

The Civilizational Uniqueness of Russia, Its Fundamental Values and Historical Path: The Ideas of F. M. Dostoevsky*

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Abstract. This study of Dostoevsky's ideas is in line with the search for a single Russian project of civilization development, i.e., a distinct model of ordering life (form of government, value system, etc.), and the study of the cultural and civilization characteristics of Russia and understanding the foundations of Russian national identity. This article reconstructs the project of the development of Russia presented in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. In this context, the problems of the origin of the state, secularization of the church, relations between morality and politics, church and state, state and church court, Russia and the Western countries, and the stages of civilizational development are considered. The concepts of *obshchechelovecheskoye* (general human) and *vsechelovecheskoye* (panhuman) are analyzed; three levels of understanding of the *vsechelovecheskoye* in Dostoevsky's writings are revealed. The author looks at the metaphysical foundations of Dostoevsky's project, on the basis of which the writer affirms the existence of a universal connection between people and their unity, and asserts the need for the integration of humanity on a new basis in Synthesis of Pan-humanity. The socio-philosophical views of Dostoevsky are considered in the context of the ecclesiastical and historiosophical concepts of Aleksey Khomyakov, Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolay Danilevsky, Konstantin Leontiev, and others. This article reveals the fundamental values of the Russian civilization, which, according to Dostoevsky, are brotherhood and community of all people, inextricably linked with Christian Orthodoxy, and concludes that the questions posed by Dostoevsky and the solutions he proposed remain significant to the present day: being rethought and invested with new content, they are alive in contemporary public

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consciousness. Dostoevsky offers new ways of interaction between humans, humans and society, and different social communities. The ultimate goal of his project is the transformation of personality and society.

Keywords: Russian project of civilizational development, Fyodor Dostoevsky, civilization, *vsechelovecheskoye*, *obshchelovecheskoye*, values, Christianity, politics, state, church, Russia, Europe.

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The socio-political ideas of Fyodor Dostoevsky expressed in his journalistic works as well as in his novels, letters, rare diary entries, and sketches can be seen as a Russian project of civilizational development (with its own form of governance, system of values, ideas of good and evil, the mission of man, etc.; see [24, p. 18]).

Dostoevsky saw civilization as a painful and transitional state, the growth of personal autonomous consciousness, in which a person begins to separate himself from the patriarchal unity and oppose himself to everyone. According to Dostoevsky, civilization is “the division of the masses into individuals” [7, p. 192]. The way out of this painful intermediate state is shown by the law of Christ, which prescribes free, voluntary, and conscious return to all through the abdication of one’s will and Self.

The foundation of Dostoevsky’s project is Christian metaphysics, which he revealed in an 1864 diary entry: “Masha is lying on the table. Will I ever meet Masha again”? By the side of his wife’s coffin, he reflects on life after death and the Christian commandment of love. The supreme manifestation of a person who has become a personality is the destruction of one’s Self and the surrender of the Self to all; in this final and complete “merger” of the Self with all is the “paradise of Christ.” He who has attained this supreme goal has become part of the “ultimate,” “synthetic” nature of Christ, His body. Dostoevsky’s Christian metaphysics is summed up in the apostle’s words “God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28), from which he concludes that humanity should unite in Universal Synthesis, i.e., in God. Dostoevsky thus describes this coveted goal: “All ... will feel itself and know itself forever,” “We shall be persons while never ceasing to merge in all” [7, p. 174]. Humanity is a single organism, which means that everyone is responsible for everyone.

State and Church

The church and the state are both earthly forms of human unity, but they are based on substantially different principles. In his fantasy story “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” (from *The Diary of a Writer*, 1877) Dostoevsky thus formulated the principle of the state: “How to unite all men so that each one, without ceasing to love himself above all others, at the same time should not hinder anyone and that all men might be thus living in a concordant society” [9, p. 117; 12, p. 688].

