

BRIDGING CULTURES: EMBRACING MUTUAL LEARNING BETWEEN CHINA AND AFRICA- UGANDA CASE STUDY

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JUNE, 2024

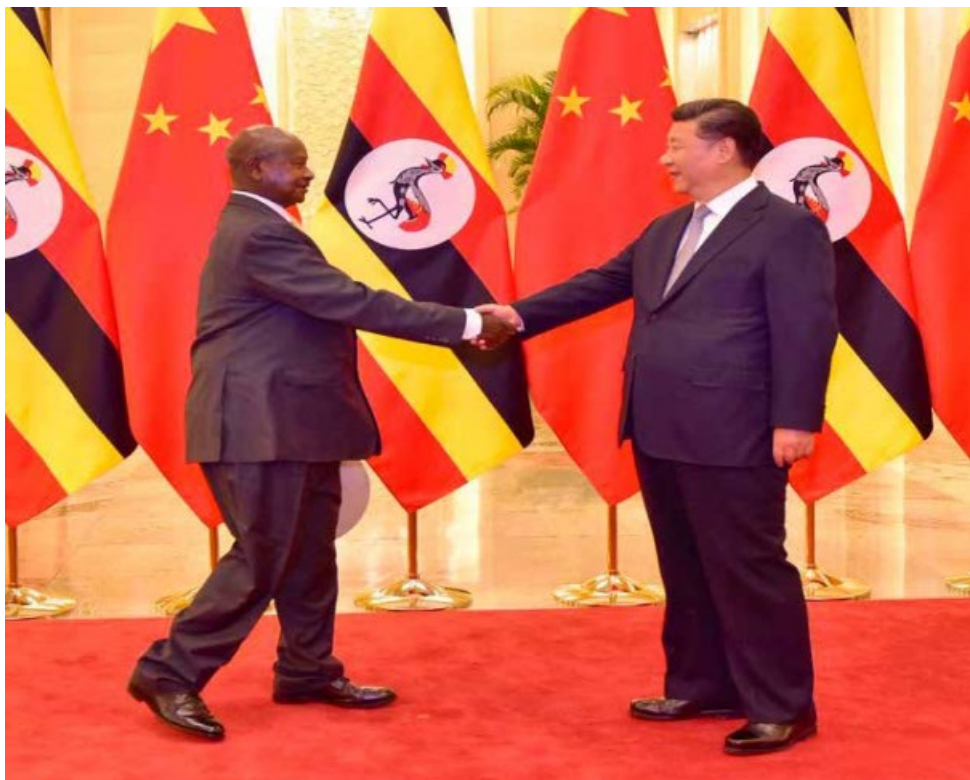


FIGURE 1: PRESIDENT XI JINPING WELCOMES PRESIDENT YOWERI K. MUSEVENI IN BEIJING, CHINA DURING THE FORUM ON CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION (FOCAC) 2018.

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1.0 Abstract

This paper offers a profound understanding of the mutual learning between the people of China and Africa, from the perspective of Uganda. It delves into how Uganda perceives the significance of mutual learning among civilizations and its hopes to deepen this with China. It examines the similarities and differences between Chinese and Ugandan cultures, and explores Ugandans' views concerning the importance of China-Africa cultural exchanges in forging a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future.

2.0 Introduction

China, as the largest developing country globally, has consistently played a pivotal role in fostering world peace, upholding international order, and contributing to global development. Conversely, Africa, being the continent with the most significant concentration of developing nations, is a crucial entity in the maintenance of global peace and the advancement of global development. In light of the current era poised at a critical juncture, it is imperative for China and Africa to enhance their collaboration, surmount challenges collectively, progress in unison, and collectively advances the realization of a shared future for mankind. Despite the geographical distance between them, both China and Africa boast rich and storied ancient civilizations, positioning them as eminent members of the conglomeration of world civilizations. Moreover, the 21st century has witnessed a renewed phase of cultural exchanges and mutual learning between these two entities, facilitating a deeper synergy between their civilizations.

