

Pemali Tradition in Indonesia Archipelago: People's Perception, Attitude and Obedience

M. Bahri Arifin¹, Awang Azman Awang Pawi², Burhanuddin Arafah³, Kaharuddin⁴

¹Faculty of Cultural Science Mulawarman University of Indonesia

mbahriarifin12@gmail.com

²Academy of Malay Studies, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

awangazman@um.edu.my

³Faculty of Cultural Science, Hasanuddin University of Indonesia

burhan-arafah@unhas.ac.id

⁴Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin, Makassar, Indonesia

andi.kaharuddin@uin-alauddin.ac.id

Corresponding Author: mbahriarifin12@gmail.com

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Abstract:

As a cultural heritage containing traditional teachings, *Pemali* has been since long time practiced by the local people of Indonesia in almost all parts of the archipelago. The traditional teachings are nowadays potential of conflicting with the current life style of people due to a number of factors. This study aims at providing data and information about perception, attitude, and obedience of Indonesian people toward the *pemali* by investigating four independent variables i.e. ethnic group, sex, age, and education of the samples. A total of 318 samples of Indonesian people residing in East Kalimantan Province participated in the study. The data of perception, attitude, and obedience collected by questionnaires form the samples specified in each of the four independent variables were then analyzed quantitatively by using analysis of variance (Anova) procedure, homogeneity test, and multiple comparison test. The statistic computations of the data analysis were done by applying SPSS computer program. The results of the analysis indicated that the majority of samples performed good perception as well as positive attitude toward *pemali*. In terms of obedience toward *pemali*, samples' obedience was categorized into 3 levels: very high, high, and moderate. The study concluded that amid the modern life style of the present era, the archipelago people keep upholding the local cultural values handed down from their ancestors as parts of their national identity.

Key words: pemali, perception, attitude, obedience, ethnicGroup

Introduction

In Indonesian context, the word 'local wisdom' is now on the lips of almost everybody. For many people, local wisdom is recognized as the knowledge acquired from a series of

interactions among a group of people in a certain region (ethnic group), which then verbally passed on from one generation to other generations (Hasjim, M., Arafah, B., Kaharuddin, Verlin, S., & Genisa, R. A. A. 2020). It appears not only as knowledge, but also as values of life which are applied as individuals' principles or standards of behavior in their social life (Arafah, B., & Kaharuddin, 2019, Arafah, K., Arafah, A. N. B., & Arafah, B. 2020). In the people's social life, it emerges to be a phrase with a special place in the discourse of various aspects of people life both in theoretical and practical perspectives, more particularly in the spirit as well as the need of reinventing and upholding the national identity of the country (Arifin, M.B., Awang A.A.P. 2020). The local wisdom, in this modern era, is striving to compete with various challenges emerging from both the phenomenon of the globalization and rapid development of technology (Arafah, B., Wahyuddin, Kaharuddin, A. 2020). Due to the development of technology, for example, almost all young people have smartphones and social media accounts (Andi, K., & Arafah, B. 2017, Kaharuddin, Ahmad, D, Mardiana, Rusni 2020). These technological devices greatly affect their habits and daily life's activities which potentially make them not recognize their local wisdom and reluctant to learn about it (Arafah, B. & Hasyim, M. 2019).

The local wisdom of Indonesian people is partly reflected and framed in the every-day life tradition practiced by people of the archipelago, the tradition inherited from ancestors and handed down over one generation to the other (Hasyim, M., Arafah, B., & Kuswarini, P. 2020). Members of every generation practice and maintain their tradition in accordance with the existing condition of their generation era. One of the traditions reflecting local wisdom of the archipelago people is the *Pemali* tradition, a tradition containing some prohibitions in several aspects of life to prevent people from various misfortune consequences when violating the specified prohibitions. The prohibition may relate to particular communal behaviors considered wrong-doings since they are perceived stand against culturally standard practices and hence will cause social-economy-health misfortunes either to individuals or the community or both.

