that had been pent up in him all this time.

*Time: 01:22:13-01:25:25*

Ming Lee : "I'm sorry. It's all my fault"

Mei Lee : "What happened?"

Ming Lee : "I-I hurt her."

Mei Lee : "Who?"

Ming Lee : "My mom! I got so angry, and I lost control. I'm just so sick of being perfect! I'm never gonna be good enough for her... or anyone."

Mei Lee : "I know it feels that way. Like, all the time. But... it isn't true. Come on."

Ming said that she felt guilty that she had hurt her mother. This is a reflection of the pressure passed down from generation to generation, when a mother feels obligated to satisfy her own mother's expectations of being "perfect". When Ming states, **"I'm just so sick of being perfect! I'm never gonna be good enough for her,"** expresses the psychological tension caused by the mother's unyielding demands for perfection. This illustrates a potential trend in the Great Mother archetype, where the mother's oppressive expectations can harm and oppress herself and her children. The interaction of mother and child becomes more complicated at this point. Since Ming, as a symbol of the mothers of the past, is still emotionally affected by her own mother, the pressure and control she puts on Mei is really a reflection of her own fears and unhappiness. The Great Mother archetype often shows this cycle, where expectations and pressures are passed down from one generation to the next.

Mei said to her mother, **"I know it feels that way. Like, all the time. But... it isn't true."** with empathy and compassion. This statement shows that Mei is beginning to recognize this pattern and is trying to break it by offering comfort. This portrays how the mother-daughter relationship has the capacity to transform, with the child acting as a catalyst for change by disrupting the distressing habits that the mother figure has passed on to them.

Compared to previous research, this study provides a unique insight into the Great Mother archetype by exploring its caregiving and controlling aspects, as well as its subtle dimensions. Hardanto et al. (2019), who analyzed the Trickster archetype in *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, focused on individual archetypes rather than intergenerational conflict. Similarly, Hanifah et al. (2023) examined communication dynamics in the film *Turning Red* but did not emphasize symbolic aspects such as red pandas or rituals. In contrast, Berezna (2023) discussed the overly controlling mother in the film but did not explore spiritual relationships or ancestral influences as this study did. Warda (2019), which analyzes the Magna Mater archetype, aligns with this study by discussing the duality of mothers, but without the intergenerational focus unique to *Turning Red*. Therefore, this research contributes by connecting Jung's theory with the intergenerational trauma and cultural symbolism embedded in *Turning Red*, providing a more holistic view of the Great Mother archetype.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, the researcher concludes that the six scenes based on Carl Jung's The Great Mother Archetype in the movie *Turning Red* (2022) show that the mother's role includes affection, control, and pressure. In the scene of Ming scolding Devon and then watching Mei, we can see how a mother's protection can lead to one to several conflicts, especially when the mother's expectations conflict with the child's desire for freedom. Mei's transformation into a red panda symbolizes the identity crisis caused by the family's overly deep expectations, while the ritual of controlling the red panda and the dialogue between Mei and Ming about perfection illustrate the pressure between generations that cannot be controlled. Through spiritual rituals, the Great Mother archetype also includes the influence of ancestors as protectors and guides in dealing with emotional conflict. The great mother archetype symbolizes not only nurturing, but also the tensions and expectations that drive Mei's character growth and understanding of who she and her mother are.

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