

## Social Action in *Suroan* Tradition in Javanese Society

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### Abstract

*Suroan is known as a tradition which resulting from acculturation between Saka and Islamic calendar. This tradition is performed to beg blessings and protections from misery and disasters. The implementation of Suroan became a custom in society and involving some trusted agents through social actions. However, most of Suroan performed in society is not in accordance with its true meaning. Regarding with this problem, this research has purpose to obtain the action in the Suroan tradition. The method used is descriptive qualitative with the kind of research is ethnography using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The data is collected through interview and observation in Bangunharjo, Taman Sari village. The result shows that social actions performed by Bangunharjo society are: a) traditional action through Suroan implementation is performed; b) affective action in a form of burial of the goat's head, group prayers and puppet shows; c) instrument rational action in a form of physic, material, and emotional involving; d) rational action of value in a form of ubarampe. Thus, it can be concluded that Bangunharjo society still conserving Suroan tradition.*

**Key words:** *Suroan*, social action, tradition, culture

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The developed tradition in the Java society cannot be separated from the acculturation between Islamic and Hindu religion. The acculturation of Islamic and Hindu has provided new tradition in Javanese society that is dating system. The dating system used by Javanese society among centuries is Saka calendar which has developed in the reign of Sultan Agung, the king of Islamic Mataram in 1613-1646. Sultan Agung is trying to change the dating system by mix and match with Islamic calendar, thus, the result from the mix and match is in form of Java or Aboge calendar that is used up to now (Maziyah, 2010).

The belief on the dating system exists in the *Suroan* tradition which is known as tradition by the acculturation between Saka and Islamic religion. The Javanese society using dating system as guiding to some life occurrences such as determining the best time for marriage, building a house, and others.

The dating system of Javanese society is in accordance with month circulation. Javanese dating system is also using seven days in a week and *pancawara* system (name for 5 days in a week) consist of *legi*, *pahing*, *pon*, *wage*, and *kliwon* (Ruhimat & Ruhimat, 2011). The Javanese societies are having its own calculation dealing with the *pancawara* system for calculating the important days. The calculation is always combined with Gregorian calendar (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). From the *pancawara* system and Gregorian calendar, thus the *neptu* which consist of 35 days will be found (Utomo, 2005).

The grade for *neptu* for each day is:

**Table 1. the calculation of days according to *Pasaran/Pancawara* System**

No	Days	<i>Neptu</i> grade	<i>Neptu</i> of <i>Pasaran</i> days	Grade <i>Neptu</i>
1	Sunday	5	<i>Legi</i>	5
2	Monday	4	<i>Pahing Pon</i>	9
3	Tuesday	3	<i>Wage</i>	7
4	Wednesday	7	<i>Kliwon</i>	4
5	Thursday	8		8
6	Friday	6		
7	Saturday	9		
Amounts <i>Neptu</i> of Gregorian calendar (days)		4	Amounts <i>Neptu</i> of <i>pasaran</i> days	33

Source: (Gunasasmita, 2009)

This *neptu* calculation then become society references in determining the good day to perform *Suroan* tradition (usually perform in the first month in Javanese calendar). The *Suro* month has its specialty for Javanese society. Javanese society assumes that *Suro* is sacred month. In this month, Javanese society is suggested to leave any kind of unimportant celebration and is better to do self-introspection.

*Suroan* tradition in Javanese society in Bangunharjo, Taman Sari village is performed in order to hoping blessings and protection from God. The Javanese society believes that by doing *Suroan* is protected them from misery or disaster in the Bangunharjo hamlet. According to Mister SI, in the previous time, Bangunharjo is experiencing disaster called *pagebluk* (an epidemic of skin disease that occurred in a community that did not heal until one of the Javanese residents in Bangunharjo hamlet took the initiative to carry out *Suroan* celebration by sacrificing a goat to obtain healing and a blessing in life (interview with Mister SI, May 16, 2018, 16.23 in Bangunharjo).

Thus, from the incident, the society believes that if the society does not perform *Suroan*, the society will face difficulty life. *Suroan* is having different procedure and implementation in each of region. The research conducted by Latifah (2015) and Christina (2008) explain that *Suroan* implementation in Temanggung, Central Java and Banyuraden, Yogyakarta are having different date or day in *Suroan* implementation. In Temanggung, the celebration is performed in the first date of *Suro*, meanwhile, in Banyuraden, the celebration is performed in the eight day of *Suro*.

