Encyclopedia > Xingyiquan

Xingyiquan is one of the three major internal Chinese martial arts—the other two being Tai Chi Ch'üan and Baguazhang—and is characterised by aggressive, seemingly linear movements and explosive power.

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History

Although the exact origin of Xingyiquan is uncertain, the earliest written records of Xingyiquan can be traced to the 17th century to Ma Xueyi of Henan Province and Dai Longbang of Shanxi Province. Legend, however, credits the invention of Xingyiquan to the renowned Song Dynasty general Yue Fei. According to the book Henan Orthodox Xingyi Quan written by Pei Xirong, "...wrote the Preface to Six Harmonies Boxing in the 15th reign year of the Qianlong Emperor [1750]. Inside it says: '...when [Yue Fei] was a child, he received special instructions from Zhou Tong. Extremely skilled in spearfighting, he used the spear to create fist techniques and established a skill called Yi Quan [意拳]. Meticulous and unfathomable, this technique far outstripped ancient ones."

Throughout the Jin, Yuan and Ming Dynasties few had his art, one of them being Li Gong (李继荣) and Li Ying'ang (李英昂). According to the book, "Yue Fei during the Southern Song Dynasty, Yue Fei is the second person from the left."

Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming argues that aspects of Xingyiquan (particularly the animal styles) are identifiable as far back as the Liang Dynasty at the Shaolin Temple. Yue Fei, therefore, did not strictly invent Xingyiquan, but synthesised and perfected existing Shaolin principles into his own style of gongfu which he popularised during his military service. Nonetheless, according to Yang, Yue Fei is usually identified as the creator because of his considerable understanding of the art (as shown in the work The Ten Theses of Xingyiquan credited to Yue) and his cultural status as a Chinese war hero.

Other martial artists and historians of Chinese martial arts, such as Miller Cartright and Kennedy, hold that this story is largely legendary; while xingyiquan may well have evolved from military spear techniques, there is no period evidence to support that Yue Fei was involved or that the art dates to the Song dynasty. These authors also point out that the works describing Yue Fei's role or attributed
It is perhaps unfortunate that the names used for the elements are also used as fundamental names and shorter to learn.

With the late Ming-era and Ji Longfeng, evidence for the art's history grows firmer. Ji Longfeng's contributions to the art are described in the Ji Clan Chronicles (姬氏族谱; pinyin: Ji Shì Jìpǔ). Like the Preface, the Chronicles describes Xingyiquan as a martial art based on the combat principles of the spear. The Chronicles, however, attributes this stylistic influence to Ji himself, who was known as the "Divine Spear" (神枪; pinyin: Shén Qiāng) for his extraordinary skill with the weapon.

The master who taught Xingyiquan to Ma Xueli is conventionally identified as Ji Longfeng himself. However, the traditions of the Ma family itself say only that Xueli learned from a wandering master whose name is unknown. Ji Longfeng referred to his art as Li He, The Six Harmonies.

The Preface identifies Cao Ji Wu as a student of Ji Longfeng and the master who taught Xingyiquan to Dai Longbang. However, other sources identify Dai's teacher variously as Li Zheng or Niu Xixian.

Xingyiquan remained fairly obscure until Li Luoneng (also known as Li Nengran) learned the art from the Dai family in the 19th century. It was Li Luoneng and his successors—which include Guo Yunshen, Li Cunyi, Zhang Zhaodong, Sun Lutang, and Shang Yunxiang—who would popularise Xingyiquan across Northern China.

### Characteristics and Principles

Xingyiquan features aggressive shocking attacks and direct footwork. The linear nature of Xingyiquan hints at both the military origins and the influence of spear technique allied to its mythology. Despite its hard, angular appearance, cultivating "soft" internal strength or qi is essential to achieving power in Xingyiquan.

The goal of the Xingyiquan fighter is to reach the opponent quickly and drive powerfully through them in a single burst — the analogy with spear fighting is useful here. This is achieved by coordinating one's body as a single unit and the intense focusing of one's qi.

Efficiency and economy of movement are the qualities of a Xingyiquan fighter and its direct fighting philosophy advocates simultaneous attack and defense. There are few kicks except for an extremely low foot kick (which avoids the hazards of balance involved with higher kicks), and techniques are prized for their deadliness rather than aesthetic value. Xingyiquan favours a high stance called Sāntǐshǐ (三體式), literally "three bodies power," referring to how the stance holds the head, torso and feet along the same vertical plane. A common saying of Xingyiquan is that "the hands do not leave the heart and the elbows do not leave the ribs." Another characteristic common to many styles of XingYi is a stance called "Dragon Body". This is a forward stance similar to a bow stance with a straight line from the head to the heel of the back foot and the front foot perpendicular to the ground. This is not so much a separate stance or technique in itself as a principle of movement to provide power to techniques.

