

Comparative Study of Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation (CAMEA) and International MBA Certification¹

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Abstract

With the rapid development of China's MBA education, participation in MBA certification has become the important measure for MBA organizations to enhance their quality to attract students. From the international perspective of business education, the access to three international certifications AMBA, AACSB and EQUIS is an important step for China's first-class business schools towards internationalization and their common pursuit. In recent years, the Chinese Ministry of Education has also launched Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation(CAMEA) to focus on the development of MBA with Chinese characteristics. This paper makes a comparative study on the similarities and differences between the three major MBA certification systems and the CAMEA certification system, and points out that domestic universities should actively participate in international certification and local certification according to their own situation.

Keywords: CAMEA certification, MBA education, MBA international certification.

Research background

China MBA education began in 1991 and has formed a variety of forms of MBA education now. The amount of MBA training institutions has developed from 9 in 1991 to 233 in 2017. Although MBA education started late in China, the pace of development is very fast that participation of institutions and number of enrollment are increasing and scale of institutions is larger. For China's universities, once '985' and '211' universities and today's 'Double-First Class' universities are signs of high-level personnel training and high level of education. The universities who have access to the top quality certification of world's top business schools receive an international recognition of quality assurance. These 'international' accreditations serve as a

¹Supported by "Guangdong Education Scientific Planning Fund", Project Title: Innovative Research on MBA Program: from the Perspective of International and National Accreditations, Project No.2011TJK135

quality label and as a competitive advantage in the struggle for the best students and most outstanding researchers (Trapnell, 2007; Urgel, 2007).

From the international perspective of business education, there are three most authoritative international certification system, namely AMBA (Association of MBAs), AACSB (The Association of Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and EQUIS (The European Quality Improvement System). AMBA whose headquarter locates in London, UK, mainly focuses on MBA and EMBA project; AACSB whose headquarter locates in the United States, focuses on whole projects of business schools, emphasizing on the academic quality and standardization of teaching; EQUIS whose headquarter locates in Brussels, Belgium, focuses on international teaching and contact to industry contact. Internationalization is a common pursuit of high-level universities in China today, and international certification is an important method and means of internalization.

In order to meet the macro requirements of China's MBA education, regulating the MBA education market and fostering management systems and models that are suitable for China's conditions. In 2012, Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation (CAMEA) was launched by China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center and China National MBA Education Supervisory Committee. The certification is the most authoritative certification for MBA program of China's domestic business school who is as important as EQUIS and AACSB international certification.

This paper employs the methods of literature survey and comparative analysis and introduces development process of the United States and the European MBA education and three certification system which are representative and have influence on International MBA education. Also, this paper produces a comparative study between three international certification systems and CAMEA system for finding out the similarities and differences. Accreditations have become an important way of ensuring the quality of higher education institutions (Stensaker, 2011). Therefore, Chinese MBA institutions should participate in the international certification according to their own actual situations and take the participation in international certification as a basic strategy for improving the quality of MBA education and international development. Moreover, Chinese MBA institutions can participate in the China's MBA certification timely to protect the sustainable development of China's MBA education.

Introduction to international MBA certification

MBA is the abbreviation of Master of Business Administration. MBA education originated in the United States which was founded by the American University in the early 20th century. In the last few decades, it has gradually become the mainstream educational model of the world management. The master of business administration (MBA) degree continues to grow in popularity in response to organizational needs for employees who can navigate the complexities of current and future business environments (Byrne, 2014). AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA are three major international certification systems related to the world's top MBA education. These three certifications are launched respectively by three international business organizations that the purpose is to promote the communication and cooperation between members. According to the specific situation of their own development, the three major organizations have introduced targeted certification system, which can be seen as the quality control and improvement standards of the business school to regulate the behaviors of leaders, teachers, managers and the resources allocation of the hardware and software.

Development of American MBA education

The United States is the birthplace of MBA education. It's generally believed that the American earliest management school is The Wharton School of finance and Economics which was founded by University of Pennsylvania in 1881. The establishment of MBA program was born later in Harvard University.

