

Changing European Academic Images of Japanese Religions

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要旨

本論考では、ヨーロッパの学術研究における日本の宗教に関するイメージの成立と変遷に関する考察を行った。1970年代以降、日本の宗教に対するイメージは、非常に、平和的、融和的、共存的であると高く評価された。特に、神道と仏教が融合されてきた歴史と、儒教を含め、それぞれの宗教の役割の違いが認識されてきた。他方、1990年代以降は、日本の新興宗教に関するイメージが注目され始め、それまでの伝統的な日本の宗教にくらべ、非常に活動的であり強固な宗教組織が構築されていることが指摘されている。それでも、ヨーロッパの宗教の歴史が対立と戦争の歴史であったことに比べれば、日本の宗教はより平和的、共存的であると分析されているが、それらの継続するイメージは多分に理想化されたものであることが指摘し得る。

Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine how images of Japanese religions have been constructed by European academics mainly after the 1970s. The images of the Japanese traditional religions have significantly influenced an important part of the foundation of Japanese society. Japanese value systems in society are deeply rooted in the history of Japanese religions. European academics have presented the common view that Japanese values and ideas have been dominated by three great religious and philosophical traditions: Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Although there are differences between these belief systems, Pauer (1996, pp. 5-6) observed that they nevertheless possessed common features which mutually interlock, providing the basis for a widely, and often unconsciously, accepted set of attitudes or deep belief structure among members of the Japanese population.

Most European academics recognize that Japanese religious and philosophical thought has been the driving force behind the Japanese modernization and the development of Japanese economy and society. Therefore, the traditional Japanese belief systems of Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism - will be illustrated as a backdrop for the Japanese social models discussed in this article. Furthermore, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, European social scientists have also displayed deep interests in the coexistent Japanese religiosity and religious practices. After the 1990s, European academics started to study new religious activities and to emphasize the diversity and the problematic phenomena of new Japanese religions.

During the 1970s, Europe faced many serious economic, social, and identity crises. As a result, people started to look to Japan, as a model nation or culture. This is the reason why the 1970s has been selected as the beginning of the period under examination in this article. They expected they could contrast themselves with Japan or could learn from. It should also be noted

that discussions on Japan have not been limited to the European level. European scholars have also exchanged their views with scholars in Japan, America, and elsewhere, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish certain aspects of the discussions on Japan taking place in Europe from those in Japan and in the US. Although an in-depth study could also be done on the Japanese or American academic influence on European images, this article will concentrate on European academic images of Japanese religions (Iwasa 2017: 409–410)¹⁾.

This article focuses on the concept of “image” and builds on the works of European researchers who have studied Japan and the concept of “image” in relation to Japan. (Breger 1990; Goodman 2001; Kreiner and Ölschleger 1996; Lehmann 1978, 1982, 1986, 1988; Pascha 2001; Wilkinson 1983, 1986, and so on. The concept of image can be described as follows:

- 1) Images play an influential role in constructing reality. Images often serve as tinted lenses through which other societies are perceived.
- 2) Images involve a high degree of generalization, simplification, and stereo-typification. Images inevitably involve a degree of subjectivity and selectivity.
- 3) Images are constructed out of power relationships. They are relational and situational. Images reflect international, macro politico-economic conditions. Images also reflect the intellectual climate of the times.

1. Main Japanese Religions and Philosophy

Shinto

According to Maraini (1988, p. 51), the first thing which catches European attention when closely studying Japanese civilization throughout history, is that vast and multi-faceted complex of beliefs, attitudes, rituals which goes under the name of Shintoism. A common interpretation of Shinto is that it is a primitive religion native to Japan which has endured to the present day. Shinto is the most ancient and all-pervasive Japanese religion. As Hendry (2003, pp. 127–130) also explained, Shintoism is the name given to indigenous elements of Japanese religion that can be traced back to pre-historic times. This religious influence has come to be known as Shintoism. Shintoism is associated with the mythology of Japan’s creation and the supernatural ancestors of Japan’s imperial line. Shinto is also associated with the foundation of Japan’s identity as a nation. During the wartime years including the Second World War, Shinto doctrine was developed and propagated by a State Shintoism office. Shintoism doctrine sought to inspire the Japanese people with nationalistic favor. This State Shinto was dismantled by the Allied Occupation as having been responsible for much of Japan’s aggression. Thereafter, the post-war Constitution includes a clause separating religion from the state.

