

GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

PROSPERO R. COVAR

Three distinct religious traditions in the Philippines can be reckoned with easily. They are: (1) Roman Catholic tradition. (2) American Protestant tradition, and (3) Filipino anitismo tradition. The first two traditions did not grow in the Philippines in their pure forms. In the process of taking root they were indigenized.

In numerous instances, the three religious traditions are blended into a new whole. This new blending is reflected in many contemporary religious movements in the Philippines. In particular, I refer to a religious organization or movement that is local in origin and maintaining itself as an autochthonous unit. It is neither a schism from the Roman Catholic nor is it associated with any American Protestant denomination or other foreign missions. It draws its central doctrine from the mainspring of Christian teachings — the Bible or *Pasyon* (Christ's Passion), tempered by Filipino parables and *salawikain* (proverbs). It believes in "anitism" — congeries of beliefs and practices related to the *anito* and lower creatures. It indulges in spiritism and faith-healing. It manifests a kind of nationalist orientation that is inspired by the writings of Rizal and other heroes of the Philippine Revolution. It utilizes either the Roman Catholic hierarchy of positions or the American Protestant council of elders as a structural model upon which it patterns its leadership set-up.

The proliferation of religious movements in the Philippines is staggering. Religious schism, either because of personality conflict or differences in doctrinal position, contributes a sizeable number to the growing list of religious groups. Visionary experience interpreted as a divine commission has propelled some local prophets to strike on their own. In a number of cases, miraculous recovery from serious sicknesses, accidents, or life crises deepens a life-long devotion to serve God by organizing a religious sodality as a vow. Surprisingly, atonement for an injury or an offense committed does not seem to spark a religious movement.

Reaction to Christianity

The reaction to the introduction of Christianity in the Philippines has been varied. For instance, the *Sapilada* religion in the Bontoc area is a combination of various Christian and lowland Ilocano practices with pagan Igorot beliefs and activities. The Tungud movement among the Manobos of Mindanao was precipitated by a prophet who returned from the dead after a severe illness and subsequently preached the imminent destruction of the world. The Isneg in Kabuwan, Kalinga-Apayao, neglected their mountain rice fields for about two years. Instead of farming, they devoted their time to the holding of community feasts, *sayam*, to await the coming of the people from Unto who would lead them to an everlasting, labor-free existence.

On the foothills of Mt. Banahao between Laguna and Quezon, a number of religious colonies believe in the mystical transfer of the Holy Land to the *tierra sagrada*. Traditional Christian landmarks in Old Palestine are alleged to be enshrined in the many spiritually charged natural formations such as rocks, streams, caves, and hills. It was there in 1841 where Apolinario de la Cruz led the Cofradia de San Jose.

These local reactions to the introduction of Christianity may be characterized as: accomodative, nativistic, millenarian, messianic, and syncretistic. Whatever the label is, the effort to mobilize human resources, i.e., the fusion of elements from several cultural systems into a coherent new whole, is indeed creative.

Normative Ideological Themes

The belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men is shared by all religious movements in the Philippines. They differ in their treatment and elaboration of the Holy Trinity, Holy Family,

deification of Rizal and other culture heroes, and the use of the Bible and/or *Pasyon* as a source of spiritual strength. Incisive knowledge of the lives of saints and miracles associated with them are indications of spiritual depth and virtuosity. Theological insights and ethical pronouncements expressed in the traditional lingo and style and charisma manifested by otherwise not formally educated persons make men followers of a *sinusunod* or *patron*. Religious symbolism, displayed in many altars, and play of words and letters in various prints, are allegedly endowed with mysteries and potency. They always await possession of those found worthy.

Emmanuel Salvador del Mundo

A little boy whose circumstance of birth is unknown in Magdalena, Laguna was engaged by a man to a show of spiritual prowess before an eagle-eyed crowd composed mostly of *mga naghahanap*. The man claimed that God is with him. The little boy instead of accepting the challenge asked the man who (the boy) was. Since he alleged that God is with him, he ought to know. The man was tongue-tied. The precocious little boy asserted. "I am Emmanuel Salvador del Mundo." This is not an isolated case. The Philippine countryside is replete with many Emmanuel Salvador del Mundos. At the time of this writing, an eleven-year old boy has been creating quite a stir in Lucena City, Pateros, Rizal, and Sta. Cruz, Laguna, healing the sick and making the crippled walk. He does not charge any fee. He only encourages people to pray.

