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CHICHA IN THE CENTRAL ANDEAN COUNTRIES

by

Mario C. Vazquez

Cornell University

Department of Anthropology

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## CHICHA IN THE CENTRAL ANDEAN COUNTRIES

The present paper deals with chicha <sup>1/</sup> in the contemporary communities of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru.

It is known that chicha is a native drink of the Andean region which has been used since before the Spanish Conquest. <sup>2/</sup> In the Colonial period its preparation and consumption became popular in all communities. However, according to the literature consulted and our preliminary investigations, it actually appears that chicha has begun to decline as an important drink as a consequence of the technological and social changes produced since 1940.

For that reason our objectives are: to describe the different types of chicha and its various functions in contemporary Andean communities, and to attempt an interpretation of the changes which are occurring in the patterns of usage of this drink.

### I

#### TYPES OF CHICHA AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

In the U.S.A. and Europe it is commonly assumed that chicha is an alcoholic maize drink used by the Andean Indians as an intoxicant. Perhaps for this reason it has been translated into English as "corn beer," although chicha is not always made from maize and does not always have alcoholic properties.

In reviewing published community studies and folklore literature and our data collection in eight Andean communities,<sup>3/</sup> we find that there are alcoholic and non-alcoholic chichas of different types and with different uses, which we will attempt to describe briefly.

### Alcoholic chicha

This exists in the three Andean countries and is obtained by means of the fermentation of sprouted or un-sprouted grain, with or without the addition of sucrose in any of its forms: cane syrup, sugar, brown cake-sugar, etc. The techniques for the preparation of chicha are similar in the three countries, as are the motives for making it. The alcoholic chicha may be classified in two main groups according to the technique employed in preparing it: that made from a base of sprouted maize or grains of germinated maize and that made with the flour of various graminaceous plants, fermented by means of ensalivation. The latter is known as "muqueada" chicha. A third type which is not widely used is chicha made from molle fruit. (Schinus molle Linnaeus of the Anacardiaceae)

Chicha made from jora or sprouted maize. The jora<sup>4/</sup> type is made in all three countries using simple methods for the germination of the grains of maize which occurs over a period of 8 to 15 days.<sup>5/</sup>

As to the amount of alcohol by volume, in Peru the jora chichas are the ones which contain the highest percentage, this being related to the types of ingredients used in the preparation and the amount of time it takes to ferment. The percentage of alcohol varies from 1.20 to 10.6<sup>6/</sup>.

The type of ingredient utilized in preparing chicha varies greatly. The simplest recipes are found in Peru and consist of grinding the sprouted maize, <sup>7/</sup> either toasted or untoasted, but leaving the flour with a rough consistency and diluting it with warm or cold water and mixing it with the flour of maize or barley or broad beans or with wheat bran. The proportion of sprouted maize meal and barley flour varies greatly, from 3 x 1 to 1 x 3. In the same way there are many differences as to the moment at which the ingredients should be mixed, whether they ought to be mixed while dry or after water is added, whether cold or warm water is used, whether the sprouted cornmeal is boiled first, or both are boiled together. Likewise there is much variation in the ingredients which are added, for example, macerated sugar cane, orange peel, mashuas (Andean native tubers), calabashes, leaves or stems of medicinal plants, etc. There is also great variation in the number of hours of boiling, from 2 to 48 hours. The ingredients for increasing the percentage of alcohol in the chicha are brown cake-sugar (chancaca in Peru, raspadura in Ecuador) and some form of alcohol which are added when the chicha is fermenting in special ceramic vessels <sup>8/</sup> during two days or <sup>9/</sup> ten months.

The most complex forms of preparation are found in Ecuador. For example in Lican, in addition to the elements mentioned earlier, they add to the chicha human urine, ammonia, mud, the sap of sisal (Agavo sp.) or rotten meat, <sup>10/</sup> In Otavalo there were found, by means of analysis, a small quantity of sulphuric acid, chimbalos (acid wild fruits), crushed leaves and flowers of chamico (Datura Stramonium), the remains of pressed sugar

cane, nettles, with lime and pieces of black agave, etc., all this in the process of fermentation.<sup>11/</sup>

"Muqueada" chicha. This is prepared by means of the ensalivation of the flour of quinoa (Chenopodium quinua), maize, kaniwa (Chenopodium), or barley, etc. This type of chicha is used in some Andean provinces of Peru,<sup>12/</sup> and in the Andean departments of Bolivia.<sup>13/</sup> Its preparation is not as complex as that of sprouted maize chicha.

