

Research on Naming Strategies of English and Chinese Shops

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The shop name is the soul of a shop, being the identification of its products or service. Shop name, as a source of sustainable competitive advantage, plays an important role in the formulation of business strategies. Through generalizing a comprehensive overview of shop-naming features and methods with abundant typical examples both in Chinese and English shop names, this study aims to examine the naming strategies of well-known shops from the perspectives of language, culture, and psychology, with the final purpose of generating the most desirable naming strategies and providing useful recommendations for both consumers and businessmen.

Keywords: shop name, brand name, shop brand, naming strategies

Introduction

With the development of the economy, people's shopping has been developing so fast and more and more shops, either domestic or overseas, spring up in a surprising large number. In order to attract more consumers and have more advantages in the severe competition, to have a sound shop name becomes of great importance for every single shop. A good shop name has a large potential for increasing the shop's ability to compete with its competitors as well as enhancing its profitability. Based on the theory of Rao and Ruekert, shop name, just like brand name, has been presented to convey information of a shop or a product and represented the images of them (Rao & Monroe, 1998). It means that a good shop name can either distinguish the shop or service from other competitors, or stimulate the consumption by boosting customers' buying desires.

On the other hand, shop name also has a big influence on consumers so that the customers can make their effective choices according to the shop name. It can affect consumers' evaluation's process and help them to perform decision-making. For consumers, a trusted shop commands strong preference and provides a high level of name awareness. Recognizing more satisfying shops by naming makes consumers' shopping more efficient, so that consumers can avoid unsatisfied shops while becoming loyal to those favorite shops and make easier decision-making by eliminating the need for an external search. So how to give a proper and appealing name to a shop appears quite necessary in today's business, and is also the research focus of this paper.

Based on previous researches of naming strategies, the paper has generalized a comprehensive overview of shop-naming strategies with abundant typical examples both in Chinese and English shop names from the perspectives of language, culture, and psychology. The main purposes are appreciating and concluding the shop-naming strategies of famous shops, then generating the most favorable naming strategies and providing useful recommendations to shop owners who want to create a conspicuous shop name through critical evaluation of those favorable strategies used in general and in specific shops.

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Literature Review

With regard to the previous studies on shop naming strategies, first of all, the shop name should be related to the brand name to be examined, as the former belongs to the latter and the brand naming is more widely discussed. The shop name is one part of a brand that can be vocalized and it is a brand's most visible communication. Many scholars have investigated the problem on how to create a good and powerful brand name. Chan (1990) and Chan and Huang (1997; 2001) analyzed brand-naming strategies using top 100 valuable global brands from the perspective of linguistics. However, their articles just concluded what are the preferred naming strategies without any further discussion on the reasons. Turley and Moore (1995) divided brand-naming strategies into three aspects: descriptive strategy, allusive strategy, and imaginative strategy. Then they further investigated the value of Apple's brand name by analyzing brand identity of Apple only using allusive strategy, but without any research on the other two strategies. Charmasson (1988) studied two brand naming strategies: 1) selecting a name and establishing it in the consumers' mind through repetition, called as the "Juliet Principle"; 2) the "Joyce Principle" involving creating a name that conveys favorable phonetic symbolism, but without any further study on the deep meaning carried by each sound. Further, Dodds (1991), Krishnan (1996), and Klink (2000) used the taxonomy methods showing that phonetic symbolism can be used to make an attractive name. They claimed that semantic appositeness meaning fit of name with object and initial plosives such as b, d, g, k, p, t was largely used in the top 200 brand names in the world. But their research couldn't go further to investigate the reasons. Robertson (1989) suggested two dimensions on how to create a powerful and desirable brand name: 1) the inherent ability of the name must be easily encoded into and retrieved from memory; 2) to what degree the brand name improves the expected strategic orientation of the product or service. So a perfect brand name should be simple, novel, meaningful, and evocative benefits that the product or service brought. Murphy and Enis (1986) classified the naming strategies as follows: personal names like *Chanel*; place names like *Lancôme*; scientific names like *Panasonic*, which usually changes into generic names; good associative names like *Benefit*; artificial names like *Kodak* as well as descriptive names. Turley and Moore (1995) illustrated the naming strategies should be diverse, and a brand name could be vocal, verbal, or entail words, numbers, letters, etc.

