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Mothers Roles in Traditional and Modern Korean Families:
The Consequences for Parental Practices and Adolescent Socialization*

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This paper examines Korean mothers' roles in the socialization of their adolescent children. First, the issue is analyzed through a historical approach that takes into account the Confucian background of Korean family life. Secondly, we consider concepts and results from recent studies on mothers' attitudes, parenting styles, and adolescent socialization. Some of the arguments and data are particularly relevant to middle class mothers. We point out that the Confucian influence remains strong in modern South Korea while at the same time mothers responsibilities in parenting and socialization have increased. As a consequence, the relationship between mothers and their adolescent children has become more complex, intense, and unstable. We conclude that the balancing of autonomy and relatedness is the most important developmental task facing mothers and their children.

Confucianism and the Parents' Roles in the Traditional Korean Family

Since the 14th century Confucianism has been the most important philosophical and ethical influence on social structures and social life in Korea. For example, Confucianism laid down the hierarchical order between the elder and the younger as well as the different tasks and roles for men and women (see e.g. Lee, 1997). At the centre of the Confucian tradition is the family. Throughout all generations parents and children have honoured an ideology that emphasizes the importance of deference to elders and obedience of children to parents. Of primary importance has been the principle of filial piety. Essentially, filial piety includes, for the child, the strong obligation to return parental love and care.

For husband and wife, Confucianism established strictly different roles in the family (see Figure 1).

Husband/Father	Wife/Mother
Family role:	
head of the family	"inner master"
Authority based on:	
power derived from status	emotional competence
Relation to children:	
emotionally distant	intimacy
authority structure	affectional structure

Figure 1. Parental Roles in the Traditional Korean Family

According to Confucianism the husband is the head of the family and thus has the authority to decide most of the family issues. His wife is subordinate to him in nearly all affairs. At the same time, however, she is the "inner master", that is, her authority is accepted in the areas of household issues and family relations. We can say that the husband's authority is based on power structures while the wife's authority is based on her emotional competence in family matters. Fathers' and mothers' relations to their

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children are fundamentally different. Fathers are expected to be somewhat emotionally distant from their children, in order to maintain the position of authority and respect. At the same time fathers give guidance to the children, in particular to sons, and demand discipline and obedience from them. In contrast, the maternal role as mediator within the family allows for much more intimacy between mother and child. Accordingly, anthropologists have characterized the father-child relationship as an authority structure and the mother-child relationship as an affectional structure (Lee, 1997).

The Modernization of South Korea: Consequences for the Family

In the social sciences, the concept of modernization has been used with various meanings. In a broad sense, the terms "modern" and "modernity" mean "corresponding to the actual state of social, scientific and technical development" or "up-to-date." Recently, as part of his theory of cultural change, Inglehart (1997) introduced the distinction between modernization and postmodernization. Modernization refers to the fact that economic, political, and cultural changes are coherently related to each other. In contrast, postmodernization is used for a new trend that could be observed in the highly developed industrialized nations during the last decades. During the process of postmodernization a cultural change takes place that includes the replacing of attitudes, values and normative concepts that dominated the world views since the industrial revolution. We will not enter into the debate about the usefulness of Ingleharts distinction. Throughout this article the phrase "the modernization of Korea" is used to denote the social, scientific and technical developments that have occurred in South Korea during the last decades. The term "modern" is used as a contrast to the term "traditional".

In only one generation South Korea has changed from a static, predominantly agricultural society into a very dynamic industrialized one. Because Confucianism favours hard and disciplined work (Yu & Yang, 1994), it contributed significantly to the prosperity and socioeconomic growth of the Korean economy. But economy is only one of several aspects of South Korean society that has undergone tremendous transformation during the last few decades. According to Inglehart (1997), between 1950 and 1988 South Korea had the highest rate of intergenerational value change of all countries throughout the world.

Against the background of traditional Confucian values the most dramatic value change is the decrease in the authority of the elder generation. Old people are no longer considered to be wise advisers, because today knowledge and wisdom that are based on age per se are not respected as conferring merit in themselves. In modern South Korean society the deep respect of "age-dependent" knowledge and wisdom has been replaced by a high regard of rationality and "expertise," i.e. kinds of knowledge that are much more dependent on high-quality education than on experiences of a long life.

