



## A Comparative Survey of Female Figures in Persian Miniatures: Studying Form, Color and Content of Miniatures by Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad

\*Elham Khatiri<sup>1</sup>, Behnam Zangi<sup>2</sup> & Fatemeh Fakharan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Master of Painting, Visual Civil, Architecture, and Art Department, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor and Faculty Member of Board at University in Tarbiat Modares, Tehran, Iran

\*Email: elhamkhatiri85@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad depicted beauty in the form of female figures using their unique ways of applying form, color, and content. The purpose of the present research was to study the way female figures are drawn in works of Mosaver and Behzad, compare them, and find out the relationship between them to finally answer the main research question, which concerns finding the similarities and differences between the works of both artists in form, color, and content. The method of the research was qualitative, the way the data was processed was descriptive-analytic, and the information was gathered through library sources. Regarding the time gap between the lives of saver and Behzad, it seems there should be similarities and differences between their miniatures. The results of the research showed that the composition in the works of both artists is mostly vertical and centralized, and the primary color blue and the secondary colors green, purple, and orange are mostly used. Foreign influences and the impact of the economic conditions are obvious in their works. Some of the differences between their works are the application of more primary and warm colors in Mosaver's works and less variety of color in Behzad's, while the latter's lines are freer. Behzad also used perspective in his miniatures, and he preferred content over form.

**Keywords:** *color; female figures; form; Hosein Behzad; Moein Mosaver; Persian miniatures.*

### 1 Introduction

Women, as a part of society, have always been a subject of art and literature in Iran, especially in the visual arts [1]. The miniatures of the Isfahan art school depicting women are mostly of figures of dancers and court ladies that were known among the people [2]. The female figures were depicted standing or sitting, with dynamic and flowing lines and more body curves than normal. What the artists show in these figures matches the characteristics of the beloved Farsi

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literature that has been the subject of lyrical literature. There is usually a goblet in their hands, or close to them, which is considered to have a spiritual meaning, the same as the position of wine and spiritual drunkenness in Iran's mystical literature [3].

Because of the cultural and artistic interactions between Iran and the West in the Safavid period, the taste of the artists changed, and gradually some features of Western art, like its view towards humans, especially women, appeared in Iranian art, which has continued to the present. The artists tried to dress the female figures in the miniatures in such a way that they could reflect the physical features of the human body better [4]. Thus, studying the specific way the women are drawn and depicted becomes more important. The present research compared and analyzed female figures in miniatures of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad to study the way they are depicted and the relationship they may have.

The main research question was: What are the similarities and differences between female figures in the works of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad from a visual point of view? The second research question was: What were the effects of economic conditions on the depiction of female figures in their works, considering the time gap between the lives of both artists? The third question was: What is the mutual relationship between religious and Western influences in the female figures in the works of both artists? In this research, the woman in Persian miniatures was studied firstly, after which the female figures in works of Mosaver and Behzad are described and analyzed, and some cases were studied more closely. The results are presented in the form of tables and charts.

No proficient research has been done previously comparing female figures in the works of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad and few referrals have been made to these miniatures. There are several female figures in the miniatures of the two artists, so these miniatures were studied and compared in the present research. In related studies, we can refer to the book *Praised Be Your Brush, Behzad* [5], in which the author discusses Behzad's life and artworks. Also, in *The Lives and Art of Old Painters of Iran* [6], the author provides some explanations about Mosaver, some of his works, and also their contents. In the book *Iranian Painting: From Yesterday to Today* [7], the author gives some information about the times in which these two artists lived. In *Safavid Isfahan Painting School* [3] there is some information on Isfahan's painting school, the way the miniatures are depicted, and also their contents. In the MA thesis *Hosein Behzad, Unknown Famous Painter* by Beigmoradi [8], Behzad and some of his works are introduced comprehensively [1]. In the literature on the history of miniatures, which includes an analysis of some of Behzad's works, there are brief explanations just on the content of Behzad's female figures. The main result of these previous studies has

been limited to general definitions, while the present article tries to study and compare the female figures of the two artists for the first time.

