

Cultural Integration: A New Stage for the Development of the Greater Bay Area

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Abstract: *As one of the most dynamic economic regions in China, the Greater Bay Area not only carries the responsibility of economic development, but also plays a pivotal role in cultural exchange and integration. This area brings together the profound heritage of traditional Chinese culture and the diverse foreign Western cultures, forming a unique cultural ecology. However, in the process of cultural integration, it also faces many challenges and opportunities. This paper aims to discuss the current situation, problems and countermeasures of cultural integration in the Greater Bay Area, with a view to providing new ideas for cultural integration in the region.*

Keywords: Greater Bay Area; Cultural integration; Countermeasures.

1. INTRODUCTION

The long-term economic development plan and foreign cooperation strategy formulated by the 19th CPC National Congress have laid a solid foundation for the continuous social and economic advancement of the Greater Bay Area. The Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (the Plan) proposes to build the Greater Bay Area with the nine cities of Guangzhou, Foshan, Zhaoqing, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhuhai, Zhongshan and Jiangmen as well as the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao. And it proposes the Greater Bay Area city cluster as one of the key driving forces of China's economic development (*Guangdong Hong*, 2019; Fu, 2022). With great economic vitality and diverse cultures, the region has become a hub for economic and cultural exchange with significant influence in China and globally. However, within the city cluster of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, there are distinct differences in the economic, cultural, environmental and foreign trade fields, which constitute a unique and rich picture of the development of this region (Wang, 2019). The Plan clearly states the need to "build a cultural Bay Area". Thus how to promote and achieve cultural integration in the GBA has aroused widespread attention from all society, which has become an urgent issue to be addressed (PwC, 2019; Li, Ke, & Ma, 2020). As one of the most dynamic and innovative regions in China, the cultural integration of the Greater Bay Area not only has a profound impact on the development of the region itself, but also highlights the diversity of Chinese culture and its unique position in global cultural exchanges. This paper aims to analyze the current situation and problems of cultural integration in the Greater Bay Area, and explore ways to realize it, with a view to contributing inspiration to the cultural development of the region and even the whole country.

2. CURRENT SITUATION OF CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN THE GREATER BAY AREA

Ferdinand Tönnies, a renowned German sociologist, considers the community and society as a naturally developed organic association that acts both internally and externally, and as a synthesis of interrelationships based on a common memory (Chen, 2014). According to Fu & Yan (2016), a cultural community can be regarded as a loose association composed of social members who share the same or similar cultural values. Raymond Williams (1991), a famous British cultural sociologist, believes that culture is a whole way of life at all levels, including material, intellectual and spiritual, and a cultural community should be established to carry out cultural transmission. Only through sharing culture can a better cultural community be formed and a better society can be built. A cultural community is the basis for the construction of common/collective human activities, and the possession of a common culture over time leads to the construction of ethnic communities and national communities. As the core value of a national community, cultural community profoundly reflects the homogeneity of the cultural core, but also covers the heterogeneity of cultural forms. Si (2011) believes that cultural integration means that different cultures collide with each other, interact with each other, absorb and harmonize with each other, and gradually merge into one body to give birth to a new cultural system. Regional subculture culture, as the distinctive members of this big family, can be regarded as the concrete expression of regional culture community. The Greater Bay Area, as a specific regional subcultural community, is located at the Pearl River Estuary and covers the two Special

administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao and nine major cities in Guangdong Province; Due to its unique geographical location, Hong Kong and Macao were once dominated by Western culture in the history, so the Greater Bay Area has formed a complex cultural ecology in which traditional Chinese culture and foreign Western culture interweave and coexist. At the same time, Lingnan culture, Guangfu culture, Chaoshan culture and other traditional Chinese culture have deep roots and are enduring over time. The influence of Western culture carried by Hong Kong and Macao has brought an international perspective and an open and inclusive social atmosphere to the region. Viewed from the logical structure, it is not only an indispensable part of the Chinese national cultural community, but also shows the close connection of individual interests and the convergence of development directions among its members. In terms of spatial dimension, the cultural genes of the Greater Bay Area are rooted in the life paths and cultural memories shared by communities or ethnic groups in the Greater Bay Area. At the same time, the fluidity of culture makes the region constantly absorb the influence of other cultural paradigms, especially the dominant cultural potential energy, which manifests itself not only as a relatively stable cultural state, but also as a continuous cultural process. From the perspective of historical development, cities in the Greater Bay Area have continuously integrated and optimized their cultures in the process of mutual integration and common development, forming the current regional community. The two cultures meet and collide here. This process has gone through the in-depth coordination of many factors, and finally created a cultural ecology in which various cultural forms in the region coexist harmoniously and promote each other. It has not only greatly enriched the connotation and level of regional culture, but also spawned a series of new topics on the cultural integration of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

2.1 Lack of Deep Integration in Cultural Exchanges

Since the promulgation of the Outline, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have carried out exchanges and cooperation at various levels and in various fields, using culture as a bond. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of various cultural exchange activities held in the Greater Bay Area, covering many fields such as art, education and tourism. For example, the Greater Bay Area Culture and Arts Festival, with the theme of “Cultural Integration Brings People Together in a New Stage of Cultural Development in the Greater Bay Area”, has attracted a large number of people from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and become an important platform to showcase the cultural charm of different regions in the Greater Bay Area. At the same time, activities jointly organized by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, such as “Singing Together- A Cappella Elite Exchange Art Week between Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Macao” and “Golden Bell Stars - The New Year Concert (Hong Kong)”, have enhanced cultural identity and people-to-people bond among the young people of the three places through music and art. Earlier this year, the first Zhuhai-Macao co-production of modern Cantonese opera, *Silent Heroism*, was staged at Guangzhou Yue Theatre. As an important achievement of the cultural connection exchange activities between Zhuhai and Macao, the play invited literary and artistic workers from the two places to work together to bring to the stage the touching story of “Red Doctor” Ke Lin in the 1930s and 1940s. In the play, Dr. Ke, with his outstanding medical skills, selfless dedication and unique personality charm, has won the deep trust and widespread love of the Macao people, and his deeds are vividly reproduced on the stage. Zou Jianhong, general manager of Zhuhai Performing Arts Group, the show’s producer, said, “This year, Zhuhai-Macao will continue to increase their joint production efforts, and invite Hong Kong teams to participate in it, so as to bring more wonderful cultural exchange activities and art works to the Greater Bay Area audience.”

Chen pointed out that the process of cultural integration is not always smooth. In the city cluster, Hong Kong and Macao rely on the advantages of “one country, two systems” system for development, and its social system is significantly different from that of the other nine cities. Therefore, in the process of promoting the development of cultural integration, it is inevitable to encounter conflicts in ideology and civil rights, especially in the fields of ease of entry-exit tourism, consumption concept and integrated development of different regions, there are many hidden barriers, which constitute a great constraint on the process of cultural intergration (Chen, 2018). Wang Hao’s conclusion shows that the depth of cultural integration still needs to be strengthened despite the increasingly frequent cultural exchanges and cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao; At present, there are a large number of cultural exchange activities in the Greater Bay Area, but they tend to be project-based and fragmented, lacking long-term and systematic planning and support mechanisms (Chen & Qi, 2023). Kenneth Fok said that in terms of culture and arts, the Greater Bay Area’s advantages will be brought into full play if it further develops institutional linkages for deep integration and takes Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao as a foothold, to tell China’s story well to the outside world and jointly promote culture to go overseas. Cai Liru, from the Institute of Modernization of Guangdong Academy of Social Sciences, discussed the evolution of regional relations and cooperation paths of the Greater Bay Area. Her paper pointed out the main problems facing the current collaborative relationship of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao urban agglomeration and the institutional

bottlenecks behind it (Cai, 2018). Chen (2024), starting from the integration and development of music culture, pointed out that the lack of deep integration makes it difficult for music cultural exchange to form a sustained influence, the form of activities is single, the content is repeated, the lack of innovation and attraction, it is difficult to stimulate the enthusiasm of public participation, and it is difficult to penetrate into all strata in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

The differences in historical and cultural backgrounds between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have formed obstacles; At the same time, the development of the Greater Bay Area is also unbalanced. In addition, cross-regional cultural exchanges and cooperation also face challenges in the alignment of policies and regulations. The different values, belief systems and social customs of the Chinese and Western cultures in the three regions have further caused various obstacles, which indicates that the integrated development of the three cultures needs to be further deepened.