[Zhang, M, & Wang, N. \(2023\),pg 3.](#)

In the heart of East Africa, Uganda stands as a compelling example of the rich tapestry of interactions between Chinese and African communities. The Republic of Uganda is the ‘Pearl of Africa’, which sits astride the equator in Eastern Africa. It is bordered by Kenya to the East, South Sudan to the North, Democratic Republic of Congo to the West, Rwanda to the South-West and Tanzania to the South.

Following President Y.K Museveni’s rise to power in 1986 as the president of Uganda, the two nations have developed closer ties, signed multiple cultural cooperation agreements, exchanging

student and medical teams. Relationships between the two nations have been strengthened by a policy of non-interference in political affairs¹.

(<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki>),Chimp reports-September, 27th,2023, [chimp reports.com](http://chimpreports.com)

3.0 How does Uganda perceive the significance of mutual learning among civilizations and its hopes to deepen this with China?

Ugandans generally hold positive views on the importance of China-Africa cultural exchanges in fostering a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future.

Here are some key perspectives from Ugandans include:

One perspective is that China-Africa health exchanges offer opportunities for mutual learning and collaboration. China has made significant investments in healthcare infrastructure and has developed expertise in traditional medicine and public health interventions that could benefit African countries like Uganda. Through partnerships, Uganda can access Chinese medical technologies, expertise, and resources to improve its healthcare system and address health challenges such as infectious diseases, maternal and child health, and non-communicable diseases²



¹ Crispin Kaheru, Journalists@ New vision, september,26th,2023, <https://www.newvision.co.ug>)

² <http://www.health.health.go.ug/sermon>



Chinese Ambassador to Uganda Zheng Zhugiang (c), Uganda health ministry officials, and members of the 19th outgoing Chinese medical team, posed for a group photo at the Chinese Embassy in Kampala, Uganda, on Oct. 14, 2019. (Xinhua/Joseph Kiggundu)

In recent years, Chinese universities and the government have played a significant role in providing scholarships to Ugandan students, opening up doors to quality education and fostering strong educational ties between the two nations. Through various scholarship programs, such as the Chinese Government Scholarship, Belt and Road Initiative Scholarship, and Confucius Institute Scholarship, Chinese universities offer opportunities for Ugandan students to pursue undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees in a wide range of fields. These scholarships not only cover tuition fees but also extend financial support for accommodation, living expenses, and health insurance, easing the financial burden on Ugandan students pursuing higher education in China. Furthermore, the cultural exchange and academic collaboration facilitated by these scholarship programs contribute to strengthening the educational cooperation between China and Uganda, paving the way for a brighter future of shared knowledge and understanding.



Representatives of Hunan Association Uganda and Makerere University display documents after signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, Oct. 22,2021.(Photo by Nicholas Kajoba/Xinhua)



Fig.The happy Ugandan students in Beijing on Huawei sponsorship, Source: Nile post Tuesday 21 MAY 2019 by Moses Namayo

Ugandans see China-Africa cultural exchanges as a valuable opportunity to enrich their own cultural landscape. They appreciate the chance to learn about Chinese traditions, language, arts, and cuisine, which can contribute to a more diverse and vibrant cultural scene in Uganda. By engaging in cultural dialogue and sharing their respective cultural heritage, Ugandans and Chinese can build bridges of empathy and respect, leading to stronger bilateral relations.

Ugandans value the connections formed through cultural exchanges, as they believe in the power of people-to-people interactions to build lasting friendships and partnerships. By fostering relationships at the grassroots level, Ugandans and Chinese can create a strong foundation for collaboration in various fields.

Ugandans recognize the significance of cultural diplomacy in building trust and goodwill between nations. They view cultural exchanges as a non-political way to promote cooperation, peace, and harmony, paving the way for a shared future based on mutual respect and understanding.

Ugandans also see cultural exchanges as a catalyst for strengthening economic ties between China and Africa. By showcasing their cultural products and creativity, Ugandans can attract investment, tourism, and business opportunities from China, leading to mutual economic benefits and prosperity.

Ugandans believe that cultural exchanges contribute to the development of a shared identity between China and Africa. By celebrating their cultural similarities and differences, Ugandans and Chinese can cultivate a sense of belonging to a common community with shared values and aspirations for the future.

