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Book Review (by Greg Hellsten)  
of

*Tigers: Leaders of the new Asia-Pacific*  
Sheridan, G. 1997, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Greg Sheridan is passionate about the future of the Asia—Pacific region and it having a successful role to play in the global economy. He is a devotee of Paul Keating's vision of an Australian republic and its engagement in Asia as aspects of Australia's modernisation, and celebrates the role that Australia has played in building the architecture of the Asia—Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum.

He claims that the success of the East Asian economies is due to political leadership rather than economic policies, because it is the ability to facilitate the reforms required to stabilise government, provide living essentials for people, develop infrastructure and harness technology to create an environment suitable for bringing about economic improvements attractive to investors and promote trade.

The success of leadership in the Asia-Pacific region is determined by Sheridan to be the ability to do the right things, viz. to take actions which continue the reforms instigated by others to bring countries into the Asia—Pacific and global environments through ASEAN and APEC, and promote economic and social advancement.

At this point in time, only three of the leaders analysed remain in effective power and their nations are facing the same problems as other organisations confronting change. It could be considered that little else other than the life experiences of the leaders, and the personal behaviour lessons they provide, are only relevant to the leadership development issues of today.

Sheridan does not explain how the leaders developed their leadership abilities nor does he attempt to link the ability to perform the leadership function with any competency other than a combination of being intelligent and pragmatic.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the time of the publication of *Tigers*, Greg Sheridan was the foreign editor of the *Australian* newspaper. He spent twenty years observing, at first hand, the rapid and revolutionary developments in the Asia—Pacific, in particular the rise of the East Asian economic miracle where previously poor, post-colonial nations had developed into stable and prosperous regional powerhouses.

Sheridan does not set out to explain the reasons for Asian success in terms of the development of, and mechanics of, various governmental and economic models.

Rather, Sheridan focuses on the role of individual leaders in bringing about and maintaining the reforms which have laid the basis for improvement in living standards, political

representation, social cohesion, harmony, regional unification, justice, accountability, environmental and resource management, anti-corruption measures, globalisation policies and infra—structure development in their own countries and the region.

Using material from exclusive interviews supplemented by readings and research, Sheridan provides a biographical sketch of leaders from East Asia and his own assessment of their contribution to their country, putting their political careers into the context of national developments.

This anecdotal account of the regions' leaders has been analysed to determine what Sheridan believes are the criteria for measuring leadership success, the leadership traits displayed, and the life experiences which are relevant to the development of these Asia—Pacific personalities as leaders. The results are considered in light of a range of views on leadership development and leadership requirements for organisations confronting today's and tomorrow's problems.

Appendix A provides a summary of the background and achievements of each leader portrayed in the book.

## **LEADERS AND THEIR LEGACY**

Along with phenomenal economic growth rates, East Asia has witnessed the greatest number of people exiting poverty in the shortest time in the history of the world. This amounts to a revolution which has been predominately peaceful. In that there has been little dislocation in the face of rocketing social and economic change. Not only has the increase in competition in world markets from products of Asian origin been—in Sheridan's opinion—the real manifestation, of globalisation but developing regionalisation with increasing intra-East Asian trade means that the Asia Pacific region is the centre of world development and opportunity. This is where Australia must focus its attention and assimilate further with Asia culture.

No common thread exists for the identification of is the reason for success of the East Asian economies since bureaucratic, corporate and market influences vary throughout them.

## **ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

What has been the real reason for improvement in per capita income—has it been the efforts of the countries business leaders or political leaders? Sheridan argues that correct economic policies explain the Asia—Pacific's success only partially and the key lies in leadership, “The East-Asian societies that have been successful .... have had extremely pragmatic leaderships”. However using the adjective of pragmatic to cover the diverse mindsets, outlooks, actions and expectations of these leaders is generalising, to say the least. In his review of *Tigers*, Asid Latif 1997 says;

“leadership is only a little about pragmatism, it is more about the ambition and the ability to ride the interplay of compulsion, contingency, opportunity and risk in the flux of events. Within those parameters, the model of leadership offered by East Asia is that of trusteeship. The executive is the trustee of the people, not one of the political estates that must compete with other estates for power. Not held hostage by a check and balance system the government moves decisively to take decisions that will benefit the country, if not immediately, then in the long run. This is the model that most likely explains East Asian growth”.