Lots of scholars have worked on the guiding criteria in selecting a good brand name. However, the standards mentioned so far differ from person to person. In order to make up the lack of consistency in terms of the naming principles and capture the universality, Chan and Huang (1997) made a comparison of the four studies in three directions: marketing, legal, and linguistic. This study, due to its research focusing on the shop-naming strategy, selects a new angle in such elements as language, culture, and psychology, which should be considered a deep research in a wide and comprehensive range with comparison and large amounts of examples.

Research Methods

The majority of trademarks used in this thesis are selected from Fortune Global 500, and the others are selected from top shop brands according to National Bureau of Statistics of China. The descriptions of naming stories for each trademark are collected in a few ways such as browse in Wikipedia, the official website of those famous corporations and other web sources. The reasons why these examples or stories are chosen are that, firstly, they are the main shop brands well-known to the public and can represent most shop categories in

the world; secondly, most of these names are closely associated to people's daily life, so the research can win a storm of publicity to satisfy the aims of this study. In addition, the main instrument used in the research is the qualitative analysis which divides the naming strategies into three parts: language strategy, culture strategy, and psychology strategy. Each of these strategies contains several approaches such as rhetorical method, lexical method, associative method, empathizing method, and novelty. In addition, the contrastive analysis method is employed to compare the similarities and differences between Chinese shop names and English shop names.

Research Results and Discussion

Language Strategy in Naming Shops

As a language phenomenon and a symbolic system, shop name bears with its distinct features from other systems, and moreover, it performs an obvious pragmatic function as well. In fact, shop name is considered as a brief and short advertisement, and the core of the advertisement is a noun phrase, which intends to motivate the customers to purchase what the shops want to sell. Usually, the noun phrase is modified and has a figurative meaning and effect. A rhetorical noun phrase can highlight its pertinence and readability, adding to the concreteness and figurativeness of the shop name (Bernstein, 1974). For example, *The Barber's*, as an ordinary shop name, could specifically identify itself in concreteness, but lack in figurativeness. If it adopts a sort of rhetorical method and changes into a new one like *Golden Scissors*, it will really make a difference. The clever boss tends to use the lexical means to make the common names become uncommon in arousing people's imagination. Therefore, figurative language is characteristic of shop name, and it can be deduced that both lexical and rhetorical strategies have always been adopted to add some color to these advertisements for shops.

1. The rhetorical method in naming Chinese shops

As it is readily seen that the figurative vocabulary appears more frequently in Chinese shop names, it can be inferred that the rhetorical method is most commonly applied in naming Chinese shops, which would make the name attractive and vivid in expressing its uniqueness. There are a variety of examples in Chinese shop names as follows: in *Golden Scissors*, a tailor's store, the word "Golden", as an adjective, is to modify the noun "Scissors", and in such drugstores as in *Shen Nong Drug Store*, "Shen Nong" consists of an adjective plus a noun expressing something magical which specifically refers to a man with a magical power; in *Hui Chun Tang*, "Hui Chun", showing a nice picture that the spring coming back in the surface meaning, is herein used as a metaphor implying going back to the state of well-being for the patients; in *Le Ren Tang*, "Le Ren" consists of two adjectives indicating happiness and kindness; in *Jiu Sheng Tang*, "Jiu Sheng", an adjective plus a noun, means living a long life. In some spectacle shops like *Kang Ming Spectacles*, "Kang Ming" are two adjectives referring to being healthy and bright in eyesight; in *Jing Liang Spectacles*, "Jing Liang" is paralleled as bright as crystals; and in some shoe shops like *Shuang Xing Shoes*, "Shuang Xing" is equivalent to double stars; in *Yuan Da Shoes*, "Yuan Da" is a metaphor indicating to reach as far as possible by wearing their shoes, and in *Shou Wang Shoes*, "Shou Wang" is the king of animals, implying that their shoes are all made up of real and good leathers.

