

Symbolism as an Aesthetic Communicative Tool: An Appraisal of the Mace and Crest of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA)

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Abstract

This study primarily explores the aesthetic and literary values of symbols with particular emphasis on the symbol used in the Mace and crest of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA). The study looks at the underlying principles, ideals, and ideologies that dictated the choice of the *akoben* as the University's official symbol. The study established, through the lens of the Psychoanalysis theory propounded by Sigmund Freud that the interpretation of images used as symbols is idiosyncratic; in that it depends on individual exposure, and experience accumulated over a period of time, cultural, and what each group understands and establishes as the meaning of the images. Consequently, these symbols are used by each group to represent their ideals, ideas and founding principles. In the case of the mace and crest of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), it has been established that the *akoben* symbol employed in the mace and crest comes from the adinkra symbols and shows the belief of the founding fathers in the potential of the young people the University was established to groom, hence psyching them up to understand that life itself is war, hence an admission to the University which is meant to prepare them for life, is a call to prepare for war. A call to fight for their future, their dreams and aspirations, and by extension, a call to prepare to fight for the national interest, to resist oppressors' rule, and join in the collective fight for the best interest of all and sundry. The study recommends that a lot more of other symbols used by other universities, state institutions, traditional set ups and families have not been studied and documented, hence the new generation of young people

are often left at sea regarding what the founding principles that underlie these symbols are and what they represent.

Key words: Akoben; Adinkra; Mace; Crest; Tradition; Psychoanalysis

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

African Images or visual representations that embody some traditional knowledge in different ways are known as traditional symbols. As a result, these symbols cause the mind to associate the visual representation with the pertinent traditional knowledge. As a result, the mind actively investigates, processes, and evaluates symbolic content while positioning itself in a never-ending quest for meaning. Unquestionably, this enhances knowledge retention and comprehension. Some traditional symbols are individually meaningful to an individual or widely recognized by a group of people. Traditional symbols can be used as a means of identification, a language of ideas, an iconic representation, to convey a deeper meaning than words alone, to carry specific meanings, to express something unknown, to simply represent something else, to transmit stories from one generation to the next, or to express intangible truths (Lipinsky, 2001).

Around the world, visual arts are used to express traditional African motifs. The ability to generate symbols is widely regarded as one of the most unique characteristics of the human species. Signs and symbols were utilized for communication before the invention of writing. They are still employed today to denote,

recognize, and comprehend nearly anything. In essence, they belong to our cultural legacy. To the best of my ability, however, it has taken years to comprehend, integrate, and interpret them (Howard, 1988).

Traditional symbols can be found throughout Ghana. They are located in the districts and regions and are primarily associated with political parties, families, ethnic groups, chieftaincy, and other aspects of daily life. Songs, dances, poetry, proverbs, and clothing patterns are examples of traditional symbols among Ghana's Asantes. Other symbols, according to Odotei and Awedoba (2006), can be seen in crafts like linguist staffs, gold weights, stools, and mace. According to Angmor (2001), the Krobo place a great importance on the totems that are used as symbols in their trades and art forms. According to Dzobo (1997), these symbols constitute a significant part of Ewe proverbial expressions, are found in their clan and family totems, and may have deeper meanings for the people than first appears. It should be mentioned that the people hold these totems and symbols in high regard due to the significance of the message they convey, which transcends simple aesthetics and unites families via blood and soul.

In actuality, symbols convey far more information than words and are an essential component of communication. To put it briefly, visual art uses symbols in the same way that written literature uses poetry. Because of the unique meanings they convey, there are many different kinds of symbols all around us that have the capacity to induce involuntary behaviors more effectively than words. All nations, ethnic groups, families, political parties, football teams, academic and non-academic institutions, and all aspects of life have symbols (Sarpong, 1971, Boateng, 1980). For example, nations have national flags that serve to symbolize their political struggles and historical heritage.