In contrast to these main images, Dale (1986, p. 48) emphasized that Shintoism was not an ancient Japanese religion, but a body of ideas and practices which was manufactured by state-ment in the Meiji period. He claimed that some Shinto theologians such as Hirata Atsutane went as far as to borrow ideas from such diverse sources as Hegel and the Book of Genesis in an attempt to construct an ‘ancient Japanese cosmology’²⁾. Hardacre also argued that State

1) Europe is here narrowly defined as comprising the nations of “Western” Europe.

2) Dale (1986, p. 48) was quoted in Revell (1997, pp. 63–64).

Shinto (the government-sponsored religion of the Pacific War years) was thoroughly artificial and hardly the indigenous religion of the Japanese people³⁾. In addition, Pauer (1996, pp. 5–6) described Shintoism as an unsystematic body of thought and as a religion lacking any absolute commandments or rules.

On the whole, however, most images in the 1970 and 1980s agreed that Shintoism rituals were associated with the celebration of life and its development, with the harvest and fertility. Shinto is mainly concerned with life in this world, and divorced entirely from dealing with the dead, because at this time Japanese families turn to the other major religion, namely Buddhism (Hendry, 2003, pp. 127–130).

Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced into Japan around the sixth century AD. Buddhism came to Japan in a series of waves. A statue and some sutras (Buddhist texts) were sent from Korea to Japan in 552 (or 538) AD. In the immediate aftermath of the introduction of Buddhism, there were severe tensions between the powers that supported Buddhism's introduction and other powers that supported indigenous Shinto and were harshly opposed to Buddhism as an impure foreign religion. As Andreasen observed, however, the 17 article constitution of 604 AD promulgated by Prince *Shotoku* (*Shotoku Taishi*; 572–621; a member of the imperial family) set out principles for governing the country which were founded in Buddhist ethics. When Buddhism was introduced officially, the Japanese concentrated on two functions of Buddhism. The first involved death and the pacifying of evil spirits. The second offered magical spells for various benefits such as prosperity, health and peace (Andreasen, 1993, pp. 35–36).

The Buddhist traditions of Japan tend to stress practical moral behaviour and human relationships (Pauer, 1996, pp. 5–6). Buddhism has developed into a large number of Japanese sects and sub-sects. Hendry (2003, p. 130) argued that the doctrines of these sects were very different from the original Indian variety of Buddhism, since they derived from the interpretations of the Chinese sages who transmitted the religion to Japan.

Confucianism

Confucian philosophy, known in Japan also since the time of Prince *Shotoku*, aimed essentially at the successful organization of society. In the seventeenth century it became the state philosophy of the Tokugawa regime (1603–1867) and thereafter permeated all levels and aspects of Japanese society (Maraini, 1988, pp. 58–59). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a revival of Confucianism took hold, which was known as Neo-Confucianism (Andreasen, 1993, p. 39). Breger (1990, p. 43) argued that the Confucian ethos of strict loyalty and filial piety was actually a Samurai ethos dating from feudal times. The ethos of the Samurai, embedded in Japanized neo-Confucian morality, was chosen and imposed on the nation via, for example, the compulsory moral education lessons of the pre-war period, leading to what is called the 'Samuraization' of Japan. (Gluck, 1985)⁴⁾

3) Hardacre was quoted in Tyler (1990, pp. 261–262).

4) Gluck (1985) was quoted in Breger (1990, pp. 40–41).

The predominant images recognize that Confucianism is much more a moral or ethical system than a system of religious practice (Hendry, 2003, p. 138). Confucianism is a philosophy of ethics and bases its moral imperatives on reason (Maraini, 1988, p. 60). According to Confucian precepts, as Hendry observed (2003, p. 138), an individual needs training in the virtues of benevolent action, loyalty and filial piety in order to participate properly in five basic relationships. There are those between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. In Confucianism, ideas of virtue and social obligation, which regulate human relations, play a central role. They are put into practice, not through a system of commandments but through certain rules. The need for 'moral virtue' is seen as a justification for why the rules should be followed. (Pauer, 1996, pp. 5-6). Maraini (1975, p. 20) contrasted the Confucian-Mencian ideas concerning 'Original Virtue' with the Judaeo-Christian ideas concerning 'Original Sin'.

