

Subcultural Development and Cultural Change: Observations on Great Snake Stories in Shouxian, China

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ABSTRACT

From a macro and overall historical perspective, as a subculture of the Shouxian region, the great snake story is a product of historical development and social change. Its narrative style reflects long-standing local cultural traditions and historical cultural processing. Oral transmission is a common form of transmission of the intangible cultural heritage, but in the process of great social change, cultural change does not happen overnight, but is relatively static in structure and space, this paper analyzes the cultural connotation of the story of the great snake from an anthropological point of view, reveals the process of change of indigenous subculture, and explores how to protect intangible cultural heritage in the present context.

Key Words : Snake Culture, Cultural Change, Shouxian, Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Transmission

INTRODUCTION

The development of China's intangible cultural heritage has made remarkable achievements over the past decade, thanks to the long history of Chinese society, the richness of its national culture and the great cultural differences among regions. However, omissions persist in the process of cultural heritage protection. A great deal of precious culture has been lost, creating an incomplete intangible cultural heritage in China. From the perspective of cultural self-awareness, these cultures are of great significance to Chinese society and should be well protected and passed on.

As one of China's intangible cultural heritage, the story of the great snake in the Shouxian region is huge in number and not very famous. Its transmission is largely by word of mouth, which leads to a serious incompleteness in the stories that are handed down. This study explores the proposition of intangible cultural heritage preservation and transmission in China, and explores the endogenous dynamics and development space of subculture development. It aims to contribute to the preservation and transmission of local ethnic cultures and

to promote the development of intangible cultural heritage preservation.

Legend of Great Snake in Shouxian:

Shouxian, located in Anhui Province, China, is a famous historical and cultural site with deep cultural heritage. Due to its location in the heart of the North and South, it was the site of frequent wars and the Battle of Huai Shui River. In modern times, from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom era to the Northern Expedition period, from the period of the Anti-Japanese War to the period of the Battle of the Cross River, the people of Shouxian have been suffering from the war. The topography of Shouxian is diverse, with shallow hills and plains dominating the entire territory. The Huaihe River runs through it and is rich in water resources, with many lakes, such as Wabu Lake, Shouxi Lake, Xiaoyan Lake, Liangjia Lake, etc. The total area of lakes is 366 square kilometers, accounting for 12.3 per cent of the county's land area (Anhui Provincial Water Resources Department, 1993). This study focuses on the local snake stories because the area has certain geographical advantages of them; and certain historical and cultural traditions are reflected

in these snake stories.

The story of the snake records the history of the formation of the geographical topography of the Shouxian region, which can be traced back to the events of King Yu's control of water in Chinese history. According to legend, during the time of King Yu's control of the water, there were demon snakes causing trouble. In order to solve this problem, King Yu moved three big mountains from the East Sea to this place and pressed the demon snakes under the mountains to control them by all means. These three mountains were later collectively known by one name, the "North Mountain". At the beginning of the Han Dynasty, strange snakes came to the area and the Huai River flooded again. One day Liu Chang, the king of the Huainan area, dreamed of Tai Shang Lao Jun, who told him that the only way to suppress the snake demon was to build a central Daoist temple in the "North Mountain". Liu Chang listened to the advice of Tai Shang Lao Jun, and in this way, the snake demon was truly subdued. Later, the eight great Taoist monks became immortals here, and the "North Mountain" was renamed the "Badao Mountain" (or Bagong Mountain).

Thanks to the legend of the snake, the names of some local heroes have been recorded in history, passed down in the form of stories from generation to generation. For example, the ancient general Lian Po, a man who was a member of the Three Serpents guarding Shouxian, is recorded in the story. General Lian Po was not valued by the court and was sent to work in distant places, missing his homeland day and night. One day, Lian Po got up and sighed, at which time an old man passed by him and said: "Since you have become a minister, you must not have second thoughts, and while you are making plans for others, you must also consider the reputation behind you." Lian Po enlightened himself and imparted his martial skills to the Red Snake, the White Snake, and the Black Snake, and placed the three snakes on the defense lines of the three realms of Shouxian to protect its safety.

