

Analysis of R.O. Winstedt's View on the Influence of Hinduism in the Malay Culture

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Abstract

R.O. Winstedt is an orientalist who had been serving in Malaya as a British administrator. His form of thinking was based on the philosophy of logical empirical positivism, which is an understanding that emphasizes on making full use of the intellect as the main approach to obtain facts based on systematic and thorough research methods. This philosophy rejects revelation as proof and source of facts because religious proofs are considered as irrelevant in the field of history. This article focuses on the analysis of Winstedt's view on the influence of Hinduism in the life of the Malay community, especially in Malaya through his four works. The authors have used historiography, comparisons and content analysis to analyse the views. The study found that Winstedt's thinking approach, in assessing the impact of Hinduism in the Malay community life, especially in culture, legal and myth, was dubious and biased. He believed that the community had been influenced by the culture and the lifestyle of the Hindus, including the ability to expand a civilization; denying the contribution of Islam. This understanding, which was based on the European-centered thinking known as Euro-centrism, emerged due to the failure of the orientalist in understanding the content of Islam. The Euro-centrism has propagated the European nation as a great and civilized nation compared to other nations and should be regarded as the "ambassador of civilization"; the saviour of to-be-civilised people.

Keywords: Winstedt, influence of Hinduism, Islam, Malaya, the Malays

Introduction

The most interesting discussion related to the culture of the Malay world focuses on Islam and Hinduism. The main direction of the discussion emphasises on their roles and contributions in developing the civilization around the Malay Archipelago (Rani, 2005). This

discussion has attracted the Western orientalist to make further investigation on the influence of Islam and Hinduism among the Eastern people especially in the Malay world.

According to Rahman et al (2019), the main objective of these orientalist were to separate the Muslims from the foundation of *'aqidah* by making the religion less functioning in their daily life. In Malaya, for example, these people had restricted the role of Islam only in the matter of *'ibadah* (worshipping) and religious rituals, such as the wedding. Adams (1975) and Said (1977) had the same idea on the form of the orientalist's thinking, which they believed that this classical thinking style was initiated based on the logical thinking. Zakaria (1999) argued that the orientalist blamed the religion on the people's sufferings as a result from being prevaricated by the concept of God. This concept of God had made people become loyal to the religion.

Along Windstedt's service in Malaya, he had been spending effort to bring changes which were alien for the Malay people especially when he applied his conservative personal view about Islam (Rahman & Kadir, 2017). One of the views was the assumption on the negativity of Islam in developing the Malay world, meanwhile Hinduism was seen as an important factor that had shaped the culture of the Malays in Malaya. Hence, the authors have chosen four Windstedt's writings in explaining his view on the Hinduism's influence in the life of the Malays, and the writings are; *The Malay: A Cultural History*, *Shaman, Saiva and Sufi: A Study of the Evolution of Malay Magic*, *A History of Malaya*, and *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu*.

R.O. Winstedt's View about the Influence of Hinduism in the Life of the Malays

1) *The Malay: A Culture History* (1961).

This writing discusses the life of the Malays in Malaya, on how the system of beliefs was formed as influenced by Hinduism until the time when Islam began to spread in Malaya. Windstedt had elaborated the customary law, particularly the *Minangkabau*. He argued that the Islamic law and the customary law were two separate laws in the eyes of the orientalist. Other than that, the writing also mentioned about the formation of the Malay culture, starting from the Malay Malacca Sultanate until the time when all Malay kingdoms began to interact with one another, in terms of history, languages, literature and social.

At the beginning of this writing, Windstedt had mentioned about the perfectness of this writing as a complete study about the Malays in Malaya. As he mentioned:

The conception of culture in this book is implicit in its table of contents. Broadly it is regarded as a body of ideas, practices and techniques that have been cherished by the Malays long enough to affect their way of life, a legacy that gives them heart and interests saves their minds from inanition as food saves their bodies.