An interesting observation of the changing image of Confucianism can be noted. In the immediate post-war period, Confucianism was perceived as a common feudal legacy that all East Asian societies would have to overthrow if they hoped to develop their economies. Confucianism was seen to overemphasize the status quo and hold back the dynamic qualities of younger, more able, creative, individualistic and nonconformist entrepreneurs (Goodman, 2001, p. 182). All East Asian economies at the same time were weak, and they were all Confucian societies; a connection between the two was accepted. As the economic strength of the region began to overshadow that of Europe in the 1980s and as it looked set to become the centre of world economic power by the turn of the century, so the commonly held images of the relationship between Confucianism and economic growth were re-evaluated. Goodman emphasized that those values which had been perceived as a negative common heritage of a homogenized East Asia were suddenly given a positive value, and those values that had been so positively espoused in a monolithic West were viewed more negatively. (Goodman, 2001, p. 182)

The images presented in this section claimed that three traditional schools of religious and philosophical thought: Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced and constructed as the main religions and philosophies in Japan.

2. Coexistent religions model

A shared European image holds that most Japanese people can practise both Buddhist and Shinto rites as well as following Confucian philosophy without conflict. It is argued that the three traditional schools of thought have, on the one hand, complemented one another, but on the other hand, separated the function and role of each throughout in their long history. These harmonious and conflict-free images of the Japanese religions especially in the 1970s and 1980s are described as coexistent religions model in this article.

As Andreasen (1993, pp. 35-36) stressed, the first surprising thing that stroke European people when studying Japanese religions was that the average Japanese person had more than one religion. The figures below in Religious Statics Survey by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 2017³⁾ showed the followers of the main religions:

Shinto	89,526,000
Buddhism	88,719,000
Christianity	1,928,000
Other religions (incl. new religions)	8,718,000
Total	188,892,000

Shintoism and Buddhism claimed to have around 90 million and 89 million followers respectively. The total population of Japan was only 127 million in 2017, so clearly many people in some way adhered to both.

Coexistence

As Maraini (1988, p. 63) depicted, the Japanese have been able to confront modernization with a most favourable background of thought and traditions. Shinto have inspired a form of pragmatism with mystic potential, and a powerful dynamic vitalism. The Confucian philosophy has been responsible for the prestige of learning and, at a deeper level, for the secularization of the ethical and moral principles that ultimately have affected social stability. Moreover, the Buddhist heritage has been a force to be reckoned with in moments of national crisis. All three spiritual traditions have augmented, fomented and cemented communal cohesiveness, and favoured the social group.

As Andreasen (1993, p. 42) argued, man seeks answers to a number of questions concerning good and evil (ethics), true and false (science), being and not-being (metaphysics), and ugly and beautiful (aesthetics). In a perhaps simplistic fashion, he characterized a modern Japanese ethics as belonging to Confucianism, science to Western materialistic science, metaphysics to Buddhism and aesthetics to Shinto. He argued that no religion or ideology has precluded or counteracted the others; rather all have functioned together and supplemented each other⁵⁾.

Assimilation

One of the most significant aspects is that there have been numerous attempts over the centuries to integrate Shinto ideas into Japanese Buddhism (Hendry, 2003, p. 130). After the introduction of Buddhism in Japan, Tyler (1990, pp. 261–262) also argued, Shinto was gradually assimilated into a Buddhist framework. As Andreasen (1993, pp. 42–43) analyzed, the Japanese mentality which could combine these two religions into one framework explains how the *kami* (Shinto gods) and *hotoke* (Buddhist deities) could work together. Buddhist gods were accepted as new *kami* in Shintoism, and Shinto gods were interpreted as Bodhisattvas (enlightened beings) in Buddhism. Even today the Japanese use one word, *shinbutsu* to refer to both *kami* and Buddha. Breger (1990) pointed out that Japanese neo-Confucianism and Shinto movements identified Shinto gods with Confucian values, incorporating native Shinto

5) From *Religious Statics Survey* (2017) by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology, Japan.