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However, trusteeship may also be a euphemism for autocracy, where Confucianism or 'Asian values' are used as justification for the suppression of civil liberties, for which Mahathir and Lee Kwan Yew have been criticised.

Sheridan has not defined leadership, but infers that it is having the intellectual capacity to have visions for improving the well being of constituents and having the motivation and strength to turn those visions into the reforms required to tangibilise the vision. Politicians have been the focus of the book because either political stability (not reform) has been a prerequisite for economic reform at the level of development in the settings these leaders were active, or politicians designed the facility for implementing their reforms.

The organisation of today or yesterday is not the right organisation for tomorrow and, in the process of trying to effect changes, some resistance is going to be generated.

Sheridan is candid about the measures taken by these leaders to negate opponents and their criticism, illustrating that they had the toughness and commitment to facilitate their reforms and to stand for what they believe in. This exemplifies the 'edge' or the courage and toughness to make the yes/no decisions as described by Tichy (Alter 1997). According to Tichy (Alter 1997), leadership is simple—your job as a leader is to take the assets you are given today and make them more valuable tomorrow.

Tichy, (Alter, 1997) also says that leaders need to create emotional energy in people and have the 'edge' to face reality and make the yes/no decisions required for the best use of people, products and investments. There is no doubt that the pragmatism displayed by these leaders, mostly likely often in desperate circumstances, is a manifestation of the yes/no decision making described by Tichy, when the leaders had the courage to oppose the status quo, dispose of a rival and consider life or death.

Sheridan's criteria for failure of the leaders seems to be their demonstrated inability to recognise their responsibilities and take action to promote diplomacy and maintain a peaceful environment for continued benefit and development in the region. He gives a scathing critique of the Clinton administration's Asia policy—for its lack of direction and ideas and the near farcical inconsistency that he claims has eroded the USA's credibility when it is necessarily the most important player in the region.

A query remains as to whether the role of a leader in an organisation at the end of the twentieth century is comparable with that of a leader in developing countries up to four decades prior. Also, when looking at the lessons provided by Sheridan in how East Asian leaders have managed to effect change, it is difficult to grasp the relevance to changing organisations in Australia where the constituents already have the basic needs for which the leaders struggled to provide to their people.

How much have the life experiences been the basis for leadership development, and is there any common thread of experience or development which has been the foundation for leadership development?

From a leadership development point of view, we are interested in the origins, characteristics and experiences of the leaders which have given them the self-esteem and the skills to be able to pursue their strategic objectives or visions by guiding, inspiring and motivating their

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followers in the direction of higher goals and to reward their efforts in ways that are fair and valued by the follower. We can glean from this study how Sheridan's 'Tigers' have been successful, or unsuccessful, and try and apply the results to leadership development requirements of our organisations.

Of the leaders studied, only two have not been educated to a tertiary level, namely Keating and Suharto, yet their achievements have been lauded no less than those of the others. Of Keating, Sheridan says "the power of his will alone was a mighty force in the creation of his vision ... for a democratic politician this is no mean achievement". However, Keating's perceived low level of emotional intelligence (Cacioppe 1997) did reduce his effectiveness when dealing with the 'recalcitrant' Mahathir, who was frustrating Keating with his rejection of APEC. Formal education of the remaining Asia-Pacific leaders has been varied, with some completing degrees at foreign institutions in England or the U.S.A if those countries were involved in regional politics at the time. Unlike Lee Kwan Yew, who also endured foreign occupation, Mahathir studied in Singapore, which may give us an insight into the influences of a foreign education during formative years with his rejection of Asian unity being influenced by Australia and the U.S.A.

