

# Analysis of Sidney Shapiro's Translation Techniques in *The Family* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

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**Abstract:** Ba Jin's realistic novel *Jia* is the earliest one of his trilogy entitled *Current* and his masterpiece which starts his writing career. It describes the downfall of the bureaucratic feudal Gao family and the progress and resistance of the young generation. In 1958, *The Family*, the English version of *Jia* by Sidney Shapiro, was published by Foreign Language Press. In the past several decades, the original work of *Jia* was researched very deeply and a lot of findings have been made, but the studies about the English Version, *The Family*, were still very limited. The emergence and prevalence of reception aesthetics give a new angle for translation studying. This paper aims to analyze Shapiro's translation techniques in *The Family* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics and to broaden its study angles.

**Keywords:** *The Family*, Sidney Shapiro, Reception aesthetics, Translation techniques.

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## 1. Introduction

As a novel of depicting and criticizing China's feudal families and feudal culture, *Jia* made an outstanding achievement in Chinese literature history and had a reputation both at home and abroad. In 1958, *The Family*, the English version translated by Sidney Shapiro was firstly published by Foreign Language Press. With long-lasting charm and high research value, many scholars studied Ba Jin and his *Jia*. On the other hand, for Shapiro's great achievement on the translation of Chinese literary works, many scholars studied his cultural identities and his translation. However, the studies about the English translation of *Jia* are very insufficient and the research angles are also limited. The emergence of reception aesthetics provides a new perspective for translation study. As a literary criticism, reception aesthetics shifts the center of literary study from author, text to target language readers. With the popularity of reception aesthetics in China, many scholars start to focus on the relationship between translators and target language readers in the process of translation, and the researches on the relationships between reception aesthetics and literary translation begin to flourish. Under the guidance of three important views of reception aesthetics, this paper aims to analyze different translation techniques in *The Family*, including free translation, transliteration and interpretation, literal translation and interpretation, and addition, to explore how the translator plays his subjective initiative to meet the expectations of target language readers and achieve the purpose of disseminating Chinese traditional culture.

## 2. A Brief Introduction of Reception Aesthetics

Reception aesthetics, which was born in the mid-1960s in Germany, is a literary criticism led by Hans Robert and Wolfgang Iser. Reception aesthetics is also known as reception theory. It shifts the center of literary study from author, text to target language readers, and declares that the literary activity is a dynamic process of author to work to

reader, and emphasizes the reception process of the readers in literature research and literature history. It includes three important views, which are appealing structure, horizon of expectations and fusion of horizon.

The appealing structure means "blanks" and "indeterminacy" in literature, the gap in the connection of semantic units, as well as the negation on readers' preexisting horizon which brings the blank on psychologically, all of these became the driving forces inspiring and inducing readers to fill the blanks and connect different segments of the text creatively. Roman Ingarden described the literary work as a schematic structure, which has a lot of "places of indeterminacy" that need readers to supplement and enrich in their appreciation. Under the influence of Ingarden's views about phenomenological aesthetics, Iser(1980) held the view that: place of indeterminacy is used to designate a gap in the determinacy of the intentional object or the sequence of the "schematic aspects", the blank, however, designates a vacancy in the overall system of the text, the filling of which brings about an interaction of textual patterns. (p. 120)

Blank is a dynamic factor that stimulates readers' imagination and inspires readers to add content on what is not said, expands what has been said in the original text, and presents greater significance than the specific content. (Zhu, 2004)

The German Philosopher Martin Heidegger puts forward the concept of "preunderstanding" in hermeneutics, which means all the comprehension activities based on "prestructure" of comprehension. This "prestructure" includes preexisting cultural habits, conceptual systems and assumptions. In the light of this concept, reception aesthetics develops it into the concept of "expectation horizon". It refers to the requirements and level of appreciation of literary works formed by various experiences, interests, attainments and ideals of readers in literary reception activities, which is manifested as a potential aesthetic expectation in specific reading. And Jauss (1982) continues to point out that this kind of intention and horizon before reading determines the standards for readers to choose the content and form of the works they read, determines their choices and focuses in reading, and determines their basic

attitude and evaluation of the works. In addition, since readers have a unique understanding and interpretation of the meaning of works, their acceptance is "interpretive acceptance", which inevitably causes the subjectivity of interpretation and different appreciation interest and different levels of literary competence of different readers. Meanwhile, he also notes that reading is a process of recreating with readers' own imagination, and this kind of imagination must be accordance with the "schematic structure" of literary works.