On the Altiplano the raw material is quinoa, especially that with a yellow or red color, which is ground and divided into two portions; one part is ensalivated by children and other people who do not chew coca and afterwards it is mixed with the other portion and warm water; then it is exposed to the sun for 2 or 3 hours and finally it is diluted with warm water, boiled, strained, and put to ferment for two or more days.

Molle chicha. (Schinus molle Linnaeus of the Anacardiaceae)

The preparation of this chicha has been mentioned frequently only in Peru and Bolivia, but the only written description of it which we have found is part of a monograph compiled by various teachers, who indicate that in the district of Lampa, in the province of Parinacochas, the chicha in question is prepared in the following manner: "A good amount of molle seed is gathered and dried for a few days, afterwards the seeds are rubbed to separate the shell, and when they are all clean they are soaked in large vessels of cold water until the water tastes sweet, then this liquid is strained and put into huge clay jars for fermentation for 2 to 4 days."<sup>14/</sup>

It should be mentioned that alcoholic chichas are employed also as ingredients in other mixed drinks. For example in porches (an alcoholic beverage made with beaten egg).<sup>15/</sup>

Non-alcoholic chichas

These beverages are used in the three Andean countries and are known by the generic name of chichas or alojas,<sup>16/</sup> but they have in addition other local and regional names, usually associated with the product which serves as a base for their preparation. The most common ones in each country are:

In Ecuador:<sup>17/</sup> chicha of aloja or fruit

" of rice

" of apples and citrons

" of mashuas (Tropeolum tuberosum)

" of morocho (white corn)

" of quinoa

In Peru:<sup>18/</sup> chicha of peanuts

white chicha or chicha of the flour of maize, quinoa, or wheat, unfermented

chicha of barley

chicha morada or chicha of whole black maize

chicha of soybeans

" of chick-peas, quince, and carrots

In Bolivia:<sup>19/</sup> chicha of peanuts

" of maize

" of flour of toasted quinoa or kanawa and of barley

We must also mention in this class of chichas those called "fresh chichas" or alcoholic chichas which are consumed before they begin to ferment.  
20/

Theoretically, all of these beverages which we have mentioned are not fermented, but actually some are fermented for relatively short periods of time, usually less than 24 hours.

The description of the different types of chichas makes it possible to affirm that the native, prehispanic chicha has been changed. That is, it is not prepared in the original way, but has had new ingredients added which were introduced in Spanish America during the Colonial period and the Republican period, like wheat, barley, chick-peas, rice, cane alcohol, brown cake-sugar, some new varieties of fruits, etc. Or in other cases the raw material has been replaced, for example, maize or quinoa by barley, chick-peas, or rice.

Likewise, these variations demonstrate that not all chichas are made from maize and not all are alcoholic as is imagined outside of their place of origin.

#### Traditional functions of chicha

The majority of those who have dealt with chicha have attributed only intoxicating powers to it and have affirmed that it is an alcoholic beverage detrimental to the health and well-being of those who consume it.  
21/ Very few have indicated that it has other functions which are more important since they are related to the socio-cultural patterns and values of the group which consumes the chicha.

We consider that chicha fulfills the following types of functions, in order of importance: nutritional, social, economic, magico-religious and medicinal.

Nutritional functions. In the Andes, chicha is considered to be an indispensable thirst-quencher.

