

Analysis on the Inheritance of Traditional Culture in Contemporary Product Design in China

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Abstract

This research paper aims to analyze the inheritance of traditional culture in contemporary product design in China. The study explores avenues for the preservation and integration of traditional cultural elements in modern design, considering the challenges faced by designers and the preferences of consumers. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, along with quantitative surveys. The findings reveal that traditional cultural elements, such as tangible and intangible cultural heritage, are at risk of being forgotten due to modernization and globalization. Integrating these elements in contemporary product design presents an opportunity to revive and promote traditional craftsmanship, artistry, and symbolism while appealing to modern consumers. The study addresses the research gap by examining the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in product design. It also investigates consumer perceptions and preferences towards products that integrate traditional Chinese culture. The research findings provide valuable insights for designers, educators, and policymakers in understanding the complex relationship between traditional culture and contemporary product design.

Keywords: Traditional Culture, Contemporary Product Design, Cultural Preservation, Sustainable Value.

Introduction

The preservation and integration of traditional culture in contemporary product design is a topic of increasing interest and importance, particularly in a country as culturally rich and diverse as China. The rapid modernization and globalization of Chinese society have posed significant challenges to the preservation of traditional cultural heritage. With the growing threat of cultural loss, it becomes crucial to explore avenues for the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture in contemporary contexts. This research paper aims to analyze the inheritance of traditional culture in contemporary product design in China, with a focus on identifying significant aspects of traditional culture that are at risk of being lost and examining their potential integration in modern design.

China boasts a wealth of traditional cultural elements that hold great historical, artistic, and symbolic value. However, many of these elements are increasingly facing the risk of fading into obscurity as society progresses and embraces a more globalized culture. For example, traditional crafts and craftsmanship techniques, such as traditional calligraphy, intricate porcelain-making, delicate silk weaving, traditional Chinese opera and exquisite woodcarving, are at risk of being forgotten due to the decline in skilled artisans and the dominance of mass-produced goods. The decline in traditional architecture, such as traditional courtyard houses and distinctive regional styles, is another aspect of cultural heritage that is threatened by urbanization and modern architectural trends such as Siheyuan architecture (china.org.cn,2023, Fig.1)

Figure 1 Beijing's Siheyuan represents the capital's architectural style.



The integration of traditional culture in contemporary product design is a significant topic in the field of design. To ensure the continuity and relevance of traditional culture, it is essential to explore innovative approaches to integrate these elements into contemporary product

design. By incorporating traditional cultural elements in modern designs, designers have the opportunity to revive and promote traditional craftsmanship, artistry, and symbolism, while simultaneously appealing to the preferences of modern consumers. For instance, integrating traditional patterns, motifs, and colors in fashion design, furniture, or home decor can offer a fresh perspective and add a touch of cultural authenticity to contemporary products.

Figure 2 Detail of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, taken by Najoua Chetioui (Europeanguanxi.com)



Previous research has explored various aspects of this integration, such as the significance of cultural inheritance (Li, 2018), design trends (Wang, 2019), and the integration of traditional cultural elements (Chen, 2020). However, there is a research gap that needs to be addressed regarding the challenges and opportunities associated with this integration, particularly in relation to sustainable value and consumer preferences.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and incorporating sustainable practices in product design. Zhang (2021) highlighted the role of sustainable value in preserving cultural heritage, emphasizing the need for environmentally conscious design practices. This aligns with the global shift towards sustainable consumption and production. Additionally, Liu and Li (2022) explored the impact of integrating traditional cultural elements on consumer appreciation and desirability, indicating a positive perception towards products that showcase cultural authenticity.

Despite the existing literature, there is still a lack of comprehensive research that addresses the challenges and opportunities in integrating traditional culture, sustainable value, and consumer preferences in

contemporary product design in China. This article aims to fill this research gap by providing a detailed analysis of the inheritance of traditional culture in contemporary product design, considering the challenges faced by designers and the preferences of consumers.

