

## Analyzing Tourism Behaviours and Tourism Autonomy in the Global Market: Cases of Nepal's Pashupatinath Temple and Korean DMZ

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### Abstract

*Tourist guides and travel agents in Nepal had been selling Hindu funeral rite as tourism package to the tourists in the Pashupatinath premises until the Covid pandemic hit the global market paralyzing tourism to a woeful state. However, soon after the dangers are curbed this will continue on a surging pace hopefully. Non- Hindus do not get to enter the temple but westerners and tourists throng here to see the extraordinary funeral rite which surely can be put as popular product that has outgrown its small-dome in this World heritage site. Unlike the ritual niche package of the Nepalese, in another part of the world, South Koreans have been selling "border-sights" in a strip of land between North Korea and South Korea. The notorious infiltration tunnels there in are so said to have been clandestinely built by North Korea to sneak its army into Seoul and capture South Korea by surprise which were found out after the secret was spilled by a North Korean involved in the project. Until now, 4 such tunnels have been found but it is believed that there are numerous. As of now, there are no clear clarifications and political confessions from North Korea about these. This paper unfurls through writer's own experiences in different roles (as a tourist guide and as a tourist) at these two entirely different sites to dig upon how tourism products are sold, consumed and popularized in the tourism sectors. The findings also reveal how states as hosts have begun inducing captivating packages in unusual destinations that turn tourists into consumers. But there are unanswered question of ethics and tourism strategies.*

**Keywords:** Pashupatinath temple, funeral rites, DMZ, niche-tourism, ethics, autonomy

## Introduction

The phenomenon of tourism sector to change anything to a selling package is termed as tourism autonomy for the novel purpose of this research. In this paper, by tourism behavior, two aspects of behaviorism have been referred to by this researcher. First, tourists' behavior, their interest and activities in a destination site and second, collective behavior of the host society that includes devising travel packages, selling attributes of destinations, promoting destination-image and forming policies for the maximum promotion of a site as a target destination. By consumers, it is meant hereby to refer to a sect/group of tourists who are thirsty of knowing about 'others' and 'otherness' although host society is also a consumer of certain touristic aspects. Here, the host society represents travel agents, guides, destination authorities' local bodies and also most importantly any state that forms policies, regulates and monitors them for promoting tourism in target destinations. Unlike the war-package of the South Koreans, the funeral tourism of the Nepalese is difficult to promote as a tourism product for many ethical reasons.

In tourism literature, we find many destinations that provoke visitors to plan a schedule to 'consume' the charms in the destination. The charms are sometimes so alluring for the visitors that they already have a set up destination image of the site. Many unique and inviting charms in a destination have been topics of study. For instance, Urry writes that 'significantly for the tourist gaze an array of developments are taking tourism from the margins of the global order' (2001, p.2). He reiterates on 'how tourism infrastructures have been constructed in what would have been thought of as the unlikeliest of places' (2001, p .2).

Undoubtedly, the ever changing trends and behaviors of tourism sectors have been a subject of contemporary researches. Taking reference from Levy's *Love + Sex with Robots* (2007) where it is suggested that by 2050 technological advancement will allow humans to have sex with androids, Yeoman writes that "in 2050, Amsterdam's red light will all be about android prostitutes" (2012, p. 11). This quite gives a space to think whether tourists will travel to Netherlands to experience this. May be this is still unthinkable for many. But the global trends of tourism behavior and tourists interests will surely surprise the conventional markets. This type of interest would be different than tourists travelling to Nepal to look at Hindu funeral rites or tourists wanting to glance North Korea from the South Korea. However this points to how the interests of tourists these days in trying out anything new and also on the other side, enthusiasm of hosts to do anything to meet the quests of their guests give a gloomy picture of how tourism autonomy can be debatable against the pure and positive image of past days' tourism. In this case "autonomy" becomes the main essence of the research in this context meaning as hosts' strategy and freedom to cash the tourists interests.

When visitors learn about DMZ, the already sour relations of North and South Korea plus the unique international image of the North Korea provoke a type of curiosity in them to have a look at North Korea through the border between these countries. The promotion pamphlets of the DMZ also has pictures of fortified army area that further provoke visitors in Seoul, Incheon and nearby to make a visit to the site.