It is worth noting the use of the Santishi as the main stance and training method originated from Li Luoneng's branch of Xingyi. Early branches such as Dai family style do not use Santi as the primary stance nor as a training method.

### Overview

#### The Five Elements

Xingyiquan uses the five classical Chinese elements to metaphorically represent five different states of combat. Also called the "Five Fists" or "Five Phases," the Five Elements are based on Taoist cosmology although the names do not literally correspond to the cosmological terms.

Xingyiquan practitioners use the Five Elements as an interpretative framework for reacting and responding to attacks. This follows the Five Element theory, a general combat formula which assumes at least three outcomes of a fight; the constructive, the neutral, and the destructive. Xingyiquan students train to react to and execute specific techniques in such a way that a desirable cycle will form based on the constructive, neutral and destructive interactions of Five Element theory. Where to aim, where to hit and with what technique—and how those motions should also work defensively—is determined by what point of which cycle they see themselves in.

Visualising the elemental cycles can be useful. It is arguably the case that the destructive cycle consists of the easiest applications. Each of the elements has variant applications that allow it to be used to defend against all of the elements (including itself), so any set sequences are entirely arbitrary. Some schools will teach the Five Elements before the Ten Animals because they are easier and shorter to learn.

#### The Five Elements of Xingyiquan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>斩劈</td>
<td>Pī</td>
<td>Like an axe chopping up and over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>破炮</td>
<td>Pào</td>
<td>Exploding outward like a cannon while blocking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>鑽鈍</td>
<td>Zuān</td>
<td>Drilling forward horizontally like a geyser.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>横郝</td>
<td>Héng</td>
<td>Crossing across the line of attack while turning over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>崩崩</td>
<td>Bēng</td>
<td>Arrows constantly exploding forward.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is perhaps unfortunate that the names used for the elements are also used as fundamental names...
for applications of energy or jìn (勁), since it can be confusing to describe the "heng jin contained within pi quan". It should be noted that the applications of energy referred to by the five element names are not the only ones, there are many others.

Animal Forms
Xingyiquan is based on twelve distinct animal forms (形; pinyin: xíng). Present in all regional and family styles, these emulate the techniques and tactics of the corresponding animal rather than just their physical movements. Unlike some styles, such as Shaolin, which have elaborate routines for every animal form, many schools of Xingyiquan have a single, or small number of movements for each animal. Once the individual animal forms are taught, a student is often taught an animal linking form (shì’ér xíng lianhuan) which connects all the taught animals together in a sequence. Some styles have longer, or multiple forms for individual animals, such as Eight Tiger Forms Huxing bashi.

The ten common animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>熊</td>
<td>Xióng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>鷹</td>
<td>Ying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>蛇</td>
<td>Shé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>虎</td>
<td>Hǔ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon</td>
<td>龍</td>
<td>Lóng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>鶏</td>
<td>Jī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>馬</td>
<td>Mǎ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swallow</td>
<td>鷯</td>
<td>Yán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshawk</td>
<td>鷹</td>
<td>Yào</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other animals that may be present in a particular lineage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crane</td>
<td>鶴</td>
<td>Hè</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crocodile</td>
<td>鳄</td>
<td>Tuó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai</td>
<td>鳥台()</td>
<td>see note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blowfish</td>
<td>鰻</td>
<td>Tái</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turtle</td>
<td>龜</td>
<td>Gui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildcat</td>
<td>豹</td>
<td>Máo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Branches
Roughly speaking, Xingyiquan has three main developmental branches:

- Shanxi
- Hebei
- Henan

However, the identification of three separate branches is tenuous because of the extensive cross-training that occurred across their lineages. This suggests that the branches did not evolve in isolation, thus diluting any major differences between them.