Some of the changes of the Korean family are summarized in Figure 2.

Family size: The average number of household members decreased from 5.0 to 3.3 between 1975 and 1995 (Source : Korean National Statistical Office 1999a).

Family structure: In general, urban families today include only family members from two generations.

Marriages: Typically, marriages today are no longer arranged by the parents, although the couple may ask for the parents' consent.

Parental roles: Today, the fathers' authority rests only on his role as breadwinner. Because of the high priority given to education, power relations have changed from father- to mother-dominance because it is the mother that is mainly engaged in the education and academic career of the children.

Figure 2. A Short Review of the Changes of the Korean Family During the Last Decades

But the picture of the family illustrated by Figure 2 is incomplete. The Confucian spirit has survived in modern South Korea. Cohesiveness and stability of the family remain important despite the changes indicated in Figure 2. Detailed data relating to family obligations were collected by Maeng in 1992 in Seoul (Maeng, 1996). Maeng's sample included 75 subjects in the age range from 20 to 25 and 68 subjects who were 40 to 45 years old. The author notes explicitly that she studied a middle class sample and that the results may not be generalized to other socioeconomic groups.

Among other scenarios Maeng presented the subjects with the following situation: "Suggest that your parents who have lived alone want to live together with you. You

are the only child. There is enough room in your house, but your spouse and your children are not really enthusiastic about your parents' wish. How would you decide: (1) Despite all difficulties I let my parents move in. Or: (2) I will try to find another arrangement since living together would be too complicated." In the younger age group 80% of the male and 60% of the female subjects selected alternative (1). In the older subsample 81% of the male and 50% of the female participants responded that they would allow the parents to move in. Thus, in general South Korean adults would prefer to live together with the old parents, even if it might be complicated. This is true for both age groups. In other words, even for the 20-to-25-year-olds caring their parents has a high value. Men's much stronger agreement to living together with the parents points to a methodological flaw in Maeng's study. According to the Confucian tradition women have to take care of their parents-in-law more than for their own parents. In contrast, for sons, taking care of the own parents has the highest priority. But Maeng asked both male and female subjects about living together with their *own* parents. A complete comparison of the influence of filial piety in both sons and daughters would have included asking them not only about their own parents but also about their parents-in-law.

Even if parents and their children live in different places the intimate relationships between generations remain intact. In many families parents and their grown-up children can rely on each other for financial and emotional support in times of burden and hardship (see Kim & Lee, 1997). To illustrate, in some families, children who live in the big cities send money and gifts to their parents residing in rural locations and the parents, in turn, provide children with agricultural products (M. H. Kim, 1992). Until recently these normative rules of reciprocal obligations and responsibilities have guaranteed the livelihood of the elder generation.

The continued influence of the Confucian tradition may be even more evident in people's interpersonal expectations than in their explicit actions. In an interview study Kim (1995) observed that parents expect the family of their adult children to visit them regularly. Daughters-in-law feel obliged to make telephone calls frequently and to offer their help in the preparation of the various celebrations and ceremonies that take place in the parents-in-law's household. Thus is can be said that family structure is not less important in modern South Korea; rather its influences on family members are more subtle. It is in this sense that today's family is called "a *modified* stem family" (Lee, 1997; emphasis by the authors).

The still existing attention of adolescent and adult children towards the family includes, for example, the fact that decisions on issues that are considered to be "individual matters" in the West are still subject to family approval in South Korea. For example, parents contribute substantially to decisions about the academic major and career, and even about the choosing of a spouse (Kim, 1997).

Today, higher education has become of major importance to most South Koreans because it is the main route to a successful and wellpaying career and social prestige. Here again, the priority of education and strong motivation for achievement are family affairs, their being directed toward the prosperity of the family and toward maintaining face and the reputation of the family. Parents make substantial sacrifices for the education of their children and the children, in turn, work as hard as they can to fulfill the expectations that their parents and the whole family have of them. Thus, in contrast to Smith & Schwartz (1996), we suggest that in modern South Korea personal achievement and enhancement of family welfare are complementary rather than contradictory values.

