

# Historic Urban Landscape Paradigm —A Tool for Balancing Values and Changes in the Urban Conservation Process



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## ABSTRACT

Today, for the first time in human history, more than half of the world’s population lives in cities. Coincidentally, within the field of cultural heritage conservation, increasing international interest and attention over the past two decades has been focused on urban areas. This is timely because the pressure for economic development and for the prioritizing of engagement with the global economy have accompanied rapid urbanization. In many societies, economic development has privileged modernization efforts leading to the loss of traditional communities. Accompanying this has been a concentration in the field of urban conservation on famous buildings and monuments rather than seeing cities as communities of people with values and belief systems that are reflected in a city’s overall setting: its cultural landscape. The Historic Urban Landscape approach is intended to address this distinction by critically discussing city communities, and how they are reservoirs of human memory and identity. This raises the question of the role of nostalgia in the field of urban conservation studies: is nostalgia an important phenomenon in understanding how the past is both brought to bear on the present and on the development of social and political agendas for the future? This article explores alternative ways of seeing cities particularly through the Historic Urban Landscape paradigm.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Investigates how the cultural landscape concept is critical to understanding urban heritage and why the word “landscape” is used in the term of Historic Urban Landscape
- Explores the opportunities presented by Historic Urban Landscape to see urban conservation as a process, not a product
- Introduces examples of secondary urban cultural landscape attractions to illustrate the versatility and potential of Historic Urban Landscape

## KEYWORDS

Historic Urban Landscape;  
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Landscape Attractions;  
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## 1 Introduction

The later 1980s and early 1990s were particularly fruitful for the conservation discipline in terms of emerging critical debate on cultural heritage; coincidental was the elaboration of an operational framework for three categories of Cultural Landscapes for World Heritage purposes: 1) designed landscapes, 2) evolved landscapes developed over time, and 3) associative landscapes.<sup>[1]</sup> It is no accident that research and reflections on such matters as landscape meaning<sup>[2]</sup> and intangible heritage emerged as driving-forces in widening considerations of heritage meanings and conservation principles, thereby extending thinking beyond the famous monuments and sites approach. International bureaucracies and agencies, accompanied by international scholarly discourse, have become increasingly conscious of the imperative to embrace a broadening of cultural heritage thinking and practice to include a concern with culture and the intangible, rather than focusing primarily on things.

International bureaucracies and agencies, accompanied by international scholarly discourse, have become increasingly conscious of the imperative to embrace a broadening of cultural heritage thinking and practice to include a concern with culture and the intangible, rather than focusing primarily on things<sup>[3]</sup>. Nevertheless, criticisms of the agencies such as UNESCO and ICOMOS have revolved, *inter alia*, around the “one size fits all” globalizing approach that stifles regional cultural differences.

Contrary to such a view is that changes that have occurred<sup>[4][5]</sup> are indicative of “UNESCO’s progressive accommodation of heritage diversity”<sup>[6]</sup>. Notably one of the shifts has also been growing attention on the need for conservation of historic urban areas. A significant field of impact associated with this shift and critical rethinking is the infiltration of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) paradigm into approaches to urban heritage conservation. The HUL idea essentially espouses a recognition of the layering of significance and values in historic cities, deposited over time by different communities under different contexts<sup>[7]</sup>. This, for example, is the thinking behind the strategy to have HUL inform future planning of Ballarat in Australia, where the city decided to apply the HUL approach in 2012 responding to population growth, changing economic future, overdevelopment and inappropriate development, and demographic and cultural changes that can render heritage vulnerable. In an inspiring collaborative effort between the city council (professional staff and councilors) and the community, Ballarat is determined to ensure that urban conservation—which has resulted in a legacy of a rich and highly significant historic

landscape and a strong sense of place—will continue into the future as a result of addressing the need for a more inclusive and sustainable development. Critical to the strategy is considering both market and non-market values.<sup>[8][9]</sup> The construct of sense of place is aptly summarized by John Brinckerhoff Jackson as “most of us [...] would say that a sense of place, a sense of being at home in a town or city, grows as we become accustomed to it and learn to know its peculiarities. It is my belief that a sense of place is something that we ourselves create in the course of time. It is the result of habit or custom”<sup>[10]</sup>.