The American development of MBA education can be divided into three stages. From 1865 to 1945, it is the embryonic stage of American MBA education. After four years of the Civil War, the United States also entered the stage of monopoly imperialism and began colonization, which accelerated the process of industrialization in the United States. In this stage, the United States has entered the era of the machine industry, leading to a large number of various factories which has demand of an education that can cultivate senior managers for enterprises. It provided an opportunity to the birth of an education which can produce senior management talents. The American earliest management college was founded by the University of Pennsylvania in 1881 and MBA education was born in Harvard Business School in 1908 which has nearly 110 years of history now. The establishment of Harvard Business School is seen as a sign of MBA education.

From 1946 to 2000, the American MBA education ushered in the transformation and challenges. After the Second World War, only the United States was not damaged and its economy had greatly developed, especially the development of enterprises. Business management education is booming, mainly due to the demand of business managers because of the separation of company's ownership and the right to management. Because MBA education gradually get enterprises' approve, more students from different backgrounds participated in MBA education that MBA education has become the main body of American education. In 1980s, because of the rapid development of the world economy, the US market was influenced by other countries. The American MBA education began to consider the problems of MBA education. In this context, major business schools in the United States began to innovate in MBA education, including: promoting internationalization of education; integrating courses; strengthening training in leadership, team awareness and management skills; focusing on the development of business and entrepreneurial ethics; the use of network universities and Virtual B-school.

After the 21st century, the world has stepped into the information age that the rise of many high-tech enterprises have emerged and MBA education is also facing new economic challenges. Coetzee (2011) described a postmodern MBA program that is flexible enough to be offered as a traditional MBA, an executive MBA, or as standalone leadership development modules. In the new economic conditions, MBA education will pay more attention to online education and international education. Many business schools timely introduce some new MBA education projects, for example, the technology produced by high-tech industry and management. In this period, the American MBA education is making market segmentation and is more specialized, mature and perfect.

AACSB

Among the American education certification systems, AACSB certification system is the most representative and influential. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business was established in 1916 and later became a certification organization for management education. It is a global and nonprofit membership organization. There are 796 business schools in 53 countries and territories that have earned AACSB Accreditation (Association to Advance Collegiate

Schools of Business International [AACSB], 2017). The certification has three standards: Strategic Management and Mission, Participant Standards, Teaching Support System (Zhang Jianru & Zhao Ping, 2006). The strategic management criteria include whether a higher management education institution under review has a mission statement, a mission statement is appropriate, sources of students, evolving education goals, and financial goals. AACSB-accredited schools need to be sensitive to changing accreditation requirements and the utility of assessment in satisfying those requirements, and business school deans pay careful attention to their schools' efforts to improve assessment (William & Agnieszka, 2015).

AACSB's education certification is performed by a specialized agency of the Association. The certification takes the form of voluntary participation for education management units in university. Its purpose is mainly to conduct academic appraisals for educational curricula. Formal assurance of learning is required for business school accreditation (AACSB, 2013). The education certification has two major categories, namely business certification and accounting certification. Some educational institutions only participate commercial certification, and some participate both.

Development of European MBA education

Compared with the United States, the development of European MBA was initially hindered by government regulations. It was not until the 1950s that European MBA education began to sprout. After the Second World War, the hard-hit European economy was in urgent need of recovery. The business sector needed to change its model in order to achieve rapid growth. Therefore, companies needed a large number of business managers who had management experience and experience of international experience. In addition, many American business schools were also actively exporting their education to Europe. Many business schools also set up their branch offices in Europe, which objectively prepares for the emergence of European education. After the 1960s, according to the talent training plan of American universities' business schools, Europe also started to establish its own education system. In the 1950s, a group of French entrepreneurs started to establish private business schools to provide a distinctive European MBA education. INSEAD Business School in Fontainebleau, France, was established in 1958. IMEDE Business School in Switzerland (now IMD) was also established in Lausanne, Switzerland a few years later.