2.2 Lack of High-quality Cooperation Projects in the Cultural Industry

As an important carrier of cultural integration, the cultural industry has developed rapidly in the Greater Bay Area, but there are few high-quality cooperation projects. As a world-renowned film and television industry center, Hong Kong's international experience in film and television production and distribution has provided strong support for the development of the cultural industry in the Greater Bay Area. However, in the 21st century, Hong Kong's entertainment, film and other cultural industries have all declined from prosperity to decline. Since *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Farewell My Concubine* and *Infernal Affairs*, there have been no works with intercontinental influence in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the film industry in the mainland region faced an uncertain future after the emergence of film products with a global perspective such as *Hibiscus Town* and *Devils on the Doorstep*. Consequently, relying on their respective cultural resource advantages, Guangdong, Hong Kong, and the mainland cooperated to produce works with intercontinental influence, such as *The Wandering Earth* and *The Three Body Problem*, but these were few and far between. It is believed that when Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao become integrate as one, works with intercontinental influence will spring up like mushrooms.

Although the Greater Bay Area is rich in cultural resources, the breadth and depth of resource integration in the actual process of cooperation are still insufficient. On the one hand, when examining the overall framework of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao cooperation, it can be clearly observed that Shenzhen and Hong Kong have established a relatively close market cooperation relationship, while Macao and Zhuhai focus on close cooperation under the leadership of the government. In contrast, the cooperation between Guangzhou and Hong Kong and Macao is relatively loose, lacking in depth and breadth. The root cause of this situation is the lack of an alliance mechanism with legal nature in the Greater Bay Area. The lack of this mechanism has made it difficult for Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao to carry out holistic and consistent thinking and top-level planning in the cooperation process, which has led to the current situation of insufficient cooperation planning and relatively loose cooperation levels (Guo, 2024). On the other hand, the cultural exchange mechanism of the three places still mainly relies on the government or government-authorized institutions to promote the construction and exchange of specific cultural projects, while the exchange activities covering education, science and technology, culture, art, environmental protection and other professional fields are also limited. At the level of cultural industry project planning, local governments generally focus on the exploitation of local resources, but few cross-regional and cross-industry in-depth integration, which leads to the homogenization of project content is more prominent, and it is difficult to breed high-quality projects with distinctive characteristics and broad social influence (Yang, J.Y. & Yang, W. J., 2020).

The development of the cultural industry cannot be separated from the support of high-quality talents. However, the current Greater Bay Area still has shortcomings in the cultivation and introduction of cultural industry talents due to the imperfect local talent training system and the lack of smooth channels for the introduction of international high-end talents. The core competitiveness of the cultural industry lies in innovation, and the driving force of innovation is obviously insufficient in the Greater Bay Area of the cultural industry cooperation. On the one hand, cultural enterprises generally face the problems of insufficient investment in research and development and limited innovation capacity; On the other hand, the environment for original content production is not friendly enough, and the intellectual property protection system is not yet perfect, resulting in a lack of creative motivation and confidence for creators. As a result, the market is flooded with a large number of imitated and copied works, and there is a lack of original quality projects with distinct characteristics and deep connotations.