*Iba ang Nagliliwanag kaysa Naliliwanagan.
Iba ang Binhi kaysa Pinagbibinhian.*

Jorge Reyes of the Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios is the head of the *balangay* in Bailen, Cavite. He aptly described his joining as, last among the first and first among the last. He was 36 years old when he joined the organization. He was in search of the truth or the light. He started his search in Tore. The leader in Tore is Ka Pinong. In Tore, he heard a voice asking him why he came. Mang Jorge replied impulsively, "I want to know if there is a God here. If there is, appear." The voice called out his name thrice. The third time he did, light suddenly struck. The glare of the rays knocked him down. Apparently he was not convinced. Later, he articulated his joining the *samahan* in these terms, "*iba ang lumiliwanag kaysa naliliwanagan, iba*

ang binhi kaysa pinagbibinhan." His conviction is that the Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios has the Light and is the Beginning.

Tapos na ang Misteryo.

Kailangan na lamang ang Papuri.

Aling Bibing is a member of the Sagrada Familia de Rizal. She was a favorite of Inang Adarna, a venerable old women from Oliveti, Bongabon, Nueva Ecija. From Nueva Ecija, Aling Bibing joined the group led by Danny Bibat. They settled in Ilog na Metung at San Isidro, San Luis, Pampanga for four years. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Felipe Salvador. From Ilog na Metung they were instructed by Danny Bibat to proceed to Calamba and see Apo Asiong, a religious *supremo*. Apo Asiong advised them to settle in a place where, "doon kayo magluluto sa ibabaw ng tubig." They wandered far and wide until they followed a ray of light which led them to Ronggot. Ronggot is a swamp full of *tikiw* along the shore of Laguna de Bay. They managed to clear and convert the swamp into rice paddies where they now draw their subsistence. In the chapel which they call *daong*, I asked Aling Bibing if they celebrate mass or similar rituals. She said, "*Tapos na ang Misteryo. Kailangan na lamang ay papuri. Kami'y naghihintay na lamang.*"

The Holy Trinity

The Bathalismo Inang Mahiwaga has anthropomorphized the Holy Trinity. Jehovah, Jesus, and Jose Rizal correspond to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, respectively. In some cases, God the Mother is added to form the Holy Family. Contrary to the Christian tradition, the Holy Family does not refer to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. In any event, it is argued that since every person should carry a name, the Holy Spirit which is the third person must bear a name, too. Jose Rizal who is considered as the Christ of the Tagalog, happens to have his name spelled with a letter "J" which parallels those of Jehovah and Jesus. Moreover, Jose Rizal is latinized as Jove Rex Al which is translated as God King of All. The following poem expresses succinctly the doctrinal posture of many Rizalist groups.

Jose Jesus at Jehoba

Ama po't itulot mo mangyaring dalitin ko
Tanging kapangyarihan mo pagtubos mo sa tao
Ikaw po ang Jehoba ang Dios "J" ang ngalan mong puspos
Na walang nakatatarok ng hiwaga mo pong lubos.

Nanaog ka po sa lupa sa tao ay pagkaawa
 Nagkatawan tao ka nga nagtiis ng dalita
 Nagngalan ka po ng Jesus "J" ang ngalan mong puspos
 Nagmukhang tao kahit Dios upang kami ay matubos.

Nguni't ikaw po ay pinatay niyong mga tampalasan
 Ang akala'y taong tunay ikaw Amang walang hanggan
 Muli ngang ikaw ay nanaog dito sa mundong mabilog
 Nagngalan kang Joseng bantog "J" ang ngalan mong puspos.

Nguni't ikaw ay pinatay din niyong mga taong taksil
 Pagtubos mo po sa amin tutuong pagkaalipin
 Jose Rizal kang pinatay pagtubos sa kaapilinan
 Bayani ka nga pong tunay Cristo ng katagalugan.