In the 1980s, Europe's industries entered a period of rapid development, and enterprises needed more senior personnel with managerial experience. Therefore, the European Business School responded to business requirements and cooperated with large enterprises for personnel training. In 1979, Britain broke the monopolies of London Business School and Manchester Business School, allowing any UK university to run its own MBA program. France took the same steps in the early 1980s. Finally, Germany adopted this view in 1998. The European MBA education began to flourish and hit the U.S. leadership in MBA education. European EQUIDS certification was officially appeared in 1997.

After the 21st century, due to the advent of the information age, the development of hi-tech and the refinement of the market, education in European schools also appeared in different forms. Schlegelmilch and Thomas (Schlegelmilch, B., & Thomas, 2011) described the MBA of the future as quite different in content and delivery mode. They predict greater emphasis on corporate social responsibility, ethics, and soft skills that allow complex dialog between business

and multiple stakeholder groups. Many European business schools partner with first-rate business schools in Asian countries to launch projects, which has become a major form of exportation of their education.

AMBA

AMBA is an abbreviation of English Association of MBAs, namely the British Association of MBA, is one of the world's three major business education certification organizations and one of the world's most authoritative management education certification system. AMBA was established in the United Kingdom in 1967. Unlike AACSB and EQUIS, which certify the whole business school, AMBA is accredited only for degree programs offered by certified university business schools. It only focuses on courses for master's degree and emphasizes practice training. AMBA's certification standards include the education quality of the whole MBA program in the business schools, whether business schools can award their degree independently, whether individuals and graduate employers agree with the international certification system, etc. It is important to assess the training objectives of the MBA program, training methods and whether the assessment system is reasonable and can run effectively. At the same time, assessment of the college system, teacher quality, student size can support the development of MBA programs.

EQUIS

EQUIS stands in English as the European Quality Improvement System, launched and operated by the European Foundation for Management Development. EQUIS was founded in 1997. It is an international certification system founded by the EFMD in the form of certification, which evaluates the quality of higher education and management institutions and promotes education. EQUIS and the business community are closely linked, and the business relationship is the new standard supplemented by the late EQUIS certification. The business school needs to actively develop good relations with relevant enterprises and employers (Ding Bin, Zhou Yueyue, & Deng Zhiqiang, 2012). EQUIS assesses institutions as a whole. It assesses not just degree programme but all the activities and sub-units of the institution, including research, e-learning units, executive education provision and community outreach. Institutions must be primarily devoted to management education.

EQUIS accreditation has ten standards, including faculty, students, research and development, top-level training, project quality management, contact with enterprises, environmental governance and strategies. The internationalization of projects includes faculty, students, internationalization of teaching and research, resources and management, contribution to the community. EQUIS in particular emphasizes internationalization of student body and faculty (Proitz, Stensaker, & Harvey, 2004). The EQUIS standard is divided into three scales, including general quality guidelines, international standards and the links between the higher education and management institutions under review and the business community. General quality guidelines include the organization's national fame, agency mission statement, degree of management, scope of educational activity, educational strategy, institutional resources, teaching strength, student qualifications, student services, personal development, course projects and academic research (Zhang Jianru & Zhao Ping, 2006). International standards refer to the degree of internationalization of higher management education institutions that offer MBA programs, including the internationalization of student groups, faculty, and curricula. The connection with the business community refers to the policy explicitly stated by the organization and the actual contact with the business community.

Introduction to CAMEA

Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation, referred to as CAMEA was launched in 2012. It is jointly organized by China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC) and China National MBA Education Supervisory Committee (CNMESC). The certification secretariat is located at the CDGDC.

CAMEA draws on the main ideas, standards and concepts of international certification 'AACSB' and 'EQUIS', basing on the requirements of domestic economic development, paying more attention to the mission guidance and business education, more emphasizing on China's national conditions and innovative features (Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation [CAMEA], 2017). Because accredited institutions also need to develop clear strategies for reaching their goals and investing their resources (Lejeune, 2011), CAMEA certification is to highlight the mission-oriented, improvement mechanism of quality development and development characteristics of the MBA certification system. The theoretical system is as the standard figure below.

