

## TOURISM, TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND AUTONOMY IN A SMALL ISLAND: YAP FACES A NEW MILLENNIUM

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### Abstract

This article discusses the autonomy of traditional Yap society in relation to its outer islands which now together constitute the Stat of Yap. It also examines the autonomy of present-day Yap society and the changes brought about by modernization. Especially, I focus on the influence of tourism on the traditional culture and also the autonomy of Yap society. “Anthropology of tourism” studies suggest that tourism is a useful means for recreation, revitalization, restoration and preservation of traditional culture<sup>(1)</sup>. This article examines whether and how much the tourism in Yap is playing such a role as an external power, and to what extent tourism in Yap is contributing to the self-sustenance of Yap society especially in relation to Yap’s outer islands.

Key words: tourism, autonomy, traditional culture, external power, modernization

### The Traditional Model of Autonomy

#### ***Tabinaw* as a model for internal autonomy**

The basic unit of life in Yap society is an estate called a *tabinaw*, a piece of land with a central stone foundation known as a *dayif*. In Yap, all land has power, and every estate is ranked accordingly. The entitlements and privileges needed to secure high political and religious status are established according to the rank of each estate and the Yap seniority system. Knowledge of *tabinaw* is taught and passed down to younger people, and every villager knows the name of each *tabinaw*.

A *tabinaw* is also an independent unit of food resources. Each *dayif* has a set of natural resources, such as taro patches, yam gardens, fishing grounds, weirs and fish traps, coconut trees, forest stands and other plots of land in addition to a housing compound. However, various changes in village life can be seen compared to that of a few decades ago. First of all, because of population decrease in rural areas, not only political and religious privileges, but also lands have passed into the hands of the small number of remaining people through various paths of inheritance.

According to an informant from Rang village in Fanif municipality, some other changes should be noted:

- 1) Every villager is now wearing a clothes.
- 2) The number of younger people is again increasing in rural areas.
- 3) Young people prefer to eat rice rather than taro. Instant noodles and canned foods are increasingly popular among them, and food life has here been changing steadily. People are buying fresh fish more often than before. In the old days, children used to eat together with their mothers until they grew up, but not with their fathers. However, today, children are eating together with their father, too. Also, there was a rule in eating a fish. Every individual part of a fish “belonged”

to grandparents, parents, or children respectively. Today, there is no such rule, and anybody can eat any part of the fish. Furthermore, the garden plots which were once divided into men's plots and women's plots, now no longer are.

4) People used to walk in a row on the road, and they used to hold some leaves or a small tree branch in their hands when they went out alone. Also when children walked in front of the elders, they used to bend their bodies forward respectfully, and they had to be quiet in the village. Today, however, none of these customs are kept up anymore.

5) People think that life today has become very convenient, comfortable and easy, much better than before. Especially, road transport is very convenient. However, people also think that the old life was really better for some because all could live without money. Today, life is very hard without money.

6) People used to show respects toward elders and other people's property. They did not enter onto other people's land without permission. Today, because of "democracy", there is less respect towards others.

7) Jobs in town, such as for day laborers or hotel boys, have increased, and more people are becoming employees.

8) Most young people have TVs, and almost all household have a telephone. The number of those who own a car has also increased greatly.

9) The number of children who study abroad or join the military is increasing. People are having more opportunities to use money sent by their children.

Thus, many changes can be seen in Yapese life. However, village life is still basically the same, mostly self-sufficient, and the main "unit of life" is still the *tabinaw*. The land system still plays a key role in village life.

### ***Sawai* trade as a model for autonomy in relation to small islands**

Mutual autonomous relations between Yap proper and its outer islands can be seen in the traditional trading relationship called *sawai*. In the Caroline islands, the islanders in the east of Ulithi atoll have a politically, socially and "religiously" close relationship with two villages of Yap proper - Gachapar and Wanyan in Gagil municipality: a kind of periodic tributary trading relationship. Politically, Ulithi atoll is subordinate to Yap. It is the main link in a chain of authority which originates in the Gagil district of Yap and terminates in Pulap, Pulusuk, and Namonuito, about seven hundred miles to the east. Furthermore Yap occupies a special place as the seat of certain religious activities and locales (USHIJIMA 1987: 281, LESSA 1950, LINGENFELTER 1975).