The House of Representatives' Mace is a symbol of both royal power and the House's own authority. It also represents the Speaker's authority. At any tertiary institution, there are symbols of authority which represent the image of the institution. In every higher institution and academia, the Mace is the symbol of authority for the institution which represents the institution's governing authority and is only present at high level events when the president, the chancellor or the principal and regents are present. It denotes that the proceedings have received official sanction. In some institutions, the image borne by the mace differs from the one on the crest of the institution. UPSA however has both mace and crest bearing the same message, and this signifies the strength of purpose and the intentionality of the founders of the University regarding what exactly their principles and desires truly are. The Mace bearer is the one that holds the Mace, and during occasions such as investiture, congregation, and inductions, the Mace is used as a symbol to confer degrees and positions.

The University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) is no exception and has had its own Mace and crest, albeit with the same image on both mace and crest since the institution attained a tertiary level. This study aims at reviewing the aesthetic appreciation of the Mace at the University of Professional Studies, Accra and the intrinsic message it conveys to observers and the University community as a whole which provides a glimpse into the ideology, faith and beliefs of the founding fathers of the University, their hopes, and aspirations as well as their futuristic vision for establishing the University. It is noteworthy that the spirit of the university is in the symbol of the mace. In other words, at the sight of the mace, a certain feeling is supposed to be evoked in all who owe a sense of allegiance to the University, and these can only be brought bare in an extensive research paper of this nature.

The notion of aesthetics has been the subject of numerous academic works, including Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. Some explanations of aesthetics offered by academics like Hegel (1975) and Kant (1987) seem to lean more toward personal viewpoints on how artistic things are expressed and their vulnerabilities. Therefore, aesthetics is the philosophical study of taste and beauty. Appreciating the beauty of artistic artifacts, such as language, drama, performance, and others, is its main focus. To put it another way, aesthetics is concerned with nature, the importance of the arts, and the reactions of those natural objects to the language of the beautiful and the ugly (Munro, 2021). Aesthetics, which is defined as a person's opinion of an object's beauty and taste, does not always stop there. The person who is watching it may have had exposure to certain cultural, religious, and other experiences that greatly enhance their appreciation of the artwork.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the most crucial elements in the framework of higher education in recent years has been branding. To support the expansion and survival of businesses in this industry, new branding strategies have been developed (Ghobehei et al., 2019). According to Mirzaei et al. (2016), "universities should use effective branding strategies to separate themselves from competitors in order to better capitalise on the opportunities, given the rising competitiveness and complexity of offerings in higher education." The ceremonial mace and crest of the University of Professional Studies, Accra has historically stood for the power granted to the highest ranking official of the governing body.

According to Sujchaphong et al. (2020), branding techniques in higher education have primarily used an outside-in strategy, such as advertisements and logos, to reach students. Thus, it can be said that a well-designed

logo can be used to introduce the company and its attributes to students in an academic setting. Respect for the authority of knowledge as well as for each person's rights and worth is the source of the authority represented by the mace in an educational setting. As a result, the leader of an academic community takes on the responsibility and difficulty of ensuring that its members live in an environment that fosters knowledge and grace. In general, this paper expands on previous studies by investigating the relationship between the traditional symbols in the crest and Mace of the University of Professional Studies Accra and critically analyzing its reflective impacts and values on the educational context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To investigate the relationship between the traditional symbols in the crest and Mace of the University of Professional Studies Accra and its impacts and values on the educational context.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the relationship between the traditional symbols in the crest and Mace of the University of Professional Studies, Accra and its impacts and values on the educational context?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Psychoanalysis is a psychological theory which was founded by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud and others in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Based on the idea that language and the unconscious are intertwined, Lacan (1983, 1985) constructs a definition of images from a psychoanalytic standpoint. Three aspects of thought registration-symbolic, real, and the imaginary function in tandem within the Lacanian optics. The symbolic dimension of thought registration or understanding, establishing and imbibing is responsible for assigning meanings to all the imagery constructed by man, although it sometimes lacks closed signs. In many cultural contexts, a single image could have multiple symbolic attributions, and these are culturally, and individually conditioned. Because situations do not always align with an individual's worldview, real registration is in charge of piercing the subject discourse. But the awareness of the signs, which serve to link an idea to an image in order to convey a meaning, is directly related to the registration of the imagery. As a result, University of Professional Studies, Accra has the ability to create and adapt her own reality and, through their history held in specific socio-cultural contexts, incorporate aspects from it that establishes the reality conveyed by the mace and crest image. The given reality almost

