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Dutch Involvement in Asian Underwater Cultural Heritage Management: Building Upon Old Connections

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Abstract Europe and Asia have a long-term maritime relationship with each other, not always to the benefit of both. However, this intensive connection has led to an outstanding heritage that is still present in many of the former colonies. These relics from the past are parts of both European and Asian history. But what we usually share is the object and not the view: the past has many different faces. The Netherlands tries to be involved in the protection and management of her heritage overseas. Being aware of the political implications this can have, it focuses on a shared responsibility, on capacity building and on sharing data and information between the partner countries. Among other tools being developed is the creation of a platform for data and information exchange, that on a political level has established a common cultural heritage policy framework.

Keywords Underwater cultural heritage · Common cultural heritage · Mutual heritage · Shared heritage · UNESCO · MACHU · Fieldschool · GIS · Awareness

Introduction

Europe and Asia have a long, complex, and at times adversarial maritime relationship. From the end of the fifteenth century, European countries like Portugal, the Netherlands and England established contacts in Asia for trade, economic, cultural, and religious reasons. In many cases, these contacts resulted in war and oppression within the Asian countries. For centuries, colonies were occupied by nations sometimes much younger than themselves, exploiting the people and the land for the benefit of a few. But mutually beneficial political and economic alliances between Asian and European countries have also been made. More commonly though, many former colonized countries still bear the scars of their colonial history and some of them are still searching for their own native identity. For their part, many former colonizing countries are still trying to cope with their

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role, which may be apologetically referred to as a “dark period” in their own history (see, for example, Gilliard 2004 and Cote 2008).

The intensive contacts between Asia and Europe, however, have led to an outstanding cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, that is still present in many of the former colonies (Fig. 1). Tangible heritage includes features such as military fortresses, which also form part of a larger maritime landscape, and whole cities, still alive and used. Intangible heritage includes such things as language and customs. There is also a remarkably rich underwater cultural heritage that can tell us a great deal about the history of the coastal states, the colonizing states (flag states) and the interactions between them. Shipwrecks are true time capsules, often untouched for centuries, that can provide undisturbed data to help us reconstruct the past. Underwater cultural heritage represents both European and Asian history, and is usually referred to as being mutual, common or shared heritage. There is, however, a distinct nuance in how that shared heritage is perceived. Although the objects are shared the feelings about the objects can differ. At times we do not look at the same object from the same perspective: a well-preserved Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Dutch East India Company) wreck in Asian waters can be viewed from a Dutch perspective with a feeling of aesthetics and pride for our ancestors who travelled around the world in these vessels, at sea for months, even years, looking for profit. From the former colony's perspective, the same shipwreck might be viewed as a symbol of oppression. The same shipwreck, when viewed from different perspectives triggers mixed feelings. Is the heritage then still mutual or shared? We share the object, but not the view.

A common (and logical) European view is to think that sites related to our colonial past located beyond our territorial borders are worth preserving. We have no problems spending money to do so, sometimes even more than we would within our own borders, as is certainly the case in the Netherlands regarding underwater archaeology in recent years. European interference in national (cultural heritage) policy and politics in order to actively protect those sites with a connection to the colonial past of a country may be considered by



Fig. 1 In Asia, many well preserved shipwrecks are found that have a strong verifiable link to the Netherlands. One such example is the Avondster, a VOC ship that sank in 1659 in the Bay of Galle, Sri Lanka. Photo courtesy Avondster Project

the former colonized countries an act of Neo-colonialism, as European nations spend large sums of money without considering the place the sites have in the coastal state's own history (see Pronk 2006 for more information on the behaviour and policy of Western Countries regarding international cultural heritage). This is of course a risk, and where possible should be avoided. On the other hand, is it not true that the colonial past is a past with many different faces? This is what makes history so interesting. We should not ignore parts of our history because it might be painful, because we have difficulties coping with it or to addressing it. Should I restrain my enthusiasm for a shipwreck because it might have been used for terrible things? Should somebody else restrain his or her dislike of the shipwreck because of its history? I do not think so—a ship or a building or any other object in this instance releases emotions, and that is what these monuments are for! History is about emotions, it is subjective, it is the story of people! History is a complex thing, not a “from object to object” story, picking up what you like and ignoring what you dislike. It is a combination of many stories and relations that can be looked at from different angles. The history of a former colonial country, therefore, is the history of the indigenous past, the colonial past, and the contacts between those two. We sometimes have the tendency to investigate only what we refer to as our own history—sites significant to ourselves. But in fact that is a very narrow-minded approach—it is only a little part of our own story. It is the different views of our past that make the story. With different views we are able to learn more from our own past than we may have ever thought. This fact puts everything in perspective.