The countries of the leaders examined can be considered in systems theory terms to be organisations operating as open, non-linear systems because of the many forces which are influencing what is going on inside those countries where a small stimulus can create chaotic effects. The eruptions of sectarian violence throughout Indonesia since Sheridan wrote *Tigers* is testimony to how simmering tensions build up from the effects of powerful forces such economic downturn, forced repatriation, social dislocation and entrenched corruption and these tensions resulted in an explosive release of emotion which tore apart infrastructure and social harmony. Many of these forces were present before Suharto took control and there is cause to wonder if Suharto, let alone anyone else in the circumstances at the end of Dutch colonialism, could have had a strategic plan or created a vision for taking Indonesia into the future. It seems more realistic that Suharto had plans to solve problems that were in evidence at the time, such as to supply his soldiers and feed the people.

It is very likely that the leaders have not been able to plan and implement strategies, but have been able to constantly realign themselves with the environment. To some degree their countries can be considered to be self-organising systems in which the people have had the capacity to respond continuously to change in the chaos of political revolution (Millett 1998).

The needs of the people in the evolving Asian nations (not including Japan), at the time the leaders were establishing themselves in positions of power, were much different to the needs of their people now. One of the strongest issues facing leaders now is the higher order needs described by Maslow's pyramid having being self respect and self actualisation, (O'Brien quoted in Senge et. al. 1994). Sheridan did not address how leaders approached issues of higher needs of their constituents.

Although he describes their visions, Sheridan did not develop the subject of how the 'Tigers' managed to build a sense of commitment in their constituents by developing a teachable point of view' (Tichy in Alter 1997), or developing shared images of the future they were seeking to create, (Senge et. al. 1994).

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Because Sheridan does not reveal them, it can only be assumed that there had been a teachable point of view or a story which illustrates ideas which engaged their follower's support, otherwise the 'Tigers' would have not had the opportunity of reaching the ultimate position of power as political leaders of their countries. Sheridan was more effective in describing the political path taken to the top which could be interpreted to be consistent with his field of interest. However, Sheridan did describe what the leaders did achieve, each stage of their success and, in most cases, they did achieve what they said they would—thereby establishing credibility for themselves. The leaders were able to offer a solution to problems which have been holding the countries back from obtaining democracy, enough food or a decent standard of living for their people.

The problems of the countries concerned have been immense. Before economic improvement took place, the political concern in the Eastern Asian countries, bar Australia and Japan, was to either establish stability in the power vacuum following the collapse of colonial power or authoritarian regimes, or re-unite the population following civil revolution and war. Where the environment from which the leader has arisen has been involved in war and hostile occupation, the leader has invariably been exposed to military training and/or combat experience. This has been the case with Lee Teng-hui, Mahathir, Suharto and Ramos. Military structures have always been hierarchical due to the recognition that leaders are required at all levels. Concepts such as unity (chain) of command, strategies, tactics and the structural notion of troops, teams, units and divisions, have all come from the military. In the 1960s large business organisations embraced the command and control theory of management and the military was right at the forefront of theory and practice (Tapsell). These days the military has felt the effects of change with the end of the Cold War and budget cuts bringing pressures to downsize and flatten organisational hierarchies from the commercial organisational sphere. Military influences are becoming less relevant to today's organisations, however, they will live on with those which have experienced them in training and action.

Sheridan, in interviewing these charismatic characters, may have allowed himself to be charmed by them at the expense of his critical faculty. It is understandable that he may have been in awe of them and their achievements. Dobson (1997) is quite forthright in wondering what compromises Sheridan had to make to gain access to these leaders at all, and says 'while these leaders have undoubtedly worked economic wonders in their countries, eulogies are no substitute for balanced and critical analysis'. Dobson is a defence analyst and may have different information sources to Sheridan, but the achievements of these leaders has been on show for all to see, to illustrate that some merit has been evident in reaching and staying at the top position. The amount of gamesmanship to balance the merit is what can be covered over by framed interview questions and the like. Were the leaders focussing on future problems, or were they following the lead of others driven by the rewards of a free market?