In traditional Korean society parents sacrificed greatly for the reputation of the family and gained identity through the admiration of their ancestors. Nowadays, as achievement, competition and successful career have become basic values in the lives of most South Koreans parents invest as much time, money, and emotional support as possible in the supposed high-quality education of their children, and their self-evaluations are closely related to the children's school and job success. Therefore, we can say that the traditional Korean society was oriented towards the ancestors and the past whereas modern South Korean society is oriented towards the coming generations and the future. What remains constant is that the individual continues to gain his or her personal identity through the family (Lee, 1997).

Women's Role in Modern South Korea

The lifecycle of a married woman in former patriarchal Korea was divided into three phases, according to her

Table 1. Opinions toward Obstruction of Female Employment by Gender and Educational Attainment

Reasons for Obstruction	Total	Gender		Education Attainment			
		Female	Male	Primary-school	Middle School	High School	College & above
Ability	4.3	4.0	4.6	3.8	4.5	4.4	4.4
Social Prejudice	28.2	27.6	28.8	22.7	30.6	29.7	28.8
Lack of Responsibility	10.0	8.1	11.9	7.5	8.7	10.5	13.1
Working Conditions	12.5	13.0	11.9	9.6	14.2	13.3	12.3
Housework	39.9	42.2	37.5	44.6	35.7	39.4	40.1
Other	5.2	5.0	5.3	11.9	6.3	2.7	1.3

Note. In the left column, reasons are listed that were considered to be relevant for the unemployment of women. For each reason, the Table presents percentages of nomination by the total sample and several subsamples (by gender and by educational attainment).

Unit: Percent
Source : Korean National Statistical Office, Report on the Social Indicators in Korea (1999c).

position in the family (see Figure 3).

Daughter-in-law
This was the hardest time in the life of a Korean wife. The bride had to establish her position in her husbands family and earn the affection of her parents-in-law by performing all her duties as best as she could. Her most important duty was reproduction, in particular, the birth of a son.

Housewife
A married woman generally assumed the position of the main housewife around middle age. Now she became the "inner master", the opposite concept to the "outer master". "Inner master" stands for "undisputed head of the household". Even the male members of the family had to accept her decisions on household management.

Mother-in-law
As a mother-in-law the wife had the dominant role in the family, although she was going to loose her status as main housewife to her daughter-in-law. Now she received from her children, and in particular from her sons, filial piety.

Figure 3. Steps in a Wifes Life in a Traditional Korean Family

Looking at Figure 3 we can conclude, that the wife in the patriarchal family held an achieved status while her husband had an ascribed position (Cho, 1998). But contrary to what socioeconomic facts and her "subordinate status" might suggest, the wife was not completely dominated by her husband. She was the financial manager and decision maker in family matters and the educator of the children.

When we turn to the South Korean women of today, we have to consider some sociological facts. The process of industrialization and economic growth has had a direct impact on the employment of women. Since 1960 the employment rate for women in Korea has increased from 9.3% to 47.0% (Korean National Statistical Office, 1999b). Although that increase seems similar to trends in other advanced capitalist countries, there is an important difference. Among *middle class* women in South Korea, no positive correlation exists between educational level and employment rate. A high level of formal education does not predict employment for women, particularly when they compete with men in the labour market. This contrasts with advanced capitalist countries in the West (M. H. Kim, 1992).

The mentality of South Korean middle class women differs greatly from the male-oriented style of business. Because of the cultural emphasis on marriage South Korean women can hardly develop an independent professional identity and do not consider a career as a means to self-fulfilment. In a survey carried out by the Korean National Statistical Office (1999c) family-related reasons and social prejudice were more frequently reported as obstructions for female employment than ability or lack of responsibility (see Table 1). Table 1 illustrates that these reasons are important for both genders and for all levels of educational attainment.

In addition, wives in modern South Korea have to fulfill the task of "inner master", that is, they are responsible for maintaining the harmony and integrity of the family and for supporting the occupational activities of the husband and the school success of the children. For mothers from the middle class, the support of children's school achievement is a full time job. They feel responsible for all aspects of their children's academic career (see M. H. Kim, 1992).