According to Hans Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, the task of the interpreter is to make his present horizon blend with the horizon contained in the content of the object so as to complete the understanding. The process of understanding is essentially the process of fusion of horizon. Based on this view and some achievements of formalism aesthetics, reception aesthetics holds the view that readers constantly change their horizon during their reading process, understand the potential meaning of the works, and in the end reach a certain degree of fusion of horizon with the author represented by the works and the traditional horizon.

### **3. Relationship between Reception Aesthetics and Literary Translation**

As a reader-centered literary theory, reception aesthetics pays much attention to the readers' preunderstanding and their receptivity. In translation process, the translator is not only the receiver but also the interpreter of the original text, and his "prestructure", which includes knowledge, experience, literature accomplishment, reception and appreciation abilities, plays a very important role in the process of reading and interpretation. In literary translation, a literary work always has multiple meanings, which requires the translator not only to grasp and translate the literary meaning but also to explore and interpret the implied meanings. Therefore, it requires the translator to be proficient in both the target language and the source language and have a good understanding about the two cultures. Meanwhile, the process that the translator, who is "the first reader", tries to grasp the textual context and the writer's intention during reading the original text is also the process for the translator to broaden his or her own horizon to achieve the fusion of horizon between the writer and the translator. On the other hand, reception aesthetics takes the view that interpreting process is a recreation process, and on account of many blanks and indeterminacy existing in literature, the translator should give play to his subjectivity and use imagination in accordance with the original text to fill the blanks and enrich these indeterminacy and creatively interpret the original text to the target readers. Meanwhile, thanks to different receptivity and expectation horizon of different readers, the translator should adopt different translation techniques or methods to meet their expectations and achieve the fusion of horizon between the translator and the target readers, and finally, achieve the goal of aesthetics appreciation of literature.

### **4. An Introduction to Ba Jin and his *Jia***

Ba Jin, whose original name is Li Yaotang, was born in a feudal family in Chengdu, Sichuan province in 1901, and in 1920 he was admitted to foreign language school in Chengdu. During his studenthood, under the influence of the May 4th

Movement, he joined the progressive youth organization named of "Gongshe". In 1927, he went to Paris for studying and read a large amount of western philosophical and literary works. At the same time, he also cared about the Chinese living condition and began to write *Destruction*.

As the first novel of *The Turbulent Trilogy* (another two books are *Spring and Autumn*), *Jia* is a masterpiece and representative work of Ba Jin. It depicts the downfall of a feudal family in 1920s in Chengdu, accusing the destruction of the feudal system to life, praising the anti-feudal struggle of the young generation and the awakening of democracy in the influence of new ideas and the May 4th Movement. Focusing on the three main characters of Jue Xin, Jue Ming and Jue Hui in Gao family, as well as other related relatives, this novel displays a picture of the life of a large feudal family, showing its typical patterns of the life and truly recording the historical process of its decline, corruption and final collapse. As the eldest son, Jue Xin, is a person who has long received feudal education but still longs for a happy life. Under the persecution of feudal ethics, he not only loses his dream and ambition but also his lover Mei and his wife Li Ruiyu. As a character with dual personalities, on the one hand, he loathes the feudal ethics in his deep heart, on the other hand, in order to undertake the responsibilities imposed on himself he has to obey and compromise with the feudal system. Jue Min, the lover of Qin, is the second young master of Gao family. Both Jue Min and Qin are young and progressive students influenced by the new thought of the May 4th Movement. With the help of his brother Jue Hui, he boldly resists the arranged marriage and finally wins the victory and gets married with Qin. Compared with his older brother Jue Xin and Jue Hui, Jue Min is the most progressive but puerile one. He actively participates in the struggle against feudalism and autocracy, including the struggle against feudal warlords. He opposes the arranged marriages and falls in love with his maid Ming Feng and supports Jue Min's marriage escape. As a person who resolutely opposes "non-resistance doctrine", he finally escapes the decayed family to chase his new dream.