This research used qualitative and quantitative methods and the collected data were processed by observation and descriptive analysis, mostly in graphs and tables. The study items of ten female figures, which are accessible and documented as a single sheet, were randomly selected from both artists. First, the thumbnails were reviewed in terms of content and then the desired features were considered for comparison, definition, and review. The similarities and differences between the works are presented in the form of tables and plans, and finally the end results are shown.

The female figure as a pictorial element has substantial meaning and content. It is natural that artists want to depict women in their artworks. The way they are depicted varies, however, especially because women always play a distinct role in the beliefs and tastes in every period because of their nature. The way women are viewed has changed significantly over time [9]. Until the middle of the Safavid period, before the influence of Western aesthetics in the representation of women in miniatures became visible, intimate situations between women and men were not depicted in paintings; however, there were nude figures of women in paintings with special contents. The faces of women in Persian miniatures were always represented as beautiful, without trace of aging. This does not mean the artists avoided depicting women of different ages, but the nature and essence of the form and color of the miniatures are 'young' [4].

## **2 Practice Context**

### **2.1 Biography and Artworks of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad**

Moein Mosaver was born in 1605. His dated and signed works in chiaroscuro show his artistic activity years. He was one of the students of Reza Abbasi and a follower of his school. He had developed his own personal style within the school of his teacher in the middle of his life. His works are delicate and precise, and he used lines freely and whip-like. Most of his works look like drawings made with a brush and ink water [7].

Hosein Behzad was born in Roobande district near Tehran bazar in 1897. He started copying some great painters' works and showed brilliant skill and taste in this work. He worked twelve hours a day and earned money by selling his works, bringing him out of poverty to some extent [5]. At that time, painters were under the influence of Western paintings. They imitated classic European paintings, exaggerating the wrinkles in clothes according to the body beneath them and as

a result, moved away from the abstract bodies that pointed to the nature and essence of the body as the symbol of artist's sacred imagination [4].

## **2.2 Form, Color, and Content of Moein Mosaver's Miniatures**

Moein Mosaver always depicted female figures in his own specific style and was skillful in presenting their coquetry, especially the beautiful and sweet cupbearers, and connected their coquetry with brilliant ornaments [6]. He also left some erotic paintings not suitable to show to the public [2]. In a single-sheet miniature of the Isfahan school, despite the dominance of the human figure, there are signs of the artists' attention to the meanings originated from Iranian mystic humanism. The miniaturists of the Isfahan school followed a spiritual idea, of beauty as a motive to symbolize tender feelings, moral qualities, and human perfection [10]. Against this background, Moein Mosaver aimed to show women's beauty by applying color and form in his paintings. At his time, there was no clear difference between male and female figures, and less attention was paid to female features in paintings; only some special features distinguished them from male figures [11].

One of the main topics in painting is color theory and studying color relations. Form and color express human life and applying color in paintings means joining a continuous chain [12]. In most of his works, Mosaver applied dark reds, orange, blue, yellow, especially violet, purple, and gold. One of the characteristics of his works is the fearless application of colors. It seems that he enjoyed applying color contrast to reach a glamorous effect [13]. He created shades skillfully, and the curves of his lines and the hatchings seem imperceptible and natural. According to his master, Reza Abbasi, he applied the hatching style powerfully and skillfully. His single-sheet paintings are pictures of the daily experiences of the artist. In narrative works like *Shahnama* and *Tarikh Alam Araye Shah Ismaeil*, the figures are combined with text, creating a harmonious combination of surface relations, figures, and tables [14]. He had a strong taste for the presentation of epic stories, battlefields, and proud stories from the *Shahnama*, and painted them with splendor and often crowded. Using *Hal kari* and *Tazhib* for the background, he deviated to the margins of the pages and presented his art and skill in working with gold [6].