Another example, in Xiebu village in the southern part of Shouxian, there is a story about the Black Snake, the youngest son of the dragon god in the Huai River, who was punished to stay in Xiebu village because he had violated the heavenly law. Xiebu village is located on a high terrain, and there is a year-round water shortage, so the black snake suffers a lot. The long life in captivity has not cleansed the black snake of its undesirable nature, but rather fostered its hostile nature. The black snake

disguised itself as a group of fish and shrimp and lured people to catch them, and when the pedestrians walked to the ambush site, the fish and shrimp immediately disappeared, and the black snake then ate the pedestrians. This may sound like a very common and unassuming story, however, after the founding of the country, a secret local social society organization made full use of this story to terrorize the masses. On the pretext of mending the snake, the leaders of the time used the Zaozhuang temple as a pretext to gather some of the young and middle-aged workers and coerce them to join the activities of the association. The structure of this type of story is relatively simple, but it enriches the image of the snake in comparison to those grand historical events, which are directly linked to social life and have a high degree of dissemination.

The above stories are representative of the full narrative captured in the research and interviews. From this, it can be found that the legend of the Great Snake has a relatively grand historical background, covering the current famous historical figures and geographical landmarks of Shouxian region. These snakes tend to appear during the critical period of China's incoming religion and Dynastic Revival. In terms of the storyline, the snakes are not monolithic and differ greatly in their births, individual characteristics and even their final endings.

According to Ni (2001), snakes are generally considered to be incarnations of poison, evil and ugliness, but they are also given meanings of truth, goodness and beauty. There are many legends about snakes around Shouxian region, except that none of these stories have specific documentary sources. These stories are told by word of mouth, resulting in incomplete stories with strong similarities. A total of 47 relatively complete stories were collected in the survey, of which 20 were stories about ancient gods and immortals, 8 were character stories about Sun Shu'ao, 5 were character stories about Lian Po, 4 were character stories about Liu An, and 10 were stories about others.

As far as the story text is concerned, in addition to the interesting nature of the story itself, the multiple paradoxes it embodies deserve attention, such as social dislocation. The mythical narrative represented by the story of the snake is somewhat at odds with a highly secularized area like Shouxian, which has experienced social change, but the storyline is highly reductive of important events in local history. In daily life, except for

the dragon play activity in An Fung Tong, there is no related to the other aspects, such as food and drink, and decoration.

Compared to the snake culture in ethnic areas, such as Luo Caijuan's study of the legend and beliefs of the dragon mother in the Damingshan Zhuang minority region found that local customs such as eating raw fish, cave burials, the third day of March, snake totems and dietary taboos, there is no imprint in the Shouxian region. Since the snake culture is not developed, then from the perspective of history and culture back to contemporary daily life, from the ritual practice grows into a possible evolution into a commercial development path is also not very realistic, although there are such examples, Lu(2018) in Fujian found that "the snake ritual gradually changed from a sacred belief to a mass tourism", but there is no corresponding case in Shouxian.

There are also many differences in the way these stories are narrated. Judging by the inheritance of the text itself, the stories of the aforementioned snakes are handed down by word of mouth and are virtually unrecorded in local canonical texts, and have received little attention in contemporary studies. Corresponding collection is also quite lagging. In the field survey, the author particularly enjoyed being involved in this kind of storytelling scenario, in which any people surrounded one narrator after another, thus creating a field scene.

This kind of storytelling is ancient and outdated. The author first discovered the rich snake culture in the Shouxian region, precisely when he was investigating water issues. During the time of the People's Commune, a great deal of labor was concentrated on the construction of water supply, and storytelling became one of the few recreational activities of the time, and continued to develop in later generations. But regardless of the manner and content of the stories, and regardless of the content of the snake stories, there is no way to determine exactly when they occurred, and these stories could not have been produced in a short time.

In terms of the textual content of the story, no more commonalities can be found in the historical tradition. The study of it can only find common ground in the literary imagery and direction it reflects. The first is the consistency in the way it is handed down, these stories are handed down in a limited cultural space. Second, on the moral side, these stories are influenced by Confucian attitudes towards the character of the gentleman. Taken together, the whole story has a heroic and tragic character.