Jose Jesus at Jehoba kayong tatlo ay iisa
 Ngala'y pinag-iba-iba upang huwag makilala
 Jehoba Jesus at Jose lumalang ng buong Orbe
 Bathalang makalawingi huwag mo po kaming iwaksi.

Pinagpupuri kang walang tahan ng iyong mga hinirang
 Amin pong inaasahan Buhay na walang hanggan.

The iconography of the Holy Trinity as worked out by a Bathalismo artist shows a very striking similarity with the backdrop of the altar of the Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios at Kinabuhayan, Dolores, Quezon. As a matter of fact Agapito Ilustricimo was a founding member of the Board of Directors of the Bathalismo which was established sometime in 1938.

*The World Has Four Corners
 and Five Crosses*

In the book entitled, *Karunungan ng Dios*, a compilation of "lihim na karunungan" by Melencio T. Sabino, the world is believed to have four corners. Each archangel holds a corner. Each corner has a cross. In the middle of the world is also a cross. Every cross is named. Each name consists of four letters. These four letters also form a cross.

			S					
			O	A	R			
			T					
	R		T			O		
A	O	S	T	E	T	R	P	A
	T		N				E	
			A					
			P	R	O			
			E					

The names of the crosses above are: SATOR, TENET, AREPO, ROTAS, and OPERA. These five crosses may be arranged in such

a way that if one reads them horizontally or vertically; forward or backward; and up or down, he comes up with the names of the crosses.

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

The name of each cross is an acronym. The elements of the acronyms are:

	S—ALUTATOR	
	A—ADAM	
	T—RAGUELA	
	O—RSUM	
	R—AVET	
R—OTATEM	T—RAMENDA	O—NATOR
O—PSCULUM	E—NSIUUVABIT	P—OPULATOR
T—EMPILARITATOR	N—OTAMBAT	E—MMANUEL
O—DONAY	E—STUTUM	R—UMACAT
S—ABAO'H	T—ENETILSUM	A—MPILATOR
	A—LAGATUM	
	E—AMAEL	
	E—XTACSUT	
	P—ERULATOR	
	O—NABELEM	

At least four in the above roster, namely: Salutator, Notambat, Ampilator, and Extacsut were identified by Jose Baricanosa of the Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi as kings of time. The angels of these kings send the message of man through a medium known as *Schemhamporas*. Through the recitation of a divine formula by an invoker the message can be transmitted through a *Banal na Tinig, poder* or *kapangyarihan*.

Recitation of Divine Formulae or Oraciones

The recitation of a divine formula has to meet certain strictures. In the first place, the formula or *oracion* should be fed with prayers (*pinakakain ng dasal*) to maintain its potency. The time of feeding is observed faithfully. How it is fed is meticulously followed. The formula should always be used as a last resort; in self-defense, or to help someone who needs it very badly.

The basic principle which underlies the use of divine formula may be described as functional replication. It is said that when God created the universe or when Jesus Christ exercised his healing power, divine words were uttered and accompanied by certain gestures. The association of words and gestures is functional. The efficacy of the formula depends upon how faithfully it replicates its initial use. *Orationes* have a wide range of application such as against physical discomforts, propitiation of malevolent spirits, or to attain invincibility.

Orationes Against Physical Discomforts

1. Physical Dislocation

QUEM QUÆRITIS SUSUBANI EGO SUM HOMO
 Mauli ang sirang buto
 CRIATUM HOMO QUIS LOVEL, PHU PHU PHU . . .

2. Fever due to Bad Air

(Whisper the following to the hand that will be used for rubbing and to the water that the patient will drink).

ATME HUIB RESEOC

3. Headache

(Whisper the following to the handkerchief that shall be used as a headband).

MATAM MAUM-RUM MOUN BEM

Orationes Against Malevolent Spirits

(Whisper the following all over the body of the patient, the oil that shall be used for rubbing, and the water that shall be taken in).

