An Analysis of the Jocosity of Female Images in the Online Collective Revelry in China

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Abstract: *In the online collective revelry, female images are actively or passively used in online spoofing, human flesh search and online posting for amusement or ridicule. In the online spoofing, female images show the characteristics of "clown", which not only satisfies the demands of netizens, but also breeds irrational vulgar contents. In the human flesh search, female images are associated with the powerlessness and helplessness of "the weak", which has also greatly affected their real lives. In the online posting, the females present the image of a carefree and joyful "freeman" due to the spread of various online posts. The jocosity of female images on the Internet often violates morality and ethics; at the same time, it will diminish the effect of sacred spiritual enlightenment, cause irrational destruction, and break down the boundaries between private and public spaces.*

Key words: *Jocosity; Collective revelry; Female images*

Because of the advocation of freedom and preference for marginal topics of the Internet, the females are placed in the online collective revelry (Yuan, 2003), which is prominently reflected in the revelry of words. In other words, female images are actively or passively used in online spoofing, human flesh search and online posting for amusement or ridicule, and these forms of collective revelry under the doctrine of "revel to death" often also lead to irrational norms and cyber violence. Such jocose revelry serves as an absurd distorting mirror that twists and enlarges farcicality, ugliness and deformity to attract netizens' eyes, while the females often play the role of stimulating the joy of jocosity in it.

The Image of "Clown": The Farcicality and Subversion of Online Spoofing

The clown is the most common character in carnivals, but people are divided in its cultural interpretations. As the focus of carnivals, the clown, like the "fraud" or the "fool", the "happy king" in the square and the disseminator of the truth of carnival. Its appearance makes the carnival factors concrete and the participants of carnival activities closely gathered in the carnival square. Everywhere it goes, there is a sea of joy. In the spirit of jocosity in folk culture, the clown takes farcicality as its survival basis, which brings the greatest convenience to escape the responsibility of life or tell the truth without taking the responsibility.

"Online spoofing" is a form of online revelry which can be traced back to Hu Ge's wanton deconstruction of Chen Kaige's film "The Promise" in 2006. Hu Ge released his spoof video "A Murder Caused by a Steamed Bun" on the Internet, and it was browsed and downloaded by countless netizens. Since then, Internet

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spoofing, as a type of cyber culture, has prevailed on the Internet in China. Through funny, inexplicable nonsense parody and irony, online spoofing subverts and reconstructs the original compositions for the purpose of drawing people's attention by ridiculing the insulting. It mainly appears by the means of text, pictures and videos. The females that are presented in the image of "clown" in spoofing revelry as the targets or the initiators have the characteristics of comical ridiculousness and seriousness-negating subversion.

Online spoofing is a double-edged sword, which can not only convey the appeals of netizens, but also breed irrational vulgar contents. Therefore, the female image as the "clown" has double meanings. One of its typical examples is the wave of netizens' imitation of Zhao Lihua's poems that swept Tianya, Netease and other websites within a short period of time in 2006. The overnight popularity on the Internet was not her subjective will, and she suddenly became a household name overnight even without knowing it. Deeply aggrieved and stressed, Zhao had never expected her "passive fame". She was busy in clarification and harassed by comments. It was exactly the widely-criticized online proofing that brought Zhao to the forefront of public opinions. In August 2006, someone established a website under the name of Zhao Lihua, in which a set of her impromptu poems written before 2002 was posted. Some of the poems were partly cut and shuffled, and others netizens also fabricated some pseudo-poems in the language as bland as everyday speech. The founder of this website carried out almost crazy reposts and incitements step by step, and as many as 28 main posts about Zhao were issued in 8 days and followed by countless relevant replies. Some websites even provided so-called poetry-writing softwares that could imitate Zhao's poems, and the number of various poems created by these softwares increased to hundreds of thousands just in a few days. That immediately spawned a host of posts by netizens who expressed their mockery of Zhao's poems.Later, someone even created "Pear Flower School" which in Chinese is homophonic of "Zhao Lihua", and titled Zhao as its "Leader". Zhao was also jokingly called "Sister Furong of Poetry" on the Internet, and there appeared a spectacle that almost everyone on the Internet was writing poems in "Pear Flower Style". Before long, criticism, mockery, imitating and spoofing surged, involving almost all emerging and traditional media with about 150,000 netizens writing poems to mock Zhao, and it triggered a battle of words between the "pro-Zhao group" and the "anti-Zhao group" in the literary world. That was how the "Incident of Zhao Lihua's Poetry" developed. Poetry of Pear Flower Style made Zhao a closely-watched female poet. In this regard, she said angrily in an interview that most of the "Pear Flowers" (so-called Zhao's poems posted by netizens) on the Internet were not written by herself. This was indeed the case. Netizens spoofed Zhao's poems, and extracted and distorted them arbitrarily, infuriating the author as well as the public; the female poet herself who had already faded out of the poetry world was also besieged by public opinions.