## **2.3 Form, Color and Content of Hosein Behzad's Miniatures**

In Behzad's time, there was much enthusiasm for buying miniatures in the style of Reza Abbasi and Kamaledin Behzad, both among Iranian and foreign customers. Hosein Behzad copied their works and started showing brilliant skill and taste in this field [5]. From the time of Reza Abbasi, the faces of the miniatures were exactly those of paintings from the Timorid period, which Behzad tried to Iranize. He applied soft, sharp, and continuous lines to create a

novel style and depicted women according to the ancient traditions [1]. He renewed Persian miniature art, his special style joining the Persian and European painting traditions together, finding a new expression in his paintings after his journey to Paris [15].

Behzad avoided monotony in his paintings, and the first point of influence in his works is the harmony and balance of lines [5]. He drew every form he had in mind only with turns of his brush and could create definitive and organic styles by simplifying the lines. His brush strokes are unique and the characteristics of his lines are wonderful [8]. His paintings have a colorful spirit and display much innovation. In his later works, he did not apply many different colors; he only used three colors or even only one color and its shades in some of his paintings, making them similar to contemporary Western paintings. Behzad decreased the number of colors that were used in previous miniatures.

Behzad's proficiency lay in the combination of harmonious colors and space, which was an innovation in Persian painting [1]. He believed that first the source and meaning are created in the thought and mind of the artist, the visualization of the content staying in the artist's mind until he finds the desired form and format [16]. Behzad had more freedom choosing content and illustrated more poetic subjects. Omar Khaiam's themes attracted him more than others [8]. The subjects of his works were different from contemporary Persian artists who worked in the style of Reza Abbasi and his students [17].

#### **2.4 The Influence of Economic Conditions on the Art of Moein Mosaver's and Hosein Behzad's Times**

Patrons of the arts and appreciators of artistic taste have always been effective in supporting Iranian painting. Artists need financial and psychological support for their production, and most of the customers of miniature paintings have always been the elite and the courtiers in society. For this reason, they were able to influence the visual direction of miniature painting. The drawing of female figures had many fans among this stratum and thus artists were encouraged to draw female figures in order to attract the attention of their customers. As the preference for new realist painting styles increased that originated from European art, the court started ordering less old-style miniatures. Moreover, the aristocratic stratum of society, the Qizilbash, merchants, etc., showed increasing interest in single-sheet miniatures, the result of which was the production of miniatures with much empty space. To produce such works, the artists spent less time and money producing paintings and worked hastily to be able to accept more orders [18]. In fact, the increase in wealth of the royal family and other rulers, together with the trend of copying European culture, created a kind of desire for a luxurious lifestyle. The other factor in the production of single-sheet paintings was Iran's

trade with Western countries [19]. The same happened in the Pahlavi period. The Pahlavi government developed some changes in the culture of Iranian society for nationalistic purposes. One of those changes occurred in Iran's education system, which influenced the art society too. Besides these changes, the Europeans' interest in traditional works of art and purchasing them and also the hatred of the Pahlavi court for art and culture from the Qajars caused the artists to revert to copying the Isfahan, Tabriz, and Herat art schools. Some artists among them traveled to Europe and opened a new chapter in Persian miniature art [8].

In Tables 1, the female figures in Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad's miniatures were studied and compared in colors, lines, forms, composition, and contents (both the figures and faces).

**Table 1** Woman figures by Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad.  
Source: authors

	<b>Hosein Behzad</b>	<b>Moein Mosaver</b>
<b>1 Picture</b>		
	Rose girl [20]	Cupbearer woman [21]
<b>Color</b>	Primary colors (red, blue), secondary colors (pink, orange, green, purple), contrast (black and white), complementary colors, dominant colors are warm	Primary color (blue), secondary colors (green, pink, violet), dominant colors are cold
<b>Line and form</b>	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick, and the forms are direct and curved	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick and the forms are direct and curved
<b>Composition</b>	Spiral and central	Horizontal and central
<b>Content</b>	A woman with a sweet, cute face, stretched eyes and eyebrows, long black hair with a hat on her head	A woman with a sweet face, white skin, stretched eyes and eyebrows, long black hair, and an elegant dress from aristocracy