- a. BENEDICTAM REENADICTAM BENITE
 MACULATAM
- b. LODEAM HOLECAM SOPECLAM
- c. MICOLAM SODICAM NICLAM

*Miraculous Acts of Jesus Christ Which Can Be Replicated
 to Produce Identical Results*

1. He walked on the water.

MEMENTOMO HOMO TUIS PEBOESEMPO
 BESPO SUO BARES

2. Protection Against Enemies

COVERATIS VERBUM EGOSUM, EGOSUM
 NAZARENUM TITULOS PALMUS SANTO DE
 SANTO IMMORTAL LIBRAME DE TODO MAL

3. Feeding the Five Thousand with Five Loaves of Bread
 and Two Fishes

MAO-EO MUM-EM ME-IA FA-AO FEO FA-EO

All these *oraciones* are considered to be very personal properties. They cannot be duplicated and shared. Once handed down to another person, the receiver becomes its sole keeper. There is no guarantee that it shall remain with the recipient. If not well taken cared of, the *oraciones* may leave the steward through mysterious circumstances.

Superficially considered, the instances cited seem unconnected and a jumble of meaningless bits. Underlying these cultural expressions, however, are normative ideological themes which in the cultural realm form a coherent system of value. Emmanuel Salvador del Mundo epitomizes the efficacy of how closely one is related to the source of spiritual power. Spiritual potency is sustained by sharing it ungrudgingly with one's fellowmen.

The case of Jorge Reyes underscores the importance of how closely one is identified with a given tradition — a tradition that is the source of truth or light. *Tapos na ang misteryo* expresses the periodicity of religious rituals. A religious practice is viewed as a step closer to eternity.

The indigenized conceptualization of the Holy Trinity mirrors the structure of the Filipino nuclear family. The positions of father, mother, and children in the Filipino family are well-defined. The exercise of control is graded and handed down from father to mother to children according to seniority and opportunity (*kapanahunan*). Normatively everyone has a chance to exercise authority and control. In the context of Honorio Lopez's astrology (*Dimasalang Kalendariong Tagalog*), *lumipas na ang sa Ama, ngayon namá'y ang sa Anak*.

The exercise of authority and control is not viewed to dominate or to overwhelm. It is more to harmonize. "The world has four corners and five crosses" is an attempt to unravel the mysteries of the world. The world is ordered and patterned. To understand the internal patterning is to behave appropriately according to it. The recitation of *oraciones* is intended to elicit highly predictable result. The

set of strictures associated with its stewardship is a built-in mechanism to avoid the exploitation of nature. In a very general way, what I have done is to map out the the normative ideological system of Philippine religious movements. I shall now deal with the patterning of its organization.

Organizational Patterning

The organizing principle of Philippine religious movements is harmony of *loob*. It is a unity. The material is not opposed to the spiritual. The priesthood is not set apart from the laity. Revealed knowledge and knowledge from books are two sides of the same coin. Even as the normative ideological theme refers to a state of becoming, the patterning of organization relates to a state of position. There is gradation but no opposition. Dualism is perceived as a unity.

The universe consists of the material and the spiritual. They are dealt with separately yet they form a whole. The *pangulo* handles business affairs. The *sinusunod* concentrates on spiritual matters. Raising funds, putting-up a chapel, paying bills, determining where to direct mission work, providing food and shelter when the flocks are gathered — these and similar activities are the immediate concerns of *mga pangulo*. On the other hand, the *sinusunod*, *taga-tawag*, *patron*, or *talaytayan* leads in the prayer, exhorts the members, treats and heals the sick and the infirm, and maintains himself or herself spiritually charged.

The *pangulo* is an organization man. He directs, supervises, and pushes. In contrast, the *sinusunod* is *charismatic*. He is reserve, cool, and persuasive. His presence alone overwhelms. Even his rustic deportment is awesome. People are drawn to him. Both types of leaders complement each other, rather than compete.

The organizational set-up of Filipino religious movements is cast into this material and spiritual unity. The unity may be invested in Apo Berto, Ama Lakay, Inang Adarna, Nana Teta, Maestro, Supremo, Ilustricimo, or Patriarchal Archireus. It may be parcelled out to a Board of Trustees, Directors, Presbyters, or Advisors, or to a Council of Elders, Executive Cabinet, Supreme Executive Staff, Standing Committees or Holy Synod. Whatever are the format and the number of offices, the areas of responsibilities and concerns, i.e., the material and the spiritual, are well recognized and delineated:

The Social Ranking Within the Movement

"Everyone is a potential instrument of Jesus Christ. We differ in levels of learning." This is the claim of Catalino Agna, *pangulo* of In Hoc Signos Vincas, Centro San Mateo, Camaligan Camarines Sur. He underwent seven sacrifices to attain the status of a *talaytayan*. He does not cure the sick, only the spirit does. He only shares (*nakiki-bahagi*) in the spiritual power of Jesus. He does not preach (*nangangaral*). There is only one *guro*, that is Jesus Christ.

