

## PILGRIMAGE AS THIRD SPACE: Contesting “Image” of Sunan Ampel

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**Abstracts:** *This paper is to analyze “image” of Sunan Ampel, including Ampel tombs, mosque, wells, and market, projected within the three online directories and the possible impacts of this use on different visitors. By using Turner’s concept “communitas”, liminality, and third space, Sunan Ampel site is also considered as a space in which the ties between tourism and pilgrimage are unclear, blurred, and poorly classified. This relationship has also resulted in possible potentialities on how that site has projected mysticism, death, and apophantic nature of Sunan Ampel. The changing projection of the site will be also highlighted in the context of economic and social contestation. The consequence of such interpretation is that Sunan Ampel could be empty vessel in which the interpretative battle and representations are continuously contested. “Sacred pilgrimage” to Sunan Ampel, finally, overlaps with tourism, trade, expression of nationalism, cyber-pilgrimage, and others.*

**Keywords:** *Sunan Ampel, pilgrimage, image, third space*

### INTRODUCTION TO SUNAN AMPEL

Sunan Ampel was the spiritual force behind the founding of Java’s first *Nusantara Islamic* kingdom in Demak. As the origins of Sunan Ampel, it is believed that his father Syekh Maulana Ibrahim Asmorokondi, who came from the Middle East or somewhere in Central Asia, married a princess of Campa, from where the young Raden Rachmad (Sunan Ampel) arrived in Java early in the 15th century. He died in A.D. 1479 and was buried at Ngampeldenta, Surabaya, East Java.

The tomb of Sunan Ampel is one destination of Wali pilgrimage in Java. Around the area of his tomb, there are other tombs of his guardians and students. One of them is Mbah Soleh, who allegedly died for ninth times, and therefore nine tombs were built for him. Near the tomb is an old well built by Sunan Ampel and his students. It is believed that the well will give a ‘blessing’ (*berkah*) for whoever drinking it. Additionally, a mosque of Sunan Ampel was upright there. It has 16 pillars of teak wood. Each of them is 17 meters without sequel woods. These are very tight until now, even they were more than 6000 years old.

It is believed that this mosque has its own ‘goodness’ (*karomah*). It was historically recorded that in the colonization period, the colonizers sporadically bombarded Surabaya which caused a wide destruction. But, this mosque was not broken. From time to time, many domestic and foreign people have visited this ‘sacred’ place, either for outing or religious travel (*ziarah*).



Around the site, a local market, namely Kampung Arab (*A Hamlet of Arab*), was built to provide another colorful sight. At this place, many books, posters, and other items can be easily found for sale. Some of the sellers have claimed themselves as a part of “authentic” trader generations in the area of Ampel, Surabaya. Kampung Arab has provided not only as traditional market, but also a Middle East culinary. There are many foods having ingredients of spices and flesh, a unique provision of Middle East. Due to this reason the local and district governments of East Java have regularly attempted to ‘restore’ this site. The tomb of Sunan Ampel, with its mosque and other facilities, was listed as one of cultural and religious reservation in East Java.

### DIFFERENT ADS, SIMILAR GOAL

“Wali Songo Pilgrimage”, it is one of headlines in an advertisement website **EastJava.com**. In the main menu, fantastic words are displayed in the top of page “East Java, Indonesia: A Tropical Paradise in the World”. As a travel website, this could be regarded as a complete online directory in which the visitors will see diverse menus navigating them into the tourist information based on the regencies and cities in East Java, ranging from Surabaya to Sumenep.

If one is going into a navigator menu “A Beauty of East Java”, it is found “pilgrimage tours” under other information option. Going into the link, one will find a new page of pilgrimage tour in East Java. Go to “Wali Songo Pilgrimage”, there are some pieces of short information about Wali Songo (the great nine saints), especially those who fought for Islamic missionary in Indonesia. The primary *wali* (Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Muria, and Sunan Jati) and other *wali* (Prapen, Ibrahim Asmoro, Sunan Bejagung, Syekh Siti Jenar, Tembayat, Puspongoro) were listed next to the other links, such as holy places, holy mosques, and others.