Should Sheridan have focussed upon others to better represent the calibre of leaders in Asia? For example, public servants, corporate moguls from Japan and Korea, people from the opposite side of politics, high achievers in the fields of education, human rights, different political persuasions or background, rather than those that the media see a story in. With concern for the environmental destruction which is prolific in South East Asia, a very relevant alternative is someone who is willing to accept the stewardship role, where the leadership task is to continue to be creative with creation, but to minimise entropy so as to effect sustainability of development, (Berry 1997).

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## CONCLUSION

In *Tigers* Sheridan does not discuss the issue of leadership development, but leaves the reader to make assumptions about what is perceived to be the building blocks of leadership in the circumstances.

Leaders of the Asia—Pacific nations have not been produced, by customised leadership, development programs aimed at producing individuals to solve their countries problems, but have been subjected to military training, educational, social or work experiences which we assume have raised their self-awareness and developed their character and judgment.

Sheridan has detailed the efforts these leaders to remain motivated, and committed to succeed with their visions against the threat of political isolation, incarceration—even death at the hands of those with prevailing and alternative view points. It is this aspect which holds one in awe of the achievements of these leaders. They also had the personality traits to respond to their environment and do what was required, when it was required, but the mystery remains whether these leaders would have risen to the occasion in another time and place. Both sides to the argument of whether the leader makes history or history makes the leader appear true in this case.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Kim Young Sam, born 1927, South Korean president from 1992 to 1995**

Parents were obsessed with education and made sacrifices so their son had the best opportunities. Studied philosophy and political science at university.

Has been absorbed with the political struggles of his society all of his conscious life, particularly for the democracy of South Korea to guarantee the rights of people and to develop the nation. Youngest ever member, at the age of 24 years, ever elected to the national assembly.

He was a bold reformer by taking steps to change the culture of corruption and sever the collusive links between politics and business, reinstatement of local government elections, outlined South Korea's globalisation policy and steps towards economic liberalisation. Also sought to normalise relations with North Korea with the view to reunifying Korea.

He says he has been motivated in the course of struggling for democracy by threats to his life and hardships endured with imprisonment, house arrest and a 23 day hunger strike.

### **Fidel Ramos, born 1928, President of the Phillipines from 1992 to 1998**

His family was a middle class member of the ruling oligarchy.

He was a career soldier all his life until appointed defence minister by Corazon Aquino and served in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Studied at West Point and holds masters degrees in civil engineering, business administration and national security administration.

He has maintained strong connections within the U.S.A. from where he was supported as reformer during the Marcos years.

Despite inheriting a declining economy, the withdrawal of U.S.A. military bases, natural disaster and insurgencies, he has confronted these challenges head on by stabilising the political system, upgrading infrastructure developments and has steered the economy back on a high growth trajectory. Other priorities he identified were protecting the environment and using resources effectively and pursuing social reform.

He received praise for his efforts, with the Phillipines being considered as one of the most attractive investment destinations.

### **Lee Kuan Yew, born 1923, President of Singapore**

He experienced the Japanese occupation of Singapore before completing his education at the London School of Economics and Cambridge University.

Formed the People's Action Party in 1954.

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Lee is a nationalist leader who has taken his country from colonialism to independence and has holds burning passions that Singapore remain independent, that communism be prevented from establishing itself in Indo-China, and more benefits come from the free market economy.

He has been held in high intellectual status and respected for his judgements on contentious international issues, such as realising that U.S.A. presence is required in East Asia (and that its withdrawal would invite problems), while remaining critical of the U.S.A.'s lack of fiscal and social discipline.

### **Goh Chok Tong, President of Singapore successor to Lee Kuan Yew**

Sees Singapore as a monument to Lee Kuan Yew's career, however, realises that rules which stifle peoples creativity must be removed and tries to involve people in programs and major decision making. He believes that the hierarchical structure of a Confucianist society provides the ability of people to work as a team and this has been critical to Singapore's success. The emphasis is on thrift and hard work because the government does not owe you a living, but your immediate family or clan is there to help you.

### **Suharto, born 1921, President of Indonesia from 1965 to 1999**

Born into absolute dirt poverty, had no formal education but attended military training and was involved in anti-Japanese activities during World War II. He led an assault on Dutch forces at JogJakarta in 1948.