The purpose of this research is to examine the integration of traditional cultural elements in contemporary product design, identify the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation, and understand consumer perceptions and preferences towards such products.

Cultural Inheritance and Contemporary Product Design

The significance of cultural inheritance in contemporary product design in China has been widely acknowledged in recent research. Li (2018) emphasized the importance of preserving traditional cultural elements and integrating them into modern designs to maintain cultural identity and foster cultural self-confidence. The study argued that incorporating traditional cultural motifs, symbols, and meanings in product design establishes a strong connection with Chinese consumers, contributing to cultural continuity. Li's research provided valuable insights into the theoretical aspects of cultural inheritance and its implications for product design.

Another significant study by Yusof, S. A. M. (2021) and Huang (2017) examined the relationship between cultural heritage and contemporary design. The Craft Revitalization Framework created by Yusof, S. A. M. (2021) sought to identify key elements and the connections between them to create craft revitalization strategy. This framework also serves as advice for craft industry participants who should put a craft revival strategy into action. Yusof, S. A. M. discussed the challenges and opportunities in integrating traditional culture into modern designs, emphasizing the need for designers to strike a balance between preserving cultural heritage and meeting the demands of contemporary aesthetics. Furthermore, Huang highlighted the importance of understanding the cultural context and symbolism associated with traditional Chinese culture to create authentic and culturally meaningful product designs. This research laid the groundwork for understanding the complexities and considerations involved in the integration of traditional culture in contemporary product design.

2.1. Integration of Traditional Chinese Culture in Product Design

Chen (2020) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the integration of traditional Chinese culture in product design. The study explored how art forms, colors, shapes, and meanings were incorporated into contemporary designs, showcasing successful examples and their impact on cultural preservation. Chen's research highlighted the significance of maintaining cultural integrity while adapting to contemporary design trends, emphasizing the need for

designers to possess a deep understanding of traditional culture and its aesthetic principles. The study contributed practical knowledge on integrating traditional cultural elements into modern product designs. Zhuyu umbrella (Fig.3) is an example of this practical integration.

The oil-paper umbrella's innovative design involves imprinting Sichuan symbols onto it, creating a meaningful connection that goes beyond mere combinations. The pairing of pandas and bamboo is thoughtfully matched, symbolizing prosperity and growth. As a result, the concept of a panda bamboo umbrella was introduced.

Figure 3 Zhuyu umbrella inspired by silk umbrella with Bamboo structure, awarded IF prize, Red dot prize.



Wu and Chen (2019) focused on the cultural meaning and symbolism embedded in traditional Chinese product designs. The research examined various aspects, including traditional motifs, craftsmanship, and materials, and explored how these elements were adapted and reinterpreted in contemporary product design. Wu and Chen emphasized the importance of preserving traditional techniques and values while incorporating modern functionality and aesthetics. Their study shed light on the practical challenges faced by designers and provided insights into successful approaches for integrating traditional culture into product design.

2.2. Sustainable Value and Cultural Heritage Preservation

Zhang (2021) investigated the role of sustainable value in preserving cultural heritage through product design. The study highlighted the significance of environmentally conscious design practices and their impact on the preservation of traditional culture. Zhang argued that sustainable product design not only helps reduce environmental impact but also fosters a deeper appreciation for traditional cultural values. By

incorporating sustainable materials, production methods, and consumption practices, designers can promote both cultural heritage preservation and environmental sustainability. As such, it is a key component of economic, social, and environmental sustainability (UNESCO 2012). This research offered a valuable perspective on the intersection of sustainability and cultural heritage in product design.

While existing studies discussed on various aspects of cultural inheritance in contemporary product design, there are still several research gaps that need to be addressed. Firstly, there is a need for more empirical studies specifically focused on the integration of traditional cultural elements into contemporary product designs in China. These studies should consider the challenges and opportunities associated with this process, including the effectiveness of different design strategies and approaches in successfully incorporating traditional culture while meeting contemporary consumer demands.