2.3 Lack of Public Participation in Cultural Heritage Protection and Inheritance

Cultural cooperation in the Greater Bay Area will mainly rely on the efforts of governments, social organizations, enterprises and individuals. To develop the Greater Bay Area under the “one country, two systems” policy, we must draw on the strength of government departments, especially the central government. The government generally promotes cultural cooperation in the Bay Area through macro-control measures such as cultural policies, cultural planning and cultural subsidies. As cultural cooperation requires institutional mutual agreements and norms, and only the government has the legal qualification and power to sign treaties and agreements, the role of the government is of vital importance. However, Leung Chun-ying, as former Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, said after his survey of the Greater Bay Area, “For cultural cooperation between Hong Kong and the GBA to truly play a role in cultural integration, it cannot be led solely by the government. All sectors of society must participate together” (Zhong, 2017). In the process of promoting the cultural integration of the Greater Bay Area, the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage plays a crucial role. The Greater Bay Area is rich in cultural heritage resources, including world cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. In recent years, intangible cultural heritage projects in the Greater Bay Area, such as Cantonese opera, dragon boat, martial arts and lion dance, have frequently come into public view through literary and artistic works, enhancing the public’s understanding and recognition of traditional culture. Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have reached broad consensus on the protection and inheritance of these cultural heritage, and jointly organized a number of exhibitions, performances and other activities to jointly promote the inheritance and development of fine traditional Chinese culture. However, there is a lack of public participation in the protection of some of the intangible cultural heritage, due to language barriers, insufficient publicity, relatively simple inheritance mode, and weak industrialization foundation (Lai, Y. C., & Lai, Y. Y., 2024). Although the Greater Bay Area has done a lot of work in the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage, public participation is still not high, and some people have limited cognition of traditional culture, lacking in-depth understanding and identity. Extensive public participation is not only an important force for cultural heritage protection, but also a key bridge to promote the deep cultural integration of the Greater Bay Area.

3. THE WAYS TO ACHIEVE CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN THE GREATER BAY AREA

Yang et al. (2020) believe that to promote the cultural integration of the Greater Bay Area requires further integration and development in such fields as ideas, policies and systems, national sentiments, exchange practices and industrial creation. Therefore, this paper puts forward the concrete path to promote the cultural integration of the Greater Bay Area from the following aspects.

3.1 Deepening Understanding of “One Country, Two Systems” to Enhance Cultural Identity

Strengthening understanding of “one country, two systems” is an institutional guarantee for promoting cultural integration in the Greater Bay Area. As a pioneering initiative in the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the core of “one country, two systems” lies in the close connection between “one country” and “two systems”, which constitutes a system from the whole to the details, and from the backbone to the branches and leaves. The “one country” principle forms the unshakable political cornerstone, and “two systems” is the principle and policy flexibly implemented on this cornerstone. Only when “two systems” closely serves the overall development of “one country” can its existence and operation demonstrate its unique value and significance. Under the guarantee of “one country, two systems”, a sound mechanism for cultural exchange and cooperation should be established, with clear objectives, principles and frameworks for cooperation to ensure the continuity and stability of exchange activities. Second, we should strengthen top-level design, formulate long-term plans, integrate cultural resources in the region, and build influential cultural brand projects. Third, we should encourage cultural innovation, support cross-border integration, combine traditional culture with modern technology and fashion elements, and enhance the attractiveness and appeal of cultural exchange activities.

Enhancing the cultural identity of the Greater Bay Area is the spiritual link to build cultural integration in the Greater Bay Area. The cooperation and development of the Greater Bay Area is first and foremost a cultural identity based on economic exchanges, and cultural identity is essentially a communication between hearts and minds (Liu, 2015). Canadian scholar Will Kymlicka (2005) points out, “People in the same cultural community share a common culture, language, and history that define their cultural membership. Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao share the same ‘cultural membership’, with the fine Chinese culture at the core”. On this basis, to further enhance cultural identity, first, we should strengthen cultural education, disseminate knowledge of the history and

culture of the Greater Bay Area through various means such as school education and public publicity, and enhance residents' cultural confidence and awareness. Second, we should promote cultural sharing and encourage residents of the three places to participate in cultural creation, cultural consumption and other activities, so as to enhance mutual understanding and respect. Third, we should strengthen people-to-people exchanges by holding various kinds of people-to-people exchange activities, such as festivals and sports competitions, to promote people-to-people ties and build a harmonious regional cultural ecology.