Among Philippine religious movements spiritual virtuosity takes several forms. The Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi has an invoker (*tagatawag*). He performs the necessary ritual to establish direct communication link between the *Banal na Tinig* (Holy Voice) and the congregation. The Sagrada Familia de Rizal has a *medium* who goes into a trance before spiritually being possessed. The voice of Apo Asiong who had left them (not died, it was emphasized by Aling Gloria) sometime ago, speaks through her. The Union Cristiana Espiritista has a *talaytayan* who performs the function of casting out devils and healing the sick. The Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios, and Rosa Mistica have *supremas* (priestesses) — ritualists who say mass and lead during religious ceremonies and rituals. The Kapatirang Pag-ibig sa Dios; Sambahang Kaamaamahan at Kainainahan; and Bathalismo have Nana Teta, Inang Adarna, and Inang Mahiwaga, respectively to bless and enlighten the believers.

In addition to these local prophets who serve as direct links with God, there are workers of lower *antas* who are known as *misyoneros*. They go around and spread the good news. Below this group are the *kapatiran* who are the initiated and had gone on many *atas* (mission). A *sacrificio* is a form of *atas*. It may be continuously praying from sundown to dawn, atop big boulders in Mt. Makiling, Mt. Banahao, Mt. Arayat or San Mateo, or in an isolated cave of Montalban or Tanay, Rizal or worshipping in such big churches like Espiritu Santo, Sto. Domingo, Quiapo, or Baclaran, attired in a special manner, walking barefoot all the way, amidst the jeers and ridicule of jeepney drivers and curious on-lookers. Outside the "fellowship" are the *mga naghahanap*. These are the seekers of *katotohanan* or *liwanag*. Below this group are the unbelievers.

The gradation of social ranks is a matter of degree. Conscientious study of *lihim na karunungan* makes an individual a different person. Every man is a potential priest. A priest has a higher *antas sa pag-*

aaral. To recall, the internal social ranking of the many religious movements in the Philippines consists of six titles or vocative referents, *misyoneros*, *may-atas*, *kapatiran*, *naghahanap*, and *walang sampalataya*.

*The Relationship of the Believers
with the Unbelieving*

On October 13, 1973, I went up to Orani, Bataan to look and see for myself what is happening at Paraiso. Paraiso is a small barrio just across the municipal cemetery of Orani. It is here where the main chapel and *tuluyan* of the *Kapatirang Pag-ibig sa Dios* are located.

The *Kapatirang Pag-ibig sa Dios* is a religious sodality that believes in Jesus Christ. They call Him *Apo*. The followers are called *Ma-ka-Apo*. The sodality was organized by a certain *Nana Teta* from Morong, Rizal. She went to Los Baños and there she took a bath. She proceeded to Castillejos, Zambales, stayed there for a while, and finally settled in Orani, Bataan.

The route taken by *Nana Teta* is imputed with religious symbolism. Morong is claimed to have been derived from Moro (unbaptized; Muslim Filipinos). *Nana Teta*, while in Morong, was less than a Christian. Los Baños is translated into English as bathrooms. That is where she was baptized. Zambales is a contraction of *sasamba* (to worship) and *aalis* (to leave). This is the reason why *Nana Teta* conducted her mission in Zambales for a short time only and subsequently left the place. Likewise, Orani is a contraction of *oras na sa pag-uwi* meaning it is time to go home. Fittingly, Paraiso is a home away from home.