The Central and West Caroline islands are located in the typhoon area of the northwest Pacific ocean. They periodically suffer damage from typhoons. If one island is hit by a typhoon and seriously damaged, the islanders of other remote islands and atolls may be safe and can give some help. Thus, the people of the Caroline islands developed an exchange system, and mutual, reciprocal and cooperative relations are traditionally strong. Since small islands are not a self complete world, the islanders have long been building a system of reciprocal political and economic relationships. Three types of exchange systems in the Caroline Islands can be seen: that is, intra-atoll exchange, inter-island exchange, and *sawai* overseas exchange. The intra-atoll exchange system included strong political, military and economic ties. The inter-islands system involved purely social and economic ties, while the overseas system between Yap proper and the outer islands was a political system of master-servant relationship based on religion and faith in

magic. The atolls of the central Carolines from Ulithi to Namonuito were under the umbrella of Yap island, and the atoll people brought a periodical offering to the two master houses of Gachapar and Wanyan in Gagil municipality. This was *sawai*, a kind of tributary trade. Outer islanders are not allowed to wear a colorful loincloth called *thuw*.

Magical and religious relationships played a very effective role in the integration of the “Yap Empire” traditionally. The deities of Yap are said to be very strong, and if they get angry the sea will become very rough and the islands will be washed over by tidewater, which could cause serious damages to islanders and agriculture (USHIJIMA 1987: 282-83). The magicians of Yap island were also believed to be very strong, and their white magic could bring bounteous food and fish, make women fertile and avert disasters. Black magic was believed to bring typhoons, catastrophe and plagues of termites. Even today, Yapese are believed capable of bringing storms and harm to the outer islands by black magic. In order to avoid this disaster, outer islanders had to make religious offerings to the ancestor spirits of the *sawai* houses as periodical tribute (*ibid.*: 288-96).

The political connections between the Yapese and the outer islanders were supplemented by a parallel set of pseudo-kinship ties. Yapese and outer islanders are thus in a parent-child relationship. The *sawai* parents in Yap treat the outer islanders as children, and provide them a place to stay and food to eat. They also provide trees for building canoes upon request.

Until early this century, representatives of outer islanders visited Gachapar and Wanyan of Gagil municipality in canoes almost once a year. When they arrived on Yap island, the paramount chiefs of the outer islands would make offerings to the master houses of Wanyan and Gachapar. After that, the representatives of each island would visit each *sawai* house and give a *sawai* gift. These offerings included island textiles (*bagiy*), palm ropes, palm oil, palm honey, mats made of banana leaves, and various kinds of shell. Outer islanders, while waiting to catch the winds back home, would stay at their “own” *sawai* house. For their return home, they would be given turmeric, earthen pots, firestones, taro, yams, sweet potatoes, other vegetables and so on by the Yapese. Through this political, social and economic system between Yap proper and outer islands, ordinary exchanges were also promoted, and the framework of a mutual help organization was built up, especially during times of scarcity, which permitted an equal distribution of essential supplies among the islands. And the external relationships with the outer islands built up on it, thus the traditional *sawai* trade made it possible for Yap and the outer island to maintain their own economic and political autonomy (*ibid.*: 301-304).

### **Sawai trade today**

Even today, outer islanders visit their *sawai* people in Wanyan when they come to Yap island for the Tamol Conference. The relationship between Gagil and the outer islands has thus lasted until today. Ulithians brought Fais tobacco, *lava lavas*, palm ropes, palm honey, black bird’s wings used for dancing decoration, and sail canvas to Yap in those days. Some Yapese often came to Wanyan to buy these trade goods. Items such as earthen pots, firestones, turmeric, red clay (for painting canoes) and combs were once traded to the outer islanders by Yapese. Today, tobacco and *lava lavas* are given by the outer islanders to the Yapese, and in return, commodities such as rice, instant noodles, canned foods and so on are given to the outer islanders by the Yapese. Thus, the outer islanders still maintain a *sawai* relationship with Yapese people. Their Yapese counterparts also offer taro, banana and so on while the outer islanders are staying for business or medical treatment in Yap island (*ibid.*: 305).

