

# Innovations in Cadres Selection and Promotion in China: the Case of Mudanjiang City

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## Abstract

*China's new cadre selection and promotion system has been arguably considered as China's most significant move in securing its implementation of reform strategies. Almost at the same time when he was advocating for China's economic reform in 1978, the late Deng Xiaoping, China's reform champion also issued a set of important speeches on reforming China's cadre selection and promotion protocols in order that there would be enough leadership to help meeting the challenges of the reform needs. His view on what talents are is a de facto mandate leading the way for China's cadre selection and promotion reform. This paper uses the case of Mudanjiang, a well-known city in China's northeast, to illustrate how Deng's Xiaoping's cadre selection and promotion ideas are implemented. Through literature and documents review, on-site observation, person to person interviews, and surveys, the authors examined how cadres are publicly nominated, competitively elected, and scientifically selected in Mudanjiang city. The study shows, the cadre open selection mechanisms have worked well, it has opened the door for many talented people who otherwise would not have had the chance to be even noticed by the upper management. The study also reveals some existing problems in the current system and made suggestions for further reform.*

## 1. The Initiation of the Open Selection and Promotion Mechanism

Starting from the revolutionary years, China's cadres have always been appointed by the up-level supervisors- a military tradition inheritance. While this system of cadre selection and promotion played its own role in history, the drawback started to emerge after the consolidation of communist power in China. Deng Xiaoping, China's reform champion in 1978, seriously criticized this system. He said, "the cadre management system for the party and the state is problematic; the main problems include bureaucratic red-tape, power overly centralized, paternalistic system, and cadre tenure system" (Deng Xiaoping, 1994) In terms of how the cadres should be managed, Deng Xiaoping suggested a four requirements for the cadres: loyal to the revolution, relatively young, extremely knowledge, and has expertise in specialized area<sup>1</sup>. Deng's speech

pointed out the key to reform the older cadre management system: eliminating the life-long tenure the cadre system and select the talented to fill the vacancies. These ideas helped initiate a round of cadre management system reform which has continued until this day.

In practice, it is the Public Utilities Company (state-owned company) that started to recruit manager, deputy manager, and technical personnel by advertizing on open media such as newspaper in October, 1980. This advertisement caused some significant stirs at the time. While open selection of cadres was not yet an accepted cadre selection protocol at the time, this practice has set the precedence for many to follow. In the following twenty some years, many places around the country started cadre-open selection experiment, and gradually tried to institutionalize the practice. Efforts were made to ensure the openness, effective-

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cadres contingent should become more revolutionary, better-educated, professionally, more competent and younger in age.

ness, formal process, and fairness in the system. Many newly issued laws, regulations, and executive orders started to appear. Tab. 1 lists a collection of the relevant central government mandates on how to openly select cadres.

At the same time, scholars in China also started to explore the idea of open cadre selection and its implementation. Some discussed the importance and methods of open cadre selection in the process of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. (Wu Hanfei, 2002) Others used survey studies and comparative methods to study how best to build an open selection system. (Li Lieman, 2004) Still others discussed the importance of paying attention to the conflict or friction between the new and the old systems in order that the new system could be implemented properly. (Wang Hanbin, 2004)

Many scholars also worked hard to identify and rationalize different open selection models used in different places. Places such as Jilin, Jiangsu, Guangdong, Sichuan, and Beijing all appeared to have made their own unique contributions to open selection (Ai Lisheng, 2007; The Research Group in Organization Department of Jilin's Provincial Committee of the Communist Party, 2002; Yang Danna, 2008; The Research Group in Organization Department of Sichuan's Provincial Committee of the Communist Party, 2002; The Research Group of Public Selection in Beijing, 2011). The foci in all these studies are to look for fairness and democracy, identify techniques used in the selection, and search for the significance, meaning, and issues remaining in the promotion of open selection policy.

Up to now, cadres in China are still chosen and promoted through four different methods: appointed, selected, tested, and contracted. Open selection is an effort to combine selection and testing methods to ensure proper identification of cadres for promotion. The method requires the Party Committee or its designated Organizing Unit to announce vacancies to the entire society, encourage self or nominated registration for test, take the test,

then evaluated in a comprehensive manner by the Party organization in charge of promotion. It is an innovation in cadre selection, making a breakthrough in changing the traditional cadre selection and promotion methods which only focused on a few party identified candidates for promotion. This method enlarged the pool for selection, widened the vision of the selection process, and allowed for openness, fairness, scientificness, and competitiveness.