One Dutch example about the association of history, different perspectives people can have about the past and misinterpretation of different points of view, came about during the Dutch “State of the Union” in 2006 when the Dutch Prime Minister mentioned the need to regain our VOC “mentality” (for more information see:<http://www.nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/VOC-mentaliteit>). What he meant was that we needed to get back the willingness to take risks in enterprise. Even after 200 years of VOC bankruptcy this statement provoked massive protests and intensive discussions between critical journalists, other politicians, bloggers and critical readers (see for example: www.vkblog.nl/bericht/77242/voc-mentaliteit_%3F%3F%3F%3F%3F and www.vkblog.nl/bericht/77827/Balkenende_wil_%5C'VOC-mentaliteit%5C._U_ook%3F). There were intense reactions from immigrants, especially those from African (and African-American) groups connecting this statement with the promotion of the African slave trade (<http://www.amsterdamcentraal.nl/archief/2006/10/31/voc-mentaliteit>).

It is interesting to see how the same aspects of history trigger mixed emotions in different people. While some people associate the history of the VOC with adventure, risk and heroism, others associate it with oppression. It is a striking fact that an open discussion on different points of view still seems to be difficult. While the slave trade of the Dutch West Indian Company (WIC) is more widely known, the role the VOC played in the slave trade has long been denied (Welie 2008). This denial has led to a biased public knowledge of the past—as evidenced by numerous blog discussions on the internet which exhibit little general knowledge about the Dutch past, a fact which does not keep people from joining the debate. Knowing and learning from the past is the key to mutual understanding and successful debate. We also have to keep in mind that the practice of archaeology and history may become highly political, even nationalistic. Acknowledging that the data we collect is always subjective because what data we decide to collect is already a subjective choice, our aim should be to keep the primary-source data as objective as possible so that we can discuss our different points of view based on accurate data. Sometimes however, even that is too much to ask, as data can be manipulated (see, for example, Kipp 2009;

Belemans 2009; Jacobs 2008; and http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/farid/research/digital_tampering/). Information—data that has been interpreted—is inherently subjective and, therefore, subject to manipulation. As long as we can get back to the source and as long as others can be persuaded to tell their story based on those sources, this can be accepted. Cultural heritage should be a source to learn from and not simply viewed as something that can be used for our own benefit. The source should be protected and the data shared (accessible).

This brings me to the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, which entered into force in January 2009. The Convention encourages overall blanket protection of underwater cultural heritage regardless of where that heritage originates, where it is presently located and whose heritage it is. Dutch shipwrecks can be found anywhere in the world and in Dutch waters we can find shipwrecks from many other nations, as well. A recent inventory, for example, revealed the presence of at least 310 known historic Dutch shipwrecks outside Dutch territorial waters, while within Dutch borders, shipwrecks of German, English, French, Danish and Swedish origin have been found (Fig. 2). The connection with additional countries would be even greater if we consider the verifiable link all these shipwrecks have with other countries (Manders and Maarleveld 2006). Good stewardship by the coastal states and cooperation and data exchange between different countries is emphasized by the 2001 UNESCO Convention (see for example Articles 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 6 and 7.3).

The Netherlands have not yet signed the UNESCO Convention, however, it has accepted the Annex Rules, which consists of a code of professional best practice. Another positive step is that the Dutch consider that the Annex rules promote cooperation with other countries, and we have developed a specific policy for mutual or common heritage in the Netherlands, using former colonial contacts for the benefit of the protection of cultural heritage.

