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LUELEN BERNART His Times, His Book, And His Inspiration

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Luelen Bernart was a Pohnpeian who lived during the last century's Japanese Administration of Micronesia. He was educated at the Protestant Mission School, and has the distinction of being the first Micronesian ever known to have written a book. His book was translated and published by the American anthropologists Saul Riesenberg, Jack Fisher, and Margaret Whiting in the late 1970s by the University of Hawaii Press under the title of "The Book of Luelen." Luelen Bernart stands today as an individual milestone in Micronesian history, as well as an inspiration for many Micronesians, and Micronesian writers of the future.

The traditions in Micronesia are oral not written ones. Knowledge and skills have been passed along from one generation to the next by word of mouth and not by writing. This is, of course, changing and it has been changing since the arrival of outsiders possessing intellectual traditions, which they have transposed, or superimposed upon the Micronesian cultures.

In Micronesia missionaries were the first to introduce the written word as a way of passing along knowledge, establishing authority, and preaching the gospel. The Bible was translated into various native languages, and in order to accomplish this translating work, the very languages themselves had to be transposed from the spoken to the written form. By the mid-1800s, through the work of the Catholic priests and the Protestant missionaries, written forms of the languages emerged in Micronesia. Although these developments have been with us now for over a hundred and fifty years, it takes much longer for them to become solidified so

as to enable a more or less automatic familiarity. Hence, we find great disagreement over orthography and grammar throughout Micronesia. A group of Micronesians cannot look at a map, for example, and find themselves in agreement as to the various spellings used to describe places.

The written word itself—through documents—is still not always taken as the final authority in Micronesia as often as the spoken declaration of an individual recognized for his or her expertise. Of course there are exceptions to this assertion, especially among younger people and students who are exposed to and participate in western schools and educational models that implicitly sanctify the written word as often being the reification of truth. However, among older people, and particularly in the realms of traditional and practical knowledge, reliance on the validity of the spoken word is dominant. It is worthwhile then to ask how does this transposition from oral to written forms take place, and how can it be en-

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couraged? Clearly, the initial steps in such a transposition are the basic ones of translation. In addition to the Bible and religious writings, various dictionaries and grammars have appeared over the years, and indeed continue today to be produced and refined.

Another step in this process is the act of teaching. Here is meant the teaching in the formalized, western fashion. There is a distinction to be made between this type of teaching and the traditional types. In Micronesia teaching has been an individual thing; no "schools" existed before intrusion by outsiders. Young people participated in all aspects of community life, and learned skills and attitudes through this participation. Readiness for participation was intrinsically determined by each person. Knowledge was specialized and was private, not public, property. No one could master all of life's skills. Individuals prided themselves on their ability to do what others could not. Specialization of knowledge and skills then distinguished one person from the next. It is true that the impartation of traditional specialized knowledge in Micronesia, such as navigational arts, fishing practices, and sexual techniques, often called for the formation of "classes," but these would not be strictly analogous to western institutions like schools that would have separate physical facilities, multiple-subject curricula, and time schedules.

Western-type schools do not operate with these individual premises. Designed to provide people with the skills they need to function in a very different kind of society, schools by their very existence and operation, negate the traditional methods of education in Micronesia. Books and libraries, of course, cannot be a part of a traditional process either because their very existence means that the knowledge they contain can be read by anyone who is literate. It is small wonder that education in the western sense, has proceeded slowly in the islands; it has represented an antithesis of cultural patterns. Nevertheless, teaching, and the establishment of formal schools, are part of a written, intellectual tradition. In the sense that they promote change, they destroy something while they create something else.

A third step in developing and encouraging written forms of communication and transfer is that of identifying and encouraging native writers. As intellectually rich or relevant as a foreign scholar or writer may be, he or she can probably never hope to be a model as useful to a Micronesian as another Micronesian. Hence, a real challenge in the encouragement of intellectual traditions is the development of Micronesian models. From these models other, and even better, Micronesian writers may emerge. An outstanding model, and a singular one, is Luelen Bernart of Kitti municipality on Pohnpei. Although Luelen has been dead for more sixty years, his inspiration as a model for Micronesian writers is only now beginning to emerge. In the early 1940s Luelen wrote a history of Pohnpei, which was published in the late 1970s. His act was quietly revolutionary!