## **2. Why the City of Mudanjiang Adopted Open Cadre Selection and Promotion Mechanism**

The city of Mudanjiang is one of the main industrial cities in Heilongjiang Province in north China. For a long time, the city of Mudanjiang followed the Central Party Organizing Unit's "Regulations on Party/Government Leading Cadre Selection and Appointment" to appoint its cadres. Competition among peers are allowed for. In 2007, the Tenth Congress of the Party of Mudanjiang advanced the goal of leapfrogging in economic and social development. To realize this ambitious objective, the city's Party Committee and Mayoral Office came to the consensus that to realize this strategic goal, the key is in its cadres. Therefore, select and use the best cadres become the most critical job. The best cadres are the ones who are creative, innovative, and capable of using unconventional methods to promote leapfrogging development. The existing system of cadre selection clearly could not help identifying new cadres to meet the challenges of the new strategies<sup>2</sup>.

The extant problems in cadre selection include: 1. Cadre reserve is not a strong pool. The selected candidates in the pool are not of high quality and good vision, but the taller of the short cohort. Specially for the sake of ensuring smoothness in leadership transition, the criteria for cadre selection into the reserve have to

<sup>2</sup> The cited are integrated from interview materials that provided by the Organization Department of Mu Danjiang's Municipal Committee of the Communist Party.

**Tab. 1. Central Government Documents on Open Selection of Leading Cadres**

| Time   | Issued by  | Name of the Document  | Purpose  |
|--------|--|---|--|
| 1982.2 | Central Government Organizing Department   | Additional Announcement on Hiring and Promotion of Central Government Managed Leading Personnel             | Encourage extensive listening before promoting a cadre.  |
| 1986.1 | Central Office of CPP  | Announcement on Selecting and Promoting Cadre on the basis of the Party's Principle                         | All Cadres should have served as at the lower level of hierarchy before they can be promoted into the corresponding leadership position.                                     |
| 1992.6 | Jilin Provincial Organizing Department, referred to by Central Organizing Department | A Report on the Method of One Recommendation with Two Tests and Open Selection for Deputy-Director-Generals | Jilin Document Referred to by Central Organizing Committee affirming the good outcome resulted from this practice in Jilin Province  |
| 1992.6 |  | A Report on Open Nomination, Tests, and Promotion of Associate Direct General Level Cadres                  | Central Party Committee transmitted documents to local governments, expressing affirmative approval of local governments open selection practice and encourage local trials. |
| 1994.9 | 5th Plenary Session of the 14th National Congress of the Party                       | Decisions on the Several Key Issues by the Central Party Committee on Party Building                        | "Should carefully review and study the open process for cadre selection and predetermined service term limits".  |
| 1994.9 |  | Decisions on a Few Key Issues by the Central Party Committee.   | Summarized the open selection methods.   |
| 1995.1 | Office of the Central Party Committee  | Central Party Announcement for Working Hard to Promote Young Cadres   | Confirming the principles of public election, open cadre selection.  |
| 1995.1 |  | Central Party Committee's Announcement Encouraging Cultivating and Promoting Outstanding Young Cadres       | Affirmative approval of open selection, clarified the principles and regulations for open cadre selection.   |
| 1995.2 |  | Temporary Regulations on Party and Government Selection Leaders   | Regulate Cadre selection and restrain corruption in personnel selection.   |
| 1995.2 |  | Temporary Regulations on Selection and Promotion of Party/Government Leading Cadres                         | Affirmative approval of open selection, clarified the principles and regulations for open cadre selection.   |
| 1996.1 | Jilin Provincial Organizing Department, endorsed by Central Party Committee          | Temporary Methods for Open Nomination and Test for Selecting Leading Cadres                                 | Popularize the experiences of open nomination and academic tests for Cadre Selection.  |
| 1996.1 |  | Temporary Methods for Cadre Selection and Promotion through Nomination and Examinations in Jilin Province   | Central party committee transmitted documents, publicizing the nomination and double tests methods practiced by Jilin Province.  |

