

**Globalization:
Resistance From the Chinese New Left**
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In the last two decades of the twentieth century Chinese intellectuals underwent several ideological divisions, among which the ideological dispute between liberalism and the New Left in the last part of the 1990s was especially provocative.¹ The dispute was not a purely academic argument over metaphysical problems, but a serious contemplation on important issues concerning Chinese modernity, which, in the wake of more than 20 years' reform and open-door policy, have aroused the greatest interest in young and middle-aged intellectuals, among whom are sociologists, scholars of political science, philosophers, men of letters, economists, and even government officials and political leaders. They have deployed themselves into a confrontation with the New Left on the offense and the liberals on the defense.² The New Left has drawn on the Western leftwing academia for intellectual resources, mainly cultural pluralism and national consciousness heatedly discussed in the international stream of globalization (Ren). On the other hand, those who are on their defense, that is, the liberals, are endeavoring to refute the charges from the left, trying hard to delimit the contour of their theories and to specify the credibility and effectiveness of their liberalist ideas. The differences between the political claims of the two parties repay detailed analysis because underlying their theoretical logic and the realistic judgments over various crucial issues are their attitudes toward globalization, both economical and cultural, but our focus in this essay will be upon the New Left's resistance against globalization although the left-liberal context remains indispensable.

Two Worlds or One: Worries Over the Future

At the very beginning of his most important essay, "The Ideological Conditions of Contemporary China and The Problems of Modernity,"

Wang Hui, a major leader of the Chinese New Left,³ makes a very explicit and forceful statement:

The year 1989 is a historical landmark. With it, ended the almost 100 years' socialist practice. And with it, the two worlds have turned into one: a capitalist world of globalization. Unlike the Soviet Russia and Eastern European socialist countries, China is not disintegrated, but the Chinese society, especially its economic domain, is not held on in entering the productive and trading process of globalization. The conclusion is drawn despite of the persistence of Chinese socialism that various acts in the Chinese society, including economical, political, cultural, and even governmental acts, are all profoundly transformed and controlled by the capital and the market. (83)

Explicit in this important remark are many things which need to be reiterated here, as have been elsewhere by other intellectuals, left or otherwise. First and foremost, there is a paradox that the year 1989 witnessed the defeat of Chinese liberalism, but the economic reform started in the late 1970s did not change its course in transforming economic and legal systems in order to adopt them to the market economy. It is in this regard that Wang speaks of the end of almost 100 years' socialist practice, which logically means the end of socialism, though it is still there; and the two worlds, which must be understood as the socialist and the capitalist, have now merged into one, and a capitalist one at that. China as a socialist country is now undoubtedly engaged in the process of capitalist globalization.

Along with this economic turn, a turn from the socialist planned economy to the capital-governed market economy, there is the intellectual turn, a turn that not only changes the roles of intellectuals from Enlightenment intelligentsia to specialized experts, scholars and professionals working in the humanities and social sciences, but also leads them into a serious reconsideration/reconstruction of their own missions, values, and identities. Thus the focus of intellectual interest is shifted from the West to the indigenous Chinese reality. Understood in this way, globalization has already penetrated not only into the Chinese

economy but also into Chinese culture, as is stated by Wang: “the process of capitalist globalization has become the most important universal phenomenon in contemporary world, and China’s socialist reform has put the productive process of Chinese economy and culture into the world market” (“The Ideological Conditions” 86–7). Along with the failure of socialism in Eastern Europe, this, the Chinese socialist transformation toward the global market, is regarded as one of the two most important events at the end of the twentieth century. China has become one of the most active regions in the world capitalist market, and in the twenty-first century, it is possible that China will become a developed market society, but there is less possibility for it to become a global power.

Thus, worries, or more exactly, anxieties over the future of China emerge in both domestic and foreign sites. Domestically, the entrance into the process of capitalist globalization has roughly completed the formation of a market society in China with national enterprises worth only nearly 30% of the total GNP, but it did not change the political system, which results in the fact that the holders of political power are also the holders of capital, thus complicating not only the relations between national economy and international capital (the general situation in this regard is mutual penetration and severe conflicts), but the more vexed economic relations within the country that have caused social injustice mainly in the form of corruption, affecting all aspects of political, economic and moral life in China. Internationally, the process of capitalist globalization has led to the total destruction and reorganization of national industries, especially those in Second and Third World countries, but no new corresponding forms of organization emerge from the process. Meanwhile, the un- or under- developed countries are ever more marginalized; the status of nation-state is severely undermined; and political, economic and military monopolizations still persist, causing injustice and imbalance in international relations.