Dostoevsky maintains that the state and civilization are born of non-love. The main character of the story brings into the blissful world his opaque “I” hiding behind its own boundaries, and everything changes in his likeness and image [18, p. 322]: people diverge and become disunited, boundaries and partitions between people and communities are strengthened: “A struggle for segregation began – for disjunction, for individuality, for ‘mine and thine’” [9, p. 116; 12, p. 686]. From the moment when “*each started loving oneself more than all others,*” man came to treat himself reverently and jealously and developed a tendency to oppose oneself to all others, to rise above all the rest while at the same time belittling and humiliating others. Remembering in its heart the blissful state of happiness, mankind begins to turn to the ideas of brotherhood, humanity, and justice, and to build churches and shrines.

The state and the church can “flow” into each other: the state can transform itself into the church and the church may become the state. The Great French Revolution marked a step of the state toward the church, having proclaimed the Christian values of “liberty, equality, fraternity.” However, as Dostoevsky shows in his notes about travels in Europe (“Winter Notes on Summer Impressions”) the ideals of the French Revolution were not implemented: freedom and equality are administered by the law, which obeys the million; if a free man does not have a million, he becomes a disfranchised slave “with whom anything is done that anyone wants” [4, p. 78; 13, p. 60]. But the biggest stumbling block is the issue of fraternity.

Dostoevsky is convinced that the Western man lacks the brotherly element: Europeans embrace “the principle of individuality, the principle of isolation, of intensified self-preservation, of self-seeking,” which juxtaposes the “I” to all nature and to all other people. That is why Dostoevsky believes that the socialist has “to cajole people into brotherhood,” enticing them with the prospect of benefit and earthly comforts. This prompts the following remark from Dostoevsky: “But how can there possibly be any brotherhood if it is preceded by a distribution of shares and by determining how much each person has earned and what each must do”? Despite the voices heard in the West calling for brotherhood, it turns out that brotherhood cannot be created, because “it creates itself, is given, exists in nature”: “the need for brotherly fellowship” is rooted in a people’s character [4, pp. 79, 81, 80; 13, pp. 60, 64, 60, 64, 62].

True brotherhood does not arise from a personal “sword in hand” demand for rights, but is given by all, by the rest, and implies selfless voluntary mutual relinquishing of all – one’s “I,” one’s will, one’s rights – everything – in favor of all.

What would this brotherhood consist in if expressed in rational and conscious language? In each particular individual, without constraint or gain to himself, saying to society: ‘We are strong only when we are all together; therefore, take the whole of me if you need me, do not think of me when you pass your laws, do not worry in the slightest, I am handing all my rights over to you, and please dispose of me as you wish...’ And the brotherhood, on the other hand, must say: ‘You are giving us too much. We have no right to refuse what you have to give, since you yourself say that therein consists the whole of your happiness; but what can we do, since we, too, care unceasingly for your happiness? You too, then, must take everything from us. We shall always do all we can that you might have as much personal freedom and as much independence as possible’ [4, pp. 81, 80; 13, pp. 62, 63].

Brotherhood that has spread to all spheres of being is the *church*, whose main principle is “*Love everyone as you love yourself*.”

Vladimir Solovyov, with whom Dostoevsky was particularly close in the late 1870s when he was writing *The Brothers Karamazov*, believed that Dostoevsky was a social thinker par excellence, and his social ideal, which he expressed in his last novel, was the church [25, pp. 197-198]. The philosophers of the religious philosophical revival who took up the ideas of Solovyov and Dostoevsky considered Dostoevsky’s social ideal to be amorphous, vague, and not ecclesiastical enough (though already Konstantin Leontiev made this remark), because it ignored church hierarchy and authoritarianism [23, p. 132] (these shortcomings of Dostoevsky’s thinking were cured by Solovyov, “an artist of inner forms of Christian consciousness” [16, p. 346] by “church clarity and vigor” in his teaching about the Church, prayer, and fasting [2, p. 683]). Dostoevsky’s notions of the church as a universal organism, as a free unity of believers, had much in common with those of Aleksey Khomyakov, Yuri Samarin, and other Slavophiles. It is no accident that a preparatory note for the 1881 *Diary of a Writer* reads: “What the church is, according to Khomyakov” [11, p. 64]. On the other hand, Dostoevsky elaborates Khomyakov’s teaching on the church: the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* who discuss the topic of the state transforming itself into the church in the chapter “So Be It! So Be It!” speak about the church in general without separating the Eastern and Western churches. Vladimir Kantor [17, p. 272] believes that the prototype of the *starets* Zosima is an Orthodox ecumenist (Ivan and Alyosha call him “Pater Seraphicus,” which brings to mind Francis of Assisi, and there are prints of Italian artists and “an ivory Catholic crucifix with the Mater Dolorosa embracing it” [6, p. 87] on the walls of his cell (here and elsewhere the quotes are from a translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky).