Since the German colonial masters forbade overseas voyage early this century, the *sawai* trade has lost much of its power in the political and economic arena today, but, as we saw above, *sawai* is still partly functioning even today. However, if we see *sawai* relations from the viewpoint of the autonomy of Yap island, we must say that it is not very important today.

### Tourism as a new model for external power ?

#### The present tourism situation in Yap

The number of tourists in Yap is not great compared with such tourist resort areas as Saipan and Guam. According to local statistics, there have been three periods of a sharp increase in the number of tourists. First, in 1984-85, when tourist numbers increased rapidly from 868 to 1,316. Second in 1986-87, when the number rose to 2,000, a 77% increase. And, third in 1989-90, a 66% increase to 3,894. Thus, tourist numbers both in 1996 and 1997 surpassed 5,000. They then went down 30% in the next year, but recovered again in 1999.

Between 1996 and 1999, the biggest number of tourists has come from the US. Their num-

Table 1. Tourist Count and Yap Revenue: 1980-99

Year	Number of Tourists	Percent Change over previous year	Revenue(\$000)	Hotel occupancy rate
1980	1,122	N/A	202	N/A
1981	757	-33%	136	N/A
1982	811	7%	146	N/A
1983	754	-7%	136	N/A
1984	868	15%	156	27%
1985	1,316	52%	237	42%
1986	1,129	-14%	203	35%
1987	2,000	77%	360	63%
1988	2,299	15%	414	73%
1989	2,354	2%	422	74%
1990	3,894	66%	717	74%
1996	5,310	-	-	-
1997	5,353	1%	-	-
1998	3,731	-30%	-	-
1999	4,355	17%	-	-

Source: Immigration Office, Commerce and Industries, Department of Resource and Development of Yap State (1987, 1990), Yap Visitors Bureau (1999)

Table 2. Individual Countries & Regions Actual Number & Share (%) Fiscal Year 1996-1999

country	1996	1997	1998	1999
United States	2,304 (43%)	2,351 (44%)	1,945 (52%)	2,182 (50%)
Australia	96 (2%)	94 (2%)	59 (2%)	73 (2%)
Canada	90 (2%)	94 (2%)	67 (2%)	77 (2%)
Germany	156 (3%)	118 (2%)	126 (3%)	221 (5%)
Japan	1,257 (24%)	1,455 (27%)	722 (19%)	832 (19%)
Other Euro Countries	343 (6%)	290 (5%)	257 (7%)	385 (9%)
Other Asian Countries	475 (9%)	401 (7%)	263 (7%)	238 (5%)
All Other Countries	589 (11%)	550 (10%)	292 (8%)	347 (8%)

Source: *Yap Visitors Bureau* (1999)

ber was between 1,945 and 2,351, that is between 43% and 52% of the total. Next come Japanese tourists, and their numbers fluctuating between 722 (19%), the lowest, and 1,455 (27%), the highest.

### **Marine Tourism**

Yap is best known for its stone money, but recently diving has overtaken stone money as the island's most popular tourism attraction. Yap is well known for its giant Manta Rays and crystal clear sea, visibility in which exceeds 30 meters at the outer drop-offs. It is very difficult to meet with Mantas in most dive sites in the world. However in Yap divers can encounter large Mantas easily, often more than a dozen at a time. Yap's Manta Rays are world renowned for their abundance. Thus Yap's sea justifiably attracts many Japanese divers. Currently there are seven hotels and one guest house on Yap. There are also four dive shops, two of which offer Japanese guided diving. One of them is run by a Japanese owner. There is also a range of tours arranged for visitors. The major ones are a marine tour and a village tour. Marine tour includes various types of scuba diving according to the diver's skill, and snorkeling, boat cruising, fishing and so on. Scuba diving includes drift dives, wall dives, cavern dives, night dives and Manta dives. Hotels and dive shops also provide a range of village tours. One is a three hour guided tour by car. Others are a five hour course tour, which combines a village tour with a mangrove tour using both car and boat, and a two and a half hour village tour. Most Japanese tourists come to Yap for diving. There are few Japanese visiting Yap only for the purpose of cultural tourism. And most of the divers spend almost all their time on diving: the village tour is nothing but an option for them.