Winstedt 1961, 1)

Winstedt believed that the whole life of the Malay people was based on the belief system, culture, language, social and literature which were influenced by Hinduism and Islam. According to him:

Malay culture includes a fear of nature spirits, an instinctive perception of the "unbecoming" rather than of the sinful and the criminal, the séance of the shaman, the Hindu ritual of a royal

installation, the celebration of the Muhammadan New Year, the sermon in the mosque, the pilgrimage to Mecca, Sufi mysticism...
(Winstedt 1961, 1)

Winstedt in his writing also stated that Islam in Malaya was almost similar to Hinduism and it was believed to be influenced by Hinduism as well. He made this argument based on Marco Polo's finding in 1292, that Hinduism had become the first belief among the people before the arrival of Islam in Samudera and Pasai, soon after Islam had spread to the entire Malay world. Based on this view, Winstedt had come into idea that the Malaya had been influenced initially by Hinduism, therefore, Islam was regarded as weak due to its vulnerability to external influences.

Winstedt also had made comparison between the Islamic law and the customary law especially the *Minangkabau*, which included matters pertaining to wedding, criminal and hereditary. Winstedt believed that the *Perpatih* customary law and the *Temenggong* customary law were two separate laws in Malaya. He assumed that the *Temenggong* customary law was under the influence of Islam and Hinduism. Meanwhile, the *Perpatih* customary law was regarded as the original law of Malaya, without being influenced by both religions.

Winstedt ended up his writing by denying the intellectual capability of the Malays, as he mentioned:

The Malay is still a child of nature in a sophisticated world that awaits his exploration. If any Malay should develop an original literary bent, it is more likely that the impulse will come from densely populated Java or even from Sumatra rather than from the two and a half million Malays of the peninsula, though it is not always the probable that happens.

(Winstedt 1961, 181)

2) *A History of Malaya* (1988).

This writing focuses on the history of Malaya starting from the influence of Hinduism and Islam, the Malay Sultanate of Malacca, the colonial period of the Portuguese, Dutch and British, the Sultanate of Johor after the fall of the Malacca Sultanate, the relationship between Malaya and Siam, the Japanese invasion until the independence of Malaya. There were also general discussions on culture, literature, social and religion in the work.

In fact, Winstedt assumed that the writing had answered all questions about the history of Malaya. He wrote:

*No one can engage in first-hand research in all the fields of Hindu, Malay, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch and English history, so that like every modern historian I am indebted for the material of some of my chapters to the labours of others whose works are cited in my bibliography. The discovery before the world war in the library of the chamber of Deputies, Paris, of the *Suma Orientalis* of Tome Pires has helped me in my researches into the early history of Malacca.*

(Winstedt 1988, iii)

Through his work, Winstedt had classified the population in Malaya into four major group of races, as he stated:

Omitting Indians, Chinese and other immigrants of historical times, the inhabitants of Malaya are of four races: the Negrito, the Sakai, the Jakun (or proto-Malay) and the civilized Malay, though anthropology has not left the Sakai pure and finds even the Negrito composite.

(Winstedt 1988, 11)

Winstedt had deeply elaborated the categorization and obviously in the form of the orientalist's point of view. The description is seen to enclose the elements of bias and prejudice against these races as he marked the negative elements more than the good ones.

He also questioned the intellectual ability of the Malays by associating this ability with the foreign culture, not originally from the community itself. The intellectual ability of the Malays, according to Winstedt, was the result of being influenced by foreign cultures, which was copied for example from the Arabians and Indians. Meanwhile, the description on the influence of Hinduism in the life of the Malay community wouldn't be as complete as "The Malay: A Cultural History". The contents of the discussion focused more on the period during the reign of Sri Vijaya and Majapahit in this region before the spread of Islam and the establishment of the Malacca Sultanate. Winstedt explained:

Sri Vijaya had its beginning at Palembang which lying at the south of Sumatra dominated the straits of Sunda. Near to its capital Bukit Seguntang (its Mahameru) is a statue of Buddha in the Amaravati style, which goes to confirm a statement by the Buddhist I-Tsing that in 671 A.D.

(Winstedt 1988, 33)

At the end of this work, Winstedt concluded that the Malays had no identity of its own, by saying:

The Malays have experienced many foreign influences, incomparably the greatest being that from India, which gave them three religions, a new magic and medicine, law Hindu and Islamic, the arts of sculpture, gold and silver-work and silk-weaving, two alphabets and a secular and religious literature, full of Sanskrit words for abstract concepts such as danger, intellect, kindness, language, name, price, profit, property, religion, heaven and hell.

