

Survey and Countermeasure Study on the Current Status of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Competency Among Nurses in Hospitals of Chinese Guangyuan Region

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Abstract

To investigate the current status of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) nursing competencies among nurses in Guangyuan City-based hospitals and identify training needs, thereby providing evidence for enhancing TCM nursing capabilities in the region, a questionnaire survey was conducted from September 20 to November 24, 2024, targeting clinical nurses engaged in TCM nursing at 19 public medical institutions (including general hospitals, TCM hospitals, and integrated Chinese-Western medicine hospitals) in Guangyuan City. Participants were selected through random sampling. Among the 19 participating institutions, TCM hospitals accounted for 42.11% and general hospitals for 57.87%. A significant proportion of nursing staff had ≤ 10 years of experience and held junior professional titles, accounting for 53.13% and 52.40%, respectively. Approximately 38.89% of nursing staff could perform only 1-2 TCM nursing techniques. Among the TCM nursing techniques they could perform, acupoint plaster application (67.15%), moxibustion (66.75%), and auricular acupressure (63.59%) were the most common; the highest proficiency in TCM nursing fundamentals was observed in commonly used TCM nursing techniques (47.27%), the four diagnostic methods (41.61%), and basic TCM nursing knowledge (39.10%); the highest proficiency in commonly used TCM nursing techniques was in moxibustion (62.48%), acupoint plaster application (61.82%), and auricular acupressure (61.09%). The highest proficiency in TCM nursing clinical practice was observed in TCM nursing rounds (44.11%),

TCM nursing protocol validation for priority diseases (33.71%), and syndrome differentiation-based nursing for specialized diseases (33.64%). The overall training willingness among the included nursing staff was relatively high at 88.35%. In general, healthcare institutions demonstrated a high level of emphasis on TCM nursing training at 82.29%. However, 43.05% of respondents still expressed a desire for institutions to increase the quantity and content of TCM nursing training. They particularly hoped for more training opportunities in TCM nursing theory, TCM nursing techniques, and TCM health preservation knowledge, while also seeking more innovative training methods. In Conclusion, Traditional Chinese Medicine nursing competencies among healthcare providers in Guangyuan remained relatively low. However, nursing staff expressed a desire for more training in theories and skills related to TCM clinical practice. They also expect hospital administrators to provide more learning opportunities, innovate training methods, and continuously enhance the TCM nursing competencies of local healthcare providers.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine, nursing competencies, current status, cross-sectional study

1. Introduction

In ancient China, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioners did not differentiate between physicians and nurses; all TCM diagnosis, treatment, and nursing were performed by TCM doctors. It was only after the founding of the People's Republic of China that TCM nursing gradually began to develop under national policy guidance (Tan et al., 2024). In recent years, with the continuous innovation of traditional Chinese medicine culture, TCM nursing techniques have played a significant role in the prevention and treatment of geriatric and chronic diseases, as well as in disease rehabilitation, attracting widespread global attention (Wang et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2021). To further promote TCM culture and cultivate TCM nursing professionals, China's National Health Commission and National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine jointly issued the Action Plan for Further Improving Nursing Services (2023-2025) in 2023. This document explicitly states that developing TCM nursing is a crucial component in inheriting and innovating TCM practices while leveraging the unique strengths of Chinese nursing. It emphasizes fully utilizing TCM nursing's distinctive role in disease prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and health promotion, thereby presenting new demands and challenges for the professional competence of TCM nursing practitioners (China's National Health Commission and National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2023).