Uganda like other African countries has shifted its quest for loans from the West to Beijing. Unlike loans from the West, which have preconditions of “good governance” and “political democratization” among others, China loans give the appearance of “no strings attached.” They are based on a pronounced China’s principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other

countries. China mainly uses three instruments: grants, zero interest loans, and concessional (fixed-rate, low-interest) loans. The loans mainly fund large projects, which involve a considerable use of Chinese goods and services of Chinese construction firms as contractors.

China has increased its Foreign Direct Investment to Uganda. China's direct investment in Uganda reached 131 million US dollars in 2022, ranking number 10 among all African countries. The two sides have since made progress in investment projects in the fields of transportation, electricity generation and transmission, oil development and industrial parks. A number of the country's flagship projects like Kampala-Entebbe Expressway project, Karuma Hydropower dam, Isimba Hydropower dam, Kingfisher Development Project, Wagagai Gold Mining Project and Osukuru Phosphates and Steel Project are being developed by companies from the People's Republic of China. China gave out \$200 million in 2015 to expand Entebbe International Airport. This has helped Uganda in the implementation of sizeable core projects articulated in the ongoing third National Development Plan (NDP-III).



The Kampala Entebbe Expressway, commissioned in June 2018, Photo by Eddie Ssejjoba, Jun 15, 2018 (constructed using loan from China).



PC: Chinese national chairman Wang Yang, the Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga First Lady Janet Museveni and President Yoweri Museveni at the commissioning of the Kampala Entebbe Expressway at Mpala in Entebbe Municipality, Photo by Eddie Ssejjoba, Jun 15, 2018.

The Chinese market operates fairly and has continued to enhance the rule of law and actively improve our investment environment so that all enterprises can enjoy equal access to the factors of production, market competition and legal protection. The Chinese economy firmly opposes protectionism in any form, and willingly solves economic and trade differences with other countries through consultation. We actively promote the establishment of a multilateral trade system characterized by balanced and mutually beneficial development. According to reports, China made \$131 million in direct investments in Uganda in 2022, placing it tenth among all African nations. Zhang Lizhong, the Chinese ambassador to Uganda, noted in his speech that investments between China and Uganda in the areas of transportation, energy generation and transmission, oil development, and industrial parks have progressed well.

China has promoted Uganda's trade relations: Uganda's trade with China hit a record \$1.1bn in 2022 from US\$ 800m in 2017, officials said, as both countries recover from the global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. "In 2022, the economic cooperation between China and Uganda withstood the test of uncertain factors in the post-pandemic era and showed a good momentum of steady progress," said China's Ambassador to Uganda, Zhang Lizhong.

"In 2022, the economic cooperation between China and Uganda withstood the test of uncertain factors in the post-pandemic era and showed a good momentum of steady progress. The bilateral trade volume rose by 6.6% against the trend, reaching \$1.14 billion. China granted zero-tariff treatment for 98% taxable items to Uganda and will support Uganda in exporting more value-added products into the Chinese market," the ambassador remarked.



Mr. Herman Asiimwe (second left) in a group photo with Mr. Liu Dongyuan (3rd Left), Mr. Zhao Wei (5th Left) Mr. Peng Qingge (Left) at the CCCC Headquarters in Beijing He was a village boy suffering but his life changed due to help from China Communication Construction Company (CCC)

Mr. Herman Asiimwe said that I became a mason in different construction companies after my primary education. In those companies, I was stuck in different areas of life. Poor salaries, bad working conditions was the order of the day. At that time, I didn't know what I was going to become in the future. I thank God that when I heard about a construction company that was to build the Kampala - Entebbe Expressway called China Chamber of Commerce. I got scared of them because I had never worked for the Chinese before. I went to the head office of the Kampala-Entebbe Expressway Project. Fortunately, I got a job as a brick maker after the human resource manager selected me because I was a mason. Thereafter, I did not know what would happen. Being in a structure factory, I saw many things. All the employees were dressed in

uniforms, safety shoes, reflector jackets, which is smart and other construction companies do not have. The brick factory's story was about molding road structures like road curbs, culvert covers and bricks. There were a variety of machines and many Chinese technicians in charge of teaching us the operation of machines.