The HUL approach relates closely to the cultural landscape concept and cities may, therefore, be categorized as a type of cultural landscape<sup>[11]</sup>. Considering “current urbanization policies often ignore the importance of cultural heritage preservation and promotion and the great potential of creativity in addressing social, environmental, and economic urbanization challenges”<sup>[12]</sup>, this article examines the need to address how policies and tools can be formulated in order to improve the historic urban management processes.

## 2 Urban Conservation

Urban heritage is an established field of research, both in the academic and public policy sectors. Internationally, issues related to urban heritage conservation and regeneration have long been dominant in the architectural and planning professions. Similarly they have become an integral part of heritage management thinking and practice but with increasingly different emphases. The difference is reflected in the modern approaches to urban heritage that have come to the forefront, beginning with Europe and North America in the 1960s, with a focus on buildings, ancient and modern, either singly or as ensembles, then contrasting with that of the later 1990s onwards with an increasing attention on urban heritage focusing away from buildings to cities as lived-in spaces<sup>[7][13]</sup>.

Underpinning discussions on urban heritage must be the notion of heritage. This raises the question of what is heritage and indeed is there such a thing as heritage. In this regard, as Laurajane Smith proposes, heritage is a social construct about people and their relationship to places; a multi-layered performance that embodies acts of remembrance and commemoration while constructing a sense of place, belonging, and understanding in the present<sup>[14]</sup>. Heritage is therefore a process not a product that recognizes established values and meanings and creates new meanings and values (Fig. 1).



1-1  
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1. The example of the World Heritage listed city of Vigan in the Philippines offers an excellent example of the point on heritage being a social construct. When the Spanish arrived in 1572 they laid-out the city on a grid pattern spreading out from a central park ringed by administrative and religious buildings (Fig. 1-1). Later Chinese immigrants intermarrying with local Filipinos formed an affluent group who built their houses tightly strung along narrow streets in contrast to the grander scale of the Hispanic houses. Many of the city streets being closed to motorized traffic today offer an attractive sense of being able to wander at will (Fig. 1-2).

As it becomes increasingly appreciated that urban conservation is a matter for international concern as urban populations expand and redevelopment pressure is put on existing towns and cities, it can be seen that urban conservation that focuses solely on individual buildings ignoring socio-spatial settings will exacerbate the degradation of urban fabrics and the sense of place of established urban communities<sup>[16]</sup>. Such a trajectory begs the question of whose values are being addressed? Xavier Greffe, linking the study of economics with cultural heritage, adds to this discourse by suggesting that historic cities should not be viewed simply as architectural masterpieces. Rather he advocates that we need to understand such cities through a post-modern lens of feelings and emotions where experiencing the city is an experience<sup>[17]</sup>.

The HUL notion is a tool to reinterpret the values of urban heritage, and its indication of the need to identify new approaches and new tools for urban conservation. It broadens the vision of human sustainable development and the concept of urban space as “landscape”<sup>[18]</sup>. Such an approach reflects a call for more attention to be paid to understanding meanings of urban places and settings, importantly include our everyday places. Valuing such associations between people and place and the concept of cities as layers through time—the city as cultural landscape—challenges the orthodoxy of modern urban conservation that privileges famous buildings and monuments<sup>[19][20]</sup>.

## 2.2 Sense of Place

Therefore an understanding of the significance of built urban heritages as the places where people live their everyday lives, where social values and a sense of place, has taken root. In contemporary urban development, planners and designers can help protect authenticity with specific restoration guidelines, demonstrating how change and adaptation towards improved environmental characters and underscoring how the past could serve the future. Architecturally, the old and the new combine to present a lively sense of socially vibrant urban life, rather than the preservation of old areas virtually as museum pieces (Fig. 2).