Pemali is a set of prohibition originally formulated by reference to cultural values representing local wisdom and high-order-thinking capacity of the earlier generation functioning partly as the rule of conduct in the every-day activities of the community members. Hence, *Pemali* emerges to be a medium of caring and maintaining local wisdom of the archipelago people, the local wisdom which embodies parts of the national identity of

Indonesia. *Pemali* tradition is a manifestation of the high-rank intelligence as well as wisdom possessed by earlier generation in contemplating and appreciating the nature of life. The earlier generations have proved themselves capable of addressing every aspect of life properly and wisely amid the lack of access toward information sources and toward education and advancement in science and technology as well as the lack of communication and transportation infrastructures and facilities.

Local wisdom which is internalized within the *Pemali* has been the ingredients of the conventional code of conduct of the community members in undertaking their social life for the purpose of creating better and prosperous life which is, in their point of view, indicated by maturity of the three-dimensional relation of human life, they are relation among members of the community, relation to nature and environment, and relation to the God, the creator of life. The high-rank intelligence and wisdom stuffed in the *pemali* were taught and handed down from one generation to another through the continuous practice of the *pemali* in the daily life of the community. Thus, *pemali* has become one smart choice among a number of cultural decisions most effective in the human effort to bequeath and preserve the intelligence and wisdom of their ancestors. Indeed, *pemali* has existed to be a chosen mode of communication that is effective to promote successful teaching of almost the entire aspects of life such as moral values, religion belief, code of conduct, social cohesion, environmental orientation, etc.

The durability of a local *wisdom* amid various potential attacks due to changes of people life style in the rapid developing era is hypothesized to be dependent on a number of variables such as people perception and attitude toward cultural tradition practices, process of development of an area, advancement in science and technology, etc. Therefore, it is a challenging research to find out how those hypothesized variables may predict the maintenance of the local wisdom existing in the *pemali* tradition of the Indonesian archipelago people. The present study investigated perception, attitude and obedience of Indonesian people towards their *pemali* tradition by considering ethnic group, sex, age, and education level of the sampled people living in East Kalimantan Province. Perception and attitude were designed to be the dependent variables to which the variables ethnic group, sex, age, and education, are hypothesized to be predictors. Meanwhile, people obedience was designed descriptively to see the extent to which different groups of samples within the four variables under investigation may perform obedience towards *pemali* tradition.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The word *pemali* is an indigenous Indonesian lexicon existed in several vernaculars throughout the archipelago. In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, The standard Indonesian dictionary, (Badan, 2016), *pemali* is defined as *pantangan, larangan (berdasarkan adat dan kebiasaan)*. In *An Indonesian-English Dictionary* (Echols, 2003), the words *pantangan* and *larangan* are both translated into prohibition. Thus, *pemali* is a prohibition emerges due to particular custom and tradition. In the theoretical perspective, different publications on local wisdom contained in the traditions and rituals of Indonesia people have been conducted (Arafah, B., Thayyib, M., Kaharuddin, Sahib, M. 2020). *Pemali* as one kind of manifestations of local wisdom in Indonesia has been investigated by a number of experts all over the world and the term **taboo** is most commonly used by the experts—see for examples—Denis (1966), Freud (2002) to explain the phenomena referred to in Indonesia as the *pemali*.

Clark (1983) describes taboo as “a powerful restriction or prohibition that regulates contact between specific categories of individuals and things in particular circumstances. Taboo is backed by social sanctions or penalties. Some supernatural force is always invoked as authority of the sanction. Kamal (2009), put taboo as “a strong social prohibition or ban, relating to any area of human activity or social custom declared as sacred and forbidden. Breaking of taboo is usually considered objectionable by society. No taboo is known to be universal, but some occur in the majority of societies”.

In the Indonesian context, however, most people are more familiar with the word *pemali* rather than *tabu* (Indonesian equivalent of the English taboo) since the word *tabu* is of foreign language origin whereas *pemali* is of vernacular one. Furthermore, the two terms may bear a semantically different psychological nuance in terms of the pragmatic use of the terms due to the different degree of familiarity. In the pragmatic sense, most people would prefer uttering the word *pemali* which is perceived less formal as well as higher degree of intimacy rather than *tabu*. Taboo is originally related to the religion practices of primitive community in different parts of the world. Although it originates from religion practices, taboo is not indeed rooted in any of the today-religion faith. Taboos reflect a social understanding of its own order and that of the universe they caution against contacts that might violate approved social behavior (Clark, 1983, Purwaningsih, Y. R., Arafah, B., & Abbas, H. 2020).