(Winstedt 1988, 263)

3) *Shaman, Saiva and Sufi: A Study of the Evolution of Malay Magic* (1925).

This writing discusses the relationship between the influence of Hinduism and Islam, especially in the medical aspect within the Malay community. The discussion touched on the degree of confidence in the community related to magical elements, whether the belief is still practiced among the people even the people had long adhered to the teachings of Islam. The activities related to magic including the farming ritual, a special ceremony celebrating the

birth of a baby and so on. Through this work, Winstedt had been trying to prove Islam, as embraced by the Malay community, came from South India. He mentioned:

Islam coming first from India, introduced the Malay to a wide field of fresh magic.

(Winstedt 1925, 26)

He believed that Islam, which was brought to Malaya, specifically came from South India based on the strong background pattern in Pasai, as found in the folklore story "*Hikayat Raja Pasai*". Winstedt also tried to show similarities between the utterances of "mantras" by the Hindus during official ceremonies such as treating patients using *du'a* (prayers), and the ones frequently uttered by the Islamic medical practitioners, for example;

*Genies of supernatural power!
Your home is at the navel of the sea,
By the tree on the broken rock!
Enter not the line drawn by my teacher!
Else will I curse ye with the words!
"There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet"
OM! I neutralize all evil,
O Solomon! In the name of God.*

Winstedt added:

When Islam came, the Malay magician sat at the feet of its pundits, studied their arts of divination, and borrowed their cabalistic talismans. Before his old incantations he set the names of Allah and Muhammad, often in impious contexts.

(Winstedt 1925, 21)

Based on the view mentioned above, it clearly showed that Winstedt believed that Islam as embraced by the communities in Malaya was brought from India, and their religious belief was weak as it was shaded by the values of Hinduism and was easily influenced by other beliefs. According to Winstedt:

Long before the introduction of Islamic mysticism, Hinduism had encouraged the Malay magician to fortify his powers and command the wonder of the credulous by ascetic practices.

(Winstedt 1925, 21)

4) *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (1927).

The writing of this work was assisted by Daeng Abdul Hamid Tengku Muhammad Salleh. This work was categorized by Ahmad (1940, 151) as the first scientific work on general Malay history ever produced in the Malay language. According to Winstedt, the writing of a historical work must consist of facts and evidence which promote the truth of an event. He also believed that any work containing aspects like the myths and fairy tales consisted in the previous writings of the Malay literature should be totally rejected.

This writing focuses on the history of Malay civilization, the race, the influence of Hindu and Islam within the society, the Malacca Malay Sultanate era, until the era of colonisation in Malaya. Winstedt proclaimed sceptical (doubtful) and biased standpoint when he reviewed any Malay work, as he argued:

Maka sungguh pun ada hikayat mencheritakan hal zaman purba kala itu, tetapi tiada-lah berapa guna-nya: kerana segala yang di-riwayatkan dari hal dewa-dewa dan orang kesaktian yang tersebut kesah-nya di-dalam hikayat-hikayat itu sa-mata-mata-lah nampak-nya cherita menyedapkan telinga sahaja, bukan-nya dari-pada perkara yang di-terima dan di-hargakan pada nilayan tawarikh. [So it is true that there are tales that tell the story of the ancient times, but it is of no use: because everything that narrated gods matter and the people of the magic as mentioned in the tales were only pleasing to the ear, not from the things acceptable and valuable in historical context].

(Winstedt 1927, 16)

This paper also discussed the races scattered throughout the Malay Archipelago especially in Malaya. Winstedt called them mixed-races people, as he mentioned:

Sa-sungguh-nya dari-pada percamporan lain-lain bangsa (terutama orang Hindu) dengan benih pancharan nenek moyang orang Melayu itu-lah telah jadi-nya bangsa Melayu yang ada sekarang ini, ia-itu yang memenohi jadi penduduk-penduduk merata-rata 'Alam Melayu'. [Indeed, through the intermingle among other races (especially with the Hindus) with the Malay ancestors, had brought into existence of the present Malays, those who scattered throughout the Malay World.]

