Community-based Videos in Vietnam

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Abstract: Since the mid-1960s, community groups have been empowered to participate in anthropological research. This same movement also took place in ethnological filmmaking. Roles of filmmakers have been shifting from making single-authored films to collaboratively created films and later on to subject-generated films that are also termed community-based films, indigenous directed films or informant-made films. In Vietnam, Vietnam Museum of Ethnology (VME) was the first museum that approached this new way of making films. Beginning in 2006, VME staff were trained in the process of making community-based films and since then, this method of making films has been applied in a number of projects. By looking at this process, the author points out that VME gained initial success by developing this type of film, which then greatly impacted the work of other national museums and prestigious research institutes in Vietnam. This fact also manifests the democratisation process within the context of active changes in Vietnam's society.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, a number of anthropologists in Vietnam have applied the community-based filmmaking methodology and achieved certain successes. Based on the established community theory, researchers who include anthropologists, film directors and professional researchers, try to find new ways to suit the real conditions in Vietnam in order to produce films that serve the public. The films are used for research and teaching in the field of visual anthropology.

The transition from theory to practice in community-based filmmaking demonstrates the process of empowerment from researchers to community groups in the context of the postmodern theory that promotes the multiplicity of voices in research. Yet, the process of empowering researchers to community groups in the community-based approach to filmmaking has also encountered many barriers such as the limited sources of funds, time of implementation and awareness of managers... that I would like to point out in this study.

2. Community-based video: a worldwide practice

Community-based video (CBV) is a new film making approach in visual anthropology. Advances in small sized, affordable digital video recording and editing equipment have created new possibilities for voice and image recording. In recent years, community based videos have been produced in several countries, especially in the United States of America (US), Canada, China, and Vietnam. CBV has contributed to visual anthropology, creating new trends in anthropological research and ethnic studies [1, p.204].

In the mid-1960s, in anthropology, the empowerment of community groups by researchers took place. At this time the power of the researcher shifted to recognise the primary role of the community. This is closely linked to postmodern anthropological theory.

In ethnographic filmmaking, the same shift applies: copyright in ethnographic films moved from single-authored to collaboratively authored films and then to subject-generated films. Films where the filmmaker is the subject of the film are also known by various names such as community-based films or indigenous-directed film or informant-made films [2, p.467], [3, p.202].

In recent decades, the community, as the subject of a film, demands the right to self-expression in ethnographic and anthropological films. They argue that the right and ability of outsiders to accurately describe a race or a community group should be reconsidered. When making a film, some community groups claim that their misrepresentation by outsiders is huge. Only members from within the group itself can correctly interpret and explain their lives and their stories. Actually, these film subjects have gradually gained the right to represent their own self-image and have the opportunity to talk about themselves. From being consulted to being invited to cooperate and more fully collaborating in many films, film actors are clearly aware of their interests and are demanding more agencies in the making of the film. They want themselves, their communities, as well as the stories of individuals and their communities, to be presented in a way that is different from how the media often speaks about them. From this situation, new films appear in which filmmakers talk about themselves or their communities.

In fact, films made by indigenous informants can provide a comprehensive view of selected activities in communities, especially when these films are used to record activities naturally as they happen.

In 1966, Worth and Adair began experimenting with such films. They taught a group of Navajo men and women how to make their own films on whatever subject they wanted and to produce a "stream of images" that could be analysed "under the structure of images and cognitive processes used to make those images" [2, pp.479-480].

Worth and Adair hypothesised that filmmaking by indigenous people (in this case, the Navajo) would reveal people's consciousness and values, which may be hidden so that others cannot observe or analyse them; especially when the studies entirely depend on verbal communication that is constructed based on the researcher's perception.

Awakenings and values can be hidden inside, unseen or indistinguishable when

surveys are completely dependent on language interfaces, especially when studies are done in the manner of the investigator. Within two months, the Navajo people practiced short exercises and made seven silent films. People analysed these films and showed them to the Navajo community, and then they became popular and became typical of the experimental format. "Our study of Navajo films clearly indicates that what the Navajo show us through their films is different from what anthropologists suggest in their films. Even in the film about embroidery, the Navajo focused largely on scenes we do not see in an anthropologist's film about the same subject" [2, pp.479-480].