In the same year of 2006, the "Trio of Folk Song" was also paid much attention on the Internet. It was a folk singing group composed of three farmers, one man and two women from Jinning County of Yunnan Province. Some people playfully "established" the "Folk Song School" on the Internet, in which the man was dubbed as the "hierarch", the two women "saints", and netizens its "members". The album of antiphonal folk songs spread widely only in the countryside at the beginning, but soon "surrounded" the city from the countryside and became popular all over the country. The " Trio of Folk Song" sang in the rhythm of the Yunnan Lantern Opera. It claimed to be carrying forward the traditional culture of our nation with the slogan that "what belongs to the countryside is rough; what belongs to the nation is international." However, its videos were just recorded by general equipment without moving the camera lens, and the background was basically fixed on the local area. Except for a few subtitles, there was almost no post-processing, so the overall video production was extremely rough. The singing was usually performed by two people, one man and one

women, or three people, one man and two women. When it involved three people, one women would serve as a dancer. Experts from the Song and Dance Theatre of Yunnan Province, after listening to the audio of the "Drama Version of Folk Songs", said that these songs were adapted from those of the Yi people but "were tampered with too much". Singing in the brisk rhythm of Yunnan Lantern Opera, they amused the viewers by exaggerated actions, varied facial expressions, and vulgar and obscene words. Many netizens were addicted to their songs and talked about them even to the neglect of sleep. Later on, topics related to Folk Song School became popular in major online social platforms. Some people said these songs were "the most vulgar rubbish", while others said they should be carried forward as they had inherited precious folk art. However, experts all agreed that the video production of Folk Song School was too rough, and its so-called folk songs were rude and erotic. Fortunately, Folk Song School disappeared soon after its transient popularity.

The Image of "the Weak": The Centralization and Alienation of Human Flesh Search

Since Google proposed the concept of "human flesh search" on the April Fool's Day of 2008, this search engine, which is different from traditional machine search, has prevailed on the Internet and aroused the interest of netizens. Human flesh search is applied on exploiting information of many female images who are involved in online disputes and irritate some netizens. Therefore, with the goal of upholding justice and by relying on moral judgement as a weapon, netizens completely expose the identity, address, phone number, photos, chat account number, work unit and other relative information of these females to the virtual world of the Internet for others to criticize and comment on them. In this process, human flesh search is not only used for collecting information, but also attracts many people’s eyes and objectively increases website visitor volume. As a result, some websites provide incentives to encourage conducting human flesh search, which, to some extent, aggravates "netizen aggregation", "group polarization" and the dual characteristic of human flesh search that is "half angel, half devil". American scholar Cass Sunstein explains "group polarization" in his book Republic.com that group members have different opinions at the beginning; after discussion, they will continue to move in different directions until extreme views are formed. On the Internet, like-minded netizens will gather together. Their cognitions and opinions will also affect each other and become more extreme, which is likely to lead to some irrational behaviors. In the name of morality and justice, some netizens will launch public opinion attacks on those targeted with extreme comments, inflicting unbearable moral condemnation and deterrence of cyber violence on them. Human flesh search can damage the victims’ rights and interests, such as privacy and reputation, and it can also distort the Internet collective behaviors, of which the original intentions are mutual assistance and knowledge sharing, into cyber violence for netizens to entertain themselves and express their emotions in extreme ways, leading to a series of revelry cases. Due to this, some of the female images on the Internet become celebrities in a passive way. Under the aggressive offensives of human flesh search, they are powerless and helpless, and their real lives are also greatly affected.