It is used as the equivalent of a soft drink or of beer while resting on trips, while doing agricultural work, during communal labor, etc. In some Peruvian communities, for example in Huaylas and in Vicos, people who do not participate in communal labor on public works contribute chicha to be drunk by those who are working. <sup>22/</sup>

At mealtimes chicha performs the same function which the cup of coffee or glass of milk does among the North Americans. Likewise it is used as a cordial after meals as is done among the Cambas of Bolivia, the costonos (coastal dwellers) of Trujillo, and the serranos (mountain dwellers) of Huaylas in Peru. <sup>23/</sup>

Chicha is considered also to be a "food" and a restorative of the energy expended during the hard labor of the day, that is to say that it forms part of the diet. With regard to this there are divergent opinions. Some consider that chicha does not have nutritive properties, <sup>24/</sup> while others present data demonstrating the opposite. <sup>25/</sup>

All polemic aside, whether chicha is a nutriment or not, what is certain is that it is used in preparing food, either as a condiment or as leavening. Thus, the dregs of the sprouted maize chicha are used as leavening in the preparation of breads in some towns of the Peruvian provinces of Chancay and Bolognesi.

Social functions. In rural and semi-rural communities chicha fulfills important social functions, since it not only has symbolic value but is also the essential element in all ceremonies and festivities. That is to say, chicha as an alcoholic beverage "is a cultural artifact."<sup>26/</sup> It is used for carrying out certain political and religious duties, for example, those of local Indian authorities (alcaldes, pedaneos and hilacatas) and sponsors of religious festivals, and in the celebrations and ceremonies related to various rites of passage such as baptism, birthdays, marriages, funerals, etc.

In the rural communities chicha is offered by hosts as part of the refreshments during the execution of certain domestic tasks which require outside help, either for pay or for mutual aid. And finally, chicha is used as a beverage for household use for fulfilling the etiquette of hospitality.

Economic functions.

In the three countries both alcoholic and non-alcoholic chicha are produced for commercial purposes. In Ecuador and in Bolivia this is under state control, as in both countries taxes are imposed on the production of chicha.<sup>27/</sup>

Chicha for commercial purposes is produced not only in rural areas but also in the large urban centers like Quito, La Paz, and Lima. In Bolivia, the city of Cochabamba exports large quantities of chicha to the towns and cities of the Altiplano and the jungle. According to the reports consulted, chicha constitutes a lucrative business in Bolivia

and Ecuador. We know that in the city of La Paz 600,000 liters of chicha are sold annually,<sup>28/</sup> and in a region of the province of Chimborazo in Ecuador, the shops ~~where~~ chicha is sold receive net profits which amount to more than 200% on the preparation of a 256-liter cask of chicha.<sup>29/</sup>

This beverage also fulfills an economic function for the landowners of Peru and Ecuador who use it to reward their peons and colonos.<sup>30/</sup> Similar methods have been used by political and military authorities in Ecuador who indemnify the relatives of accident victims by giving them chicha.<sup>31/</sup>

Magico-religious functions. The use of chicha for magico-religious rituals has ancestral roots in the prehispanic epoch. Since the Colonial period it has combined with elements of Western religion and has become what is called pagan-catholic.

In the three countries the custom is still preserved of offering libations of chicha in honor of tutelary divinities and in special places which remain sacred for the inhabitants of the Andes.<sup>32/</sup>

In various parts of the South of Peru alpacas and llama lambs are given chicha to drink during the annual ear-clipping because there is a belief that this drink keeps the animals healthy and strong.<sup>33/</sup>

The Aymaras utilize chicha in their magical rituals.<sup>34/</sup>

Medicinal functions. Magical properties are also attributed to chicha in the area of empirical medicine, especially for treating pulmonary infections. In Aquia, Ancash, chicha is boiled with a medicinal

herb (escorsonera) to soothe a cough, in Ecuador mashua chicha is considered good for curing rheumatism; in Mayobamba, Lima, in cases of toothache, sun-stroke and mumps, cloths soaked with sprouted maize chicha are applied to the affected part; in Irpa Chico of the Bolivian Altiplano bran from chicha is eaten to combat pulmonary infections. The pasnacha or ponche of chicha from Cuzco serves to combat influenza, nasal catarrh, coughs, pneumonia, etc. <sup>35/</sup>

#### Chicherias and "chichismo"

Places where chicha is sold are called chicherias and generally are situated at the gates of the towns and along the roads where the Indian peasants are known to travel; they indicate their presence by means of little flags or wooden placards which advertise the product. In the large cities chicherias are located in the suburbs and in the sectors where there is a heavy concentration of poor people.

In the chicherias not only chicha is sold but also other inexpensive liquors like alcohol and aguardiente ("firewater") and also certain typical regional foods.