THE FIRST BOOK WRITTEN BY A MICRONESIAN

On Pohnpei, as elsewhere in Micronesia, people are distinguished from one another largely by what they know. Talents vary, but one rule governs: a man cannot tell all that he knows, lest he lose that which makes him special. To reveal all is to die. "Some knowledge, like the juice of the coconut, passes from darkness to darkness," say the Palauans. This attitude stands in marked contrast to the western belief that all have a right to know. The publication of *The Book of Luelen* (University Press, Hawaii, 1977) a compilation of the legends, myths, chants, songs, spells, and botanical lore of Pohnpei Island, marked a major break with this tradition. The publication of the book was also an historical event. A body of information, transmitted orally from one generation to the next over a period of centuries, has now been put down in writing. The book exists as the only history of a Micronesian Island written by a Micronesian. The story of the book and the man who wrote it offers a valuable glimpse of a traditional value system coping with change. It might also help us to better understand the process of change and learning in the island cultures.

Let us first take a look at Luelen himself in order to see if there is anything in his profile, which helps to explain why he wrote the book. Luelen Bernart was no cultural deviate or renegade; quite the contrary. He was a wise and respected man with strong familial ties to the ruling families of two of Pohnpei's five kingdoms. Born in 1866 in the Wone section of Kitti kingdom, Luelen was a member of the chiefly Lipitan clan, which held the title of Nahnken (prime minister). His father was a member of the Dipwinmun clan from whose members the Nahnmwarki (king) was chosen. Luelen's father, at his death, held the title of Dauk, the third highest title in the Nahnmwarki's line of succession. One of his five matrilineal cousins was married to the Nahnmwarki of Kitti; one of his daughters was later to marry a future Nahnmwarki of Madolenihmw. By birth, and through marriage then, Luelen had a high societal position.¹

Unlike most Pohnpeians of his day, Luelen received formal schooling. He attended the American Protestant Mission School at Ohwa in Madolenihmw. There he studied English, arithmetic, the Bible, geography and world history.² Luelen did well at Ohwa; so well in fact that there were plans to send him to Hawaii for training in the Protestant ministry. The ship on which Luelen was to leave never arrived, however, and his parents later developed second thoughts about a trip abroad.³ Thus Luelen remained on Pohnpei and took a position as teacher with the Protestant mission.

Luelen's noble blood provided him with direct access to the princely families of Kitti kingdom. It was in this world that Luelen mastered the language and rituals of the Kitti court. He became familiar with the legends governing the origins of traditions and customs. The knowledge gained here—available to only a few—was to provide the basis for much of the material set down in his book. Today, at feasts on Pohnpei, anybody who has something to say can address a gathering in the *Nabs*, or traditional meeting house. Such was not the case during Luelen's day, however; only a few qualified speakers could speak at an assembly attended by the chiefs. Luelen was such a man.

Often the Nahnmwarki or Nahnken would call on Luelen to give a speech explaining the purpose of the gathering. The power of his words was such that usually no one chose to speak after him.⁴ We see here now that Luelen became a noted storyteller and public speaker. He was quite secure in his command of his own language, and became creative with it within his own cultural context. It follows that, had there been a normal tradition of writing on Pohnpei, he would probably have begun to write long before he actually did.

BERNART'S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Luelen's religious training at Ohwa added moral influence to his already formidable social position. By the turn of the century on Pohnpei, the Bible, as well as the legends, had become a source of authority for settling disputes and making decisions. During the Japanese administration of the islands (1914-1944), Luelen served as a village *soncho*, the second highest title in the system of native government established by the Japanese. The Japanese anthropologist Imanishi Kinji, in his book *The Island of Pohnpei; An Ecological Research* (Kodansha, 1944), attributed the respect accorded to Luelen by the Japanese government to his moral influence. Imanishi, visiting Luelen in 1943, during the last years of the Pohnpeian's life, described him as "a white-haired man over seventy years old, with a long oval face, and really a noble appearance appropriate for a chief. For clothing moreover, he wore neat trousers and a dress shirt."⁵ Imanishi went on to mention a photograph of Luelen, ". . . in Japanese *haori* and *hakana* in the first government sponsored group touring the island, and a framed letter of public recognition dated August 1920, from the commanding officer of the Temporary South Seas Defense Force for a project in which, at personal expense, Luelen renovated the paths of his village."⁶ Before his death in 1946, Luelen received the title of *Nan Sau Ririn*, the third highest in the Nahnken, or prime minister's line.