If it refers to the fact that most of the protagonists appeared before the Han Dynasty, it is likely that the highly secularized life in the Shouxian region, accompanied by war, social transformation, and population movement, has long since replaced the magnificent imagination contained in the mythology, which is the background of our research. From the research and practice of this article, these stories do not appear to be elegant, in addition to the collection of specific research activities, they also face the dilemma of human erasure, which is a very common phenomenon in non-heritance, in view of this, the psychological structure of people, from the perspective of cultural thinking seems to be the only entry point, the analysis of these stories should start from the meaning of these texts.

Structural Features of the Great Snake Stories:

Since Durkheim and Malinowski, the anthropological study of myth has focused on the study of the narrative laws of myth, pursuing the expression of the boundaries of social groups or certain social facts. Mythology studies and historical studies are often intertwined, and mythology, as a symbolic representation of a particular social structure, is often used for in-depth research. This is evidenced by the survey conducted in Myanmar, where the pursuit of structural expression has been introduced into the human mind. The pursuit of certain social structures of expression and metaphor has become a tradition in anthropological mythology.

Citing Cohen and Persy's concept, Peng (2003) argues that emphasis should be placed on the interpretation of myth as a functional symbolic expression, on myth as an unconscious way of making mental representations, and on myth as a function of creating and sustaining an entire society. Mythic narratives have the legitimacy of social organization and social practice, and myth, as a symbolic form of social structure that interacts with ritual, should emphasize the structuralist theory interpretation of mythic narratives.

The boundaries of these classifications are very blurred, but inform the multidimensional analysis in this study. In terms of the textual expression of the stories, they can be analyzed in two structural spaces, one about the concept, which is related to historical cultural traditions, and the other in reality, which expresses the boundaries of rules and institutions. The two spatial perspectives can be analyzed, including the expressed national boundaries, class differences, cultural thinking,

etc. However, there may be differences in time and space. For example, much of the stories is storytelling and doesn't directly refer to current events. In order to answer this historical question, it is necessary to look for its concrete presence in the external world, to find the rationality of its narrative boundaries, which in effect is concerned with the social rationality of its existence and development.

Returning now to the question of the transmission of the snake culture, there is a need to establish a macro, holistic, historical perspective that takes into account historical materialism and explores the relevant material conditions under which the culture emerges. The aforementioned snake story has little to do with the daily lives of Shouxian residents, so it is difficult to find such a corresponding physical or folk carrier, but the plausibility of snake culture in the Shouxian region can be found in many ways. For example, in terms of natural geography, Shouxian is located in the central plains and hills, and its topography is dominated by plains and hills, with few large animal populations except for long periods of social unrest. At the same time, the water system in Shouxian region is very developed, due to its location along the Huaihe River, not far from the Yangtze River, there are vast wetlands within the territory, providing ample space for snakes to live. In such natural conditions, snakes have become a rare raptor in the region.

Although the snake here is closely related to the history of water, it is not an aquatic myth in the folk sense. Folklorists have found explanations for human origins in ancient times in aquatic mythology. The main activity of the snake in this article is clearly not creative activity. As for its literary connotations, it doesn't even have metaphors for mothers and women, only heroes or villains, which fits in with the historical culture of Shouxian. This intuitive, folkloric, oral approach is very common in the transmission of many intangible cultural heritage. This transitional relationship, which revolves around the relationship between people, can be specific to a particular family, which guarantees the path and space for the dissemination of the stories. The historicity of these stories remains to be explored if one considers the historical facts of the long period of war and frequent population movements in the Shouxian region.

These stories, from the time they happened to the present, may not be convincing. One possible explanation, according to some scholars, is that the stories had a thematic extension and processing, and were

reconstructed at a later time period, but the time of their occurrence is almost impossible to test. The characters involved in the story are all historical figures from Shouxian (and even these characters are outsiders), but instead of showing a specific plot, the personal qualities of the excellent historical figures are highlighted. Mythology's use of metaphor to explain social change is an inheritance of this historical and cultural spirit. This way of constructing the narrative subject with greater autonomy is conducive to the transmission of the cultural spirit and complements the cultural phenomena that arise on the basis of the material reality mentioned above.

Since these myths present multiple historical and cultural contexts, they need to be reduced to the historical context to which they relate. Levi Strauss's structural analysis provides us with tools to interpret the meaning of the story text. In the stories enumerated earlier, the opposing structures manifest themselves as follows.