The prohibition in *pemali* is explicitly stated in a cause-and-effect structure in which the statement of prohibition (cause) precedes the statement of consequence (effect). The prohibition

may cover any practices in all aspects of human life whereas the consequence is merely related to social, economy, culture, and health misfortunes. Both the prohibition and consequence are constructed neither based on any particular religion faith nor on national regulation of the country. There exists a nearly universal taboo in countries of different cultural contexts. Among the universal taboos are taboos against incest, taboos concerning foods that are not to be eaten, taboos against particular behaviors during menstruation, pregnancy, and birth delivery, taboos against uttering particular words in particular time/place settings, etc.

2. METHOD

This research used quantitative approach which was applied by collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (such as texts, videos, or audios) to figure out participants' opinions and concepts based on their experiences (Ismail, Sunubi, A. H., Halidin, A., & Amzah, Nanning., Kaharuddin. 2020). In this regard, this approach was used to investigate perception, attitudes, and obedience of the archipelago people toward *pemali* tradition given the people variables: ethnic group, age, education background, and sex. The four people variables: ethnic group, age, educational background, and sex were designed to be independent variables (X), whereas the former three variables: perception, attitude, and obedience were set to be the dependent variables (Y). Such design clearly indicates the position of the present study which is hypothesizing the determinative relation between the independent and the dependent variables under investigation.

The data to be collected were the scores of perception, attitude and obedience of sampled people towards *pemali* tradition. The scores were measured based on the indicators of each variable specified in the questionnaires to be filled in by the respondents. Population of the study was the archipelago people residing in East Kalimantan Province, one of the provinces in Indonesia whose population is recognized as a multi-ethnic people originating from different parts of the archipelago. A stratified-cluster-random sampling technique was applied to determine sample units. First of all, the area from which the sample units to take was determined, that is Samarinda, the capital city of East Kalimantan Province which is considered adequate in representing the characteristics of the territory in most aspects, including the aspect of ethnic diversity of its population. After that, twelve ethnic groups were determined to include in the sampling, they are (in alphabetical order): Bali, Banjar, Batak, Bugis, Dayak, Jawa, Kutai, Mandar, Paser, Sunda, Timor,

Toraja. From each of the 12 ethnic groups, twenty five or more sample units were randomly determined, those who were voluntarily ready to fill in the questionnaires provided by the researcher by considering the representativeness of the sample units in terms of the other three independent variables: age group, education level, and sex. A total of 318 sample units participated in the study but due to inaccuracy in data coding, 8 sample units were not well identified in their sex and another 4 in their age group. Data of the unidentified sample units were excluded in the analysis of the two variables respectively.

Table 1.
Distribution of Sample by Variable

Variables	Group	Sample	Total
Ethnic group		8	8
Sex	Male	53	100
	Female	47	
Age group	< 25	10	44
	25 – 40	13	
	40	21	
Education	Elementary	2	8
	Secondary	41	
	Higher	35	

In collecting data, survey technique was applied. The researcher distributed questionnaires to the respondents to be filled in at the time convenience to the respondents. Respondents may choose either one of two ways of completing and submitting the questionnaires. Some respondents filled in the questionnaires during the time of researcher's visit and submitted them right away to the researcher soon after, while the rest filled in the questionnaires after the researcher's visit and submitted them the next day or after a few days.

The collected data were further analyzed to find answers to the research questions. Data of people perception and attitude toward *pemali* were analyzed in inferential statistic procedure using Test of Homogeneity of Variance, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Multiple Comparison Test. Computational works on inferential statistic procedure were done by using SPSS computer program. Meanwhile, data of people obedience toward *pemali* were analyzed descriptively to find statistic proportion of the number of *pemali* being implemented out of

the total number of *pemali* recognized by the people.

Conclusions were inferentially taken based on whether or not there was a significant difference in the mean scores of data on perception and attitude between the different groups of sample within the independent variables: ethnic, age, education, and sex. With regard to people obedience, conclusions were based on the difference in percentage between number of *pemali* being implemented and number of *pemali* recognized by the samples in the four independent variables using the following criteria.

