A Case Study of Family Language Policy (FLP) in Diasporic Chinese Families in the Paris Region

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Abstract: Minority language maintenance and childhood bilingualism have attracted attention and generated a significant number of publications over several decades. As an emerging and increasingly critical domain which provides a microscopic view of daily interactions, family language policy (FLP) is still a relatively new field of study in Sociolinguistics in France. Very little research, in which field studies are included, has been carried out since 2000. This short article attempts to analyse first-hand data collected in 2019 from ten Chinese families living in the Île-de-France region. A mixed approach, including quantitative, qualitative and sociolinguistic ethnography, was adopted. Four of the ten families were selected for study in greater detail. Surveys, interviews, recordings and onsite observations are the main methods used to collect data for this paper. This FLP case study tries to gain an insight on how Sinitic languages are maintained and handed down in the Parisian Chinese diaspora; the results of this study are also compared to FLP studies carried out in other Chinese diasporas.

Keywords: family language policy, heritage language maintenance and transmission, Chinese diaspora, multilingualism, identity.

1 Introduction

Family language policy is the significant domain" in the field of Sociolinguistics as the family is a complex and dynamic unit (Spolsky, 2012). The FLP model most often applied is made up of three elements: language ideology, language practice and language management (Spolsky 2004 & 2009). Over the last decade quite a few case studies have already been conducted in many English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and Singapore (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013 & 2014; Fogle, 2013; Fogle & King, 2008; Li, 2011; Smith-Christmas, 2016). In France, Christine Deprez, Martine Defryus and Shahzaman

Haque [1] are among the first researchers to be interested in this specific domain. In 1996, both Deprez and Defryus published an article dealing FLP in the French context. Nevertheless, FLP was not considered as a research topic on its own in Deprez's and Defryus's publications. As a matter of fact, Haque is the first researcher in France who studies FLP itself as a research topic. Also, Haque is the first researcher that has done FLP field work in France. He has studied FLP in several Indian families in France and other European countries (Haque, 2008 & 2012). In 2016, with Françoise Le Lièvre, Haque organised the first ever symposium on FLP in France. Meanwhile, Suat Instanbullu, a then INALCO's PhD candidate was also interested in intergenerational language practices within transnational families and submitted her thesis in 2017. The most recent FLP study in France is a PhD thesis submitted by N. Wang in 2019. She studied FLP in three mixed Chinese-French families. With the objective of providing more insight into this increasingly significant domain, which is insufficiently studied in France, I present in this communication, my first-hand data collected from several Chinese families in France.

2 Methodology

In view of the interdisciplinary nature of FLP, this case study has resorted to several different methodological approaches, including a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach and sociolinguistic ethnography. The author first carries out a quantitative study by means of a Web-based self-reported 30-question survey submitted to ten Chinese families living in and around Paris. She then selects four of the ten participating families for a more detailed study by utilising a qualitative approach. Interpretive enquiries, such as interviews and target family life stories, have contributed to the understanding of FLP in heritage language maintenance. In addition, ethnolinguistic tools such as audio-recording and onsite observation are also used in this case study in order to follow daily interactions within these Chinese families based in France.

Curdt-Christiansens (2013) three-type FLP categorisation is adopted in this case study to analyse the daily interactions of the above mentioned families. According to Curdt-Christiansen, FLP can be broadly categorised into: highly organised FLP, unreflective parental adaptation and *laissez-faire* FLP.

