

The Spirit of Tai Chi Chuan

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Loving People

Humans are the most intelligent of living beings.

Because they are intelligent, we should love their life.

There are people who are serene and free, following natural reality, whom others consider lazy, but I consider at peace.

There are people who conduct themselves simply and have very stable personalities, whom others consider uncultured, but I consider unspoiled. It is useless to speak only of the qualities of sages without knowing why they have such qualities.

The mind is like an eye, if even a tiny hair gets in an eye, the eye is uncomfortable. Similarly, if even a small matter concerns the mind, the mind will be disturbed. Once afflicted by disturbance, it is hard to concentrate.

just as an enormous tree grows from a tiny sprout, the stabilization of the spirit and attainment of enlightenment comes about through accumulated practice.

Luxurious food and clothing, social distinction, and material riches are all extraneous likes of desire, not good medicines that enhance life.

When people pursue them, they bring about their own destruction.

What can be more confused? Every meal, every nap, is a potential source of gain or loss: every act every word, can be a basis of calamity or fortune. Nonetheless, the body that practices the Way must be sustained by food and clothing. Social relations and the necessities of life are a boat for us – if we want to cross the sea, we need the aid of a boat. How could we neglect food and clothing before we have yet crossed over?

Ones deeds are done by one self, but destiny is bestowed by heaven.

The relation of deeds to destiny is like shadows and echoes following form and sound. Actions that are harmful to people are eventually punished in some way or other, outwardly or inwardly.

Ultimately it is impossible to escape the consequences of deeds.

For heaven helps the good, God enriches people.

Therefore to those who want to know how to deal with the world, I suggest, Love People.

*Extracts from the writings of the legendary founder of Tai Chi chuan
Chang San-feng 1391 – 1459*

The Spirit of Tai Chi

The Spirit of Tai Chi.

Cyclical in all of its aspects, the form is a moving Mandala, the postures arranged to lead us into a meditative state that deepens as we progress. Repetition of the form carries us further into ourselves freeing the spirit from the ego where it is scattered, ineffective, isolated and overshadowed by the gross emotions and desires of the material world.

The stillness we find in the movements brings us into the clarity of the form. It is here that the energy is processed and refined over and over again, gradually lifting it to higher and higher resonance. The form relates to the Tai Chi symbol, constantly changing and revolving between Yin and Yang.

Every time we practice the form we are refining the spirit, increasing our clarity of mind, transforming consciousness and concentrating energy and spirit. As we become more fluid in our movements we are absorbed into our practice, ready to begin again and again.

Three Steps

The Tai Chi form has three distinct parts, representing the holistic being- body, mind and spirit. Each of the parts is self contained yet exists only as part of the whole, we tend to feel that our bodies and minds are independent of each other and that spirit is some unattainable state reserved for people with religious connections and habits. Spirit is the ultimate driving force behind consciousness, spirit is already present in each and every one of us but it is weakened from lack of recognition. It is scattered by the pace of modern life, the constant assault of stimuli from our environment. It is best nurtured by quietening the mind and entering the stillness within.

Step One

The first part of the form relates to the body, and is the shortest. The physical form being the external part of Tai Chi is an aspect with which all of us have great concern because our vanity, self-consciousness and other similar feelings are closely connected within most of us. Because others can see us, much of our thinking is directed outward concerning itself with how others perceive us and we become anxious about how we are judged by them. On a personal level this refers to our own prejudices and the preconceived habits that we carry with us into every life situation, many of them, which are geared to satisfying our perceived sensual desires.

Step Two.

The second part of the form is twice the length of the first. The Mind, being more complex and difficult to deal with than the body, more challenging to comprehend, and quieten requires different challenges. The mind, in its craving for possessions, is always busy in the pursuit of power and control, driving us to achieve our ambitions, colouring the way in which we see the world. It leads us to rely on our preconceptions and distracts us from the reality of the present moment by yearning for the past or planning for the future. The mind contains our own idea of our existence, projects that image into the world for others to see and conditions the way in which we behave. As we judge ourselves to be, that is the way in which we are judged by the world.

Step Three.