In the three countries alarmed voices have been raised against the consumption of chicha among the peasants. It has been said that the excessive consumption of chicha, not only by adults but also by children, is a social problem. <sup>36/</sup> It is affirmed that the chicha which is sold is not a nourishing drink but an unhygienic and toxic one which contains toxins and germs harmful to human beings. Undeniably the highly alcoholic chichas, offered to the public freely and with no control, may

bring with them the same negative effects on health and on society as any other alcoholic beverage, and from this comes chichismo, which is the abuse of alcoholic chicha.

#### Changes in the functions of chicha

As we indicated at the beginning, the production and consumption of chicha was popular in all communities of the three Andean countries mentioned, where local raw materials or those acquired by barter or purchase in neighboring towns were used. This situation is changing as a result of technological and social changes which have been occurring with greater intensity since the Second World War. During this time there has been observed a scarcity of the raw materials necessary for the preparation of chicha, the presence of new drinks produced industrially and the presence of factors related to the phenomenon of upward social mobility, etc.

The natural increase in population, especially in urban areas, has brought about the scarcity of maize, wheat, quinoa, etc., whose producers prefer to sell their products in the markets rather than use them for the production of chicha as they did in the past.<sup>32/</sup>

As to technological aspects, modern products are reaching the most isolated towns where they are being substituted for the native cultural products like chicha, which presently is not fulfilling its diverse traditional functions. Thus chicha as a staple for satisfying thirst has been and is being replaced progressively by the greater demand for soft drinks which are sold at relatively low prices in almost all the towns in the three republics, and these are widely accepted among the

popular sectors. This has brought about the installation of soft drink factories in the towns in locations strategic for distribution of the product.

As an ingredient for the preparation of foods and breads chicha has been replaced by modern products like industrial leavening which is used both in the household and commercially.

Chicha as a spirituous drink is being replaced by "firewater" or <sup>38/</sup> sugar cane alcohol which is preferred because it intoxicates more quickly and because its acquisition, preservation, and transportation are easier in comparison with that of chicha whose preparation requires many ingredients and much time. Bottled beer also is replacing chicha.

Chicha as medicine has been replaced by modern medicines which are steadily receiving more acceptance among the Andean peasants.

The area in which chicha continues to have importance is in magic and ritual, although in some places it has been replaced by other things, as, for instance, among the Aymara who perform their magical ceremonies with red wine. <sup>39/</sup>

Another cause of the decline in the production of chicha as a soft drink and as an alcoholic drink is the social change which is occurring in the three countries. Thus the soft drinks are preferred by the younger generations, not only for refreshment but also because they raise their social status, since drinking chicha, and especially alcoholic chicha, is identified with a lower status, that of the Indian, which constitutes the lowest social sector and whose members, by their

own initiative and/or motivated by the agencies of socio-cultural change, try to integrate themselves into the modern national life with a Western orientation. So it happens that manual laborers with a desire for upward social mobility avoid the use of chicha which they accept primarily as a soft drink, or, as an alcoholic drink, only when associated with certain festivities and places. This attitude seems to have brought about an increase in the production of non-alcoholic chicha, not only in small communities but also in large urban centers like Lima, where there is widespread sale of chicha morada, which is sold even in powdered prepared form (like Kool-Aid).

With regard to the preceding, it is interesting to mention that of a group of 100 workers at a mine in a very Indian area of Peru who were interviewed on the subject of the consumption of alcoholic beverages with meals, 50% declared that they drank beer, and only 5% declared that they drank chicha.<sup>40/</sup>

We may understand the decrease in the production of chicha better if we compare the changes in the occupation of chicheras (women chicha-makers) at the community level. In the case of Peru, in many communities the chicherias have disappeared, for example in Paucartambo, Pasco,<sup>41/</sup> and if some remain it is as a secondary activity, as the sale of chicha is now associated with other businesses, for example with other alcoholic beverages, typical regional foods, retail groceries, etc. So the former chicherias have been converted to small bars or cantinas (Peru) and estancos (Ecuador) in which, as we said, chicha is sold together with

inexpensive liquors and mixed drinks. The survival of chicherias as a lucrative business in Ecuador, according to the estimations of the Ecuadorians themselves, is due to the new ingredients added to the native chichas, such as the use of ammonia together with native products with narcotic and toxic properties, which produces violent intoxicating and toxic effects. It appears that the Ecuadorian Indian is accepting this new mixture of chicha, since he continues to consume it and acquires it with his own money or receives it in the form of recompense on the part of landowners and authorities.<sup>42/</sup> This is an attitude which merits a special study to determine its basis.