3 Data Collection & Analysis

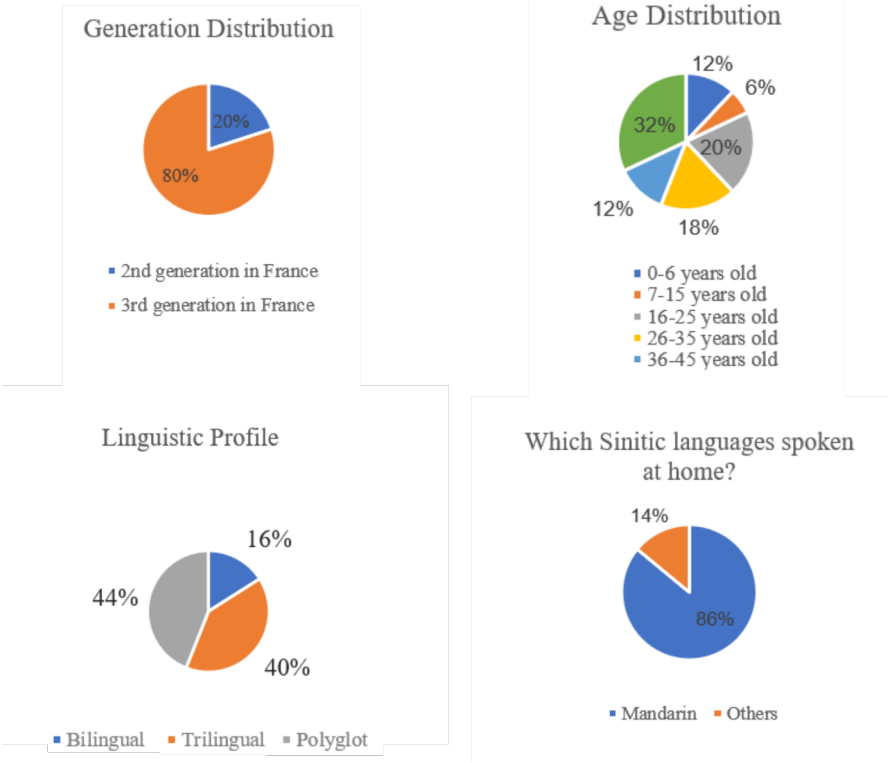
The online questionnaire aims to obtain the following information: 1) date of birth, 2) place of birth, 3) arrival year in France, 4) nationality, 5) occupation, 6) education background, 7) medium of instruction, 8) mother tongue(s)/first language(s), 9) language(s) used at home, 10) foreign language skills, 11) attitude to the host country official language (in this case, French); 12) existence of one or more languages imposed at home.

We have collected a total of 50 answers from ten Chinese families. This questionnaire provides the author with a general overview of the sociolinguistic landscape of Chinese

1. Shahzaman Haque: Co-director of the Departement of South Asia and Himalaya at INALCO, MDF in Urdu, latest publication: *Family language policy: Dynamics in language transmission in a migratory context* (2019).

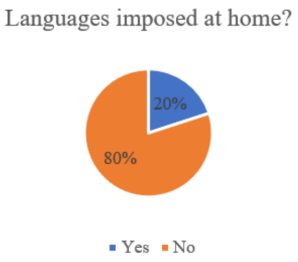
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families in France. A family is considered to be a Chinese family" if one of the parents originally came from China. While his or her first language may or may not be Chinese, as Curdt-Christiansen (2014) mentions in *Learning Chinese in Diasporic Communities: Many pathways to being Chinese*, Chinese proficiency is not the only way to be and feel Chinese. Due to the length limitation of this communication, only the following five aspects will be presented: family generation distribution, age distribution, linguistic profile, Sinitic languages spoken at home and the existence of one or more languages imposed at home.



Two of the ten participating families have lived in France for three generations, while the majority of the families were second-generation immigrants in France. Participants from all age groups were part of the study. Restults from the sampled participants indicated that the Chinese diaspora in France is highly polyglot. No participant self-declared as monolingual in this case study. As in other overseas Chinese communities, Mandarin is the Sinitic language which is the most spoken by the present day within Chinese community living in France. Aside from Mandarin, the Sinitic languages most spoken at home are the following: Teochew, Cantonese and Wenzhou. These languages are those spoken in coastal provinces of South-Eastern China. In France, Teochew and Cantonese are mostly spoken among ethnic Chinese immigrants from Cambodia and Vietnam (Zhang, 1998).

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Since we are studying family language policy, it is important to know whether parents impose a language at home. The vast majority (eight out of ten) of participating families self-reported that no language is imposed at home. However, as revealed by other social science studies, participants do not always declare what they actually do in real life. That is why a field study was essential to find out what was in fact taking place.