Fathers, in contrast, tend not to be consistently involved in their children's education because there is agreement in South Korea that men should commit themselves totally to their job. As mentioned above, in the traditional South Korean family, fathers were responsible for their sons achievement and discipline aspects of their socialization. But this role is considered outdated. Today, in addition to benevolence and affection, the mother's role includes some of the traditional responsibilities of fathers. This experience of this "double burden" is ambivalent (M. H. Kim, 1992). At the same time, mothers are stressed and frustrated by the whole range of duties but also rewarded if the children are successful, for example, by winning prizes at school.

In conclusion, the industrial revolution in South Korea during the last decades has transformed rather than destroyed the Confucian family role limitations for women. From the mothers' perspective, child rearing has become more important in two respects. First, mothers' responsibility for education and child rearing has increased (see H. B. Kim, 1992). Secondly, her self-esteem and self-worth depend primarily on the "outcomes" of her child rearing activities, that is on the successes of her children at school and university.

Implications: Parental Goals, Parent-Child Relations, and Developmental Tasks in Modern Korea

So far, our analysis of the mothers' involvement in her adolescent children's education has been based on sociological considerations. Some of our conclusions are supported by results from a pilot study on mothers' perceptions of their parenting goals that was carried out by one of the authors (Kim, H. O.) in 1999.

The questionnaire study took place in Kwangju, a city of about a million inhabitants in Southwest Korea. Subjects were 80 middle-class mother's in the age range between 35 and 46. The mothers were asked to select the three most important goals out of a list of 12 goals according to the following instruction: "Select the three most important goals. Begin with the utmost important goals, then go on with the second most important goal, and finally choose the third most important goal." The list was based on a preliminary interview study and included: economic independence, emotional independence, achievement orientation, responsibility for ones own family, orientation to one's own needs, success in competition, professional success, getting married and having a family, responsibility for society and community, harmonious relationship with siblings, perpetuation of family traditions, and being respected and accepted by others.

The results are summarized in the upper part of Figure 4.

Most important goal (first priority)
Achievement orientation (34%)
Economic independence (15%)

Goals with high priority (average of first to third priority)
Being respected and accepted by others (19%)
Harmonious relationships with siblings (15%)
Responsibility for society and community (12%)
Achievement orientation (19%)
Economic independence (7%)

What do mothers expect from their grown up children?
Emotional support (93%)
Help (52%)
Material support for younger siblings (16%)
Material support in times of hardship (34%)

Figure 4. Parenting Goals and Expectations of Korean Middle-Class Mothers (Data from 1999)

The comparison between goals with the first priority and goals with first to third priority is instructive. Achievement orientation and economic independence were selected as *the utmost important goals* (by 49%). Achievement orientation and economic independence are individualistic values, characteristic indicators of transformations to modern or even postmodern societies (see Inglehart, 1997). Therefore, one may conclude that South Korean mothers have internalized the values of the modern society, with a high priority for achievement orientation and economic independence. But things change when we look at *the selection rates across the first to third position*. Being respected and accepted by others, harmonious relationships among siblings, and responsibility

for society and community now enter into the top positions (46% in comparison to 26% for achievement orientation and economic independence). From this perspective, it seems that relatedness is more important than economic independence.

We asked the same mothers what they expected from their children when they were adults. The answers may help to explain the high priority of relatedness. In the first place, mothers expect from their grown-up children emotional support (by 93%). Help is expected by 52%, and material support in times of hardship by 34%. Considering the Confucian principle of filial piety, we suggest that mothers' emphasis on relatedness during the parenting of their children and the expectation of emotional support rest on the implicit and tacit belief in the principle of filial piety: The child will return the *emotional* support that the mother had invested in him or her during childhood and adolescence.

How can young South Koreans, especially adolescents, get along with their mothers' emphasis on relatedness and expectation of future emotional support? In order to find an answer to this question we have to note that technological advances and the importance of knowledge have resulted in a demand for citizens who are independent and autonomous problem solvers and decision makers. Consequently, we propose that the development of an autonomous self will become the most important developmental task for Korean adolescents. Considering our prior analysis of the roles of fathers and mothers in modern South Korea, it would appear that because of lack of time and of information about educational issues nowadays many fathers cannot effectively help their children in the task of developing an autonomous identity. Completely involved in bread winning, some of them have lost their roles as authority figures and immediate models during the socialization process. Thus, it is the mother who must guide sons and daughters through the processes of identity formation. On the one hand, the absence of a patriarchal authority figure with its demand for obedience and strict discipline may facilitate the development of the autonomous self. As Piaget (1965) in his book on moral development in the child previously pointed out, autonomy is elaborated in an atmosphere of trust and personal freedom. On the other hand, one can question, whether mothers feel free to let their children go and become emotionally autonomous, because it is in the close relation with the child that they gain self-worth and affection. Middle class mothers have very often committed their whole life to the children, one consequence being that it is very difficult for the children to detach from them.