Unlike Western nursing, TCM nursing emphasizes holistic and dialectical approaches to patient care. Its theoretical foundations stem from traditional Chinese medical theories including Yin-Yang and Five Elements, Zang-Xiang (Organ-Imagery), Meridian, Qi-Blood-Body Fluids, and Etiology-Pathogenesis. Specialized nursing techniques encompass moxibustion, massage therapy, cupping, gua sha, auricular therapy, and traditional exercise therapy. Consequently, TCM nursing practitioners must not only possess fundamental clinical competencies—such as communication skills, critical thinking, and teamwork—but also thoroughly master TCM nursing theory and skills to effectively deliver

TCM-related care (Chang et al., 2020; Hao et al., 2011). However, in practice, the TCM knowledge and skills of nursing practitioners fall significantly short of expectations, and training methods remain relatively limited. This severely hampers the professional development of TCM nursing staff and compromises the quality of TCM nursing care (Dong Huaqian et al., 2024; Wang Dan et al., 2019). To comprehensively assess the application of TCM nursing techniques in Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province, and to innovate training methods based on practitioners' needs while standardizing the promotion of appropriate TCM technologies, this study employed a questionnaire survey. The objectives were to understand the current TCM nursing competencies and training needs of local practitioners, analyze challenges in implementing TCM nursing, and provide evidence-based recommendations for TCM nursing training within local healthcare institutions.

2. Study Population and Methodology

2.1 Study Population

Using random sampling, a questionnaire survey was conducted from September 20 to November 24, 2024, targeting clinical nurses engaged in TCM nursing at 19 public medical institutions (including general hospitals, TCM hospitals, and integrated Chinese and Western medicine hospitals) in Guangyuan City. Inclusion Criteria: (1) Possession of a valid nursing license with independent practice capability; (2) Engagement in frontline TCM nursing work, i.e., providing TCM nursing services or implementing TCM nursing projects within their department; (3) Informed consent to participate in this study. Exclusion Criteria: (1) On sick leave or maternity leave for ≥ 3 months; (2) Individuals undergoing advanced training within their department; (3) Participants exhibiting contradictory responses after screening for inclusion/exclusion criteria; (4) Participants selecting identical options for all questionnaire items; (5) Participants failing to complete the questionnaire according to instructions. This study complies with the requirements of the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Survey Tools

The first section comprised a general information questionnaire designed by the research team through literature review and expert consultation. After questionnaire development, 53 eligible nurses were randomly selected for a pilot survey. Based on feedback, the questionnaire was supplemented and revised accordingly, resulting in a comprehensive general information questionnaire covering gender, age, years of service, professional title, employment status, highest education level, alma mater, department affiliation, and implementation of TCM nursing techniques. The second part comprised the Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Competency Questionnaire. This section utilized the "Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Competency Survey Questionnaire" developed by Wang Dan et al. (2019) in 2018. The questionnaire assessed three dimensions: Basic Knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing (12 items), TCM nursing techniques (18 items), and advanced TCM nursing clinical practice (7 items). The 37 items were scored using a 5-point Likert scale: not at all familiar = 1 point, unfamiliar = 2 points, average = 3 points, familiar =

4 points, very familiar = 5 points. with total scores ranging from 32 to 185 points. Higher scores indicate greater mastery of TCM knowledge/skills among nursing staff. The Cronbach's α coefficients for each dimension were 0.91, 0.88, and 0.96, respectively, while the content validity indices (CVI) were 0.83, 0.91, and 0.80, respectively, demonstrating good reliability and validity. Part III comprises the TCM Nursing Training Needs Questionnaire. This section adopts the "Survey Questionnaire on Training Needs for TCM Nursing Staff in Public Hospitals" developed by Ye Meixia et al. (2019) et al. The questionnaire comprises six items: willingness to participate in TCM nursing training, level of importance assigned to training, desired training volume, preferred training methods for theory and skills, and training content. The overall Cronbach's α was 0.84, with factors explaining 62.1% of the cumulative variance, indicating good construct validity and internal consistency reliability.

2.2.2 Data Collection Method

The questionnaire was distributed online via the WeChat platform, adhering to voluntary and anonymous participation principles. A total of 1,521 questionnaires were distributed, with 1,519 valid responses collected, yielding a response rate of 99.87%.