In 2000, in order to promote structural cooperation and to deploy available resources and capacity as effectively as possible the Dutch identified eight priority countries that share mutual heritage: Russia, Ghana, South Africa, Surinam, Brazil, Sri Lanka, India, and Indonesia. These countries were subject to former Dutch colonial dominance, were involved in extensive trading contacts or shared cultural exchange (Fienieg et al. 2008).

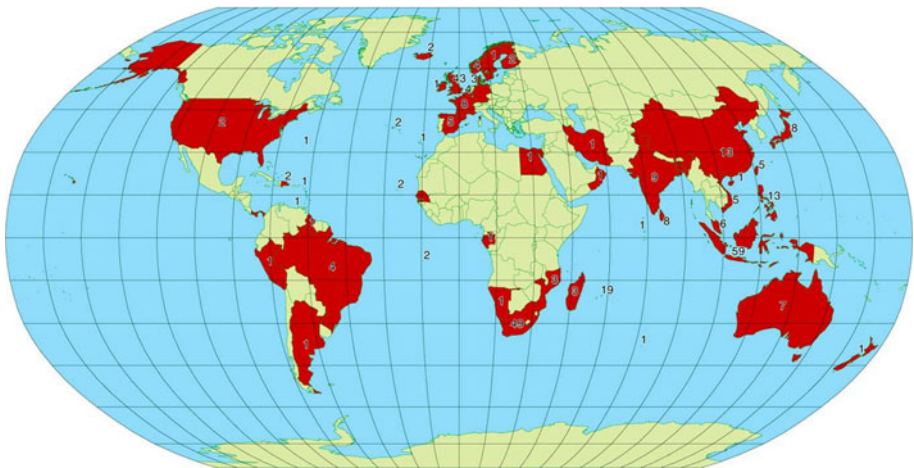


Fig. 2 A world map showing all known countries (*in red*) where Dutch historic shipwrecks are found. The numbers correspond with the amount of sites known at present. RCE

Until 2009, however, this policy meant that the Dutch government sponsored single projects within these countries, regardless whether the projects had clear aims and plans for the future, or a solid basis for co-operations between the two countries. In addition, projects were often conducted only by Dutch institutes, individuals and organizations, which often led to a lack of (long term) commitment or involvement from the countries where the projects took place.

These problems led to the decision to restructure and develop a new policy: The Common Cultural Heritage Policy Framework 2009–2012 (CCHPF) (for more information see: www.en.nationaalarchief.nl/.../Common%20cultural%20heritage%20policy%20framework.pdf). The CCHPF is based on a more balanced cooperation between the Netherlands and its eight priority countries, creating a structure of country-specific, multi-year programmes and individual projects as building blocks for these programmes. The programmes will be leading all future projects between these countries, but are not solely focused on the mutual heritage itself. The programmes focus on the protection of cultural heritage in general, of which the mutual heritage is one part. This means objects of mutual heritage will be placed in their context again, as part of the heritage of both the “coastal” state and the “flag” state. This also means that an important part of the initiatives to co-operate should come from the coastal states themselves.

The Common Cultural Heritage Policy Framework places an emphasis on capacity building for the protection of cultural heritage, because only when a state has built the capacity to manage its own heritage can it take the responsibility to manage that of others. In the framework of the CCHPF the term ‘common cultural heritage’ is defined as: relics of a past that the Netherlands has shared with others, such as buildings and engineering constructions, archives, underwater wrecks, museum exhibits, and intangible heritage. Common cultural heritage includes heritage in other countries dating from the era of the Dutch East and West India Companies and from Dutch colonialism in Asia, Africa, and South America, as well as heritage deriving from a period of intensive cultural relations such as between the Netherlands and Russia. The term may also include artefacts (including archives) commissioned in other countries and built or supplied by Dutch people. Finally, it includes heritage in the Netherlands of other countries which have had a particularly strong (reciprocal) influence on Dutch culture.