Spirit is the third ingredient. The final part of the form is longer than the first two parts together, and likewise, it contains the most repeated postures. Because of ourselves, physical body and mind, our essential nature or Spirit is “on the run,” scattered, and in confusion. When we enter into the form we begin to reveal our essential nature - that which has been obscured by the superficial aspects of our lives. As our true nature emerges, it is able to have a greater influence upon the body and mind. Strengthening the Spirit with accumulated practice increases our understanding of the art, more accurately; practising Tai Chi ensures the Art is woven into the fabric of our lives.

Repetition

The benefits of repeated practice are initially physical but, as our competence increases and our movements slow down the mental demands increase. Longer spans of concentration are required to maintain the postures and a greater degree of mental awareness is necessary to control our movements in as precise a manner as possible. At this point, our imagination is brought in to the picture to integrate the actions of the mind and body. In this way we are able to work within our limitations, although the assimilation of the form always remains challenging and ever changing.

Slowly ascending through the levels prepares us step by step to open ourselves gradually to the inner self, the true self. Although this sounds ideal and gentle the energies we all contain have properties that can be likened to those of water: sometimes a gently flowing stream in idyllic surroundings; at other times a maelstrom that has the power to wash us before it. Fortunately we experience, these extremes rarely. It is more likely that we swing between feelings that are modifications of our normal moods and expressions of temperament.

Tai Chi gives the "No pain-No gain" cliché a new spin. To grow holistically, the "suffering" must be of a more rounded nature. We do not need to seek a physical "burn" but, in a holistic sense, the Mind, Body and Spirit must be stretched and exercised for them to experience growth. For these reasons the form has been devised to exercise the whole person gradually moving through us with its unique integrating effects. The body we all possess requires sensations - food, drink, sex and all manner of sensual experiences to satisfy it! Patience and self-discipline are difficult to sustain when the body's desires are involved.

Cyclical in its organisation, the form, apart from being physically circular in motion, is repetitious with postures appearing in distinct patterns. Completing the form once completes one cycle, with the nature of our internal state changing and developing as we progress. Our consciousness reaches a higher level as the performance of the form refines the intrinsic energies of our bodies. First, the regulation of the body occurs, the physical comes as close to its naturally intended state as it is able. Regulating the body allows us to focus more closely on the mind, this stage, being longer and having the more testing postures, develops greater amounts of energy (Chi) the "fuel" for the third section, where Chi, is processed thoroughly. Through eight repetitions of **Grasp the Sparrows tail**, we maintain the energy levels. This indicates the patience and endurance required, not to perfect the art, but to perfect ourselves.

The Parts of the Form Part One

The Body

Grasp the Sparrow's Tail with Ward off Left, the left hand rises to hold the birds head whilst the right, moving downwards, smoothes the tail feathers. Associated with heaven, the bird represents our intended alignment with that resonance.

Roll Back as we begin rolling back we are accepting incoming energy and preparing to press forward and outward simultaneously (**Press**) . Next we draw energy back into our centre as the hands and arms are pulled inwards in readiness to expel it outwards as we push forwards. (**Push**) Moving inwards and outwards gently, allowing the breath to stay calm the back remains straight giving free movement to our energy. We can then begin to investigate the inner calm within the movement. The intensive movement of **Grasp the Sparrow's Tail** brings an awareness of the centre as the body generates the energy to transform into spirit.

Single Whip In Single Whip, the body turns full circle for the first time in the form. The move is a natural progression from **Grasp the Sparrow's Tail**. A seamless movement is necessary because simply turning without thought would not only compromise our balance but break our concentration and lose the energy gathered up to this point. The whole of the **Grasp the Sparrows Tail** sequence is repeated throughout the form taking us expansively through the five elements – Metal, Earth, Water, Fire and Wood.

In **White Crane Spreads Wings**, the right hand is raised to the level of the forehead raising the Chi to the higher centres. The *I Ching's* description of the posture is difficult to better. The Hexagram of a lake over a lake symbolises “the joyous, Yin in nature joy has great power. A lake evaporates upwards and thus eventually dries up; but when two lakes are joined they do not dry up so readily, for one replenishes the other.”

This is consistent with the image of Tai Chi rolling like a great inexhaustible river.

Brush knee and Push The repetitions, five in all, brush away each of the five senses and the appetites that they give rise to. Moving from one to the other we diminish the effects of the senses and see that gradual progress is possible with the effort of repetition.