2.3 Statistical Methods

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 software. Descriptive statistics for general characteristics were presented as (n, %). Normally distributed continuous variables were expressed as (mean $\pm$ standard deviation), while non-normally distributed variables were represented by median and interquartile range. When data were normally distributed with equal variance, differences were assessed using One-way ANOVA or Independent samples t-tests. If data met normality but did not satisfy homogeneity of variance, t-tests were selected.

3. General Information & Findings

3.1 Basic Hospital Information

Nursing staff from 19 public medical institutions participated in this survey, including 8 traditional Chinese medicine institutions (42.11%) and 11 general hospitals (57.87%). Grade III Class A hospitals represent the highest quality ones in China; Grade II Class B hospitals represent lower quality ones. Detailed information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Information of Hospitals Surveyed in This Study

Hospital Type			Hospital Grade						Total
			Grade Class A	III Class B	III Class A	II Class A	Grade Class B	II	
Traditional Chinese Medicine Institutions			0	1	4		3		8
Comprehensive Medical Institutions			4	2	2		3		11
Total			4	3	6		6		19

3.2 General Characteristics of Study Participants

A total of 1,519 valid questionnaires were collected for this study. Among the respondents, 42

(4.08%) were male and 1,457 (95.92%) were female. Nursing staff under 40 years old numbered 1,247 (82.09%), 1,507 (99.21%) held associate college degrees or higher, 807 (53.13%) had ≤ 10 years of work experience, 400 (26.33%) had 11–20 years of work experience, 796 (52.40%) held junior professional titles, 586 (38.58%) held intermediate professional titles, 606 (38.89%) could perform 1-2 TCM nursing techniques, and 335 (22.05%) could perform 3-4 TCM nursing techniques. Detailed information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. General Characteristics of Study Participants

Project	Number of People	Composition Ratio/%
Gender		
Male	62	4.08
Female	1457	95.92
Age (years)		
20-30	636	41.87
31-40	611	40.22
41-50	227	14.95
≥ 51	45	2.96
Years of Experience (years)		
0-5	381	25.08
6-10	426	28.04
11-20	400	26.33
16-20	99	6.52
≥ 21	213	14.03
Professional Title		
Junior	796	52.40
Intermediate	586	38.58
Senior	137	9.02
Education Level		
Vocational School	12	0.79
College	405	26.66
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	1102	72.55
Number of TCM Nursing Techniques Permitted		
1-2 techniques	606	39.90
3-4 techniques	335	22.05
≥ 5 techniques	578	38.05

3.3 Status of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Techniques Available to Research Subjects

Among 1,519 nursing staff surveyed in this study, the most commonly available TCM nursing techniques were acupoint plaster application (67.15%), moxibustion (66.75%), and auricular acupressure (63.59%). Detailed implementation status is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. TCM Nursing Techniques Performed by Survey Participants

Project	Number of People	Composition Ratio/%
Acupoint Plaster Application	1020	67.15
Moxibustion	1014	66.75
Auricular Acupuncture	966	63.59
Herbal Enema	711	46.81
Herbal Wet Compress	705	46.41
Herbal Rubbing	703	46.28
Herbal Hot Compress	652	42.92
Herbal Steam Therapy	634	41.74
Herbal Ointment Application	621	40.88
Acupoint Injection	609	40.09
Cupping	586	38.58
Gua Sha	549	36.14
Herbal Bath	446	29.36
Herbal Pack	390	25.67
Meridian Massage	236	15.54
Wax Therapy	206	13.56
Herbal Ionophoresis	194	12.77
Other	141	9.28
Acupoint Plaster Application	1020	67.15

3.4 Survey Findings on Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Competencies Among Study Participants

Among the 1,519 participants surveyed in this study, the highest proficiency in TCM nursing fundamentals was observed in commonly used TCM nursing techniques (47.27%), the Four Examinations (41.61%), and foundational TCM nursing knowledge (39.10%). The highest proficiency in commonly used TCM nursing techniques was demonstrated in moxibustion (62.48%), acupoint plaster application (61.82%), and auricular acupressure (61.09%). The highest proficiency in TCM nursing clinical practice was observed in TCM nursing rounds (44.11%), TCM nursing protocol development for priority diseases (33.71%), and syndrome differentiation-based nursing for specialized diseases (33.64%). Detailed findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Survey Results on Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Competencies Among Research Participants ($\bar{x} \pm s$)