### **5. The Introduction of The Dual Cultural Identities of Sidney Shapiro And His View on Translation**

Shapiro was born in an American Jewish family and graduated from St. John's University in 1937. He studied at Cornell University during World War II and went to Columbia University and Yale University to study Chinese after World War II. In 1947, he came to China, and in the following years, he settled in Beijing and married Fengzi, a famous actress and writer. He worked as translator and corrector in Beijing Foreign Liaison Bureau and Chinese Literature Magazine in succession. In 1963, he was granted Chinese nationality by Premier Zhou Enlai. Shapiro has translated Chinese literature for 50 years and made an outstanding contribution for Chinese literary translation and cultural exchange. He has not only translated Ba Jin's, Mao Dun's and Sun Li's works, but also translated *Outlaws of the Marsh* which is also his most famous and influential translation work. In 2009, the Chinese Foreign Language Bureau awarded him the Lifelong Honor Award for International Communication, and in 2010, the Chinese Translation Association awarded him the Lifelong Achievement Award for Chinese Translation Culture.

Although born in America, Shapiro spent half a century in China and acquired the Chinese nationality. During more than

60 years of living in China, he actively integrated into Chinese culture and developed a great affection for China. His marriage with Chinese actress Fengzi further promoted his contact with China. His proficiency in Chinese enables him to have a comprehensive understanding of the Chinese culture and his competence in English ensures the acceptability and accuracy of the target texts. Such a special cultural identity of Shapiro helps him to know more about Chinese customs and culture in Chinese classics and disseminate them to TL readers through his translation properly.

My purpose of translation is to let foreigners know about a real China, its political situation, its culture and the feelings of the Chinese people at that time. Translators has responsibility to help foreign readers to understand the essence of Chinese history and culture. When we translate Chinese works to foreigners, it is necessary to consider the target reading group (Hong, 2012).

As an excellent translator who introduced a large number of Chinese literary works to western countries and made contributions to the spread of Chinese culture, when translating Chinese literary works into English, Shapiro adhered to the principle of faithful treason, that is, be faithful to the target readers and the ideas of the original work, betray part of the content and form of the original work (Huang & Liu, 2016). On the one hand, translator should try to convey ideas and spirits of the original text to achieve faithfulness. On the other hand, translator should also take account of readers' expectations and receptivity to improve readability and circulation.

## 6. Different Translation Techniques Shapiro adopted in *The Family from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics*

Collins defines technique as a particular method of doing an activity, usually a method that involves particular skills (Collins). According to its definition, translation technique means particular ways or skills required when adopting translation methods to solve translation problems in translation activity. As a reader-centered theory, reception aesthetics highlights the importance of readers' participation and understanding in reading activity, which means only when readers and author achieve the fusion of horizon can the literary work give full play to its value. Therefore, translators should give full consideration to readers' horizon of expectations and receptivity in the translation process. As a novel describing the stories of a feudal family in 1920s, it referred many historical events and Chinese traditional culture, which was difficult for foreign readers to understand at that time. In order to help foreign readers to know about China better, Shapiro adopting several translation techniques such as free translation, transliteration and interpretation, literal translation and interpretation as well as addition to illustrate Chinese traditional culture and customs as well as literary images to help readers to appreciate the charm of this work, so as to achieve the purpose of reproducing the aesthetic value of Ba Jin's work and disseminating Chinese culture.

### 6.1. Free translation

Free translation means to translate the meaning of the original text without being restricted to the form of the source

language. In the process of translation, when some words with particular cultural meanings or images cannot be found in the target language, or when adopting literal translation or transliteration method cannot fully reveals and conveys the connotations of the SL, free translation can be used (Xia & Dai, 2014). Applying the method of free translation into translation appropriately requires translators to understand the SL and the cultural meanings correctly. In the following examples, Shapiro translated them in a clear and brief way, which took into consideration not only the specific historical background and contextual meaning, but also the TL readers' receptivity.