(Winstedt 1927, 27)

Winstedt also underestimated the Malay indigenous tribes such as the Semang and Sakai by categorizing them as primitive compared to the more civilized Malay community. In fact, Winstedt also elaborated the influence of Hinduism in the lives of the Malays by saying:

Maka guru yang mula-mula datang memberi tiruan atau tuladan ka-pada orang Melayu berkenaan dengan perkara-perkara kemajuan dan tamaddun dan fikir-fikiran baharu yang tiada pada orang Melayu zaman itu ia-lah orang Hindu; khabar-nya mereka mulai datang itu pada kurun Masehi yang kedua (T.M. 200), tatkala Tanah Jawa sudah di-duduki oleh orang Hindu itu". [And the teachers who first came to let the Malays imitate or guide them towards the matters of progression and civilization as well as contemporary thoughts were the Hindus; as it was reported that they started coming in the second century (AD 200), when Java was already occupied by the Hindus "].

(Winstedt 1927, 7)

He believed that the development of Malay civilization was influenced by the Hinduism instead of Islam. In fact, according to Winstedt, the Malays were not adhering to the teachings of Islam even after embracing the religion for so long. In the early spread of Islam in Malaya, the religious teachers were not so respected and often looked down by the society.

Scholastic Views on the Influence of Hinduism in the Life of the Malays

1) View on the Myth

Winstedt (1961) rejected the use of myths to proof a historical event. He claimed that the use of myth as illogical such as in the works like *Salasilah Raja-Raja di Negeri Kutai*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Aceh*, *Hikayat Siak* and *Tuhfat al-Nafis*. Based on this view, Winstedt made his own assumption that the knowledge of the Malay community was lower than the Western societies. This assumption meets the requirement of the historiography approach that the accuracy of the fact must be proofed by logical thinking. As Maier (1988, 62) mentioned:

Winstedt, on the other hand, was fully aware of reading a text and not reality, and when he tried interpreting the world in term of the hikayat he had to draw the conclusion that Malay historiography was apparently operating from a distinct set of rules and regulations of knowledge that made it incommensurable with modern Western historiography, and also inferior.

According to Denisova (2011), the elements of mythology in the works related to the Malay Islamic history from the 13th Century up to the 19th. There was information in the form of semi-historical narrative that was associated with the tradition before and after embracing Islam. The narration of this historical work in the form of *hikayat* was made at the behest of the government with the purpose to praise and illustrate the greatness of the administration at that time. Every information contained in these works needs to be studied critically and comprehensively to find out the truth. The authors believe that it is inappropriate to regard the above historical works as less valuable and reject their use as important historical sources. Denisova (2011, 52) also argued:

Dalam mitos-mitos yang dirakamkan dalam teks-teks sejarah itu, berlaku transformasi penting yang dipengaruhi oleh Islam. Unsur-unsur mitologi tradisional (cerita mengenai kanak-kanak kembar, perkahwinan suci, anak dewa-dewi dan lain-lain) beransur-ansur hilang dan diganti dengan maklumat yang berkaitan dengan tamadun Islam. Muncul juga banyak definisi dan watak daripada kebudayaan Arab, Parsi, India, Macedonia, Turki dan lain-lain. Ini ternyata bahawa alam Melayu adalah lebih terbuka dan hubungan intelektualnya juga lebih luas. [In the myths recorded in those historical texts, there was an important transformation influenced by Islam. The elements of traditional mythology (stories about twins, sacred marriages, children of gods and goddesses, etc.) were gradually diminished and replaced with information related to Islamic civilization. There were also many definitions and characters derived from the Arab, Persian, Indian, Macedonian,

Turkish and other cultures. It turned out that the Malay world was more open and the intellectual relationship also became wider.]

2) View on the Malay Culture

The first orientalist who related the history of the Malay world with the elements of the Indian culture was Snouck (Rahman et al., 2016). It is used as a basic reference in the questions of history, cultural practices, and the origins of the influence of religion in the Malay world by the Western orientalists. According to Elias (2012, 613):

Dalam konteks pengkajian orientalis terhadap sejarah Islam di alam Melayu, persamaan rupa zahiriyah pada banyak amalan yang bersifat kebudayaan dengan masyarakat Islam di benua India atau amalan pra-Islam telah menguatkan andaian bahawa Islam di sini tidak mungkin pada fikiran mereka berasal dari tanah Arab atau disebarkan oleh orang-orang Arab. [In the context of the orientalists' research on the history of Islam in the Malay world, most of the cultural practices seemed to be similar with Muslim community in the subcontinent of India or the pre-Islamic practices confirmed the assumption that Muslims were unlikely, to their mind, coming from the Arab lands or disseminated by the Arabs.]