To deepen the understanding of the "one country, two systems" system and strengthen the institutional cornerstone of cultural integration in the Greater Bay Area, it is necessary to clarify the dialectical relationship between "one country" and "two systems", establish a stable cultural exchange mechanism and long-term planning, and integrate and innovate to enhance cultural influence. At the same time, to enhance cultural identity as a spiritual bond, it is necessary to strengthen the cultural membership of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao with fine Chinese culture at the core, through the popularization of cultural education, the promotion of cultural sharing and the deepening of people-to-people exchanges, so as to build a harmonious and co-existing regional cultural ecology.

3.2 Enhancing Cultural Industry Cooperation through Establishing Multi-level Alliance Platforms

To increase the number of quality projects in cultural industry cooperation in the Greater Bay Area, it is firstly necessary to strengthen the integration of cultural resources and promote cross-regional and cross-industry collaboration. On the one hand, a cultural resources information sharing platform should be established to promote the interconnection of cultural resources across the region. On the other hand, cultural enterprises should be encouraged to strengthen cooperation and jointly develop cultural industry projects with regional characteristics. At the same time, attention should be paid to the combination of protection and utilization of cultural resources to ensure the rational application of precious cultural resources in cultural industry projects.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to build an alliance structure with legal effect in the Greater Bay Area to promote holistic, consistent thinking and top-level strategic planning in the cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. This mechanism should undertake the heavy responsibility of guiding and participating in cultural exchange activities among the three places, ensure that the construction of cultural exchange mechanism is multi-level and multi-dimensional, and pay attention to the upgrading of professional level, so as to comprehensively promote the deep integration and prosperity of the three places. At the same time, relying on the China (Guangdong) Pilot Free Trade Zone, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao will try to make institutional breakthroughs and innovations, formulate the same industry access standards, management systems, tariff systems, etc., and activate the vitality and driving force of production factors such as personnel, technology and capital. This will strengthen the free circulation of various factors of production. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen the sorting out of the existing regulations, norms and rules for maintaining cultural cooperation mechanisms and cultural trade, and refine and upgrade them into operable and easy-to-implement rules and regulations; Alternatively, the regulations currently in place concerning the development of the cultural market should be optimized to reduce mandatory barriers that restrict entry into the market. These efforts collectively aim to provide a solid institutional guarantee for fostering a favorable market environment for cultural cooperation in the Bay Area.

Thirdly, we should expand the channels for the introduction of international high-end talents and formulate more flexible and diverse policies for attracting high-end talents in the cultural industry from all over the world to work in the Greater Bay Area. The cost of introduction of talents can be reduced by setting up a special fund for cultural industry talents and providing incentives such as tax incentives and housing subsidies. At the same time, exchanges and cooperation with internationally renowned cultural institutions should be strengthened, and a joint training mechanism for talents should be established to jointly train leading talents in the cultural industry with an international perspective and innovative ability. On the other hand, a talent exchange platform and incentive mechanism should be built. To foster the cultural industry in Greater Bay Area, it is essential to establish a talent exchange platform specifically for the cultural sector. This platform would host regular forums, creative competitions, and other events aimed at promoting exchanges and cooperation among talents. Additionally, there is a need to improve the evaluation mechanism for cultural industry talents by establishing a system that focuses on abilities and contributions. Such a system would provide more development opportunities and advancement prospects for outstanding talents, further enhancing the overall quality and competitiveness of the cultural industry in the Greater Bay Area. At the same time, more efforts should be made to commend and reward outstanding cultural enterprises and talents to stimulate the innovation vitality of the entire industry.