The collaboration between China and Uganda led to initiation of Food and Agriculture organization (FAO) in Uganda since 2012 to date. The project focuses on improving crop production and productivity, especially for rice and maize ,through the introduction of improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation systems and mechanization.it also sought to support the development of aquaculture and livestock sectors, as well as the establishment of demonstration farms and training centers.

(Shemei Ndawula, Development Watch Center, <https://www.dwcug.org>)



FAO project in Uganda sponsored by China, photo posted on October, 26th,2023

By development watch centre

Uganda is particularly interested in learning from China's successful development model, which has lifted millions of people out of poverty and transformed the country into a global economic powerhouse. By studying China's experiences and best practices, Uganda aims to adapt and implement relevant strategies to drive its own development agenda and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

Moreover, Uganda is eager to enhance its educational and cultural exchanges with China to promote people-to-people interactions and build lasting friendships. By facilitating more student exchange programs, academic collaborations, and cultural events, Uganda aims to strengthen the ties between the two countries and nurture a sense of mutual understanding and respect. This explains why Mandarin language is now taught in Ugandan secondary schools and also at the Confucius institute Makerere University the top university in Uganda. ([xinhua, 2019-11-24 15:18:56](#))



Students of the Infectious Diseases institute at Makerere university pose for a group photo after performing at an event celebrating the 5th anniversary of the founding of the institute, in Kampala,Uganda on 23rd November, 2019.

4.0 Similarities between Chinese and Ugandan cultures

Chinese and Ugandan cultures have several similarities despite being geographically and historically distinct. Here are some key similarities between the two:

Emphasis on Respect for Elders: Both Chinese and Ugandan cultures place a strong emphasis on respecting elders. In Chinese culture, elders are revered for their wisdom and experience, while in Ugandan culture, elders are seen as the custodians of traditions and values.

Importance of Family: Family is highly valued in both Chinese and Ugandan cultures. Both societies prioritize the well-being and unity of the family unit, with extended family members often playing significant roles in the lives of individuals.

Celebration of Festivals: Both Chinese and Ugandan cultures have a rich tradition of celebrating festivals that are deeply rooted in their respective histories and beliefs. These festivals serve as occasions for communities to come together, celebrate, and honor their cultural heritage. Nyege Nyege, Imbalu circumcision festivals in Uganda, Chinese New Year, dragon boat festivals among many others.

Culinary Traditions: Both Chinese and Ugandan cuisines are diverse and reflect the rich culinary traditions of their respective cultures. Food holds a special place in both societies, with communal meals being an essential part of social gatherings and celebrations. Uganda Matooke, Kalo bread, Nsenene, Chinese Shandong Cuisine: fresh and salty with a lot of seafood dishes. Sichuan and Hunan cuisines: hot spice. Guangdong (Cantonese), Zhejiang, Jiangsu cuisines: great seafood, and generally sweet and light flavors. Anhui and Fujian cuisines: inclusion of wild foods from their mountains. Among many others.

Traditional Clothing : Traditional clothing holds an important place in both Chinese and Ugandan cultures. In China, traditional attire such as the cheongsam and qipao are worn during special occasions, while in Uganda, traditional garments like the gomesi and kanzu are cherished for their cultural significance. 1. Hanfu ,Qipao (Cheongsam),Tang Suit .The Zhongshan Suit - Traditional Formal Attires for Men , qipao for women.

Respect for Nature: Both Chinese and Ugandan cultures have a deep respect for nature and the environment. Traditional beliefs and practices in both societies emphasize living in harmony with nature and treating the environment with care and reverence.

Art and Music: Both Chinese and Ugandan cultures have a rich tradition of art and music. Traditional art forms such as Chinese calligraphy and Ugandan bark cloth art showcase the creativity and talent of their respective cultures. Similarly, music plays an important role in both societies, with traditional instruments and musical genres enriching their cultural heritage.

Spiritual Beliefs: While the religious beliefs in China and Uganda may differ, both cultures place importance on spiritual beliefs and practices. Chinese traditional beliefs such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism coexist alongside modern practices, while Ugandan culture is rich in traditional beliefs and spiritual rituals that connect people to their ancestors and the supernatural world.