Example 1:

ST: “姑太太和琴小姐。快点上去罢，”她说了便转身向上房走去。(2018, p. 6)

TT: “Mrs. Chang and Miss Chin. Hurry up.” Ming-feng turned and went into the main building. (1978, p. 3)

Analysis: In Chinese traditional courtyard buildings, “上房” usually refers to the biggest and the most important building. Usually, it is located in the central position of the whole house, and it is always used to accept guests and sometimes only the eldest or the most honorable people can live in it. The translator translated it into “the main building” is very clear and brief for TL readers to quickly understand its meaning.

Example 2:

ST: 据说这两年来学生太爱闹事了，今天检查仇货，明天示威游行，气焰太盛，非严加管束不可。(2018, p. 54)

TT: We've been too much of a headache to them the last few years—demanding checks on stores to see whether they were selling Japanese goods, holding parades and demonstrations.....(1978, p. 46)

Analysis: “仇货” means enemy goods. This novel depicted a series of stories happened in 1920s, when World War I broke out and Japan stepped up its aggression against China. Anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese people kept rising, and many patriots, especially patriotic students launched a series of demonstrations and firmly boycotted the Japanese goods. Therefore, the translator translated “仇货” into “Japanese goods” can make it clearer for TL readers to understand the principle contradiction during that period of time and know Chinese history better, which supplements the indeterminacy of the original text through the translator's effort.

Example 3:

ST: 做奴隶的人永远没有办法。(2018, p. 73)

TT: Once a slave, always a slave! (1978, p. 62)

Analysis: This is what Chueh-hui said to Ming-feng, the bondmaid in the Kao family. As the girl whom Chueh-hui adored, Ming-feng received many a curse and many a blow in his family. The second young master, Chueh-hui thought that life is unfair for Ming-feng, so he said that to her, which shows the puniness and lowliness of bondmaids in feudal society and Chueh-hui's sympathy and helplessness to Ming-feng. However, the translator did not translate it according to the original form, instead, by clarifying the implied meaning of this sentence, Shapiro changed it into a catchy sentence pattern to express the same emotion and help the TL readers to understand the character's emotion in this dialogue clearly, which catered to the liner thinking pattern of English.

## 6.2. Transliteration and interpretation vs. Literal translation and interpretation

Both the two translation techniques, transliteration and interpretation, literal translation and interpretation, focus on the reproduction of the cultural color or images of the source language. In the translation process, in order to retain and reproduce the culture of the SL and avoid the obscurity, translators always adopt the technique of transliteration and interpretation, which not only can show the charm of the culture of the SL, but also take into account the receptivity of the TL readers and fill the blanks of cultural cognition. The technique of literal translation and interpretation means to add explanatory translation while retaining the expression modes and cultural images of the SL. It can avoid the obscurity caused by total literal translation and the cultural loss caused by total free translation. Using the translation technique of literal translation and interpretation can not only satisfy the TL readers' curiosity about the foreign culture, but also enable them to understand the meanings and cultural background of the original text (Xia & Dai, 2014).

Example 1:

ST: “爹”; “爷爷”

TT: “Tieh”(Father) (1978, p. 82), “Yeh-yeh”(Grandfather) (1978, p. 12)

Analysis: On the translation of address forms, Shapiro created two new words which sound similar to Chinese words to help target language readers to know more about Chinese culture and broaden their horizons. Meanwhile, since this translation edition was firstly published in 1958, most of TL readers did not know much Chinese and Chinese culture, even though the two address forms were very common and ordinary in China. Taking TL readers' language and cultural acceptance into full consideration, Shapiro respectively gave footnotes of “father” and “grandfather” to help TL readers to know their meanings better.

Example 2:

ST: “梅”(觉新的表妹)

TT: “Mei, “mei” for “plum blossom.” (1978, p. 25)

Analysis: Due to the plum blossoms bloom in the cold winter, and their unique fragrance and gorgeousness in snowy days, in Chinese traditional culture, “梅” always represents the noble, strong and modest character. In ancient China, plum blossom carried a lot of personal feelings, poets twisted the plum blossom to friends to praise their noble character, and when seeing the plum blossom, they couldn't help thinking of their friends far away, so “梅” also represents a feeling of missing. In addition, plum blossom is also used to refer to beauty and convey one's blessings.