The parties to the debate – the *starets* Zosima, Father Paisius, hieromonk Joseph, Pyotr Miusov, and Ivan Karamazov – discuss Ivan’s article about the church-communal court. Zosima argues that the state should give way to the church because, proceeding from the false mechanistic principle, it is powerless to comprehend the human personality and to transform society, as witnessed by the inefficacy of the justice system: it is unable to prevent crime any more than it can reform the criminal [21, p. 129]. Dostoevsky shows a more just, humane, and effective “alternative” justice in action in the chapter “Religious Women,” when Zosima receives women, one of whom apparently has committed a murder.

The state penitentiary system mechanically cuts off the criminal from the other members of society, deprives him of rights, and consigns him to indifference and oblivion, whereas the church does not abandon the criminal, who remains its member, and leads the criminal to reform, moral revival, and ultimately redemption. According to Zosima, it is not the state law but the law of Christ that protects, corrects, and potentially reforms the criminal by giving him a sense of guilt. As Maksim Mozin [21] shows, the key role in transfiguration is played by the sense of guilt, which can prompt the criminal to repent and hence to be reformed and forgiven. However, no repentance occurs if the crime is justified (historically, economically, or socially) by society or the criminal. Thus, according to Dostoevsky, true punishment is the sense of guilt that has a creative and transforming character.

The opposite process – the church being taken over by the state and becoming secularized – is the subject of Ivan’s other work, the poem about the Grand Inquisitor. It apparently refers not only to the Catholic but also to the Synodal Russian Orthodox church [20, p. 505; 17, p. 263]. The church that chose to become the state answered three questions that bring out the essence of history and human nature: “Someone to bow down to, someone to take over his conscience, and a means for uniting everyone at last into a common, concordant, and incontestable anthill” [6, pp. 234-235], and proceeded to “resolve and connect” in its sacraments on behalf of God, to forgive sin, to soothe conscience, and, taking up Caesar’s sword, to build a kingdom of happiness on Earth.

The Grand Inquisitor, who embodies the spirit of godlessness and theomachy, claims that freedom is unbearable because it implies responsibility for one’s actions and the need to constantly make moral choices. He argues that most people try to get rid of freedom at all costs, delegating it to the object of their worship. According to Dostoevsky, Christ’s behest is freedom. Christ’s teaching assumes that man, after becoming inwardly transformed and carrying His image in his heart, should decide for himself what is good and what is evil. Instead of usurping human freedom, Christ increased it by going beyond the framework of ancient law. In the Inquisitor’s opinion, Christ did not make people happy, but merely brought turmoil to their minds and hearts: only he can be happy who has renounced spiritual bread for earthly bread, i.e., quiet, obedient, and contented happiness. People are weak, wicked, and vile, the Inquisitor asserts. Christ saddled them with an unbearable burden by overestimating them. Thus, the Inquisitor takes the side of the spirit of lies, which does not believe in man’s heavenly mission and claims that man can only be assessed by a human and not divine measure. By renouncing the gift of freedom, man forfeits the chance of communion with God as an inner motive of actions. The church of the Grand Inquisitor offers general rules that cannot bring those who follow them to God. At the end of the poem, Christ kisses the Inquisitor on the mouth: a kiss of love by which the Bridegroom wishes to awaken His Bride, the Church (see [20, pp. 500-506]).

“The Secret of the First Step”

Dostoevsky shows how much depends on the person: one person may cause the death of many (“I debauched them all!” [9, p. 115; 12, p. 686], says the Ridiculous Man). But the reverse is also true – a personality may contain “the secret of renewal for all” [6, p. 29]. He believes that “a microscopical effort” may help “the common cause” “without awaiting a general upswing and a common initiative” [8, p. 25; 12, p. 182].

