

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF MUSLIM CHINESE UMMAH DURING THE TANG DYNASTY ♥□

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ABSTRACT

The historical ties between Muslim and Chinese cultures hold a significant position in Asian geopolitics and have left an indelible mark on world history. During the Tang Dynasty, the spread of Islam, the flourishing Silk Road, and enhanced communication between China and foreign nations facilitated the migration of numerous Muslim merchants, envoys, and missionaries from Arabia and Persia to China. These Muslim ummah became central to foreign trade, connecting China with the Western world through Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. This period represents one of the most remarkable chapters in Chinese history, with Muslim activities during the Tang Dynasty profoundly shaping the nation's historical and cultural development. This study aims to systematically explore the history of Muslims ummah during the Tang Dynasty in China by utilising textual analysis and examining historical sites. The research provides a foundational framework for further investigations into the enduring influence of Chinese Muslim ummah history, highlighting its significance in the broader narrative of global historical interactions.

Keywords: Chinese Muslims Ummah; China-Arab relations; Islam; Tang Dynasty; Silk Road

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**PENGANTARABANGSAAN CINA MUSLIM UMMAH ZAMAN
DINASTI TANG**

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ABSTRAK

Hubungan sejarah antara budaya Muslim dan China memainkan peranan penting dalam geopolitik Asia dan telah memberikan pengaruh yang mendalam terhadap perjalanan sejarah dunia. Ketika zaman Dinasti Tang, penyebaran Islam, perkembangan Laluan Sutera, dan peningkatan komunikasi antara China dan negara-negara asing telah mendorong migrasi pedagang, utusan, dan mubaligh Muslim dari Arab dan Parsi ke China. Ummah Muslim ini menjadi pemangkin dalam perdagangan luar negara, menghubungkan China dengan dunia Barat melalui Asia Tenggara dan Lautan Hindi. Zaman ini merupakan salah satu waktu yang paling gemilang dalam sejarah China, di mana sumbangan dan pengaruh ummah Muslim pada zaman Dinasti Tang memainkan peranan penting dalam membentuk perkembangan sejarah dan budaya negara tersebut. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti secara sistematik sejarah ummah Muslim semasa Dinasti Tang di China melalui analisis teks dan kajian tapak sejarah. Penyelidikan ini menyediakan kerangka asas untuk eksplorasi lanjut terhadap kesan mendalam sejarah ummah Muslim di China, sekali gus menegaskan kepentingannya dalam konteks dinamika sejarah global yang lebih luas.

Kata kunci: Ummah Muslim Cina; hubungan China-Arab; Islam; Dinasti Tang; Laluan Sutera

Introduction

Although Islam has become a global religion, as Lila Abu Lughod (Lila, 1989) said, the "theoretical area" in Islamic research is centred on the Arab world. After Islam was introduced to China, Chinese Muslims made important historical contributions to developing Chinese civilisation. Therefore, the spread and development of Islam in China is a major topic in the study of Islamic history and an integral part of the study of Chinese history. The East Asian image of Chinese-speaking Muslims and their non-Arabic characteristics are considered to be close to "Chinese tradition". This perspective has long caused Chinese Muslims to be neglected and described by Western scholars as "marginal people between two worlds" (Sabrina Xuan, 2009) or "familiar strangers" (Lipman, 1997). In addition, the international attention aroused by the Xinjiang Uyghur issue has made the study of Chinese Muslims relatively weak. So far, few people know that Chinese Muslims not only have a large population size but also have experienced a complex history of symbiotic development with Chinese civilisation. Over the centuries, Muslims have gradually developed from Persian and Arab settlements in southeastern China to a large and diverse group throughout the country. Nowadays, Chinese Muslims have become the most geographically distributed, urbanized and integrated group in all walks of life. According to China's sixth census, the Muslim population in China reached 23.1422 million in 2010, mainly distributed in the five northwestern provinces.