It is important to understand that the HUL paradigm is not a set in concrete way of approaching the application of HUL, rather it is a way of thinking linking to the construct of cultural landscape<sup>[21]</sup>. The culmination of thinking on new international approaches to urban conservation came in 2011 with the UNESCO’s *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*<sup>[22]</sup>. It raised an awareness that conservation of urban heritage should no longer be preoccupied with simply the freezing of a district with special characteristics, but rather understanding the way in which urban areas can

## 2.1 Historic Urban Landscape

The concept of HUL is a major initiative by UNESCO. It was first set out at a UNESCO conference in Vienna, May 2005, and advocated in the *Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture—Managing the Historic Urban Landscape*<sup>[15]</sup>. Why is the word “landscape” used in the term “Historic Urban Landscape”? It is because of the inextricable connection between the cultural landscape construct and concepts of human values, memories, and identities, which collectively underpin sense of place (*genius loci*) for people. Nevertheless difficulties may arise with the term HUL in cross-cultural discourse because of its Western origin and associated meanings, I have previously critically commented on what for me are the distinctive characteristics of cultural landscape and repeat here as relevant to this discussion on the HUL paradigm: The landscape is marked by distinctive characteristics. These are tangible, as in the physical patterns and components of our surrounds, and intangible as in the symbolic meanings and values we attach to places. They offer a past, are part of the present, and suggest future continuity. Linked to the cultural concept of landscape is the understanding that one of our deepest needs is for a sense of identity and belonging and that a common denominator in this is human attachment to landscape and how we find identity in landscape and place<sup>[3]</sup>.





2. Street scene in Jalan Besar, Singapore. Jalan Besar is a notable urban conservation area where historic shop-house areas are saved from demolition.

strengthen identity of communities and become models for the broader process of urban growth. The Recommendation recognizes the layering of significances and values in historic cities deposited over time by different communities under different contexts.

The idea of layering also strikes a chord with, and relates closely to, the cultural landscape concept. The Recommendation recognizes the challenges of urbanization today, as well as the importance of cities as engines of growth and centers of innovation and creativity that provide opportunities for employment and education. It identifies urban heritage as a key resource in enhancing the liveability of urban areas and fostering economic development as well as social cohesion. The 798 Art Zone of Beijing, China is a notable example of this aspect of cities as engines of growth and innovation. The creative industries idea is also linked to poverty alleviation, gender and youth empowerment, and sustainable use and conservation of natural resources.

### 3 Nostalgia, Memory, Identity, and Culture: Dilemmas of Interpretation

Inextricably intertwined with aspects of human memory and identity associated with places is the role of nostalgia and its use in the field of urban conservation studies. Florence Graezer Bideau et al., by using the case of the traditional Gulou precinct in Beijing, suggest that nostalgia is ambiguous<sup>[23]</sup>. It has resulted in some residents moving out and some staying as upgrading has taken place, leading to the authors' assumption that "nostalgic feelings would drive residents to want to stay" by no means applied to all residents. By expressing nostalgic attachment to their neighbourhood, many residents were actually legitimizing their willingness to move. Emotional attachment does not transform into an act of attachment. There are multiple layers of nostalgia, and those that could easily be overturned by economic

compensation may not be seen as substantial as other forms of nostalgia. In a context of looking at the past, it can be "approached through the lenses of history, memory, and heritage, among which heritage serves as a body of selected history and memory ... [where] history attaches itself to events, memory attaches itself to objects and places"<sup>[24][25]</sup>. In this sense, a city may be regarded as its peoples' collective memory. The significance of nostalgia in urban conservation thinking is also succinctly summarized by Smith et al. "as a process of remembering that is overtly, and often unashamedly, emotional, nostalgia is an important phenomenon in understanding how the past is both brought to bear on the present and on the development of social and political agendas for the future"<sup>[26]</sup>.

#### 3.1 Multiple Nostalgias

The above phenomenon where the interface between nostalgia, urban memories, and changes occurs is the result of what David Berliner refers to as "multiple nostalgias" in his discourse on Luang Prabang<sup>[27]</sup>. He suggests that contrary to received wisdom from some experts and sometimes scholars who may criticize changes that take place, local communities may see things differently and welcome changes that bring economic opportunity. At the World Heritage site of Luang Prabang, he addresses the idea of multiple and conflicting nostalgias between foreign heritage experts, expatriates, and international tourists looking from a "Western romanticized perception of Buddhism and colonial perceptions of other people's traditional life," and the "*charme nostalgique*" in contrast to perceptions and values of local people<sup>[27]</sup>. Architectural and building regulations in place to control local people and what they can or cannot do—because locals are perceived as a threat to good preservation of Luang Prabang's ambience—are ignored. Underneath all this Berliner points to how local people insist that tradition is not changing, custom is not disappearing, nor do they long for the world that some foreign experts and tourists lament has disappeared.