Loso, et al., (2014) and Zahra, (n.d.) also states that the implementation of *Suroan* celebration is not only different in the date or day but also the way its implementation is also different. *Suroan* in Wonosari, Malang is performed by giving *sedekah bumi* (alms of the earth), washing the heirlooms, burning ogoh-ogoh, and puppets show. In addition, in the Gorontalo, Sidomukti, *Suroan* is celebrated in the intersection and started after Maghrib prayer.

These differences in the *Suroan* celebration are inseparable from the influence of social agents who feel responsible and able to implement *Suroan* tradition. Thus, the actions that perform by the social agents will be followed by other parties. Social action can be described as an act that can influence people or an act that is influenced by people. According to Weber, action was behavior that

was meaningful, social action was action, i.e., meaningful behaviour that was oriented toward others (Truzzi, 1974).

Weber (2009) specifically classified the social action which has subjective meaningful into four types. These four types are including: 1) traditional action, 2) affective action, 3) rational action of value, 4) instrumental rational action. The first classification can be described as actions that become a hereditary custom. Hence, *Suroan* tradition as traditional action is inseparable from society action. Secondly, affective action is described as action determined by the condition and emotional orientations of the agents. Thirdly, rational action of value is action which is performed without think about the way achieving its goal. In this action, the individual do not value whether or not the chosen way is the right one to achieve the goals. Fourthly, instrumental rational value is an action that is performed by individual with the consideration of its purpose. In order to determining the choice, individual usually used the tools in achieving its purpose.

In fact, *Suroan* tradition has become a habit of society group in Bangunharjo, hamlet. However, in its implementation, *Suroan* does not in accordance with the implementation of the ancestors. According to Said (n.d.), the *Suroan* tradition usually celebrated with *tirakat* (keep awake during night), fasting, and praying. Since it is become different in its implementation in each of region, it has caused different social action in the implementation. Based on the explanation, this research has the objective to obtain deeper about the actions performed by agents in *Suroan* tradition especially in Bangunharjo hamlet.

## **2. Methodology**

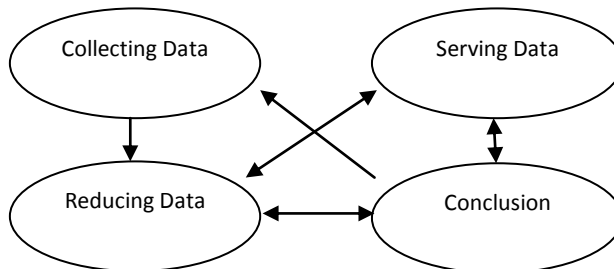
This study used descriptive qualitative methodology with ethnography as the research type. Ethnography is a systematic description and analysis on cultures of groups, society or ethnic groups which gathered from the field in a certain time (Bungin, 2003). It is done simultaneously in six stages, such as; (1) choosing ethnography project, (2) submitting questions, (3) collecting data, (4) recording, (5) analyzing data, and (6) writing report (Spradley, et al., 1997). This study was done in Bangunharjo Hamlet, Taman Sari, Gedongtataan, Pesawaran. The location was chosen due to its

different *Suroan* tradition performance with other regions. Moreover, Bangunharjo Hamlet is still performing *Suroan* tradition every year. The variable used in this study is social action of *Suroan* tradition. Social action is an action which apparently directed to other people. According to Weber (2009), social action was consisted of four types, namely; (1) traditional social action, (2) affective social action, (3) value rational social action, and (4) instrumental rational social actions. The subject of the study was taken using purposive sample based on criteria as below;

- a. The customary elder whose job is giving information on *Suroan* tradition
- b. Religious figures in Bangunharjo Hamlet
- c. Committee whose job is running *Suroan* tradition
- d. Society who perform *Suroan* tradition

The data were collected through interview and observation. The observation was done in three phases, started from descriptive observation which describe the social situation in the location, focus observation which done to find out the category such as the society's actions in performing *Suroan*, and selective observation to know the differentiation among categories. Furthermore, researchers also used books and documents which related to the problem as the secondary data.

