

Research on The Turning From the Perspective of Post-Colonial Criticism

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Abstract

Tim Winton, who gained fame in the 1980's, was known as a genius child in Australia. He has won the Franklin prize, the top Literature prize of Australia, for four times and was selected based on the list of the most influential 100 Australians. He has been publishing more than 20 works, including ten novels, four collections of short stories, six children fictions as well as a lot of other types of works. The Turning is the collection of short stories by Tim Winton published in 2005. It has caused reader's reflection on the contemporary Australian society. Apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion, the paper aims to make interpretations of the stories in four parts and reveal the current social situation and common problems of contemporary Australia as well as demonstrate the glamour of Winton's literature. The first part is about the growth of people with the bitter experiences of one generation. The second part focus on the pure love, which causes reflections through the love story covered with a depressing atmosphere and the despair. The third part mainly emphasizes the importance of family reconciliation through the description of the broken family. The last part discusses the repressed reality and tries to tell a truth that people with an independent personality should put down their burdens and relieve themselves instead of being trapped by fame. Winton has a special insight into human nature and the post-colonial lives of Australians are depicted multi-dimensionally in seventeen stories including bitter growth, sweet love, incomplete families and oppressive reality. The Turning bases on the narration of Australian life in west coast, showing Winton's unique

writing style as well as revealing the national spirit and the characteristics of Australians from the perspective of Postcolonial Criticism. There are just a few researches on Tim Winton in China, not to mention researches combining Winton together with Post-colonial Criticism. On account of this, it has profound meaning to do researches on his works and this thesis aims to fill the blank.

Key words: Tim Winton; *The Turning*; Post-colonial criticism; Australian society

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INTRODUCTION

Tim Winton, who gained fame in the 1980's, was known as a genius child in Australia. He has won the Franklin prize, the top Literature prize of Australia, for four times. In addition, he was selected from the list of the most influential 100 Australians. Winton's maiden work *An Open Swimmer* was published in 1982 and since then, he has been publishing more than 20 works, including ten novels, four collections of short stories, six children fictions as well as a lot of other types of works: *Shallows(1984), That Eye, The Sky (1986), In the Winter Dark (1988), Cloud street (1991), The Riders (1994), Blueback (1998), Dirt Music (2001), Breath(2008) and Eyrie (2013).* Most of his influential novels have been translated into many kinds of languages and taking high popularity among people at home and abroad.

Winton is definitely a versatile artist since he also has outstanding achievements in the field of film, drama, etc. What is worthwhile to be mentioned is that his several masterpieces have been performed on the stage and screen, such as the movie *The Third Eye (1994)* and *In* the Winter Darkness (1998). Besides, Cloud Street was adapted into TV plays in 2011. Dirt Music was directed by the famous director Phillip Noyce and featured by the popular actor Heath Ledger and Oscar winner Rachel Weisz as the male and female protagonists. In addition, *Riders*, adapted from the novel is also in preparation. Winton actively involves himself into movies or TV plays which are adapted from his own literary works, with a positive attitude. "Tim Winton embraces his novels and movie works and tries to make them an organic unity" (Hou, 2013, p.37).

Researches of domestic scholars like Liu Yunqiu and Hou Fei, mainly focus on the interpretation of the texts of Tim Winton's novels from the prospective of Post-colonial Criticism. Studies from foreign expertise on Tim Winton are mainly in Australia. In the thesis of Kutenan from the University of Queensland Vitoria Boundary trouble: trauma fiction and post-colonialism in Tim Winton's 'The Turning, the writer says: "An exploration of the way the slippery terrains of settler post colonialism and trauma fiction come together in the work of Australian novelist Tim Winton" (Kutenan, 2012, p.33). In his early doctoral thesis Telling Tales: Settler Fictions and the Short Story Composite, he suggests that "it might be fruitful to also interrogate how settlers have used the form to negotiate their claims to place, their negotiations of home, their ties to community and nation, and their shifting relations to the colonial past and the imagined postcolonial future" (Kutenan, 2007). In addition, Caroline Lesley from Deakin University says in A tapestry of tales Tim Winton's 'The turning' that this novel is "undoubtedly the most unique and challenging book-to-film text ever produced in this country" (Lesley, 2013, p.8). And Torre Stephen also has comments in his thesis 'Turning' as theme and structure in Tim Winton's short stories: "This chapter critically analyses the motif of turning as both a thematic concern with transformation and a structural concern in the narrative within and between individual short stories in Tim Winton's collection, The Turning" (Torre, 2009, p.281).