Regarding the village tour, which I attended, the tourists are taken to the wreckage of a Japanese World War II Zero fighter at an old airstrip, and then on to Kaday village in Weloy municipality on the west coast of the island. At Kaday, tourists are guided to see the giant stone money, and traditional men's house called *peebay*. They also experience a guided stone-path walk in the village. Kaday is the only village that tourists are allowed to enter and walk around. Tourists can pass by other villages and stop by stone money and men's houses, but they cannot enter these villages without previous permission. The tour guide usually gives warning beforehand about this touristic taboo. According to the explanation given by my tour guide, most of the village lands in Yap, which include estates, roads, seashore and fishing grounds in front of villages, are private property. What impressed me most was that the guide repeatedly emphasized the warning not to enter villages without permission, not to take pictures in villages without permission, not to gather coconuts and plants, and not to talk loudly or make a fuss while passing by villages. These warnings are also often repeated in tourist brochures.

### **Cultural Tourism**

Currently, Kaday village of Weloy municipality and Maa village of Tomil are the only two villages on Yap proper that offer cultural tour packages. Villagers from Makiy of Gagil municipality and a club in Rull municipality called Teens WorBals used to do so as well, but they no longer do. The villagers of Maa started their tour package in 1998, and, currently, a stick dance known as *Yibung* and a ladies' sitting dance by kids up to twenty-five years of age, are performed upon request from hotels. They charge \$25 per person, and the money is said to be evenly distributed among the participants.

Kaday is the only village that has made positive efforts to promote tourism in Yap proper.

Kaday Community & Cultural Development Organization (KC&CDO) was organized for this purpose, and started to open the village to tourists around 1996. First, the villagers of Kaday didn't think of opening their village to tourists. However, one day, a hotel director from Colonia came and saw a dance performance, and he then asked the villagers to open the village to tourists. Thus Kaday tourism started. In the first place, the villagers undertook the renovation and restoration of an old men's house (*peebay*), stone money (*rai*) and stone-paths. Some volunteers also helped the restoration work, among whom was a member of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) who was stationed in Yap at that time. A part of the restoration money came from donations. Today, all villagers have to work together on restoration and maintenance work in the morning of every Saturday. Buildings which are to be restored in the near future include a men's house (*faluw*) near the seashore and a women's menstrual house (*dapal*).

The construction activities of a tourist village include not only the restoration work of the traditional village, but also the teaching of traditional culture to the younger generations. The older women of the village have been teaching traditional dances, basket weaving, grass skirt making, bamboo craft, and the making of fishing nets.

Kaday village established an arrangement with Manta Ray Bay Hotel, E.S.A. Hotel and Pathways Hotel by which all three hotels combine their guests and join the cultural tour that takes place every Tuesday and Saturday at around 4: 30 P.M. This tour package includes a guided stone-path walk, a cultural dance called the *Karew* performed by teenagers and younger kids, basket-weaving and a demonstration of coconut tree climbing and a "cultural glimpse" in a question and answer session. Each tour of Kaday together with costs a total \$200. All hotels contribute to this payment depending on the number of guests they each have<sup>(2)</sup>. Besides this special package, one can also go on an individual self-guided tour for \$3.

A community meeting is held once a month and the balance of revenue and expenditure is reported. A part of the money from tourism is said to be divided evenly among the dancers, and the rest goes to a scholarship fund for children, since financial aid from the US is supposed to end in the year 2001 (*The Yap Networker* Vol.1(6) 1999.7.30 ).

## Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Culture

### Preservation

As an important part of traditional culture in Yap, there are various types of dances in each village. The number of local dances now practiced on Yap proper is altogether about 16 (four in Fanif, three in Weloy, one in Gagil, three in Rull, two in Rummung, and three in Kanifay Municipality). The dances are performed for different purposes. These include performing for tourists, helping the younger generation look back to the past as their own way of life and keeping the dance movement strong (*The Yap Networker* Vol.1(7) 1999.8.6). Each municipality presents its own ritual dance on Yap Day, the first of March. There is also an opportunity for some villages to get together and perform dances on UN Day, October 24th.