	<b>Hosein Behzad</b>	<b>Moein Mosaver</b>
<b>2 Picture</b>		
	Falcon woman (Naseripoor, 2017: 76)	Woman with European dress [21]
<b>Color</b>	Primary color (blue), secondary colors (orange, green), contrast (black and white), grey and gold colors, the dominant colors are warm	Primary color (red), secondary color (violet, purple, brown, green), contrast (black and white), gold, and complementary colors used, the dominant colors are cold
<b>Line and form</b>	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular, thin and thick, and the forms have direct and curved lines	The lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular, thin and thick and the forms have direct and curved lines
<b>Composition</b>	Vertical and central	Vertical and central
<b>Content</b>	A woman with stretched eyebrows and eye, smiling, a glove in her right hand for a falcon to land on	A woman with a happy and cute face, a chapeau in her hand, standing, with a necklace of jewels
<b>3 Picture</b>		
	Shirin looking at Farhad's picture (Naseripoor, 2017: 96)	A woman counting on her fingers [20]
<b>Color</b>	Secondary colors (orange, green, ochre, purple, blue), contrast (black and white) complementary colors, dominant colors are cold	Primary color (red), secondary colors (green and pink), contrast (black and white), gold color, dominant colors are warm
<b>Line and form</b>	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick and the forms are direct and curved	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick and the forms are direct and curved
<b>Composition</b>	Vertical and central	Vertical and central
<b>Content</b>	The woman in this miniature is Shirin, reading Farhad's letter. Behzad applied many lines and forms in this miniature	A cute woman with white skin, curly hair, stretched eyes and eyebrows, and with a veil on her head

	<b>Hosein Behzad</b>	<b>Moein Mosaver</b>
<b>4 Picture</b>		
	Drunkenness dance [22]	Cupbearer woman [21]
<b>Color</b>	There are only two colors, white and black, in this miniature	Primary color (red), secondary color (green), contrast (black and white), gold color, the dominant colors are warm
<b>Line and form</b>	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick and the forms are direct and curved	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick and the forms are direct and curved
<b>Composition</b>	Circular and central	Vertical and central
<b>Content</b>	In this miniature, which is one of Behzad's innovations, shows a dancer whose face is upside down	In this miniature, the woman is a butler with a sweet smile, long hair, tall, with an elegant dress and a veil on her head
<b>5 Picture</b>		
	Coquetry (Naseripoor, 2017: 164)	European young woman [23]
<b>Color</b>	Primary color (blue, red), secondary colors (orange, purple), contrast (black and white), complementary colors used, and the dominant colors are warm	Primary color (blue), secondary colors (violet, pink, orange), contrast (black and white), grey, gold, complementary colors used, and the dominant colors are warm
<b>Line and form</b>	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick and the forms are direct and curved	Lines are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, circular thin and thick and the forms are direct and curved
<b>Composition</b>	Vertical and central	Vertical and central
<b>Content</b>	The woman has a sweet and cute face, smiling, stretched eyes and eyebrows. Her face is turned to the right and she has a daf in her hand	The woman's face is sweet, she wears a pearl necklace and a woman's chapeau, and has a white vessel in her hand

In Table 2, the single-sheet female figure miniatures of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad are compared based on color, line and form, composition, and content.

**Table 2** Comparison of color, line and form, composition, and content of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad’s miniatures. Source: authors