always represents the interests of the hegemonic groups. Imagery is socially constructed and naturally goes through the institutionalization processes (Berger & Luckmann, 2002), involving the subjectivity in the language for the construction of socially shared objective realities: Once the organization is formed by people, the reality, while given, is also modified in the dynamics of daily life of the people involved, hence this paper investigates the relationship between the traditional symbol in the crest and Mace of the University of Professional Studies Accra and critically analyses its reflexive function, impact, and values on the educational context, viewing the images from a psychoanalytic standpoint.

Black (1970) opines that Psychoanalysis is both a human mind theory, and a clinical procedure. It was founded between 1885 and 1939 by Sigmund Freud, and continues to be developed worldwide by psychoanalysts. Psychoanalysis has 4 primary fields of application:

- 1) as a theory of how the mind works
- 2) as a treatment method for psychic problems
- 3) as a method of research, and
- 4) as a way of viewing cultural and social phenomena

like literature, art, movies, performances, politics and groups.

The concept and vision for a paper will be unclear without a theoretical framework, much like a house that can't be built without a model. By comparison, a research plan with a theoretical framework allows for a clear and structured analysis with an organized flow in this paper hence the selection of psychoanalysis theory which is viewed to be applicable to underpin the study.

TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL EMBLEMS

As indigenous cultural expressions, symbols have long been valued for their ability to express ideas and a community's values and beliefs (Kuwornu-Adjaoter et al., 2016; Muhlenbeck & Jacobsen, 2020). Traditionally, symbols have special idiosyncratic value they add to the arts of a specific people, portraying the artistic talent of people and their culture with their profound meaning, beautiful form, and exquisite craftsmanship. Traditional symbols are rich in philosophical ideas such as valour and conquest, and harmonious coexistence, kinship and kingship systems which still have enduring and endearing significance for the development of modern societies. Finally, traditional symbols have a strong social cohesion, which can strengthen intellectual competence, and promote national identity and pride amongst students. Aside the popular Adinkra symbols cited and commented on by many scholars including Gyekye (1963) and Agyakum (2006), there are the fifteen traditional clans of Anlo with their individual totems and symbols as well as the 'nunya dzeziwo'(wisdom symbols)

present in the oral tradition of the Ewe people, most of which remain largely undocumented. An example is the baobab tree which represents knowledge, and moves with the proverb “nunya adzidoe, asi mesune o”. to wit, knowledge is like the baobab tree, one hand cannot embrace it. Oladumiye (2018), Parmentier (2015), and Van Niekerk (2018) support the use of signs and symbols that consumers are familiar with in order to successfully draw in and influence the attention of both present and potential customers, highlighting their persuasive power. According to Hoskins (2015), symbols have a unique communication power that stems from their natural capacity to symbolize or conjure anything through mental analogies or associations. Therefore, symbols are powerful brand communicators that can draw in, influence, or turn people off (Meis & Kashima, 2017; Sodikin, 2018). The University of Professional Studies Accra has to utilize the “Akoben” adinkra sign from the Akan community as an emblem to project her identity and image because it has become compulsory for every recognized institution to adapt a symbol to reflect her vision and mission.

The Coat of Arms, the National Flag, Adinkra symbols like “Akofena” and “Sankofa,” and traditional drums like the Atumpan” are just a few examples of Ghana’s modern and cultural symbols that capture the country’s identity and culture (Adom et al., 2018; Akotia, 2010; Annuku & Mireku-Gyimah, 2009; Chunfa et al., 2021; Jecty, 2022; Kemevor, 2014; Owusu, 2019; Smith, 2013; Zhe & Bawuah, 2013). Ghana’s security and its long-standing relationship with Great Britain are symbolized by the Coat of Arms, which combines symbols like the Black Star, livestock, Akofena, Eagles, and the cocoa tree (Akotia, 2010; Shahid et al., 2012). Notably, the Atumpan drums, also referred to as “talking drums,” are used as symbols for notice, communication, and amusement during ceremonies. They evoke local musical traditions while expressing announcements, accolades, and ceremonial greetings (Kemevor, 2014).