In 2008, netizens exposed the personal information of "Sister in Red" and "Xidan Girl" by human flesh search, and in 2010, that of "Mother Du". Thus, the entertainment inclination of human flesh search is most obvious. For example, the "Xidan Girl", Ren Yueli, is now a household name. When her videos of singing and playing the guitar in the Xidan underground passages were released on the Internet in 2008, countless people were moved and eager to know who she was. The girl said that the overnight fame made her uncomfortable,

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so she changed her phone number and no longer sang in Xidan. After that, people began to discussed her real identity and tried to find her by human flesh search.

Clear traces of human flesh search and netizens' revelry craze also appeared in the "Guo Meimei Incident". In June 2011, after Guo Meimei showed off her wealth on Sina Weibo under the name "Guo Meimei Baby", folk "detectives" and "excavators", though not professional, hurried to search and disclose her information. Then various speculations led to a torrent of live human flesh searches on "who is Guo Meimei" on Sina Weibo and Tianya BBS. Most of the relevant breaking news was disclosed by enthusiastic unknown netizens, who tirelessly pushed the event forward. A middle-aged man in Wushan County of Chongqing Province, who was "online all day long" because of his paraplegia caused by a car accident, even changed his Weibo account that originally aimed to promote social progress into "a special platform of disclosures about Guo Meimei". He made no secret of his excitement after digging for "valuable" clues and aspired to be an "influential" source. Following his suit, other netizens also exposed Guo's personal information such as address, work unit and whereabouts, and some of them even brought human flesh search into reality by following Guo in real time. In 2009, Obama Girl became popular overnight, incurring waves of condemnation on the Internet and human flesh search from Mop.com. With all efforts, the true identity of Obama Girl was finally revealed. The girl was forced to show up to tell the truth and consequence of the incident: her seat was specially arranged; she wanted to make a name for herself by taking off her coat when Obama was delivering the speech, but it was all in vain. She also claimed that her quiet life had been disrupted and almost collapsed, and she hoped that all could return to normal. If life could be replayed, she said she "would rather die than be involved into the entertainment industry". Human flesh search played an essential role in this incident, greatly satisfying people's desire to explore the truth and also providing them an opportunity for revelry.

Besides its entertainment inclination, human flesh search also showed its clear characteristics of collective condemnation and violent assault in the "Cat-abuse Girl Incident" and the "Tongxu Scandal". In the "Tongxu scandal", everyone became a judge, and human flesh search was used for online condemnation. Netizens were enjoying the excitement of personal abuse. On the one hand, they expressed sympathy for the poster; on the other hand, they cursed and abused the infidel husband with the most vicious language — "Afraid, aren't you? Tremble, you dirty cheater! You will die a terrible death." The protagonist of the scandal "Tongxu" is universally criticized, and posts condemning his behavior could be seen on various social platforms. The so-called moral indignation of condemning adulterers became the mainstream of Internet public opinion, and someone even claimed that he would volunteer to be a modern "Wu Song" and kill "Tongxu". As there were enough clues and keywords in the original post, netizens soon find out the true identity of "Tongxu" by human flash search, bringing about great trouble to him and his family. However, subsequent reports and Internet rumors then transformed it into a "Rashomon" scandal. Whether the incident was true, what was the purpose of the poster, whether the development of the incident was the same as what was described by the poster,etc., all lacked precise evidence. For example, it was pointed out that another important person of this incident — the wife of the poster — was a model in Taiwan. Afterwards she was invited to "Kangxi Comes", an entertainment program, as a guest and took a set of photos for a fashion magazine. What's more, she insisted that she did nothing wrong. The "Tongxu Incident" seemed to be an "extramarital affair" caused by online games, but what was more concerned about was the cyber violence that extended to real life.