Since Wang (2019) had already conducted an FLP case study of mixed Chinese families (one French and one Chinese parent) in France, families from mixed parentage were eliminated from the selection of the four families to be studied in more detail. In order to analyse and compare any potential differences between second and third generation families, the researcher selects two second-generation and two third-generation Chinese only families (both parents are ethnically Chinese).

Family A (highly-organised FLP)

Table 1 – Family A (highly-organised FLP)

Member	Grand-father A	Grand-mother A	Uncle A	Father A	Mother A	Grand-daughter A
Age in 2019	67	58	23	37	39	6
Place of birth	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	Paris, France	Laon, France	Metz, France	Paris, France
Arrival in France	1970s	1970s			Back to France after 2000	
Linguistic repertoire	Teochew Cambodian Thai French	Teochew Cambodian Vietnamese French	Teochew French English	Teochew French English Mandarin	French Mandarin English	French Mandarin English Teochew
Education	Secondary school level	Primary school unfinished	Master	2 Masters	Master	Kinder-garten
Profession	Retired restaurant owner	Retired restaurant owner	IT Student	IT Specialist; psychologist	Security consultant; translator	Pupil
FLP	No			Yes		

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Family A is a third-generation Chinese family living in France. The grandparents were Cambodian originally from China. They came to France in the 1970s as war refugees. Even after having lived in France for many years, grandparents A can barely speak French. Their two sons have been their translators since childhood. Teochew is their mother tongue and the only language they handed down to their sons. However, as members of a Chinese ethnic group, both grandparents have Cambodian as one of their first languages, this language of their birth country cannot be found in the next generations linguistic repertoire. Also, it is noteworthy that both their sons were born in France before their ancestors home country, China, had become a global superpower. Perhaps this could explain why grandparents A did not send their sons to afterschool Mandarin class. Father A picked up Mandarin as a grownup when he met his wife. Mother A is half French half Chinese and has spent a considerable amount of her life in China before finally settling down in France. Father A has explicitly stated in an interview with the researcher that he wants his daughter to learn Mandarin for two main reasons: This is for her identity and future career." Parents A firmly believe that it is only through strict language tuition in the home, that their daughter can be fluent in all the languages they expect her to master, which are, French, English and Mandarin. Daughter A is supposed to speak French at school, Mandarin with her mother and English with her father. In addition, an English native speaker babysits daughter A twice a week, and a Chinese native speaker babysits her three times a week. Parents A have even thought of sending their daughter to learn Arabic, the mother tongue of the biggest minority community in France. Thanks to the Internet, Daughter A has access to many cartoons, songs, films and other language learning materials which provide her with total immersion in Mandarin while living ten thousand kilometres away from China. Parents A have already taken their daughter to English-speaking countries (such as the UK) to practice her English. They plan to travel to China with the little one in the not-too-distant future to offer her the opportunity of speaking Mandarin. Daughter A is able to understand some Teochew, but she cannot have even the most basic conversation in her grandparents' mother tongue. When there is a family reunion, grandparents A prefer to speak broken French with their granddaughter rather than Teochew.

A concrete example of how Family A practices highly organised FLP is transcribed below.

Excerpt A

(Transcribing convention is in Appendix A.)

Daughter A:	*Parce que c'est férié.*
Mother A:	Oh it's a holiday.
	[[
Daughter A:	*C'est férié* (giggles).
	It's a public holiday.
	[[
Father A:	English please!

This extract shows how parents A explicitly request that their daughter apply the family language rules.