Similarly in this context, Bideau et al. outline the tension between the local population of Gulou and the official municipal planning commission approach of preservation of what is seen as a nostalgic neighbourhood<sup>[23]</sup>. Consequently the local community struggled to have their voice heard in support of maintaining their social and cultural livelihood against official heritage nostalgia which is based on preserving physical setting. In effect this is contrary to the spirit of the HUL approach. In some contrast with the Gulou case is that of the Hongkou District in Shanghai (Fig. 3), where upgrading of some lilong housing precincts displaying a common characteristic



3. Hongkou District, a lane scene in Ruiqing Lilong where an additional storey was added to the houses to create more living space. The local inhabitant was expressing his approval of such a change to participants at a WHITRAP (World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO) Training Course on HUL in December 2014.
4. Industrial structures and sculptures in the urban reclamation project of Yangpu River in Shanghai.

of “an overwhelming palpable sense of community” has taken place<sup>[28]</sup>. *The HUL Guidebook: Managing Heritage in Dynamic and Constantly Changing Urban Environments*<sup>[29]</sup> similarly outlines how the management of change in the historic Hongkou District addresses the application of the HUL approach as a mindset and way of thinking to achieve a balance between development and conservation and maintaining existing community life.

### 3.2 Industrial Heritage

An understanding of a specific form of urban nostalgia is central to the study and practice of industrial heritage, which has been a focus of rapidly growing interest internationally over the past two decades. Industrial heritage places by and large celebrate the lives of ordinary working class people. In direct contrast to the idea that industrial heritage can represent a negative form of nostalgia that denies working class history, industrial heritage involves the concept of progressive nostalgia. It is linked to a sense of loss tempered with overt pride, empathy, and gratitude, underlined by a desire to assert a sense of communal belonging and sense of place in the context of rapid deindustrialization and social change.<sup>[26]</sup>

This is not to claim a sense of nostalgia meaning people yearn to revert to the conditions experienced in the industries concerned,

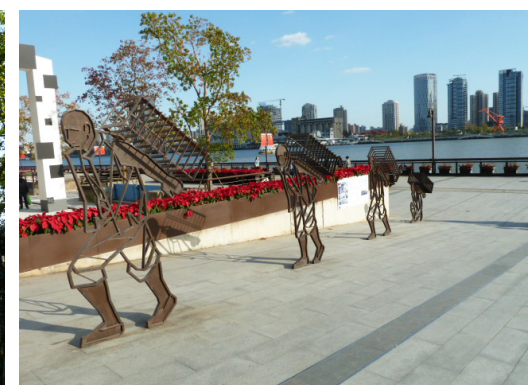
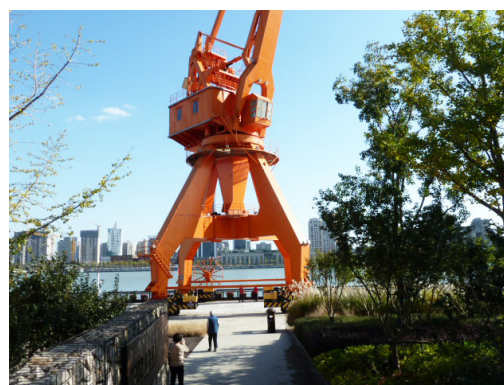
which were, by and large, harsh and physically punishing. Rather it is a desire to form links with the past and sense belonging<sup>①</sup>. It can also be a personal wish to link to the past by listening to stories of people who experienced the conditions. Such stories may be orally passed on, or as time goes by through written records, visiting industrial heritage sites which may now be open-air museums or where heritage memorabilia are housed in buildings and galleries.