In 1987, in the US, the American Documentary Film Association launched a video project in the village, Video in the Village, to develop and encourage Indians to produce their own images. The project focused on making video as a tool for Indians of a group named the Xavantes to express their views of the world: the people themselves documented their memories of their rituals and ceremonies in a purposeful way. This process helped them understand the importance of the image; it also explained why they learned to film. For them, camcorders and pictures were a gift for everyone, including the elderly, the young and the women, especially for the present generation. They said that their memory was very short and they had to keep the image so that their children could see it later. Over time, their children and grandchildren will have new perceptions: the video is very important because it can help maintain the Xavantes' language and rituals. Importantly, the natives of Xavantes

wanted to make a film so that the majority of white people could understand how they truly live. White people often assume the Xavantes are very lazy, or think the Xavantes have a lot of land or even believe in the myth that the Xavantes can sleep while standing. "It is a long process of community self-preservation of culture, and the Xavantes want to show their culture to the non-Indians so they can be seen and understood. The filmmaker is not an individual, but a community of Xavantes; they want to let more people understand their history" [5].

In 2004, Wendy Erd (Pratt Museum, Alaska, US) collaborated with local indigenous Sugpiaq Alutiiq people, who live in a small village in Alaska to produce a film titled "Kiputmen Naukurlurpet". (Let it Grow Back). The film is about the disappearance of the community language in the process of integration with white people. Through this film, the community expresses regret and deep loss that their ethnic language is gradually disappearing and the need for the community to preserve its language. They equate their language with their cultural heritage and hope it can be taught to the next generation.

Thus, it can be said, community-based video has appeared in the world since the 1960s. It is also associated with the shift from "speak for" and "speak on behalf" to "speak with" and "speak oneself". It's a step-by-step empowerment shifting from researcher/ director to community group; the copyright (author's copy) has also gradually transferred to the local group. This trend is shaping up to become a strong current in community-based filmmaking, initially in the United States, and then spreading to other countries such as China, Canada and Vietnam.

3. Community-based video practiced at the VME

To date, much of the research on the media in Vietnam has focused on the role of newspapers, television, radio, publishing, and government issued magazines all of which is subject to disscusions between the author (s) and the editor (s) on the contents so as to provide the precise information to the public stricly control information before releasing it to the public.

These established media outlets have been heavily influenced by specific administrative bodies in order to meet particular national objectives. Therefore, there is a focus on a scripted approach to the presentation of information in order to guide public opinion. For example, filmmaking in Vietnam is structured in such a manner that, overall, the film studio is in charge, followed by the film director, the script editors, the camera person, then the main actor/actress and others. Film ideas and content always illustrate topics of current issues and events. There are very few films or videos that are concerned with the feelings and lives of specific communities. In this context, the collaborative, bottom-up approach of community-based videos is a new means of communication.

Community-based video also uses new film-making methods. It is a collaboration between the researcher, who takes on the role of facilitator with a "seed" idea, and the people in specific communities, who take active roles in the full film-making process. The community members shoot film, discuss community concerns, express their opinions and attitudes, edit video contents and structures and provide key

feedbacks in the creation of the rough cuts and final films. Original footage and rough cuts of the videos are screened to gather community feedback that will be incorporated into the final cuts of the videos. These videos present the views and opinions of insiders without the influence of outsiders. They are a self-expression of the specific community created from their stories and views, real stories in real contexts. Therefore, the goal is to present a true portrait through the real experiences of the real lives of specific communities. Broader issues and generalisations can be raised by the researchers, but the specific illustrations, stories, and viewpoints are contributed and chosen by the communities [1, p.205].

Post-modern anthropologists have called for a more "collective and participatory" approach in research, and dialogue in alternative to monologue. That is to say, an anthropological study should be conducted by a group instead of one anthropologist - a popular approach today. As such, the research subjects also have the opportunity to talk with the researcher.

A distinct point of post-modern anthropologists is that they oppose the construction of a common theory of cultural evolution. They view culture as an ever-changing set of meanings constructed by social members. It therefore requires continuity in research and interpretation. The lessons learnt from participating in discussions with the people are the activities of community-based anthropology.