The Tang Dynasty was the peak period of opening up and cultural exchanges in Chinese history. The Silk Road closely linked China with Central Asia, West Asia and other regions. The arrival of early Muslims showed the first encounter between Islamic culture and Chinese civilisation, which provided a valuable historical case for the study of cultural exchanges between the East and the West. Chinese Muslims living in the Tang Dynasty were not only key participants in the trade network but also promoted cross-regional connections in Eurasia by spreading science, technology and culture, which is of great significance for understanding the connection and interaction of the ancient world from a global history perspective. Exploring the relationship between early China and the Islamic world, religious dissemination and cultural adaptation is beneficial.

The Historical Context of Early Sino-Arab Exchanges

The history of Chinese Muslims can be roughly divided into two periods. Islam "began in China during the Tang Dynasty, clear from Western countries' classics and history." The first period began in 633AD when Islam entered China until the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), during which time the society and development of Chinese Muslims became stable; the second period began in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) when Chinese Muslims entered a new historical environment. The history of China's Muslim ancestors has a deep connection with the Silk Road. The Prophet Muhammad spread Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and then established a new huge empire in Medina in 630 AD. At the same time, the Tang Dynasty began the Zhenguan Reign under the rule of the Li family, who were of mixed Hu descent and ushered in an era of prosperity and tolerance of Chinese civilisation. But "500 years before the rise of Islam, China and Arab countries had already had traffic, and this traffic route was the world's longest, oldest and most famous Land Silk Road" (Bai Shouyi, 1983). This ancient trade route connected the Central Plains of China with the Arab region, laying the foundation for later cultural integration.

The exchanges between the Chinese and Arab peoples can even be traced back to Yao in the era of the Five Emperors. The Records of the Grand Historian called Arabia

“Taiz” (大食), Although Zhang Qian did not reach Arabia during his 12-year mission to the Western Regions, he had heard of “Tiaozi” (条支). Gan Ying tried to cross the sea to “Tiaozi” but was blocked in 97AD. It can be seen that "commercial exchanges between China and Arabs can be traced back to a period before any existing historical records." Chinese documents at that time called the Arab Empire, Taiz and this name was used until the Yuan Dynasty. In addition to the Silk Road, the Arab Empire also had a dangerous sea route to China (also known as the Spice Road). In order to avoid storms on the high seas, Arab merchants (including Persians) mostly loaded ships at the port of Siraf in the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf, crossed the Indian Ocean, entered the Malay Archipelago in the Pacific Ocean, and then to cities such as Guangzhou and Quanzhou on the southeast coast of China (Lipman,1997). This interaction happened before the Prophet Muhammad started spreading Islam. Since the Prophet Muhammad began his missionary work, the relationship between China and the Arab world has become closer.

The early period of Islam's introduction into China

For over a thousand years, a hadith has been widely circulated in the Islamic world: "Even if knowledge is far away in China, we should still seek it ." (Sultanate of Oman, 2011).The Quraysh family, to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged, had long since transported goods from China to various places through the Hejaz trade route. The ancient Arabs had long been active between Parthia (in ancient Persia) and Rome, so the Arabs had some knowledge of China. British scholars believe, "In 628AD, the Prophet Muhammad sent a group of Arabs from Medina to Guangzhou with his letter to Emperor Taizong of Tang." Later, he was warmly received by Emperor Taizong of Tang when he arrived in Chang'an." (Wells,1984). The Old Book of Tang" also records that in 628AD, the Prophet Muhammad sent missionary envoys to nine countries, including China. Because China was an influential country in the world at that time, Muhammad would not ignore such a big country. Tang Taizong's "Induction Legend" in the early Zhenguan period, widely circulated in Chinese Muslim classics, also records the contact between Emperor Taizong of Tang and Islam. Liu Jielian, a famous Muslim scholar in China in the 18th century, also held this view, and his supplement was also recognised by Western Oriental scholars: Sayyid Wanges, the maternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, was sent to China at the invitation of the Chinese emperor. He visited China for the first time with a Chinese delegation in 611 AD. Emperor Taizong of Tang treated him with courtesy and helped build the Huaisheng Mosque in Guangzhou, which was used by Arab merchants and is considered to be the earliest mosque in China (Long Qingzhong,1990). Wanges led 3,000 people to escort the Quran to China for the last time and was buried in the ancient tombs of the ancient sages in Guangzhou in 632AD.