Item	Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Competency Score/Points
Fundamentals of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing	
Common TCM Nursing Techniques	3.38±20.85
Four Diagnostic Methods	3.28±0.44
Basic Knowledge of TCM Nursing	3.24±0.27
Key Disease Categories	3.13±0.29
Yin-Yang and Five Elements	3.09±0.15
Syndrome Differentiation	3.03±0.29
Meridians and Acupoints Basics	2.99±0.34
Essence, Qi, Blood, and Body Fluids	2.96±0.18
Etiology and Pathogenesis	2.96±0.31
Zang-Xiang Theory	2.89±0.17
Formula and Medicinal Basics	2.81±0.15
Interpretation of Classical TCM Texts	2.72±0.21
TCM Nursing Techniques	
Moxibustion	3.75±0.24
Acupoint Plaster Application	3.71±0.16
Auricular Plaster Application	3.67±0.47
Herbal Enemas	3.61±0.35
Herbal Rubs	3.55±0.36
Herbal Ointments	3.50±0.88
Herbal Steam Therapy	3.46±0.41
Herbal Compresses	3.45±0.16
Cupping	3.42±0.13
Gua Sha	3.39±0.49
Herbal Baths	3.34±0.16
Acupoint Injection	3.31±0.19
Herbal Poultice	3.21±0.12
Meridian Massage	2.95±0.26
Herbal Ionophoresis	2.90±0.25
Paraffin Therapy	2.88±0.12
Clinical Practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing	
Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Rounds	3.28±0.44
Traditional Chinese Medicine Chronic Disease Management	3.06±0.18
Specialized Syndrome Differentiation and Nursing for Specific Diseases	3.05±0.15
Evidence-Based Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Plans for Key Disease Categories	3.05±0.12
Evidence-Based Practice in Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing	2.98±0.25
Research on Standardization of Traditional Chinese Medicine Techniques	2.94±0.18
Recent Advances in Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Research	2.90±0.19

3.5 Survey Findings on Training Needs Among Research Participants

Among the 1,519 research subjects surveyed in this study, the overall willingness to participate in training was 88.35%. The perceived level of importance placed by medical institutions on TCM nursing training was 82.29%. Approximately 56.96% reported that the quantity of TCM nursing training received met their expectations. They expressed a stronger

desire for more training opportunities in TCM nursing theory, TCM nursing techniques, and TCM nursing health preservation knowledge. They also hoped for more innovative training methods. Detailed findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Survey Results on Training Needs of Research Participants

Project	Number of People	Composition Ratio/%
Nursing Staff's Willingness to Participate in Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Training		
Willing	951	62.61
Very Willing	391	25.74
Indifferent	115	7.57
Unwilling	42	2.76
Very Unwilling	20	1.32
Hospital Administration's Priority Level for TCM Nursing Training		
Prioritized	692	45.56
Highly Prioritized	558	36.73
Moderate	236	15.54
Not Prioritized	20	1.31
Very Not Prioritized	13	0.86
Perceived Adequacy of Received TCM Nursing Training Volume		
Just Enough	865	56.95
Insufficient	376	24.75
Unclear	215	14.15
Very Insufficient	63	4.15
Preferred TCM Nursing Training Methods		
Case Analysis	1060	69.78
PBL Scenario-Based Teaching (Instructor presents clinical case: Students identify problems: Students independently seek answers and learn: Classroom addresses identified problems: Instructor summarizes findings)	1023	67.35
Micro-lectures (Online learning)	918	60.43
Flipped Classroom (Instructor defines problems, students explore independently, collaborative learning, in-class results sharing)	902	59.38
Group discussions	883	58.13
Bedside comprehensive skills training	768	50.56
Self-study	696	45.82
5-minute morning handover Q&A	483	31.80
Preferred Training Methods for TCM Nursing Procedures		
Live demonstrations	1323	87.10
Micro-lectures or video demonstrations	1148	75.58
Bedside comprehensive competency training	899	59.18
Role-playing	828	54.51
Flipped classroom	777	51.15
Skills competitions	658	43.32
Most Needed TCM Nursing Training Content		
Fundamentals of Traditional Chinese Medicine	1215	79.99
Fundamentals of TCM Nursing Theory	1203	79.20
TCM Nursing Techniques	1100	72.42
TCM Health Preservation Knowledge	1094	72.02
TCM Diet Therapy	1031	67.87
TCM Nursing Routines	924	60.83
TCM Nursing Observation of Patient Conditions	907	59.71
TCM Nursing Documentation	869	57.21
Specialized Syndrome Differentiation and Nursing for Specific Diseases	847	55.76
TCM Nursing Rounds	825	54.31
TCM Chronic Disease Care	809	53.26
TCM Nursing Protocols for Priority Conditions	774	50.95
Recent Advances in TCM Nursing Research	761	50.10