The Turning is Winton's best-selling collection of short stories published in 2005, telling the story of a generation in the town of Western Australia. The first version was printed in 2004, and then reprinted in 2005. The book won the Federal National Writers Award in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. British Daily Express has highly praised this book: "it was an outstanding work by a worldclass novelist". However, when the book was introduced in Asia, there had been many translations which to some extent caused confusion. The movie The Turning, adapted from the novel invested by the Australian Screen Companies, made its premiere on September 26, 2013 in Australia and on November in New Zealand. The *Turning* is far different from a conventional movie in people's impression, for the entire movie is up to 179 minutes, consisting of 17 short films respectively shot by 17 directors. Although each movie stands alone, there are also interwoven overlaps and there are a lot of mutual associations between the roles. Winton declares that the creation of *The Turning* is inseparable from the enormous impacts in his own adolescence. This collection of stories reveals various changes in life, such as change of thought, slow arousal of consciousness, surprise and misfortune, the wrong way, hope emerged and shattered. In his works, the brothers turn away; the husband dumps his wife and children; the adult is trapped in fear of his childhood. People are struggling in their own past and they're eager to find a balance in his life. With extraordinary insight and quick thinking, Winton has the good and evil of human nature starkly exposed. "Such behaviors and implications reveal profound humanistic spirit and social responsibility" (Hou, 2013, p.37). The Turning enjoys a high reputation among Australian readers, and even some chapters are elected into the textbook in Western Australian high schools. Although the novel has a good fame abroad, it has not yet attracted enough attention and concerns of scholars in China. The paper is based on the Post-colonial Critical theory aims to make interpretations of the stories in four parts and reveal the current social situation and common problems of contemporary Australia as well as demonstrate the glamour of Winton's literature.

1. THE BITTER GROWTH IN THE TURNING

The Turning puts the growth of people on the first place, which is concerned about with all the people. In Sand, four adults with two boys go fishing. The two boys innocently enjoy themselves in the sand hills, but after a while conflict happens between them and then transform into a scuffle. The dark-hair boy plots to kill the blondhair boy by luring his rival into the cave and then deliberately buries him with sand avalanche. Eventually, the blond is lucky to survive, but both boys have turned into enemies and former friendship goes away. This story is mostly about how children lose their innocence, which makes us feel sad and shiver. In Long, Clear View, Vic leads a rich but very lonely life. He usually wears an indifferent expression and is often in eloquent as he is used to living in his own isolated world. He often seats in front of the bed and stares at his pet bear doll silently for a long time. What's more, he has a strange habit: counting the number of people who watch at him. Vic is very afraid of the darkness so he is required to turn on the lights during sleeping to make sure he is not blind. Once at home by himself, Vic secretly aims at pedestrians with a rifle through the window. Only in this way can he make himself feel the inner peace. Australia is a post-colonial country with vast land and few people. Of labor shortage, the adult fails to take good care of their children and this

makes the children lead a seemingly happy but actually lonely life. This isolation and alienation between people cause damage of interpersonal relationship, which will separate people from the society.

Aquifer is about an adult's reflection on his childhood. News on the TV says that human bones are found in a swamp land. The police have not yet identified the victim, but can only determine it a child's body. This brings back a music teacher's memories of his childhood since he is exactly the witness of the matter. Just at that night, he quickly rushes to the accident site, where also located his old home. He recalled when he was on the way to school through a jungle in his childhood, he met with three bad boys and bullied by them. He was beaten onto the ground by one of the bad boys and humiliated by being peed. Shortly after, the bad boy used car hood as a boat and enjoyed himself in the lake, but accidentally he fell into the water and drowned. The hero hid in the grass on the shore, neither cried for help nor aided, but just witnessed the whole process of life disappear. Over the years, the hero remains silent on the matter with the trauma bearing in his soul. When he revisits the old place, the forest, lake, fallen tree, telephone booths, and abandoned car are still alive, but life has gone, just leaving an empty world of silence. The hero cannot conceal his pathos, sitting on the edge of the lake sobbing for his cold-blooded behavior and regrets for his fault. The novel emphasizes that life is fragile and irreplaceable, urging people to cherish life and calling for the return of love.