Access to the community not only provides anthropologists with skills but also methods of thinking and cooperation with the subjects as local people or cultural bearers. It also gives the anthropologist the

insider's perspective. The most important question which many in other theoretical systems will make is power or authority. This is not political power but the right to speak in monographs.

In other words, the voice derives from postmodernist view, which points out that before anthropologists used their power as researchers to write about others. Meanwhile, the others do not have the power or voice over the writings about themselves. An outsider, even with good fieldwork, cannot fully become an insider. Thus, postmodernist anthropologists have set up a methodology to coordinate the researcher and the researched in making of anthropological products.

Through this, the power/voice of the insiders are shown in the product itself. The role of a researcher is reduced, but authenticity and multiple voices are more present. Postmodern anthropologists point out that an anthropologist should act as an editor rather than a writer. And it can be said that community-based films demonstrate the democratisation in sharing the power of researcher with community groups through making films on the issues that interest the community.

3.1. Looking for a new approach

During the last years of the 20th century and in the early 21st century, Vietnam' ethnographic research were in the tendency to shift from ethnological to anthropological studies, which can be seen in the establishment of the Faculties of Anthropology in the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), part of Vietnam National University, or VNU, Ho Chi Minh City, and in the USSH

in Hanoi, which is part of VNU, Hanoi. That is not just a change in the appearance or the names, but actually a change in the thinking, in the research and teaching of ethnography and anthropology towards the common trend of the world. During the period, the Vietnamese anthropological research sector developed more in-depth subspecialties such as museum anthropology, urban anthropology, gender, and medical anthropology, etc. Visual anthropology was also born in line with the trend. And community-based films have also been part of visual anthropology and have grown along the trend [5, p.177].

Right from its inauguration (1997), the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology (VME) was one of the first museums in Vietnam to introduce the use of (video component) materials in their exhibitions to the public. Museum visitors not only view the exhibits but also experience the life of the object in the context of contemporary society. For example, in addition to the objects depicting a corner of Dong Van Market (Ha Giang Province) by Mai Thanh Son et al, there are implements of the buyers and sellers of goods such as spoons, wooden bowls, baskets, cloth, and clothes of the Hmong people. Visitors can see the video of a very lively market of ethnic minorities in Dong Van. In another area, beside the corner of the exhibit display representing the funeral of the Muong people, visitors can view a video of the whole process of a Muong funeral performed on the edited material. However, these video clips are still considered to be in addition to the artifacts and/or reproducible corners of museum exhibits.

In the year 2000, VME took a new step in ethnographic filmmaking. With funding from the Ford Foundation, the museum's researchers filmed the "Story of Tham Roc Puppetry" by La Cong Y et al., describing the revitalisation of the practice of puppetry of the Ma Quang group, the Tay, in Dinh Hoa, Thai Nguyen. Using a new method to make this film, for the first time, the characters in the film spoke for themselves and told about their own experiences in the process of reviving puppetry. Although it was not a community-based filmmaking method, it experimented with a new approach as filmmakers used the local puppeteer's voice as the main narrator of the film. His voice leads the story and expressed the right for the community to interpret itself. This marked the beginning of a new approach to filmmaking at VME.

3.2. Meeting a new method of filmmaking

In 2006, VME exhibited "Life in Hanoi during the Subsidy Period" (1975-1986). The exhibit included a filmmaking component that explored the lives of Hanoians during the difficult years of the subsidy period. At that time, Wendy Erd (Pratt Museum, Alaska, US), a community-based video expert, came to VME to seek opportunities for cooperation and application of new methods of filmmaking for Vietnam at that time. She offered a community-based video-making approach to making films on subsidised topics. This staff training created a strong partnership and its success extended throughout subsequent projects. It is worth mentioning that the journey of this new discovery is linked to the projects and activities within the framework of VME.

Theoretically, the community-based video process can be briefly understood as follows:

Film making process

To explain the process of making a community-based video, in this study I want to compare how community-based and traditional films differ.