Interestingly, under the menu “holy places”, only Kampung Arab was provided. In the light of such advertisement, Kampung Arab is believed as one of sacred place from which the travelers and tourists can see “colorful selling” there. Some pictures, such as old books, tales, legendary pictures, mosque, and shopping activities, are displayed. However, it is a few of information provided in this menu, as well as information of each Wali Songo.<sup>1</sup>

Another source is e-newspaper **Travel.okezone.com**. Under the menu “Indonesiaku”, many articles about tourist destination are provided. This website is easy-use due to the menu “search”. One simply types a specific destination or site, this website will display some articles about it. In addition to “Indonesiaku”, there are other interesting menus, such as “Jelajah”, “Pelisir”, “Video”, “Potret”, and “Booking Hotel”. If one wishes to get a collection of travel diaries, it is simply to click “Jelajah” (*Expedition*).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>“Sunan Ampel”. <http://www.eastjava.com/books/walisongo/html/walisongo/ampel.html> (last access: October 19, 2013)

<sup>2</sup>“Wisata Religi ke Makam Sunan Ampel”. <http://travel.okezone.com/read/2011/08/01/407/486845/wisata-religi-ke-makam-sunan-ampel-1> (last access: October 19, 2013)



The articles published in “Jelajah” have issued traveler’s experience in a visit to specific site. However, the style of such report is not narrative, but a kind of feature. The menu “MyJourney” in the top of site will provide ‘more’ narrative stories about personal travel experiences. By reading journey articles and features in Travel.okezone.com, readers are invited to have a travel as if they are in the real-time. Like as Eastjava.com, this travel website also displays many advertisements and updated information about tourism, but with broader destination, not only East Java, but also all around Indonesia.

To enrich these journey insights, Yudasmoro’s travel essay “Simbol Harmoni Surabaya” (*A Symbol of Surabaya’s Harmony*) will be used to show the different points of view in positioning Sunan Ampel in the light of religious harmony. It will give a unique perspective on the ways Sunan Ampel is perceived by a travel writer. Visiting to his travel blog, **Yudasmoro.net**, one will consider about how Yudasmoro has personal enjoyment as traveler-writer. There are menus indicating it, such as “Travel Photo”, “Culture”, “Journey”, and others. He is also an author of books *Fast Food United* and *Travel Writer*.<sup>3</sup>

### POSSIBLE “IMAGE” OF SUNAN AMPEL

Given the foregoing, it is possible to consider that Eastjava.com and Travel.okezone.com seeks to establish a mental picture of Sunan Ampel as a very unique tourist destination, which is evident by its impressive architecture, important business center as well as in its diversity in architecture, pictures, shopping, and scenery. Furthermore, by visiting at Eastjava.com and Travel.okezone.com, one will see Sunan Ampel as a religious travel site characterized by a blend of old and new, traditional and modern nuances, East and West.

Meanwhile, concerning the psychological holistic impressions of Sunan Ampel, Yudasmoro’s travel note seeks to establish certain atmospheres and/or feelings surrounding the site, despite the absence of the words ‘*atmosphere*’ and ‘*feeling*’ in his note. Primarily, his essay describes Sunan Ampel as having a vibrant and exciting atmosphere due to not only Middle East environment in Kampung Arab, but also a harmony among people/traders: *This hamlet of Arab (Kampung Arab) takes place in next to the hamlet of China (Kampung Cina/Pecinan) with more luxurious building. However, the house-business building (ruko) of Kampung Arab has bigger gateway than Kampung Cina, with colorful Oriental paint.* By using these remarks, Yudasmoro wishes tourists to have expectation about a harmonious destination with relaxed atmosphere.