The children will grow into adults and enter society some day. Big World is on this topic. At the end of the fifth year in high school, after examination, graduation and beach party, the hero together with his buddy Biggy steps into the society with feverish anticipation. Because of the dreadful scores coming out after Christmas, the hero who is not so outstanding cannot be admitted to the University as "those lucky ones". He is disappointed with swollen eyes, but has to find a job to make a living. However, with the hero turning into a formal worker in a slaughterhouse, he finds that the social reality is quite different from their point of view. This kind of growth is accompanied by bitterness and confusion. In the hero's eyes, Biggy is not so clever but of enough integrity and loyalty. Their friendship began in high school and they have been forever tied together ever since. Biggy and the hero brave the cold wind to go to work every morning. They suffer in monotonous job day in and day out like two freaks. Finally, the boys determine to escape with adventure. One afternoon they buy an old Volkswagen at the dock from hippies and then slip away without announcement. Even if mother will be very unhappy about this and father may even be in fury, boys still choose to flee without hesitation and they can not believe that they managed to do this. In a very distant place, by side of Saline Lake, boys feel just like being redeemed freedom. As good days do not last long, the car is quickly filled with bitter and metallic smell of smoke. Because there are no fire extinguishers, we could do nothing but only to be at a loss to watch the car burning in the evening sun. A year later, Biggy dies in the Pilbara mine accidents. However, the scene Biggy and I stand together by Saline Lake watching the sunset, leaves in my deep memory. From home and school to the society, no one can avoid the process of adaptation. The novel reflects the Australian young people's confusion and the thoughts of escape. Compared to the previous generation, the contemporary Australian youngsters bear too much pressure in the process of growing up.

2. THE PURE LOVE IN THE TURNING

Love is the eternal topic of human society, and the pure love is the thing one can only meet with luck but can not claim forcibly. Cockleshell tells such a story: a high schoolboy named Bridge has a crush on the neighbor girl Agnes for a long time, so he often deliberately waits her to go to school together in the morning. After school, Agnes often goes fishing near the stream in order to help support family. Bridge often watches Agnes by the stream, later he also accompanies her to fish in the water. Bridge feels very happy with the girl, even if his feet are scratched by sharp stone in the creek. Some days later, Bridge finally summons the courage to kiss the girl, but only gets slapped on his face by Agnes. In fact, she has to fish until very late in the night, or will be scolded by her father. Thus, she leads an unhappy life without a sense of belonging and comfort. One night, Agnes's house suddenly gets on fire. As long as he sees the fierce fire, Bridge was concerned about girl's safety. He means to rush into the burning house to save the girl, but just at that moment Agnes stops him from behind and the story comes to an abrupt end. Winton has shown the pure love of that boy incisively and vividly, and he also takes this opportunity to highlight the Australian people's noble personality and pure good nature. As the same in Abbreviation, a boy encountered a girl on the beach after surfing. The fourth finger of the girl was imperfect, but the slight blemish cannot conceal her beauty. The girl makes a pendant with a hook and gives it to the boy and then quietly leaves. When he wakes up only to find the girl has gone, the boy tightly holding hooks, despite its stabbing to bleed. Besides, the beautiful and charming posture of the dancing man and woman are displayed in Immunity. Winton combines love and dance together so that love is shown in a special way.

Damaged Goods tells a very beautiful and sad love story. The narrator of the story is a wife who reveals her husband Vic's secret: he once loved a girl with a birthmark on her face, but eventually had to end up with a tragic end. The story should date back to the period of Vic's high school and his girl he loved is Allison who had a large dark red birthmark on her face, which was very scary. But except for this, her blond hair and blue eyes were particularly beautiful, making people could not help but lament that she is "just a jade with little defect". But that flame-like birthmark brought Allison huge invisible pressure and made her excluded from the school social circles. The normal people seemed to be superior, being "deliberately belligerent to her, scoff at her, made she have no way to escape", treating her with contempt and criticism. But in her most vulnerable points, there were no one courageous and resolute enough to come and gave her a hand. As for love, Allison's courage had already been buried for she was contemptuously called as "the light in the fireplace", so she could only look for spiritual sustenance in the Lesbian community. When facing to Vic's confession of love, she could only choose to retreat timidly. Winton designed a tragic ending for her: the girl finally ended this life in a car accident on the highway. Her image gradually fades out of people's memory "with the rolling burning flames". Winton mercilessly deprives the life and love of an innocent girl, which leaves huge impacts and strong senses of helplessness to the audience.