Every Sunday the women of Okaw, Weloy municipality, gather together to learn the ancient art of Yapese dancing. For the three dances being learned in Okaw, *talelog* is said to be unique in Yap today, based on an old native legend with chants in old Yapese. *Talelog* mostly consists of rapid jumping, clapping, chanting and bending of the knees. The theme of this active Yapese dance is to show non-Yapese the youthful beauty of Yapese girls, to display Yapese dance spirit and the pride they have in their culture and traditions. The dance is performed at the Okaw community center, the Manta Ray Bay Hotel, and in the village. The other two dances are bamboo

dances. The two bamboo dances were “bought” from Okaw’s ally village of Gachapar, Gagil, in the early 1980s. Shell money, shell beads, and stone money and other gifts were given to Gachapar in exchange for the dances. They were brought over from Gagil to be performed during the grand opening of the Okaw community house in 1983 (*ibid.*).

According to the rules of the village, every woman must be involved in these dances, or otherwise endure some form of penalty for not participating. The penalty includes repairing broken stone-paths, cleaning the community house area, surrender of local valuables, or doing whatever is commanded by the elders of the village. All women, both those born in Okaw and those married into the village, are bound by tradition to join in the dances and indeed all village activities. The village of Okaw resumed the dance lessons in July 1997 in order to teach the younger village members. Since then, the dances have been practiced every Sunday. They are practicing these dances because they want to teach their children to learn and take pride in their culture. Learning Yapese dances is one unique cultural way of showing how much Yapese people care about who they really are (*ibid.*).

As for the restoration of traditional culture, weirs and also fish traps made of stone formations, have been restored in Leng, Riken and Wanyan in Gagil municipality, and in Keng and Okaw in Weloy municipality over the past year as a part of the cultural preservation program of the Yap Historical Preservation Office (HPO). The HPO program aims to preserve and promote the cultures and traditions of Yap through restoration of weirs, stone-paths, local houses and ceremonial and sacred sites, and through the documentation of oral history. So far the restoration of six weirs has been completed (*The Yap Networker* Vol.1(3) 1999.7.9).

The HPO has also been helping many villages in various municipalities to restore their stone-paths. Each village has been given \$800 to reconstruct their path. The average length of the contract is set on three months. The advantage of stone-path restoration is thought to be in making the inside of every community look more presentable to attract not only tourist attention, but local attention as well. Village people reconstruct their stone-path because it represents an old way of life. But the main reason behind the restoration is to make each villager aware of their ownership of the stone-path, as well as to show tourists that Yap has a unique traditional way of life. After restoration, each individual villager is responsible for cleaning certain parts of the stone-path (*The Yap Networker* Vol.1(6) 1999.7.30).

### **Succession**

Today, there are two public high schools in Yap state, one in Yap proper, the other in an outer island (Ulithi). The Yap high school has 500 students and offers such courses as commerce, engineering, agriculture, mechanics and computer science. Education in traditional culture is said to be difficult because the students come from different places with different customary backgrounds. However, students are given time for discussions related to traditional culture in the homeroom (*Miyako Shinpou* 1998. 11.15). They also celebrate annual Culture Day on October fifteenth by dressing up in traditional costumes such as colorful grass skirts, loin-cloths, *lava lavas*, and decorative lei. The purpose of Culture Day is for students to show pride in their cultural identity (*The Yap Networker* Vol.1(18) 1999.10.22). The state Government is said to be considering a new curriculum, in which primary school kids from first grade up to fourth will not be taught in English but only Yapese. There are some children who even don’t know how to count in Yapese.

The State government has put real effort into education in traditional culture. The textbooks

for school children in the lower grades use folk tales to tell children how to ride in a canoe, how to find edible nuts and how to do other things related to everyday life (*Miyako Shinpou* 1998. 11.15).

### Conclusion: Autonomy and Tourism

Tourism promotion in Yap is not very positive except in such a village as Kaday. On the contrary, there are some high-up people who even try to deny the value of tourism and appeal for control of tourists coming in. These people seem to be very afraid of the disintegration of Yap culture through tourism. One Yap politician stresses the need for control of tourism in order to avoid negative influences such as drug problems. Again one villager in Kaday foresees that, in the future, tourists might arrive by the busload every day and people might end up commercializing their culture by hurrying through each dance in order to make time for another \$200 performance (*The Yap Networker* Vol.1(6) 1999.7.30).

Many people seem to be stressing that the traditional way of life must be preserved for the next generation. Thus it is important to teach self-supply of fish and agricultural products and the value of village life. It is becoming a big challenge for Yapese to be self-sufficient economically while at the same time respecting their own traditions.