The Malay world has gone through a long course of history and has been communicating with the civilizations of India, China and Arab. With the ability to absorb other cultures, the Malay civilisation was ready to accept and modify the influences of the foreign culture. Its nature was quite open, but its openness did not even diminish the core identity or transform the entire structure (Deraman, 2000). The Malay civilisation will always be influenced by other cultures, nevertheless people should be wise in adapting elements from other cultures by matching them to the will and values of the cultural philosophy. In this regard, Fadzil (2006, 142) mentioned:

Pengislaman tidak bererti penghapusan secara total budaya tempatan. Memang Islam tidak bermaksud menghapuskan segala yang bersifat kebudayaan peribumi. Tidak semua unsur budaya peribumi itu negatif, malah sebaliknya banyak yang positif. Dalam hal-hal keduniaan, Islam mengamalkan prinsip yang disebut "al-Bara'ah al-Asliyyah" atau "al-Ibaha al-Asliyyah" yang membawa maksud bahawa semuanya dibolehkan, kecuali yang dilarang. [Islamization does not refer to total elimination of local culture. Indeed, Islam does not mean eliminating everything that is culturally indigenous. Not all elements of the indigenous culture are negative, in fact many are positive. In worldly matters, Islam practices a principle called "al-Bara'ah al-Asliyyah" or "al-Ibaha al-Asliyyah" which means that everything is allowed, except what is forbidden.]

According to Malek (2014), as Windstedt argued in his writing that the Malay culture was rooted from India until the 19th Century. It included lifestyles, political systems, medicine, literature, art and carpentry. However, as Fadzil (2006, 142) asserted:

Sebahagian kepercayaan dan adat Melayu pra-Islam memang karut, sesat dan perlu dihapuskan. Ia mungkin bersumber dari pengaruh Hindu, Buddha, animisme atau kepercayaan-kepercayaan keperibumian lainnya. Tetapi terdapat juga adat budaya yang tidak bertentangan dengan hukum atau nilai-nilai Islam, terutama adat yang lahir dari pemerhatian terhadap alam. [Some of the beliefs and customs of the pre-Islamic Malays were distorted, deviant and should be eliminated. It may have come from Hinduism, Buddhism, animism or other indigenous beliefs. But there were also customs that were not contrary to the Islamic law or values, especially the customs derived from observation of the nature.]

3) View on the Islamic Law and Custom

Based on the reading of Winstedt's works as mentioned earlier, the authors have identified some of his views on the Islamic law through his work entitled *The Malays: A Culture History*, which he made a comparison between the Islamic law and the customary law, especially the Minangkabau, in terms of implementation and the acceptance of the society towards both laws at the time. According to Rahman et al (2020), Islamic law is considered as the most impartial law, which meets all human needs. However, in Malaya, the Islamic law was muddled with the customary laws, which were created by men to safeguard the position of a group of people especially the aristocrats.

Winstedt (1961) viewed the customary laws of *Perpatih* and *Temenggong* as two different types of legislation in Malaya. He explained that the *Temenggong* Customary Law was influenced by Islam and Hinduism, meanwhile, the *Perpatih* Customary Law was categorized as the original law of Malaya, which was affected by those two religions. Winstedt (1961, 91) explained:

There are digests, containing traces of Malay indigenous patriarchal law, but mixed with relics of Hindu law and overlaid with Muslim law. This patriarchal law is called Adat Temenggong or law of the Minister for war and police.

From this point of view, Winstedt (1988) perceived the arrival of Islam as a major obstacle to the advancement of the Malay law especially in relation to the culture and it was not supposed to be practised in Malaya. To clarify this argument, the authors also provided the view from Yan (2009, 140). He stated that:

They perceived Islam and Malay adat laws as irreconcilable and conflicting because Islamic laws originated from a different social context, so it could not practically serve the needs of the Malays.

He also added:

The colonial writers judged Islamic laws as static and arbitrary and that it has a negative impact upon the traditional Malay laws.