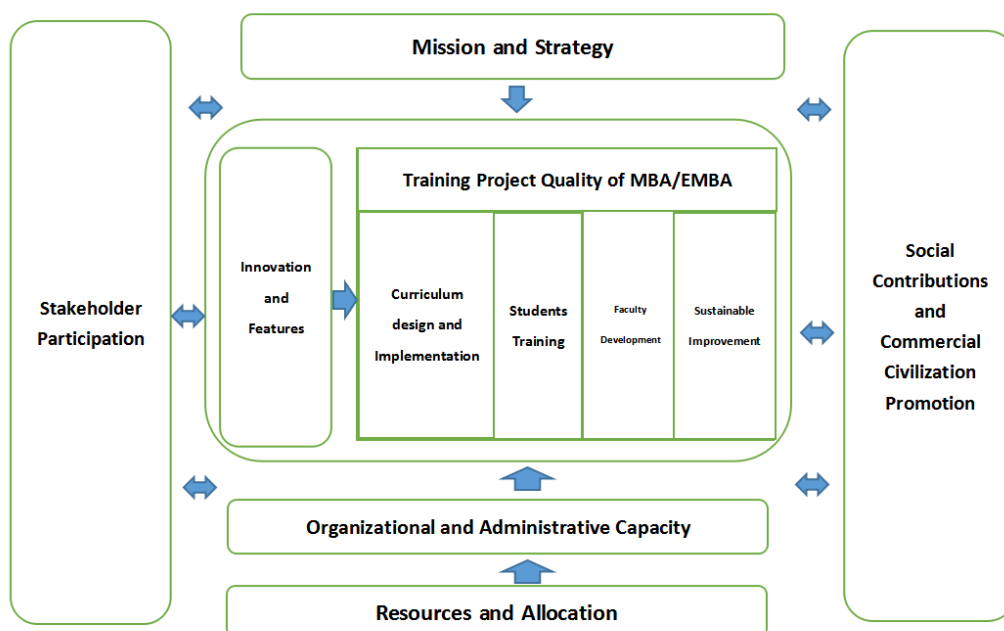


Figure 1. Theoretical system diagram of CAMEA

Source: Translated from Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation (CAMEA). (2017),

<http://www.camea.net.cn/>

The certification process is very standardized, including the consulting of training participation, submission of applications, inspection the confirmed qualifications, self-assessment of organizations, experts on-site assessment, the results confirmed, continuous improvement and other sectors. Qualified organizations on the spot will be allowed to pass the CAMEA valid for three years or five years after being discussed and approved by the Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation Working Committee. Certified organizations must also be in strict accordance with the relevant requirements of the certification process, doing a good job of certification and keep promoting the continuous improvement of the quality of MBA education. It takes 1-3 years to complete the entire certification process.

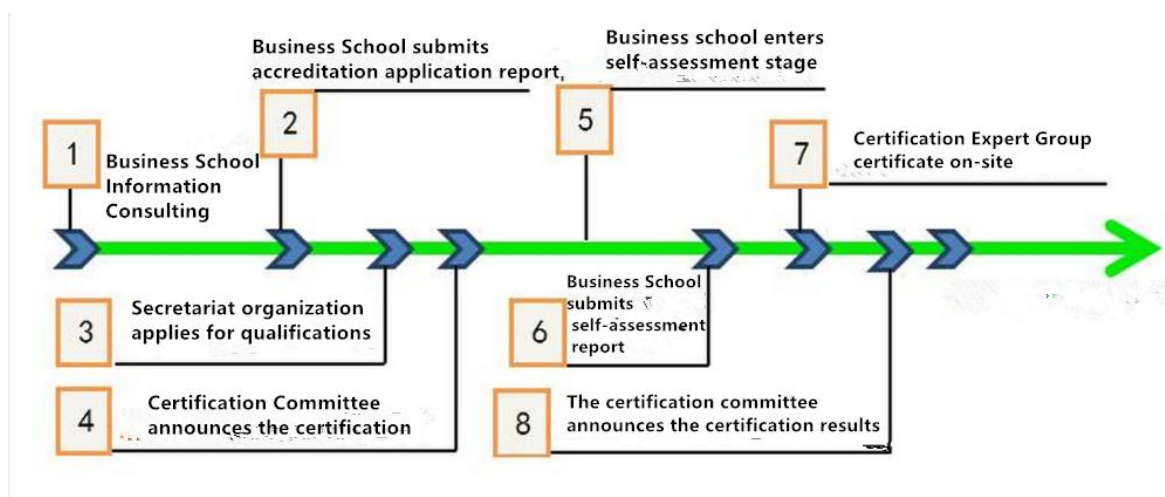


Figure 2. Certification Process of CAMEA

Source: Translated from Chinese Advanced Management Education Accreditation (CAMEA). (2017), <http://www.camea.net.cn/>