6) Andreasen (1993, p. 42) noted that this idea was inspired by a lecture given in October 1986 by Professor Olof G. Lidin, at the Copenhagen University.

elements into a Confucian framework.

However, *Shinbutsu-bunri*, the separation of Shinto and Buddhism supported by the *Meiji* government, began immediately after the restoration of Imperial rule in 1868. The *Meiji* government regarded only Shinto as the original Japanese religion and re-established Shinto as the Japanese state-religion in order to integrate all Japanese people into subject of the Emperor. This policy greatly expanded religious tensions in Japan. Many Buddhist statues and temples were destroyed. The conflict-ridden events took place in contrast with the European images perceiving the Japanese religious relationships as conflict-free. Nevertheless, this event has been generally ignored, and everyone has tried to forget State Shinto in the post-war period. Tyler (1990, pp. 261–262) argued that scholarship had perhaps overemphasized the endurance from the earliest times to the present day of a pure Shintoism that was distinct from Buddhism. In fact Buddhism and Shintoism have now come to be closely associated. While Shinto has certainly influenced Japanese behaviour and culture, for most of Japan's history it did so within a cosy Japanese Buddhist world.

Separate Roles

On the other hand, other contrasting images of the assimilation of Japanese religions pointed to the separate roles of each religion. One of the main reasons why Buddhism and Shintoism have managed to live parallel lives for over fourteen centuries in a state of peace and harmony is to be found in the fact that '*la condition humaine*' is so evenly partitioned between the two religions. (Maraini, 1988, p. 55)

Shintoism takes care of material life—promotions, luck, and so on; while Buddhism takes care of truly spiritual concerns and the after-life. Shintoism makes Japanese Buddhism more down to earth and more Japanese, and at the same time, less Buddhist (Tyler, 1990, pp. 261–262). Shintoism looks after man's birth and his introduction to the myriad of ancestors. Shintoism sanctifies everything pertaining to life. Where Shintoism leaves off, Buddhism takes over. Buddhism speaks to the individual spirit, it elevates thought to levels never touched by Shinto, it sanctifies death and turns a fearful event into a further step towards final liberation from the bonds of suffering, on the way to nirvana (Maraini, 1988, p. 55). Together they form a whole series of rituals which accompany the individual from birth (Shinto) to death (Buddhism). (Andreasen, 1993, pp. 42–43)

From another viewpoint, Maraini (1975, p. 52) made interesting observations on Shintoism and Buddhism. He mentioned that the Japanese appeared principally to shift between two polarities. The first polarity, which is negative but profoundly spiritual, and constantly inspires art and literature, is mainly connected with Buddhism; the second one, positive, pragmatic, affirmative—but also rich in artistic and poetic threads—is linked with Shinto. The same person may veer from one to the other at different moments. What was very important was that, on the whole, the latter polarity seemed to prevail, and in particular seemed to inspire the Japanese in their actions.

The coexistent religions model has clearly presented the Japanese religions as conflict-free, harmonious and coexisting. By virtue of the division of religious roles, Shintoism and

Buddhism have coexisted in the Japanese society. These images showed how most Japanese can be religious in terms of both religions without any tension or contradiction. These European images seem to be, to some extent, over-idealized and over-simplified, in contrast to the European backdrop characterized by the fact that Europe's history has been one of religious conflict more than anything else.

3. Religiosity and Religious Practices

In contrast to the images in the coexistent religions model, recent survey indicates that as a nation the Japanese are among the least religious people in the industrialized world. According to the survey⁷⁾ conducted by the Agency of Culture, Japan in 2015, in answer to the question 'do you have some kind of religious faith?', only 28% said yes. This meant that more than two thirds of all Japanese claimed to have no religious faith which contrasted with the images presented in the last section. These Japanese had no strict allegiance to any particular religious organization. Revell (1997, pp. 62-63) argued that this low level of religiosity was more clearly appreciated if it was contrasted with a country such as Britain where only 4% of the population claimed to have no religious beliefs. This picture of a relatively irreligious Japan was further confused by the fact that, although more than two thirds of Japanese were atheists, the survey above found that 66% of Japanese thought a religious spirit was very important as a whole. These factors led to the conclusion that in Japan religion assumed a different form and played a different role from the one normally assumed in the West.