(Yan 2009, 140)

Yan's view is the proof of how the orientalist's biased assessment in evaluating something related to Islam was clearly influenced by the classical orientalist study approach that was very hostile to Islam. On behalf of the imperialists, Islamic law in Malaya did not greatly influence the life of the community and its position was lower than the customary law (Rahman et al., 2019). According to Winstedt:

Those taken in adultery might be stoned to death under Muhammadan Law. But over the relation of the sexes the adoption of that law was as gradual as in order fields of jurisprudence. Brutal as many of the penalties in the Malacca digest are, its mediaeval customary law was more lenient towards sexual offences than contemporary Muslim practice.

(Winstedt 1961, 105)

Through this view, he clearly labelled the customary law as fair and more fulfilling to the will of the society. The proof can be seen through his expression "was more lenient" as mentioned above. The authors believed that Winstedt was trying to underestimate the influence of the Islamic law in resolving the problems faced by the community in Malaya. This is explained by Abdullah (2005, 107-108), as she mentioned:

Sementara di Kepulauan Indonesia, pihak penjajah Belanda telah meneruskan langkah-langkahnya yang tertentu untuk melemahkan pengaruh undang-undang Islam. Ini dilakukan dengan menonjolkan kepentingan hukum adat yang mengatasi hukum agama. Polisi ini diperkenalkan dengan menetapkan bahawa orang-orang Eropah yang berada di Indonesia tertakluk kepada undang-undang Belanda. Sementara rakyat peribumi Indonesia pula tertakluk kepada hukum asli iaitu hukum adat. Dengan polisi ini, undang-undang Islam dianggap sebagai hukum asing yang kurang keutamaannya. Undang-undang syariah hanya dianggap mempunyai nilai-nilai keagamaan tanpa membawa implikasi perundangan dan hanya diperlakukan sekiranya diterima oleh hukum adat. [Meanwhile in the Indonesian Islands, the Dutch colonialists have continued their specific measures to weaken the influence of the Islamic law. This was done by highlighting the importance of the customary law that overrode the religious law. This policy was introduced by stating that the Europeans living in Indonesia were subjected to the Dutch law. Meanwhile, the indigenous people of Indonesia were subjected to the original law, namely customary law. With this policy, the Islamic law was considered as a foreign law that has less priority. Sharia law was only considered to promote religious values without carrying the legal implications and was only practiced if it was accepted by the customary law.]

Conclusion

The contribution of this research is very important in explaining the community's misunderstanding of the orientalist's particularly related to Winstedt's influence of Hinduism and Islam in the life of the Malay community. The cause of this problem is due to the Western colonial rejection of Islam which is considered an obstacle to human progress and its content does not follow the passage of time.

Winstedt's thinking approach regarding Islam in Malaya clearly shows a sceptical viewpoint (dubious) in almost all his writings on Islam and the Malays based on the bias judgment and it also deviated from the history of the Malay civilization. His view was based on the paradigm of evolution and diffusion found in the orientalism approach. He prioritized logical thinking at a higher level, to the point that all traditions, manners, and procedures of knowledge, as well as Islamic law, can be questioned its validity.

The arrival of Islam to Malaya for the authors did not eliminate the direct impact of the culture in the lives of the Malays. The arrival is seen positively as "led to a selective syncretisation" which refers to any customs that are considered appropriate and not in conflict with Islam will be maintained in their original form. The argument has contradicted the views of Winstedt who regarded that Islamic law and tradition as impossible to be practiced simultaneously because based on the orientalist's view, Islam was inappropriate to be practiced in Malaya due to cultural differences and place of living.

Winstedt also labelled the Malay community as people who were left behind in all aspects, such as the slow-rate progress as well as modernization when the people held firm onto Islam. Winstedt had failed to understand the community because his thinking was centered on Euro-centrism. The angle of his idea was based on the idea of Europeans as a great nation and more civilized compared to other people living in Asia, including the people in the Middle East as well as in Malaya. To improve this condition, the British were considered as the "ambassador of civilization," the savior of the people in the Malay world. When Winstedt made this Euro-centric approach as a yardstick to assess the history of Malaya, it turned out he failed to fully understand the Malay community, even became bias in interpreting the concerns related to Islam in Malaya.

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