Questions arise when the present and future problems concerning the destiny of Chinese society are being reflected and contemplated: in the historical universalization of the capitalist mode of production, or in the process of Chinese realization of market economy, what are the relations

between individual, national and international capitals? What is the relation between rural and urban populations? What is the relation between the advanced coastal areas and the backward inland countryside? How do we judge and evaluate the changes of these relations and their influence upon the Chinese society as well as upon the world capitalist market as a whole? It is evident that the conventional and still dominating way of thinking, putting things in a binary opposition such as West/China, reform/conservatism, capitalism/socialism, market/plan, and so forth, cannot give satisfactory answers to these questions, which, according to the explications of Wang himself and intellectuals from other camps, do not come from within but from without.

Western Sources: Education in Critical Theories

Two Western sources for the Chinese New Left ideology are summarized by Ren Jiantao. He is a comparatively minor figure in the liberalist camp, but his interpretation and criticism of the New Left seem illuminating on certain issues, although prejudices are not lacking. One is the Frankfurt School, which, starting from Gramsci and Lukacs, has always put their emphasis on critiques of capitalist ideology, resisting against not only the political and economic hegemony of capitalism, but also capitalist cultural hegemony. These critical theories forcefully criticized popular culture, a capitalist mode of production that had penetrated into artistic production, but the ultimate purpose was to negate the bourgeois culture as well as the capitalist system, and in the process, they effectively critiqued and analyzed the growth of modern totalitarianism. But one thing that is usually overlooked is that, in their indiscriminate criticism of capitalism, totalitarianism and liberalism, they had made a contextual displacement from the non-free society of Nazi Germany to a country that has a long tradition of liberalism, the United States of America. This is the same mistake, according to Ren, that the Chinese New Left made when they tried to apply the Frankfurt critical theories to the Chinese reality.

Another theoretical source of the New Left ideology, if we can continue with Ren's genealogy, includes all sorts of postmodern theories and, more importantly in political and economic matters, those the-

ories of globalization, which stand in opposition to the dominating liberalism. Typically cited here are Fredric Jameson, Edward Said and Samir Amin. The first in the list had taught and given a series of talks in Beijing University and was among the first who disseminated post-modern theories in China; nearly all of his publications were translated into Chinese. Jameson's Marxist framework of analysis has become the New Left's ideological foundation for reasons that are too complicated to elaborate here. But one thing is certain: Jameson's Neo-Marxism seems quite attractive to the New Left because it intervenes and mediates among different theoretical codes and opens a tremendous space for explication and interpretation of almost all discourses in the West, and its insights are far more extensive than other discourses. More importantly, Jameson, with his special critical insight, sees in Marxism a utopian essence indispensable and irreplaceable in dealing with capitalist crises, and particularly, in rescuing human life from the capitalist rationalization of technology and markets. Jameson himself had taken much from the German and French traditions in developing his own basic theoretical framework, and his periodization of the history of capitalism into realism, nationalism, imperialism, and finally, the globalization of capitalism, a history of a linear declination, serves as a blueprint for the New Left in China.

Edward Said, best known in China for his *Orientalism*, is valuable for the New Left in China mainly for his reconfirmation of Oriental (especially Islamic) cultural values and his critiques of Western-centrism which provide both theoretical perspectives and practical methodologies for the New Left in dealing with problems concerning globalization and nationalism. As a result, the postcolonialist cultural theories, as well as the later developments of ethnic, minority and gender studies, were translated and spread out among Chinese intellectuals, and soon became fused with the nationalist tradition in China, and particularly treasured by the leftwing ideologies. In the recently heated discussions of globalization (Ren's genealogy continues), Samir Amin (*Growth, Inequality and Globalization; Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*) has become a much-quoted figure, the most important source and theoretical basis for the New Left's discussion on globalization. Amin argues that the process

of modernization is exactly the process of globalization of capitalism, in which Western countries first occupied the center of developed territories of capitalism as well as the center of distribution of international resources and powers, while the latecomers could only be dependent, and be oppressed and exploited by developed capitalism. This is what Amin calls the polarization of “centers” and “margins.” In the last analysis, Amin makes a judgment of interest to the Chinese New Left that the globalization of capitalism via market is a reactionary utopia, and a new global socialism would be built on a general dialectic of the universal and the particular, a relationship between political democracy and social development, and a value dialectic of economic proficiency (the market) as well as equality and charity, thus setting up the ultimate goal for the Chinese New Left.