Similarly the Hindu cremation and the funeral rituals that are performed in the banks of the pious Bagmati river of the Pashupatinath temple provide peculiar charm to the foreigners who come here. The legal body in the region is PADT (Pashupati Area Development Trust), which has allowed the tourist movements in the cremation premises. Although photography in and during the sacred rituals may not be enjoyed by the bereaved members, there is no stringent rules laid out hereby the state.

States have begun inducing captivating niche traps highlighting the charms for tourists to come to the destinations and on the other way round, the traps are harmless traps where tourists simply want to be in after learning about the unique offers in the destinations.

## **Methodology**

The sites of study are entirely different and this research has no any intention of comparing them. The researcher has collected information in the Pashupatinath premises as a tourist guide and also as a sensitive researcher. This researcher observed the Korean DMZ site as a tourist and an inquisitive observer. In the Korean peninsula, tourists normally visit the DMZ to look into North Korea. The sites in two different countries have been focused in the article for research-study of unique tourism market. The sites also provide ample of tourists' behaviours while they use gadgets (devices)—for examples camera in Pashupatinath and camera and binoculars in the DMZ. In the DMZ observatory huge binoculars are installed for tourists to look at the North Korea. The two sites are totally unrealistic to compare in other parameters. One is a World Heritage religious site where niche tourism products like *Rudrakshi*- trade, photographing with the sadhus or photo-filming funeral rites have been cashed by host societies and the other is a widely visited war/conflict site where niche products like " looking at North Korea through binoculars" or walking in the tunnel built by North Korea have been cashed by the host country. Both states are also looked upon here as hosts and they have cashed interest of different sects and category of tourists through alluring tourism strategies. In Pashupatinath, tourists' act of camera-panning towards a burning pyre amidst sobbing relatives, though from distance that does not at all seem intrusion is an important vantage for studying tourist behavior here. The tourism behaviour is questioned in terms of ethics.

## Rethinking on Global Tourist Behaviours

Tourists are also great experimenters with photography. Tourists taking photos of Hindu death rites by the banks of the Bagmati river in Pashupatinath temple premises have unsurprisingly not evoked any significant research in Nepal. Some *sadhubabas* (Hindu hermits) are ever willing to have themselves photographed for exchange of some money. Regarding give and take of money between tourists and community for photography, there is nothing such as state policy or destination regulations in many sites as it is autonomously negotiated between tourists and the people being photographed. When the observed is being given money or when the observed asks for money to be photographed, who is really the consumer? This could be a philosophical question however, it is high time that researches be centered on 'consuming style and strategies' in the touristic sectors. It would be appropriate to cite here Robinson and Novelli's claim in their article about niche tourism. They write "the clear premise is that the market should not be seen as some simplistic homogeneous whole with general needs, but rather as sets of individuals with specific needs relating to the qualities and features of particular products"(2005. p. 5). On photography issue, Satus while depicting patterns of intercultural encounters of the Kalahari and the Zulu writes:

Visitors in short, might feel betrayed of their 'authentic' experience when asked to pay for pictures, for which they think they 'own' the rights simply because they own the camera that exposes the picture. Taking into account the unequal power relations between observers and the observed, a policy on picture taking and its strategy, whether logical in the western sense or not, does not seem to make any difference to the community members. From their point of view, no fault or irregularities are to be found, as long as they do not feel exploited and betrayed by their images. (2012, p. 88-89)

This can be compared to the tourists paying money to pose with the Hindu hermits in the Pashupatinath premises. However, when the images are that of the mourning bereaved family members doing death rituals, the definition of exploitation needs to be rethought. Along with camera, binoculars do their work in some touristic places. The binoculars/telescopes stationed in the Dora Observatory, DMZ are simply awesome for tourists to have a glance of the N. Korea. Certain destinations like this give a good space for sensitive researchers to rethink over issues of state's tourism strategies, autonomy and tourism policies. In this changing tourism mutation, states as hosts have used every right, every ingenuity and unique strategy to promote tourism activities in the destinations. It would hereby be appropriate to remember McCannell's tourists "who embody the quest for authenticity are indeed the pilgrims of the contemporary secular world" (as cited in Kunwar, 2017, p. 112). Their quest of "paying homage" (as cited in Kunwar, 2017, p. 112) to attractions, are cashed by today's hosts. For example: if Hindu cremation in the Pashupatinath temple premises had been curtailed or at least if the spaces of sacred ritual were being closed for tourist view,

the number of foreign tourists (mainly Westerners) visiting the site would have dwindled significantly.