Table 2. Criteria of Obedience Level

Percentage	Obedience Score	Level of Obedience
100% - 100%		Very High
90% - 89%		High
70% - 69%		Moderate
50% - 50%		Low
0% - 25%		Very Low

3. RESULT AND FINDINGS

4.1 Perception of *Pemali*

Result of Analysis of Variance (Anova) on the data of people perception showed is presented in the following table.

Tabel 3. Perception toward *Pemali*

No	Variables	Perception	
		F	Sig
1	2	3	4
1	Ethnic	3.516	.000
2	Sex	4.686	.031
3	Age	2.246	.107
4	Education	1.833	.162

The Anova result indicated that people perception toward *pemali* was significantly different in two out of the four independent variables under investigation i.e. Ethnic and Sex, while in the other two variables, Age and Education was not. In other words, the result indicated that people perception toward *pemali* varied across different ethnic groups as well as between male and female samples. Meanwhile, samples of different age

group and different education level were homogenous in their perception toward *pemali*.

As far as ethnic group is concerned, the Analysis of variance did not determine which ethnic group was different from the others in their perception and therefore the data were then further analyzed by applying Multiple Comparison Test. The result of the test, as presented in table 4, indicated that of the twelve ethnic groups under investigation, four ethnic groups were significantly different one another, they were Banjar, Batak, Mandar, and Paser.

Banjar ethnic was different from both Batak and Mandar, whereas Paser was different from Batak. Compared to all the twelve ethnic groups, Banjar and Paser both proved to have the highest mean scores of perception (18.76 and 18.41 respectively), whilst Mandar and Batak the lowest (15.15 and 14.56 respectively). Since Banjar and Paser performed the highest mean scores while Mandar and Batak the lowest, it was plausible that Banjar was significantly different from both Mandar and Batak, so as with Paser and Batak. An interesting result of the test was that of Paser and Mandar. Although Paser belonged to the highest mean score on the one hand and Mandar belonged to the lowest on the other hand, the difference in mean scores of perception they both performed was statistically not significant. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the mean scores of both Paser and Mandar were very close to the mean scores of the other eight ethnic groups that belonged to the middle score category, and therefore neither Paser nor Mandar was statistically different from the other eight ethnic groups.

Table 4. Perception by Ethnic Group

Ethnic Group	Batak		Mandar	
	F	Sig	F	Sig.
1	2	3	4	5
Banjar	4.205	.000	3.611	.015
Paser	3.852	.007	3.258	.056

Based on the results of the multiple comparison test, and referring to the indicators of perception as measured during the data collection, it would be save to infer that the majority of the people of the archipelago regardless of their ethnic groups keep appreciating *pemali* and considered it as the expression of the local wisdom as well as high-rank intelligence of their ancestors. In fact, the higher the perception rate of people perception toward *pemali*, the better the effort given to promote

and maintain it.

With regard to Sex, the other variable that was also significant in the difference of perception, the analysis of variance indicated that male and female samples performed significantly different mean score of perception. Male samples performed higher mean score (17.47) of perception than female samples (16.54). The results implied that male samples had better appreciation and awareness toward the local wisdom and high-rank intelligence inherited by their ancestors.

The analysis on the data of the other two variables, Age and Education, showed no significant results, meaning that people of different age group and of different level of education background did not perform different perception toward *pemali*. With regard to age, the findings may eradicate any worries of many people that the *pemali* tradition will soon extinct since the young-aged people nowadays are no longer aware of it and even tend to avoid recognizing it.

With regard to education background, the findings clarified that the different level of education earned by the samples did not proof to have significant contribution to their perception toward *pemali*. In other words education level could not be considered as a predictor of people perception toward *pemali*.

4.2 Attitude about *Pemali*

Based on the result of analysis of variance procedure, it was found that of the four investigated independent variables, samples in three variables showed no significant difference in the mean score of attitude i.e. Sex, Age, and Education; whereas the other one variable, Ethnic, was significant. Such finding implied that people attitude toward *pemali* was not determined by sex, age, or education of the samples. In other words no significant different in attitude toward *pemali* between male and female, among different age groups as well as among different education levels.

Meanwhile, the other one variable, the ethnic group, was found significant, meaning that samples in different ethnic groups under investigation differed significantly one another in the mean sores of their attitude toward *pemali*. The result of Anova procedure on the data of samples' attitude is presented in table 5 below.

