

# Cultivation of Community Understanding Among 9-year Compulsory School Students: A Case Study of Shanghai



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**Abstract:** Isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the mental health of students, leading to higher rates of loneliness and depression symptoms. Scholars have primarily addressed this issue through the cultivation of social relationships, emphasizing their influence on mental and physical health outcomes. However, the paper argues that this approach is insufficient for primary and secondary students. Therefore, the concept of community understanding is proposed as an alternative approach. The purpose of this research is to design and implement an evaluation system that aims to foster the development of community understanding among primary and secondary school students. This research is based on the premise that students can enhance their community understanding through engaging in social practice activities, which are experiential learning opportunities that expose students to the real-world situations and issues in their communities. The strategies of an integrated system architecture, overall construction, and gradual progress are outlined, focusing on exploring and utilizing community resources, establishing a community practice workplace, and enriching the educational connotation of "Five Education." The paper also illustrates the research tools and practical activities implemented to foster students' community understanding and promote their comprehensive development. The significance of this study is that it can provide schools and communities with a practical and useful tool for assessing students' social practices, which can help them to improve the community understanding.

**Keywords:** Community Understanding; Students; 9-Year Compulsory Education

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## 1 Introduction

Isolation can have a negative impact on mental health, especially for students. In a systematic review of 41 observational studies (30 cross-sectional and 11 longitudinal) from January 2020 to June 2022 in six European countries, the United States, Australia, China, Hong Kong, Brazil, Israel, and Chile (six of which were rated 8 or 9 on a 9-point quality scale), Farrell et al. (2023) reported that higher rates of loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic were associated with higher

depression symptoms among children and adolescents. [1] Another survey conducted by CDC in 2021 found that more than a third (37%) of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic [2]. Nazish Imran and etc. confirm this point by stating that uncertainties regarding pandemic itself, strict social distancing measures, widespread and prolonged school closures, parental stressors, and loss of loved ones are likely to affect children and adolescent's

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wellbeing in addition to specific psychological effects of quarantine and isolation [3]. Mental health crises are also on the rise. From March 2020 to October 2020, mental health–related emergency department visits increased 24% for children ages 5 to 11 and 31% for those ages 12 [4].

Most scholars tend to tackle this problem using the cultivation of “social relationship”, which is obscure when addressing the issue concerning with primary and secondary students. For example, Umberson, and etc. argue that social relationships—both quantity and quality—affect mental health, health behavior, physical health, and mortality risk. Sociologists have played a central role in establishing the link between social relationships and health outcomes, identifying explanations for this link, and discovering social variation (e.g., by gender and race) at the population level. Studies show that social relationships have short- and long-term effects on health, for better and for worse, and that these effects emerge in childhood and cascade throughout life to foster cumulative advantage or disadvantage in health. This article describes key research themes in the study of social relationships and health, and it highlights policy implications suggested by this research. [5] This article will adopt the concept of community understanding to tackle this problem.

## 1.1 Definition of Community Understanding

Community understanding is a social ability that enables individuals to perceive, understand, participate in, and transform their own and other communities. It involves respecting the diversity and values of different communities, and developing a sense of belonging and identity within one’s own community. Community understanding is essential for building strong relationships and social cohesion among community members, and for promoting personal growth and social development. Community understanding is especially important for primary and secondary school students, as it helps them to learn from their educational practice and to acquire transferable generic literacy that is valued by the future society. Community understanding connects the individual’s autonomy and social development, and integrates the key connotations of generic literacy, such as higher-order cognition, personal growth, and social development.

## 1.2 Theoretic Basis

According to Earle Edward Eubank’s book “The Concept of Sociology,” communities generally have a stable group structure and a more consistent group consciousness. Members have consistent behavioral norms, ongoing interaction, division of labor among members and the ability to act in concert. A community is a group of like-minded people brought together based on a point, needs and hobbies with the aim of achieving a win-win community. [6]