The point is that despite of different ways used to describe Sunan Ampel, Eastjava.com, Travel.okezone.com, and Yudasmoro’s essay would invite tourists to receive an instant authentic feeling of romantic and exotic past, and they promise an authentic atmosphere in a modern environment. As Taylor theorized, there is a general agreement among tourism researchers and academics that a quest for authenticity forms the basis of many tourists’ choice of destination. Thus, the creation of an

<sup>3</sup>Yudasmoro, “Simbol Harmoni Surabaya”. <http://yudasmoro.net/2012/12/05/simbol-harmoni-surabaya/> (last access: October 19, 2013)



authentic atmosphere may be appealing to potential tourists. However, in the attempt to promote an authentic atmosphere, those descriptions are actually promoting an attraction, which has been staged by the tourism industry as ‘*staged authenticity*.’<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the above described atmospheres and feelings possible to experience during a visit to Sunan Ampel, the tourists may also take a break from the vibrant and ever-changing situation, and experience a fresh and natural atmosphere. Travel.okezone.com exemplifies, *Then, local community has attempted to build the great mosque and tomb of Sunan Ampel in such a way the visitors are possible to have comfortable and quite praying and pilgrimage; the mosque with marble layers which refrigerate the temperature of its interior floor; etc.* Thus, despite the emphasis on Sunan Ampel as a center of business center Kampung Arab with that includes, this website also highlights a feeling of beautiful lush greenery nestled among the busy metropolis center.

Finally, the website conveys a friendly and welcoming atmosphere: *friendly people, local community*, etc. In addition, the reader of the website will sit back with a feeling of local population that is very much part of the destination’s identity: In Yudasmoro’s essay, *What makes this hamlet unique is its people living in harmony.* With this statement, he stresses an importance of Sunan Ampel as image of ‘religious’ destination.

### SUNAN AMPEL AS “THIRD SPACE”

In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, first published in 1978, Victor and Edith Turner highlighted a dimension of religious experience that had scarcely received attention in the field of anthropology.<sup>5</sup> The work presented a unique anthropological contribution to the field of pilgrimage studies, providing a hermeneutical lens for interpreting pilgrimage experience through the concepts of *liminality* and *communitas*. In brief, liminality concerns being “in-between” within a rite of passage, as a person moves from one social state to another. During a rite of passage, a person enters a phase of separation from a previous group, which is followed by an “in-between,” or liminal, phase during which many aspects of life are likely to go through a process of change or distortion.<sup>6</sup>

Victor Turner recognized *communitas* as an experience of oneness or unity felt by those sharing a rite-of-passage experience. He compared it with Martin Buber’s “I-thou” concept: a sacred experience of mutuality with another. *Communitas* therefore describes a model of sociality and a way of experiencing unanimity with other human beings that exists beyond the rite-of-passage experience. Another aspect of *communitas*, the experience of “antistructure,” contrasts with the usual norms of society, or “structure.” Within the realm of antistructure, commonplace social distinctions disappear and individuals relate to each other as equals. Victor Turner saw the structure/antistructure cultural dynamic as central to the organization of human

<sup>4</sup>John P. Taylor, “Authenticity and Sincerity in Tourism”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28, No 1 (2001), 14.

<sup>5</sup>For instance, read Simon Coleman, “Do You Believe in Pilgrimage? *Communitas*, Contestation, and Beyond.” *Anthropological Theory* 2, No. 3 (2002), 355-368.

<sup>6</sup>A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Trans. G. L. Caffee and M. B. Vizedom, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1960), 3.



society; human beings flourish by engaging in a *communitas* experience and then return to everyday structure renewed and rejuvenated.<sup>7</sup>

By positioning Sunan Ampel site as “*communitas*”, one will find that this site has transcended itself to the lived-in and planned world, a place which is often referred to “third space”. There are many ‘modern’ events held in Sunan Ampel, such as circumcision ceremonies, the parade of Ampel villagers from homes at Kampung Margi to the mosque, and others. At the entrance of the Ampel mosque hawkers line both sides of the alley way selling all kinds of goods from perfume, to sarongs, black caps, Muslim clothing, rosaries, to Zamzam water from Mecca, and other prayer needs. There are also hawkers selling Ampel specialty snacks and food like prawn cakes to Arabian curry.