Traditional films	Community-based videos
- Writing a literary script	-The idea of the film comes from the community/decided by the community
- Writing a review and shooting images according to the literary script	- Film content cannot be envisioned from the beginning
- Film content is envisioned from the beginning	-The film will become rambling if noone knows how to guide the community to discuss issues of community interest
- Editing the film content in line with the subjective opinion of the director	- The film lacks professionalism
- The director has the right to choose a character, the story's content of words and scenes	- Film vividly reflects the reality of life, rich in emotion, close to the audience
- Professional films of high quality	
- The film lacks objectivity, less vivid does not reflect the reality of life	

Community identification ⇒ Finding and establishing relationships ⇒ Initial relationship ⇒ Cooperative agreement ⇒ Preliminary planning ⇒ Listening and exploring ⇒ Searching for seed ideas ⇒Engage with the community listening for ideas and direction, discuss, test ⇒ Community acceptance, community change ⇒ Community guides discussion ⇒ Help the community visualise ⇒ Gather materials ⇒ Organise the story ⇒ Discussion with community ⇒ First draft ⇒ Share first draft with community ⇒ Discussion ⇒ Last product ⇒ Introduction to community⇒ Get feedback.

For nearly a decade, since 2006, community-based filmmaking has been successfully applied in VME, influencing and spreading elsewhere in society, and gradually has become recognised as an important achievement.

In 2006, the VME completed two films "A Time to Remember" by Nguyen Truong Giang et al and "Hanoi a Difficult Time" by Pham Minh Phuc et al with the participation of two community groups respectively: the first group of 18 people varied in age and gender and lived in different districts of Hanoi; the second group consisted of 12 people, of different ages and sexes, who lived in an old quarter of Ha Noi on Hang Buom street. The groups were invited to come together to reflect on their experiences and on their flexibility and creativity in overcoming the difficulties during Vietnam is edsubsidised times.

Using community-based filmmaking, for the first time in a museum in Vietnam, community groups engaged in key conceptualising for the film, identifying the

subjects and expressing ideas in their own voice. Community members gave feedback through a process of collaborative editing, further empowering their voices.

From 2006 to 2009, the success of these two community films was reproduced using similar methodology in Community Visual Education and Communication: A Collaborative Vision. In this project VME, in collaboration with Yunnan's Bama Mountain Culture Research Institute and Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS), was funded by the Ford Foundation to conduct a community-based training and filmmaking project with 7 ethnic minority communities living along the Vietnam-China border.

Community based trainers Wendy Erd: Pratt Museum Alaska, Zeng Qingxin: Yunnan Provincial Museum and Zhang Zhongun: YASS paired a researcher from the dominant culture with a community- based indigenous village member. Over the course of several training sessions community-based films were completed and screened in Hanoi and Kunming. It became a very important part of the Yunnan Ethnographic Film Festival (Yunfest 2009). The films shown at the festival included: We Thai People (Vietnam, 35 minutes, Thai community in Hanoi) (by Trinh A Sinh and Nguyen Truong Giang); Nhay boi Festival in the village of Tham Ve (Vietnam, 40 minutes, Dao community in Ha Giang) (by Ban Van Thach and Pham Minh Phuc); What we will do? The change of Loushui village (China, 38 minutes, Mosuo community) (by Cao Honghua, Xie Chunbo et al); Soul of rice (China, 33 minutes, Ha Nhi community) (by Meilan, Lu Bin et al); Blue Hmong funeral in Lannidong Village, Wenshan

(China, 53 minutes, Hmong community) (by Hou Wentao, Yan Enquan et al); Our Jiabi Village (China, 50 minutes, Tibetan community) (by Lurong Jicheng, Cili Zhuoma et al); A day with fun games (China, 32 minutes, Hmong community) (by Wang Zhongrong, Yang Yuanjie et al). Remarkably the films approached many issues of contemporary life without a prewritten script. This was a refreshing way of anthropological film making as it valued equal cooperation between anthropologists and local people; supporting indigenous communities to speak in their own voices, to raise awareness of diversity and to preserve cultural heritage in the context of rapid socio-cultural transformation.

After the series was presented, VME and Yunnan's Bama Mountain Culture Research Institute and Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences organised mobile screenings and dialogues as project filmmakers traveled between the participating villages screening the finished films in each location. These fieldtrips deepened the dialogue on cultural issues between the project's participants and diverse communities in the village filmmaking sites. This was a rather unique form of scientific activity organised by organisations on the occasion of the launch of community films. Through this activity, many participants in the workshop had the opportunity to listen to the opinions of the local people about these films as well as to learn about their desire to preserve and promote the value of their traditions.