However, the sustainability of intangible heritage, which comprises skills, traditional knowledge, and informal transmission of these to succeeding generations, is rarely discussed, even though it is a crucial challenge (Mohamed Yusof S.A. & Walker S, 2018). Furthermore, the role of sustainable value in the preservation of cultural heritage through product design requires further investigation. Although some studies have touched upon the importance of sustainability in cultural heritage preservation, there is a need for more comprehensive research that examines specific ways in which sustainable design practices can be integrated with traditional cultural elements.

To fill these research gaps, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the inheritance of traditional culture in contemporary product design in China. By examining successful case studies, exploring the challenges faced by designers, and identifying strategies for the effective integration of traditional cultural elements, this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge. The findings will provide practical implications for designers, educators, and policymakers and offer valuable insights for future research in understanding the complex relationship between traditional culture and contemporary product design.

Based on the literature review and research gap identified, the following three research questions are proposed: (1) How can traditional cultural elements be effectively integrated into contemporary product design in China while meeting the demands of modern consumers?

This research question aims to explore the strategies and approaches that designers can employ to successfully incorporate traditional cultural elements into their product designs without compromising contemporary aesthetics and consumer preferences. (2) What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of

sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in contemporary product design in China?

This research question seeks to examine the practical difficulties faced by designers in incorporating sustainable design practices while preserving traditional cultural elements. It also aims to identify the opportunities and potential synergies between sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in product design. (3) How do consumers perceive and respond to products that integrate traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs, considering factors such as cultural authenticity, aesthetic appeal, and product desirability?

This research question focuses on understanding consumer perceptions and preferences towards products that embrace traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs. By exploring consumer attitudes, motivations, and purchasing behavior, this research aims to provide insights into the market acceptance and potential commercial success of products that integrate traditional cultural elements.

By addressing these research questions, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the inheritance of traditional culture in contemporary product design in China and provide practical implications for designers, educators, and policymakers in this field.

Methods

This research paper employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the inheritance of traditional culture in contemporary product design in China. The study utilized qualitative data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, as well as quantitative surveys to gather comprehensive insights into the research topic. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience in product design and traditional Chinese culture. The sample size consisted of 30 participants, including 20 professional product designers and 10 individuals representing consumer perspectives. The selection criteria ensured diversity in terms of age, gender, design expertise, and cultural background to capture a broad range of perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the professional product designers to explore their experiences, challenges, and strategies in integrating traditional cultural elements in contemporary product design. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes and patterns (Morgan, 2014). Focus group discussions were organized with the consumer participants to gain insights into their perceptions, preferences, and purchasing behavior regarding products that incorporate traditional Chinese culture. The

discussions provided a platform for participants to share their opinions, reactions, and cultural interpretations related to specific product designs. These discussions were also audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify common themes and variations in consumer responses (Stake, 2010).

Quantitative data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to a larger sample of consumers. The questionnaire assessed participants' attitudes, perceptions, and purchasing intentions towards products that integrate traditional cultural elements. The responses were collected using an online survey platform and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the transcripts, categorizing the data into meaningful themes, and interpreting the findings. The analysis aimed to uncover the common challenges, strategies, and consumer perceptions related to the integration of traditional cultural elements in contemporary product design (Morgan, 2014).

The quantitative data obtained from the survey were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and percentages were used to summarize the responses. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests or correlation analyses, were employed to examine relationships between variables and test hypotheses derived from the research questions. By employing this mixed-methods approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the inheritance of traditional culture in contemporary product design in China, addressing the research questions and filling the identified research gap. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data allowed for a nuanced exploration of the challenges, strategies, and consumer perceptions related to the incorporation of traditional cultural elements in product design.