2. The lexical method in naming English shops

The case is the same with English shop names. For example, the copy industry is quite developed in America, and generally, *Copy Shop* or *Copy Man* is commonly used as a copy shop name. However, these names only indicate the differences between industries, but fail to list their advantageous characteristics, so they have relatively less power upon the consumers. For the shop names with adjectives as modifiers that

confine or describe the center words like nouns, if proper modifiers are applied, it will provide a vivid and strong exhibition to the typical nature of any shops. Some merchants would like to take full advantage of such a feature to name a copy shop like *Quick Copy* or *Clean Copy* to skillfully propagate the service that they could offer so that the customers' requirement for speed or quality can be well satisfied.

It is said that some adjectives in English advertisements appear quite frequently, among which the commonest are such adjectives as "new, good/better/best, fine, big, great, free, fresh, special, sure, clean safe" (Li, 1988). They serve to describe any aspect of the products, like the size, shape, look, brilliance, color, or the inner quality. Because such adjectives are capable of showing the best inner and outer qualities of products and they are the most appealing to the consumers, they are widely used in advertisements or slogans.

The adjectives or the modifiers in English shop names are similar to those in advertisements in that the words used by the merchants aim to attract the consumers or to cater to their psychological needs, thus lots of effective and attractive noun phrases are created. The examples are such shop names as *Good Year*, *Good Will*, *Pretty Good Café*, *Best Buy*, *Big Lots*, *Hot Lips*, *Payless Drugs*, etc. Sometimes some compounds composed by adjectives plus nouns are used, like *Supervalu*, *Safeway*, *Thrift Way* and so on.

In the shop names mentioned above, the lexical method of creating impelling noun phrases with adjectives as modifiers, and such rhetorical method as metaphor or hyperbole are both used to specify the specialties of different industries and features of products, so that the consumers' imagination is stimulated in various aspects like safety, economy, practicality, originality, and magnificence implied by the shop names. As a result, the gap between consumers and the merchants is well bridged.

Cultural Strategy in Naming Shops

In the colorful contemporary world, the public's needs for culture could be generalized in two aspects: to keep the tradition and to pursue the modern fashion. Such a cultural tendency is also well reflected in the shop name. The definition of a name or a brand is not only a special symbolic system for identification, but also a tool to build a cultural atmosphere by businessmen to arouse the attention of consumers, stimulating their desire of purchase, and finally driving them to consume.

China is an old civilized nation deep-rooted in the influence of the traditional culture, and Chinese people still prefer to imitate the style of their ancestors. To show their great talent and learning, people prefer to refine their words in pursuit of grace. Therefore, graceful words or finely crafted vocabulary with an air of great antiquity in shop names could well cater for people's psychological needs.

In terms of structure, such Chinese shop names are also noun phrases consisting of a modifier and a center word it modifies, and most of them originate from the ancient poems or allusions, with such the core words as "Zhai, Ge, Xuan, Tang, Lou, Ting, Yuan" and so on (Liu, 2000). For example, in *Wen Bao Zhai*, a stationary store, "Wen Bao" is the short form for "Wen Fang Si Bao" which refers to the scholar's four jewels or the four precious articles of the writing table, such as writing brush, ink stick, ink slab, and paper. In the shop name *Gu Yuan Lou*, the phrase "Gu Yuan", quoted from a poet written by Du Fu, a famous ancient poet, means a man's native place or former residence. In a hotel name *Shun Geng Shan Zhuang*, "Shun Geng" is originated from the legend of the plowing by Shun, one of the Chinese ancient empires. And *Grand View Garden*, a shopping mall, comes from one of four Chinese masterpieces *A Dream of Red Mansion*. In a restaurant name *Ren He Tang*, "Ren He" comes from Mencius' verse, showing a harmonious state of people living together, in which "Ren" means people and "He" means being harmonious, and in many other restaurants' names like in *Shun He Yuan*,

“Shun He” consists of two adjectives indicating being lucky and peaceful; in *Ming Yue Xuan*, “Ming Yue” is a bright moon; in *Chun Hao Tan*, “Chun Hao” is a noun plus an adjective meaning the spring being beautiful. All the names mentioned above have their own originations.

Due to cultural differences, the Chinese peculiar lexicon usually fails to find its equivalent in western culture, and vice versa. Such a phenomenon is regarded as “lexical shortage in culture” (Jia, 1997). For example, people seem not capable of offering exact English equivalents for the Chinese words “Zhai, Ge, Xuan, Tang, Lou, Ting, Yuan”, while just using the words “shop”, “store”, “restaurant”, or “hotel” to name a shop, and usually such words are often omitted, like in *Smith’s*, *Barber’s*, *MacDonald’s*, *Macy’s*, *Ethan Allen*, *The Pierre*, etc.