Comparison of Three International Certification Systems and CAMEA

The three authoritative certification systems have in common that the college participate voluntarily, make explicit demands on college resources, faculty and curricula, emphasize internationalization and encourage innovation. The assessment is basically divided into the two important stages including self-evaluation and joint assessment. The main difference between the three major certifications is that AACSB has the heavier traces of the United States which usually takes five to seven years from the beginning of assessment process to pass the certification. EQUIS has a significant European ancestry whose passing time is generally two years. AMBA is different from AACSB and EQUIS which focus on the overall development of business schools. AMBA only focus on master's degree courses. The CAMEA, as a product with Chinese characteristics, refers to AACSB and EQUIS certification system and more emphasizes on business education mission and guidance. Its assessment time is generally 1-3 years. Some of CAMEA's standards are even higher than the international ones.

Certification features

The AACSB certification system is primarily concerned with the quality of education. The certification process benefits all stakeholders, including staff, students, alumni and the university itself. Romero (2008) states that AACSB accreditations encourage flexibility and creativity. AMBA only concerned with the degree offered by a certificated university business school, with a focus on business and management practices. As an European MBA certification, EQUIS promotes personality and internalization, emphasizing on diversity education of college and student with an international perspective. CAMEA regulates the MBA education market and fosters a management system and model that is suitable for China's conditions through strategic positioning, education quality assurance system, innovation and diversified development, social contribution of business schools and promotion of commercial civilization.

Certification numbers

The total number of AACSB International accredited organizations is 796, mainly in the United States and Canada. A total number of AMBA accredited bodies is 241, UK business schools accounting for 35%, followed by continental European business schools accounting for 30%. In

2016, AMBA accredits more Business School MBA, MBM and DBA programme than ever before in its history and has attracted a truly global membership of more than 20,000 aspirational MBA students and graduates from 120 countries across the world. There are 172 institutions that have obtained EQUIS accreditation from Europe, mainly from business schools in European countries.

Certification focus

AACSB certification system focuses on the overall business school and emphasizes on teaching and research results assessment and teacher-student ratio. It only certificated degree project. Certified university should have business management courses which can offer degree and courses need to be supported by updated data. Degree programs offered by business schools require regular or irregular checks.

AMBA certification system for the AMBA project certification, only focuses on degree education offered by evaluated business schools. It provides the overall supervision on the evaluated business schools, not only to review its proposed degree system, but also to check their own departments. Moreover, it requires that the business schools must take education management as the basic form of education.

The EQUIS certification system focuses on courses and career development after graduation, attaching importance to internationalization, connection with enterprises and contribution to social practice. EQUIS is not primarily focused on the MBA or any other specific program. EQUIS accreditations foster three core-capabilities of business schools: strategizing, changing resources and activities, and branding (Lejeune, 2011). Its scope covers all program offered by an institution from the first degree up to the PhD.

CAMEA is a high-level MBA program that focuses on mission orientation, improvement mechanisms of quality development and development features. The certification program covers five aspects, including mission strategy, quality, innovation, resource allocation and organizational administration.

Certification process

AACSB certification system consists of six programs: candidate counseling, qualification evaluation, evaluation from inspection team, inspection team review, assessment result and evaluation support. The AMBA certification system includes initial discussions, self-assessment, preliminary assessment, field surveys and preparation of reports. The AMBA accreditation process provides schools with holistic, detailed analysis comprising: institution interest expression; self-assessment; pre-assessment visit; self-audit report submission; official assessment visit; feedback or commendation; final report and final accreditation decision (Association of MBAs [AMBA], 2017, p20). The EQUIS certification system requires a pre-investigation followed by formal application, qualification studies, self-assessment, international expert review, eligibility for accreditation and guidance if necessary. CAMEA certification process includes the following procedures: participation in training consulting, submit an application, examine and confirm the qualifications, self-assessment units, on-site certification, the results confirmed, continuous improvement.