The theory of pro-social behavior of adolescents. Pro-social behavior reflects the positive state of adolescents’ self and social development, which not only implies mature self-awareness, positive interpersonal relationships and healthy group adaptability, but also involves the interaction and relationship between the individual and the larger environment, customs and cultural norms. Huinan Hu and tec. in their study confirm this point. They investigated the development of individual differences in prosocial behavior among adolescents from the perspective of positive psychology. The study found that social support was associated positively with the adolescents’ self-esteem, hope and prosocial behavior, and prosocial behavior was associated positively with self-esteem and hope. Structural equation modeling analyses showed that self-esteem and hope fully mediated the relation between social support and prosocial behavior, with hope accounting for 45.12% and the path from self-esteem to hope accounting for 54.88% of the relation between social support and adolescents’ prosocial behavior. [7]

Theories of community awareness development. The sense of community defines the people in the environment, which makes individuals more successful. Schools place a great deal of importance on how students build social networks with the people around them because it means that students have to manage different people and have the ability to get along with different personalities. The concept of community also makes students more ambitious. [8] At school, if a student has a new idea, the school will invite mentors to guide the student and provide financial support to help the student implement the idea. The sense of community makes children more able to live in harmony with their environment and to pursue their own development in different environments. At the same time, the development of a sense of community also helps to educate children’s character, which is crucial for their growth and future development.

Maslow's theory of psychological needs. Abraham Harold Maslow, an American social psychologist, personality theorist and comparative psychologist, put forward the theory of motivation, also known as the hierarchy of needs. The theory argues that the development of human motivation and the fulfilment of needs are closely related, and that there are high and low levels of needs. Needs can be classified from low to high: "physiological needs", "safety needs", "love and affiliation needs" (social needs), "respect needs", "self-esteem needs" and self-actualisation needs. This theory tells us that the highest need of human beings is "self-actualisation", and that enthusiasm is stimulated by higher-level needs. [9] Therefore, in the growth of primary and secondary school students, we need to guide them to stimulate their higher-level needs on the basis of satisfying their lower-level needs, so as to promote their healthy physical and mental development.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

Through literature research and contextual analysis of the current education reform, this project attempts to construct the concept of community understanding of primary and secondary school students, and puts forward a model of community understanding of young people with the goal of cultivating social citizens who are introspective, joyful and conscientious, in order to consolidate a consensus on parenting and unify parenting actions, so as to truly promote the return of school education to the fundamental principle of establishing morality and cultivating humanism.

In order to adapt to the requirements of the new era, SISU Bilingual takes the cultivation of students' community comprehension as the core, integrates the existing resources of the school, and expands and deepens them at the same time. Under the theme of "Me and Community", we create a series of social practice activities by establishing a linkage between students and different communities, so that students in primary school, junior high school and senior high school. By creating a series of social practice activities, students learn to experience, understand and participate in different community spaces, and through practical activities in different community spaces, they immerse themselves in and understand communities, so that they gain an understanding of communities with the same destiny, and have a sense of the community of human destiny.

This will not only provide a reserve of talents with

international vision and global awareness for the construction of Shanghai as an excellent city, but also provide future talents for the construction of the community of human destiny. The cultivation of the ability of community understanding is crucial to the cultivation of students' correct world view and outlook on life, the sense of mastery and the overall situation, as well as the consciousness of the community of human destiny, which is beneficial to both the individual development of students and the future destiny of the country.

## 2 Research Content and Process

### 2.1 The Project Is Divided into Three Progressive Levels in Three Academic Segments

#### 2.1.1 Primary School

We focus on cultivating students' feelings and understanding of the social spaces around them, such as family, school and community. Students will develop the concepts of love for family, care for classmates, and care for the community, and become young citizens with a certain degree of understanding of group spaces. They will be guided to realize the importance of tolerance, co-operation and helping others to build a better community space while experiencing different community spaces. At the same time, it also plants a seed in their little minds that the world is diverse and pluralistic, and stimulates their desire to explore a bigger world when they grow up. This approach helps students develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to their communities while also promoting their healthy physical and mental development.

In the workshop, primary students were encouraged to engage emotionally with the feelings of others through imagination using the transmedia storytelling method. This method involves transforming a story into artwork and in this case, it comprised a variety of options such as drawings, paintings, cartoons, collages, comparative charts, and acrostics. Students used varied materials including paper, cardboard, cotton, glitter, pencils, color pencils, watercolors and canvas. They resorted to several techniques leading to diverse outcomes such as handmade painting, handmade art crafts, digital artwork, details in 3D, black and white artwork, and flyers. Some students

created music scores which they later enacted as music tracks and one student made a brief video dramatized by herself. In this way, students had the opportunity to become the principal designers of the creative activities in which they engaged.