Significantly, the final Brush Knee leaves us with a sense of clarity, which is the foundation of our individual and limited selves, a reminder that no matter how much effort we put into personal growth, more is always required.

Deflect Downwards Parry and Punch. Separating the hands to parry can be likened to drawing a bow, as the energy is brought inwards with the breath. Stepping forwards, the punch is released from the waist like an arrow carrying its energy forward. As we make the loose fist in preparation for this movement we signify that we are opening ourselves and penetrating the intricate nature of the deeper self and with this understanding begin to view the material world that has been revealed to us and cleansed in **Brush Left Knee and Push.**

Apparent Close Up. Seals and closes the first part of the form.

Cross Hands. We turn on the left foot, the hands moving upwards and right to the forehead (upper Tan Tien) sweeping the energy and spirit to this energy centre. As the hands move downwards gently in a circular movement so as not to break the fragile energy, they carry the Chi to the lower Tan Tien. As the wrists meet the energy is then lifted upwards into the Conception vessel (Greater Yin) coming to rest at the throat centre (Thyroid) after passing the rejuvenating thymus gland and the heart where the emotions dwell. Moving upwards through this axis, the hands sweep Yin energy and water energy upwards, cooling the Yang energy of the preceding movement.

Part Two The Mind

Carry Tiger to Mountain also known as (Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain). The desiring Tiger aspect that represents our ego - the busy minded-ness that we need to help us survive in everyday life – has been tamed enabling it to be embraced; we then carry this volatile emotional self to take root like a mountain. In this way we as individuals are rooted in our lives providing a solid foundation upon which we are able to develop holistically, in mind body and spirit. In this state we are moved into a state of inner silence where our true consciousness can be recognised when it reveals itself. Once again we are reminded of the fragile nature of our internal energies. We embrace the Tiger, an action of love to place it carefully and reverently on the mountain of contemplation so that it can begin to grow.

Fist Under Elbow Is immediately preceded by the reaffirmation of the profound nature of the form, **Grasp the Sparrows Tail, Fist under Elbow**, is a heaven posture which raises the newly generated energy from the previous form to the higher centres, nourishing these points, preparing the newly calmed mind to accept the deeper aspects of the art. The open palm fingers extended upwards with the closed fist at the elbow of the pointing arm is frequently seen during Buddhist meditation practices. Many religious statues in the East adopt this posture of the arms depicting the raising of energy and self emptying, the self-opening process to the deeper dimensions of being.

Step Back to Repulse the Monkey (Repeated five times in the Classical Yang Style form, again referring to the five senses.) *Retreat is controlled and purposeful whilst flight is beyond control, an expression of the emotional reaction that is the commonplace method of action.* In such a controlled manner we are able to maintain a detached observance of the circumstances that surround us and prepare our next move, thus "through retreat success is achieved" (I Ching). The monkey represents the Mind, or at least that part of it that is ruled by the ego and emotions and is concerned with the worldly aspects. The "Monkey Mind" as it is known in the East, symbolises the basic forces, unconscious actions and what we might also know as the rational Mind. The Mind, as one eastern mystic puts it - is "*Like a giant tree filled with monkeys jumping from branch to branch and all in incessant chatter*".

Diagonal/Slant Flying Opens the heart centre and raises energy to a new level, before we plumb the depths of the ocean currents.

Needle at Sea Bottom. Representing the divine spark or the early presence of spirit, (Shen) the "Needle," is the smallest object when set against the enormous volume of the seas. The Needle of our Spirit is also the greatest of things and is capable of "moving mountains" when, in clarity it can be gathered and used. Knowing that it is better to descend and retrieve the Needle from the sea bottom (interior) than to chase illusions (exterior), we plumb the depths of our interior ocean and risk the dangerous currents, to retrieve the sharp single pointed needle of the absolute.

Fan through Back. Following our plunge into the depths to retrieve the needle, we then raise it upwards carrying energy through the centres to the upper Tan Tien. Here we open the fan, expanding Spirit (Shen) as it penetrates and joins with the Chi. Through this posture we are able to restrain our energy and direct it. It is this control that allows us to accumulate energy within to further build the Spirit.

Turn and Chop With Fist. As we turn the body the hands are brought in toward the upper Tan Tien and the Heart Centre, gathering energy from these areas to be expressed outwards to strike. The motion has the effect of converting energy - Chi to Shen, and integrates the essential natural mind with the reflective and ego centred mind.