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Family B (*laissez-faire* FLP)

Table 2 – Family B (*laissez-faire* FLP)

Member	Grand-father B	Grand-mother B	Aunt B	Father B	Mother B	Grand-daughter B
Age in 2019	64	64	27	32	31	2
Place of birth	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	Haute-de-Seine, France	Haute-de-Seine, France	Hainan, China	Paris, France
Arrival in France	1970s	1970s			After 2000	
Linguistic repertoire	Teochew Mandarin Cambodian Vietnamese French	Teochew Mandarin Cambodian Vietnamese Cantonese French	Teochew French English German	Teochew French English Mandarin German	Mandarin Sichuanese French English	Teochew French Mandarin
Education	Primary school	None	Master	Master	Master	Nursery
Profession	Retired bookstore owner	Retired bookstore owner	IT special-ist	IT special-ist	Chinese teacher	
FLP	No					

Family B has a similar profile to Family A. Grandparents B also came to France in the 1970s as war refugees. Interestingly, just as in Family A, Southeastern Asian languages (i.e., Cambodian and Vietnamese) are not handed down to the following generations. Although the grandparents were born and grew up in Cambodia, when they introduce themselves, they always say We are Chinese", instead of saying We are Cambodian". Language usage in Family B is more open to free choice when compared to Family A. According to the researchers observation from a recording of the familys discussion at lunchtime, code-switching is not unwelcomed, and family members speak the language they prefer without any restriction. In Family B, the Sinitic language handed down from the first to the second generation is Teochew. Mother B is from Mainland China and came to France for her masters degree. Similarly, father B acquired Mandarin as an adult after having met his wife, whose mother tongue is Mandarin and who teaches Mandarin as a second language in Ile-de-France. With access to Youtube and other online video sharing platforms, there is no lack of language learning resources for both father B and his daughter. Despite her young age, daughter B has already travelled to China with her parents and has therefore been exposed to a totally Chinese environment. In Family B, Teochew is also handed down from the second to the third generation. Most of the time, father B speaks Teochew with his daughter. Because of her pre-school age, for the time being, daughter B spends most of her time in Teochew and Mandarin speaking environments with her relatives in the home domain. Parents B are not worried about their daughters French proficiency: She will learn French sooner or later when she goes to school.".

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The following example illustrates how Family B practices a *laissez-faire* FLP.

Excerpt B.1 (Transcribing convention is in Appendix B.)

Grandmother B: Mie gai? (Teochew)
How de we say?
Grandfather B: *diabèt*[2]
Grandmother B: *diabèt*[3]
Aunt B: Mais (laughing), *pourquoi, pourquoi il est heureux et t'es t'es en train de dire ...*
[[
Grandmother B: *Parce que moi, je le veille pour ne pas rentrer dans cette voie.*
Conversations continued in Teochew...

Code-switching and accommodation occur frequently and seem to be widely accepted within Family B. Furthermore, it is noticeable that language socialisation is used to hand down heritage language in Family B. Later in the same recording, grandfather B tried to explain to his son a Chinese proverb in Teochew which praises scholars:

Excerpt B.2

(Transcribing convention is in Appendix B. The whole conversation is in Teochew.)

Grandfather B: Tong gok nang, wu jei gu wei, ta "ze gou rui wu tag ze gao".
(Among) Chinese people, there is a proverb which says "From ancient times, only learning is the noblest of human pursuits."

Pause for three seconds

Grandfather B: Tong gok ze gou gao ji zuong a ...
In China from ancient times till our days...
Father B: Hein heng, tja oi tong. (Teochew)
Hmm understand.
[[
Father B: Oi tag ze gai nang siang ceng gao.
People who study well are the noblest.

2. Diabèt = diabète
3. See note 3

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Family C (highly organised FLP)

Table 3 – Family C (highly organised FLP)

Member	Father C	Mother C	Daughter C1	Daughter C2
Age in 2019	39	37	6	3
Place of birth	Jilin, China	Heilongjiang, China	Paris, France	Paris, France
Arrival in France	After 2000	After 2000		
Linguistic repertoire	Mandarin Northeastern Mandarin French English	Mandarin French English	Mandarin French English	Mandarin French
Education	Master	Master	Kindergarten	Nursery
Profession	Architect	Entrepreneur	Pupil	Pupil
FLP	No			