Some results from the well-known study by Rohner & Pettengill (1985) support our interpretation that the closer emotional relation between mothers and adolescent children may hinder the process of detachment. The authors assessed perceived parental warmth and control among 125 15-to-18 year old South Korean adolescents from middle-class homes. We suggest that the results are relevant today although the data were collected over 15 years ago. The authors report that *parents* perceived as being highly controlled were also rated as being high in warmth and low in neglect. However, strict *maternal* control was also seen by the same South Korean youths as being slightly aggressively hostile and rejecting.

To explain this result, which may at first appear contradictory, Rohner & Pettengill (1985, p. 527) considered a principle from small-group behaviour sociology. According to this principle, "when a person in an affective/expressive role exerts authority within a stable small group, that authority is more likely to be resented by other group members than the authority wielded by a group member in an instrumental or task oriented role." When the principle is applied to South Korean mothers, "it seems understandable, then, why strict South Korean mothers are perceived by their adolescent offspring as being slightly more hostile and rejecting than fathers... the South Korean maternal role is that of emotional provider and healer. Since South Korean mothers exercise control within an affective/expressive role, their use of authority is more apt to be perceived by their offspring as an expression of hostility, aggression and rejection."

What Comes Next? Some Implications for Cultural Change and Effective Parenting for South Korean Adolescents

In cross-cultural comparisons South Korean culture has been categorized as a typical example of a collectivistic culture, in strict contrast to individualistic cultures of the West (Western Europe, North America; see for example Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, (1994). But undoubtedly South Korean culture will undergo tremendous changes in times of globalization and increasing contacts with other cultures, through media, travelling and a world-wide economy. What direction will these changes

take, and what will be the consequences for Korean mothers and their role in the education of adolescents?

Among others, Hermans & Kempen (1998) have argued that the present cultural change that is taking place on a global scale may not be adequately categorized by the individualism vs. collectivism-dichotomy. Even existing cultures are more complex than this dichotomy suggests. In an innovative analysis of cultural complexity, Hannerz (1992; quoted from Hermans & Kempen, p. 1115) has distinguished between three interrelated dimensions of culture:

> "(a) ideas and modes of thought ...;
>
> (b) forms of externalization: the different ways in which ideas and modes of thought are made public and accessible to the senses ...; and
>
> (c) social distribution: the ways in which the ideas and modes of thought and external forms ... are spread over a population and its social relationships."

Only a consideration of these three interrelated dimensions in combination leads to an understanding of culture and cultural change. In contrast, the individualism vs. collectivism-dichotomy rests on a definition of culture that has focused mainly on the first dimension.

Throughout this paper we have emphasized the continuity of Confucian ideas in modern South Korea and their impact on family values and women's roles. We suggest that in view of the rapidly increasing number of encounters and experiences with other cultures, the traditional Confucian elements will become more and more mixed and combined with inputs from outside. Hermans & Kempen (1998, p. 1114) have described this process as "the interpenetration of the global and the local." It is not possible to predict precisely the consequences for the roles and parenting tasks of South Korean mothers. However, it seems reasonable that the cultural interpenetration will result in rapid changes of South Korean adolescent norms, social rules and meaning systems. We suggest that mothers will experience these changes as incomprehensible and for that reason will reject them totally.

Uncertainty is another consequence of facing changes in adolescent subculture which have been brought about by influences from the Western culture. Thus one of the central tasks for the South Korean society lies in supporting and guiding mothers in coping with (and reducing) feeling of incomprehensibility and uncertainty. South Korean middle class mothers, who have until now concentrated their energy on traditional family values and fulfilled the traditional roles in the family, may not understand the implications of the rapid cultural changes for the parent-adolescent-relationship. In particular, these changes include the emergence of an adolescent subculture that is no longer under the control of traditional values and that appears strange to South Korean mothers because it entered South Korea from the outside through the "windows" of the media, through the internet, the TV music channels, and videos. Therefore, we suggest that educational programs for South Korean mothers (and fathers) should include information about cultural complexity and this media-influenced adolescent subculture. We believe that such information would serve as a first step to an open-minded dialogue between parents and their adolescent children.