As we saw above, tourism in Yap has contributed to the restoration, revitalization and preservation of traditional culture. However, it is not replacing the traditional *sawai* trade which played such a big role in providing external power for politico-economic autonomy. While a self-sufficient social system based on traditional land ownership seem to have been sustained to date, the present situation of Yap and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is heavily dependent on American economic support, and economic autonomy is still a dream.

Yap State became independent as a member of FSM on the third of November 1985. Yap State has been financially supported by the US for fifteen years. This support is based on the Compact of Free Association which extends financial aid to the extent of about 70% of Yap's annual budget. For the last decade, Yap has made various efforts to achieve economic autonomy. However, a private company which was developing diversified business for Yap, such as sales of agricultural products, tourism, construction and so on, failed because of lack of know-how, technology, and markets. There was also once a plan for setting up a canning factory, but it also failed because of difficulty in securing a constant supply of raw materials on a commercial basis, and the high cost of importing cans. Currently, there is no industry except an apparel factory launched by Taiwanese capital, which has been doing well by taking advantage of a preferential trading agreement with the US. However, most of the workers are Chinese and there is little spreading effect on local industries.

Looking at the balance of annual expenditure and revenue for Yap State between 1985 and 1990, we can see that revenue from 1985 up to 1989 remained on the same level, between \$1.5 million and a little over \$2 million. On the whole, State revenue shows little fluctuation. On the other hand, expenditure showed a dramatic increase from \$7 million in 1985 to \$12 million in 1990. The balance clearly shows over expenditure: expenditure is three times revenue in 1985 and six times higher in 1990 (*Yap State Statistical Bulletin* 1990: 59). This over expenditure has only been balanced by US financial aid, and this statistical fact clearly shows that Yap State is not achieving economic autonomy. The main reason for the imbalance seems to be the lack of the competitive agribusiness and local industries, plus insufficient effort to establish invited foreign industries. The Yap economy is suffering over all excess of food product import, and



economic development is an urgent issue for increasing food self-sufficiency.

Fisheries are an economic development priority for the Yap State government, but there are some problems to solve, such as construction of transport infrastructure and market cultivation. The other priority for government policy is tourism, which is thought to be an easy way to earn foreign exchange, and Yap islanders are showing growing interests in tourism. The promotion of tourism is also thought to be possible in combination with development of agriculture. However, the governor seems to be cautious about the promotion of tourism, saying that he doesn't want Yap to become like Guam or Saipan, although their unique cultures have been attracting a lot of tourists (*Miayako Shinpou* 1998.11.18). He also says he wants to preserve the traditional way of life for the next generation, and to gain economic and political autonomy. The former governor of Yap State also told the people in his inauguration speech that the Yapese should not be washed away by foreign influences, but should hold on to Yapese culture and tradition inherited from their ancestors, and build the nation in the Yapese best way. 'We don't need to think like the West that money is everything. If we can achieve our self-sufficiency, we are free from the influence of world economy' (*ibid.*).

As we have seen above, the traditional Yap way of life and even economic autonomy are still, to a certain extent, maintained at the village level. However, if we turn to look at Yapese life at the Yap State level, people more and more depend on the money economy and monthly salary, especially the younger generation. It is still a big challenge for Yapese to work on economic autonomy while at the same time preserving and transmitting their traditions down to the coming generations.

### Note

1) See MCKEAN 1989, PICARD 1990, 1996, and YAMASHITA 1992.

2) For example, if there is a total of twelve guests, six from Manta Ray, four from Pathways, and two from E.S.A., Manta Ray pays 50% of the \$200, Pathways pays 33%, and E.S.A. pays 17%. This \$200 is said to be divided up into the following categories: 44.5% for dancers, 40.75% for K.C. & C.D. Organization, and 14.75% for other services (4% to the contact person, 3.25% to the coconut provider, 1.25% to the climber, 1.25% to the weaver, 3% to the Master of Ceremony, and 2% to the tour guide). If the guests decide to give voluntary donations, some of which are as much as \$900, they go directly to a small scholarship fund set aside if ever the children of Kaday should need it in the future (*The Yap Networker* Vol.1(6) 1999.7.30).

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