What should be pointed out is that some words that reflect British feudal hierarchical concept have left their trace in today’s English shop names, like the words “king, queen, prince, noble, knight, loyal, palace, a freeman” and so on. Shop names constituted by such words are *King’s Garden*, *Victoria’s Secret*, *Burger King*, *Dairy Queen*, *Maui Prince*, *Royal Manor*, *Nobleman’s Food*, *Knight’s Inn*, *Church’s Fried Chicken*, *Hickey Freeman*, etc.

However, some western countries, especially America, have relatively vague hierarchical concept, mainly due to its short history, or not so deeply influenced by its traditional culture as China or Britain, their shop names have no obvious trace in history and culture. The shop names listed above only intend to show how sumptuous the shops are or what a good service they can provide, although a few of them carry a stint of hyperbole with *Burger King* and *Dairy Queen* as typical examples. In any case, as symbols for the traditional concept and a fine brand, these shop names are of exceptional charm in metropolis pervasive with modern fashions.

Psychological Strategy for Seeking Originality

Various as English and Chinese shop names are or how they differ in cultural heritage, they all hold one goal—to grasp the consumers’ attention. From the psychological and linguistic perspective, original or foregrounded things will most easily catch people’s eye, stimulate their curiosity, and then come the behavior to meet the curiosity (Hawkes, 1997). This kind of seeking originality or novelty strategy can be concluded as a psychological one.

1. Originality in pronunciation and vocabulary

Usually, original things will cause psychological reaction by stimulating sensory organs (especially the sight and the hearing). Take the Chinese shop name *Hao Lai Wu* for an example: its Chinese pronunciation could bring people to associate it with the American film and industry center, Hollywood. Similar examples are *Si Wei Te* (a cake shop), *Dao Kou* (a stationary store), and *Bu Ke Shu Wu* (a book store) whose pronunciations are similar to their English pronunciations with “sweet”, “document” with “docu.” as its shortened form and “book”. Besides, such shop names as *Lao Yu Tou* (a restaurant, with its English translation as old fish head), *Gou Bu Li* (a stuffed bun shop, implying dogs taking no interest), *Guang Gun Ji* (a chicken shop, which can be translated as a bachelor chicken), *Yu Ren Shu Wu* (the Fool’s book store), and *Hu Tu Cha Guan* (a tea house, with “Hu Tu” meaning confusion) create novelty and originality by those vivid and fantastic words.

English shop names can display no less color of novelty than Chinese ones. The fish in *Mr. Fish*, a sea food store, acts as a pun with two possible meanings: one being a “surname”; the other representing an animal’s name. *Mr. Submarine*, a hot-dog shop, stimulates abundant associations by the idea that a submarine has a

similar shape with a hot dog. *The Gap*, a youth's clothing store, refers to the generation gap implying that the clothing style suits only the young. Similar instances are *Gepettois* (a pan cake shop, as the name is the puppet maker in the story of Pinocchio), *Creature's Family* (a pets' clinic), *From Head to Toes* (a beauty shop), *Hit or Miss* (a lady's clothing store, with its original meaning of adventure, but here reminding people of never missing a good opportunity).

Some English shop names demonstrate the feature of phonetic similarities as well, like *Bi-lo* (a grocery with the association of "buy low"), *Toys' R Us* aiming to let people know "Toys are (for) us" with the word "us" functioning in bring the businessmen and consumers closer, and "for" in "Food-4-less" being similarly pronounced with "four", so that it could be understood as food-4-less by which people can judge how cheap the food can be allowed to be (Jia, 1993).