Results and Discussion

The research findings address the research questions regarding the effective integration of traditional cultural elements into contemporary product design in China while meeting the demands of modern consumers, the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in product design, and consumer perceptions and responses towards products that embrace traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs. The findings provide valuable insights into the strategies, challenges, opportunities, and consumer preferences related to the incorporation of traditional cultural elements in contemporary product design based on each research question.

RQ1: How can traditional cultural elements be effectively integrated into contemporary product design in China while meeting the demands of modern consumers?

The findings revealed several key strategies for effectively integrating traditional cultural elements into contemporary product design in China while meeting the demands of modern consumers. Firstly, designers emphasized the importance of understanding the cultural significance and symbolism associated with traditional elements. By thoroughly researching and studying traditional Chinese culture, designers were able to identify meaningful symbols, motifs, and artistic forms that could be incorporated into their designs.

Secondly, the findings highlighted the significance of striking a balance between tradition and modernity. Designers acknowledged the need to adapt traditional elements to suit contemporary design aesthetics and consumer preferences. This involved reinterpreting traditional patterns, motifs, and colors in a way that resonated with modern consumers while still preserving the essence of the cultural heritage.

Furthermore, collaboration and co-creation emerged as essential strategies for successful integration. Engaging with local artisans, craftsmen, and cultural experts allowed designers to gain deeper insights into traditional craftsmanship techniques and materials. The crucial factor in initiating these projects is the convergence of action, which enhances the effectiveness of collaboration and establishes the necessary conditions for their implementation. Manzini, E. and A. Meroni (2014) argues the application of community-centered design facilitates the co-design of both the process and the required actions. This collaboration not only ensured authenticity but also added value to the products by supporting local artisans and promoting cultural preservation.

The findings also emphasized the importance of user-centered design approaches. Designers recognized the need to consider the needs, preferences, and cultural backgrounds of the target consumers. By conducting thorough market research and understanding consumer behavior, designers were able to create products that resonated with the target audience while incorporating traditional cultural elements.

Overall, the findings for RQ1 suggest that effectively integrating traditional cultural elements into contemporary product design requires a deep understanding of cultural heritage, a balance between tradition and modernity, collaboration with local artisans, and a user-centered design approach. By following these strategies, designers can create products that not only reflect Chinese cultural identity but also meet the demands of modern consumers. These findings align with previous research conducted by Yusof, S. A. M. (2021), Li (2018) and Chen (2020), who emphasized the significance of cultural understanding and

adaptation in contemporary design. Yusof, S. A. M. (2021) emphasized on the importance of personal value in culture as part of sustainable strategy. Li (2018) argued that designers should maintain cultural identity while incorporating modern aesthetics, while Chen (2020) highlighted the importance of integrating art forms, colors, shapes, and meanings of traditional culture into contemporary designs. The present findings expand on these concepts by providing practical strategies and approaches for effective integration.

The findings also support The Craft Revitalization Framework proposed by Yusof, S. A. M. (2021), which suggests that cultural elements can be adapted and combined in a way that preserves cultural heritage while meeting contemporary demands. By incorporating traditional cultural elements into contemporary product design, designers contribute to the preservation and promotion of Chinese culture while appealing to the preferences of modern consumers.

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing practical insights into how traditional cultural elements can be effectively integrated into contemporary product design in China. The strategies and approaches identified in this research offer valuable guidance for designers, educators, and practitioners in the field of product design, facilitating the preservation of cultural heritage while meeting the demands of the ever-evolving market.

RQ2: What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in contemporary product design in China?

The findings of this study shed light on the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in contemporary product design in China. The research identified several key challenges that designers face in incorporating sustainable design practices while preserving traditional cultural elements.

One of the primary challenges is the availability of sustainable materials that align with cultural heritage. Traditional materials and craftsmanship techniques may not always meet the criteria for sustainability. Designers expressed the need to source environmentally friendly materials without compromising the authenticity and cultural significance of the products. This challenge requires a careful balance between sustainability requirements and cultural preservation.