These facts have brought us into a sense of “third space” in which people from Jakarta, Bali, Banjarmasin, Yogyakarta, Manado, Lombok, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and even Kuala Lumpur can encounter between each other to take a spiritual journey in Sunan Ampel. They are also coming from different social status, but when they have worshiped in Sunan Ampel, these social statuses have been blurred. In that site, they encounters with their fellow travelers, of varying nationalities and spiritual persuasions, along the route. It is a space in which people have taken temporary transition away from mundane structures and social independence into a looser commonality of feeling with fellow visitors. It is a space in which Sunan Ampel as sacred place and ‘mundane’ destination is poorly classified.

What so-called “spiritual journey” to Sunan Ampel, therefore, is not really spiritual, because there are many other human beings that exists beyond the rite-of-passage experience, there are also many stores which provide ‘spiritual devices’ they need to praying. This site is also possible to be “*communitas*” with anti-structure where it is difficult to find out social structure tied with Sunan Ampel site, because many Muslims, or even non-Muslim tourists, come and leave. It is a space where social encounter, not social structure, has happened. By “encounter”, I refer to a condition in which people get involved with other activities in temporary time, and only their traces have been remained. Sunan Ampel site, in this case, is a liminal space which suggests alternative ways for people to perceive “pilgrimage” not merely in the center of place, but rather in the in-between space.

## POTENTIALITIES OF PILGRIMAGE TO SUNAN AMPEL

### Mysticism of Sunan Ampel

One of the gems of *Image and Pilgrimage* is an observation concerning the mystical nature of pilgrimage: “Pilgrimage may be thought of as extroverted mysticism, just as mysticism is introverted pilgrimage. The pilgrim traverses a mystical way; the mystic sets forth on an interior spiritual pilgrimage. For the former, concreteness and

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<sup>7</sup>Edith Turner, *Heart of Lightness: The Life Story of An Anthropologist*, (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 129.



historicity dominate; for the latter, a phased interior process leads to a goal beyond conceptualization.”<sup>8</sup>

Sunan Ampel is one of the greatest Islamic saints in Java who spread Islamic teaching by adopting local and cultural mediations. It is the first pathway of syncretism between Java culture and Islamic religion. What so-called *Islam kejawen* is a central theme of such syncretism which is hitherto practiced by local people surrounding Sunan Ampel. The main characteristics of Islamic mysticism in Sunan Ampel are the existence of ancestor, ritual activities for getting talisman (*jimat*), or *selamatan* ceremonies.

In Travel.okezone.com and Eastjava.com, Sunan Ampel is frequently called as Islamic ancestor of Surabaya. By ancestor (*leluhur*), I refer to those who have noble attitudes (*sifat-sifat luhur*) in their lifespan, and for these reasons posterity will honor them by carrying out customary rituals (*upacara adat*). Muslims *kejawen* believe that Sunan Ampel is a moral leader whose the daily behavior or conduct is regarded religious model for people in their ways of speaking and conversation. *Leluhur* has taken a central position in Javanese cultures, including Surabaya.

### Death in “Pilgrimage” to Sunan Ampel

In an article written three years before *Image and Pilgrimage* was published, Victor Turner explored the theme of death in the context of pilgrimage in the salvation religions, describing pilgrimages as “full of symbols and metaphors for death”.<sup>9</sup> Such death, comparable to “mystical death,” is viewed positively as a form of regeneration, and is equivalent to experiences of metaphorical death in indigenous rituals.<sup>10</sup>

These aspects are very much evident within contemporary pilgrimage practice, as expressed by the veneration of saints and the pilgrimage-like tradition of remembering the dead. Sunan Ampel is Islamic saint or martyr associated with his tomb. People have visited to mosque, wells, and tombs of Sunan Ampel as their attempts to connect with the dead founder. Such effort is usually practiced by Muslim *kejawen* who believe that by providing ritual gifts, they can be possible to connect with soul’s death of Sunan Ampel. The gate guardians (*juru kunci*), for example, have usually told their spiritual experience when meeting a spirit, soul, or something sacred regarding with Sunan Ampel. Some people also describe how they have dream about Sunan Ampel after praying for days and months in that site.