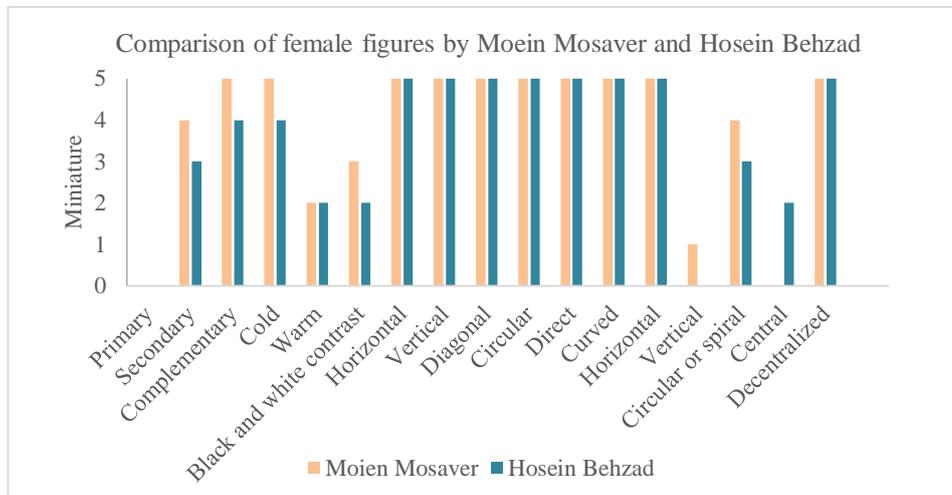
Factors	Hosein Behzad	Moein Mosaver
<b>Color</b>	Primary color (blue), secondary colors (green, purple, and orange). There is black and white and color contrast, complementary colors used, i.e., blue, orange, and shades of grey.	Primary colors (red, blue, and yellow). Secondary colors (green, purple, and orange), gold is used, black and white contrast, complementary colors are used, the colors are mostly warm.
<b>Line and form</b>	Vertical, horizontal, diagonal, circular, thin, and thick lines, the form of the lines direct and curved	Vertical, horizontal, diagonal, circular, thin, and thick lines, the form of the lines direct and curved
<b>Composition</b>	Vertical, central, spiral, and circular, there is no negative space or it is very small	Vertical and central, there is no negative space or it is very small
<b>Content</b>	The women in these miniatures are cupbearers, dancers, musicians, or derived from ancient stories and poems. In some miniatures, they wear elegant clothes full of patterns and are completely dressed. Behzad has depicted them beautifully. Realistic and full depiction of women can be seen in his single-sheets with female figures.	Most of the figures were popular characters. The paintings depict special figures’ moods, thoughtful movements, and their dignity, showing the unfamiliar urban life. The miniatures were created based on books but free from text; the waning relation to literature and decrease in court support created single-sheet miniatures of women with different contents that changed to realist depictions of women from previous idealized images.

In Table 3, the female figure miniatures of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad are quantitatively compared in color, line and form, and composition. The information in Table 3 is presented in terms of colors (primary, secondary, complementary, cold, warm, black and white contrast), lines and forms (direct, curved), composition (horizontal, vertical, circular, spiral, central, and decentralized).

**Table 3** Quantitative comparison of female figures by Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad.

Components	Moein Mosaver		Hosein Behzad		
	Miniature	Percent	Miniature	Percent	
<b>Color</b>	Primary	4	80%	3	60%
	Secondary	5	1%	4	80%
	Complementary	5	1%	4	80%
	Cold	2	40%	2	40%
	Warm	3	60%	2	40%

Components	Moein Mosaver		Hosein Behzad		
	Miniature	Percent	Miniature	Percent	
<b>Line</b>	Black and white contrast	5	1%	5	1%
	Horizontal	5	1%	5	1%
	Vertical	5	1%	5	1%
	Diagonal	5	1%	5	1%
	Circular	5	1%	5	1%
<b>Form</b>	Direct	5	1%	5	1%
	Curved	5	1%	5	1%
<b>Composition</b>	Horizontal	1	20%	0	0%
	Vertical	4	80%	3	60%
	Circular or spiral	0	0%	2	80%
	Central	5	1%	5	1%
	Decentralized	0	0%	0	0%



**Figure 1** Comparison of female figures by Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad.  
Source: authors

### 3 Analysis of the Similarities between Female Figures in Works of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad

According to Table 2, both artists applied bright and primary, secondary, complementary, cold, warm, black and white contrast in their miniatures to show the female figures as elegant. The figures are accompanied by horizontal lines showing balance and dignity, vertical lines for stability and strength, diagonal lines to show anxiety and worry, and circular lines to show dynamism and movement. The lines, thick and thin, show volume, and forms' overlapping with direct lines (depth) and curved lines (depth and movement) are applied. The compositions of these miniatures is mostly central and vertical, showing self-

confidence, stability, movement, and dynamism; the painting elements are centered or near the vanishing point, and the negative space in them is small. The female figures in the single-sheet miniatures have an independent personality to which a subject is added.