Associate Professor, PhD. Nguyen Van Huy highly appreciated this new way of making these films. The former director of the VME and the first person to have the idea of making a community based-video project at the museum, PhD. Huy said: "Through exhibited films, we can assert that community-based films have a prominent advantage of being able to access many problems of contemporary life from the perspective of very ordinary people. Modern technical equipment such as video cameras and video editing equipment are not a barrier to those people who have no experience with technology but rather offer a very effective means of telling other people what they want to say" [1].

4. The expansion of a new method of filmmaking

From 2009 to 2012, following the success of the filmmaking project with seven ethnic minority groups in Vietnam and China, a new project called "Community-based Media in Vietnam: First Voice Stories" was sponsored by the Ford Foundation. The core members of the project were staff from VME, in collaboration with TV journalists and editors from Vietnam's Television Channel 5 (VTV5) Peter Kaufmann and Wendy Erd, two US experts on community-based (CB) video approaches, were the project's trainers. The project's plan was to share a CB approach with core participants who would in turn teach the values and skills of a community-based approach to museum researchers and television reporters based in four regions of Vietnam: Hanoi, Ha Giang (Northern Mountains), Kon Tum (Central Highlands) and Ca Mau (the South). The project aimed to develop VME and VTV5 as resource centres for other

agencies and to disseminate this approach. Through the project, the implementers' goal was to train project participants so that they could effectively practice a community-based approach and in turn teach this philosophy/methodology to others.

The project also expected to form a new form of communication: a combination of authentic community voice and the expertise of media people and museum researchers who together could produce community-based films of high quality.

The project was implemented in two phases. In the early stages, core members first became practitioners themselves then they were trained to become trainers in this approach. Core members were divided into three groups, each working with one of three community groups in Hanoi: students who worked as tutors; women from the province who collected materials to recycle; and a group of young people who danced hip hop on the street. Researchers at VME and VTV5 editors served as technical support, guidance and elicitation with these three urban communities. Each community group not only discussed ideas and wrote content, but also directly shared and decided on the selection of stories, images, and suggestions about the structure, layout of the film as well as the images. They were also the ones who named and choose music for films, wrote articles, and created their own museum exhibits. The showcase and the three films introduced on this occasion were the products of close collaboration between the three community groups and the core staff of the project.

The latter phase continued to be implemented in Hanoi and also expanded to three provinces. The core cadres in the earlier phase then became trainers who trained professionals at local museums and television stations. Using an experience-based learning model in the training courses, members in the provinces both learned methodology and were able to apply their knowledge in the fieldwork with a specific local community group. They choose to make community-based films.

Within 2 years of local project implementation, community-based films were produced: 9X Gongs (Bana ethnic minorities community in Kon Tum village, Kon Tum city) (by Dang Van Hien et al.), Be Khe- my life (LGBT group in the city Ca Mau) (by Nguyen Thi Thao et al.) and Stories from a Stony Land (Hmong group in Dong Van, Ha Giang) (by Pham Van Phuoc et al). "These films open up new insights, perceptions and public acceptance. Community-based films and displays open doors to the voices of communities revealing things that the public does not understand about them. When the community tells true stories, audiences listen, to real voices, to the real story, transforming public perception to foster tolerance, curiosity and connection" [4, p.22].

An important point in this project was for project members to pay more attention to the community-based process rather than focus on the final product of the project. From the senior experts to the core members of the museum and from the television station to the community participants, everyone went through self-study and self-discovery through learning, doing, and teaching.

The impact of these films strongly changed the perception of the audiences. An officer in Ca Mau when watching the film about homosexuals felt less stigma and more empathy with this marginalised group. After watching a film about Bana teenagers, a teacher, despite standing on the podium for 25 years and teaching some of his students who were the characters in the film, he confided it was the first time he knew about their personal lives and their dreams. He realised he needed to pay more attention to them.

The trend of using community filmmaking is not limited to VME, considered the starting point for this kind of film in Vietnam, but has spread to other museums and research institutes.