To this another long list of references must be added, including Foucault’s critiques of science, power, knowledge, and history; Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory of communitarianism; Arjun Appadurai’s exposition on disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy; John Rawls’s insightful conceptions of justice, political liberalism and the law, and nearly all the important works by one of the best known Western thinkers in China, Jürgen Habermas. Admittedly, the New Left has drawn much of its strength from Western critical theories, crisscrossing a wide range from history, economics, society, culture, and politics, covering a huge expanse of interdisciplinary subjects in humanities and social sciences, and involving a great deal of concerns such as socialism, capitalism, nationalism, multiculturalism or cultural pluralism, modernity and post-modernity, democracy, equality and liberty, and issues emerging from the process of globalization. And, the list can never be exhausted. Admirably, they have made thorough studies of liberalism, as well, in order to refute against it.

Chinese Concerns: Globalization as Libertarianism

It is of no doubt that the sources are nearly all Western, but the ultimate concerns, which are explicitly or implicitly posited and discussed by the New Left, are Chinese. They are quite conscientious in their deep concern about the social and cultural problems existing in contemporary

China. What we, and every Chinese intellectual writing and speaking in the 1990s, identified with was their appropriate stress on recognition of “Chinanness,” on the severe social injustice in contemporary Chinese social development, on the ideas and values of social equality, and finally on further exploitation of the original intellectual resources and political heritage inherent in the traditional socialist system. It is evident that by the late 1980s social injustices caused by economic reform became preeminent, and more and more serious by the mid 1990s, including the ever-increasing distance between the rich and the poor, the ever-penetrating social conflicts and contradictions, and the ever-worsening of the general social practice and social security. These injustices were crystallized mainly in the imbalanced sharing of costs and benefits, that is, those who held powers at different levels, even their relatives and friends, were usually the beneficiaries of the largest shares of profits, while the workers and peasants remained the oppressed and the exploited as they were under the old systems, especially when industrial workers were laid off their jobs on a large scale in the early 1990s.

These social injustices have become foci in both the liberalist and the New Left discussions in their Chinese concerns, but their expositions of the causes of and solutions to these injustices are far from the same. The liberalists believe that these social injustices were rooted in the unreformed monopolizing power structure which, in making the best use of the opportunity of reform, had tried to establish a market economy by taking advantages of the planned economy, thus benefiting themselves and their relatives/friends in the redistribution of social resources. In this sense, making money by way of power is the most severe social injustice. It is true that it has been twenty years since the actualization of reforms and the open-door policy, and great changes have taken place in the infrastructure of economy, but the superstructure remains intact. This is the basic reason why public powers come into market transactions, and why social injustices are continuously produced and ineffectively eradicated. It is for this reason that the liberalists strongly advocate that political reform must be precipitated so as to fit the infrastructure of market economy, that public power must be withdrawn from the market so as to decrease opportunities for the nouveau riche, and that

political discipline and restraint must be established so as to effectively police the government powers.

Not only did the Chinese New Left accuse the liberals of this idea of naturally realizing national and international justice, equality and democracy via the market, they also ascribed the injustices to the market, to capitalist productive relations, and to the so-called innate conflicts and contradictions in capitalism much talked about in socialist discourses for the past decades. They believe that the present polarization and distancing between the rich and the poor is deeply rooted in the fact that market competition has made the strong stronger, the weak weaker, and the latter more violently and arbitrarily oppressed and exploited. In the process of the market and capitalist globalization, according to the Left's otherwise considerate understanding, China has been taken into the world capitalist system, and thus issues in the international capitalist market are the very issues that are loaded with Chinese concerns, and the clinical diagnosis of these issues is also that of the globalization issues of capitalism. To this, the liberalists would retort that the corruption in contemporary China has nothing to do with the market economy imported from the West, but with the consequences of abuses of power, of violations of law, and of economic manoeuvring engaged in by political power-holders, and an effective way to end all this is to appropriate the power-restraint mechanisms and the developed legal system operative in capitalist market economies.