The Image of "Freeman": The Carefreeness and Joy of Internet Posting

The Internet has the advantages of hypertext, which is rich in content and has a unique incentive mechanism. That makes various message boards and bulletin boards available throughout the Internet to "arouse" and "call up" "the desire for participance" and "re-creation potential" of all users in posting. Posting is a way of expressing views in the cyberspace, and netizens are involved in it by commenting on what has happened. They can get the interest of "I speak therefor I am" from their evaluation, praise and complaint of certain events or people and enjoy the revelry in dialogues. The main content of online posts includes jokes, ridicules, and even spoofs and insults that cross the bottom line of morality. Some terms that are regarded as rude and vulgar by mainstream culture are also frequently seen. In short, the content of posts varies from person to person, and the posters express their happiness, dissatisfaction, opinions and suggestions at will. Various social buzzwords and cyber neologisms are highly gathered in the posts, and negative emotions are fully released. Among the female images on the Internet, some have become online celebrities relying on the spread of various online posts.

The novels of Li Xunhuan, Ning Caishen, and other online writers in the Web 1.0 stage were serialized in the posts on online social platforms at the beginning. Thanks to the follow-up comments and reposts, both writers and their works have gained more popularity. For instance, Ning Caishen, began to write in various bulletin boards after entering the Internet industry in 1997, and has gradually became a well-known online writer. Another example is Xing Yusen. The Ph.D student of Information Engineering from Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (BUPT), kept active on the BBS of BUPT in the 1990s. In 1997, he published his first novel "Beauties on the Internet" through his platform, immediately attracting a large number of readers to follow up and repost. That helped to make a name for himself and publicize his other writings.

It can be said that the popularity of all online female images in this paper have something to do with intentional or unintentional posting disclosure and the follow-up comments of netizens. The follow-up comments can be seen as social evaluation, which makes what the females on the Internet say more valuable. Whether it is praise, condemnation or "nonsense", they are all closely watched and become the focus of public attention. Take Sister Fairy as an example. In August 2005, a post by Brother Lang about Sister Fairy on the TOM BBS attracted a great many followers and received a enthusiastic response, which was beyond Brother Lang’s expectation. After that, Brother Lang drove to the village where Sister Fairy lived for several times and took many pictures of her. Sister Fairy became widely known on the Internet as quickly as in just two months. Relevant posts got hundreds of thousands of hits, and the mysterious ancient village of Qiang people in which she lived also drew worldwide attention. When the netizen "Aweisu" posted the introduction of the "Trio of Folk Song" on Tianya BBS for the first time, he never expected that his post would be so influential and became a real hit on the platform. After that, the"Trio of Folk Song" also quickly became popular. The passive popularity of Poet Zhao Lihua and "Pear Flower Style" resulted from malicious posts by netizens, and countless replies brought her to the forefront of public opinions and created the spectacle that almost everyone on the Internet was writing poems in Pear Flower Style. In 2006, the self-proclaimed "Hot Girl of Chinese Classics" published a blog titled "A Senior Girl at National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts: My One-night Stand is Worth 100,000 RMB". Her language smacked of arrogance and sexual teasing, and was illustrated by sexy photos, which greatly shocked the public. For a time, the click rate of her blog soared with more than one hundred comments, and was reported by dozens of print media and online media

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across the country."Chinese classics" and "Hot Girl of Chinese Classics" fell into the whirlpool of public opinion overnight, overwhelmed by both applause and condemnation. However, the girl later explained in an interview that the previous post "A Senior Girl at National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts: My One-night Stand is Worth 100,000 RMB", which spread across the Internet and was written in the first person with her photos and personal information, was actually not written by herself, and the terribly misleading content smeared her reputation. For this reason, she sued the original poster and won the case, and relevant gossips finally dissipated. Nevertheless, discussions on topics such as overnight popularity on the Internet, narcissism and the revival of Chinese classics have never stopped.

Particular mention should be made of the anecdote of Sister Paperclip, a "barter fan" on the Internet. It began with and was also promoted by online posting as an "engine". On October 15, 2006, 23-year-old Sister Paperclip posted an article entitled "A Chinese Fairy Tale Will Be Created by a Girl Like Me in 100 Days" on Tianya BBS with the net name "Ai Qingqing", which described how a Canadian boy bartered a red paperclip for one-year residency in a double-storey villa. She said that she would follow his suit and continue the legend of Internet era by bartering a paperclip for residency in a villa in 100 days. The post created much of a stir on the Internet and received almost 70,000 hits within 24 hours; her Sina blog was also hit for over 5.6 million times in 100 days. In the meantime, follow-up posts continuously provided more willingness of participating in this barter deal to keep it going on. For a while, Sister Paperclip became so well-known on the Internet that she could even be recognized on a Beijing street. After 16 exchanges in 100 days, although she did not succeed in bartering for villa residency as expected, she managed to got a record contract worth 800,000 yuan. Barter fans involved also enjoyed themselves in this incredible deal.