There are also relevant records in Chinese historical materials. "On June 16, the second year of Zhenguan, the emperor ordered that the envoys of various tribes who took Han women as concubines were not allowed to take them back to their tribes. According to the records in Volume 7 of "Minshu" "*Fangyue Zhi Lingshan Tiao*" and a large amount of oral information from the northwest, Muslims did come to the Tang Dynasty in the 7th century and stayed there. The Daxuexiang and Huajuexiang Mosques in Xi'an today were built in 705 and 742 of Tang Zhongzong, respectively. These two mosques have been renovated and rebuilt many times, so some people believe they were built after the Tang Dynasty, but this basis is weak. Therefore, there is no doubt that Islam was introduced to China through Muslim merchants as early as 651AD (Li Jianbiao,2000)

There is a lot of evidence that " Wanges came to China to preach", and the academic community still regards "August 25, 651 AD, when the Arab Empire sent envoys to pay tribute " as the beginning of the introduction of Islam into China. Both the

New and Old Books of Tang solemnly record that in 651, the third Arab caliph, Osman, sent an envoy, "Da Mi Mo Mu Ni", to meet Emperor Gaozong of Tang and introduce the founding of the caliphate and the teachings of Islam (LiuXu,1975). Chen Yuan'an pointed out in his "Tang Dynasty Arab Intercourse Table" that in the 148 years from 651 to 798AD of Emperor Dezong, the Arab Empire officially sent envoys to the Tang Dynasty and recorded them in the history books 39 times, and there were more than that that were omitted. China and India records, according to MuGenlai (1983), also recorded the frequent exchanges between the Tang Dynasty and the Arab Empire. According to Japanese historical records, the Arab envoys congratulated Emperor Xuanzong at Dongpai in 753. The Arabs were undoubtedly the most powerful country in the Tang Dynasty. As a major power in the West, the Tang Dynasty never ignored it for a long time. China and Arabia formally established diplomatic relations. The Arab Empire's visit to China significantly impacted the history of Muslim merchants coming to the East to write Islam.

Muslim merchants came to China for trade

In addition to sending envoys and establishing inter-governmental contacts, the most common thing was that a large number of Muslim merchants came to China for trade. With the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty and the Arab trade, Muslims gradually formed a larger group. The Taiping Guangji records that Chen Wuzhen, a merchant from Zhenzhou (Sanya City) in the Tang Dynasty, became rich by plundering Arab and Persian merchant ships passing through Hainan Island. He "amassed a fortune of tens of thousands of gold" and "had hundreds of warehouses of rhinoceros, elephants, and tortoises" because "the merchant ships from the Western Regions lost their way into Zhenzhou." In the Tang Dynasty, foreigners were called "Hu" or "Fan". Between 690 and 692, the Muslim population in Chang'an and Dongjing alone reached tens of thousands. There were 8,000 Fan students studying at the Imperial College in Chang'an. Jin Jitang said in the History of Islam in China that Arab merchants and Chinese merchants traded with each other in the counties of Hexi, "many of them stayed there, took Chinese surnames, and married Chinese women as wives and concubines." (Jin Jitang, 1935). Thus, the "native foreigners" appeared, which had the prototype of Chinese Muslims. The open and inclusive policy of the Tang Dynasty also provided a good survival foundation for the settlement and development of Muslims in China. Some historians believe that the initial spread of Islam in China did not only begin with the merchants of the Arabs, but was influenced by the last monarch of the Sassanian Dynasty, Yezdegerd, whose grandson, the Prince of Baloch, later settled in Chang'an. (LiuXu, 1975). After the fall of the Sassanian Dynasty, most Persians converted to Islam, and the Persians in China naturally became Muslims under the influence of their motherland. The "Persian Temple" built in Chang'an at that time, as recorded in the Old Book of Tang, is likely to be a mosque. The relationship between China and Persia is also close due to their geographical proximity.