As a matter of fact, Vic's love to Allison is "earnest and dedicated". He used to hide himself and cry for the affection. There are two reasons made it hard for him to conceal his love: one is that the girl is older than him and this is a principle problem according to the local tradition. The other is that the negative evaluation on the girl by the other students makes the sentimental boy timid to his feeling. Though he did not have the courage to make any breakthrough, Vic never stopped to seek opportunity. During the basketball game, he "observed Allison in a right and proper way". Vic was persistent in his choice and he was intoxicated by the hazy poem the girl published on the school magazine. The poem led to the boy's bold attempt: publicly declaring his appreciation for her poetry. However, the end was not desirable. Allison cried away and Vic spent his entire high school life in the shadow. Such love tragedy made people incapable of action but sighed. With vivid words, Winton toggled to the softest part of readers' heart as the good saying goes: "The most distant way in the world/ Is not the way from birth to the end/ It is when I sit near you/ That you don't understand I love you". Furthermore, Vic's first love also had a stamp which gave him an "enchanted" infatuation. He loves the fragmentary beauty instead of accepting a normal person just because the so-called "normal" was too inaccessible for him. There is a wide gap lying in the interpersonal relationship simply because the undying envies, rumors and intrigue are ubiquitous. As for Vic, it is better to choose those with physical disfigurement to find their inner purity and simple hearts, rather than face the ugliness of human nature hiding in the complete body. The boy is the only one who can find the real world in the scarred girl's heart. In the eyes of Winton, Vic's aesthetics is not alienated but natural. But the screwy values or fearsome interpersonal relationships in contemporary Australia bring different problems to the society. This love story is covered with a depressing atmosphere and the despair which is successfully created by Winton causes reflections.

3. THE INCOMPLETE FAMILY IN *THE TURNING*

"There are always discords hidden under the surface even among the happiest people in the most harmonious family" (Liu, 2013, p.65), said Winton in an interview. As Australia is a post-colonial country, the ratio of men and women has not been coordinated for a long time. The family relationship has been criticized a lot and the latent problems are so common. Thus the stability of family is not as fine as that in Europe and North America. As an Australian novelist. Winton sticks to the concept of family's stability by means of his novels. In Small Mercies, Peter leads a dull life with his son Ricky Mette. One day on a fishing trip, he encounters his ex-wife's parents who hope to save Peter's marriage but Peter is indecisive about that. Coincidentally, his son is taken back home one day by his ex-wife Fahey when peter oversleeps, thus the hero and heroine encounter in an awkward situation. Because of drug abuse, Fahey is forced to detention and she is now released from prison with full blank of the future. In such the incomplete family, life is very dull. Peter lies under the bridge with his son, feeling the car rumbles from the above and gallops off, looking for a moment of stimulation. Finally Fahey summons the courage to see Peter and conceals her feelings, but the husband with contemplative nature chooses to give up the idea of reunion and Fahey has to leave with disappointment. As for Winton, the ideal family is a place sharing weal and woe with each other. He tries to warn all people through his description of the broken family and emphasize the importance of family reconciliation.

In Winton's novel, there also exist some people who make great efforts to prevent the family from breaking up. Defender is an appropriate example for this: Vic is a stern man and his wife Gail has always shown resentment for his nature. When the husband says he is old, she will show disdain to him. At a dinner table talk, her words often reveal the contempt for her husband, for living together with him is so lonely. Gail eventually betrays her husband and secretly engaged together with her husband's friends Finn. So angry is the husband when he knows the truth. The next morning, he shows his superb skills in the flying saucer shooting. In the roar of gunfire, he displays men's dignity to his wife and endeavors to protect the fragile marriage. Commission tells a story about the reunion of a long-parted father and son. Father was involved in a drug smuggling case for he had drunken. Then he flees to the outskirts and has been living there with loneliness for fifteen years. During these years, he has all day long endured suffering of being separated from his family.