In a destination, the behavior of tourists, tourist guides, locals' response and state's policy all sum up for tourism behavior. On one occasion, Pearce writes on one issue about tourist behavior, to whom does it matter? He answers:

First tourist behavior tends to matter to tourists. [.....] A second answer to the question is that tourist behavior matters to people who are making decisions about tourists. There is a whole array of such decision makers. They may be people in the public sector who provide permits for tour operators: they may be managers who let others go to the Great Barrier Reef or white water rafting or canoe down one of the scenic rivers in N. America. All sorts of people are concerned with tourist behavior because their job involves making an enabling decision or policy choice about tourist activities. (2006, p. 6)

But is for the fact that very few studies and researches become resources for assisting stakeholders and state mechanisms for policy making. Tourists are stepping beyond their traditional tourist –dome and turning into consumers. Robinson and Novelli rightly state " it is clear that the tourists, as consumers, have developed increasing levels of expertise and experience of being tourists (2005, p. 7). Along with host strategies, careful study of the tourists comply to a major part of tourism behavior studies to address tourism autonomy in destination marketing. Hall, Timothy and Duval while dealing with the inter- realms of security and tourism have at one reference written how conflicts, unstable border and territorial disputes refrain potential travelers from exploring the countries (2007, p 10), they have essentially missed out how exceptionally borderlands and conflict zones can become touristic sites. The best example is DMZ between the North and South Korea.

The tourists visiting the Antarctic to take photos of the penguins and collect experiences among icebergs or those willing to travel to the space as space tourists surely point to the extremity of tourists desires, interests and destination choices. However, the strategies devised by host societies to manipulate their choices are also important lenses to look at the global tourism market in studying tourism behavior.

## **Hindu Funeral Rites by the Pashupatinath Temple: Death sold and Rites Consumed**

The Pashupatinath temple by the banks of the pious Bagmati river is also known as the national god of Nepal. This world famous temple is dedicated to Hindu lord Siva. The square two-tiered pagoda temple built on a single tier plinth stands at 23. 6 meters above the ground ( Hutt, 1994,p.183). Hindu cremation in the Pashupatinath temple premises have been one of the major touristic attractions for visitors especially the Westerners. The Sadhus

are photographed against money. The *sadhus* are happy about this. This niche package has never been studied in Nepal.



**Fig. 1.** A Sadhu poses for the tourist.



**Fig. 2.** The tourist turns into a consumer

As the visitors stroll by the banks of the pious river they are held awestricken by the funeral pyre, mourning relatives and chanting priests and esoteric rites. The tourist guides hereby are busy explaining how the Hindus consider the Bagmati river to be the abode of heavenly path; what importance does fire play in the pyre and stages of rituals. Particularly when guides explain death rituals of Hindu to the tourists most of them will revitalize the Hindu sacraments sometimes glorifying the after- life perspectives and symbolic performances.



**Fig. 3 and 4.** A tourist guide explaining funeral rites (2019) to tourists and the funeral rite at Brahmanaal. The death is simply an event to the tourism package.

Tourists guides' emotional attachment or professional behavior hereby can be a separate topic of research. In Pashupatinath, the interesting funeral rituals are captured by visitors in their camera. The long lenses that can be fixed into the camera body does have real function here as the tourist capture the pyre rituals from another banks of the river. Many go as near as the bridge to watch the pyre rituals. The Pashupatinath temple gives entry to only Hindus. Most of the non-Hindu enter this world heritage site, (declared in 1979) here because they know that it is a religious performance site. The cultural tourism around the Pashupatinath temple, makes a major niche market especially due to the Hindu funeral sites going on around here. The tourists who visit the site for watching funeral rites cannot be put in the same basket. Referring to the sin of homogenization how Pearce clarifies " tourist are not all alike, in fact, they are staggeringly diverse in age, motivation, level of affluence and preferred activities" (2006, p. 2).