The data analysis was done by organizing the obtained data into categories, explaining the data into units, analyzing important data, arranging or serving the data in the form of report and making conclusion to make it easy to understand. The researcher used interactive model by Huberman, et al., (2014) to analyze the data, as below;



**Figure 1. Interactive Model**

Source: (Huberman, et al., 2014)

Data reduction is a form of analyzing data which obtained through interview, observation and documentation. The data are reduced with summarizing, choosing, erasing and organizing the unnecessary data. In this stage, the researchers reduce the data by choosing, categorizing, and making abstraction from field report, interview and documentation. After reducing the data, the remaining data were prepared in the form of interview report, field report, and documentation report and given a code to organize the data. The last is making conclusion by verify the field data due to know its validity. Hence, the researchers can analyze the data faster and easy.

### 3. Result and Discussion

The condition that push Bangunharjo's societies in performing *Suroan* tradition is based on the motives that occur. The motives that occur in Bangunharjo's society are developed due to their experiences or habits. It cannot be observed in a direct way but can be interpreted in behavior in the form of stimulation and encouragement (Uno & Motivasi, 2011). Bangunharjo's motives in performing *Suroan* can be seen in table 2 below:

**Table 2. The Motives in Performing *Suroan***

No	Motives	Description
1	Culture Preserving	<i>Suroan</i> tradition is held by Bangunharjo's society and transmitted to next generations to keep maintaining and preserving the tradition. Hence it can motivate others to keep running the tradition
2	Religious	The purpose in <i>Suroan</i> tradition is to appreciate God's blessings in a year
3	Social Bonding	The performance is involving the whole Bangunharjo's societies, started from the preparation until the finale with cooperation and togetherness. Togetherness showed the attitudes of working together and helping each other. These attitudes are done spontaneously with the sense of family relation.
4	Economy	During <i>Suroan</i> tradition, Bangunharjo's society sell various kinds of things

Source: Primary Data, 2019

These motives above lead to some actions in achieving the objectives. It is similar to *Suroan* tradition in Bangunharjo's that performed based on cultural motives in forming the social system on human

actions. The social system is consisted of human activities, including interaction, relationship and friendship among each others.

This study discussed on social actions done by Javanese people in Bangunharjo Hamlet in performing *Suroan* tradition. Social action, according to Weber, is an action which able to influence people or influenced by people. Weber (2009) classified the social actions in four types; (1) traditional social action, (2) affective social action, (3) instrumental rational social action and (4) value rational social action.

### **3.1. Traditional Social Action**

Every human needs a culture as a self-defense for life survival. One of the cultures that still preserved is the tradition which done hereditary due to its advantages. Bangunharjo's society has a tradition that has never been abandoned every year, namely *Suroan*.

1. ***Performing Suroan tradition annually*** - Javanese people in Bangunharjo Hamlet still preserving *Suroan* tradition. *Suroan* tradition was held since the hamlet established until now. One of the informants said that *Suroan* tradition is still held annually as a form to maintain the culture from elder who found Bangunharjo Hamlet" (L/WO/8/7/2019). Bangunharjo's societies believe that *Suroan* tradition is a heritage from the ancestor that should be maintain. Pi added that *Suroan* tradition teach about kindness. Many values are contained within its performance, such as maintaining *sillahturahim* (family relationship), strengthening intimacy and togetherness between families (5/P/Pi/9/7/2019). In *Suroan* performance, there is a sense of helping each other to fulfill the needs and purposes. All people are work together every year to maintain *Suroan* tradition in order to not be left behind. For Bangunharjo's societies, *Suroan* is a characteristic or identity for its Hamlet.
2. ***Performing Suroan tradition in Suro*** - *Suroan* is performed every *Suro* in the beginning of the year in Javanese calendar and held on *Kliwon*. As the informant said, *Suroan* is held annually on *Kliwon* in *Suro* (3/L/So/8/7/2019). However, the reason why *Suroan* is held on *Kliwon* is unknown but people keep doing it since it is what has been exist from the past. *Kliwon* is seen as *jengunge dina* (the queen of the day). There are some sacredness in *Kliwon*, including (1) perfect

time to hope, utter and value many kind of life problems, (2) time to suggest own self to enter inner peace, (3) the opening time for *ijabah* (something to be granted) for hopeful people when praying to The Creator, (4) time that has Creator's power.