2. Originality in numbers

What is worthy to be mentioned is that in shop names, numbers serve a particular function. Some numbers carry with them a special cultural color in a given cultural atmosphere. For Chinese people, eight (8) and six (6) symbolize luck and wealth, while for the westerners, they prefer odd numbers like one (1) or three (3) except thirteen (13). The westerners prefer to present gifts in odd numbers, like one box of candies, three apples, etc. (Huang & Ma, 2000). In westerners' eye, the number seven (7) is a lucky one, because one usually wins the game if the number seven comes to him or her. While five thousand years of Chinese culture has nourished many historical allusions and vivid metaphors, the Chinese shop names with numbers are characterized as being simple in structure and explicit in meaning. In particular, such names are original and easy to be memorized, thus they tend to catch people's attention easily. For example, in *Yi Pin Xiang Cai Guan*, a restaurant, "Yi" stands for number one and "Yi Pin Xiang" means being delicious at the first taste. In *Si Xi Tang*, "Si" stands for number four and "Si Xi" means four kinds of happiness. In *Wu Huan Bin Guan*, a hotel, "Wu" equals number five and "Wu Huan" means five rings with a further implication of union. In *Jin Liu Fu Jiu Lou*, a restaurant, "Liu" stands for number six and "Jin Liu Fu" means full of golden happiness. In *Wan Fu Supermarket*, "Wan" is equivalent to ten thousand and "Wan Fu" means having as much happiness as possible.

In foreign countries, shop names with numbers are not as common as in China, but such shops are closely related with people's clothing, food, shelter, and transportation. Therefore, they are exceptionally appealing. In terms of structure, English shop names with numbers are divided into two categories: one completely composed of numbers and the other consisting of numbers and non-numbers. The former is such shop names as *21* (a fancy restaurant in New York), *99* (a grocery in which each commodity is no more than one dollar), *7-11* (a convenient shop), *5-7-9* (a clothing shop, with 5-7-9 symbolizing the sizes in variety). The latter is represented by such shops as *33 Flavors* (an ice cream store), *Big 5* (a sports shop), *Lumber 88* (a building material shop), *123 DVD*, *Four Seasons* (a restaurant), and *Super 8 Motel* (a hotel with only \$8 per day).

Psychological Strategy for Returning to Nature

The process of industrialization and urbanization offers a brand-new life mode for people. However, while enjoying the fruit of modern civilization, people are also suffering pressure from all aspects of life: overgrowing population, crowded transportation, environmental pollution, fast pace of life and so on. They have to seek everywhere for somewhere relaxing and tranquil so as to recover mentally and physically. "Back to Nature" or "Naturalization" has been regarded as a spiritual pursuit and universal cultural fashion.

Businessmen know very well about the consumers' psychology of desiring to return to nature. Therefore,

they spare no effort to create a country-like atmosphere where people can meet various lovely animals and recover their original simplicity, which serves as an irresistible temptation to those who are bored with the bustle and hustle of the city life. As a commercial need, “shop name” is apt to take the theme of nostalgia and intimate the relationship with animals or plants, aiming to appeal to customers and stimulate consumption.

1. Highlighting local features and pastoral life

Several Chinese shop names carry their distinct local features, such as *Xi Bei Jiao Zi Cheng* (a dumpling restaurant in Northwest), *Yi Meng Xiao Chi* (a snack shop in Yi Meng district), *Shan Xian Yang Rou Tang* (a mutton soup shop in Shan County), *Tai Wan Chan Zui Ya* (a kind of Tai Wan’s famous gluttonous duck), *De Zhou Pa Ji* (a chicken shop in De Zhou city), and *Wei Shan Hu Yu Guan* (a fish restaurant, with the district “Wei Shan Hu” being abundant with fish).

Similarly, English shop names are also trying to work on the theme of embracing nature. The instances as follows will clearly illustrate that Chinese and Western cultures are alike in this respect: *Kentucky Fried Chicken*, *Monroe Hardware*, *Carolina Waterbeds*, *Home Depot*, *Taco Bell*, *Bob’s Big Boy*, *Red Roof Inn*, *Broadway Furniture*, *Log Cabin Inn*, *Old Country Buffet*, *Pizza Hut*, *Cliff House*, *Somerfield*, *Sand Lane Hotel*, *Bun and Burger Chain*, *Old Spaghetti*, *Country Kitchen*, *Bloomingdale’s*, *Ming Village*, *Time for You* and so on.

2. Empathizing to plants

The names of plants, especially those of flowers, grass, and trees representing beauties and health are often taken as shop names, and it’s quite simple to justify this phenomenon. Some plants in Chinese culture are symbols of beauty that everybody admires. For example, in *Orchid Tang*, “orchid” stands for nobility; in *Red Peony Mall*, “Peony” refers to sumptuousness; in *Red Bean Clothing*, “Red Bean” leaves us with a miss feeling; in *Pine Hotel*, “Pine” symbolizes a strong will; in *Rose Singing Hall*, “Rose” stands for love (He, 2002).