One day his son came to find him and persuade him to go back home and see mother for the last time since she is seriously ill. Father and son sit around the fire all night, exchanging their feelings. Father says for a long time he has felt that the nature is calling him and leads him to something yet he does not know what it is. Maybe it is life. Father shaves beards the next day and goes back with son in a new image. At the last minute, family restored integrity from the broken. As for *Reunion*, it is really a micro comedy occurred in the family life. The old mother pays a visit to Uncle Ernie with her son and daughter-inlaw Gail. Funny was that they go into other's backyard because of a wrong address. The old mother falls down into the pool, but cheerful is she to be a lovely old urchin. All that night they drinks with self-deprecation and in the joy of Christmas Eve, the distance between the families members get shorten.

Some readers comment that The Turning is the most impressive one. Indeed the title story of the whole collection has a profound meaning. In the story, the couple lives in a shanty town where their house is small and shabby, even without a proper toilet. The wife Ray manages household affairs drudgingly day and night but her husband Marx is drinking all day. Ray lives a very depressed life because she always suffers violence from her husband for he has a violent temper. Later she met with Shirley, the garage manager's wife in the laundry room by chance. Although they belong to different classes, they have congenial temper. Struggling in the bottom of society, Ray has been in the pursuit of the hope and beauty in life. She buys a snow globe with a Jesus doll in it from the bazaar and waits for the salvation from Christian Savior. The hope is so strong as if "a hot knife inserting the body". Her husband suspects Ray has an affair with someone at darts night party (in fact not), so he imposes violence on her again. Ray does not beg for her life this time but quips: "He is quit stronger than you, so be careful. You don't know him, but he knows much about you." In her husband's violence, Ray looks at the snow globe on the table. She sees Jesus walking on the surface of water in the warmth of the sunshine and embraces her in the arms. Winton has made a special breakthrough in the novel, hoping to save the family by the power of religion. Australia as a post-colonial country was greatly influenced by Great Britain and has far-reaching Western Christian tradition as well. Christian attaches great importance to marriage, family and interpersonal relationship, which is conducive to eliminating the contemporary Australian family and marriage crisis. In the same way, the religion brings benefits to the social harmony and stability. Winon has great interest in the topic of family as he speaks openly, "I prefer to live an intimate life like the ordinary people to get to know their troubles, hobbies, and desire. The happy family is not an isolated group, nor a closed compartment." (Liu, 2013, p.61)

4. THE REPRESSED REALITY IN THE TURNING

As a typical post-colonial country, Australia is the product of early penal system in Great Britain in the 18th century. "The felony prisoners exiled to where is considered to be the edge of the earth at that time, were impossible to become optimists" (Wakis, 1990, p.24). The early prisoners landed in yellow jumpsuits, engaged in heavy labor every day but merely had coarse bread with rice bran in it. "The cycling of drought and flood disasters strengthens another kind of view: life in this land is hard and any struggle is futile" (Ibid.). Up to today, there is still a kind of innate humbleness lurking in the Australians' minds, which has much to do with their early hard career and appears to become depression and helplessness in today's society. Fog is a story about a middle-aged policeman Ron who is intimidated by his colleagues to bribe and is forced to be against his own professional ethics. He is so nervous that has to rely on alcohol to calm myself down. A skydiver has been trapped in the mountains for two days due to the fog and his body is finally found by Ron. It makes Ron recall a traffic accident when he works here on the first day: a young boy plays fancy on his bike and is knocked over from the back by a car. When waiting for the ambulance, everyone stares at Ron as if he can do something, but only to see the boy die in the policeman's arms. Ron speaks frankly to Mary, a female intern reporter, that sometimes he really has no ability to help, which shows the aspirations of the majority of Australians.