With the conquest of Central Asia by the Arab Empire, people of all ethnic groups in Central Asia also became Muslims due to tax avoidance or the attraction of Islam. According to the materials left in the Book of Tang, "Cefu Yuangui", some small countries in the Western Regions tried to get rid of the conquest of the Arabs and asked the Tang Dynasty for assistance and troops. In response to this request, "Emperor Xuanzong of Tang did not listen". Residents of the nine surnames of Zhaowu (Hu people) from Central Asia and the Western Regions once settled in Chang'an and other places in large numbers through business. Some of them also became the ancestors of early Chinese Muslims, such as the An and Shi surnames among today's Chinese Muslims. (Since the Tianbao period of Emperor Xuanzong (742-756), Hu people "stayed in

Chang'an for a long time for 40 years." There was a "West Market" in Chang'an specifically for these "Hu merchants", and their streets were filled with "Persian shops" and "Hu residences" were opened. In the seventh century, a group of Shia Muslims migrated eastward to escape persecution and came to northern China to work as "brokers" for foreign trade. Today, there are still Muslims in northwest China who work as "brokers". Chang'an was officially called the largest Muslim centre in Western China at that time. Building a mosque was inevitable because Islam requires Muslims to pray wherever they go, and men must pray together. The mosque in Xi'an's Daxuexiang was built at that time (Ma Tianying, 1991). In Chang'an, the capital of the Tang Dynasty, the tribute envoys of the Arabs and the 4,000 envoys who stayed in 787 were unable to return to the Western Regions after Tubo occupied the four towns of Parthia, and they also stayed for a long time. Most of these envoys were tribute merchants (Ouyang Xiu et al., 1975).

Southeast coastal cities in the Tang Dynasty were also the main activity areas for Muslims to trade with China. Tubo marched into the Western Regions, blocking the Silk Road on the road. Arabs and Persian Muslims went to Guangzhou in an endless stream. The smooth progress of maritime trade prompted Arab and Persian merchants to inevitably live in Tang, settle down, marry, have children, and multiply from generation to generation. History books say that "since the Tang Dynasty set up envoys in Guangzhou, merchants have settled down since then, and this continued until the Song Dynasty" (Gu Yanwu, 1981) The Arab merchants thus became the first group to have a huge impact on China's trade and economic development, and preaching was also an indispensable quality for believers. When these Muslim merchants had trade relations with the Chinese, their behaviour and moral norms left a deep impression on the Chinese. Through understanding, some Chinese converted to Islam. At that time, Guangzhou, Quanzhou and other places, the world's major trade ports, established "Fanfang" where Muslims enjoyed autonomy. Fanfang became the commercial centre of the town (Ma Jianzhao et al., 2012).

The influence of Muslims in the role of war on the Tang Dynasty

The Shi Kingdom, one of the nine Zhaowu clans, saw that the Tang Dynasty could not assume its responsibility as a suzerain to maintain regional order during the 750s and unilaterally cancelled its tribute obligations. The Jiedushi Gao Xianzhi destroyed the Shi Kingdom, and this punishment made the Western Regions turn to the Arab Empire. Gao Xianzhi believed the wrong intelligence and thought that the Arab army would attack the four towns of Parthia, so he pre-emptively launched a war with the Arab Empire army in Talas (Tashkent) in Central Asia. (Bai Shouyi, 1983) After that, the Tang army led by Gao Xianzhi was defeated by the Arab Empire army, and the Tang Dynasty's power in the Western Regions was frustrated, but the relationship between the two countries did not deteriorate, and trade continued as usual. Du Huan, a Chinese captured in Gao Xianzhi's army, lived in the Arab Empire for 12 years. After returning to China, he wrote the first Chinese Islamic document "Jingxingji" (Du You, 2016). The special significance of this battle in history is not the short five-day war itself, but the Arabs made huge profits from the results of the war. The profits came from the Chinese papermakers among the captives. The Arab conquerors treated them well, paid them wages, and opened the first papermaking workshop in Samarkand. At the insistence of Burmakid AL-Fadl Abu Yahya, the governor of Khorasan, the first large-scale paper mill was established in Baghdad in 794 (Ma Tianying, 1991). Later, cities such as Damascus and Spain provided a more convenient carrier for cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