In addition, Sister Furong, Ms. Lan, Sister Feng, Little Red Pepper, Ayawawa, Cat-abuse Girl, Zhang Xinyu, Sister Bus, February Girl, and Xiaoyueyue, etc., all entered the cyberspace by posting, became increasingly influential with a flood of follow-up posts of netizens, and and ended up as Internet celebrities. The posters expressed their opinions tirelessly, while the viewers enjoyed it a lot. In essence, all above was a mass revelry totally constructed by words.

Anomie Caused by Jocosity

The revelry from the jocosity of online female images smacks of the desire for and indulgence in present joy and fame, that is, to enjoy what is gained in this life. The so-called "this life" refers to the present existence in Buddhism, as opposed to previous existence and afterlife. Now the term has been widely used for the present moment. Elder people believe that one should not be confined to the present life, but look forward to the future and make a long-term plan; he needs to work hard and make continuous progress, making happiness unceasing along with his whole life like flowing spring water. Nevertheless, the view of "the gains in this life" is quite the opposite. It advocates to "enjoy the moment before it is too late", and believes that the long-term benefits are hard to be predicted or valued. So it proposes to seize the interests available at present. The pleasure, fame and gains in this life refer to the fact that some females on the Internet only pursue short-term interests and expect instant psychological satisfaction, popularity and increase in wealth. Although most of these do not violate the law, they are often against morality and ethics. At the same time, it will diminish the effect of sacred spiritual enlightenment, cause irrational destruction, and break down the boundaries between private and public spaces.

Diminishing the effect of sacred spiritual Enlightenment

When people "are lost in ecstasy with extreme excitement in deafening rock music, in gleaming disco lights, and at the concerts where everyone is emotionally out of control", people will succumb to the sensual pleasure that will lead to the loss of both space-time and self, and the breaking down of the constraints of rationality and social systems—"the extreme pleasure after the lost of control of the body, that is, the loss of self, is derived from excitement of escaping from self-control /social control." The temptation of uncontrollable pleasure, like the singing of Siren, will only make people "happy to death". As Henri Lefebvre said, the theme of daily life "is combined with the logic of commodities in great harmony", and life is experienced at the rhythm of capital. As a Marxist, Lefebvre regarded contemporary daily life as an exploitive, repressive and cruelly controlled "bureaucratic society where consumption is regulated". He again concluded the core position of daily life in critical Marxism—"commodities, markets and money grasp daily life with their irreplaceable logic; the expansion of capitalism stretches to the every nook and canny in daily life."

Causing irrational destruction

For the happiness brought by cultural goods purely for entertainment, there must be a unique tolerance limit which cannot be at the cost of anything. The indulgent revelry is an irrational state, which has always been deprecated by culture of ration for its vulgarity and barbarism and suppressed by its unstable power of overwhelming destruction over the existing order caused by deficiency motive. In the "Incident of Zhao Lihua's Poetry", some netizens wrote new poems by imitating those of Zhao in a way of ridicule, and transformed her colloquial works into comedic and even absurd symbols of great irony. They dubbed Zhao "Sister Furong of Poetry", established "Pear Flower School" and lauched poetry-writing softwares which created hundreds of thousands of "software poems" in several days, bringing about a spectacle that almost everyone on the Internet was writing poems in Pear Flower Style. Those parodies and distorted poems pushed Zhao, who had already faded out of the literary world, to the "judgment seat" again as an object of ridicule and jocosity. Some netizens questioned the meaning and connotations of her works, asserting that these so-called poems were just "nonsense of self-deception"; others jokingly called them "a waste of saliva". Han Han, a famous young writer in China, also satirized in his blog that the only skill which the poet mastered was to hit the "Enter" key.