Another fact which we wish to point out in this section is that chicha is also consumed on special occasions and in public places by the middle classes, who use it as a symbol of the "criollo"<sup>43/</sup> or of nationalism together with typical meals or dishes, as happens, in the case of Peru, in certain regional restaurants or "gardens" in the principal cities. A similar case is noted in the city of La Paz, where there are ten "quintas" where chicha is sold together with food.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summing up our brief exposition we may make the following statements:

FIRST. The existence of chicha in the Andean countries is related to the presence of a large Indian population, of whose cultural patterns it forms a part. In the same way it is found among some mestizo groups who use it at the household level or in their relations with the Indian groups.

SECOND. The production of chicha has decreased, in certain regions, because of the effect of modern technological change. However, its production does not decline when it can compete in alcoholic strength with modern beverages, and the demand for it is favored by its low price.

THIRD. The decline in its usage is related to social change. That is to say, if modern products (the beverages) are identified with groups of higher social status (the mestizos), inferior social groups (the Indians) will replace the products which identify them as such (in this case chicha) with those used by the immediately superior group, since this favors their rise in the social scale.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Chicha has many regional names, the best known of which are:
  - Acca, in the department of Ayacucho, Peru (Centro, 1951:422)
  - Acha, in the department of Cuzco, Peru (Morote, 1952; Nuella, 1945; Roca, 1953)
  - Aswa, in the departments of Ancash and Huanuco and in the provinces of Chancay and Cajatambo in Peru. The same name is used in the Quechua region of Ecuador (Rodriguez, 1945:39)
  - Chicha agria or made of jora, in Ecuador (Carvalho-Neto, 1964:170)
  - Guarapo or huarapo (chicha made of jora) in the canton of Quito and in the province of Imbabura in Ecuador (Costales, 1960:341; Rubio, 1956:257)
  - Huanduy, in the canton of Cayambe, Ecuador (Costales, 1960:341)
  - Kusa, in the Bolivian Altiplano (La Barre, 1948:65)
2. For references to chicha as a prehispanic drink consult the works listed for Morote, 1952:2-4; Carvalho-Neto, 1964:161-166; Roca, 1953:3)
3. The Department of Anthropology at Cornell University has sponsored and is conducting numerous studies of communities in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. In seven of the following communities data related to chicha have been gathered:
  - Aquia, Ancash, Peru (Vazquez, 1965)
  - Huaylas, Ancash, Peru (Doughty, 1963)
  - Colta-Monjas, Chimborazo, Ecuador (Cornell University Andean Program field notes, 1965)

3. (Cont'd)

Irpa-Chico, La.Paz, Bolivia (Cornell University Andean

Program field notes, 1965)

Mayobamba, Lima, Peru (Cornell University Andean Program

field notes, 1965)

Vicos, Ancash, Peru (Vazquez, 1952)

Viru, La Libertad, Peru (Holmberg field notes, 1948)

Paucartambo, Pasco, Peru (Andrews, 1963)

4. The term jora is known in all three countries. However, other regional names exist, among others:

Huanapu, in Beni, Bolivia (Cutler, 1947)

Pachucho, in the department of Piura, Peru (Ramirez, 1952)

Shura, in the departments of Ancash and Huanuco, Peru

Sora, according to Morote (1952:4) is an older name for winapu

Winapu or guinapo, in the departments of Cuzco and Puno in Peru

(Morote, 1952; Muelh, 1945)

5. There are numerous references to the preparation of the jora, the most detailed descriptions being: Muello, 1945:147-48; Morote, 1952:1-2; Ramirez, 1952:776; Gherzi, 1959:169; Parsons, 1945:23; Gillin, 1945.
6. Vinas Tello, 1951:8.
7. In Mayobamba, Lima, jora is toasted before grinding in order to give color to the chicha (Cornell Andean Program field notes, 1965)