By maintaining, managing, using and highlighting this heritage, we can foster a critical reflection on our past and a mutual understanding of past, present and future. This can strengthen relations and promote cooperation between countries, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The conservation of common cultural heritage can help to strengthen cultural identity, promote socioeconomic and cultural development, and raise the profile and quality of the living environment.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science have jointly contributed €2 million per year for common cultural heritage management. To stimulate involvement on the part of the priority countries and local parties, half of the available resources (€1 million) is delegated to the relevant embassies for multi-year projects. This budget allows the Dutch embassies to develop common cultural heritage initiatives, thus giving them an important role in implementing this policy locally. Local organisations that intend to carry out projects—whether or not in collaboration with a party from the Netherlands—can apply to the embassies for funding. The other €1 million is earmarked and added to the budgets of the Netherlands’ three cultural heritage departments: the National Archives (NA), the Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN). The grant covers the cost of their

equipment, enabling them to create space within their organisation for implementing the common cultural heritage policy. Within their particular field of expertise, the agencies use the available budget to transfer knowledge, build capacity, raise and stimulate awareness of common cultural heritage, and provide substantive support for projects. In this process they will work with other parties in the field.

All projects, including those submitted to the embassies as well as those from the cultural heritage agencies, are being monitored and assessed in accordance with these country-specific programmes. An example of where Europe, Asia, the 2001 UNESCO Convention and the Dutch Common Cultural Heritage Policy meet is the UNESCO Regional Field Training Centre for Underwater Cultural Heritage in Thailand. The Regional Field Training Centre on Underwater Cultural Heritage was established under the UNESCO regional capacity building programme entitled “Safeguarding the Underwater Cultural Heritage in Asia and the Pacific,” and it is located in Chanthaburi, Thailand. Until now its focus has been mainly on the Asian region, but extension to the Pacific Region is already in progress (see <http://www.UNESCObkk.org/culture/our-projects/empowerment-of-the-culture-profession/underwater-cultural-heritage-in-asia-pacific-waters/regional-training-workshop-2009/>).

In 2003, UNESCO decided to start a regional field school or a centre of excellence for the protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage. Since 2007 preparations have been made to organise this programme—the above mentioned Regional Field Training Centre in Thailand—under the umbrella of UNESCO, financed by the Kingdom of Norway. The field school’s goals are:

- To prepare partner countries in the ratification and implementation of the 2001 UNESCO Convention
- To encourage close collaboration among partner countries and experts
- To build regional capacity in the protection and management of underwater cultural heritage among partner countries
- To professionalize maritime archaeology among those who are already involved in maritime archaeology
- To encourage and assist partner countries in establishing their own maritime archaeology units
- To promote a multidisciplinary approach in the protection and management of underwater cultural heritage
- To provide a platform for effective networking among partner countries in the Asia–Pacific Region
- To disseminate best practices among partner countries
- To sustain maritime archaeological programmes in the Asia–Pacific Countries

To fulfill these aims, the Regional Field Training Centre gives two different types of training courses: foundation courses and advanced courses. The Netherlands provides trainers for both types of courses, while other trainers for the two foundation courses have come from Thailand, Laos, Philippines, Australia, USA, UK, and Argentina. In this way the Regional Field Training Centre can fulfill its aim to help to raise the capacity of underwater cultural heritage management in three of its own priority countries: India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

The first field school given by the Regional Field Training Centre, a six-week foundation course, was conducted in November and December 2009, followed by a second one in March and April 2010. The foundation course consisted of both practical and theoretical training. Theoretical topics were (amongst others): underwater cultural heritage

management, significance assessment, in situ preservation, Asian shipbuilding technology, and material culture analyses. In the first two foundation courses, 35 persons from 11 countries were trained, including students from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines. A large network of well educated underwater archaeologists and underwater cultural heritage managers has now been established in Asia. A third foundation course will be executed in February and March 2011. In addition, three advanced courses, on topics including Geographical Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, and establishing an underwater cultural heritage unit, will be conducted before the summer of 2011, when the programme funding expires. The project implementation partners however, also aim to help sustain the regional field training programme over the long term by aiming to establish the Centre as a UNESCO Category 2 institute, to mobilize the support of the Asian Academy for Heritage Management and to encourage participating Member States to contribute to operation of the Centre (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 The UNESCO Regional Field Training Centre in Chathaburi organises foundation courses and advanced courses for the whole Asian Region. Students at work during the first foundation course: In the classroom (**a** photo by author) and on site (**b** photo courtesy UNESCO)