Continuing the movement into **Deflect Downwards Parry and Punch** we symbolically transcend the egocentric self and punch through the illusion of the physical into the spiritual centre, (giving chuan (*fist*) in Tai Chi Chuan its true meaning).

Grasp the Sparrows Tail once again, as we practice the postures of **Ward off, Roll Back, Press, Push and Single Whip**, we bring ourselves into the "presence" of Tai Chi deepening the work of enlightenment. Emphasising the cyclical nature of the Form the repetition also highlights the progressive nature of the art as the postures generate universal energy or Shen from Chi through the integrating effects of the postures. The postures of **Grasp the Sparrows Tail** generate and integrate the five energies, however it does not do so in the order of the creative cycle but in a much older pattern that we also see expressed in Wudang Shen Chuan Chi Kung, - Ward off - Wind, (metal/lungs), roll back- Cloud, (earth/stomach-spleen), Press- Dragon, (water/kidneys), Push- Tiger, (fire/heart) and Single Whip- Crane, (wood liver).

Cloud Hands. Beyond the incessant and chaotic movement of the clouds lays the clear blue sky. Five cloud hands (found in the Classical Yang Style Form) symbolise the images perceived by the senses and help us to move on to a purer perception of the world around us.

High Pat on Horse Taming the wild horse (symbolic of temporary craziness or anger,) first by approaching carefully from underneath, then we exchange hands as we get to know it and "pat" using the right hand from above.

Separate Left and Right Foot. These postures reflect the dual nature of the way we see the world right and wrong, plus and minus, positive and negative, yang and yin. Here, the kicks symbolise an opening to allow internal power, our interior energy of peace, to begin the process of absorbing and transforming the anger and desires we cling to. All kicks are derived from the ancient crane exercises and therefore belong to the generative aspect of Tai Chi.

Turn and kick with left Heel. This represents the piercing of dualism, the ego or self consciousness, clouding the intelligence with opposing thoughts, the cause of all perceived pain.

Brush Left Knee and Push, Brush Right Knee and Push. The cleansing and purifying motion depicted as in the first section but this time sweeping desire and anger from the psyche.

Punch Downward. Subduing ignorance, through the infusion and internal release of vision, clarifying energy and power.

Turn and Chop with Fist. As before, the energy is lifted through the whole of the body, mixing, cleansing and clarifying the energy, penetrating deeper and deeper into the centre, the original source.

Kick with Right Heel. Is a grand opening of all the energy centres, crane posture right side in preparation for the postures of **Strike Tiger Left** side and **Strike Tiger Right side**. The tiger here represents the twin aspects of desire, Yin and Yang, inner and outer, soul (*psyche*) and body. **Strike Tiger** is a term for dissolving or absorbing the desiring aspect of self consciousness into our emerging spiritual power. In some schools of Tai Chi this posture is aptly named **Taming the Tiger**.

Kick with right heel. Completes the great opening that is the grand circulation on both sides and also prepares the way by opening the body for the following posture: **Phoenix punch** (sometimes crassly called “box both ears”) Notice that this double punch incorporates the upper hand positions (upper Tan Tien) of the previous Strike Tiger postures both at the same time. The phoenix, the mythical bird symbolising rebirth, soars heavenward when it begins to free itself of desire in all of its many subtle guises.

Kick with right heel completes the great opening for the previous postures and provides the final major opening of the second section before

Deflect Downward Parry and Punch. Now deflecting egocentric consciousness downwards, punching through to the supreme ultimate and **Apparent Close Up** of the second section, stilling the mind further in preparation for the third and final section which belongs to the spirit

Cross hands brings the section to a close sweeping the energy upwards to the higher centres in readiness for the third section.

Part Three

The Spirit

The repetition found in the third section is typical of spiritual tradition. Silent repetition is the fire that purifies the Spirit and reveals the simplicity and sincerity of being. Harmonising the many into the one, we are able to perceive, for a moment, the tranquility that resides within.

Carry Tiger to Mountain symbolises a "turning over" or conversion of energy from the Tiger of the ego to be absorbed into the stability of the enduring Mountain. In this way, we are rooted firmly into the traditions of the art and its constant cycle of refinement as we enter the realms of the Spirit.