Another challenge is the difficulty in maintaining sustainable production processes while incorporating traditional craftsmanship. Traditional techniques often involve resource-intensive practices, which may conflict with sustainable principles. Designers highlighted the importance of finding innovative solutions to adapt traditional

craftsmanship methods to more sustainable processes, such as exploring alternative energy sources and minimizing waste.

Furthermore, designers face the challenge of consumer perceptions and preferences. While there is an increasing demand for sustainable products, consumers may not always associate sustainability with traditional cultural elements. This challenge highlights the need for effective communication and education to bridge the gap between sustainable design and cultural heritage preservation, ensuring that consumers understand the value and significance of products that embody both aspects.

Despite these challenges, the findings also revealed several opportunities for integrating sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in contemporary product design. Designers recognized that sustainable practices can enhance the perceived value of cultural products, creating a unique selling proposition in the market. The findings suggest that by emphasizing the sustainable aspects of their designs, designers can attract environmentally conscious consumers who also appreciate cultural authenticity.

Moreover, the integration of sustainable design and cultural heritage preservation can contribute to the overall sustainability and social responsibility of the design industry. Designers expressed the potential for collaboration with local communities and artisans to develop sustainable supply chains and support local economies. By engaging in sustainable practices, designers can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and promote sustainable development at the local and national levels.

The findings align with the concept of sustainable design, which emphasizes the interconnection between environmental, social, and cultural aspects. Previous research by Zhang (2021) discussed the role of sustainable value in preserving cultural heritage through product design, emphasizing the importance of environmentally conscious design practices. The present findings expand on this concept by highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating sustainability and cultural heritage in the specific context of contemporary product design in China.

In conclusion, the findings for RQ2 illustrate the challenges designers face in integrating sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation in contemporary product design in China. These challenges relate to sourcing sustainable materials, adapting traditional craftsmanship to sustainable processes, and communicating the value of combined sustainability and cultural authenticity to consumers. However, the findings also reveal opportunities to enhance the perceived value of cultural products and contribute to sustainability and social responsibility. By leveraging these opportunities, designers can create

products that embody both cultural heritage and sustainable principles, making significant contributions to the design industry and cultural preservation efforts.

RQ 3 : How do consumers perceive and respond to products that integrate traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs, considering factors such as cultural authenticity, aesthetic appeal, and product desirability?

The research findings discuss on how consumers perceive and respond to products that integrate traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs, taking into account factors such as cultural authenticity, aesthetic appeal, and product desirability. The findings provide valuable insights into consumer attitudes, motivations, and purchasing behavior, offering a comprehensive understanding of the market acceptance and potential commercial success of such products.

The research found that cultural authenticity plays a crucial role in consumer perception and response. Consumers expressed a strong desire for products that accurately represent and preserve traditional Chinese culture. They appreciated products that showcased genuine cultural elements and craftsmanship, as these products were seen as more valuable and meaningful. Authenticity was associated with a sense of cultural pride and an emotional connection to the products. Aesthetic appeal also emerged as a significant factor influencing consumer response. Consumers responded positively to designs that effectively integrated traditional cultural elements into contemporary aesthetics. Designs that struck a harmonious balance between tradition and modernity, creating visually appealing and innovative products, were highly regarded. Consumers appreciated products that exhibited a unique and distinct design language, reflecting both cultural heritage and contemporary trends.

Product desirability was closely linked to consumer perception and purchasing behavior. Consumers expressed a willingness to pay a premium for products that successfully integrated traditional cultural elements. The findings suggest that products embodying cultural authenticity and aesthetic appeal had higher perceived value, leading to increased desirability among consumers. This indicates a market demand for products that authentically represent traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs.

The findings align with previous research conducted by Wang (2019) on cultural hybridization in product design, which emphasized the importance of balancing tradition and modernity to create appealing designs. Similarly, the research findings support the work of Li (2018) and Chen (2020) on the significance of cultural inheritance and the integration of traditional Chinese culture in design, respectively. These previous findings highlight the importance of cultural authenticity and

aesthetic appeal in consumer response, reinforcing the present research's conclusions.