Dutch involvement on international level is based on a growing recognition that an important aspects of Dutch maritime history can be found far beyond our own borders and—of course—that we are part of a larger global past. We recognize that to effectively protect the heritage beyond Dutch borders, we need to be internationally active to help develop tools, both for ourselves and for others, to manage and protect this heritage. In this regard, two examples of practical tools for the management of Underwater Cultural Heritage have been developed as part of the MACHU project (Managing Cultural Heritage Underwater), financed by the European Culture 2000 programme, which ran from 2006–2009 (www.machuproject.eu). The tools include the MACHU GIS and the MACHU Content Management System (CMS). Although developed in a European setting, the tools are now available for global use.

The MACHU GIS was the backbone of the MACHU project. It brings together information in clear illustrations, each of which includes data that are key to the management of the cultural heritage underwater, not only nationally, but also internationally. Scientists can access the underlying databases, combine information according to their own needs, and add new layers as needed. Policymakers and underwater cultural heritage managers can quickly gain an impression of the pressure on the exploitation of the seabed. The GIS immediately shows the wealth of cultural resources already found (the known resource), but in addition expected resources can be also be predicted (the unknown resource). The MACHU GIS system reveals both the threat to and opportunities for heritage underwater protection at a single glance (Fig. 4).

The MACHU GIS currently consists of five layers. The archaeological layer and the research layer lie at the heart of the system (Hootsen 2008; Hootsen and Dijkman 2009). The archaeological layer describes maritime finds underwater: their location, date and a description of the object and its possible association with other countries (the verifiable link).

The research layer lists all the activities and interventions that are planned or have actually occurred in or on the seabed, distinguishing between archaeological investigations and, for example, infrastructural projects. A bathymetric layer has also been added, which



Fig. 4 The MACHU GIS at use during fieldwork on board a ship. Photo Courtesy MACHU project

includes data obtained by multibeam and side-scan sonar, and a legislation layer that shows what legislation affords protection to the cultural heritage in a specific area.

The MACHU GIS has been built as an open-source system, to enhance functionality and allow for the inclusion of extra layers at any time. It does not consist of one large database, but of many databases that are managed at the source, which consists of the countries or organisations that have the responsibility for the data. It can be connected to the GIS whenever there is approval from the source manager. The GIS itself is web based so it can be used all over the world. The management of the data and the decision to share that data remains where it is supposed to be: at the source.

The MACHU GIS has been used as an example and point of departure for the discussions around the development of an underwater GIS in Asia. With a similar framework, similar formats, and database structure, it might be possible in the future to exchange data not only between Asian countries but also between Asia and Europe. This would again promote easy access to data for coastal as well as flag states. At the GIS advanced course from the UNESCO Fieldschool held in September 2010 in Chanthaburi, Thailand, the possibilities were explored for such a joint Underwater Cultural Heritage GIS in Asia.

Due to its nature, the GIS is only accessible to a limited amount of people. It will not help us to create awareness for the largest group: the public. In addition, the GIS is data driven, and it shows very little interpretation. For this the MACHU Wreck & Site ID was developed as a Content Management System (CMS), a database of stories about wrecks and sites underwater (see www.machuproject.eu). It is not intended to give raw scientific data or an exact position, which is what the MACHU GIS does. MACHU Wreck & Site ID is more like an open content website (e.g., Wikipedia) where everyone who is interested and has information on wrecks and sites can make a wreck ID or page. A wreck ID is an online record of information about a wreck or site. It is easy to obtain an account to add wreck ID's, edit them and give comments on wreck ID's created by others. After creation or editing, the new information will be automatically sent for validation. In this way all