After that, Chen Heng verified that Islam was widely seen in Chinese literature under the name of "Da Shi Fa", and the relationship between China and the Arab Empire and the gradually Islamised Central Asian countries continued to develop. The most well-known is that during the An Lushan Rebellion in 756, the Tang Dynasty borrowed troops from Da Shi, and the army of Caliph Abu Giafar was "equipped with improved weapons and armour". In 757, it jointly recovered Chang'an and Dongjing Prefecture with the Tang army, including the garrisons of various ethnic Muslims in Central Asia, among which the Western Regions Huihe sent Prince Yehu to enter the Central Plains. In this regard, "Old Tang Book", "New Tang Book" and "Zizhi Tongjian" all record that "in September of the second year of Emperor Suzong's Zhide... Marshal Guangping Wang led 150,000 soldiers from Anxi, Huihe and Da Shi... In October, the richest man was Dongjing (Luoyang)". After recovering the two capitals, these soldiers were proposed by Emperor Suzong of Tang to stay in Chang'an. They "all had wives and lands, and there were 4,000 people in total". These soldiers were later incorporated into the Left and Right Shen Ce Army, and some were granted official positions. After the Anshi Rebellion, the Tang Dynasty persisted for another 150 years. In this sense, the Muslim officers and soldiers bore the responsibility of protecting the dynasty; otherwise, the emperor would not have sought to ensure their permanent presence in China.

In the Qingzhen Yingli Temple in Xi'an, there are two tablets from the early Qing Dynasty Daoguang period, referred to as "A Stele of King Yehu, the Loyal and Righteous of the Tang Dynasty" and "A Stele of the Tomb of the Loyal and Righteous King and His Family, Donating Sacrificial Land". The contents involve Yehu's participation in suppressing the An-Shi Rebellion and the tomb-sweeping visit of the "ancestor" Yehu by the person who erected the tablet when he was young. Although the contents of these two tablets are suspected of being self-centred, they are of great value in studying the ethnic origins of Chinese Muslims. The Shayuan in Weihe, Shaanxi, which guards the main road to Chang'an today, was also the residence of these officers and soldiers at that time. Muslims lived there until the Hui uprising in the Qing Dynasty (Yang Huaizhong, 1991). Another outstanding manifestation of the alliance between the Tang and the Arabs is that in 801, the Tang and Nanzhao allied forces, including Kang and the Black-robed Arabs, defeated Tubo on the Sichuan border. The Arabs here were definitely not Tibetan prisoners of war or Persian political refugees. They were the earliest Arab and Persian Muslims to enter Dali, Yunnan through the land route of India. They also became one of the ancestors of Chinese Muslims (Bushell, 1880).

The Fanfang (蕃坊) and Fanke (蕃客) in the Tang Dynasty

It was these Muslim merchants from the Persian Gulf, the Muslim officers and soldiers who had made contributions to the protection of the Tang Dynasty, and the Arab Muslims who went to Yunnan who entered China in a peaceful way. Even when "Emperor Wu of the Tang Dynasty destroyed Buddhism" (LiuXu, 1975), and ordered "more than 3,000 Daqin Muhu and Zoroastrian monks (ancient Persian and ancient Roman missionaries) to return to secular life" and "not to mix Chinese customs", Islam was not affected. Huichao, a famous Buddhist in the Tang Dynasty, noticed that most of the merchants from the Western Regions who came to China had Islamic beliefs and lived with the Chinese. In the eighth year of the Tang Dynasty, Emperor Wenzong of the Tang Dynasty issued an edict that "the foreign ships in the South China Sea originally came to admire the culture... The foreign guests in Lingnan, Fujian and Yangzhou should be entrusted to the Jiedushi to keep an eye on them." (DongHao, 1983)

It can be seen that the rulers of the Tang Dynasty attached great importance to these "foreign guests". According to Fan Bangjin's research, the Fanfang, which enjoyed