In general, schools of the Shanxi branch have a narrower stance, lighter footwork and tend to be more evasive. Schools of the Hebei branch emphasise powerful fist and palm strikes, with slightly different evasive footwork. Schools of the Henan branch are typically the most aggressive of the three. The Henan branch is also known as the Muslim branch because it was handed down within the Muslim community in Luoyang to which its founder, Ma Xueli, belonged. Henan branch is sometimes referred to by practitioners as Xinyi LiuHe Quan instead of simply Xingyiquan. This may be attributed to the fact that the Muslim community of China was historically a very closed culture in order to protect themselves as a minority, thus retaining the older addition to the name of Xingyi. LiuHe means “Six Harmonies” and refers to the six harmonies of the body (hips, feet, knees, elbows etc.) that contribute to correct posture. This is not be confused with the separate internal art LiuHe Bafa.
Both the Shanxi and Hebei branches use a Twelve Animal system with Five Elements while the Henan branch uses Ten Animals. Depending on the lineage, it may or may not use Five Elements. Due to the historical complexity and vagueness of the lineages, it is uncertain which branch would constitute the “authentic” Xingyiquan.

**Weapons**

Traditionally, Xingyiquan is an armed art. Students would train initially with the spear, progressing to shorter weapons and eventually empty-handed fighting. Xingyiquan emphasises a close relationship between the movements of armed/unarmed techniques. This technical overlap produces greater learning efficiency.

Some common weapons:
- Spear
- Straight sword
- Saber
- Large Saber (used by infantry against mounted opponents)
- Long Staff
- Short Staff (at maximum length you could hold between the palms of your hands at each end - techniques with this weapon may have been used with a spear that had been broken)
- Needles (much like a double ended rondef gripped in the centre - on the battlefield this would mostly have been used like its western equivalent to finish a fallen opponent through weak points in the armour)
- Fuyue (halberds of various types)
- Chicken-Saber Sickle (鷄刀鐮). This weapon was supposedly created by Ji Longfeng and became the special weapon of the style. Its alternate name is “Binding Flower Waist Carry” (捆花腰子).\(^4\)

Weapon diversity is great, the idea being that an experienced Xingyi fighter would be able to pick up almost any weapon irrespective of its exact length, weight and shape.

**Famous Figures**

Since the validity of lineages are often controversial, this list must be read as a provisional guide only. Names are presented in alphabetical order using pinyin romanization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Other Names</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cao Jiwu</td>
<td>曹继武</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listed as a student of Ji Longfeng. From Hebei province. Reported to have won first place in the Imperial Martial Examinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che Yizhai</td>
<td>車毅齋</td>
<td>Che Yonghong</td>
<td>Listed as student of Li Luoneng. From Shanxi province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chu Guiting</td>
<td>褚桂亭</td>
<td></td>
<td>Famous student of Li Cunyi. He died in 1977 in Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai Longbang</td>
<td>戴龍邦</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listed as brother of Dai Linbang and student of Cao Jiwu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai Linbang</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listed as brother of Dai Longbang and student of Cao Jiwu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gong Zhongxiang</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carrier of Chu Guiting lineage; learned from him for 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guo Yunshen</td>
<td>郭雲深</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listed as student of Li Luoneng. From Hebei province. An important Xingyi legend reports him as having been incarcerated for killing a man, and when confined to a prison cell only being able to practice Beng quan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Yi Xiang</td>
<td>洪毅祥</td>
<td>Hung I-Hsiang</td>
<td>Student of Zhang Junfeng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ji Longfeng</td>
<td>晁際可</td>
<td>Ji Jike</td>
<td>Listed as a student of Li Longfeng.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Cunyi</td>
<td>李存義</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listed as student of Liu Qilan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Luoneng</td>
<td>李洛能</td>
<td>Li Nengran</td>
<td>Listed as student of Dai Longbang. Nicknamed “Divine Fist Li.” Taught students in his native Shanxi province as well as in Hebei province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Tian Ji</td>
<td>李天骥</td>
<td>Li LongFei</td>
<td>Student of Sun Lutang’s Xingyi and author of “The Skill of Xingyiquan”. Was the first Chairman of the Chinese Wushu Administration under Communist China. Helped preserve Xingyiquan during the Cultural Revolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Qilan</td>
<td>劉奇蘭</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listed as student of Li Luoneng.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liao Kequan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^4\) Close up picture of the “Chicken-Saber Sickle”. © http://www.tai-chi.co.nz
Xingyi and Bagua