These qualities of intelligence, knowledge, and strong moral position, are sufficient qualification for a writer-historian. But, there was

yet another element which influenced Luelen. Henry Nanpei, the richest and most prominent Pohnpeian of his day, figures prominently in Luelen's story, and in the writing of the book. Born in the same year as Luelen, Nanpei, like Luelen, was an only child. His father was Nanku, the Nahnken of Kitti, and his mother, Merian, the daughter of an American sailor. Nahnken Nanku was known among the whalers and traders who visited the island for his hospitality to visiting foreigners, and over the years had amassed quite a collection of money and gifts. Returning from school in Hawaii, Henry continued his tradition of hospitality and used his wealth to open a store in the *ronkitti* section of Kitti kingdom. He soon increased his number of stores and the size of his landholdings. With no access to money, Pohnpeians patronizing Henry's stores were sometimes forced to give their land in payment of debts. This land, coupled with the considerable tracts he inherited from his father, made Henry the single largest landholder on Pohnpei. Henry expanded upon his wealth by planting coconuts on his land to produce copra. By the end of the nineteenth century his power was such that he simply took the title of Nanpei, sixth in the Nahnmwarki's line, and made it his last name.⁷

Nanpei's ambitions extended to the religious and political spheres. He was the principal benefactor of the Protestant mission in Kitti and served as its pastor. He later assumed the leadership of the island-wide church. The best-educated Pohnpeian of his day, Nanpei often served as a negotiator between the Pohnpeians and the Spanish and German administrations. The American anthropologist John L. Fischer describes Nanpei's ultimate objective as the establishment of an American protectorate over Pohnpei, governed by an island-wide Congress that he himself would lead.⁸

LUELEN AND HENRY NANPEI

A great deal of controversy surrounds the person of Henry Nanpei. Albertine Loomis, in her history of the Hawaii Conference of the United Church of Christ entitled: *To All People*, terms

Nanpei "a devout and loyal brother who kept the Protestant church alive on Pohnpei."⁹ A member of the Hawaii Evangelical Association wrote at the end of the nineteenth century: "Amid persecutions and wars, and the challenge of death itself, that brave man (Nanpei) has not abjured his faith, nor his gentle soul ceased . . . to give his patient, clear testimony to the power of the Christian life Had those venerable fathers of the Pohnpeian mission, the Revds. [sic] Sturges, Gulick, Doane, and Rand, done no more than achieve the training of such a man, they would have done well."¹⁰

Others, however, hold a decidedly different picture of Henry Nanpei. Cabeza Pereiro, a member of the Spanish administration on Pohnpei, accused Nanpei of instigating, for his own gain, the Protestant-Catholic Wars that raged on Pohnpei throughout Spain's tenure over the island. Paul Hambruch, anthropologist with the German South Sea's Expedition (1908-1911), identifies Nanpei's hand behind the Pohnpeian rebellion against the German authority in 1910. Hambruch believed Nanpei wanted to prevent the Germans from taxing his profitable trading business. A modern scholar of the period, the late Professor R.M. Keesing of the Australian National University, calls Nanpei "a virtual agent of the colonists and exploiter of his own people."¹¹

Where some suspected a villain in Nanpei, Luelen saw only a Christian man. In his book, Luelen devoted two chapters to the life and accomplishments of Nanpei:

Now Henry Nanpei was well respected in Pohnpei as well as the islands outside of Pohnpei, and as far as some of the great lands abroad. The cause of this was that he had great thoughts by his teachers of the religion of God. He became a Protestant Christian who loved God and believed in Jesus Christ who is the savior of the whole world.