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|--------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1999.3 | Organizing Department                 | Central Organizing Committee Announcement for Good Practice in Promoting Open Cadre Selection Methods               | Implementing 15 <sup>th</sup> Central Party Selection Methods.   |
| 1999.3 |                                       | Central Party Organizing Department's Announcement on Promoting Best Practice in Open Cadre Selection and Promotion | Recognize that open selection is an important reform.  |
| 2000.3 | Office of the Central Party Committee | Examination Outline for National Cadre Selection Tests  | Regulate adrenal selection test.   |
| 2000.3 |                                       | National Test Keys for National Open Selection and Promotion of Party/Government Cadres Trial                       | Regulated examination's range and procedures.  |
| 2000.7 | Office of the Central Party Committee | Outlines for Deepening Cadre Selection System Reform  | Specified the methods and clearly stated that gradually, Party-Government Leader Selection Method should institutionalized.                        |
| 2000.7 |                                       | Outline for Further Strengthening Cadre and Personnel System Reform   | Gradually promote open selection, make it more institutionalized.  |
| 2002.7 | Office of the Central Party Committee | Outlines for Cadre Selection and Appointment  | Building Scientific Cadre Selection Mechanisms and Methods, promoting scientifically and democratically selecting leaders.                         |
| 2002.7 |                                       | Regulations on Leading Cadre Selection and Promotion  | Added one chapter on open selection and competition for promotion.   |
| 2004.4 | Office of the Central Government      | Temporary Regulations on Open Selection of Party/Government Leading Cadres  | Temporary Regulations on Open Selection of Party/Government Leading Cadres.  |
|        |                                       | Temporary Regulations on Open Selection of Party/Government Leading Cadres  | Regulated party selection procedures.  |
|        | Central Party Organizing Department   | Outlines for Open Cadre Selection and Competitive Test  | Implementing Central Government efforts in Building Talents for Succeeding leadership positions. Promoting the standardization of cadre selection. |
|        |                                       | Outline for Leading Cadre Selection and Examination   | Further regulated the contents and procedures of the examinations.   |
|        | Office of Central Party Committee     | Methods for Local Party Committee to nominate and Elect the lower level Party Committee and Government Top Leaders  | Ensuring Democracy in the process of lower level government and Party Committee Selection.   |

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|         |  | Protocols on Local Party Committee's Voting Methods for Determining the Lower Level Key Leaders        | Regulated the procedures for nomination.   |
| 2007.12 | Central Organizing Department  | Opinions on Furthering the Building of Test Banks for National Level Cadre Selection                   | Formalize and perfect the open selection methods.  |
| 2007.12 |  | Opinions on Further Strengthening National Cadre Selection and Examination Test Banks                  | Further improved open selection system.  |
| 2009.9  | Central Organizing Department  | Outlines for Open Cadre Selection and Competitive Test   | Deepening reform, emphasizing the importance of procedures and open cadre selection. Test questions and methods were selected by this time. Fixed contents of all the tests. |
| 2009.9  | Resolution Passed by the Fourth Plenary Session of the 17 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress | Resolution on Strengthening and Building the Party in the New Situation by the Central Party Committee | For the first time raised the issue of "competitive Cadre Selection".  |
| 2009.12 | Office of the Central Party Committee  | 2010—2020 Outline for Deepening Cadre and Personnel System Reform                                      | Continue to perfect cadre selection to ensure effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and democracy in the process.  |
| 2010.3  | Office of Central Party Committee  | 2009-2020 Planning for Cadre Reserve Building at the National Level                                    | The first time the Central Party Committee passed a resolution to cultivate and prepare cadre reserve.   |
| 2010.3  |  | 2009-2020 National Leading Cadre Reserve Building Plan   | First time the Central Party Committee made a plan for building party/government leader cadre research.  |

Source: Author collected from various openly published governmental documents.

be lowered due to limited availability of candidates. The Municipal Leaders agreed that simple and single sources of cadre candidates, lack of competition, inadequate management, lack of internal education and cultivation, are the main reasons contributing to the poor quality of the reserve candidates. Traditionally designated source of cadres for the cadre reserve was within region, occupation, existing status. Many outstanding candidates were excluded. The seniority consideration arranged candidates by seniority in rank, diminishing possibilities of competition. Advanced level personnel and women cadres were rare, and

conscientious cultivation of leadership abilities of the young far lack behind.