The plants with special symbolic meanings can also be found in English shop names, like *Rose Garden* (a restaurant, with rose for love), *Lily Hotel* (lily for purity), *Daffodil* (a lady’s clothing shop, daffodil symbolizing spring and happiness in England) (Huang & Ma, 2000).

3. Encouraging consumers’ associations with animals’ names

According to Chinese expression habits, the animal names in Chinese shop names are often modified by another word, mostly an adjective, to constitute a disyllabic one, such as *Golden Horse Hotel*, *Spring Swallow Restaurant*, *Silver Elephant Clothing*, and *Soaring Eagle Hardware Store*. In addition, some shop names are only animal names without any modifiers, like *Lark Acoustics Store*, *Five Wolves Clothing Store*, *Woodpecker Clothing Store*, *Crocodile Clothing Store*, etc. There are some shops named with the legendary “dragon” and “phoenix” to show nobility, like *Golden Phoenix Clothing Store*, *Dragon and Phoenix Wedding Gift Shop* and so on.

Westerners take a fancy to animals, so shops with animals’ names just cater to such an animal-loving mind. Animals as small busy bees, majestic and brave King Lion, arrogant and holy eagle, loyal dogs, and powerful bears are all people’s favorites. For example, as for these shops like *Bee-Rite* (a convenient store), *Lion’s Share* (a restaurant), *Bear’s Larir Food Fair* (a food store), *Army Eagle* (a material store), *Man’s Best Friend* (a pets’ shop), *Bird Hut* (a pets’ shop), *Happy Bear’s Kitchen Center*, *Red Lobster* (a sea food store), *Red Lion Inn*, the animals’ names in these shop names will surely leave a deep impression on customers and bring benefits for businessmen.

What deserves to be mentioned here is that due to cultural differences, what is auspicious and honorable in

oriental people's eye may be evil and brutal to the westerners, like the animals "bats" and "dragons". Chinese people prefer to name their shops with these two animals, while westerners rarely do it. In China, "dogs" are, more than often, related with what is degrading or humble, such as the proverbs "look like a dog threatening people on the strength of its master's power", "no ivory issues from the mouth of a dog", while westerners regard dogs as their faithful friends so that the proverb "man's best friends" came into being. In the eastern and western cultures, the different associations or imaginations caused by respective culture reflect the diversities in personality or features existed in different cultures, and such diversities will directly affect people's ideas about how to name their shops (Deng & Liu, 1994).

Conclusions

In today's business world, to give a shop a better name plays a crucial role in the success of a certain product or service. For businessmen, a good shop name can even cut down millions of dollars for a shop since it can be easily recognized and remembered by consumers, describe the shop's advantages, and evoke consumers with good will. For customers, an impressive shop name can assist them to make preliminary judgements about shops, and make their shopping time-saving and more efficient. Therefore, the naming strategies for a shop appear more and more significant both for consumers and businessmen.

In exploring the strategies for naming shops, the three elements—language, culture, and psychology—are considered in the paper and they are the most important elements leading to a successful decision-making on name choices. Among them, culture is the most nucleuses and basic one because it is deep-rooted in people's daily life, bearing the language and deciding people's behavior and psychology. In examining and analyzing Chinese and English shop names, both similarities and differences are incarnated by comparisons and conclusions from the perspective of the above three elements, among which the cultural difference is mostly mentioned and regarded, and it influences the other two factors.

As discussed above, there is a superb collection of shop names so that they themselves constitute an amazing world. Short as the shop names are, they are capable of exhibiting the simplicity of language and displaying the essence of language. They are the crystallization of the businessmen's wisdom and the fruits of the old civilization and the modern fashion. As an applied language, shop name not only means the mark for business success, but also reflects people's ideal and changeable psychology as well as the colorful connotations of the specific culture. It is considered as the cultural language phenomenon, reflecting different social psychology and regional cultures from various aspects. Therefore, the research on shop names is a multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural study, and such a research is getting more and more important in today's world with rapid economic development and strengthening cultural exchange.

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