In this novel, “Mei” is the name of Chueh-hsin's cousin. She is pretty and grows up with Chueh-hsin. As the ideal lover of Chueh-hsin and one of his dreams, even Chueh-hsin's academic dream is broken, Mei is still an inspiration and motivation for him to continue to work hard. However, they are separated in the feudal society in the end. Obviously, the writer names this character “Mei” with many implied meaning, for example, it implies her beauty, and the missing feeling of Chueh-hsin to her. Hence, the translator not only translated her name according to Chinese pronunciation but also interpret its Chinese meaning, inspiring the TL readers to fill the blank with their imagination.

Example 3:

ST: 他信步走到窗前，把头伸出窗外去望，看见觉英、觉群和淑英、淑华、淑贞、淑芬几姊妹在阶上踢毽子，觉民也加入在里面踢。(2018, p. 121)

TT: The children were taking turns kicking up a small feathered pad with the inner side of the foot. The point of the game was to see who could kick it up the most times without letting it fall to the ground. (1978, p. 98)

Analysis: As a Chinese traditional game, “踢毽子” has been widely welcomed since its invention. Most of translators translate “毽子” into “shuttlecock”, which may be obscure for those readers who do not know Chinese culture. In chapter fourteen of this novel, the scenes of “踢毽子” appear frequently and play a very important role in the plot. The writer uses the happiness of shuttlecock kicking among these kids to set off the sorrow of Chueh-hsin. In order to explain this activity vividly and help the TL readers to understand the plot better, the translator not only clarified the appearance of “毽子”——“a small feathered pad”, but also interpreted its playing methods——“kicking up it with inner side of the foot” to help TL readers to know more about this traditional game in a brief way. In addition, the translator also made an explanation about its playing rule——“The point of the game was to see who could kick it up the most times without letting it fall to the ground”, which not only broadens the TL readers' horizon and meets their expectations, but also shows the translator's effort for the spread of the Chinese culture.

## 6.3. Addition

Addition means to add certain words, sentences or paragraphs in translation in accordance with the needs of the morphology, syntax, semantics, rhetorical devices or stylistics of the TL to better express the ideological content of the original work or to better achieve specific translation purposes (Xiong, 2014). In the following examples, Shapiro supplemented some necessary cultural information and introduced the Chinese culture for the TL readers based on the original text, so as to help the TL readers to fully appreciate the charm of the original work and meet their expectation of knowing more Chinese culture, achieving the purpose of spreading Chinese culture.

Example 1:

ST: 门墙上挂着一幅木对联，红漆底子上现出八个隶书黑字：“国恩家庆，人寿年丰。”(2018, P. 5)

TT: On the walls on either side of the entrance, hung vertically, were red veneered plaques inscribed with black ideographs. Reading from top to bottom, first the right board then the left, the wishful motto was set forth: Benevolent rulers, happy family; long life, good harvest. (1978, p. 2-3)

Analysis: This is the first chapter that Chueh-hui and Chuei-min go back home from school. In this part, it involves some depictions about the appearance of the Kao family compound. As mentioned above, the translator has a good understanding about Chinese culture. In 1960s, when the translation version of Jia published, many foreigners did not know so much Chinese culture, for example, the couplets culture in this novel. Therefore, Shapiro not only translated the content of the original text, but also added some interpretation about how to read a couplet and the characteristic of Chinese couplets to help them know more about the couplets culture, which not only broadened the TL

readers' horizons but also met their expectation about knowing more Chinese traditional culture.

Example 2:

ST: 围着一张方桌坐了六个人,上面坐着他的继母周氏和姑母张太太,左边坐着张家的琴表姐和嫂嫂李瑞钰,下面坐着大哥觉新和妹妹淑华,右边的两个位子空着。(2018, p. 7)

TT: Seated around a square table were six people. On the side farthest from the door—the seats of honour—sat his step-mother Madam Chou and his aunt—his father's sister—Mrs. Chang. On the left sat his cousin Chin—Mrs. Chang's daughter—and Jui-chueh, wife of his oldest brother Chueh-hsin.....(1978, p. 4)