2. In actual cadre selection and promotion, there are also problems. It is often a few people working to select and promote the few—the standing committee members selecting a limited number of candidates. Decisions were made in close door format, lacking adequate participation from the concerned parties. Some leaders do not stick to the cadre selection criteria but using personal preferences for cadre selection. Some candidates work hard to lobby or even bribe the selection committee. Information asymmetry, local democratic par-

participation, manipulated election etc are often the norm.

In terms of cadre management, once the leadership team was built, there were no proper follow-ups. Some deputies have a position but with no work responsibilities. Cadre management methods are sporadic, performance evaluations are lacking, incentives are not clear, cadre capacities were lacking, and most serious of all, they were not motivated to perform. Under the circumstances, the municipal leaders determined that special efforts need to be made to select and promote high quality cadres and place them in proper positions. After many discussions, meetings, and workshops in answering the questions such as: Selecting what kind of cadres? Who should do the selection? How to select the cadres? What criteria to use for cadre selection? The municipal government made a bold move in opening up and democratizing the cadre selection and promotion process. The new principles include: openness, fairness, competitiveness, and selecting the good.

### 3. How Did They Do It

After multiple discussions, the Municipal Government of Mudanjiang designed a new system for its cadre selection and promotion.

First, they worked to institute a system that helps to identify outstanding candidates for cadre reserve. One is open nomination. After the municipal government finalized the quota and composition of cadre reserve such as how many male, female, minority non-party members; how many should be from public administration, economic, finance, politics and law, education and culture, public health; how many should be the key rank official (2 to 1) and how many should be deputy candidates (1 to 1), what should be the basic qualifications for selection etc. the information shall be disclosed to the general public. All qualified individuals are encouraged to participate, regardless of his/her organizational and regional affiliation. Individuals could be nominated by his/her working unit, the general public,

or individuals. Employees in government and public enterprises in the entire province could participate. This method greatly enlarged the pool for candidates, and enabled diversity.

The second point is the emphasis on open selection. Candidates enter the pool on the basis of open selection, comparative evaluation, and organizing unit's approval, and are classified by rank, expertise, social demographic characteristics. These way, all those who have potential are included in the pool, solving the problem of constant lack of talents to fulfill the cadre team. The open selection part includes general test of the qualification through examinations,. Those who fail will be excluded. Comparative evaluation includes assigning scores to candidates' diploma, training certificate, occupational rank, career experiences, and resume analysis. Afterwards, there will be process of democratic evaluation, public opinion collection, general surveys to gain more in-depth knowledge of the candidates and general public's opinions of the candidates. To what extent the candidate is recognized and accepted by the general public is an important consideration. The organizing unit's approval is an official step certifying the candidates' qualifications. Following is a flowchart of the steps of selecting candidates for the cadre reserve.

The third point is targeted training . Selection and training work hand in hand. Once the reserve team is determined, according to their rank, expertise, job nature, region, level of maturity, the municipal government will come up with a training plan with clear training objectives. Specific measures taken included: 1) Strengthen theoretical studies. The municipal government regularly hold Saturday Forums, using menu method, clustering method, and order method to design the curriculum, inviting senior scholars, municipal government leaders to deliver lectures and provide study guides. The emphasis is theoretical study, vision expansion, and new concept building.

The fourth point is to strengthen practical experiences through internship in upper, low-

er, horizontal, and external positions. Every year, over 100 cadre reserve candidates were selected from county (city), district, township and municipal departments to assume temporary administrative positions in other parts of the government or key enterprises, economic development units, or citizen engagement sections. Some were selected to work in economically more advanced regions and others vice versa. Also, allow these candidates to audit or participate in key decision-making meetings. This way, the candidates enrich their administrative experiences, broadened their perspectives, gained firsthand knowledge, and increased research ability. The municipal government also built 10 teaching and research bases in which cadres could receive well designed, specialized, and region characteristic specific training. Candidates often formulate 10 member groups to conduct research projects, attend exchange discussion sessions, and solve problems together. The team learning environment created has created an atmosphere for learning, encouraging work through learning and learning for work attitudes. Individual and team learning plans are made to ensure steady progress in learning.