He also helped the Pohnpeian teachers in the work of their congregations. This is why the nobles and all the people of Pohnpei knew him and believed in him and trusted him in everything for his kindness to all kinds of peo-

ple He was a great man, for he helped them all in times of trouble¹²

There was no objectivity in Luelen's view of Nanpei. Their association, which began at the Protestant Mission School in Ohwa, was lifelong. The two men were also related by marriage; their wives were blood sisters. In Pohnpeian kinship terms, Luelen and Nanpei were brothers-in-law (the Pohnpeian term for which is *mwab*), and indeed they acted as such. Luelen visited Nanpei often in *ronkitti*, and there was able to meet people who helped him increase his knowledge of Pohnpeian lore. Nanpei took Luelen on one of his trips around the world; Luelen, however, got only as far as Hong Kong before having to return to Pohnpei because of illness.¹³ In a very real sense Nanpei was Luelen's patron. In return Luelen served his benefactor faithfully. Luelen sat as a member on Nanpei's *pwim en loalokong*, a small group of mission-trained Pohnpeians who attempted to reform the traditional political system of the island.¹⁴ Also, it was Luelen who watched over Nanpei's business interests during Nanpei's periods of confinement under the Spanish, and later during his several trips around the world. Given the special relationship between the two men, it is not surprising that portions or partial copies of Luelen's original work were later turned over to the Nanpei family for safekeeping.

Privy to valuable sources on Pohnpeian lore and tradition, training by Protestant missionaries to be literate, and supported by his special friend, Henry Nanpei, Luelen Bernart found himself in a singularly advantageous position to put down in writing some of what he knew. Luelen began writing his book in 1934 at the age of 68, after a lifetime of gathering information. Secure in his position as one of the foremost authorities on Pohnpeian culture, and confident of what he knew, Luelen wanted to leave behind him a reminder of those things which he believed to be important to Pohnpeians. Aware of the changes that were sweeping Pohnpei even then, and of the problems that confronted a society based on oral traditions, the old man sought to provide something that might help to sustain his people

and their customs. An admirer of the western scholarly tradition, Luelen may have also been attempting to demonstrate his talents through a mastery of another culture's principal mode of expression. Being a good Pohnpeian, however, Luelen probably wrote down only part of what he knew. His sources were oral. He combined his extensive knowledge with what he had heard from others.

KNOWLEDGE AND PRIVILEGED INFORMATION

Transcribing onto paper the myths and legends of an oral society proved to be no mean feat. No matter how reliable the source, a single version of any given story could never be considered complete. This is because Pohnpeians, then and now, would automatically withhold certain information in order to preserve their advantage. To share all would be to cheapen a privileged body of knowledge, and to undermine one's own position as an authority. Then too, no one person knew everything. Knowledge on Pohnpei was specialized as well as privileged. There were special chants and spells for even the most routine of activities. Each kingdom and section within a kingdom had its own particular stories and traditions that differed slightly, but importantly, from those of other areas or sections.

Deliberate distortion presented another problem for Luelen. Legends, for example, served as the source and justifier for the island's traditional political system. The legends determined which clans and sub-clans held legitimate claim to chiefly titles. In an oral tradition the possibility of distortion for political gain always exists. Luelen then had to be a master detective of sorts. Over the course of a lifetime, Luelen undoubtedly heard many versions of a single story. By checking and re-checking one version against another, Luelen was able to come up with a reasonably complete and accurate story.

Luelen did most of his writing in his own thatched-roofed home behind a larger, two-story Japanese structure in the Rentu section of Wone. The Japanese built the structure to entertain government officials and visiting digni-

taries on their trips to Wone. Luelen, as the village *soncho*, had access to the building, though he chose not to live in it himself. Luelen did his actual writing on loose-leaf sheets of paper, and in small, black, school notebooks. Dr. Imanishi, during his visit to Luelen's home, noted "on one corner of the table in the guest room [was]. . . a school notebook in which he had carefully written things down in Ponapean. [sic]"¹⁵ In organizing the book, Luelen called upon his early training at Ohwa. The book, like the Bible, is divided into chapters and verses, and follows a fairly orderly sequence of events beginning with the prehistoric migration of Pacific peoples, and concluding with the end of the German period in 1914. The last twenty chapters were dictated by Luelen to his daughter, Sarihna. This was done toward the very end of his life when he was dying and too weak to write. The book, according to its English version editors, was completed in 1946.