4. Discussion

4.1 Analysis of the Current Status of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Competency Among Nurses in Hospitals of Guangyuan, China

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) nursing constitutes a vital component of TCM services, and the competency of nursing staff in TCM nursing is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of TCM nursing services. Within the evaluation system for TCM nursing competency, the focus lies on assessing nursing personnel's mastery of TCM nursing theory, TCM nursing skills, and TCM clinical practice (Feng Ling et al., 2023). This study surveyed nursing staff at 19 public medical institutions in Guangyuan City, involving 1,519 practitioners engaged in TCM nursing. Results indicate that 39.89% of nurses could perform only 1–2 TCM nursing techniques, while 38.05% could perform more than 5 techniques. This disparity may correlate with the nurses' years of experience. Among the TCM nursing techniques performed by nurses, acupoint application, moxibustion, auricular seed therapy, herbal enemas, and herbal compresses were most prevalent. This likely reflects the dominance of certain TCM nursing projects within hospitals; techniques performed more frequently tend to be mastered more thoroughly by nursing staff. This study's survey of TCM nursing competencies revealed that nursing staff generally demonstrated poor mastery of TCM nursing fundamentals. Even for the most commonly used TCM nursing techniques, theoretical knowledge proficiency reached only 47.27%. Crucially, proficiency in meridian and acupoint knowledge—essential for clinical practice—was merely 28.24%. Mastery of knowledge regarding pathogenesis and the Zang-Xiang theory stood at 27.05% and 25.54%, respectively. This indicates that when implementing TCM nursing, staff do not delve into the underlying mechanisms of disease for related procedures. They learn theoretical explanations merely to master techniques, resulting in a relatively superficial grasp of TCM nursing theory. Surveys on mastery of common TCM nursing techniques revealed that the most familiar procedures among nursing staff were moxibustion (62.48%), acupoint plaster application (61.82%), and auricular acupressure (61.09%), showing relatively better proficiency. However, distinctive TCM nursing techniques such as cupping (48.06%), gua sha (proficiency: 46.74%), and wax therapy (proficiency: 27.39%) showed lower proficiency rates. This indicates that nursing staff in Guangyuan can only perform relatively simple TCM nursing techniques. They have not fully mastered the essence of more complex, TCM-specific nursing procedures, and their overall proficiency level remains low. When implementing TCM nursing in clinical practice, the most familiar applications involve using TCM nursing knowledge for nursing rounds (proficiency rate: 44.11%) and developing TCM nursing protocols for priority diseases (proficiency rate: 33.71%). The lowest proficiency is observed in applying new advances in TCM nursing research (proficiency rate: 26.27%). This likely stems from the relatively low mastery of both foundational TCM nursing knowledge and practical skills among nursing staff in this region. Consequently, they struggle to flexibly apply TCM nursing knowledge in clinical practice and integrate relevant knowledge for theoretical or technical innovation—a finding consistent with research by Zhao et al. (2024). Currently, nursing personnel in China generally exhibit a low level of mastery in both TCM nursing theoretical knowledge and practical skills. It is advocated that TCM nursing

professionals should possess a solid theoretical foundation and extensive clinical practice experience.