In addition, students were encouraged to place themselves in the shoes of others through restorying, representations and transformations. This sense of empathy and solidarity was built through linguistic evidence of this process of engaging with otherness through imagination. Students would be encouraged to use phrases as ‘for a person who’, ‘behind what could be seen as’, ‘as a representation of’, ‘under those circumstances’, ‘it came to my mind the idea of’, ‘what I think the characters should think’, ‘we can’t imagine’. The difficulty of imagining the actual experience of another is shown in the use of modality (‘what could be seen as’), hedging and tentativeness (‘somehow’, ‘what I think’) and expressions like ‘we can’t imagine’. In their representations, the students transformed the literary texts they read in their English language course (novels, short stories and films) through modes, for instance to art work, but also through adjustments in time (e.g. past and present) and place. Transformations in time, place, perspective and identity are forms of restorying that characterize reading in the digital age as students make connections amongst texts, prior knowledge, experiences and feelings.

### 2.1.2. Junior High School

Students are guided to actively participate in social activities designed by the school. In these activities, students are encouraged to broaden their horizons, cultivate their high aspirations, and endeavour to contribute to more groups and the society on top of their self-fulfillment and self-needs. For example, students join the school’s volunteer club, which organizes various service projects such as tutoring underprivileged children, visiting elderly homes, or cleaning up the environment. Through these projects, students learn about the needs and challenges of different communities, develop empathy and compassion, and make a positive difference in the world. This will ease the many adolescent problems brought about by their rapid growth, such as stress, anxiety, or low self-esteem, promote their physical and mental health, and also cultivate their ambitious aspirations for the greater good and their courage to take on responsibilities. [10] Another example is the school’s debate team, which trains students to research and argue

on various topics of social importance, such as human rights, democracy, or climate change. Through this activity, students expand their knowledge and perspectives, sharpen their critical thinking and communication skills, and become more aware and engaged in social issues. This will also help them to pursue their academic and career goals with confidence and passion, and to become responsible and informed citizens.

### 2.1.3 Senior High School

Through in-depth social practice activities, senior high school students can come into contact with a wider world, meet different groups, observe and communicate with each other in practice activities, experience the differences and complexity of different cultures, and thus build up a sense of cross-cultural communication, which is indispensable for them to go out into the world in the future, and to become tolerant and open-minded international talents.

We have designed some social activities to broaden their horizons, cultivate their high aspirations, and endeavor to contribute to more groups and society, such as Community service projects, Volunteering opportunities, Study abroad programs and Cultural exchange programs. These activities ease the many adolescent problems brought about by their rapid growth, promote their physical and mental health, and also cultivate their ambitious aspirations for the greater good and their courage to take on responsibilities.

## 2.2 Implementation Measures and Suggestions

In order to cultivate international talents with different community sensibilities to adapt to the new era, we focus on constructing the following kinds of communities to help students establish a sense of community and cultivate the concept of community.

### 2.2.1 Constructing an Integrated Campus

#### Community of Primary, Middle and High School

The 12-year system is used to realize the whole process of educating people, to educate people consistently with moral education, and to build an integrated campus

community [11]. The 12-year system of our school provides objective conditions for the construction of an integrated campus community, and the reform of the consistent practice of moral education will become an important hand in the cultivation of students' community understanding.

Compile a series of moral education objectives, requirements and contents from primary to secondary school, and lay the foundation of their thoughts, beliefs and ideals with consistent influence; plan and design a series of activities for students with a nine-year long perspective, expand the space of moral education, form an integrated mechanism of moral education, solve the problems in the convergence of moral education, and promote a better integration and interaction of different groups of students, so that they get development and learn to be human beings in practice. learn to be human beings.

To formulate the general objectives of integrated moral education and sub-objectives for each grade, starting with common perceptions, common emotions, and behaviors, and to gradually and deeply cultivate the sense of community and the concept of community at different levels, such as the individual, the class, the school, the Young Pioneers, the Youth League, the community, the city, the country, the nation and the world.