A good deal of the credit for the survival of the book goes to Sarihna. It was she who served as its editor, collecting the loose-leaf pieces of paper and various notebooks, and copying them down into a single, bound version.¹⁶ She made several partial copies for members of Luelen's family, and these appear to pre-date the more complete manuscript. Her husband, Koropin, completed the task after her death.¹⁷ Many of the original notebooks and pieces of paper from which the manuscript was compiled were given to Oliver Nanpei, son of Henry, by Luelen's son, Wililinter.¹⁸ Members of the Nanpei family used these to make other, partial copies. These partial copies and some of the original notebooks and pieces of paper remain in the Nanpei family to this day.

THE PUBLISHES MANUSCRIPT

From 1952 to 1954, Dr. Marjorie Whiting, one of the three editors of the English translation, worked with a partial manuscript said to be copied from the original by Caroline, wife of Henry Nanpei. Whiting described this copy as "written in Pohnpeian in a ten cent school notebook with ruled sheets. It was rather painstakingly copied in a firm, Palmer-style penmanship, evenly spaced. It looked as

though it were copied from another manuscript. Credit was given to no one—it was written as though the writer knew, or heard, the stories."¹⁹ Dr. John L. Fischer, second of the three editors, saw a partial copy made by a relative of Luelen who asked to remain anonymous. Fischer also discovered an earlier draft of that copy made by yet a second anonymous relative.²⁰

Word of the book's existence spread among the Pohnpeians. People coveted the book because of the importance of the traditional legends contained within its pages. To the holder of such information belonged respect, prestige, and position. Those who could speak with recognized authority on the old stories were powerful men. Their words were highly influential in settling major disputes among the kingdoms, clans, and families.

Because of the advantages falling to the holder of *The Book of Luelen*, copies remained scarce for nearly twenty years after its completion. The book, in all its forms and copies, rested securely with the Nanpei and Luelen families. Foreign scholars knew of the book even before its completion. As mentioned earlier, Dr. Imanishi remarked upon the book in his description of a visit to the Luelen house in 1943. Dr. Saul H. Riesenberg, as staff anthropologist for the U.S. Naval Administration in Micronesia following WWII, heard of the book on his first visit to Pohnpei in 1947. It wasn't until 1963, however, that copies of the book began to proliferate. In that year Riesenberg, working for the Smithsonian Institution, returned to Pohnpei and, accompanied by two Pohnpeian informants, traveled to Wone to visit Sarihna's husband, Koropin, who now held Luelen's old title of *Nan Sau Ririn*. Aware of the importance of the book and its potential contribution to the fields of Pacific anthropology and history, Riesenberg hoped to persuade Koropin to allow his copy of *The Book of Luelen* (Sarihna manuscript) to be taken to the Pohnpei Agricultural and Trade School (PATS), where he planned to have it photographed. To assist his cause, Dr. Riesenberg enlisted the support of Father William McGarry, a Jesuit missionary assigned to

Wone. Riesenber, McGarry, and the two Pohnpeian informants, met with Koropin at his home. At that meeting, according to Riesenber, Koropin agreed to release his copy of the Luelen book for a short time on condition that it be returned promptly, and that the book never be published in the Pohnpeian language. Dr. Riesenber agreed.²¹ Whether or not Koropin gave his permission to the publication of an English translation is not clear.

At PATS, Riesenber, with the assistance of Walker Evans, also of the Smithsonian, photographed every page of the book, and left it in the safekeeping of Father Hugh Costigan, S.J., the director of PATS and head of the Catholic mission in Madolenihmw. Father Costigan later gave the book to one of the two informants present at the meeting with Koropin, McGarry, and Riesenber. It was Costigan's understanding that this man would return the book to Wone. The book, however, was never returned. Koropin, and the members of his family accused the Pohnpeian informant of taking the book. As proof, they pointed to the man's failure to attend the funeral of Sarihna, his aunt. Koropin and his family members claimed that the failure to participate in the funeral of his mother's sister—a shocking violation of Pohnpeian social obligations—attests to the man's guilt.²²

Dr. Riesenber, as he had promised, sent a complete set of photographs of the book's pages to Koropin. Also included was a set of photographs for Father McGarry. Although Koropin received his copy, McGarry's became lost. Riesenber, hearing that McGarry had received no copy, sent a second set to the missionary in Wone.²³ The missing set of photographs later turned-up at PATS where it was then sent to the Micronesian Area Research Center at the University of Guam, to be preserved. Later still, a Peace Corps Volunteer working at PATS managed to procure a copy for himself, and there are reports that still other copies have been made. Thus, it cannot be said with certainty how many copies of the Pohnpeian version of *The Book of Luelen* are in existence.