As for the content of the miniatures, they illustrate poems, stories, and daily life. The female figures display certain emotions and are skillfully beautified. The face's and bodily expressions are romantic and mystical with fine ornaments. The faces are sweet, cute, smiling with stretched eyes and eyebrows, and long black curly hair. They are tall and balanced with hats or crowns on their head. The angle of their faces is usually three-quarter view; their clothes are long, wrinkled, and elegant with many patterns. Both artists tried to show the perfection of their beauty by applying colors, forms, lines, and composition. The female figures are dynamic, and the artists, besides being influenced by their teachers and previous artists, added their own innovations and personal style. Regarding the time gap between the lives of both artists, it can be said that their imaginations are very close to each other. They were also both influenced by realism in their works.

#### **4 Analysis of the Differences between Female Figures in Works of Moein Mosaver and Hosein Behzad's**

One of the outstanding characteristics of female figures by Moein Mosaver is the daring and even dazzling application of colors. He used mild shadows when depicting women from aristocratic levels. Hosein Behzad used less primary and warm colors. His works are innovative in color, and drawing is preferred to color, so there are not many colors in his works, only three or two, or even one color, with their shades are used in his works.

Behzad brought shadows to his works and changed the flat surface to a three-dimensional one. In Moein Mosaver's works, there is a two-dimensional perspective, and the lines are soft and smooth, but Behzad avoided line monotony and preferred content to form. The difference between their compositions is the spiral and circular composition in Behzad's miniatures. The women's faces cannot be distinguished easily in Moein Mosaver's miniatures, whereas they are completely recognizable in Behzad's works. Both artists drew faces closely resembling contemporary human faces, but this is more the case in Behzad's works. The women are smiling with stretched eyes and eyebrows and they have long curly black hair. The angle of their faces is three-quarter view, and they are tall and dynamic with a little bend. Women's and men's faces are similar in Moein Mosaver's miniatures but different in Behzad's. The female figures of Mosaver have a goblet in their hands and are drinking and enjoying themselves.

## 5 Conclusion

1. Many of the cultural factors and beliefs of a society can be understood by analyzing women's position in art. Considering the 292-year time gap between the two artists, their single-sheet miniatures of women have many similarities and differences in form, color, and content. Mosaver's miniatures are poetic with a nice expression and application of bright colors, strong lines, geometric forms, and a more vertical composition. The lines in Behzad's works are freer and his paintings have perspective with different levels in which he located some personages. From a color perspective, he applied contrasting colors in specific places, creating a kind of distance and proximity in the eyes of the viewer. Behzad looked at humans sociologically and tried to create female figures close to reality – beautiful, full of feelings, and poetic. He used shaded colors, fewer different colors, strong lines, geometric and delicate forms, and various compositions. The free drawing of miniatures and the foreign influence of on Persian miniature art can be seen in the content of Mosaver's works and in the color and content of Behzad's works.
2. Economic conditions were among the factors influencing the single-sheet female figure miniatures of both artists. The changes in both artists' styles are connected to their financial situations. The traces of foreign influence in Moein Mosaver's female figures were the result of his customers' change in taste, because after the enthusiasm of the court and aristocratic levels of society for Iranian art faded, there were landowners and capitalists who still ordered these miniatures. This influenced miniature art in Mosaver's time and this change was a motive for him to let himself be influenced by Europeans. Foreign influence is obvious in Moein Mosaver's female figure miniatures, especially in subject and content. On the other hand, Behzad copied Kamaleddin Behzad and Reza Abbasi miniatures because of his financial situation, and in his time, many customers paid specific attention to such works not only in Iran but also foreign galleries and collections.
3. There is always a mutual relationship between religious and foreign influences in the miniatures of Mosaver and Behzad. Because of the decreasing importance of religion in their lifetimes and less attention from royalty to it and their tendency towards appreciation for European artists and communication with Europe, the influence of religion was not a preventing factor in creating female figures. The society was ready for this change and evolution in drawing female figures. This influence can notably be seen in the more realistic depiction of the female body.

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