Tabel 5. Attitude about *Pemali*

No	Variables	Attitude	
		F	Sig
1	2	5	6

1	Ethnic	25.780	.000
2	Sex	.654	.419
3	Age	2.377	.095
4	Education	.677	.509

In order to determine which ethnic group differs from others, data of people attitude by ethnic group were further examined by applying Multiple Comparison Test, and the result is presented in the following table.

Table 6. Attitude by Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Group	Paser		Toraja	
	F	Sig	F	Sig.
Bali	9.532	.000	9.000	.000
Banjar	10.647	.000	10.115	.000
Batak	7.435	.000	6.904	.000
Bugis	8.502	.000	7.970	.000
Dayak	11.312	.000	10.781	.000
Jawa	8.235	.000	7.704	.000
Kutai	11.569	.000	11.037	.000
Mandar	7.658	.000	7.127	.000
Paser			-532	1.000
Sunda	9.885	.000	9.354	.000
Timur	10.966	.000	10.434	.000
Toraja	532	1.000		

Based on the result of Multiple Comparison Test in Table 6, it can be seen that, in terms of people attitude toward *pemali*, it was found that there were two ethnic groups that were significantly different from all other groups i.e. Paser and Toraja. The finding implied that while samples of the other 10 ethnic groups were not different in their attitude toward *pemali*, samples of Paser and Toraja did differ significantly from the other ten ethnics.

Of the twelve ethnic groups investigated, Paser and Toraja performed the lowest mean scores of attitude (8.76 and 9.30 respectively). Three ethnic groups with the highest mean scores of attitude were Kutai (20.30), Dayak (20.08), and Timor (19.73). The mean score of attitude of the other seven ethnic groups—Banjar (19.41), Sunda (18.65), Bali (18.30), Bugis (17.27), Jawa (17.00), Mandar (16.42), Batak (16.20)—did not significantly differ from those of the highest but significantly differ from those of the lowest. This is to say that if we were to categorize the ethnics based on the mean scores of attitude they performed, there will be found two categories of ethnic i.e. a

category of positive attitude toward *pemali* and a category of negative one. The positive attitude category includes eight ethnics (Kutai, Dayak, Timor, Banjar, Sunda, Bali, Bugis, Jawa, Mandar, and Batak), whereas the negative attitude category includes two ethnics (Paser and Toraja).

The present study did not provide data pertaining to such question as why the two ethnics (Toraja and Paser) had performed negative attitude toward *pemali*. Therefore, such question remains interesting to be further investigated in the other studies.

4.3 Obedience in *Pemali*

Analysis on the data of people obedience toward *pemali* resulted in percentage of level of obedience samples in the independent variables may perform. The percentage was then converted to determine category of obedience level based on the conversion criteria that had been set before. The result of this procedure indicated that level of obedience of the samples in all the four independent variables, based on the criteria set before, was classifiable into three categories, Very High, High, and Average; none of the samples belonged to Low level of obedience toward *pemali*. Level of obedience of the samples in the four variables is described successively as in the following paragraphs.

Obedience in *pemali* by ethnic group was categorized into three levels of obedience i.e. Very High (3 ethnic groups), High (6 ethnic groups), and Average (3 ethnic groups). The three ethnic groups of very high level of obedience were Timor (97.23%), Toraja (96.10%), and Bali (91.24%). The six ethnic groups of high level of obedience were Banjar (82.17%), Sunda (75.32%), and Kutai (74.43%). The last three ethnic groups of average level of obedience were Dayak (62.28%), Java (53.03%), and Bugis (52.09%). Recapitulation of people obedience toward *pemali* by ethnic group is presented in the following table.