A contemporary example is the urban reclamation project of Yangpu Riverside, Shanghai. This industrial site along the Yangpu River near the center of Shanghai was a local landmark and has been transformed into an industrial heritage setting with strong local character. Along with designed landscape, including planting to form a riverside park, the reuse of buildings, and the incorporation of former industrial structures, the project is now a major tourist attraction (Fig. 4).

## 4 Communities and Urban Conservation: Secondary Urban Cultural Landscape Attractions

HUL can also act as a catalyst for socio-economic development treating cities as dynamic organisms<sup>[22]</sup>. Although the HUL Guidebook outlines six critical steps in its implementation,

① This is about the author’s personal experience of growing up in a cotton mill town of England. Many of his relatives and neighbors worked in the cotton mills and their stories were fascinating and often humorous, thereby masking the depredations and harsh conditions compelling. The kind of nostalgia is not translated into a wish to return to such conditions, and as young person his main desire was to escape. Through entry to grammar school and then university, he did escape.





significantly HUL is not, unlike urban heritage, a heritage category, nor is it a set recipe for “do it this way.” It is a guide on how to think about urban conservation that moves away from the obsolete view that urban heritage is about buildings by putting culture and people at the core of urban heritage conservation. It cross references to a fundamental aspect of modern thinking on heritage. It considers heritage as concerned with human-focused intangible associations and values. In this context therefore there are two key issues relative to the concept that heritage can only exist in relation to a community: 1) heritage to be recognized must play a central role in the life of a community; and 2) no heritage can be effectively conserved without the participation of the community.

Rapid changes taking place throughout cities globally all too often amount to an attack on urban variety and vibrant streetscapes that reflect interesting and traditional social patterns. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in Asian cities where so much of the traditional life is experienced on the streets and the communities associated with urban cultural landscapes of small provincial towns and also distinctive precincts in cities<sup>[21]</sup>. These places represent a vibrancy of “living history and heritage [which] exist in [their] cultural landscapes, traditions, and representations”<sup>[30]</sup>.

In this context Thailand’s Tourism Authority (TAT) launched in 2003 an international campaign—“Unseen Thailand”—to focus on local areas. Its 2012 plan includes “Thailand Experience and Smile” that aimed to incorporate small towns as tourist destinations. Additionally the Second Tourism Development Plan (2017–2021) coined the term “Discover Thainess” linked to the idea of promoting balanced tourism areas and establishment of tourism sub-clusters to develop tourism in provinces and areas not yet popularly based on local identities. Traditional images of Thai heritage and tourism have long focused on famous glittering monuments and sites: primary cultural heritage attractions such as World Heritage sites and sites that feature in countless glossy magazines, travel brochures, promotional tourism literature, and will draw tourists and visitors in their own right<sup>[31]</sup>. They are representative of what is termed the “conventional approach”<sup>[32]</sup> to heritage conservation and management. They stand in contrast to the approach which focuses on involving communities and using such tools as cultural and participatory mapping to understand people’s values and intangible connections to places and sense of identity. Such places in effect are often secondary attractions, the places we pass through on the way to primary attractions or places adjacent to primary attractions as in the case of Tha Tien District of Bangkok near the Royal Palace and Wat Pho<sup>[33][34]</sup>. It is a lively and vibrant vernacular streetscape popular with tourists and local people redolent with interesting and

traditional social patterns.

In contrast to primary attractions are what can be termed “secondary attractions.” Hilary du Cros reviewed heritage tourism attractions in Hong Kong, China and proposed that “secondary attractions will appeal to tourists once they are already at a destination and are examining the options for best use of their time and so become a more discretionary choice for tourists”<sup>[31]</sup>. I would add that it is critical to address what are acceptable levels of change in the context of historic, natural, and cultural resources, because change is inevitable. Critical to the process of change is collaboration between local government and communities facilitated through cultural and participatory mapping which documents heritage resources, meanings, and values.

## 5 Conclusions

HUL offers an opportunity for a much needed dialogue with city planners, urban designers, local communities, legal instruments, and governments (national and local) on how layered cultural experiences influence perceptions of the urban landscape and why these are important in urban renewal outcomes. Culture as a driver of innovative development processes notably cross connects with the UN Sustainable Development Goals programme and the issue of Cultural Sustainability on a global level. It is important, in a dialogue with planners that understandings of the concept of urban heritage conservation and the reality of economic and political influences on city development and expansion are not mutually exclusive. Key to this includes the following points.