Revering such dead may invoke a sense of *communitas*. The memorials of Ampel’s death in Surabaya attract many visitors from different places each year. Some of them visit to get *karomah* and *barokah* from Allah through praying in the mosque of Sunan Ampel, and some of them visit to witness the tombs as religious museums of the Sunan Ampel’s death which are possible to provide them a state of life-in-death. Victor

<sup>8</sup>Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978/1995), 33-34.

<sup>9</sup>Victor Turner, “Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process,” In E. Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 29-47. First published in M. Whison and M. West (eds.), *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa: Anthropological Essays in Honour of Monica Wilson*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975), 30.

<sup>10</sup>Victor Turner, “Death and the Dead”, 32-33.



Turner described pilgrimage as “a rehearsal of the pilgrim’s death”.<sup>11</sup> The need to revere the dead in pilgrimage activity perhaps stems from a need to confront and accept human mortality.

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTESTATION IN SUNAN AMPEL

### *Sunan Ampel* and Economic Contestation

There are huge effects of Sunan Ampel as religious tourism on economic development in Surabaya. The existence of Kampung Arab, for instance, has provided as a complex location of culinary, souvenirs, and accessories in which we will find a large market in the sense of Middle-East situation. In some ways, it has indicated a sense of *communitas* in Victor Turner’s term, where Sunan Ampel site become liminal space in which social and economic activities are engaged with religious ones.

However, the local government’s initiative to design Sunan Ampel site not only as religious site, but also as tourist destination, has influences on much discussion about the desirability of Sunan Ampel site as a strategy for economic development. It has also complex external transformations: technological change, such as cheap air travel and internet booking system; developments in capital, including the growth of worldwide hotels, travel agencies, and personal finance organizations, such as credit cards; the widespread growth of the ‘romantic’ gaze so that more people wish to isolate themselves from existing patterns of mass tourism; the increased fascination of the developed world with the cultural practices of less developed societies; the development of tourists as a ‘collector’ of places often gazed upon and experienced on the surface; and the emergence of a powerful interests promoting the view that tourism has major development potential.<sup>12</sup>

The image of Sunan Ampel is used to attract tourists in the pure connection with Sunan Ampel. By doing so, the boundaries between ‘home’ and ‘away’ have been perforated, blurred. Tourists to Sunan Ampel are those who find themselves as “diasporic traveler.”

### *Sunan Ampel* and Social Contestation

Another interesting development has been the attempt to classify Sunan Ampel site in the context of heritage and root seeking tours.<sup>13</sup> Sunan Ampel site can be read not only as religious, but also historic site. It is due to the historical fact on which the story of Sunan Ampel as one of National Patriot of Indonesia has been based. However, his tomb today is shaped into a successful tourist destination commemorating a remembered past, not only about Sunan Ampel, but also about other sites, such as Majapahit and Mecca.

<sup>11</sup>Victor Turner, “Death and the Dead”, 35.

<sup>12</sup>John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0 (Third Edition)*, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2011), 73.

<sup>13</sup>J. Killinger, “Communitas,” in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, Edited by D. Leeming, K. Madden and S. Marlan, (New York: Springer, 2009), 445.



The minarets that stand 50 meters high are a unique feature of this mosque from where the *adzan* (call to prayers) is sent out. The large hall with its large dome follows the Javanese *pendopo* (or open hall) style that marks the greatness of Majapahit Empire, whose seat was at Trowulan. Majapahit the time was also instrumental in spreading Islam together with Sunan Ampel. Another historical instance is the Ampel mosque which has five main gates called *Lima Gapuro* symbolizing the 5 Pillars of Faith of Islam. When you enter from the south at Sasak Road you will pass the *Gapuro Mungguh* or *Mungguh* gate, where you will pass the town's market place, which resembles the Seng market by the Haram mosque in Mecca, reminding the faithful to go on the haj pilgrimage when able. By going to *Gapuro* and *Mungguh Gate*, it is possible for people to have "tourist's gaze" on Majapahit and Mecca, otherwise than Sunan Ampel.