But this "perfect" law and market system is put into question by the New Left and is regarded as "institutional utopia" because so far none of the Western countries in modern history has achieved such a system (Wang "The Ideological Conditions"). What they worried most is that twenty years' reform in China has created a class of monopolizing elite, who, upon completing their primitive accumulation of wealth and power, have already been strong enough to counter the current socialist system, and therefore social injustices cannot be easily eliminated by market regulations based not on reason but on the willfulness and wantonness of the power elite. It is not enough to rely only on market principles. The justice the general public desires should not only be in the process, but also in the results. Distribution in accordance either with

privileges or with market principles is no doubt contrary to the principle of justice in result, and therefore becomes obstacles to democracy, if wealth remains in the hands of a minority. This means that democracy and justice cannot be reduced to a market competition principle. The economic system of the contemporary world is conducive merely to the developed countries for their exploitation of the undeveloped or underdeveloped and developing countries because the principle is made and held by developed capitalism, which is the ultimate injustice.

Understood in this way, the history of Chinese reform is a process of economic globalization, which, according to the Chinese New Left, is a process of subordinating different regions, societies and individuals to a hierarchical and unequal structure of global monopolization. This is explained in their clarification of the term “Neo-Liberalism,” which actually refers to economic Libertarianism, whose characteristics include an absolute and universal fetishism of the market used to suffocate values of equality, and a glorification of abstract competition and efficiency under which abysmal differences between the rich and the poor are created within either a society or the world as a whole. Free Trade is promoted in the name of which resources in backward countries are plundered and traded by developed countries. According to the logic of this analysis, Chinese reform is represented by the economic libertarians who make the biggest share of national assets by making the best use of their power, obtain the largest profit by way of monopolizing the market, and reterritorialize all the market resources and interests by making alliances with national and international capital. The solution to this problem is nationalism: the economic process of globalization is politically guaranteed by a system of nation states since so far there is no other form correspondingly emerging from the economic and cultural relations of globalization.

Chinese Concerns: Nationalism vs. Globalization

In this context of the left/liberal controversy, nationalism has become an issue as keen as market economy and social injustices, as modernity and modernization, and as liberalism and libertarianism as such. Generally agreed among both the Leftists and the liberals is that glo-

balization is a current in the modern history of the world with which China must engage, but controversial opinions arise in how to locate the proper position of China in the current development of the world economy and how to tackle the relationship between globalization and national/indigenous interests. The liberals universally agreed that, in its modern history, China has unfortunately experienced failures and setbacks which made impossible its modernization and globalization. But China cannot make any progress without entering into the international system of modernization and globalization since this is the mainstream of the contemporary world. Besides, what held China back are not the interferences and interventions of Western capitalism and transnational businesses but the old institutions and ideologies inside the country, including fanatical nationalism (Zhu). Contrary to this, the New Left believe that, as is stated above, since the 1990s, China has already been involved in the process of globalization, and along with it, the ugly picture of capitalism as has been depicted by Western leftwing critical theory. Therefore, the task for intellectuals in this late capitalist era is to disclose the unequal international relations under the disguise of globalization, and to protect national interests and public rights in resistance against the invasion of transnational corporations (Wang "The Ideological Conditions"; "Questions and Answers on Modernity").⁴

Unlike the liberals, who strongly promulgate that China must enter the economic and political system of global capitalism, that China must be capitalized and democratized, and that the global capitalist system is and must be the political, economic and cultural system of globalization, the leftwing intellectuals do not equalize globalization and modernization with capitalization. Instead, they believe that the Western system cannot be regarded only as capitalist system because it contains something in common with socialism, that is, critiques and resistances against capitalist modernity, the social struggle to gain the political, economic and cultural rights for the lower classes, and finally, the national liberation movements which have liberated poverty-stricken peoples from the oppression and exploitation of imperialism and colonialism. In a sense, the capitalism as is depicted may be turned into a powerful force against market forces and an aid to nationalist movements or indigenous inter-

ests under certain circumstances (Wang “The Ideological Conditions”; “Questions and Answers on Modernity”). In the eyes of the liberals, this kind of nationalism can be classified into two aspects: one is rational, expressive not only of the national ethos, but also of international fraternity, and the other is fanatical, being rendered as both anti-foreign and power-flattering (Zhu). It is to the latter that some of the New Left are supposed to belong. Nationalism as such could become grounds for self-enclosure, obstacles to modernization, and above all, a means for totalitarian regimes to deprive citizens of their rights as dissidents.