One of the reasons for the 1861 peasant reform, he argues, was that the obscure and taciturn petty clerk who sometimes could not afford “bare necessities” for his family but who in his heart of hearts had deep sympathy for the serfs, had bought freedom for several serfs during his lifetime. It seemed to be happening unbeknownst, quietly, clumsily, but it left a trace and became a window into a

new reality for a Russia without serfdom. Dostoevsky shows that it is possible “to cure the whole calamity with a microscopical, isolated instance” [8, p. 25; 12, p. 182], that “an isolated case” could resolve “the whole question” because once a movement arises from the heart it cannot be stopped. A single person can radically change the world and create (if only for an instant) paradise on Earth, i.e., bring closer the blissful state of unity of all with all:

Without these units, the sum total can never be arrived at: everything will fall apart, but these will unite everything. These suggest the thought; they inspire us with faith; they constitute a living example and, therefore, a proof. And it is not at all necessary to wait until everybody becomes as good as they, or a great many: only very few such men are needed to save the world – thus strong they are. And if so, how can one fail to hope [9, pp. 90, 92; 12, pp. 657, 659].

In accordance with the same principle of “the secret of the first step,” the *nationwide* war to liberate the Balkan Slavs languishing under the Ottoman Empire became possible, among other things, because two centuries earlier, the “quietest” Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich bemoaned the fact that he could not be a liberator of his co-religionists calling for help:

My heart grieves because of the enslavement of these poor people who are groaning in the clutches of the enemies of our faith. God, on the day of Judgment, will call me to account if, *being in a position to liberate them, I were to neglect my duty* [9, p. 103; 12, p. 672].

According to Dostoevsky, Russia waged the Eastern War of 1877-1878 not in pursuit of its political interests or benefits, but to protect and liberate the oppressed. This war, he believed, was to demonstrate that an “alliance of love and brotherhood” could bring about international unity and selflessness, it was to be a spiritual feat of self-sacrifice that unites and strengthens the Russian nation and morally elevates it through the consciousness of a duty fulfilled. In Dostoevsky’s view, a war can be useful and wholesome if it is waged in the name of an idea, in the name of the highest selfless principle and not out of “greedy usurpation” or “haughty violence” [9, pp. 100, 103; 12, pp. 667, 671].

In the writer’s opinion, the Russo-Turkish war was

the first step toward the realization of that perpetual peace in which we are happy to believe – toward the attainment *in reality* of international fellowship and of *truly* humane welfare.

Dostoevsky saw the Eastern War as the end of the previous epoch and the advent of a new era for humankind, he believed that the end of the war would usher in “new language” and “a new life”:

We shall be the first to announce to the world that we seek to achieve our own welfare not through the suppression of national individualities alien to us, but, on the contrary, that we perceive our welfare in the freest and most independent development of all other nations and in brotherly communion with them. Our nation will be amplifying the other; we shall be grafting upon ourselves their organic peculiarities, and, on our part, we shall give them our own twigs for grafting. We shall maintain spiritual intercourse with them and learning

from them, up to the time when mankind, as a grand and beautiful tree, having attained full maturity and universal brotherhood through the fellowship of all people, shades with itself the happy earth! [9, p. 100; 12, pp. 668, 667-668].

Vsechelovecheskoye

In accordance with Dostoevsky's project, a social community (state, nation, humanity) is an agent of moral relations similar to inter-personal relations. Dostoevsky writes:

In addition, politicians and wise teachers come forward: there is such a rule – they claim – such a doctrine, such an axiom that reads that the mortality of one man, of one citizen, of a single unit – is one thing, and the mortality of the state – another thing. Thus, that which in a single unit, in a single individual, is regarded as villainy, in the case of an entire state may acquire the guise of greatest wisdom! This doctrine is very popular and antiquated, but be it also damned [9, pp. 48-49; 12, p. 606].

This line of reasoning makes it possible to talk about the moral duty of a community and implies moral judgment of its actions.

Dostoevsky's project follows the mainstream of 19th-century historiosophic theories that justify history from the Christian point of view and call for an active and creative implementation of the Christian ideal in the world. In such an optimistic view, the goal and crowning of history is the Kingdom of God attained through interaction ("co-work") of God and man. This position was espoused by Fyodor Tyutchev, Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolay Fyodorov, and others who believed that Christian ideals illumine all spheres of human life and serve as a beacon (see [15]).