Analysis: In Chinese table manners, we often take the “上” as honour. And in Chinese traditional families, “上座” are usually prepared for the eldest, the honored guests or the important people to show our respect. In this example, among the six persons, Madam Chou is the eldest, so she naturally seats on “上座”, however, in western countries, there are no related concepts about “上座” in table manners. Westerners are used to using the distance away from the door to describe the importance of a seat. Therefore, Shapiro translated “上面” into “on the side of farthest from door”, and added “the seats of honour” to help the TL readers to understand Chinese table manners better. On the other hand, in western countries, for the reason that the kinships are not so complicated and divided so clearly as China, the translator not only translated “姑母” as “aunt” but also add the interpretation of “his father's sister” to help the TL readers to understand the complicated relationships among these characters. In addition, thanks to the character Chin was first appeared in this novel and the writer did not give too much description, which may caused the fuzzyness and indeterminacy for readers to understand. Therefore, the translator also adopted the addition method to interpret her identity in a clearer way to fill the blank.

Example 3:

ST: “这跟他们有什么关系?你读书是你自己的事,况且你又不是我们家里的人!”觉慧半惊讶半愤怒的说。(2018, p. 18)

TT: “What have they got to do with you? Going to school is your own affair. Besides, you're not a member of our family!” Chueh-hui was a little surprised that Chin should have mentioned his family. Although Chin's mother was a daughter of the Venerable Master Kao, when she married she came under the jurisdiction of her husband's family, according to custom, and she no longer had any say in the affairs of the original home.(1978, p. 13)

Analysis: In this example, Chin wanted to go to the mixed school and studied with Chueh-hui and Chueh-min. However, she worried that she would be gossiped by other relatives, because in Chinese feudal society, people held the view that it is against the virtue that women have physical contact with men. On the other hand, in Chinese traditional society, once the women got married, she was seen as an outsider, and her affairs would be discussed and interfered by her husband's family instead of her original family. That is why when Chueh-hui was surprised when hearing Chin said that she was worried that her decision to go the mixed school would be opposed by her father's family and Chueh-hui's family.

However, this is Chinese traditional custom that many foreigners even contemporary Chinese young people are unacquainted. If they don't know this Chinese traditional custom, the readers may do not understand the anxiousness, the pressure and the courage of Chin to challenge the tradition and the backward concept. Therefore, the translator tried to explain this Chinese traditional custom to fill the blank and to help the TL readers to understand this plot and Chin's characteristic, to understand the theme of this novel better, achieving the fusion of horizon among the writer, the translator and the TL readers through the translator's effort finally.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper analyzes Shapiro's English translation of *Jia* from the perspective of reception aesthetics. Firstly, it concludes some research achievements about the English translation of *Jia*, finding that the studies about the English edition are still limited. On the other hand, reception aesthetics as a reader-centered literal theory gives a new angle for translation researches. Therefore, this paper then gives a brief introduction about reception aesthetics, by analyzing its three important views, the appealing structure, horizon of expectations and fusion horizon, finding that there are many blanks and indeterminacy in literary works. And in order to clearly understand these works, the readers should bring their subjectivity into full play to fill the blanks. As a result, the translator as the reader of the original text plays a very important role to interpret the two languages and cultures. Then this paper continues to make an introduction about *Jia* and the translator's dual cultural identity. Under the guidance of reception aesthetics, this paper analyzes the English version of *Jia*, finding that in order to meet the TL readers' expectations and achieve the fusion of horizon, Shapiro adopted different translation techniques, including free translation, transliteration and interpretation, literal translation and interpretation, and addition, which either aims at imploring and translating the connotation of the original text, reproducing the cultural images of the source language, or conveying the ideological content of the original work by addition, to fill blanks in the original text and to achieve the aesthetics appreciation of this novel finally.

As the representative work of Ba Jin, *Jia* plays a very important role in understanding Chinese history and culture in 1930s. However, its English version does not attract enough attention both at home and abroad. In this paper, through the analysis of Shapiro's translation from the angle of aesthetic reception, the author finds that the translator tries his best to help the TL readers to know more information about Chinese culture and appreciate the charm of the original work with various strategies, which also proves that the translator's cultural identity and translation purposes are very important for culture communication in literary translation. Nevertheless, on account of the author's superficial scholarship and limited knowledge, the analysis of this paper is still shallow. Driven by the charm of this Chinese classic work and the great significance for the spread of Chinese culture of Shapiro's translated version, the author hopes more scholars to make further studies and dig out more value about *The Family* and make contributions for the spread of Chinese culture.

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