In 2008, the Vietnam Women's Museum used a community-based filmmaking method to produce two films, Story of Dzung and Vendor-Voices (by Bui Thu Thuy et al), for a temporary exhibit. Staff based in research worked with community groups for 9 months. The film's narrative is the true story of street vendors who come from the provinces make a living in Hanoi: they gather, take refuge and share the benefits with each other in their daily lives.

Most recently (in 2013 and 2014), the Institute of Social and Environmental Economics (iSEE) applied a community-based video method in working with a Hmong group in Giang Tra and Ma Tra villages in Sa Pa Commune, Sa Pa District exploring the Hmong point of view about the practice of reciprocity, a practice that in the understanding of outsiders is seen as a waste of time and money. Hmong participants also had the opportunity to express their self-control, self-confidence, and pride while participating in their project

"My Culture - Conversations in Open Spaces" and "Labour Exchange" (by Giang A Cua et al.) of these films were created by the Hmong people through all the steps from the topic identification, to filming, interviewing, editing and completion of the product with the technical assistance of the community expert.

After a period of practice in Vietnam, community-based filmmaking has matured into a community-based media philosophy: "Applying a community-based (CB) approach is as simple as opening your hand and as difficult as letting go of your own ideas. Helping communities find and tell their stories is not a method; rather it is a way of being. A CB facilitator must learn to put aside their professional identity as professor, researcher, anthropologist, exhibit director, educator and TV journalist. They must learn to approach communities in ways that build trust and develop the relationships necessary to be embraced by a diverse group of strangers. To create community-based films and exhibits CB facilitators must become willing listeners and the skilled hands of the community." [5, p.178].

5. Barriers and future of community-based video

The biggest barrier of a community-based film project is the budget. Community-based projects require a long period of time between the establishment of a relationship and a cooperative agreement. Working together usually takes place over two years

and focuses on participants' consciousness rather than on specific products, therefore it requires a larger budget. Most of the community-based film projects implemented in Vietnam have been funded by foreign funds. At present, large and socially minded funds such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations have left Vietnam or have shifted their attention to other areas, so the funding for these activities is very difficult to obtain.

The second barrier is the perception of the leader, which can be the director of the museum or the research institute, or the president of the university. It is not easy for any manager/director to use this approach to work in the community because it requires a shift in attitudes, in professional roles as well as in radical change. How can it work? When applying this approach, managers, experts, and scientists must agree to transfer power to the community and allow the community voice. In some cases, this means sharing financial benefits and/or reputation with a community group, not easy for everyone to do.

The risk of community-based filmmaking is that it is difficult to imagine the final results or products of the project at the beginning stages. The output when applied to this kind of project often brings pessimism to those who have no faith in the community and only pay attention to the product without regard to community access. As well, working on this kind of film is very thorough, so it takes a lot of time to make and some managers think it is cumbersome, lacks persuasiveness and negatively affects their decision-making process.

Despite such difficulties, in the past decade, the first community-based film series piloted at the Vietnam Academy of Television have taken initial steps and achieved some milestones. From being a component of an exhibition, community-based filmmaking has become a method that a lot of large projects collaborating with foreign countries have employed. From its beginnings within the framework of the VME, community-based film has been included in a program of collaborative extension with media-related agencies and it has been studied and applied in many other provinces. The attraction of this kind of film also has a great impact on national museums and prestigious institutions in Vietnam. Community-based Video productions are also shown at regional and international film festivals such as Yunfest (China), Yamagata (Japan), and the Margaret Mead Film Festival (US).

The development of community-based films is even more meaningful when it follows the trends of the times and looks toward the future and elevates the voice of the people as power and control move from the researcher to the community. This shift represents the process of democratisation in the context of positive social changes in Vietnam today.

6. Conclusion

Over the past decade in Vietnam, anthropologists have been practicing the community-based filmmaking to create films that express the voice of the community. This method has been used by a number of universities and research institutes as the University of Social Sciences and

Humanities, the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, the Museum of Vietnamese Women, iSEE, VTV5, Kon Tum, Ha Giang and Ca Mau provincial radio and televisionstations as a powerful tool for collaborative research with the community to produce objective products. I think that in the context of the contemporary Vietnamese society with many positive changes, which increasingly upholds democratisation, the approach should be expanded and practiced in the research of social sciences in general, and anthropology in particular.

Note

[1] This paper was edited by Etiene Mahler.

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