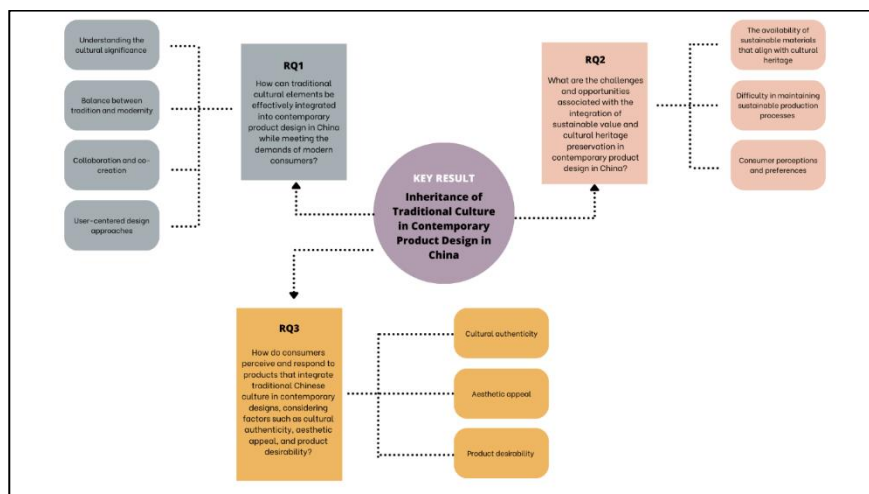
Understanding consumer perceptions and responses to products that integrate traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs provides valuable insights for designers and marketers. By considering consumer preferences and motivations, designers can create products that resonate with the target audience and have a higher chance of market success. Moreover, the findings contribute to the preservation and promotion of traditional Chinese culture by encouraging the integration of cultural elements in contemporary designs that appeal to consumer sensibilities.

In conclusion, RQ3 findings highlight that consumers perceive and respond positively to products that effectively integrate traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs. Cultural authenticity, aesthetic appeal, and product desirability were identified as key factors influencing consumer perception and purchasing behavior. The findings emphasize the market potential and commercial viability of products that authentically represent traditional cultural elements while appealing to contemporary consumer preferences.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the effective integration of traditional cultural elements in contemporary product design in China while meeting the demands of modern consumers, the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of sustainable value and cultural heritage preservation, and consumer perceptions and responses to products that embrace traditional Chinese culture in contemporary designs. The key findings summarized in Figure 4 as follows:

Figure 4 Key result from the findings



For research question 1, the findings suggest that designers can employ strategies such as understanding the cultural significance of traditional elements, striking a balance between tradition and modernity, collaboration with local artisans, and adopting a user-centered design approach. These strategies allow designers to create visually appealing and culturally rich products that resonate with consumers while incorporating traditional cultural elements.

For research question 2, the findings reveal challenges in sourcing sustainable materials, adapting traditional craftsmanship to sustainable processes, and communicating the value of combined sustainability and cultural authenticity to consumers. However, designers can leverage opportunities by emphasizing the sustainable aspects of their designs, supporting local economies, and contributing to overall sustainability and social responsibility.

For research question 3, the findings highlight the importance of cultural authenticity, aesthetic appeal, and product desirability in consumer perceptions and responses. Consumers value products that accurately represent traditional Chinese culture, strike a harmonious balance between tradition and modernity, and exhibit unique design language. Products that successfully integrate cultural elements have higher perceived value and desirability among consumers.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide practical strategies, challenges, and opportunities for designers to effectively integrate traditional cultural elements, sustainable value, and consumer preferences in contemporary product design in China. By following these strategies, designers can create culturally rich and visually appealing products that meet consumer demands. Moreover, the findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge and can inform design practices, education, and further research in the field of product design.

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