'Death sold and death consumed' would be a little more of literacy jargon here as it is an undeniable fact that that the main attraction for the tourists are the funeral rites. Architecture of the temple with golden roof, the myth of Lord Shiva and Parvati disguised as deer fall far beyond the level of satisfaction that the tourists get through watching a funeral pyre.

Popular tourists guide publisher, Lonely Planet (here taken as an example although not an academic book but as popular reference and view book for tourists) briefly writes about the use of cameras in the site as:

Bodies are wrapped in shrouds and laid out along the river bank, then cremated on a wooden pyre in a surprisingly business like way. It's a powerful place to contemplate notions of death and mortality. Needless to say, this is a personal and traumatic time for relatives, and tourists intruding with cameras is just not appropriate (Lonely Planet, 2009, p. 172).

The happy local and certified tourist guides selling stories of death and Hindu death, the curious tourists who ask couple of questions pointing to the funeral are other elements of tourism behaviour in the Pashupatinath temple, that can contribute to the study of tourism behaviours hereby. Ury's anthropological gaze (cited in Kunuwar 2017, p. 118) is described as "how individual visitors scan a variety of sights and are able to locate them interpretively, within an historical away of meaning and symbols" can be related here though there is always a "reverential gaze" around the temple .For tourists gazing the pyre, there must be little doubt that the gaze is more anthropological than the reverential one and surely with tourists coming from different religious views the rituals might be too much of esoteric.

The Brahmanal, a religious incline platform for the dead body is one of the important tangible assets that can for the tourists gaze. On the other side, the Brahmanal is a religious,

the most pious platforms for the dead body to rest, leg half immersed in the holy Bagmati river, the head directed to the Pashupatinath temple, from where the oblations (milk water, flower water) offered by the devotees to the main Lingum flow through an unseen funnel and touch the head of the dead body laid there. The dead body then is taken by the relatives lifted in a bamboo shaft and the funeral people saying a slogan in unison 'Ram Naam Sat hai' (The truth is only the Rama) (Rama- an avatar of Hindu Lord Vishnu).

The funeral pyre laid out of wood (sandal wood used the rich relatives) in another tangible product for the visitors. The body draped in yellow tinted cloth printed with word Rama all over is then put on the pyre. The bereaved sons(s) circumambulate the pyre three times and the eldest one offers the *Dagbatti* (funeral fire) to the dead body on the mouth of the dead. The blazing body is then taken care by the undertaker. The average 4 hours of time is the sobbing/wailing time for the bereaved family, relatives and near ones but to the onlookers, guides and tourists, this is the consumption period of learning, appreciating or criticizing or commenting on cultural rites and rituals. In the changing phase, daughters also offer funeral fire to the dead parents.

This researcher himself having experienced through guiding tourists numerous times in the Pashupatinath funeral cremation sites have felt that this is one of Nepal's most authentic site of tourism sector if looked through the lens of authenticity. There is no stage, no rehearsal, no artificial sentiments that tourists consume here. The guides take much pleasure to explain why the pyre is circumambulated three times, or how 13 days of seclusion period is passed on after the funeral where the ash of the body is thrown, how the Bagmati is religious as it meets the Ganges in India and stuff like that. There are vague sense of sentiments too towards the departed soul and the wailing family members but the profession has to continue as if nothing has happened. The guide just needs to make sure that his/her tourists do not go very near to the pyre for filming or taking photos.

Even after the dead body converts into ashes, it is still under Hindu ritual process as it flows with the river. A staunch Hindu would like to die in the premises of the Pashupatinath temple by the banks of the Bagmati. This has been quoted in Brown's 1989 account as "And so lying about in corners and recesses are people in the last stage of some fell disease, groaning out their lives tortured in body, but happy in mind because they have been spared to die within the precincts of Pashupati" (p. 84-85). The temple premises are still a last haven for a dying Hindu. In recent times, eye-donation takes place herein.