Table 7. Level of Obedience by Ethnic Group

Ethnics	Rank of Obedience	Level of Obedience	
		%	Category
Timur	1	97,23	Very High
Toraja	2	96,10	Very High
Bali	3	91,24	Very High
Banjar	4	82,17	High
Sunda	5	75,32	High
Kutai	6	74,43	High

Paser	7	72,72	High
Mand	8	72,63	High
Batak	9	71,08	High
Dayak	10	62,28	Average
Jawa	11	53,03	Average
Bugis	12	52,09	Average

A special note must be addressed to the facts indicated by the findings in the level of obedience in relation to the findings in the attitude in which the Toraja and Paser performed a contradictory phenomenon compared to the other ethnics. As was found in the analysis of attitude toward *pemali*, samples of Toraja and Paser ethnics performed the lowest mean scores of attitude and thus belonged to the category of **Negative Attitude**; meanwhile in the level of obedience toward *pemali*, samples of Taraja proved to achieve the category of **Very High** level of obedience and Paser of **High** level of obedience.

One would normally expect that the two variables (attitude and obedience) should correlate and go parallel each other. As was apparent in the result of the present study, such an expectation did not find sufficient proof, and therefore requires another research specifically designed to investigate the relation of the two variables.

Different from the category of obedience level applicable to Ethnic Group, in Sex variable, only one category of obedience level was identified, that was High category. Although there existed different percentage of obedience between male and female samples in which female samples (78.5%) was higher than male samples (74.2 %), but both equally belonged to the category of high obedience level. The level of obedience of samples by sex is presented in the following table.

Table 8. Level of Obedience by Sex

Sex	Rank of Obedience	Level of Obedience	
		%	Category
Female	1	78,5	High
Male	2	74,2	High

As far as sex is concerned, the result of analysis on level of obedience indicated that the high level of obedience of both male and female samples goes parallel with the result of analysis on the samples' attitude in which no significant difference of mean score was found and both male and female performed positive attitude toward *pemali*. Unlike with the attitude, the result of analysis on obedience did not go parallel

with the result of analysis on the samples' perception. A significant difference was found between male and female samples in their perception in which male samples proved to have better perception than female ones.

Analysis on the data of Age Group identified two categories of obedience level i.e. High category and Average category. Samples in two age groups shared the same high category level of obedience—the groups of > 40 years (81.63%), and of 26 – 40 years (79.43%)—whereas the age group of ≤ 25 (65,6%) belonged to average level of obedience. The level of obedience of samples by age is presented in the following table.

Table 9. Level of Obedience by Age

Age	Rank of Obedience	Level of Obedience	
		%	Category
> 40 Years	1	81,63	High
26 – 40 Years	2	79,43	High
≤ 25 Years	3	65,6	Avarage

In terms of Education background, the result of analysis indicated that only one category of obedience level was identified. Samples in the three different school levels shared the same category of obedience to *pemali* (high category) although they slightly differed in the percentage of obedience—elementary school (79.96%), higher education (74.36%), and secondary school (72.57%). The level of obedience of samples by education is presented in the following table.

Table 10. Level of Obedience by Education

Education	Rank of Obedience	Level of Obedience	
		%	Category
Elementary	1	79,96	High
Higher	2	74,36	High
Secondary	3	72,57	High

The result of analysis on level of obedience of the samples coincided with the findings in perception and in attitude. No significant difference was found in the means scores of perception, attitude, and obedience of the samples of different education level. In other words, level of education achieved by the samples did not prove to have contribution to their perception, attitude, or obedience.

4. CONCLUSION

The archipelago people residing in East Kalimantan Province no matter of their place of origin recognized *pemali* as one among the local wisdoms practiced by their ancestors since the earlier ages. They perceived *pemali* as the manifestation of the high-rank intelligence of their ancestors who were capable of contemplating on the nature of life as well as of formulating appropriate code of conducts for a better life of their era amid the limited access toward intellectual institution, information sources, advancement in science and technology, and poor transportation facilities. The *pemali* were then handed down over one generation to the others and were considered relevant to apply in the daily life of the present time.

Although there was found a little variety of people's responds to the existence of *pemali*, the majority of the archipelago people residing in East Kalimantan performed positive attitude toward *pemali* tradition and keep practicing it in their today life regardless of difference in their sex, age, and education level. Since they have perceived and internalized *pemali* as the high-valued teachings of how living should be made to continuously promote safety, health, and prosperity, most people of the archipelago practiced high level of obedience toward *pemali* independent of their ethnic groups, sex, age, and education. It is then obvious that, amid the modern life style of the present era, the archipelago people keep upholding the local cultural values handed down from their ancestors as parts of their national identity.

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