Integrate with the integrated moral education curriculum to establish a complete system with progressive levels of objectives and effective articulation between primary and secondary schools. It mainly includes the integration of three aspects and disciplines; the integrated construction of theme class (team) lessons and theme class (team) meeting series in grades 1 to 12 to ensure the progressive education of worldview, outlook on life and values, and to strengthen students' sense of community and comprehension; and the articulation and integration of the social practice lessons in grades 1 to 12 to promote the continuous strengthening of students' sense of community and comprehension in the consistent practice activities. (3) To further optimize the social practice lessons of different school divisions.

To further optimize exchanges between different sections and to promote hands-on activities. Through campus visits and sharing sessions with seniors, students will be introduced to campus life and culture, so as to help them better adapt to campus life and culture, and more intuitively and practically feel and understand the new community life.

## 2.2.2 Establishment of Mutual Learning with the Community

Based on our school's practice and experience in building communities, we will expand in depth in the following areas:

Going into the community to experience the life of different groups is a great way to broaden one's horizons and cultivate empathy [12]. For example, volunteering at homes for the elderly or libraries help students understand the needs and challenges of different groups. This approach also help students develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to their communities while promoting their healthy physical and mental development.

Carry out theme activities. Understand the human environment and customs of the community; pay attention to the greening and beautification of the community and public health, and strive to be a "community environment guard"; know the development of various aspects of the community, and be concerned about the development of the community, and be a person who cares about the development of the community; conduct a survey of the community's water supply, and put forward their own reasonable suggestions on the pollution and governance.

Organize lectures. Invite successful and influential people in the community, or people with expertise in folk crafts and professional knowledge, or model workers and heroes in the community to participate in the school's education and teaching through the elective courses set up, presentations and tutorials, etc., so as to enhance the students' understanding and perception of the various walks of life in the community.

Integrating community resources into the curriculum promote students' perception of the surrounding environment and enhance their participation. According to a study by Columbia University, community building in the classroom is about creating a space in which students and instructors are committed to a shared learning goal and achieve learning through frequent collaboration and social interaction. This approach help students develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to their communities while promoting their healthy physical and mental development.

Establishing internship bases for students in collaboration with the community is a great way to promote students' perception of the surrounding environment and enhance their participation. Taylor Hausburg proposed three approaches to illustrate the way

of integrating with community. They are: Knowledge of community: Having students conduct interviews with community members or inviting locally-based guest speakers to school to discuss a given topic are two strategies that align with this approach. Knowledge for community: Service-learning and youth participatory action research initiatives that support students in tackling local issues on behalf of their communities exemplify this approach. Teaching students changemaking strategies and having them work independently as they figure out how to apply those strategies is a specific example of building students' knowledge for their communities. Knowledge with community: Community members serve as co-generators of knowledge. Having students assemble and work with Community Action Groups may be one way of pushing students to create knowledge with their communities. [13]

### **2.2.3 Community Building with Universities to Integrate Basic Education and Higher Education**

Based on our experience of linking up with universities in Shanghai, we will start from the following aspects:

Learning a second foreign language is an important goal for many students who want to broaden their horizons and enhance their communication skills. However, teaching a second foreign language can be challenging, especially if the curriculum is not well-designed or updated. Therefore, inviting experts from university foreign language institutes to build our second foreign language courses and deepen curriculum reform can be a beneficial strategy. These experts help us to select the most suitable and effective materials, methods, and assessments for our students, based on their needs, interests, and levels. They also provide us with professional guidance and feedback on how to improve our teaching practices and outcomes. By collaborating with these experts, we ensure that our second foreign language courses are relevant, engaging, and rigorous for our students.

Another way to enrich our students' learning experience is to provide them with practical activities that expose them to the university environment and culture. To carry out in an orderly manner students' visits to university campuses, libraries, museums and other venues to experience the study and life of the university community, we plan ahead and coordinate with the

university staff and faculty. We arrange for tours, workshops, lectures, and interactions with current university students and professors. We also prepare some questions, tasks, or projects for our students to complete during or after their visits. These activities help our students to gain a deeper understanding of the academic and social aspects of university life, as well as inspire them to pursue their higher education goals.