Buddhism and Shintoism never occupied, in Japanese life, a position similar to that of Christianity in the West. The fact of their coexistence acted as a check on the spread of one exclusive spiritual power. The place of religion in the general scheme of Japanese civilization is different. Maraini (1975, p. 76) argued that Religion was mainly seen as a spiritual consolation and inspiration, and not as the basis of ethics, morals, conduct. Japanese religious thought fulfils a function within a framework of rules which, by virtue of its only loose definition, in no way represent a closed body of doctrine. Pauer (1996, pp. 5-6) stressed that this amounted to a significant difference with Western systems of thought which were dominated by universal principles. As Revell (1997, pp. 62-63) argued, this contradictory religious picture of Japan was born out of the fact that in Japan religion was not defined by following the doctrines of a single religion, but by adhering to the traditions of Japan.

Lack of belief in a specific religion, however, does not mean a rejection of religious practices or of participation in religious rituals. Religion in Japan has always been more a matter of participation in religious rituals than a matter of holding specific beliefs. Rituals connected with religion, both private and public, are everyday events. As Andreassen (1993, pp. 33-34) stressed, both this diversity and practice-oriented religiosity must be understood. One of the features of Japanese religion world is that it is practiced daily. The close relationship between religion and daily life continues, as can be seen by the presence in most households of the *kamidana* (Shinto altar) and *butsudan* (Buddhist altar for ancestors) before which people pray regularly

7) The Agency of Culture, Japan, (2015) "Sourcebook about Religion-related Statistics (*Syukyo-kanren Toukei ni kansuru Shiriyosyu*)", pp. 54-57.

(Andreasen 1993, p. 41).

As Hendry (2003, pp. 126–127) also observed, many people practised a variety of apparently ‘religious’ activities during the course of their lives. Religion in Japan had been described by Fitzgerald as ‘a ritual system which pervades all institutions’⁸⁾. When religious ideas pervade all areas of society, as is the case in many traditional worlds, the use of the word ‘belief’ is less appropriate, because there is really much less opportunity for choice⁹⁾. In fact the Japanese do not consciously perceive themselves as believers in specific religions, whether Shintoism or Buddhism. They are too naturally influenced by the religious traditions to realize that they are conducting religious practices. In Japan, Revell (1997, pp. 62–63) described that there was no contradiction between being Shinto, marrying as a Christian, and being buried with Buddhist funeral rites. Hendry (2003, p. 140) also depicted that it was quite common for couples to request a Western-styled Christian wedding, even though they are not practising the faith. Hendry (2003, p. 142) argued that religious activity for many Japanese people might be carried out ‘in an ad hoc way’.

Prevailing European images describe Japanese religiosity as being very different from that of the Europeans. European images consider the Japanese as being relatively irreligious from the European point of view. However, other European images emphasize the fact that many Japanese engage even daily in ‘religious’ practices without considering that they have strictly religious faith. Japanese religious practices are interpreted not as principle-oriented, but as practice-oriented.

4. Main images in the 1970s and 1980s

Central European images and stereotypes in the 1970s and 1980s clearly described the Japanese religions as being conflict-free, harmonious and coexisting. The Religions model was prevalent and interpreted in their most positive and favourable light in the 1970s and 1980s within European academic images. This model was perceived as the main basis for a Japanese stable, harmonious and conflict-free society. Furthermore, the images of this model was applied not only as interpretations of the peaceful Japanese society, but also of Japanese economic and business management models in the 1970s and 1980s. However, this model was rather represented as a model contrasting with the European model; less religious to more religious, consensus to dissension, harmonious to conflict-ridden and homogeneous to heterogeneous.

Partly since the middle of the 1980s, and increasingly throughout the 1990s, however, this model has been more and more criticized as stereotypical, because it was argued that it had not reflected the actual aspects of Japanese religious society. New and different images started to emerge. The principle European images after the 1990s will be presented in the next section.

5. The new religious images after the 1990s

The established religious images did not totally disappear after the 1990s. Nevertheless,

8) Fitzgerald, Timothy (1993) Japanese Religion and the Ritual Order, *Religion*, 23, pp. 315–341, quoted in Hendry, 2003, p. 126.