Traditional Medicine: Both Chinese and Ugandan cultures have longstanding traditions of using natural remedies and traditional medicine to treat ailments and promote well-being. Herbal medicine and holistic healing practices are valued in both societies for their effectiveness and holistic approach to health.

Strong Sense of Community: Both Chinese and Ugandan cultures place a strong emphasis on community and social cohesion. Traditional values of cooperation, mutual support, and solidarity are upheld in both societies, fostering a sense of belonging and interconnectedness among individuals.

5.0 Differences between Chinese and Ugandan cultures

Chinese and Ugandan cultures are distinct in many ways, reflecting their unique histories, traditions, beliefs, and values. Here are some key differences between the two cultures:

Historically, China has a rich history dating back thousands of years marked by dynasties, cultural revolutions, and periods of rapid economic growth. The culture prevail across large geographical regions in East Asia with Sinosphere in whole and is extremely diverse, with customs and traditions varying greatly between counties, provinces, cities, towns. Chinese culture exerts profound influence on the philosophy, virtue, etiquette, and traditions of Asia.

Chinese characters, ceramics, architecture, music, dance, literature, martial arts, cuisine and history have had global influence, while its traditions and festivals are celebrated, instilled, and practiced by people around the world. ([https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki -Chinese culture](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_culture)) Ugandan culture, on the other hand, is made up of ethnic groups Lake Kyoga forms the northern boundary for the Bantu-speaking people, who dominate much of East, Central, and Southern Africa. In Uganda, they include the Baganda and several other tribes. The Baganda are the largest single ethnic group in Uganda. They occupy the central part of Uganda which was formerly the Buganda Province. They are found in the present districts of Kampala, Mpigi, Mukono, Masaka, Kalangala, Kiboga, Rakai, Mubende, Luwero, Wakiso, Sembabule, and Buikwe. They are a Bantu-speaking people and their language is called Luganda.

In the north, the Lango and the Acholi peoples predominate, who speak Nilotic languages. To the east are the Iteso and Karamojong, who speak a Nilotic language, whereas the Gishu are part of

the Bantu and live mainly on the slopes of Mt. Elgon. They speak Lumasaba, which is closely related to the Luhya of Kenya. A few Pygmies live isolated in the rainforests of western Uganda.

(https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/culture_of_Uganda), (The Uganda guide, <https://www.theugandaguide.com/about-uganda/uganda-culture>)

list of the 56 local tribes in Uganda arranged in alphabetical order

1. Acholi	2. Baganda
3. Bagisu	4. Bagungu
5. Bagwe	6. Bakiga
7. Bakiga	8. Bakenyi
9. Bakkonzo	10. Bakuku
11. Bakukusu	12. Bamba
13. Bamwe	14. Banyabindi
15. Banyole	16. Banyoro
17. Banyoro	18. Bagwe
19. Bashamia	20. Bafumbira
21. Bakwe	22. Bakwere
23. Banyole	24. Basamia
25. Basoga	26. Basoga
27. Batagwenda	28. Batuku
29. Batuku	30. Bahororo
31. Bahehe	32. Bahehe
33. Bajoro	34. Bosoga

35. Chope	36. Dodoth
37. Ethur	38. Hehe
39. Japadhola	40. Jie
41. Jonam	42. Karamojong
43. Kebu	44. Kebu
45. Kuku	46. Kumam
47. Kweni	48. Langi
49. Lendu	50. Lugbara
51. Madi	52. Menig
53. Napore	54. Nyangia
55. Pokoth	56. Sabiny

<https://www.ugandasafaristours.com/blog/tribes-in-uganda.html>, accessed on 02nd/May/2024



A Uganda-China cultural exchange center was inaugurated Friday at a vocational school in central Uganda, marking the deepening of cultural relations between the two

countries.(Photo by Nicholas Kajoba/Xinhua Source: XinhuaEditor: huaxia 2024-03-09 01:05:45



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/dancing-costumes--50947039508767375/> on 03/April/2024



Western Uganda-Banyankole culture dance, <https://www.gorillatrips.net/top-10-tribes-in-uganda/>