Often referred to as the “sword of war,” the Akofena symbol represents bravery, legality, and the power granted to the rightful monarch. In addition to promoting the virtues of statesmanship and bravery, this emblem emphasizes the significance of honoring, respecting, and being loyal to elders (Adom et al., 2018; Annuku & Mireku-Gyimah, 2009; Chunfa et al., 2021; Jecty, 2022). In a similar vein, the “*Akoban*” symbol, which was chosen by the founders of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), is a war horn those ancient warriors used to alert their fellow soldiers. The institution has selected this sign to connotatively communicate to students that the academic setting they are in is a battlefield. According to Oladumiye (2018) and Kuwornu-Adjaoter et al. (2016), symbols are widely recognized signs that stand for cultural characteristics, historical narratives, society values, and goals. By successfully conveying cultural

heritage and traditional values, branding attempts to visually, linguistically, and iconically unify communities through the use of cultural and traditional symbols (Adom et al., 2018). In order to convey its values, beliefs, and aspirations to the Ghanaian community and the wider world, the University of Professional Studies in Accra has also incorporated traditional Ghanaian symbols into its academic realm through the use of its crest and mace.

Imagery and Symbolism

The term imagery has been examined from a variety of angles across time, leading to varying interpretations and implications depending on the cultural and geographic setting. According to Altman (1995), the idea of imagination is an incomplete history that starts with human history. According to her conceptual analysis, the first work challenging the dominance of common sense in the Western philosophical tradition was written by Giambattista Vico in 1709 (as stated in Altman, 1995). For example, because of the meaning of the English language, the North American epistemological notion has a strong psychoanalytical emphasis, which is different from the French connotation. The university of Professional Studies, Accra also settled for the image of the *akoben* which is an old adinkra symbol to put out the message of resilience and importunity the founding fathers hoped to inculcate in the lives of the students they would be training.

Using the term “imaging,” Castoriadis (2000) challenges the rational conceptions of the human and social sciences that structure society as a result of man’s materialistic and historical development, reducing social relations to the level of relations based on historical determinism never for some unconscious mind action or symbols directly associated with social imagery. For him, the concept of appropriate and neutral symbolism is nonexistent as imagery is the primary institution of social cohesiveness and the site of power struggles. According to preexisting references, society makes up the symbolic order, and this decision is not free.

According to Castoriadis (2000), the dominance of symbols over institutions shares a similar dimension with the dominance of language, but it is transferred to an un-symbolic object. Although speech is influenced by symbolism, it is not independent of it. Consequently, it may be said that a society uses all of the networks of symbolic and rational linkages when it creates an institution. According to this author, the symbolic relations are those that exist between the imaginary function and the real function’s dominance over it.

The functionality of each institutional system with its own orientation that dictates the selection and linkages of the symbolic networks in their historical, cultural, social, and economic context of each civilization is provided by Lacan’s notion that symbolism is neither symbolic nor real-rational. This increases the existence of objectives of

practical success, affective and intellectual, individual or collective, and stereotypes ways of living and making their existence, separating the significant from the unimportant. Society imagery is this component (Castoriadis, 2000). As long as the majority of members will accept these networks of symbolic relations as legitimate, creating these stereotypes in organizations entails carrying out the dominance of individual imagery and, as a result, directing the subjects' true attitudes for the change processes in accordance with the leadership's interests. This ideology is carried on from the founding fathers of the University in their choice of the *akoben* image as their permanent symbol of representation as it communicates what each member of the University community as well as the entire Ghanaian community is able to understand the ideas postulated by these images so long as their individual repertoires of traditional knowledge capture the meanings imbedded in the symbols that the founders hope to communicate. In this case, the *akoben* is known to anyone with good knowledge of the adinkra symbols as a communicator of valour, courage, importunity, and will to win despite massive opposition.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was used in this study. According to Wyse (2011), exploratory inquiry is the main function of qualitative research. It is employed to comprehend fundamental motives, beliefs, and justifications. It sheds light on the issue or aids in the formulation of concepts or theories for prospective qualitative study. In order to go deeper into the issue and find patterns in thoughts and attitudes, qualitative research is also utilized. Retrieving detailed information from the traditional symbols in the crest and Mace of the University of Professional Studies Accra examined as the rationale behind the study's usage of this methodology. The aforementioned arguments make it abundantly evident that qualitative research methodology is the better choice when a study calls for in-depth analysis and eversion to reveal problems in order to facilitate understanding. In order to start a close observation strategy, this study used a descriptive and textual approach that combines textual analysis. In accordance with psychoanalytic theory, it also employs textual analysis of the information depicted in viewing cultural and social phenomena like literature, art, movies, and performances.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