3. ***Unaltered Suroan tradition procedure*** - The procedures in performing *Suroan* are not changing from past until present. As the performing time which done on *Kliwon*, in *Suro* and the performing procedure which still using goat's head as the main requirement. This is in accordance with Wo, one of the informants, who said that the performance was held by cutting goat's head in the morning, and then burying the head in crossroad, while the meat is cooked and given to people in *riungan* event (gathering event) (1/L/Wo/8/7/2019). Another informant, Po, said that there should be goat's head for every *Suroan* tradition because it is the tradition that has been existed hereditary. Thus, goat's head is always exist, even just one, in every *Suroan* (4/L/Po/9/7/2019). This showed that Bangunharjo's societies are still believed that there will be a disaster if *Suroan* tradition is not performed as it is.
4. ***Giving Education to committee*** - Young generations are involved in *Suroan* tradition as the committee with expectation that the tradition can be run everlastingly. Yi said that young generations are asked to help in performing *Suroan* tradition as a preparation for the future. They will get education on what is *Suroan* and how *Suroan* tradition is performed through their participation as committee. Therefore, *Suroan* tradition can be performed continuously until indefinite time.

### **3.2. Affective Social Action**

Bangunharjo's societies claimed that *Suroan* is not only performed based on the ancestor preservation but as a form of honor and appreciation to God because He was given a cure to Bangunharjo's societies that had been stricken by mass disease. The appreciation of Bangunharjo's societies is applied to *Suroan* tradition with actions as below:



### 1. Cutting Goat's Head

In the past, the elders tried to get rid of plague by holding some rituals. However, none of the rituals showed any recovery until they performed *tasyakuran* (appreciation to God) by cutting goat's head. They were cutting and burying the goat's head on crossroad during *Suro* in *Kliwon* as a form of appreciation to God. As the informant said that, "Suroan is held because Bangunharjo's people had been stricken by a disease, then they were performing *tasyakuran* by cutting a duck in order to get rid of the disease but it did not work until they were performing *tasyakuran* on *Suro* in *Kliwon* with cutting goat's head and burying in crossroad" (2/L/Ln/8/7/2019).



**Figure 2. Goat's slaughtering**

Source: Self documentation, 2019

*Suroan* tradition is performed as an appreciation to God for curing the disease plague. It also performed to communicate with God either to say thank you for everything which has been given in the past year or to ask for everything to run smoothly and even better than last year. As one of the informants said, that *Suroan* tradition is done as an appreciation to God and get blessings (W/HS/8/7/2019). Furthermore, Wo explains that goat's head was buried as a gratitude to Allah for creating earth and living things (Wo/8/7/2019).

The statements from HS and Wo described the position of *Suroan* is not merely as the heredity tradition but also as a relationship between human and the Creator. Human express his thankfulness for the God's blessing in one year by holding *Suroan*. Nevertheless, not all people accept the tradition, some of them reject it. According to Bangunharjo's society, in the past, there were some citizens who reject the celebration of *Suroan* tradition because it considered as *musyrik* (a person who does not believe on the oneness

of God) and believe on myth. Po explained that the citizen who reject *Suroan* were incomers not the indigenou. He also added that the incomers probably did not know about the history from *Suroan* tradition, therefore they reject it. But now, all of the citizens are accept and even support the tradition (4/L/Po/8/7/2019). Moreover, Pi stated, "If people thought that the tradition is giving an offer to devil or demon, I absolutely disagree with that. That thought is owned by somebody who had wrong idea on the true meaning of the tradition done by the ancestors. This tradition is only directed to God, not devil or demon" (W/Pi/10/7/2019).

Therefore, the tradition which has been done by the ancestor is directed only to a God as a media to express gratitude for everything given to Hamlet's citizens. If there is a citizen who worship and offer offerings during *Suroan* tradition to something except God is an offense or fault.