The first is to build a gentleman's personality for the purpose of cultivating one's moral aspirations. The Gentlemen personality is the ideal personality of a person in traditional Chinese culture. In addition to Confucianism, other influential schools, such as Taoism, have proposed specific goals for character cultivation. The founders of these schools proposed many specific goals of "being a perfect person" and together they proposed many virtues such as virtue-making, positivity, social responsibility, etc. Some of these snake stories have a moral of actively pleading for the good of the people and not caring about grievances, while others are stories of repentance and atonement. Their spirit lies in the fact that the aggrieved and humiliated individuals are actually suffering for society. To achieve such a goal, a series of trials and tribulations must be endured. It can be seen that many great snakes have given their lives to achieve their goals in life. The difference is that different stories embody different literary spirits and connotations of life, and different meanings set off different values of the times.

The second is to realize the social ideals aimed at stable and good governance. In these myths, the character of the snake is not the great god who created the world, and the historical figures associated with it are often heroes of tragic beauty. They are all tragic characters who died before they succeeded, and the role of the snake is rarely connected to people's daily lives. From the local development history of Shouxian, the characteristics of this narrative structure and the general tone of many wars and chaos merged into one, in these

stories, the sympathy encountered by famous generals and heroes is the people's expectation of good social governance, and the people's expectation of good leaders. It makes sense that heroic figures such as Lian Po and Sun Shu'ao, who are bent on serving the interests of the people, are loved by the masses. Meanwhile, the story of the snake reflects a collective memory. These stories connect people's voices to historical figures in a mythical way, highlighting a common spirit of place. While there is no direct connection between the snake and the immigrant in these stories, nor is there any involvement in how the outsider is integrated into local life, this sense of community is evident in the text of the stories.

The third structural feature is a literary narrative characterized by "big heroes and sidekicks". The protagonists appear as a combination of big heroes and sidekicks, which is very common in Chinese historical stories and folklore. For example, Guan Yu has partners of Guan Ping and Zhou Cang, and Yue Fei has partners of Yue Yun and Niu Gao. The literary significance of this pairing is that it facilitates the continuation of the story, separating the supporting characters from the main characters and widening the avenues of interpretation. From the point of view of the development of folk culture, such a dramatic approach is required for storytelling. In this way, the dramatic world presented by the masses is given a metaphorical color, and the storytelling expands from a reliance on the big hero to an expression of social institutions and order.

It is feasible to seek the basis of indigenization in terms of materialism and cultural symbols, based on the logic of change. Peng(2016), after studying the changes in China's Nuo opera, emphasized the significance of cultural change, through the analysis of local collective memory, it can be found that the narrative of the legend of the great snake fuses people's imagination of historical and cultural, on the issue of cultural change, people's imagination is very rich. Zhao(2019) proposes through the analysis of the three major epics of ethnic minorities that the hero is a collection of natural bodies (flesh), a combination of socio-cultural bodies and a dual embodiment of historical and cultural elements.

According to Jiao (2019), there is a distinctive feature of post-statehood heroic stories, which is that the narrator enters the hero's life and the main character and narrator work together to complete the story. The snake culture clearly does not possess such characteristics, and the protagonists of the snake culture's

stories are mostly emperors and generals. This heroic narrative process is, to a certain extent, a throwback to history, embodying a concern for history. Its concern is to look at the story of the snake from the macro perspective of the laws of cultural development, where the heroism shown by the snake's story can interact with the laws embodied by the local culture. Snake culture as a subculture has a two-way connection to local culture and contemporary local cultural life. Word of mouth is the most direct means of cultural transmission, and is an important reason why the story of snake culture is preserved. The re-expression of the snake culture has a distinctly constructive character, an expression of historical culture that transcends the logic of migration and social change and the complexities of historical change. It seeks a logical and narrative way of explaining everyday life in terms of the relationships between macro social systems.

The underlying spirit and main story content of the snake story is linked to the daily life of the local people, and its cultural processing around the construction of historical memory preserves the basic cultural elements and structures. They are only active when expressed, but this raises another question about how the processed stories relate to the cultural order of the moment.