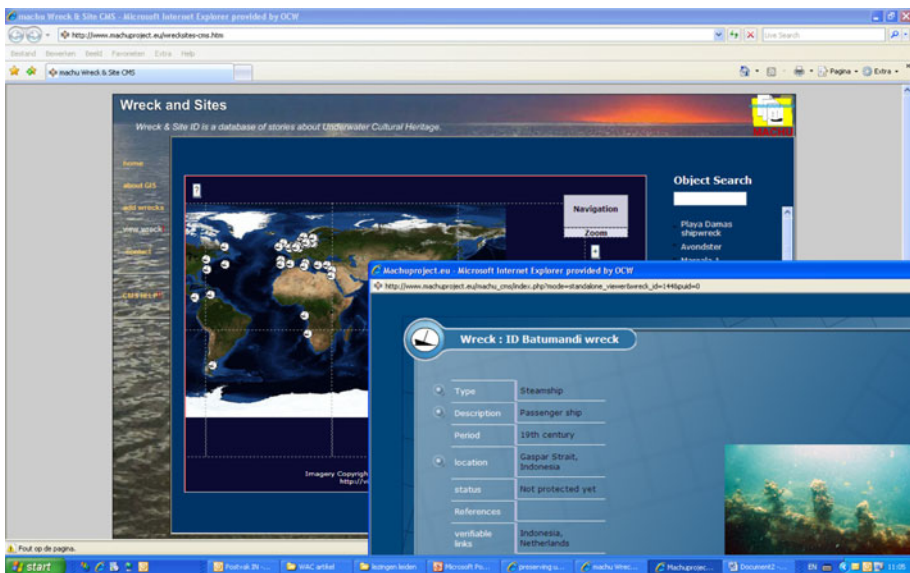


Fig. 5 The MACHU Content Management System with Wreck ID. Courtesy MACHU Project

information added to the system is checked. The application is web based so in essence for international use. The wreck ID contains partly uniform specific information: e.g., length, type, name and period. But much more is possible: additional text can be attached about the history of the wreck (and the people who once sailed it), the wreckage and other (historical, archaeological, etc.) background. Other specific uniform subjects are the state and preservation of the wreck, the verifiable links of the site with other countries and references. It is also possible to add media such as pictures, maps, drawings and movies. In this way an ID can give a complete picture of an archaeological site underwater, making it more visible for a larger public. Jointly, all of the sites within the wreck ID show the richness and variety of the underwater cultural heritage from both the scientific and public perspectives (Fig. 5).

The MACHU CMS is already active globally. Stories of underwater cultural heritage sites are shared through the CMS amongst those who feel connected to that past and others who just want to enjoy and learn about it.

Conclusion

Europe and Asia have a long-standing shared history demonstrated by an outstanding inventory of tangible and intangible heritage. An important part of the tangible heritage is the underwater cultural heritage, which plays an important part in Dutch international cooperation in common cultural heritage protection. Dutch cooperative involvement is based on the growing belief that an important part of Dutch maritime history can be found far beyond our own borders, within the larger realm of the global past. A new policy for international cooperation that has been developed for the period 2009–2012 aims at an intensive programme of coordinated cooperation between the Netherlands and eight other countries. Three of these countries are former Dutch colonies from Asia, including India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. For underwater cultural heritage, there will be a focus on local capacity building for underwater archaeologists and cultural heritage managers, trained through the UNESCO field school in Thailand. This cooperation, where the Netherlands provides trainers and helps to identify students, is beneficial to both the flag and coastal state. Students from priority countries are being trained to responsibly manage the underwater cultural heritage in their own country. Part of this underwater cultural heritage is mutually shared, and has connections with the Netherlands. The field school however, is a training facility for more than just these three countries: the first two foundation courses trained 35 people from 11 different Asian countries. The field school also has the possibility to grow towards a permanent facility as a Centre 2, something that could never be financed through the available individual budgets within the framework. The field school is also a place where networks are being made and new initiatives developed. One of these initiatives is the development of a GIS for the underwater cultural heritage in the Asian region, which combines local knowledge of sites with technical expertise from the Netherlands.

International cooperation between the Netherlands and its priority countries has increased over the years, leading to a larger understanding of differences in points of view, valuation and management related to the mutual heritage shared between countries, especially those with past colonial relationships. The fact that the Netherlands is intensifying its role in the protection of underwater cultural heritage overseas slowly increases the interest in the 2001 UNESCO Convention.

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