Boner McPharlin's Moll tells a special story about a man named Boner McPharli while he does not appear from the beginning to the end. The anecdotes about him are so widely-spread in the town that each person knows more or less, but real side of the hero is unknown. From descriptions of different people, readers can only see a fictional Boner who quickly lives "over" his life. Winton indicates that few Australian are able to dominate his/her own destiny, not to mention having the right of speech. However, Family narrates in a diametrically opposite way. Winton exemplified in the opening: an archery athlete can make his archery technology in high degree proficiency if he shoots for nothing. Whereas if he shoots for a copper medal, he might feel anxious; if he shoots for a gold medal, he will see nothing. Although he has an excellent and professional archery technology, he has diverted his attention and sees nothing but a gold medal. His greedy heart makes his power dry up in the final. The same story takes place on the rugby field: Lippi could have turned the scale by a free kick, but he chose to give up in the end of the match. Thus, he terminated his career and dreams permanently. When he goes to the beach for surfing, Lippi meets an old man, who blames Lippi for his abandonment. Nevertheless, Lippi does not assert too much but just expressed his unperturbed mentality. Taking Lippi for example, Winton comes to his

point: people with a free and independent personality should put down their burdens and relieve themselves instead of being trapped by fame.

According to a report in 2010 on the employment and the cost of living, the confidence index of current Australians has fallen to hit its lowest level in the recent 10 years. On Her Knees mainly focuses on the ordinary person who makes a difficult living. The narrator is a college student, living with his single mother. Mother is an Australian typical low-level worker who maintains the living by helping cleaning rooms. In the eyes of the son, it is not a decent work which he is reluctant to accept. Knowing that his mother "works on her knees in someone else's shower room", the son "would rather stay at home, while suffering from guilty at the same time". The conflict in the story comes from the employer's mistakenly believing that her valuable earrings are stolen by the cleaning worker. When the son accompanies his mother to the employer's house to do the final cleaning, he has deeper understanding of humanity and the society, with great change taking place in his mind. Winton's always keeps a positive and supportive attitude to the working people in most of his works. As in this story, author shows deep sympathy to the mother.

CONCLUSION

Tim Winton deserves to be a master for his writing skills. He specializes in excavating the memory, and showing life trajectory of heroes by a specific event. His work is not amazing but engaging, with a kind of otherworldly beauty. While Winton is not particularly popular in China, he has a good reputation in Australia. As the leading writer of new generation in Australia, Winton "intended to influence and change the Australian lifestyle with his artistic creature" (Hou, 2013, p.37). Winton's literature mostly concentrates on the world of ordinary people, in which the dazed and helpless hero has to deviate from the original path in life and is forced to go down the other way. Works contains the struggles against the fate of ordinary people, the reflection on human's life, and the confusion and anger of the roles slowly revealed over time. Winton's novel is simple and unadorned, mainly focused on ordinary people's lives. There is no empty talk between the lines, but the philosophy of life and profound implication being reflected from the heroes. He "is definitely not pleasing the public, but intends to guide the public" (Ibid.).

The Turning depicts the life in the west coast of Australia from the 1970's to the present. This collection covers and contains many things, showing a unique lifestyle in Australia, which can be called the Encyclopedia of contemporary Australian society. The novel collection involves many heroes, so it is significant to observe the association between the characters in the process of reading. Sometimes a boy and a man with the same name in the different stories are not the same person. It is not easy to find resemblance between each character because each story is of quite a different style. It is said that when the movie was released in Europe and America, the audience all gave a 40-page brochure for describing the relationship between the characters. Even so, some reader still reflected that he did likes this work, but unfortunately the content of the movie and his understanding of the world is too far away. This is indeed a collection of stories that need the reader to own lots of information before he can fully appreciate it. That is why it is particularly highbrow and exclusivity.

This thesis describes the Australian life with seventeen stories and has a fine interpretation from four aspects: the bitter growth, the pure love, the incomplete family and the depressing reality. With the description of life on the west coast of Australia, Winton shows his unique arts. From the perspective of Post-colonial criticism, the thesis reflects the national spirit and character of the Australian majority. The truth can find out that as citizens in a postcolonial country, every Australian is unwillingly engaged in turning again and again. In The Turing, the sense of loneliness is sometimes depicted with the showing of the natural beauty, especially the sea and sky in Australia. The hero of the drama has commented that at the moment he does not care what happens in this hot, dusty northern continent as the world he lives in suddenly becomes so large that he could do nothing but only give up and watch helplessly. With the use of his creative talent and unique writing style, Winton successfully brings the readers a strong sense, and makes them carefully listen aside. The effect of natural scenery in the story has not yet been discussed in this paper, which leaves room for further research.

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