8. These vessels have various names, among others:
- Botijas, in Peru
  - Cantaros, in Peru
  - Hraki, in Cuzco, Peru
  - Kuntu, in Ancash, Peru
  - Pando, in Ecuador
9. See Vinas Tello (1951:6).
10. Instituto, 1962:37-38.
11. Rubio, 1956:258.
12. According to the information given in the Monografia de la Provincia de Parinacochas, (Centro, 1951), the technique of muqueado is common in this area.
13. Cutler (1947) has an excellent description of the preparation of chicha muqueada in the valley of Cochabamba, Bolivia, and Mendieta (1962:36) makes a brief reference to this type of chicha in Padcaya, Provincia de Arce, Tarija.
14. Centro, 1951:426.
15. In Peru, one of the most popular beverages is a mixture of chicha made of jora with cane sugar alcohol, which has different regional names, among others: tumba-cholo in Mayobamba, Lima; pulli-poncho in Vicos, Ancash; machimbrado in Aquia, Ancash; chicharon in Callejon de Huaylas; in Ecuador they have chinguero, which is also a mixture of chicha made of jora and aguardiente (Rubio, 1956:257).
16. Aloja, according to the Diccionario de la Real Academia Espanola, 1950:81, is a drink composed of water, honey, and spices.

17. Consult Carvalho-Neto, 1964:161-170, and Guevara, 1961:265-269.
18. Consult Centro, 1951 and Vinas, 1951.
19. Some types of non-alcoholic chichas are mentioned by Mendieta, 1962:35; La Barre, 1948:66; Heath, 1962:26.
20. Mentioned by Tschopik,, 1946:557; Gillin, 1945:47.
21. Mentioned by Bush, 1952:25; Rubio, 1956:255; Oficina Internacional de Trabajo, 1953:164-165.
22. See Doughty, 1963:264 and Vazquez, 1964:35.
23. Cited by Heath, 1962:26; Gillin, 1945:47; and Doughty, 1963:198, respectively.
24. Bush (1952:25) of Peru maintains that basic nutritive properties are erroneously attributed to chicha although it "is highly detrimental to the health . . . because of the changes produced in the germinal plasma," due to the toxic action of high alcohol, acids, ethers, and alkaloids, which are obtained when the chicha is fermented for a long period of time.
25. In the analysis carried out by the Department of Nutrition of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Aid on various samples of chicha, the following elements were discovered: protein, calcium, phosphorous, iron, carotene, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, ascorbic acid and alcoholic percentage (Vinas, 1951:6-7).
26. Mendelbaum, 1965:281.
27. In Peru, until 1925, chicha was taxed with a duty called mojonazgo (Delgado, 1935:79). In spite of its abolition, the Municipal Concejos continued collecting other duties until 1949.

28. Cornell Andean Program field notes on Bolivia, 1965.
29. Cornell Andean Program field notes on Colta Monjas, Ecuador, 1965.
30. See Vazquez, 1961:25; Penaherrera and Costales, 1957: 193.
31. Cornell Andean Program field notes on Ecuador, 1965.
32. There are references to this in La Barre, 1948:185 on the Aymara Indians of Bolivia; Parsons, 1945:122 on Otavalo, Ecuador, Cornell Andean Program field notes, 1965, on Mayobamba, Peru.
33. There are references in Mishkin, 1946:468 and Centro, 1951:405.
34. See Tschopik, 1951:255-56.
35. There are references in Morote, 1951:4 and in the data gathered by the Cornell Andean Program field notes during 1964-65 on Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia.
36. See the references indicated in No. 21.
37. In the case of Peru, the production of maize increases annually, but this is hybrid maize which is not used for the making of chicha (Ministerio, 1964:114).
13. There are references in La Barre, 1948:88; Andrews, 1963:510; Tschopik, 1951:245; Doughty, 1963:195.
39. Tschopik, 1951:245 and Hickman, 1963:93-94.
40. Moya, 1964:28.
41. A good case is provided by the community of Paucartambo, Pasco, Peru, cited by Andrews, 1963:510 in which the chicherias have disappeared.
42. Rubio, 1956:257-258.
43. Simmons, 1955:114.

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