Such programs might include the following topics: Learning about the adolescents life styles (hobbies, music scene, dresses) and the needs behind that life style;

Information about the dissemination of new trends in the youth subculture. For example, this part of the program should include information about South Korean adolescents' use of multimedia. This will assist parents in their own understanding of the ways in which adolescent culture is formed and distributed;

Learning about successful and faulty strategies in adolescents' reactions to the new complexities of developmental tasks. The tensions between the traditional role expectations (in particular from the elder generation) and the new idols and life goals from the outside result in a conflict for young people. It is a conflict between traditional obligations and duties, on the one hand, and temptations of an individualistic way of life that includes an increasing amount of personal freedom and choice. It is our impression that parents sometimes have no idea of the existence of this conflict because it is not part of their life experiences, which reflect more traditional attitudes, values and life goals.

Such programs for parents should be supplemented by "complementary" courses or programs for adolescents. As we have learned from studies and theories of perspective taking (see e.g. Selman, 1980), adolescents' limitations in understanding others' points of view is not a deficit in willingness but in social-cognitive competence.

We doubt that prevention or intervention concepts and strategies for fostering "effective parenting" from Europe and North America can be *directly* applied to East Asia.

Nevertheless it may be helpful to learn from experiences on mothers' roles in adolescent socialization in other cultures.

Following Havighurst, Erikson and others it has been proposed in the West, that the acquisition of the autonomous self (in the sense of separateness) is the central developmental task to be solved during adolescence (see Kagitcibasi, 2000, for an overview). Recently, several authors carried out a more detailed analysis and argued for a more subtle description of development during adolescence. For example, Baumrind (1991, p. 119-120) proposed that we have to distinguish three steps in the growth of the autonomous self:

> In early adolescence, coinciding with the middle school and junior high school periods, young people assume an exaggerated pseudoindependent stance which parents should respond to by continuing to enforce age-appropriate limits; the mid-adolescent period, coinciding with the high school years, brings forth cognitive and social gains that enable parents to increase both responsibilities and rights in the domains of money management and individual liberty; only in late adolescence, following graduation from high school, sometimes with an intervening moratorium in the form of college or apprenticeship, does emancipation become the central developmental issue and a nearly symmetrical parent-child relationship become a meaningful possibility.

This would suggest that "effective" parenting strategies change from early to late adolescence, at least in the U.S. culture. Starting from different theoretical ideas, Ryan & Lynch and Kagitcibasi reach similar conclusions. Ryan & Lynch (1989, p. 341) emphasize the importance of age-adequate emotional attachment between parents and adolescents: "... individuation during adolescence and into young adulthood is facilitated not by detachment ... but rather by attachment, and Kagitcibasi (2000, p. 4) favours parental practices that instill both relatedness and autonomy in the developing adolescent. The autonomous-related self is an "inntegrative synthesis," derived from the reconceptualization of the traditional Western concept of autonomy, "evoking its meaning as agency and untangling it from interpersonal distance dimension." Several studies have pointed out that, in the West, authoritative parenting (in the sense of Baumrinds well-known taxonomy) fosters the development of a self-concept that includes both autonomy (agency) and relatedness. But in the same breath, Kagitcibasi warns that experiences of effective parenting may not be transferred from one culture to the other: "These family patterns, in turn, are embedded in cultural contexts that render certain types of child rearing orientation functional. With socioeceonomic changes, what was functional, may become dysfunctional ... (p. 7)."

To conclude, the idea of the autonomous-related self may provide a point of reference for discussions about South Korean mothers' contribution to the socialization of their adolescent children. Such ideas and the consideration of parenting practices that have been "effective" in other cultures will contribute to parental sensitivity and reflectivity in education. But models from other cultures may not serve as strict guidelines, because the South Korean culture differs from other "cultural frameworks" (in the sense of Hannertz, mentioned above) and from what main stream psychology has studied.

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