Among the historical-philosophical doctrines of Dostoevsky's time, the theories of Nikolay Danilevsky and Leontiev stand out. Danilevsky, the author of the theory of cultural-historical types, insists on the separation of politics, morality, and religion. In his view, applying Christian imperatives to inter-state affairs is a strange confusion of concepts: love and self-sacrifice have no place in foreign policy, while the sound notion of utility does have a place there. Although Dostoevsky described Danilevsky's book as "the future table book for all Russians" [11, p. 30] and although he shared some of its ideas, he found *Russia and Europe* disappointing in some ways because, unlike Danilevsky, he thought that Russia's mission and historic path were inseparable from Orthodoxy. Leontiev, a follower of Danilevsky, a critic of "pink Christianity" and Dostoevsky's "Pushkin speech," and author of the theory of "heptastilism," believed that the state should be "fearful, sometimes cruel and merciless" (quoted from [14, p. 86]); it has the right to punish, pursuing its ends, implementing a tough and robust policy in foreign and domestic affairs, whereas morality has a personal character. For Danilevsky and Leontiev, the laws of the existence and development of cultures accord with the biological regularities of the ontogenesis of all living things.

Unlike Danilevsky and Leontiev, Dostoevsky was convinced that the policy of selflessness, magnanimity, and truth constitutes the main strength of Russia

and its positive historical mission. Russia is capable of leading the nations toward brotherhood and universal conciliation, a union based on the principles of serving humanity in accordance with pan-human principles.

For Dostoevsky, *vsechelovecheskoye* can manifest itself at the inter-personal, inter-cultural, and inter-state levels. Speaking about the *vsechelovek*, Dostoevsky recounts “a one-off episode,” this time around about the life and death of Vasily Hindenburg, a dedicated doctor who helped anyone who came to him irrespective of nationality, religion, and financial status. In *The Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevsky gives a detailed account of the doctor’s funeral. “He was buried like a saint” (see [9, p. 90; 12, p. 656]): there was not a single person in the German church who did not come up to cry over him and kiss his feet; especially disconsolate were penniless Jewish women whom he had helped during and after childbirth, leaving them money because he saw that the families were destitute and lived in squalid circumstances. The whole city followed his coffin, psalms were sung, church bells rang, a military band and Jewish musicians played, and a Protestant pastor and a rabbi spoke over the grave unable to stifle sobs.

Like Danilevsky, Dostoevsky distinguishes the notions of *obschechelovecheskiy* and *vsechelovecheskiy*, the former being cosmopolitanism, or the erasing of the spiritual and cultural originality of nations, and the latter the unmerged and undivided unity (*sobornost’*) of original peoples based on freedom and love. However, while for Danilevsky the only true *vsechelovek* is God, for Dostoevsky, anyone can become a *vshechelovek* by discovering in oneself the pan-brotherly – i.e., true – Christianity. Dostoevsky interprets *obschechelovek* as an abstract, faceless, content-less subject who has gone beyond his nationality but has failed to join any other, whereas *vsechelovek* is involved and rooted in all folk personalities and bodies. Such a *vsechelovek*, according to Dostoevsky, was Pushkin, who could enter (as one of them) any European nationality and express its essence. *Vsechelovechnost’* enables one to “understand that the other is actually you,” a different “but therefore all the more precious and wonderful part of you” [18, p. 170]; it expands the horizon and possibilities for man, enabling one to “inhabit ... the new space of being, which ... is inaccessible without the other” [19, p. 270].

A nation, too, can implement the ultimate human ideal (*vsechelovechnost’*), which involves a synthesis of all cultures and civilizations. Pan-service is the meaning and purpose of the existence of a personality, both single and collective, national: “I did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28). The aim is not to be the first, but always be the second by serving the other: a person (or a people) surpasses itself and its history, goes beyond its limits to become a co-participant in the histories of other personalities, helping them to fulfil their potential. The meaning of the human existence is facilitating participation in the transformation of the other; the meaning of Russia’s existence is facilitating the transformation of other countries.