Social Change forges New Social Relations:

The contemporary fate of the snake story, from the perspective of socio-cultural change as a whole, has met a similar fate to that of other intangible cultural heritage projects, namely, a lack of developmental dynamism. However, it has survived in a relatively small space and can find material and cultural foundations to support it. From another point of view, that is, from the classification of intangible cultural heritage, the collection of information on such cultural phenomena is incomplete and many stories are not collected well. At present, the preservation of many rural cultures faces the same dilemma, that is, part of the culture is extinguished and part of the new cultural elements are re-integrated, eventually forming the current cultural scene of multiple rural cultures coexisting. This study is primarily concerned with the relationship between the cultural phenomenon of snake story processing and other cultural phenomena, only to compensate for the above measures.

The snake culture has undergone cultural change. The transmission of the story of the snake benefits from the underdevelopment of the aforementioned cultural

space, as well as from the processing and memory of local culture and heroism. The story of the snake reflects to some extent the inheritance of local contexts. Unfortunately, most of these stories suffer from intangible cultural heritage inheritance, and many resonant conclusions can be used to explain their decline, such as “rapid social change, the breaking of generations of cultural inheritors” and so on. As mentioned earlier, if the collection is not done well, the conservation work cannot be carried out well, not to mention the fact that if the efforts at the technical level do not penetrate the laws of cultural development and localization, the effect of cultural conservation may not be obvious.

From the perspective of historical development, the distribution of historical and cultural resources has its dynamics. The interaction between cultural elements in a particular time and space, its changes, transformations, cultural inculcation and shed, etc. will not happen overnight, it will form a relatively static state within a relative time and space. All these processes of cultural change take time to complete. This formation process, and its maintenance state, manifests itself as a remarkable structural feature with spatial differences. The passing on of the snake story relies on an inherent spatial strategy, an uncompromising subculture in the local cultural system that is the embodiment of its status quo and destiny, a state of relative stability that is also a sign of multicultural coexistence in the village.

The coexistence of multiple cultures in rural cultures is a common phenomenon. There are already scholars expressing folktales from the perspective of social space. For example, Yan(2016) examines the coexistence relationship of multi-religious culture in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture based on the perspective of social space, proposing that common geography, similar or complementary modes of production, boundaries formed by historical memory, and commonly recognized local norms act together in a multicultural space.

In addition to constructing a framework for socio-spatial research, researchers are quickly confronted with the issue of cultural coexistence and the cultural shifts that come with it. The interaction between the dominant culture and the subculture is multidimensional and manifests itself in a variety of ways, including cultural adaptations, cultural shifts, etc. The content of the main culture and the subculture are mutually echoing. The main culture contains both modern and postmodern cultural content. All cultural content is changing at the same time.

In such cases, cultural substitution and change occur with considerable frequency. The content of the dominant culture and subculture is constantly replaced within their respective structural frameworks. In turn, subcultures may connect with the primary culture, leading to self-renewal and development.

By analyzing the relationship between cultural change and modernity, Wang (1998) suggests that social anthropologists tend to view the socio-cultural unit under study as a stable whole, and on this basis, he points out that in the process of adapting to change, the dynamic balance of culture itself forms a new equilibrium structure. Therefore, researchers need to break out of the original analytical framework when studying subcultures in order to adapt to new social changes and technological requirements. As human societies continue to change, it is inevitable that primary and subcultures will co-exist. In the dual space in which the snake culture is situated, the outer space refers to an irreversible general trend, while the inner space contains a power of everyday life that requires more attention. These two spatial contexts have come together in a consensus of “processed history”.

Meanwhile, the external space has given new impetus to development. From the point of view of cultural-historical change, this “change” is the norm. Paying attention to the spontaneous change of the endogenous structure, the snake story is always under the influence of cultural connotation, which is also the destiny of the snakes. But this cultural interaction does not manifest itself in an intense form, and the formation of such cultural boundaries does not take place overnight. Cultures form relatively stable structures in the process of adapting to each other, forming major subcultural differences within a certain range of practice spaces. These differences, which are objective descriptions of cultural phenomena, reflect the order in which social resources are allocated, and the order in which social resources are allocated may influence the distribution of socio-cultural resources.

Whether it is the space and intent outlined in the snake story, the historical distribution mechanism, or the characteristics of the reality mechanism, the fate of the snake culture is the result of the intertwining of history and reality, which also corresponds to the frequent changes in the cultural status and subcultural status of the subject. The fate of the snake has always arisen in the vicissitudes of history, but the production of historical processing has been preserved by the initiative of special

groups.