## **2. *Riungan* (Gathering Event)**

The purpose of *riungan* during *Suroan* tradition is a form of citizens' appreciation toward God who has given a gift, such as life's security, prosperity and earnings. Thus, people need to save a little part of their earning to be given to others. In *riungan* event, people pray to God for all kindness and pray for the ancestors so that their sins were forgiven and their deeds were accepted. *Riungan* is done in the afternoon after Ashar (the time when the sun has not turned dark yellow) in the house of Community Leader. Before performing *riungan*, some figures are giving some greeting. The first greeting is done by the Committee Leader who provide reports of income and outcome of *Suroan* funds. The next greeting is delivered by the Community Leader of Bangunharjo Hamlet, and the last greeting is given by the Village Chief of Tamansari. After delivering greetings, *Rois* (an elder or a chief) is delivering speech for 7 minutes and ended up with prayer to express gratitude to God and ask for safety, protection and blessing. *Rois* also pray for the ancestors to be in His protection and forgiveness. After the prayer is done, people are welcome to eat the food that has been served. The food has meaning and message for human that depicted through the ingredients used within.

### 3. Puppet Performance

Puppet performance is always done as the closing event in *Suroan* tradition. The performance is started on night after *riungan* with accompaniment of Javanese songs and gamelan. Puppet is chosen as the closing performance because it is one of the cultures that often staged in Indonesian culture.



**Figure 3. Puppet Performance in Bangunharjo's Hamlet**

Source: Self Documentation, 2019

The values within the puppet's art have been proved to popularize the life guidance, norms, and variation of government sectors. Puppet is an entertainment media which able to carry every human life aspects, human thought including things related to ideology, politic, economic, social, culture and law or security defense.

#### 3.3. Instrumental Rational Social Action

*Suroan* has defined as interaction tool between societies in the Bangunharjo hamlet. The *Suroan* tradition is successfully performed due to good cooperation between residents of the Bangunharjo hamlet. Hence, the action performed to make the successful implementation of the *Suroan* tradition include:

##### 1. Material Action

The society role in *Suroan* tradition is quite important. Therefore, it will not be implemented if the society do not involving directly in the celebration. The involvements of the society are material involvement in a form of money or supporting tools that can be used in *Suroan* tradition. The informant "Po" stated that, "the society of Bangunharjo, hamlet is participated in *Suroan* by paying tuition amounted IDR 35,000 for each family (KK) that is collected to the committee in each

neighborhood.” (4/L/PO/8/7/2019). According to the informant, sometimes the society of Bangunharjo hamlet is also donating as like coffee, sugar, tea, or even cigarettes for the guest or the society itself.

The obstacle facing by the committee is that there are some residents who do not pay tuition because they have not been able to. In this case, the committee’s policy is invite to pay sincerely without considering the specified amount. It is delivered by one of the informant, “the committee has its own policy or those who not able to pay based on the specified amount. But, the amount of people who not able to pay is only three families, so sometimes it does not matter.” (L/GN/11/7/2019).

Another obstacle facing in *Suroan* is that no material support from village government, only moral supporting by the presence in *Suroan* tradition. It is stated by the informant, “the government never provides supporting material, but they support by the presence in *Suroan*. I have asked to the government about the material but it remain no material supporting, maybe it is due to the low budget from government or anything else, I just do not know.” (4/L/PO/8/7/2019).

## 2. Physical Action

Besides material action, the society is also helping for the sake of *Suroan* successful. The society is helping start from pre-implementation including the making of stage, preparation, and cleaning the venue.



**Figure 4. The society of Bangunharjo is helping each other in *Suroan* preparation**

Source: Self Documentation, 2019

The women are also supporting the *Suroan* by helping each other in cooking the food and beverages for *riungan* (gathering event). The cooking process usually conducts in the hamlet head mother, community leader of Dusun Bangunharjo. The activity of the women

begin by going to the market to buy cooking needs and the evening before the event in the morning the cooking activity starts until it is finished.



**Figure 5. The women while cooking in *Suroan* tradition**

Source: Self Documentation, 2019

### **3. Emotional Action**

In the *Suroan* celebration, all of the society is helping sincerely without any enforcement. It is due to the emotional bounding between the society under the same culture and region. As stated by the informant EH, “every society always involving in the *Suroan* tradition, they are participated without expecting anything. They are sincerely helping for the sake of *Suroan* celebration successfulness in each year.” (W/EH/11/7/2019). Moreover, Informant HS added that *Suroan* tradition is must, even though it is not an original tradition from the region. HS is newcomer in Bangunharjo hamlet, but HS is always involving in *Suroan* tradition.