Finally, we also try to establish primary and secondary school study bases, jointly organize summer science and technology camps, "Little Academician" summer camps, enter the innovation laboratory, visit famous academicians, and carry out academic study activities. These initiatives foster our students' interest and curiosity in science and technology, as well as develop their skills in inquiry, experimentation, and innovation. By creating opportunities for our students to learn from experts, peers, and mentors in various fields of science and technology, we expose them to the latest research and developments in these areas. We also encourage them to apply their knowledge and creativity to solve real-world problems or create new products or services. These experiences not only enhance our students' scientific literacy and competence, but also prepare them for future careers in science and technology.

### **2.2.4. Building an International Community with Sister Schools**

To deepen international co-operation with sister schools, and carry out integration activities in the form of mutual visits of teachers and students, exotic trips and curriculum observation and exchange, is a valuable way to enhance the quality and diversity of education. We practiced the following activities that might be inspiring: Learning from different educational systems, methods, and standards, and gaining insights into how to improve one's own teaching or learning practices. Developing intercultural competence, language skills, and global awareness, and understanding the similarities and differences among various cultures and regions. Building meaningful relationships and friendships with people from different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, and fostering mutual respect, trust, and collaboration. Exploring new places, opportunities, and challenges, and expanding one's horizons and interests.

By participating in these activities, students also cultivate their awareness of the community of human

destiny, which is based on mutual respect, equality of treatment, and exchanges and mutual understanding. The community of human destiny expresses the aim of creating a “new framework” of international relations that would promote and improve global governance. Some Chinese analysts have hailed the expression as the first major amendment of China’s foreign policy in more than four decades, shifting from being nation-oriented to focusing on the whole of humankind [14].

The community of human destiny is also a transformation of traditional Chinese culture, reflecting the value aspirations of the people all over the world and embodying the charm of classical Chinese culture. It is based on the concept of human great harmony, which advocates peace, cooperation, inclusiveness, and mutual benefit among all nations. It also incorporates the spirit of “unity” and the spirit of mission, which encourage people to work together to address common challenges and pursue common development.

Therefore, by deepening international co-operation with sister schools, and carrying out integration activities in various forms, students not only enrich their educational experience, but also contribute to the well-being and improvement of the people and places where they live or visit. They also learn to respect and appreciate the diversity and complexity of the world, and to seek common ground while reserving differences. They develop a sense of responsibility and citizenship for their own communities and for the global community.

When we host foreign friends, we always emphasize the introduction of Chinese culture and the cultivation of “national spirit” as our main theme. We also integrate the related knowledge of history, geography, art, language and English into the whole process of the activities in a timely way. This way, we let the foreign students experience the richness of Chinese civilization through a mixed class format. We also boost the cultural self-confidence of our school students and their affection for their own country and literature.

### **2.2.5 Building a Diversified Home-school Community with Parents**

We aim to build a diverse “home-school education community” that creates synergy through connecting home and school. By implementing a variety of activities, we can more effectively establish a diverse sports environment and help students to develop the ability to

sense the culture of different family groups and appreciate the differences in life. [15] The following areas will be covered by the activities:

We welcome parents to join us in the classroom. Parents have diverse backgrounds and valuable educational resources, so we encourage them to take part in school education to enhance its effectiveness. We organize various activities related to traditional festivals or themes, such as inviting parents who can make mooncakes in the classroom during the Mid-Autumn Festival, or making dumplings in the classroom during the Dragon Boat Festival. These activities not only strengthen the bond between parents and children, but also increase the students’ sense of responsibility to preserve the traditional skills of the Chinese nation.

We organize “Parents’ School Lectures” to involve parents in school education. Unlike the “Parents in the Classroom” activities, the “Parents’ School Lecture Hall” is open to all parents, offering them a platform to communicate and share with each other, and to achieve the goal of mutual improvement at home and at school. For instance, we have conducted activities such as sharing and exchanging the achievements of class Parent Committees; holding a themed program on “Harmony and Beauty of Home and School, Promoting Growth Together - Home and School Co-Education” [16]; inviting “Guangzhou Famous Classroom Teachers’ Workshop” to come into the school; organizing a parents’ essay writing activity on “I grow up with my child”; and requesting parents to be role models for their children under the theme of “Being a responsible person”.