Xingyi for the student more interested in Pa Kua (Bagua), he had more interest in and resonated in them more. Xingyibagua for the student more interested in two with more emphasis on the art that is stated first in the name. A person had to decide which art the friendship developed two new arts BaguaXingyi and Xingyibagua. Both arts were a fusion of the were equally on par with each other and always had mutual respect for the other. They also claim that Dong Hai Chuan himself. They claim that the two masters agreed to a draw, realizing that both arts have knowledge of specific, original forms both empty handed and weapons that were invented by

accurate. On another note there are claims that the fight did happen from very credible masters that Guo Yunshen actually fought one of his older Xingyi brothers and lost. Sun Lutang was a student of Yunshen and Dong Hai Chuan never happened. The book states that the truth of the matter is that masters Cheng Tinghua, and four other Xingyi and Bagua teachers lived together (Frantzis, 1998, p. likely to have occurred in

contact with each other. Frantzis also argues that a Xingyiquan-Baguazhang exchange was more problematic, producing translations which are linguistically correct but inconsistent within a fighting or interpreted with regards for their closest, modern linguistic equivalent. The results can be describe historically-specific concepts (names of ancient weapons for example) are commonly meanig are obscure or have disappeared completely from the language. Specialised terms which Ancient Chinese texts, the source of Xingyiquan knowledge, often contain characters whose describe historically-specific concepts (names of ancient weapons for example) are commonly interpreted with regards for their closest, modern linguistic equivalent. The results can be problematic, producing translations which are linguistically correct but inconsistent within a fighting or martial context.

Jargon from other martial arts seems to have entered the Xingyiquan vocabulary through cross-training. For example, some schools refer to a training method of "Xing Yi Push Hands" - a term more commonly in use in training Taijiquan - which may be called by other schools "Five Elements Fighting"

The recognized founder of Baguazhang, Dong Hai Chuan, was reputed to have fought Guo Yunshen with neither able to defeat the other - though it is possible that they were training together. It would have been controversial at the time for Dong Hai Chuan to have studied under Guo Yunshen, since Dong Hai Chuan was the older of the two. The most neutral viewpoint would be to say that they trained together, which may explain the stylistic similarities between Baguazhang and the Xingyiquan Monkey. Frantzis argues that this encounter never took place and that Guo and Dong had little contact with each other. Frantzis also argues that a Xingyiquan-Baguazhang exchange was more likely to have occurred in Taijiquan c. 1900 where Xingyi masters Li Cunyi and Zhang Zhaodong, Bagua master Cheng Tinghua, and four other Xingyi and Bagua teachers lived together (Frantzis, 1998, p. 179). Furthermore, it is stated in Sun Lutang's autobiography that the legendary fight between Guo Yunshen and Dong Hai Chuan never happened. The book states that the truth of the matter is that Guo Yunshen actually fought one of his older Xingyi brothers and lost. Sun Lutang was a student of both Guo Yunshen and Cheng Tinghua so this stance on the subject seems to be one of the most accurate. On another note there are claims that the fight did happen from very credible masters that have knowledge of specific, original forms both empty handed and weapons that were invented by Dong Hai Chuan himself. They claim that the two masters agreed to a draw, realizing that both arts were equally on par with each other and always had mutual respect for the other. They also claim that the friendship developed two new arts BaguaXingyi and Xingyibagua. Both arts were a fusion of the two with more emphasis on the art that is stated first in the name. A person had to decide which art he had more interest in and resonated in them more. Xingyibagua for the student more interested in Xingyi and BaguaXingyi for the student more interested in Pa Kua (Bagua).

### Important Texts

A variety of texts have survived throughout the years, often called "Classics", "Songs" or "Theories".

- Classic of Unification
- Classic of Fighting
- Classic of Stepping
- Classic of Six Harmonies

### Modern Xingyiquan

A simplified version of Xingyiquan was taught to Chinese infantry during the Second Sino-Japanese War for close quarters combat. This included armed techniques such as bayonet and saber drills in addition to unarmed techniques.

### In fiction

- The fictional Tekken characters Julia Chang, Michelle Chang, and Wang Jinrei were written as Xingyiquan fighters.
- The fictional characters Kano of Mortal Kombat use Xing Yi as his fighting primary style in Deadly allience and Armageddon.
- The fictional Dead or Alive character Gen Fu and Eliot were also written as a Xingyiquan fighter. Although Eliot is the apprentice of Gen Fu, Eliot does not practice Xing Yi Liu He as Gen Fu does.
- The comic book Shaolin Cowboy includes a character called "King Crab" who uses Xingyiquan terms for a number of techniques - though those terms are applied wrongly, and could be seen as a satirical view of the state of kung fu.
- In the 2001 Jet Li movie The One, the "bad guy" character Gabriel Yu-Law (Jet Li) is written as Xingyiquan fighter while the "good guy" (also played by Jet Li) is written as Baguazhang as his fighting style, reflecting the legendary fight between the Xingyiquan master Guo Yunshen and Dong Hai Chuan the founder of Baguazhang.
- In David Baldacci's recent thriller novel "the Camel Club" (ISBN 0446577383), one of the characters, "Tom Hemingway", is proficient in Tai Chi Chuan and Pa Kua Chang, but prefers the ShanXi school of Hsing-I. He uses Hsing-I at many intervals during the book, demonstrating its incredible strength and speed, and defeating many opponents, including several Taekwondo masters