Family C has a totally different life story to Families A and B. Parents C are originally from North-Eastern China, where their local language shares many similarities with Standard Mandarin. Both parents came to France for higher education after Chinas Reform and Opening-up" and entry into WTO. Father C and mother C met each other at the end of their studies in France and decided to stay after graduation. Both parents have a masters degree and intellectual profession. Compared to Chinese immigrants who came to France as refugees, parents C belong to the so-called elite". Parents C have near native-level French and professional proficiency in English. Grandparents C still live in China, so the girls go to China to visit them approximately once a year. During the school year, the girls have video calls with their grandparents and other close relatives. In the self-reported questionnaire, parents C declare that there is no FLP in the home. Nevertheless, the researcher discovers in her fieldwork that language use is highly organised in Family C. Parents C are aware that their daughter should master not only French and Mandarin but also English. Similar to Family A, they also hire a native English-speaking babysitter, to pick up their daughters after school and look after them for several hours three times a week. Daughters C do not have a Chinese babysitter. However, they do have afterschool Chinese cultural classes where they learn Chinese calligraphy and painting. Even after living in France for more than 15 years, parents C often refer to themselves as We Chinese". When they talk about their trip to China, they usually say We returned to China". Excerpt C gives a concrete example of how the childrens language is accommodated under their fathers influence.

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Excerpt C

(Transcribing convention is in Appendix C. The conversation is mainly in Mandarin.)

Daughter C2:	Mama, zhe shi shei de ya?
	Mum whose is this?
Daughter C1:	Zhe shi baba de.
	It's daddy's.
Daughter C2:	Ohh.
Mother C:	Baba de.
	Daddy's.
...	
Daughter 1:	Baba ni kan *ça fait deux fois.*
	Daddy look, it has been twice.
Daughter 1& 2:	Puuu, puuuu. (onomatopoeic)
Father C:	Aiya, bie pu le, bie pu le.
	Aiya don't pu, don't pu.

Above is a recording made at dinner time. We can observe that, compared to Family A, parental language resistance in Family C is applied in a smoother and more implicit way. Instead of overtly telling their children to use the language they are supposed to speak, father C simply ignores his daughters utterance in French and continues to use Mandarin. The youngest daughter has not gone to school yet, the language she speaks best is the language her parents speak at home most often, which is Mandarin. This could well explain why the girls speak to each other in Mandarin instead of French. The data collected from other FLP studies, indicates that school-age siblings usually prefer to speak the language of their birth country when they talk to each other.

Family D has a similar background to Family C. Both parents are well-educated and former international students in France. The whole family has acquired French nationality after living in France for several years. The parents speak Wenzhou between them and with the grandparents, but never to their children. Daughter D does not speak Wenzhou, however, she can understand most of the conversations in Wenzhou. For the parents, Wenzhou is a plus but not a must for their children. Her younger brother can neither speak nor understand Wenzhou. Just as Teochew was not handed down in Family A, so the less powerful Wenzhou gives way to Chinas sole official language, Mandarin. It is noteworthy that Family D and Family A are neighbours living in the same building and send their children to the same school. For this reason, daughter D and daughter A share the same babysitters, go to the same after school Chinese cultural classes, and frequently spend weekends together. Father D is a very busy and hard-working businessman. The author met him only once while doing her one-year-long fieldwork. Generally, he leaves home for work before his children wake up and returns home after his children have gone to sleep. The Childrens Chinese input in the home mostly comes from mother D. Children D have already been to China several times with their parents.

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Family D (unreflective parental adaptation)

Table 4 – Family D (unreflective parental adaptation)

Member	Father D	Mother D	Daughter D	Son D
Age in 2019	34	33	6	3
Place of birth	Zhejiang, China	Zhejiang, China	Paris, France	Paris, France
Arrival in France	After 2000	After 2000		
Linguistic repertoire	Mandarin Wenzhou French	Mandarin Wenzhou French	Mandarin French English Wenzhou	French Mandarin
Education	Bac+2	Master	Kindergarten	Nursery
Profession	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	Pupil	Pupil
FLP	No			

Excerpt D

(Transcribing convention is in Appendix D.)

Daughter D: "Ge tian xi" shuo ming shen me ne?
What's the meaning of "washing every other day"?