CONCLUSION

What might be learned from this consideration of Luelen; particularly with regard to the continuing introduction of written traditions? Since the introduction of democratic and egalitarian philosophies for education in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands following WWII, it has been held that "each individual should have the opportunity of progressing as far as his abilities can take him,"²⁴ and there has been a constant increase in the numbers of Micronesians participating in all levels of education.²⁵ In the competition for scholarships for study abroad, citizens and administrators have frequently complained about two things in the selection process. First, selection is not based on sufficient empirical data about each student. Second, and almost as a corollary, social status and clan-family affiliation remain the most important selection criteria. Ironically, the case of Luelen Bernart would seem to validate such approaches!

Another direction which may be usefully taken is the one which recognizes the cultural value of public speaking, and then uses it as an integrated pedagogical tool. That is, the teaching of writing may be more successfully done by mixing it closely with public-speaking and speech-making.

On a broader social level in Micronesia the propensity to write increases, and the degree of intellectualization also increases and continues to develop. More and more Micronesians use writing as a means of political, economic, and artistic expression. After another fifty years has passed, however, the experience of Luelen Bernart will still remain as a hallmark of this development, and his memory will undoubtedly inspire many Micronesians in the years to come.

ENDNOTES

This article had its beginnings in some notes I prepared for a keynote address I was invited to deliver at the November 2001 annual conference of the Pacific Islands Association of Libraries and Archives (PIALA). However, the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York City on 11 September 2001 made air travel

scary for many people, and so the event was cancelled. I resurrected my notes recently while preparing some lectures on the history of education in Micronesia.

- 1 *Luelen Bernart: The Book of Luelen*, translated and edited by John L. Fischer, Saul H. Riesenberg, and Marjorie G. Whiting, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977, p.5.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 3 Interview with Masao Hadley, Pohnpeian elder. Pohnpei, 11 November 1979.
- 4 Luelen Bernart, *op.cit.*, p.3
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.4
- 6 Interview with Denno Serilo, Pohnpeian informant. Pohnpei, 3 January 1980
- 7 John L. Fischer, *The Eastern Carolines*, New Haven, Connecticut: HRAF Press, 1957, 3rd printing, 1970, p.40
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.41
- 9 Albertine Loomis, *To All People*, Hawaii: United Church of Christ, 1911, p.89
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.90
- 11 R.M. Keesing, Review of the Book of Luelen, *The Canberra Times*, 12 May 1978
- 12 Luelen Bernart, *op.cit.*, p.119.
- 13 Interview with Masao Hadley, *op.cit*
- 14 Interview with Denno Serilo, *op.cit*
- 15 Luelen Bernart, *op.cit.*, p.4.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p.6.
- 17 Interview with Koropin David, the younger. Pohnpei, 6 February 1980
- 18 Interview with Masao Hadley, *op. cit.*
- 19 Correspondence with Marjorie Whiting, 5 October 1978.
- 20 Luelen Bernart, *op.cit.*, . p.1.
- 21 Correspondence with Saul H. Riesenberg, 7 June 1978
- 22 Interview with Koropin David, the younger, *op.cit.*
- 23 Riesenberg correspondence, *op.cit.*
- 24 Statement of Policy, Department of Education, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), Saipan, CNMI. 1976.
- 25 see: TTPI, Annual Reports, 1970-79; Francis X. Hezel, S.J., "The Education Explosion in Truk," *Pacific Studies*, v.2, spring 1979, p.167ff.; and, Dirk Anthony Ballendorf, "The Community College of Micronesia," *South Pacific Bulletin*, 4th quarter 1978, p.27.

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