The fourth point is dynamic management. There is an exchange between the active cadres and the cadre research. The Organizing Unit and the Party Committee are both responsible for cadre pool reserve management. The candidates in the reserve are evaluated annually, re-ranked biannually, and re-elected every three years together with the incumbent officials. This strategy is designed to overcome the limitation of “one test” determines all phenomenon, and enables immediate promotion of the reserve candidates when vacancies occur. In 2008, the city openly recruited cadre candidates in the entire province, 1801 individuals registered and 668 division level candidates were selected into the reserve (34 from out of the region, 86 from central and provincial government agencies located in the region. Among them, women, minority, and non party members were 22%, 17%, and 13%

respectively). This statistics show a decent collection of the talents both within and without the region.

Fifth, when it comes to appointment to positions of power and responsibility, competitive comparison is used as the final strategy—known as publicly nominated and competitively selected. Namely, competitive consideration appears in all the stages of cadre promotion: recommendation, nomination, evaluation, and decision. Candidates merits, performance, and public support are all compared and scored. Only the best of the best, the outstanding of the outstanding will be promoted. The process includes six steps: 1) registration. Candidates from across the region, occupation, status could either register, or be recommended by his/her work unit. Selection and qualification criteria are announced to the public. All eligible individuals could participate, breaking the boundaries of agencies and department. 2) Quantitatively screen the candidates on the basis of his/her educational background, career experiences, rank, performance history, and various examinations. 3) Democratic recommendation: The first round is to identify needs and rank order the first 8 candidates for consideration. The second round is asking municipal government leaders and committee members to provide individualized recommendation on behalf of the candidates they know. The top five will enter the final stage for competitive comparison selection. 4) Competitive comparison stage: Two evaluation committees are formulated, one consisting of municipal government leaders including standing committee members and the vacant position’s supervisor, another consisting of invited external expert, service clientele, and general mass representative. Both groups will attend candidates’ job selection speech (for evaluation of values, work plan, strategic thinking, understanding and analysis of issues), designated question answers (answering public affairs, improvise, special topic), on the spot questions and answer (for evaluating candidate’s ability to solve prob-

lems in face of different situations and scenarios); Quantitative scoring with 40%, 30%, and 30% weight for the three part evaluation with signatures of the scoring leaders. Only the top three will advance to the next step. 5). Differentiated evaluation: At this stage, comprehensive evaluation on the basis of values, performance merits, and public support shall be considered. The names of the top two candidates shall be sent to the municipal government's standing committee for vote. 6). Voting result will determine who to be promoted.

This method of rigorous evaluation and selection encouraged public participation, competition and comparison. It has identified talents, selected talents, made boldfaced statement about the importance of public support, individual capability, and performance merits. It discovers, trains, and stores talents for use. The impact has been strongly and positively felt.

Four types of "Public Nomination and Competitive Comparison" are implemented. One is for leadership positions of municipal departments. These departments are the functional components of the municipal government, responsible both to the Municipal Party Committee and the Government. Between 2007 and 2009, 21 department heads including those for Commerce and Investment, Tourism, and Statistics are promoted into position. 27 deputy department heads including those for Finance, Public Security, and Reform and Development Bureau are selected. Another is for county heads (or county level city heads), district heads, township heads. These type of leaders are responsible for everything in an entire region and have strong interactive relationship with the general public. Their selection has more to do with the general public. They were nominated by the Party's standing committee, the general public, and invited experts. Once the final set of candidates are determined, they shall make competitive speeches to the representatives of the local people's conference. Their final selection is determined by the votes casted by the leading members of