The dynamic mechanisms created by the symbiosis of cultures are subject to the synergy of history. Jiang and Zhang (2009) and Zhong (2010) argue that changes in political mechanisms and changes in economic structure are often used to analyze socio-cultural changes and reconfigurations. This is more a function of historical synergy, a synergy formed by the interaction of multiple systems. There are also scholars who have made vertical and horizontal comparisons of subcultures in different regions from a historical materialist perspective. This makes the fate of the subculture to form historical synergy in history (Li, 2018). If scholars explore the extent of the destruction of intangible cultural heritage from this perspective, it can also reflect changes in social dynamics.

This regularity is also validated by a spatial perspective on cultural development. Zhang and Qin (2010) complemented this understanding with a study of Rothman cultural symbols. What needs to be looked at in the future is the dynamics of cultural development provided by systemic interaction. Of course, the fact that this interaction and integration of the subject culture with the subculture facilitates the development of the culture is a progression of the culture itself, and it is likely that the snake will be created as a local cultural symbol in the future.

By now, the contemporary fate of the snake culture in the Shouxian region has become clear. According to cultural materialism, there is a specific process for the existence and rise and fall of socio-cultural elements. The new social structure will undergo a new cultural sifting and reorganization, driven by historical change and the participation of multiple social elements, but this process will not take place overnight. There will be different connections between cultures. The boundaries between them can be deduced in the course of the subsequent interaction.

The snake stories in the Shouxian region are processed and handed down by word of mouth on the one hand, and rely on the structural advantages provided by the rural cultural landscape on the other hand to exert value at a higher level. Structure and space are the most intuitive responses to this cultural-spatial pattern, and this response, such as the encounter with the snake culture in the Shouxian region, is a law of cultural development that needs to be viewed objectively. It can also be seen that the fate of the subculture is not passive and needs to find a balance between the two spaces mentioned above.

If the space becomes more mature, the subculture is likely to flourish and become the dominant culture in the region.

Conclusion:

Using Redfield's account of "big traditions" and "small traditions" as a spatial observation of cultural development, it can be seen that the small-big debate can be a common tool for cultural analysis. In this study, the space in which the snake survives is influenced by socio-cultural changes on the one hand, and in a pluralistic cultural community, on the other hand, it relies on a strong connection with local culture, which is passed on by word of mouth, through the vision of mythology, and the relationship and interaction between the two through a "poetic logic".

The story of the snake culture presented by the time of occurrence is not readily available, but in the plot and residents' lives have a high degree of connection, in general, the content of the story and the significant historical content of Shouxian region to a large extent has the possibility of being processed and constructed, its current fate can be expressed as follows: from the overall perspective, the snake story is a subculture, but its expression content and expression has a deep connection with the local culture, which provides the impetus for its transmission and development. These two states also correspond to the historical causes and realistic dynamics of their development and change.

From the point of view of historical development, the distinction between the subject culture and the subculture is always present. The distinction between primary culture and subculture is, from a static point of view, a description of cultural phenomena, and from a dynamic point of view, it is indeed a cultural screening mechanism that can be used by both historical subjects and historical objects. This structural relationship leads indirectly to the distribution of cultural resources. When this distribution goes to the common man, it requires the cooperation of some forces from everyday life. From the experience of the development of the snake story, there is a need to preserve cultural memory and fight for discourse in order to gradually move out of the situation.

There are so many unknown, incomplete, large-scale but unsystematic cultural phenomena in the current rural culture. These cultural phenomena, which are difficult to collect data on and weak to study, are a major headache for academic colleagues. But the significance of these phenomena in culture, in sociology, cannot be ignored.

According to the survey of the Shouxian area, in addition to intangible cultural heritage such as snake stories and legends, there is a large amount of material heritage such as ancient monuments and ancient tombs. However, the corresponding research and conservation measures are rather limited.

The take away from the study of cultural heritage in the Shouxian region is that it is the transmission of core texts and spirits, as well as their expression in a given era, that needs attention. The use of structural relationships between cultural systems can help to achieve the goal of preserving development. As many of the preceding cases have repeatedly demonstrated, the impact of change and loss of discourse on the development of cultural connotations is almost catastrophic.

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