4.2 Current Status of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Training Needs Among Nurses in Guangyuan Hospitals, China

The cultivation of traditional Chinese medicine nursing professionals must align with China's current economic development and evolving nursing models while adhering to the principles of TCM nursing education. Continuous enhancement of professional competence necessitates reforming teaching models and methodologies, alongside refining assessment systems (Cai, 2022). In this study, the nursing staff included demonstrated a strong desire for TCM nursing training. Approximately 88.35% of nurses expressed willingness to participate in such training, and about 82.29% perceived healthcare institutions as having a positive attitude toward implementing TCM nursing training. However, 43.05% still indicated a desire for institutions to increase the quantity and content of TCM nursing training, advocating for innovative training approaches. For theoretical training, they anticipated case analysis, problem-based learning (PBL), and micro-lectures. Practical skill training was expected to include live demonstrations, micro-lectures or video tutorials, and bedside comprehensive competency training. Beyond foundational TCM nursing knowledge, training should cover TCM health preservation, TCM dietary therapy, and TCM clinical observation. Demand for TCM syndrome differentiation-based nursing and recent advances in TCM nursing research was relatively low. This reflects the emphasis placed by medical institutions in Guangyuan City on developing TCM nursing competencies among nursing staff. However, it still falls short of meeting their needs. Nursing personnel expect TCM nursing training to be delivered through demonstrations or case studies, with content closely aligned with daily practice. Yet, there remains a lack of exploration into the essence and innovation of TCM nursing. This suggests that health authorities and medical institutions in Guangyuan should tailor TCM nursing training to meet nursing staff needs. They may draw inspiration from Zhejiang Province's TCM nursing talent development model (Yao Binlian et al., 2024) and the core knowledge and practical competency standards for TCM nursing established by Xu et al. (2019), offering new approaches to advance TCM nursing talent cultivation in the region.

4.3 Countermeasures and Recommendations

Addressing the issue of low TCM nursing competency among practitioners in Guangyuan, China, requires prioritizing training to enhance core TCM capabilities. Theoretical training should emphasize studying classical TCM theories and reading ancient texts to enrich the theoretical framework, guiding nurses to innovatively apply theoretical knowledge in clinical practice. When implementing skills training, focus should extend beyond routine TCM nursing techniques to include complex care procedures with distinctive TCM characteristics. Innovative teaching methods and assessment standards must be developed to ensure every participating nurse thoroughly masters relevant techniques while fully stimulating their enthusiasm and motivation for learning.

5. Summary and Limitations

This cross-sectional study examined the TCM nursing competencies of healthcare providers in Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province. Although TCM nursing competencies were relatively low in this region, healthcare providers expressed a desire for more training in TCM clinical practice theories and skills. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen training in innovative TCM practices and evidence-based competencies. Healthcare administrators are also encouraged to provide more learning opportunities for TCM nursing staff, innovate training methods, and lay the foundation for cultivating TCM nursing talent. However, this study has certain limitations. For instance, the surveyed area is a prefecture-level city in Sichuan Province characterized by a relatively underdeveloped economy, uneven distribution of resources, and varying levels of nursing staff competence. It cannot represent the TCM nursing competency of nursing staff across the entire Sichuan region. Therefore, to further understand the TCM nursing proficiency of nursing staff, the scope of future surveys should be expanded. In summary, this study examined the current status of TCM nursing competencies and training needs among nursing staff in Guangyuan City, providing robust theoretical support for the development of TCM nursing in the region. It offers valuable reference for cultivating local TCM nursing talents, promotes the advancement of TCM nursing to higher levels, and serves as a reference for further developing TCM nursing in other similar regions.

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Competing interests

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Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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