9) Needham, Rodney (1972) *Belief, Language and Experience*, Oxford: Blackwell, quoted in Hendry, 2003, p. 127.

these models were not supported in academic debates at the same level as previously. Recent images have started to criticize and revise the established model as stereotypical images because it is argued that the religious images have not succeeded in explaining the actual and different aspects of the Japanese religious society.

As the prevailing images were portrayed in the above section on the 1970s and 1980s, the Japanese had different religious practices from those of the Europeans. Japanese religions were interpreted as coexistent, conflict-free and harmonious. These images still continue to be effective after the 1990s. However, contrary to the images of non-pronounced religiosity within traditional Japanese religions, the newly emerging religions in Japan show fairly contrasting images. According to Andreasen (1993, p. 40), what have collectively come to be known as the 'new' religions have turned out to be vigorous and dynamic movements. Many are 'messianic' and build on prophecies made by founders in a state of divine revelation. Some practice spiritual healing and some are mainly involved in group therapy. However, in general they are active in helping people solve their problems, and their growth has been one of the most prominent features of recent Japanese religious history.

The new religions comprise a number of religious movements, often drawing on Buddhist or Shinto traditions which are already much more amenable to the Japanese way of viewing the world. Typically, they have a charismatic leader who attracts followers to some new, promising way of life. As Hendry (2003, pp. 140–142) observes, the spate of new religions that appear at that time tend to stand in opposition to an overabundance of materialism and scientific rationality within a world of 'frantic' education and 'pressurized' overwork, rather seeking the spiritual meaning that people think it disappear from the established religions.

Andreasen and Stefansson (1993, pp. 121–153) also points out the main newly emerging religions, such as *Soka Gakkai*, *Tenrikyo*, *Itto-En*, *Rissho Kosei-Kai*, *Seicho-No-Ie*, *Mahikari* and so on¹⁰⁾. The new religious groups carry out targeted activities in order to promote their religions. Members are far more religious and observant than the standard Japanese described in the sections of traditional Japanese religions. Images of the new religions include descriptions as energetic, non-coexistent, and deeply religious, in contrast to images on traditional religions, which portrayed as conflict-free, coexistent, and less religious. In the 1970s and 1980s religious harmony fitted in traditional religious images discussed, but no longer with the critical stance of the model after the 1990s.

Concluding Remarks

In the 1970s and the 1980s the established and stereotypical images of Japanese religions were predominant. The prevailing images of Shintoism and Buddhism was described as being conflict-free, harmonious and homogeneous in the framework of the simplified and idealized views. Religious stability and co-existence was emphasized. Confucianism was also interpreted as a philosophy and ethical system emphasizing harmony, teamwork and vertical relations. These images were regarded as the symbolic features of Japanese society. They were also used in order to explain the strong performance of the Japanese economy and its business man-

10) Andreasen and Stefansson with Reader, 1993, pp. 121–153.

agement models drawing on images of conflict-free social classes and peaceful labour — employer relationships. European academic images interpreted the Japanese religions as being to large extent over-idealized, in contrast with the conflict-ridden individualism within the European society. Here the generalization and simplification of European images on Japanese religions became apparent.

On the one hand, over-simplified and over-idealized images predominated. On the other hand, European images started to present different images of the Japanese new religions. Furthermore, the established images also started to be increasingly suspected from the middle of the 1980s and especially after the 1990s. Newly emerging images build on claims that established images failed to observe the changing religious reality in Japan. The images of Japanese religions as harmonious or co-existence were criticized as an over-idealization.

The new counter-images of Japanese religions which started to prevail after the 1990s have been described as more egoistic, non-coexistent, complex and diversified. The images have undergone a drastic change. The new images portrayed Japanese society as being characterized not only by conflict-free, harmonious aspects, but also by diversified and disputed aspects. This development of a movement from homogeneity to heterogeneity is a part of the rhetoric of globalization, which places a greater focus on individual responsibility due to the influence of neo-liberalist ideas (Iwasa 2017: 417). This article has argued that the historical shift of European academic images of Japanese religions must also be analyzed alongside changes in society and academic thinking.

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