In the evening of October 13, 1973, Carling the *misyonero* and an elderly man who was a former municipal treasurer of Nueva Ecija visited me in a house which is about fifty meters away from the main chapel. I was with a small group of devotees brought along by *Inang Ester Angeles* who has been commissioned by *Nana Teta* to take care of her flock in Sta. Rosa, Nueva Ecija.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. We had just finished our supper. Carling started to work on me. He said, "*Batid namin na mataas ang inyong pinag-aralan. Kami rito'y pare-pareho, walang marunong, walang mayaman. May kasabihan, kung nasa Roma ka, gawin mo ang ugaliin ng mga taga-Roma. Sa iyong pagpasok dito sa Paraiso, marahil ay lalong mainam kung ang iyong kasuotan ay iwanan mo sa kampo santo.*" I perfectly understood what he was driv-

ing at. All through the night he discussed a lot of things, mostly his personal testimonies and those of others about the *kahiwagaan* (they emphasized that what is happening in Paraiso is not *milagro*) of the Apo — none other than Jesus. Jesus Christ in various transfiguration is said to have been physically experienced and talked with personally by numerous witnesses. Others spoke of a luminescent cross that flutters around the black shrouded room where about three dozen icons of different sizes, makes, and shapes are enshrined.

In quite a different occasion, sometime in 1960 while I was doing my fieldwork in Lecheria, Calamba, Jose Baricanosa, sensing my unbelief about the presence of the national heroes in a room adjacent to where the congregation is assembled, mentioned to me in passing the case of a man who expressed the same unbelief. This man challenged the leadership of the Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi to present to him personally the national heroes. They agreed under one condition, that is, he should offer his life to the service of the organization forever if he comes face to face with the *Banal na Tinig*. The deal was accepted. The man was brought into the room where the heroes were allegedly present. Pushed against the wall, the man found out later that serving the organization entailed a lot of sacrifices. As the pangulo pointed out, "*hindi ako maglilingkod ng ganito katagal sa Samahan kung hindi ito totoo.*"

To cite another instance, it was one afternoon of February 1973 when a resident of Camaligan, Camarines Sur directed us to the house of Catalino Agna. My research assistant and I did not know anything about him and his organization. While we were explaining our purpose, Catalino Agna retorted, "I know that your intentions are holy, that's why you found me."

Whether it be "come as you are, nude and simple," or, "we dare your challenge," or, "I understand your good intention," each of these instances defines the relation of the believers with the unbelieving. One distinctive characteristic of Philippine religious movements is its emphasis on believing (*sampalataya*) in contrast to the Protestant gospel-oriented message of the forgiveness of sinners.

General Summary and Conclusion

By way of summary, what I have indicated in this study is that Philippine religious movements are a fusion of three distinct religious traditions. They are: (1) the Roman Catholic tradition, (2) the American Protestant tradition, and (3) Filipino anitismo.

The base culture, to borrow the concept from Dr. F. Landa Jocano, of what I call Philippine religious movements is Filipino animism. The other two traditions contribute their respective focal expressions such as the Roman Catholicism's celebration of Mass and devotion to numerous saints; and the American Protestantism's emphasis on the Gospels and salvation by Grace through Jesus Christ. These cultural dimensions were not accommodated in their own terms. They have been selected and cognized in accordance with the Filipino traditional system of belief and social relationship.

Finally, Philippine religious movements are anchored on the efficacy (*bisa*) of beliefs, rituals, or practices rather than a belief in a god who would forgive sins or who has redeemed the world of its sinful ways. The belief in saints and deities revolves around the consideration that they can attune themselves to them — harmony of *loob*. To emulate the life of a saint or to follow the life style of a *sinusunod* is to functionally replicate his or her religious potency. Rituals and ceremonies are instrumental culture to assuage, appease, and to share in divine power rather than to reciprocate an *utang na loob* because Christ died on the Cross.

Every religious movement in the Philippines has a set of moral dicta to be followed. Its morality is practised to enhance the efficacy of belief whether it be a belief in *anting-anting*, the Bible, *Pasyon*, *lamang lupa*, *aswang*, Virgin Mary, or Jesus Christ. It is necessary to lead a moral life to maintain one's potency or the potency of his *agimat*. This is in contrast to another religious group which exhorts its followers to lead a moral life as an atonement for offense committed and wrongs done.

Finally, religiousness in Philippine social movements is reckoned with in terms of the maintenance of religious potency. Efficacy requires religious observance of rites and rituals, and leading a moral life. Churches are neither for sinners nor for believers. They are the wellsprings that nurture religious potency and efficiency.

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