[Source:https://www.micoope.com.gt/?o=tribes_7-%E2%80%93qsafarisafrica-nn-8BBlnBiq/03/April/2024](https://www.micoope.com.gt/?o=tribes_7-%E2%80%93qsafarisafrica-nn-8BBlnBiq/03/April/2024)

Ugandan traditions include folk music, dances, foods, clothing, and building styles, among others. In Northern Uganda, particularly the Lango sub-region, a healing ritual called child-cleansing ceremony is conducted to restore the lost manhood of a child. In this ceremony, both the child and mother spend 3 days in a grass thatched house. Traditionally, they are tasked to drink sweetened millet porridge. As the 3 days elapse, both the mother and child sit at the door entrance with a company of paternal brothers. This is believed to restore the lost manhood after the healing ritual is performed. The Acholi people and Lango people have their unique dances, such as Larakaraka and Bwola for Acholi, and Okeme/Abuda for Lango people.

In Western Uganda, there is the Empaako naming system where the indigenous communities of Batooro, Banyoro, Batuku, Banyabindi, and Batagwenda identify traditional names that match different seasons, times, and clans, among others. Other traditions include dances, namely Entogoro and Ekitagururo, performed by traditional dancers.

Eastern Uganda has traditional practices such as the Imbalu circumcision ceremony from the Gisu people in the Mbale District, and Karamoja herders who traditionally move to many places

in search of water and pasture for their animals. Central Uganda is known for traditional dances such as Bakisimba, Nankasa, and Muwogola, which are inspired by their daily life.

Chinese culture is characterized by the widespread use of the Chinese language, which is tonal and uses written characters. Ugandan culture is diverse, with a multitude of languages spoken across the country, including Luganda, English, Swahili, and various local dialects.

Chinese cuisine is known for its diversity of flavors, ingredients, and cooking styles, with popular dishes like dumplings, noodles, and stir-fries. Ugandan cuisine features dishes such as matoke (plantains), posho (maize meal), and luwombo (stew wrapped in banana leaves), reflecting the country's agricultural heritage.



Source:<https://www.gorillasafariexperts.com/most-popular-food-in-uganda/>

Luwombo is a special meal in Ganda culture of Buganda kingdom. It is well known to have been created by Kabaka's (King of Buganda) personal chef in late 19th century. The **Luwombo food is made by wrapping meat, fish, chicken in banana leaves together with groundnut paste**

Chinese culture places a strong emphasis on hierarchy, respect for elders, and maintaining harmony in social interactions. Ugandan culture values communal living, hospitality, and inclusivity, with extended families playing a central role in society.

Chinese culture has a mix of religious beliefs, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity. Ugandan culture is predominantly Christian, with a significant Muslim minority and traditional African religions also practiced.

Chinese culture celebrates festivals such as Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Dragon Boat Festival with traditional rituals, performances, and food. Ugandan culture has its own festivals and traditions, such as Buganda Kingdom ceremonies, cultural dances, and religious observances.

Chinese culture is known for its intricate artwork, calligraphy, porcelain, and ancient architecture such as the Great Wall and Forbidden City. Ugandan culture showcases vibrant traditional art forms like basket weaving, bead work, and storytelling, as well as vernacular architecture reflecting local building techniques and materials.

Chinese culture has a diverse range of traditional clothing styles, such as cheongsam, qipao, and hanfu, often influenced by silk fabrics and intricate embroidery. Ugandan culture features colorful fabrics, such as kitenge and gomesi, worn in various styles to reflect cultural heritage and individual expression.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of mutual learning among civilizations lies in its ability to bridge cultural divides, promote empathy, and foster cooperation between different societies. By embracing mutual learning between Chinese and African civilizations, particularly in the context of Uganda, we can cultivate a spirit of inclusivity, respect, and shared humanity. Recognizing and celebrating the differences and similarities between Chinese and Ugandan cultures is a crucial step towards building meaningful relationships based on mutual understanding and collaboration. Ultimately, by valuing and integrating the diverse perspectives and wisdom of both cultures, we can create a more harmonious and interconnected global community.

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