To the two kinds of nationalism that the liberals classified, the Chinese New Left retort with two foci of a diseased intellectual elite (referring to the liberals): on the one hand, they are too contemptuous of and frightened by the general public, and on the other, they are too unaware of national interests, too worried about their identity as Chinese, and therefore too eager for their identification with the West, to the extent that they even have lost their dignity and decency as freemen. In their analysis, the liberalist accusation of nationalism is based on two reasons: for one thing, this is an era of the global village outside of which nationalism finds its own narrow and enclosed space; for the other, the fallacy runs that nationalism requires national rights but not human rights, and the so-called national rights are the means of oppression for the power elite. And yet, nationalism, as is normally understood by the liberalists, can only exist so long as there are elements of states, nations and races existing in this world, and human rights must exist as national rights in foreign affairs, and vice versa in domestic political affairs. Such nationalism cannot do without democracy, and true democracy, in turn, operates under the control of liberty. And the greatest liberty, in the final analysis of the liberalists, is that of the market as realized by a free economy. In this version of liberalism, according to the New Left, democracy is extravagant, equality is evil, and the first principle is the law of the jungle. A way of life with complete democracy is one in which every individual has equal rights to participate all aspects of social life, and one in which capitalism is both locally and globally controlled and counterbalanced, and the global polarization created by the world capitalist system must be eradicated.

Critical Considerations

As is shown above, the Chinese New Left of the 1990s drew their intellectual inspirations from the West, especially from the opponents of liberalism. But when they tried to crystallize these inspirations into Chinese concerns, they seemed to have forgotten the backgrounds against which their foreign pioneers made the arguments, that is, before and after the Second World War in the first phase, when Western societies were fallen into political and economic crisis; and after the 1970s in the second, when Western societies theorized postmodern experiences. If postmodern theories have their feasibility and legitimacy within Western parameters, they would lose their temporal and spatial values when removed into the “pre-modern” context in China. One question must be put here: when they used Western theories (especially those of the Left) to analyze Chinese reality, did they examine the inner contradiction inherent in their intellectual hypothesis? The answer to this question is three fold. First, the Western Leftists take anti-essentialist gestures in ideological methodology, but what they are actually doing is using an essentialism of anti-linear progression to establish an essentialism of linear degeneration in capitalism. For the very basis of the ideological presupposition of the Chinese New Left is the precipitating decline of capitalism, which, in turn, presupposes what they believed to be the validity of socialism. This nurtured their strong desire for socialist universal democracy, their deep hatred for elite-domination and absence of democracy in capitalist societies, blinding their eyes and diminishing their opportunities of making cross-evaluation of the two systems. Second, when the Chinese New Left accuses liberal democracy of being unable to guarantee people’s democracy, they appeal to Western leftwing deconstruction of the democratic institutions constructed by modern liberalism; meanwhile they overlooked the fact that when the Western left deconstructed such modern hypotheses as reason and responsibility, they were unable to put forward feasible alternatives and therefore were unable to map out a future, thus making the Chinese New Left’s frames of reference unrealistic. Third, when the Chinese New Left made accusations against liberal tendencies in modern society by drawing on Western sources, they also neglected the utopian nature of these discourses, which is indispens-

able in the social and cultural context of the West. But when removed to the Chinese context, the critical gestures and spiritual impetus that are innate in the utopian representation would be rendered invalid, thus losing their practical value of conducting the society toward prosperity, liberty and democracy.