Without the role of society, it is impossible the tradition can be everlasting up to now. The society has giving the mental and emotional supporting to celebrate *Suroan* tradition. The emotional participation of the society is also actively helping conserving the *Suroan* tradition.

Thus, there is no enforcement for all of the society to involve in the celebration. But, the society is sincerely helping without expecting anything. The society realizes about the important of *Suroan* tradition so that the God’s blessing and protection will not losing.

### **3.4. Value Rational Social Action**

The implementation of *Suroan* is a sacred ritual or Javanese community who still believing in the majesty of *Suro*. Therefore, the implementation is always performing in every year. The society still believes that if the *Suroan* is not implemented, then there will be disaster or misery in their life. In fact, the implementation of *Suroan* is needed extra cost for the celebration as like the making of *Ubarampe*.

#### **1. The Making of Ubarampe**

*Ubarampe* is a complement in Suroan tradition. In some traditions performed by the society in Java, there is value expressions that are contained in the offerings used. As like Suroan tradition in Bangunharjo which also using offerings described as follows:

##### **a. Ayam Inkung (Inkung Chicken)**

*Inkung* is Kampong chicken cooked and served as a whole. In some of traditions in Java, *Inkung* become the part of “*ubo rampe*” or offerings’ complement served to complete the serving of offerings. *Inkung* is described as tribute to Prophet Muhammad. In addition, *Inkung* is interpreted as unborn baby, thus is deemed not to have any mistakes or still be pure. *Ube rampe inkung* then interpreted to purify the guest in the *tasyakuran* (appreciation to God).

##### **b. Bubur Merah-Putih (Red-White Porridge)**

The red porridge is a compliment in offerings made from rice, giving salt seasoning and is mixed with palm sugar for giving the red color. The white porridge is also a compliment in offerings made from rice and giving salt seasoning. The red-white color is interpreted as a tribute for ancestors in order to get blessing and symbol of human creation.

##### **c. Pisang Raja (Cooking Banana)**

Cooking banana is symbolized as a king who can uphold all his people and assumed that human has the characteristic as a king who is fair and wise.

##### **d. Wedang Lima (Five Drinks)**

*Wedang Lima* or five flavor drinks including sweet tea, bitter tea, sweet coffee, bitter coffee, and mineral water is used as a symbol for five days *pancawara/pasaran* (*Legi, Pahing, Pon, Wage, Kliwon*), seven days in Gregorian Calendar (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday), twelve months of Javanese calendar

(*Sura, Sapar, Mulud, Bakda Mulud, Jumadilawal, Jumadilakir, Rejeb, Ruwah, Pasa, Sawal, Dulkaidah and Besar*) and *windon* eeight years (*Alip, Ehe, Jimawal, Je, Dal, Be, Wawu and Jimakir*). This tradition is aimed so that humans able to pray for their own salvation.

**e. *Jajanan Pasar* (Snacks)**

*Jajanan pasar* is snacks that are sale in market, such as cake and bread. The meaning of *Jajanan Pasar* is aimed for unity and harmony among societies.

**f. *Tumpeng* (ceremonial dish of yellow rice served in a cone shape)**

*Tumpeng* is symbolized as a form of gratitude to the God. Besides, there is another believe as refer to the cone shape of *Tumpeng*, mountain is will provide abundant natural resources.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the result and discussion explained above, it can be conclude as follows:

- a. *Suroan* tradition is still preserved in Bangunharjo hamlet in every *Suro* as form of *tasyakuran* (appreciation to the God) for the blessings and abundance that has been obtained by residents for the past year.
- b. The *Suroan* celebration is divided into two classifications that held sequentially as communal and entertaining celebration.
- c. The *Suroan* celebration has encouraged social action of Bangunharjo, hamlet. There are four social actions including:
  - 1) Traditional action: the society doing *Suroan* celebration in every year without changing the procedures implementation
  - 2) Affective action: the action implemented in burying goat's head, praying together, and held puppet show
  - 3) Instrumental rational action: the action implemented in physic, material, and emotional supporting.
  - 4) Rational action of value: the action is implemented in the making of *ubarampe*.

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