all the four branches of the local governments – the party committee, the administrative committee of the government, the committee of the political consultation consisting representatives of multiple non communist parties, and the people's congress; the top leader of each municipal department, representatives of the local government people's conference. This type of selection adhered to the principle of Party manages the cadres, and at the same time, integrated public opinion and citizen participation into the selection process. Up to now, 3 county level heads and 60% of township leaders have been elected this way. The method of selection ensure that the cadres came into position with purpose, sense of mission, and clear expectations of the general public. They become more devoted leaders once appointed into position. The third type has to do with the selection of leaders for public enterprises. These group of leaders are responsible for non-profit type organizations which were owned by the government. Their leaders are contracted for service on three year terms. Namely, their job missions were predetermined. Open enrollment, quantitative evaluation, municipal government leader nomination, municipal committee evaluation and approval are all the same. Only that they were elected by responsible municipal leader, department head, cadres, and representatives of the people in their enterprises and from the general public. Voting will happen immediately after their speech and the questions and answers session. The certificate for contract will be issued for their term of service one voting confirmation is passed. In the past two year, 67 division level leading members in the sections of culture, education, public health are promoted this way, and 173 members of 39 section level units were promoted this way. This practice has enhanced the sense of the unified whole, increase cadres' sense of responsibility and service orientation, stimulated their enthusiasm for service. It is an effort to integrate cadres' sense of responsibility to the general public as well as their immediate supervisors.



The fourth type has do with promotion of individuals working in more specialized areas. These groups of candidates shall also go through open enrollment, quantitative screening, democratic nomination, and organizing unit's work meeting confirmation. They shall be evaluated and voted on by the Standing Committee of the Municipal Party Committee. They do not need to be voted on by the general public.

Cadre management did not stop at the stage of selection and promotion. The city of Mudanjiang also instituted a set of management strategies that require the cadres to be trained, evaluated, and exit when competency becomes an issue. In the past, China's cadres enjoyed the privilege of becoming a permanent incumbent. There is no exit mechanism for non-performing cadres. After careful consideration, the city established a system of cadre management. First, on the basis of current practice, they set up management objectives for the selecting leadership group and clarify unit goals, second, annual and term evaluation systems are established so that comprehensive performance evaluations will be implemented; third, those who rated on the third tier (first tier: competent, second tier, general competent, third tier, incompetent) shall be sent to training classes and wait for reassignment. This system of evaluation and cadre circulation gave pressure to the incumbent leaders and provided a venue for cadre exit.

The system of evaluation and promotion created a scenario that cadres are selected and promoted innovatively, evaluated scientifically. Cadres know their work objectives, evaluators know the criteria for their evaluation, cadres are responsible to their supervisors and at the same time serving their clientele and possess their support. Performance merits and democratic election are two measures that help evaluate the cadres. In the past two years, after systematic and comprehensive evaluation of the cadres, 6 leadership units were adjusted, 36 cadres were interviewed and encouraged by the municipal government

leaders, 21 cadres were alerted, 15 of them were issued yellow warnings, 13 were sent to training classes, and 11 were removed from their positions. This dynamic system of cadre management instigated new incentives into the bureaucratic system and stimulated the cadres to work hard according performance measurement yardsticks. The city culture is no longer one of stagnation but one full of energy, diligence, and upbeat hardworking spirit.

#### **4. A Summary of the Characteristics and Experiences of the Mudanjiang City's Open Selection Practice**

The above discussions show that the city of Mudanjiang has implemented a dynamic, systematic, and encircled cadre selection and promotion system. It has moved cadre selection process forward to the point that it is not only selecting cadres for promotion but selecting cadres to enter the candidate pool for future promotion. This way, the risk for promoting wrong candidates become much less and that the candidates got a chance to be trained before they assume positions of leadership. The methods of open nomination has greatly enhanced Organizing Unit's ability to identify qualified candidates on behalf of the Municipal Leaders, enlarged the candidates' pools, overcame the constraints that seniority often dominated the choice of candidate selection. The entire process of cadre selection has become much more open, fair, and democratic.

The second feature is that the Municipal Government has designed different methods for different tracks candidates. The third feature is the use independent and specialized test services to help test and evaluate the educational background, personal traits, and practical working ability of the candidates. The selection of candidates have become more professional and scientific. Fourth, a system of cadre reserve has been established. Each candidate has his personal portfolio. The candidates are classified and given opportunities

for training and field internship. Also, multiple methods were created to the candidates in the reserve pool to learn, to study, to exchange with others, creating a learning environment and atmosphere. The training objectives include making the cadre candidates more professional, more inquisitive, more creative, and more diligent.

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