### Controversy

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- **Ma Xuei**  馬學禮  Listed as a student of Ji Longfeng. From Henan province.
- **Shang Yunxiang**  尙雲祥  Student of Li Cunyi.
- **Song Shirong**  宋世榮  Originator of the Song Family Style. Listed as student of Li Luoneng. From Shanxi province.
- **Sun Lutang**  孫祿堂  Sun Fuquan  Listed as student of Guo Yunshen.
- **Wang Fuyuan**  王福元  Listed as student of Guo Yunshen.
- **Zhang Junfeng**  張俊峰  Chang Chun-Feng  Student of Li Cunyi and Zhang Zhaodong.
- **Zhang Zhaodong**  張兆東  Zhang Zhaodong  Listed as student of Liu Qian.
- **Xu Hongji**  許鴻基  Hsu Hong-Chi  Student of Hung I-Hsiang

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Treating the story of Dong Hai Chuan and Guo Yunshen as allegory, however, reveals a common training protocol among xingyiquan and baguazhang practitioners. Often, because baguazhang requires significantly more time for a practitioner's skill to mature, it is acceptable to learn xingyiquan first or simultaneously. Such a practitioner develops a tactical vocabulary that is more readily apparent than the core baguazhang movements. Furthermore, each art intersects at several points. For example, Crossing Fist (横拳) in xingyiquan is said to be equivalent to Single Palm Change in baguazhang. When done correctly, each movement trains the same method of twisting the kwa (inguinal fold) and spiraling the arms even though the stepping patterns and range of motion differ.

The founder of Yiquan, Wang Xingzhi, studied under Guo Yunshen, and similarities in techniques between these arts can also be seen. It can be said that the primary standing postures of Yiquan trains separately what xingyiquan santishi (三體式) trains simultaneously.

See also
- Neijia
- T'ai Chi Ch'uan
- Baguazhang
- Neijin
- Yue Fei
- Zhou Tong (Shaolin Monk)

References
2. Heart Chinese boxing emphasizing flexibility and confusing the opponent (Chinese only)

Uncited References

Published works

TRANSLATED WORKS
These may also be available in the original Chinese.
- Xing Yi Lianhuan Quan, Li Cun Yi (translated by Joseph Crandall)
- The Xingyi Boxing Manual: Hebei Style's Five Principles and Seven Words, Jin Yunting (Translated by John Groschwitz)

ENGLISH WORKS

External links
DISCUSSION SITES
- Song Shi Xingyiquan
- Chinese Fighting Arts Public Forum
- Shen Wu Discussion Board

VIDEOS
- Xin Yi Liu He Quan demonstrated by Master Wu Qiu Ting:
  http://video.google.com/videosearch?q=Wu+Qiu+Ting
- These “free” instructional videos are more or less 60 minutes long (Chinese Only). Paste into web browser.
  mms://vod.sports.cn/vod/v1/xingyi/01.asf (Titled: Xingyi Five Element Saber)
  mms://vod.sports.cn/vod/v1/xingyi/02.asf (Titled: Xingyi Five Element Staff)
  mms://vod.sports.cn/vod/v1/xingyi/03.asf (Titled: Xingyi Twelve Shape Fist)
  mms://vod.sports.cn/vod/v1/xingyi/04.asf (Titled: Xingyi Eight Word Achievement)
  mms://vod.sports.cn/vod/v1/xingyi/05.asf (Titled: Xingyi Mixed Style Striking)

OTHER
- emptyFlower Xingyiquan
- Northern Shaolin Academy Hsing I Chuan (Xing Yi Quan)
Xingyiquan is an internal Chinese martial art that has enjoyed a long history, and may be older than its two siblings: Taijiquan and Baguazhang.

Xingyiquan means "Form and Will Boxing," so it follows that the will and the shape are more important in making Xingyiquan work as a martial art than mere physical strength and heavy handed force.

The practitioner that seeks the more sophisticated, efficient path is advised to seek the softness in the hard, the small in the vast, the lightness in the heavy, the Yin in the Yang and vice-versa: avoid the overuse of force and reliance on physical strength.

Xingyiquan practitioners use the Five Elements as an interpretative framework for reacting and responding to attacks.

Xingyiquan was taught to Chinese infantry during the Second Sino-Japanese War for close quarters combat.

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