Mother D: Jin tian bu xi, ming tian xi. Hou tian bu xi, da hou tian xi. Jiu shi ge yi tian, ge yi tian, ge yi tian.
Not washing today, washing tomorrow. Not washing the day after tomorrow, washing the day after the day after tomorrow. That is every other day, every other day, every other day.

Daughter D: "Da hou tian" shi shen me ne?
What is "the day after the day after tomorrow"?

Mother D: "Da hou tian" jiu shi ...
"The day after the day after tomorrow" is ...

Daughter D: [[
Après-après-après-après-après-après-demain ?
After after after after after after tomorrow?

Mother D: *Non, après-demain.*
No, the day after tomorrow.

Daughter D: *Après-demain, après-demain.*
The day after tomorrow, the day after tomorrow.

Mother D: *Non*, da hou tian" *cest « après-après-demain ».*
No, "da hou tian" it's "the day after the day after tomorrow".

This excerpt is also drawn from a dinnertime recording. Mother D is explaining the meaning of the term da hou tian" to her daughter. Her explanation first starts in Mandarin. Her daughter gets confused so tries to get a confirmation of the meaning by translating the term into French. Under her daughters influence, Mother D switches from Mandarin to French without any hesitation. The explanation ends up

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in French. Mother D would like her children to speak Mandarin as much as possible when at home. But she seems to find it difficult to impose a Mandarin-only domestic environment. Very often, she adapts her language to that of her children without thinking.

4 Discussion

This case study briefly compared the FLP of four Chinese families living in Paris and its suburbs. It contributes to the field of FLP by expanding on existing literature on FLP with fieldwork conducted in France. Three main tendencies emerged from the data collected:

Firstly, the choice of language and the implementation of a FLP are very personal, and so can differ from one family to the next. Even though families A, C and D are friends who know one another well and who live in the same area, with daughter A and the eldest daughters of families C and D being schoolmates, they do not share the same type of language management. Parental language fluency is a sufficient but not necessary condition for the choice of language they have the intention of handing down to the next generation. In the case of Families A and B, Cambodian is one of the grandparents' first languages. However, none of their descendants speak Cambodian. In the case of Family D, the parents have not handed down their mother tongue and one of their first languages, Wenzhou, to their daughter and son. So, we suggest that identity is the key element which decides on the choice of language which the parents tend to hand down. Furthermore, the economic and political power of a language can also play an essential role in the choice of language. It is apparent that Mandarin outweighs other Sinitic languages and has become the new symbol of identity amongst overseas Chinese.

Secondly, this case study shows us that language transmission can fall into two categories. Less-educated parents tend to hand down heritage language in an unconscious way, whereas the elite" do it consciously. For example, when it comes to daily language practice, in Family A and B, the grandparents do not make any explicit effort to hand down Teochew to their children. In fact, grandparents A and B are unaware of the advantages of bilingualism or multilingualism.

Finally, with the development of technology and the democratisation of air travel, children now have more possibilities and opportunities for immersion in their heritage languages. Native-level audio and visual language learning resources are accessible to all four families *via* the Internet. Free online resources break down, in some way, language resource gaps between wealthy families and less affluent families. In the past, travelling back to the ancestors country was expensive and so not affordable for everyone, even once in a lifetime. In our sample, all four families can afford a trip to China once in a while. Some even travel to China at least once a year.

We hope that this case study could also inspire French language educators while teaching students from immigrant backgrounds. Some knowledge of their immigrant students' FLP might be helpful and useful to understand their difficulties in learn-

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ing French and French culture. Thus, more adaptable adjustment could be made according to the audience's situation and need.

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Appendices

Appendix A

French lines are in Italic. Translation in English is underlined. Double brackets [[appears when two phrases are enunciated simultaneously.

Appendix B

French lines are in Italic. Translation in English is underlined. Double brackets [[appears when two phrases are enunciated simultaneously.

Appendix C

French lines are in Italic. Translation in English is underlined.

Appendix D

French lines are in Italic. Translation in English in underlined. The phrases which are neither in Italic nor underlined are in Mandarin.

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