Relatives bring the dying person to this place for it is believed that in the last hours, this holy place will provide solace to the dying and the soul will get through the heavenly abode's journey conveniently. The funeral ceremony also called 'antyestisamskara'(last sacrament) is listed among 16 Hindu sacraments that are meaningful practices from birth to death in a staunch Hindu's life. About the funeral, Pandey writes "this samskara, being post



mortem is not less important, because for a Hindu the value of the next world is higher than that of the present one" (1998, p. 234). The value of next world/other world (the world of rewards) is instilled into the mind of a Hindu since his/her childhood. Rigveda's mantra (as cited in Pandey, p. 253-254) also asserts when the pile is ready to be lighted a fire is applied to it with the prayer. 'Agni consume not this body to cinders: nor give it pain, nor scatter about its skins or limbs.' O Jatavedas when the body is fairly burnt, convey the spirit to its ancestors.' Relatives stay until the body is completely burnt as it is believed that in case complete burning is not achieved then the body cannot recreate (1998, p.75)

Swami Prapannacharya has taken references of religious texts like Rigveda (10/60/7 mantra) Pancha Visam Brahman (13-12-5), Sathapatha Brahmana (1/1/4/14) Jaimini Brahmana (3/16/7) and Brihaddevta (7/82/88) to claim that the Hindu's know how to revive a dead in context the vast knowledge of the wise Hindus in the Vedic period,. He writes that with the course of time, this knowledge has been lost (B.S. 2014, p. 240). In today's time proper funeral ceremony is limited to aid recreation of the soul in another life.

At humane level, the sentiments that a funeral celebration brings to the tourist can also be assumed to be different. But the delight that a unique funeral rites brings in all of them, having opportunity to watch the live ceremonies can spark studies on tourists' delight in unusual places. On the other hand, their curiosity is also cashed by tour operators, guides, heritage management personnel's of the PADT Nepal Tourism Board and the Nepal government to earn revenues. According to the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT), Governing Council, the precincts of the temple and its surrounding is spread over 264 hectares. The informative brochure prepared by PADT for tourists boasts of how visitors here can capture unique images of golden monkeys, babas (hermits) smoking pipes from their chilims (short smoke pipe) and 'seize' the opportunity to view Hindu funeral rites (2018, PADT Brochure, p.4). There is no any mention of taking photos of funeral rites but with the word "view" the brochure entails the intention of selling it as a lucrative tourism package.

## **Tourists' Interests in DMZ**

The demilitarized zone between the South and the North Korea is 250 kms long and 4 kms wide<sup>1</sup>. The transformation of strip of land between the South Korea and North Korea following many bitter relations in decades, then comprising some armistice agenda has been a bit of neglected issue in tourism sector. A handbook Focus on Korea: this is Korea published by Seoul International Publishing House, refers briefly to the transformation of a small village into a strip of DMZ as:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/korea.demilitarized.zone>. as retrieved on March 19, 2019

Before the Korea War, P'anmunjom was a small farming village, but no more. Now it is the meeting place, within the DMZ of the Korean Armistice Commission and the infrequent contacts between the South and the North (1998, p. 75).

But Panmunjom is also a place for tourists. This researcher had visited DMZ as a tourist in 2018 taking a guided tour through Seoul. There were many large buses full of tourists guided by a tour guide in each and it was amazing how buses stopped by at every place in Seoul to collect tourists who reserved for a sightseeing to DMZ. The guide in the bus requested the visitors to take out passports, at check points wherein a security personnel stepped to check for everyone and to every seat by seat. It is easy to imagine how they give a 'scrutinized gaze' at the tourists who had already been warned by the guide of strict security process.. At times, he just gives a 'duty-look' at them. This all heightens the curiosity of tourists and for sensitive researchers like me, this provides space to rethink on the rising autonomy in global tourism sector essentially on how a country can use another country's international image (terrain) to earn tourism related revenues. Or simply how war products (images objects etc) are developed as tourism package in the state's niche markets. Vietnam's Cu-chin tunnels or Hawaii's Pearl Harbour are other examples.

In the Dora Observatory of DMZ, the tourists insert coins in the big binocular box and zoom the terrains, buildings, tower, and jungles and villages of North Korea until the lenses turn black after some times.



**Fig. 5.** The tourists queuing in the balcony, take turns to look at the beautiful terrain of North Korea which undoubtedly points out how tourists turn into consumers through another state's tourism product like that of "viewing at North Korea".

Tourists here are also given opportunity to go through model trolls in the visitor parlour. A short video on DMZ's , history and topography of the site elevate the curiosity

of already curious visitors. The infiltration tunnel -3 is open to the tourist and walking in the tunnel is another niche package here. The interest of the visitors heading towards DMZ, through all those security check-ins (state's provision of security in the border region) is actually given a space of reverence through this spalling activity.