When To Use the Mace

The mace is used only in formal academic processions, such as Matriculation, Congregation, and Investiture of Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor or Principal. Participants

are expected to be in full regalia when the mace is being used. The mace is a symbol of the Vice-Chancellor's or the Principal's authority as the University's legal representative with the right to govern. It is carried in procession immediately before the Registrar. During the ceremony, the mace rests either on a stand or on a specially designed table near the Vice-Chancellor or the Principal. It should never be placed on the floor. The mace precedes the Vice-Chancellor or the Principal during the recession. During the installation of the new Chancellor/Vice Chancellor or Principal, the mace is handed over to him or her. For the recession, the mace precedes the newly invested chancellor/Vice-Chancellor or the Principal. If the former Vice Chancellor or Principal is not taking part in the inauguration, the mace precedes the Chairman of the University Council. It precedes the new Chancellor/Vice Chancellor or Principal during the recession.

Design and Concepts of University of Professional Studies Crest and Mace



Figure 1
Mace

The University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) mace incorporates the Ghanaian Adinkra symbol "Akoben," meaning "Horn of War," adapted into its design. This symbol, depicted in navy blue within the mace, symbolizes vigilance, readiness, and wariness, reflecting the responsibility students bear in their personal and academic journeys. The Adinkra symbol "Akoben" is an ancient Ghanaian symbol representing a horn or a horn-like object used in traditional warfare. UPSA has adapted this symbol into its mace, incorporating it into the design as a central element, usually within a shield or a similar shape. The Akoben symbol in the mace signifies the importance of being vigilant, prepared, and aware, qualities that are valued in academic pursuits and professional life. The symbol also reflects the idea that students are responsible for their own learning and outcomes, emphasizing the need for attention, caution, and hard work to achieve success.

The Mace Bearer

The mace remains the major symbol of authority and tradition. It is within the authority of the The University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) to designate a permanent mace bearer, who will often work unpaid. The macebearer's position is purely ceremonial, but highly coveted, and honored. The most revered office symbol in the University is the mace, thus its bearer equally accord the role he place same honour as is accorded by others too. It represents the power that the Governing Council has bestowed upon the Vice Chansellor. The Governing Council procession is led by the bearer.



Figure 2
The Governing Council procession, led by the bearer.

Etymology of the Adinkra Symbol “Akoben”

‘*Ako*’ in the Twi language is war, battle, or fight. ‘*Aben*’, or *ben* in Twi may refer to that which is blown, Adom et al (2016). It could be a horn, a whistle or anything else that is blown by the mouth. However, in the context of our discussion on the mace as an adinkra symbol adopted by the founding brains of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) *Akoben* is the war horn used by the ancient warriors as warning trumpets for their warriors. It has been typically associated with the Ashanti and Ga warriors who employed the elephant tusk or Ivory as their trumpet. It is not surprising that the Ga state itself has the elephant as its totem, whereas the New Patriotic Party, a majority Akan party also has the elephant as its emblem. It is thus not uncommon to have the horn trumpet associated with these two ethnic groups.

It is noteworthy that the University of Professional Studies is situated in Accra, the heart of the Ga state. Hence the adoption of the *akoben* as the emblem on the mace of the university is not misplaced, but rather reinforces the strong ties that have existed between the Ga state and the Akan group, particularly Ashanti.