An abortive coup involving the Indonesian communist party in 1965 led to the overthrow of Sukarno and the gradual assumption of authority by Suharto.

Despite a poor human rights performance and inadequate control of the army, the sheer scale of Suharto's achievements is impressive, from turning one of the poorest nations in the world on the brink of famine in 1965 to being self sufficient in rice by 1980 and using the oil wealth sensibly by investing in infrastructure and industry to form the economy into a manufacturing powerhouse by 1990.

He has also been responsible for taking Indonesia back into the united nations, trying to get G7 nations interested in third world issues, supporting APEC by leading the 1994 conference at Bogor where 18 countries committed to achievement of the goal of free and open trade and investment in the Pacific region by 2020.

Three guiding lights of his life are:

- don't be easily surprised;
- don't be overwhelmed by anything; and
- don't overestimate your position.

**Paul Keating, born 1944, Prime Minister of Australia 1991 to 1996**

He was only formally educated to secondary school level before entering federal parliament at the age of 28 years, but from when he became Treasurer in 1983, Keating effected great economic changes against the traditions of his political party when he internationalised the Australian economy by floating the dollar and allowing entry of foreign banks.

His greatest foreign policy achievement was developing the architecture of APEC. He saw the Australian republic and the engagement in Asia as aspects of Australia's modernisation which, in turn, brought about a change in the way Australians think about foreign policy.

Sheridan says that “ *the power of his will alone was a mighty force in the creation of his vision ... for a democratic politician that is no mean achievement.*” Keating saw Australia as a nation of the new world, confronting momentous decisions of identity, security, economics, on the edge of South East Asia.

**John Howard, born 1939, Prime Minister of Australia from 1996**

He was brought up in a petit bourgeois environment and studied law at Sydney University.

Has been astute enough to defer to the views of Malaysia's Prime Minister Dr Mahathir concerning China and Taiwan and has dropped Australia's opposition to Malaysia's proposed East Asian Economic Caucus, but has made some clumsy and confused speeches where he has he stated that “... *Australia was not Asian ...*”.

Sheridan believes that although Howard is not intuitively switched on to Asia he has made adjustments necessary to try and make the Asian connection a winner for him and his government.

**Mohammed Mahathir, born 1925, Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1981**

He survived the Japanese invasion and studied medicine in Singapore before combining his medical practice with activities as a political dissident and a rebel.

He entered politics in 1964 and, consistent with his tendency of not deferring to his elders or seniors, he became impatient with the old world courtesies and racial status quo under Tunku Abdul Rahman and espoused a radical form of Malay chauvinism in order to raise Malays from the bottom of the social strata.

His efforts to build up heavy industry to give Malays greater economic opportunity has been successful with economic growth averaging 5 percent through the 1980s to 8 percent over eight years to 1995. A pragmatic attachment to 'whatever works' has been a hallmark of Mahathir's administration.

He has tended to be more confrontational and less diplomatic than other Asian leaders. Accordingly he does not see a role for the U.S.A. in East Asian stability and believes that while Australia is part of the region, it needs to accept Asian culture—if not adopt it.

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Mahathir's rival for his party's leadership, Anwar Ibrahim, said prior to his recent incarceration that *"it was shameful if ingenious to cite Asian values as an excuse for autocratic practices and denial of basic rights and civil liberties ... any semblance of intolerance for non-Muslims would hurt both Muslims and non-Muslims"*

### **Bill Clinton, President of the United States of America**

Sheridan claims that Clinton has placed domestic issues before foreign policy issues by engaging in inconsistent—and bullying trade policies, particularly with Japan, while ignoring the strategic dimension thus harming alliances in the region.

The Clinton administration's inability to grasp the U.S.A.'s role as the key player in modern East Asia, when the U.S.A. is credited with the responsibility for the re-emergence of China into the global community and the transformation of East Asia into a region of prosperity, peace and the world's most dynamic zone, has led Sheridan—out of apparent frustration—to describe Clinton as a politician without discernible core beliefs beyond re-election.