Tourist buses packed with visitors from all around the globe, neatly parked outside the DMZ entry zone reveal the increasing number of visitors wanting to know about the border zone between the North and the South Korea. Boorstin's concept of pseudo- events would fail here although tourists become a bit of Boorstin's traveler while experiencing inside Infiltration Tunnel-3. One, infiltration tunnel -3 (said to be built by North Koreans), now inside DMZ (Demilitarized Zone between the North and South Korea) has been turned into a touristic site by the South Koreans. Many tourists have visited it and crawled onto it since it opened as a touristic site. Guided tours are mandatory here through all those security check-ins and it is far from imagining a solo traveler to DMZ. Actually tourists want to know more about the tensions and gripping fear imposed by the North to the South. The prime interest of all the tourists here in the DMZ can be related to Aristotle's famous adage "Man is by nature a Political animal." The politics between the South and the North, their sour relationship and their global images reproduced through media multiple of times now have become the alluring charms of the destination - DMZ. The international image of N. Korea that is somewhat blurred in media especially You Tube has certainly provoked the tourist's curiosity to see its terrain, at least through the S. Korea's border. "I am looking at North Korea" - this feeling of satisfaction at least in tourism studies what we refer to as 'tourist gaze' (John Ury's terminology) can be read in the faces of on lookers who are peaking at North Korea through binoculars installed in the balcony of Dora Observatory. The infiltration tunnel-3 is full of tourists. They wear helmets on their heads (provided on the spot) and in a long queue they crawl and walk. Many times they can be seen leaning on the walls most probably amazed at the failed project of N. Korea. For me it was an awesome research space to praise the South Korea's tourism destination. Most tourists are awestricken at the sight of trickling water drops and they all seem to get a feeling of "adventure", even when having to stoop a little at some points. The tunnel entry is well managed with own visitors lockers. The vigilant security personnel's and camera recorders heighten the importance of this place as security -sensitive site. This niche package offered to the visitors at Infiltration tunnel-3, at one level, is a living testimony to the bitter relationship between the two Koreans, hence if categorized broadly is a package of war tourism.

## **Discussion**

The sentiments of tourist guides with their identity is a recent stream for today's research as for example how Halls' ethnographic work Machu Picchu: an Andean Utopia for the twenty-first Century? has case-studied tourist guides in Machu Pichhuportraying their emotional perspectives with the sites especially that of being 'Incan'. Similarly" being

Hindu" tourists guides in Pashupatinath to explain funeral rites- (the issue so connected with life and death belief pattern of the Hindus) would be another interesting research in the Niche Tourism literature. But these type of studies are new herein.

Is use of camera to film/capture photos of the funeral pyre in Pashupatinath ethically justified? It could be a debatable issue. Similarly, is installation of binoculars in the Dora Observatory of DMZ in Korean border ethical or not? This could also be questioned in terms of tourism ethics. The tourism package developed by South Koreans, in a way, is their popular product in DMZ that can be assumed to have outgrown its niche-dome and been successful to allure a considerable mass of tourists. Now, it is questionable whether it is still a niche product or not. For now, certainly it is not. It is obvious that most of tourists go to DMZ to have a sole desire to glance North Korea (because of its mysterious international image) from its South neighbor.

## Conclusion

Pashupatinath and DMZ both are not niche sites owing to the volume of tourists who visit here but here are popular and less studied mini-tourism products like looking at / filming the Sadhus/yogis, looking at the funeral rites, buying of *Rudrakshi*, photographing with the yogis/sadhus and looking towards North Korea, or photographing the North Korean villages through Korean border and crawling in the infiltration tunnel-3. These all reveal how tourist activities in destinations can be sources for further agenda on managing sites, or to study of host's policy on promoting sites and analyzing hosts' marketing strategies through multifarious researches. However, certain destinations like Korea's DMZ and Hindu cremation sites in Nepal's Pashupatinath temple premises offer unique spaces to rethink on how tourism autonomy is globally trending in destination sites with definite question marks on ethics of using devices in sensitive religious sites or peeking intentionally onto a state which is not so much open to tourism.

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