Grasp the Sparrows Tail is a further reminder of the repetitive and cyclical nature of the form as we repeat these fundamental postures to further refine and hone our energies, lifting them to a higher resonance.

Part the Wild Horses (Mustangs) Mane corresponds with the five **Brush Knee** postures in the first part of the form and the five **Repulse Monkey** postures in the second part. We now cleanse our innermost nature, sweeping away the wild horses of our passions which can pull us in differing directions seemingly out of control. This represents our growing understanding of our wayward emotions, allowing us to befriend them gently, as we might groom a horse's mane, eventually seeing and understanding their unpredictable and powerful nature.

Grasp the Sparrows Tail.

Fair Lady Works at Shuttles. Moving deeper into the contemplative aspect of silence, we enter into the great feminine aspect of Spirit. Bearing a resemblance to certain ancient Qi Gong postures associated with Yin and water energy, we perform the postures through the four corners of a square sealing ourselves in, ready to penetrate the depths of the Spirit.

Grasp the Sparrows Tail.

Cloud Hands. Images from the depths of the mind, charged with emotions, disorder and random like clouds, are cleansed and purified allowing the Spirit to relate clearly to the world.

Snake Creeps Down (in the grass). From its vantage point close to the earth, the snake (serpent) sees only the stems of the grasses, a multiplicity of objects symbolising duality, division and constant change.

Golden Pheasant Stands on One Leg (left & right). Moving from **Snake Creeps Down**, we emerge from the grass, momentarily transcending multiplicity, to view the wholeness of the world. By alternating the posture from left to right we purify the two aspects or powers of the soul - desire and anger, positive and negative- the appetitive (desiring) and incensive (strong emotional feelings) aspects of being, complementary aspects to be experienced and not fed upon by the mind.

White Snake Turns Body and Sticks out Tongue. A metaphor for discernment, the white snake extends its tongue to sense its surroundings. White in colour, because of the constant cleansing of the form, the snake's tongue is sensitised and empowered, able to taste reality with a greater accuracy than before.

High Pat on Horse with Piercing Palm. After yet more repetition and journeying ever deeper into the stillness we are able now to approach the once wild horse with confidence. We dare to confront the horse and look into its mouth. That which was once feared, our own outer selves, we now see is broken and tamed through the emergence of a greater power, our true inner self which envelops all before it.

Turn Around and kick with Right Sole. The remnants of desire and identification with the thoughts and feelings of body are dealt with by kicking with the right foot and the sweeping of the hands.

Punch the Opponents Groin, aimed at the lower body where the animal instincts are the strongest. It is the prolonged attachment to the lower instincts that arrest our progress beyond the illusory and passionate energies that distort our perceptions of that which is real and which infinitely endures.

Snake Creeps Down. Once again we have the metaphor of the snake in the grass. Such is the purifying process, it really is up and down and one needs to fully understand that. The difference is that, as the internal power (which is always gentle and restful) increases in the postures of the Form, the outer changes have less and less influence since they are seen in quite literally a different light.

Step up to Form the Seven Stars. Universally, seven represents individual wholeness that is an important initial step in spiritual terms. It is Tai Chi before Wu Chi So the snake rises to form the seven stars symbolising individual completion. But only for the moment because there is always further to go, for that which has no beginning has no end.

Step Back to Ride the Tiger. The tiger of desire is now firmly controlled and is at the mercy of the purified intellect. Now, in fact, it serves the intellect and is, so to speak docile and without passion.

Turn Around and Sweep the Lotus with one leg. Once again, “turn around” is the term used for conversion of energy, of chi, into Shen. The lotus is swept and broken, the ego (self consciousness or selfishness) is integrated and absorbed into the greater consciousness of Wu Chi.*

**Wu Chi is the boundless state from which things are created. Tai Chi is born of Wu Chi or the ultimate nothingness. It is the origin of dynamic and static states and is the mother of Yin and Yang. If they move, they separate. If they remain static, they combine*

Bend the Bow to Shoot the Tiger. The desire which energises the illusory and separated self is finally slain as it shifts from isolation and a divided state to one of undifferentiated consciousness or from primitive fear to universal love.

Step Forward Deflect Downwards Intercept and Punch. Empowered by a direct, personal and unique contact with the clarifying energy of creation the final penetration is enacted.