"extraterritoriality", appeared at the latest in 835. From the Dali to Tianbao years, nearly 10,000 foreign merchants traveled to and from Guangzhou every year, an unprecedented scale (Fan Bangjin, 1990). During the Kaiyuan period of the Tang Dynasty, which was at its peak, more than 800,000 merchants travelled to and from Guangzhou alone in a year, laying a certain foundation for the formation of Chinese Muslims. The Chinese emperor also appointed a Muslim judge for the Fanfang to handle Muslim lawsuits according to Islamic law. The judge was also responsible for leading all Muslims to pray together, recite the Koran, and pray for the caliph (Zhang Xinglang, 1977). Fanfang is a Muslim community, and these communities must have a place for religious and social activities in a mosque. This is because the Islamic prophet Muhammad advocated collective prayer and emphasised that collective prayer is better than individual prayer at home. As for when and where the mosques in many Fanfang were built, there is no specific document record. In the book "Islamic Civilisation", an American scholar mentioned that in the era of the Prophet Muhammad, "every Muslim temporary residence had a mosque with a simple cloth tent as the roof" (Hodgson, 2016). It is very likely that the Muslims at that time followed the teachings of the Prophet and did not build magnificent mosques, which led to the scarcity of mosque relics that can be examined in the Tang Dynasty.

During the heyday of the Tang Dynasty, Muslims from Arabia, Persia, and Central Asia gathered in Chang'an, Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, Yangzhou, and Tokyo in China, and there were many markets, making the above cities the earliest regions where Islam was introduced. The resident envoys, merchants, soldiers, and craftsmen, as well as Muslims of various ethnic groups in Central Asia who migrated to the Hexi area, lived in the Tang Dynasty for a long time (JinJitang, 1935). As they intermarried with local women, the population increased, and they gradually became native "foreign guests". These Muslims began to become familiar with and master Chinese culture, and there is no doubt that they merged with the Chinese through marriage and formed the earliest Chinese Muslims. The children of the native foreign guests received Chinese education since childhood, took Chinese surnames, participated in the imperial examinations, and gradually became Chinese. Li Yansheng, a descendant of Arabs, went from Guangzhou to Chang'an to take the imperial examination and was selected by the emperor as a Hanlin scholar and granted an official position in 848. He was a typical example of the sinicization of Muslims. (DongHao, 1983) Jean-Baptiste Du Halde mentioned in a book written in 1735 that "during a famine that swept Shandong during the Tang Dynasty, some Muslims bought or adopted more than 10,000 children from poor families and built entire towns to accommodate them." These Chinese children naturally integrated with Muslims. Fanfang has become an important way for Chinese Muslim communities to inherit their beliefs, build their identities, and reflect on themselves.

With the prosperity of trade along the Silk Road and the establishment of "Fan-Fang", the Muslim society in the middle and late Tang Dynasty developed rapidly. Muslims who came to China began to learn and accept Chinese culture and gradually integrated into Chinese society, and their family power and influence grew (Ma Jianzhao et al, 2012). However, with the decline of the late Tang Dynasty and the collapse of social order, the development of Chinese Muslims suffered a heavy blow. According to the original Arabic text "Golden Prairie", bandit Huang Chao's rebellion attacked Guangzhou, where Muslims gathered during the late Tang Dynasty. The number of Muslims and Christians killed in Guangzhou reached 120,000 when the total population of Guangzhou was only 200,000 (Mas'udy, 2013). Likely, Muslim merchants suffered so much because they were wealthy in business and too much favoured by the Tang court.

Conclusion

Islam was introduced to China before 651 AD. The earliest people who introduced Islam to China included envoys, merchants, and missionaries from the Arab region and fleeing Shia Muslims. Islam was first introduced to China during the Tang Dynasty when the mosque was the main symbol of Islam in China. As the number of Muslims remaining in China gradually increased, a specific social group was formed. In the eyes of the main ethnic group in China at that time, Muslims were "foreign guests", foreigners, and expatriates. These ancestors of Chinese Muslims made important contributions to the foreign trade, international relations, and political stability of the Tang Dynasty. In fact, Muslims had begun to integrate into China through intermarriage with the Han people and the conversion of some Han people. However, although Islam was introduced to China during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam did not develop much in the Tang Dynasty. Although the "Fanfang" system was a friendly courtesy of the rulers to Muslims, it also caused the group to be closed and isolated. Over time, the main ethnic group's understanding of Muslims became superficial and formal. Finally, while there are still some doubts about Wanges missionary story in China if even a tenth of it is true, it is of inestimable historical significance to Muslims in the Chinese-speaking world - legends have always been transformed into a special spiritual function that inspires the lives of Chinese Muslims in the experiential world.

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