Meaning and Adaptation of the Symbol into the Crest

The symbol represents readiness to be called to arms and the preparedness for action or battle. Further, the symbol

depicts the authority and gallantry of all who subscribe to the institution that bears the *akoben* as its mace or crest symbol. Spiritually, the *akoben* symbolises devotion, loyalty, and service. Black, (2011).

What the Symbol Represents

The symbol invites citizens to a wake of vigilance and alerted concern over their communities, and by extension patriotism, love, and protection of the national territory and assets. Adom et al, (2018) observes that the *akoben* has also been adopted by the Environmental Protection Agency in Ghana for an environmental performance rating and disclosure initiative for mining and manufacturing operations. The University of Professional studies also recognize the value of protecting the environment hence the introduction of the Environmental Protection as a Core Course for all first-year students. This is informed by the choice of the *akoben* as the principal symbol of the university. This symbol calls the citizens to be alert and prepared for action and defend their communities. In this instance the symbol represents a call for environmental action, to be vigilant and be ready to defend national territory, to care for the tender green country side, and to follow through with environmental initiatives the country's leadership has put in place.

The Implication of the Symbol in Educational Institutions

Implicatively, the mace thus becomes the visual representation of the entire University as observed by Gyekye (1963). The sighting of the mace is therefore is expected to inspire in the students and entire University community to a sense of ownership and active involvement, not only in the University's affairs but also the development of the entire nation at large. It represents an invitation to take action and get involved, participate and create a good place for their families, friends, and generations yet to come. It is therefore evident that the courses offered by the University are meant to prepare the next generation of leaders and ready them to carry out the prayers of the National Anthem “and help us to resist oppressors’ rule with all our will and might forevermore! The might referred to in the above lines of the Ghana national anthem is not only physical might as in the words of the great literatus, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, captured in the Cambridge dictionary, “the pen is mightier than the sword”. Therefore, the *Akoben* adinkra symbol as adopted by this intellectual discourse community portrays the University as a preparer of the citizenry to fight for our motherland both physically, intellectually, and mentally.

The Implication of the Symbol in our Social Lives

Life in itself is like the electrocardiogram which shows the life or every living organism displayed on it. The zigzag movement of the signals on the device indicates that the organism being observed is still alive. In the event

the signals go flat on the device, it means the organism has died. This tells the tales of man that socially, man is expected to have ups and downs but in the words of the poet Dylan Thomas, man is not expected to “go gently into the midnight” but he is expected to “rage against the dying of the light”, signifying a need to keep fighting, raging, contending against all odds to survive. This *akoben* symbol provides man the necessary inspiration and courage to fight and soldier on to the vanquishing of all of life’s torrents. In the ideas of Agyekum(2006), symbols are expected to arouse an expected feeling or sentiment in members who swear allegiance to the body the symbol represents and this is evident in the feeling that accompanies the *akoben* symbol, how it encourages learners to swim on, even against the tides, to keep hope alive, and to have faith in oneself that all certainly would be well with time so long as one does not fold his arms and resign to a fate despondency.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It has been brought to light through extensive reading of various academic scholarly works that have been done on traditional symbols and their implications on the social lives of the information age. Symbols possess the ability to inspire hope, raise spirits and promote innovations in the lives of all who bear allegiance to the realities that these symbols represent. Further, the interpretation of these images used as symbols is idiosyncratic; in that it depends on individual exposure and what each group understands the images to mean. Consequently, these symbols are used by each group to represent their ideals, ideas and founding principles. In the case of the mace and crest of the University of Professional Studies, Accra(UPSA), it has been established that the *akoben* symbol employed in the mace and crest shows the belief of the founding fathers in the potential of the young people the University was established to groom, hence psyching them up to understand that life itself is war, hence an admission to the University which is meant to prepare them for life, is a call to prepare for war. A call to fight for their future, their dreams and aspirations, and by extension, a call to prepare to fight for the national interest, to resist oppressors’ rule, and join in the collective fight for the best interest of all and sundry. The study recommends that a lot more of other symbols used by other universities, state institutions, traditional set ups and families have not been studied and documented, hence the new generation of young people are often left at sea regarding what the founding principles that underlie these symbols are and what they represent. Further research into this area is highly recommended.

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