These findings indicate the creation of a strong sense of unity, which brings us back to Turner and Turner's model of "ritual process"<sup>14</sup> and the ways in which ritual helps create and sustain group cohesion. Ioannides and Cohen Ioannides,<sup>15</sup> which examined patterns of Jewish travel in the United States, described them as "pilgrimages of nostalgia". It is also true for Sunan Ampel site, due to it is possible produced as a commoditized object of the nostalgic past.

#### AFTER SUNAN AMPEL: CYBER-PILGRIMAGE

By taking Sunan Ampel as *communitas* or "third space", it brings our attention to another paradigm 'contestation' in Eade and Shallnow's term. In some ways, the idea of contestation can be a critique of *communitas* which tends to just idealize discourse about pilgrimage rather than an empirical description of it. Eade and Shallnow present pilgrimage as a capacious arena capable of accommodating many competing religious and secular discourses.<sup>16</sup>

The interpretative battle has been a part of projecting Sunan Ampel as the contested space in which representations of that site are always being consistent among parties. It has been implicitly mentioned that Sunan Ampel could be differently used by different people, either in reading different online directories, or in visit to this site. This section is intended to clearly provide a multi-faceted meaning of Sunan Ampel not only as a strip away mundane conflicts and assumptions (as in Turnerian paradigm), but rather a space providing exceptionally accommodating (and possibly amplifying) contexts for them to be expressed.

As sacred place, Sunan Ampel is *consumed* by religious people who believe that this site will favor spiritual sense, a rites of passage, negative experience, and metaphoric feeling of death. They have assumed that Sunan Ampel should be perceived only for religious purposes. It will be functional only if people employ Sunan Ampel in giving *berkah* and *karomah*, and as mediation through which they are possible to pray

<sup>14</sup>Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *The Ritual Process*, (London: Routledge, 1969), 47.

<sup>15</sup>D. Ioannides and M. Cohen Ioannides, "Pilgrimages of Nostalgia: Patterns of Jewish Travel in the United States," *Tourism Recreation Research* 27, No. 2 (2002), 23.

<sup>16</sup>John Eade and Michael Shallnow (eds.), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 5.



God. Every year, even every day, there are lots of Muslims coming to search for religious benefit.

For being personally involved with having 'pleasure' to read Sunan Ampel from the distance (from Internet), pilgrimage is probably perceived as a practice beyond 'normal' definition of religious one. By doing so, pilgrimage to Sunan Ampel is not considered only as a visit to the location, but also a 'cyber-pilgrimage' to that space. When the Internet is increasingly seen as more than a space for information, but a space that is encouraging spiritual and social connection, it will make us possible to have new forms of spiritual exploration and religious observance.<sup>17</sup> To engage with Islamic faith and culture in Sunan Ampel, individuals can do so on virtual Ampel.<sup>18</sup> However, it is probably difficult to implement this experiment due to the fact that Indonesian people still have a strong awareness of pilgrimage to the 'real' destination. Even though it is uncommon in (Muslims) Indonesia, such venture has been initiated by Pesantren Virtual<sup>19</sup> to provide a "communitas" in different way, and this idea is possible to be undertaken in the context of pilgrimage

By locating the image of Sunan Ampel as 'contested', one will construct it not merely as a vacuum space in order to differentiate pilgrimage activity from the everyday, but also religious 'void', an 'empty vessel' that is open to the assumptions that will be poured into it by constituencies of pilgrims. As a blankness, Sunan Ampel is *contested* among peoples who perceive it or who has directed it to the certain goals. The contestation of Sunan Ampel is finally depending on who have interests to look at that site and for what this vision look like.□

## DAFTAR PUSTAKA

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<sup>17</sup>Connie Hall-Smith, "Cyberpilgrimage: The (Virtual) Reality of Online Pilgrimage Experience," *Religion Compass* 5, No. 6 (2011), 238.

<sup>18</sup>It is as like as, for instance, "Virtual Jerusalem" in <http://www.virtualjerusalem.com/>

<sup>19</sup>See [www.pesantrenvirtual.com](http://www.pesantrenvirtual.com).



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