We encourage our students to engage in social practice and experience activities. By following teachers and parents outside the school and designing social practice activities as a learning method, students discover a wider and more thrilling world. Students will be urged to transform their comprehension of responsibility into consciousness of responsibility, establish responsible actions and emotions of responsibility, and improve the effectiveness of education.

The purpose of this research is to design and implement an evaluation system that aims to foster the development of community understanding among primary and secondary school students. Community understanding refers to the ability to comprehend and appreciate the physical, social, cultural, and economic aspects of one’s local context, as well as to participate in and contribute to the well-being and improvement of the people and places

where one lives or works. This research is based on the premise that students can enhance their community understanding through engaging in social practice activities, which are experiential learning opportunities that expose students to the real-world situations and issues in their communities.

The evaluation system that this research proposes is intended to be objective, comprehensive, and scientific. Objective means that the system uses clear and consistent criteria and standards to measure students' performance and progress in social practice activities, and that the system minimizes bias and subjectivity in the evaluation process. Comprehensive means that the system covers multiple dimensions and indicators of community understanding, such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, behaviors, and outcomes. Scientific means that the system is based on sound theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, and that the system employs valid and reliable methods and tools for data collection and analysis.

### 3 Conclusion

The cultivation of community understanding helps them develop a sense of belonging and identity within their community by promoting social cohesion and building strong relationships among community members. By recognizing the diversity of the community and respecting the differences among its members, students learn to appreciate the values, beliefs, and customs of others. This help them become more tolerant and accepting of others, which is an important skill in today's globalized world. When students feel like they belong to a community, they are more likely to participate in community activities and events, which further strengthen their sense of belonging and identity.

The main objectives of this research are: 1) to review the existing literature and practices on community understanding and social practice activities in primary and secondary education; 2) to identify the key components and elements of an effective evaluation system for social practice activities; 3) to develop and test a prototype of the evaluation system with a sample of students, teachers, and community partners; 4) to evaluate the feasibility, usability, and impact of the evaluation system on students' community understanding; 5) to refine and improve the evaluation system based on feedback and findings; 6) to disseminate and promote the use of the evaluation system among schools and communities.

The expected outcomes of this research are: 1) a comprehensive literature review on community understanding and social practice activities in primary and secondary education; 2) a conceptual framework and a set of criteria and standards for evaluating social practice activities; 3) a prototype of the evaluation system that includes various methods and tools for data collection and analysis; 4) a report on the implementation and evaluation of the prototype with a sample of students, teachers, and community partners; 5) a revised version of the evaluation system that incorporates feedback and findings; 6) a guidebook and a training program for using the evaluation system in schools and communities.

The significance of this research is that it can provide schools and communities with a practical and useful tool for assessing students' social practice activities, which can help them to improve their community understanding. By enhancing their community understanding, students can develop into modern citizens and talents who are open-minded, tolerant, respectful, cooperative, responsible, creative, critical, compassionate, and globally aware.

The evaluation method uses multiple sources of feedback, such as students' self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher assessment, and social assessment, to create an evaluation system that emphasizes process evaluation and complements it with outcome evaluation. It also investigates value-added evaluation to enhance the overall evaluation of our students. Process evaluation can measure various aspects of students' participation, such as their involvement, attitude, performance, and impact, and combine them with the actual completion of student activities to give a holistic evaluation. By utilizing the school's unique Murray Eagle platform, we overcome the barriers of time and space and communicate seamlessly with the parent group. We present feedback and evaluation on the practical activities related to this topic on this platform.

### 4 Recommendations

Further research can compare the outcomes of different types of social practice activities, such as service learning, project-based learning, experiential learning, etc. It can investigate which types of activities are more effective in enhancing students' community understanding and promoting their comprehensive development, and what are the factors that influence their effectiveness. It can



also extend the scope of community understanding to include not only the local community, but also the national and global community. It can explore how students can develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to the wider society and the world, and how they can apply their community understanding to address global issues and challenges.

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