The issues Dostoevsky raised and wrestled with remain relevant in our day: he investigated the relation between the personality and society and inter-personal relations, turned to the problems of international and inter-state relations, proposed methods of carrying out social transformations, examined the role of

the personality in history, and affirmed the significance of “the little man” and the infinite value of personality, probing the limits of the individual and studying the problem of competition. The aim of the project of Russia’s civilizational development proposed by Dostoevsky is explication of new models and practices of relations between humans, between individuals and society, and between communities, which open up the prospect of a more complete and harmonious realization of positive moral ideals and principles that inform the Christian faith. The ultimate goal of his project is transformation of the individual and society. The foundation of this project is the concept of the unity of humanity and the existence of a universal bond between humans.

An abiding feature of the Russian civilizational project is orientation toward wholeness and synthesis, which manifests itself as the wish to absorb and combine the achievements of other cultures. According to Dostoevsky, the project of Russia’s civilizational development is based on brotherhood and universality (*vseobshchnost’*). At the level of relations within society, the essence of brotherhood is that rights are not won but given. In genuine brotherhood, there is no division between “mine” and “thine”; instead, there is “ours,” there is no division into “I” and “Thou,” but there is “we,” such that brotherhood is “not a system of mutual demands, but a system of mutual self-giving” [18, p. 197]. In this pattern of relations, the other’s need is felt as one’s own. Dostoevsky’s *vsechelovechnost’* approach assumes that each person is capable of perceiving the needs and interests of the other as one’s own; at the same time, one person (or society) does not displace another, does not compete with him, but is a new opportunity for him. In Dostoevsky’s view, the *vsechelovechnost’* in Russia’s history manifested itself as the capacity of the state to give and sacrifice itself for the sake of other peoples, as witnessed by the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. Openness, the ability to go beyond the limits of one’s own selfish existence, and universal unity are the only possible way for the existence of the individual and society.

Another constant of the Russian civilizational project is the problem of relations with the countries of Western Europe, with Europe coming across either as a beacon and model for Russia or as something that Russia rejects while absorbing the results and fruits of Western culture. For Dostoevsky, the confrontation between Russia and Europe was not geopolitical but primarily religious and moral. He believed that Christian Europe was a second motherland for Russia cherished as much as Russia itself. For him, Russia and Europe were two ideals of humanity’s development: he counters the wish of the modern West to live comfortably and happily on Earth without God with the abiding Russian hope for the imminent realization on Earth of the truth of God, the aspirations of the City to Come.

According to Dostoevsky, the Christian ideal is not a utopia, since it has already been revealed in history. Its implementation calls not for progressive external development of society or economic or political improvement, but for bringing out what potentially exists in reality.

Russia’s uniqueness, in Dostoevsky’s view, consists in its unifying potential. He and his followers proceed from the assumption that Christian values are universal, founded as they are on the ideas of equality and brotherhood of people and

nations, contributing to the solution both of internal and external tasks of society through the free cooperation of moral agents. Dostoevsky is convinced that Christianity is capable of handling any problems and answering all acute questions of the time:

Imagine that all men are Christs. Would the present wavering, confusion, and pauperism be possible? He who does not understand it does not understand anything about Christ and is not a Christian. If men did not have the slightest idea of the state and any sciences, but all were Christs, would not life on Earth become paradise at once? [5, pp. 192-193].

Many of the social and moral problems facing contemporary Russian society are the same as those faced by society in the mid-19th century: disunity among people, the confrontation between Russia and Western Europe, military campaigns, social injustices, and the crisis of traditional values. Dostoevsky's ideas live on and abide in public consciousness. Dostoevsky today is perceived as an anthropologist, psychologist, and spiritual seer who has discovered an underground dimension of consciousness. For the 20th century, he became a sinister prophet who predicted communism, materialism, totalitarianism, and slavery and showed that the ideals of freedom, humanity, and equality lead to political immorality, totalitarianism, and slavery. Sociologists, culturologists, and philosophers today continue to interpret modernity in Dostoevsky's terms, investing with new meaning his concepts of "the underground," "vsechelovek," Bobok, "Karamazovshchina," and so on (see [17; 22]), and seeking more prophecies about the future in his works.

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