Fourthly, innovation is the soul of the development of cultural industries. To increase the number of quality projects, it is necessary to stimulate the vitality of innovation and foster the ecology of original content. On the one hand, more support should be given to the innovation and research and development of cultural enterprises, and enterprises should be encouraged to increase investment in research and development and enhance innovation capability. On the other hand, the intellectual property protection system should be improved to protect the legitimate rights and interests of creators and stimulate enthusiasm for creation. In addition, an open and inclusive innovation ecosystem should be built to encourage cooperation and exchanges among innovation entities such as cultural enterprises, universities and scientific research institutions. China supports the establishment of innovation platforms such as cultural industry innovation incubators and mass maker Spaces to provide start-up guidance and financial support to start-ups and individuals. At the same time, it will strengthen docking and cooperation with international innovation resources, introduce international advanced innovation concepts and technological achievements, and promote the improvement of innovation capacity of the cultural industry.

Fifthly, overcoming institutional differences can ensure the steady progress of cultural industries. We should strengthen the connectivity and integration of the cultural markets in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao to promote the free flow of cultural products and services. In addition, we should reduce the operating costs and market risks of cultural enterprises through measures such as streamlining the approval process and lowering the threshold for market access. At the same time, cooperation in market supervision and law enforcement should be strengthened to crack down on unfair competition and infringements, and maintain a sound market order and a level playing field.

Sixthly, to promote in-depth exchanges and cooperation among young people in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, relevant mechanisms should be established and improved, and the Greater Bay Area Youth Forum should be held. The purpose of this initiative is to strengthen patriotic education among young people, enhance their cultural literacy, and jointly shape cultural symbols with cultural consensus. As a result, we will enhance young people's sense of identity with the motherland to help promote the process of market integration, and jointly build a platform for cultural cooperation and development among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, with a view to creating a "highland" for cultural products.

3.3 Boosting Public Engagement to Forge a Solid Foundation for Cultural Heritage Protection and Inheritance

The protection and transmission of cultural heritage, in essence, is the continuation of historical memory, and is a vivid manifestation of cultural diversity. By increasing public participation, we can not only promote mutual understanding and respect among different cities in the region, but also inspire people's sense of pride and belonging to their local culture, laying a solid foundation for building cultural identity and self-confidence.

Faced with the current situation of insufficient public participation, it is urgent to build a set of multi-dimensional and multi-level participation mechanism. Firstly, various forms and rich contents of cultural heritage education activities, such as lectures, workshops and interactive experiences, can be held to enable the public, especially young people, to have close contact with and feel the charm of cultural heritage, and stimulate their interest in learning and awareness of inheritance. At the same time, modern scientific and technological means, such as digital display and virtual reality, can be used to present cultural heritage to the public in a more vivid and intuitive way, break the restrictions of time and space, and broaden the boundaries of cultural transmission.

In addition, encouraging social forces to participate in the protection of cultural heritage is also an important way to enhance public participation. The government can introduce relevant policies to guide and support enterprises, social organizations and individuals to participate in cultural heritage protection projects, so as to form a pattern of co-governance with government leading and public participation. For example, it may provide financial, technical and human resources support for cultural heritage protection by setting up cultural heritage protection funds, conducting public welfare donations and supporting the training of inheritors, so as to jointly safeguard this valuable cultural wealth.

4. CONCLUSION

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has a common history and cultural gene as well as different mainstream cultural characteristics. This unique regional cultural pattern and cultural phenomenon is not only an important manifestation of the differences in social development between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, but

also the result of the different social systems, development paths and development models between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in modern times. As Raymond Williams (1991), a British cultural sociologist, put it, a cultural community is “a very complex form of organization that will need to be constantly adjusted and re-planned.” Therefore, the cultural integration in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is a complex and long-term process, which requires the joint efforts of the government, enterprises and all sectors of society to constantly adjust and adapt to the planning. This paper analyzes the current situation and problems of cultural integration in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and discusses the solutions. It holds that through deepening the understanding of the system of “one country, two systems”, enhancing cultural identity, enhancing cultural exchanges, developing cultural industries and strengthening public participation, Can promote the deep cultural integration and sustainable development of the Greater Bay Area, and provide a new way of thinking for the cultural integration of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

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