Underlying these displacements are the (mis)judgments made by the New Left leaders. One of them is the diagnosis of the so-called crisis or the loss of understanding among Chinese intelligentsia that, from the beginning of the 90s, the process of capitalist globalization has become the most important international phenomenon since the modern era, and the Chinese socialist reform has put the national economic and cultural production into a world market. In the process, China's "Post-schools" have abandoned their critical perspective in introducing Western terminology into Chinese ideology without discrimination. They have consciously or unconsciously supported the mutual penetration between mass culture and official thinking, and made the arising hegemonic project of postmodernism dominant in contemporary ideology, thus eliminating such binary oppositions as West/China and Capitalism/Socialism (Wang "The Ideological Conditions"). This Chinese adaptation of Western "postology" can be regarded as a by-product of economic globalization. Another (mis)judgment lies in their diagnosis of the ways in which economic globalization, from the modernist or Marxist point of view, is a form of colonialism or imperialism. Admittedly, the dynamics of globalization are indeed a necessity of capital expansion, for under the pressure of market competition, low-cost technologies must be continuously produced, new markets for consumption must be effectively discovered and expanded, and institutions and regulations of international markets must be established accordingly. But these institutions and regulations must be determined by negotiations between nation states, and must be greatly influenced by domestic policies, which may affect or even interrupt the course of globalization.

Moreover, for the future of underdeveloped and developing countries, globalization may provide chances for learning advanced technologies and managing skills from the developed countries. This process of learning is not necessarily submission or capitulation to capital, but a strat-

egy to gain strength and time to enlarge economic and productive scale so as to counterbalance the West and therefore to play a key role in the competitive world market. This sounds reasonable, for learning as such is not a passive reception but an initiative innovation, and when the capability of innovation is enhanced and strengthened, social institutions must be established accordingly, and these institutions are the products of regional culture and society, innate in the cognitive framework of the indigenous. Therefore they cannot be removed from the interiority of the region. In this sense, the relation of globalization with regional economy, and for that matter, with indigenous culture, will not lose its importance because of a rapid influx of capital, and changes in conditions and qualities of Chinese society, reformations in governmental actions, functions, roles, and transformations in intellectual relationships with the state, are all part of a historical inevitability that cannot be wistfully resolved in such controversies as those between the New left and the liberals in China. The fact speaks louder that, in the twenty years' reform after the Mao era, China has undergone substantial changes in social, economic, cultural and political systems, and these are changes for the better, already paving a way for a smoother transition from a developing country into a developed one. Ultimately, the solution perhaps lies exactly where the problem is, as Wang Hui has repeatedly announced (even in the same essay) that:

globalization is an economic process whose political guarantee is still the system of nation-state, therefore, even though the functions of nation-state have been changed, its significance as a unit of interest in the process of economic globalization is all the more preeminent. In a sense, the clarification of the interest relations in the international economic system is conversely conducive to the integrity within nation-state. (Wang, "The Ideological Conditions" 86)

Notes

- 1 The New Left in China is a product of the intellectual division in the 1990s, and has little to do in organization with the Western New Left, though they

- are ideologically closely associated. They are New, so the legend goes, when in comparison with such old leftists as Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu, who were governmental leaders in the 1970s; and they are Left because they gained consensus on their interrogation, criticism and even negation of private ownership, market economies, legal systems based on individual freedom, modernity and capitalist social system, and on their high praise and affirmation of Mao's theory and practice before China's reform.
- 2 The debaters of the two camps are clearly demarcated in their loosely organized groups, but very often not so clearly in some of their ideas, that is, there are quite a few common grounds and inter-discourses between them. The key figures on the liberal camp are Li Shenzi, Zhu Xueqin, Qin Hui, He Qinglian, Xu Youyu, Liu Junning, and such lesser figures as Qiu Feng, Mao Shoulong, Yuan Weishi, Ren Jiantao, Ren Bumei, and Ji Yongsheng. The other camp can be further divided into mainland and overseas representatives: Wang Hui, Han Yuhai, Kuang Xinnian, and Han Deqiang are the mainlanders, and Gan Yang, Cui Zhiyuan and Wang Shaoguang the voices overseas.
 - 3 Toward this nomination, Wang Hui seems very indifferent, and sometimes even does not admit it. He regards the so-called divisions of "liberalism" and "the New Left" in China as hypothetical classification, by which he means that there are no such things as "the liberal camp" and "the left camp," and what really exists are the different attitudes toward the crisis for the moment.
 - 4 See also Han Yuhai in Wang Dingding.

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