### **Martin Lee, born 1938, democratic voice of Hong Kong**

Lee is the son of a Kuomintang general who fled China in 1948 and settled in Hong Kong instead of Taiwan. He studied law in London and, following a brilliant legal career in Hong Kong, won the position as a representative of Hong Kong's legal community on the legislative council. Beijing appointed him to the Basic Law Drafting Committee.

He has been devoted to the cause of Hong Kong democracy, which has been irritating to both Britain and China, but has given him international credibility to the extent that the American Bar Association gave him its International Human Rights Award in 1995.

In 1989 he led massive Tiananmen square massacre protest rallies in Hong Kong bringing him the notoriety of being the most disliked person by Beijing. He has maintained a fight for the integrity of the Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong and once supported a motion of no confidence in the Legislative Council against Governor Chris Patten over the limiting of foreign judges to one, and no jurisdiction over acts of state such as defense issues.

He claimed that the Australian government of Paul Keating would not see him because "trade is more important than human rights .... money before honour"

### **Morihiro Hosokawa, born 1938, Prime Minister of Japan from 1993 to 1994**

He descended from a long line of aristocrats who governed the island of Kyushu for hundreds of years, his grandfather being the Japanese prime minister in 1941.

After graduating in law he worked as a journalist with the Asahi Shimbun newspaper until taking up a seat in the Diet, representing the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1971 where he pursued strong environmental policies producing strict regulations, and promoted increased local autonomy in government. In 1983 he returned to Kyushu as local governor with the policy of managing the local community as employees of the regional government. In 1991 he again took up a seat in the Diet, but walked out on the LDP to form the Japan New

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Party and became prime minister at the head of a coalition government in 1993. He managed to accomplish changes such as allowing Japanese voters to contemplate and elect something other than an LDP government and caused multi-member electorates to become single member constituencies. This allowed a more conventional choice between larger political parties, liberalisation of the rice market, efforts to improve dialogue with Korea, committing Japan to an indefinite extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and moving to express more fully Japan's regret and apology for its World War II actions.

### **Lee Teng Hui, born 1923 , President of Republic of China on Taiwan from 1996**

Born the son of native Taiwanese farmers, Lee's intellectual ability was recognised by the occupying Japanese forces who took him to Kyoto to study. He also served in the Japanese army. In 1951 he received a scholarship to the Iowa State University where he studied agricultural economics and developed a relationship with America—whom he saw as a teacher, friend, patron and strategic guarantor of the last resort.

In the late 1950s he was appointed to the US-Republic of China Joint Commission on Rural Construction where he was directly involved in land reform to increase productivity and output from the rural sector with a view to using economic surplus from agriculture to finance industrialisation.

In the mid 1960s he obtained a PhD from Cornell University with his thesis titled: 'Intersectoral Capital Flows in the Economic Development of Taiwan'.

He gained the confidence of the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) government when he presented the 'Joint Commission' on Rural Construction report to the deputy premier such that he was appointed as Minister of State. In subsequent promotions to Mayor of Taipei in 1978 and Governor of Taiwan Province in 1981 he appeared to the KMT as progressive but not dangerous and, therefore, useful to the KMT's plans to modernise itself. He was elected as vice-president to Chiang Ching Kuo in 1984 and as president on probation upon the death of Chiang in 1988.

In 1990 Taiwan joined APEC along with Hong Kong and China and, in 1991, ended the state of emergency which had been in place since 1949.

Lee has taken a casual approach to diplomacy by visiting nations with the aim of playing golf and ending up having private meetings with the leaders of the countries he visited.

After holding high level bilateral talks with China in 1993 Taiwan began to play a role as inventor, design and management centre for the mainland economy.

Sheridan claims that Lee has delivered Taiwan democracy, security and prosperity with some of the fastest periods of economic growth in the world. Although Lee has delivered Taiwan from the martial law system, he has changed the KMT from an authoritarian to a chaotic party, because he does not know how to institutionalise the new system.

According to Dobson 1997, Lee has been called the 'Teflon' president, but since *Tigers* was written he was facing increasing public dissatisfaction with the breakdown of social order.

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