1) Understanding that the city as an evolving process—living entity—is not merely a series of objects (buildings). Here the idea of process embraces intangible cultural heritage associations that people have with places (*genius loci*), and interaction between culture and nature.

2) Addressing the overall urban morphology of the city in its landscape setting so that future development does not overwhelm the landscape physically or its intangible meanings and associative values.

And 3) understanding that urban landscape under the banner of visual and physical integrity is not just a matter of quantitative visual attributes, where management is nothing more than dealing with views and skylines as seen objects.

Parallel with the thinking on HUL is the growing recognition of urban areas as drivers of creative industries and values associated with the notion of cultural capital (economics of art and culture). The HUL approach emphasizes locality, context, historical

continuities, and identity, thereby addressing opportunities for achieving goals of equity and social justice. It is the opposite of the historic city brand image which, according to G. J. Ashworth et al., is reflective of the hallmark of some European cities typified as “catalogue heritage”<sup>[35]</sup>.

Cultural heritage and creativity are, as discussed above, valuable cultural resource assets for the future well-being of cities, including three potential benefits: 1) as a driver for economic development in urban areas; 2) as a resource for improving the liveability *[sic]* and sustainability of urban areas; and 3) as an enabler for increasing the effectiveness of development intervention in urban areas.

Nevertheless in academic research and professional practice thinking, there is an ongoing discussion and speculation on whether HUL is being applied in practice. There are also challenges to its application because of the differences in regulatory systems at various government agency levels, e.g., national, state (provincial), and local. Suspensions still linger, without substantiation, in my view, that because it is a UNESCO initiative, it is an imposition of universal values that disregard national and local contexts<sup>[36]</sup>. Relevant to these considerations is the fact that HUL offers a guide on how to think about urban conservation. Many of the chapters in the recent book *Reshaping Urban Conservation: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach in Action* show clearly with case studies that the HUL approach is being applied internationally<sup>[37]</sup>. In this context Loes Veldpaus suggest that HUL is quite ambitious in trying to stimulate governments to develop partnerships with local communities, and it can easily be criticized questions and may never fully succeed: “... practitioners see HUL as an opportunity [which] pushes for different ways of thinking, for new perspectives, and for openness in processes of heritage management—for thinking about heritage beyond its traditional definitions, uses, and ideas”<sup>[38]</sup>.

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# 历史性城市景观范式

## ——平衡城市保护过程中价值与变化的工具

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摘要

关键词

今天，全世界一半以上的人口在城市中居住，这在人类历史上是前所未有的。相应地，过去二十年来，城市保护已逐渐成为文化遗产保护领域中的一大研究热点。这样的转变是具有时代意义的，因为与快速城市化相伴而来的是经济发展及优先参与全球经济的巨大压力。当前，许多社会的经济发展都以现代化建设为主导，导致传统社区不断消失。与此同时，城市保护领域的重点仍集中在著名建筑和古迹上，并未将城市视为由价值和信仰体系构成的人类社区——这些价值和信仰体系反映在城市的整体环境中，即城市的文化景观。本文所聚焦的历史性城市景观途径旨在通过批判性地讨论城市社区，以及它们之于人类记忆和认同感的重要意义，转变城市保护的观念。这其中还涉及乡愁在城市保护研究领域的作用：乡愁这一现象，在理解过去对现在及未来社会和政治议程发展的影响时为何如此重要？本文特从历史性城市景观的范式出发，为审视城市提供了新的思路。

历史性城市景观；  
文化景观；  
城市遗产；  
城市保护；  
历史城市；  
城市文化景观次级景点；  
创意产业

文章亮点

- 探讨文化景观概念对理解城市遗产的关键作用，以及“历史性城市景观”中使用“景观”一词的原因
- 探讨历史性城市景观途径将城市保护视为一个过程而非产品所带来的机遇
- 通过介绍城市文化景观次级景点的实例，展现历史性城市景观的多面性和潜力

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