Apparent Close Up - Withdraw and Push - Conclusion of Tai Chi. The final movements represent a sealing in, completion and return to the Tao. Paradoxically it is also the point from which we can begin the form again to complete another cycle of purification and growth. Although the Tao is always present, it is not so important to understand it, as it is to experience it, for in experience all we need to know is revealed. It is returning to the Tao, aligning us with the mysterious but pure and simple consciousness at the centre of all creation.

The entire Form symbolises the journey of life, a journey through conflict to peace. A journey where peace is at all times present, even in the middle of conflict. Our task is to learn this and communicate it through our lives.

The 85 Forms of Classical Tai Chi Chuan

Part One

1. Preparatory Posture
2. Beginning Form
3. **Grasp Sparrows Tail**
4. Single Whip
5. Lift Hands Upward
6. White Crane displays Wings
7. Left Brush Knee Twist Step
8. Hands Strum Pipa
9. Left & Right Brush Knee Twist Step
10. Hands Strum Pipa
11. Left & Right Brush Knee Twist Step
12. Advance Step, Deflect, Parry & Punch
13. Like Sealing, As If Closing
14. Cross Hands

Part Two

15. Embrace Tiger Return To Mountain (**Grasp Sparrows Tail**)
16. Observe Fist under Elbow
17. Left & Right Step Back to Despatch Monkey
18. Flying Obliquely
19. Lift Hands Upward
20. White Crane displays Wings
21. Left Brush Knee Twist Step
22. Needle at Sea Bottom
23. Fan through Back
24. Turn Body and Strike
25. Advance Step, Deflect, Parry & Punch
26. Step up, **Grasp Sparrows Tail**
27. Single Whip
28. Cloud Hands
29. Single Whip
30. High Pat on Horse
31. Left & Right Separate Feet
32. Turn body Kick with Heel
33. Left & Right Brush Knee Twist Step
34. Advance Step, Plant Punch
35. Turn Body and Strike
36. Advance Step, Deflect, Parry & Punch
37. Right Kick With Heel
38. Left Hit Tiger
39. Right Hit Tiger

40. Turn Body, Right Kick with Heel
41. Phoenix Punch, (Twin Peaks Strike the Ears)
42. Left Kick with Heel
43. Turn Body Right Kick With Heel
44. Advance Step, Deflect, Parry & Punch
45. Like Sealing, As If Closing
46. Cross Hands

Part Three

47. Embrace Tiger Return To Mountain (**Grasp Sparrows Tail**)
48. Oblique Single Whip
49. Part Wild Horses Mane
50. **Grasp Sparrows Tail**
51. Single Whip
52. Jade Maiden Threads Shuttle
53. **Grasp Sparrows Tail**
54. Single Whip
55. Cloud Hands
56. Single Whip
57. Squatting Single Whip (Snake Creeps Down)
58. Golden Cock Stands on One Leg
59. Left & Right Step Back to Despatch Monkey
60. Flying Obliquely
61. Lift Hands Upward
62. White Crane displays Wings
63. Left Brush Knee Twist Step
64. Needle at Sea Bottom
65. Fan through Back
66. Turn Body White Snake Darts Tongue
67. Advance Step, Deflect, Parry & Punch
68. **Grasp Sparrows Tail**
69. Single Whip
70. Cloud Hands
71. Single Whip
72. High Pat on Horse with Piercing Palm
73. Cross shaped Legs
74. Advance Step Punch Toward Groin
75. Advance Step **Grasp Sparrows Tail**
76. Single Whip
77. Squatting Single Whip (Snake Creeps Down)
78. Step up to Form The Seven Stars
79. Retreat Astride Tiger
80. Turn Body to Sweep the Lotus
81. Draw The Bow and Shoot the Tiger
82. Advance Step, Deflect, Parry & Punch
83. Like Sealing, As If Closing
84. Cross Hands
85. Closing Posture

Some List of postures may vary in number, for instance this list is sometimes quoted as 108 postures or 105 postures. The number in the list is dependent on how the repetitions of postures are listed. i.e. Clouds hands Left. Cloud hands Right In this the first posture of a group is listed. The number of repetitions is either 3, 5, 7 and so on, but would remain consistent throughout the form.

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