In the "Tongxu Scandal" , the player of World of Warcraft whose game nickname was "Tongxu" was universally criticized for his love affair with a married woman. Netizens launched human flesh search and reveal all of his private information. Internet public opinions were almost on the same side of cursing him, and he was also intimidated by someone who said on the Internet that he was eager to kill him. The joy of everyone giving a kick to who had fallen into the ditch attracted more than 200,000 hits a day. The indignation of natizens even pushed a household trifle to foreign media. The indulgent revelry on the Internet also brought about the term "Internet mob".

Breaking down the boundaries between private and public spaces

Someone says that the Internet is an expanded private space. Using female images on the Internet to indulge in daily emotions and amusement has also broken down the boundaries between private and public spaces. Many private senses of daily life, together with the extremely self-centred interests, habits, words and deeds,

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are exposed to open and transparent public spaces. According to the Dramaturgical Theory of sociologist Goffman, the differences of people's performance in public and private spaces can be found in their different presentations in the "front stage" and "back stage". Goffman believes that people's performance of in the front stage is intentional designed with a high degree of self-control to maintain and reflect certain standards. People will strengthen the meaningful side and cover up what is likely to be suspected in their life in order to make their performance meet others' expectations; in the back stage, those hidden facts are revealed. Relaxed and carefree, people can use various devices in private without being checked for any offense against others, so they will show their true selves. However, those who reverse their performances in the front and back stages will make fools of themselves, and there is no shortage of such cases among female images on the Internet, some of which are even widely-criticized scandals. Hot Girl of Chinese Classics, Ms. Lan, Sister Feng and Ma Nuo expressed their arrogance with on secret; Hooligan Yan, Dancing Girl Mumu, Shoushou and Gan Lulu boldly showed their naked bodies; Muzimei and Zhuyingqingtong made their unmentionable sexual desire public; netizens released their desire for violence at will in the "Cat-abuse Girl Incident" and "Tongxu Scandal". The image of Xiaoyueyue in the story posted by the netizen Rong Rong on Tianya BBS was extremely shocking and disgusting because she confused the boundaries between public and private situations: she would undress in front of friends or seduce her boyfriend by naked body in front of others; she also showed her personal habits unabashedly, such as scrubbing her body with banana peels, eating banana peels, and spiting out the egg and pork congee in her mouth and then eating it repeatedly. It is thought that there was no behavior more astonishing than hers and that even Sister Feng would be no match for her. But after Rong Rong revealed these ugly behaviors to the public, Xiaoyueyue quickly attracted other netizens who even specially established a virtual organization to worship her together. In the cases mentioned above, the private life exposed to the public cyberspace is not only the basis of personal indulgence, but also an implicit reflection of "scandal economics". The more ridiculous these women seem to be, the more nasty their lives exposed to the public are, the more they are teased and watched, the more fame and fortune they will get. Among them, Sister Feng is the most typical example. Even Muzimei has admitted that the response of her diary collection "Love Letters" publicized on BlogChina.com was unexpected: "In fact, the environment at that time was completely different from now. At that time, BlogChina.com was just a small website on the periphery of attention, and only some bloggers wrote in this small circle. It is not expected that it should come to this at present. "

Everyone lives in the constant alternation between the public space (front stage) and the private space (back stage). In the public space, people need to abide by the common social norms, which are "criteria by which to judge their moral quality and their products". However, in the private space, people can freely present their true selves as well as their preferences and habits and do something secret. The revelry space oriented towards the female images on the Internet is a paradise of laughter, while laughter represents the abdication of solemnity. In laughter, netizens can shake off the burden of future, get rid of the past, and escape from the constraints of the existing state in irony, mockery and humiliation. Therefore, laughter is a polyphonic voice in the online carnival square, and the revelry of indulgence needs to be curbed urgently. Nevertheless, the criticism of the desire for revelry does not mean the exile or derogation of revelry itself. It's just that the centrifugal effect of core values produced by indulgence is an alien force, and such alienation of revelry will exert a harmful impact on the formation of values.

Bakhtin believes that the culture of revelry is a passionate consciousness of life, the core of the culture of bottom society, and a force that is create but also destructive. After all, the revelry of the female images on

the Internet is only a short-term clumsy game, a kind of marginal life, and a disturbing, alien and centrifugal force.

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