The combination of international and local certification

According to the global education trend, many schools regard the development of education quality certification as a very important task. Especially in the specialized fields of some

developed countries in Europe and the United States, more and more countries and regions, recognize this system. U.S News & World Report (Flanigan & Morse, 2015) and Bloomberg Businessweek (Rodkin, 2014) annually rank graduate business programs based on faculty credentials, admissions selectivity, student engagement, and recruiter ratings. China's business schools, especially the top ones, rely on their own strong academic strengths, building MBA education brand. Therefore, the domestic first-class business schools are also seeking this internationally renowned MBA certification, especially the three major certification system. The main advantages of international certification for Chinese MBA institutions are as following: First, it increases the space for international exchanges that schools, teachers and students can get more exchange and communication opportunities. Second, the schools can sort out its own positioning, vision and goals, looking for precise positioning, rather than blindly follow the trend. Thirdly, in the process of international certification, the schools can regulate and improve the teaching quality. As accreditation policies evolved, accredited schools pursued a moving target, attempting to find more effective methods to improve performance and the best way to document these efforts (Kelley, Tong, & Choi, 2010). Some poor quality and non-standard teaching projects will be cut off under the pressure of certification.

To a certain extent, international certification can regulate the management, improve the quality of education and enhance the level of internalization. On the other hand, because of the difference of cultural background, especially education system and philosophy, international education certifications are not entirely suitable for the development of MBA education in China. Therefore, the development of CAMEA certification system with Chinese characteristics can raise the educational power of MBA education in China.

The three major international MBA certification systems are highly valuable that only 1% of the world's business schools can get certification. Today, being accredited by one of the main agencies in this field, considerably contributes to a business school's reputation (Bradford, Guzmán, & Trujillo, 2017). The access to the three major certification is necessary for domestic business schools who want to gain public recognition and enhance international influence. There are 28 AACSB-certified business schools, 20 EQUIS-certified business schools and 32 AMBA-certified business schools in China (including HK). Most of the business schools that receive the three major international certifications are 211 or 985 university business schools such as Sun Yat-sen Business School, Fudan University Business School, or domestic business schools cooperated with European business schools, for example, China Europe International Business School. It shows that currently the Chinese business schools who have strength to apply for and pass the three major international business schools are basically the first-class ones. These first-tier business schools also approve CAMEA that a total of 19 business schools have passed CAMEA and more than 20 schools have applied for accreditation.

According to the data from official website of AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS and CAMEA, to most of first-class business schools in China, the first choice of certification are the three major international accreditation, but most can only pass one international certification. Domestic business schools who have three international certification are Sun Yat-sen University (China) School of Business, Hong Kong Baptist University (China) School of Business, Antai College of Economics and Management of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, School of Economics and Management of Tongji University and Zhejiang University Management of Schools. Among them, Antai College of Economics and Management of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, School of Economics and Management of Tongji University and Zhejiang University Management of Schools also received CAMEA certification. It shows that some top domestic business schools

have begun the ‘three major international certification + CAMEA’ model to further increase their influence at home and abroad. Among the business schools accredited by CAMEA in China, the School of Economics and Management of East China Normal University, Business School of East China University of Science and Technology, Sichuan University and Western Business School have not obtained any three international certifications. It proved that some non-leading business schools turn their attention to CAMEA certification to enhance their influence.

MBA education should combined international certification and local certification. On the one hand, according to their own characteristics, domestic MBA programs should select a number of indicators in the developed regions as a reference. Just like the indicators required by the three major international certification AMBA, AACSB and EQUIS, we should set these indicators as the benchmark and set reference content to compare, analyze and improve for changing the current status(Huang Lei, 2011). The international certifications are standardized and mature which are world’s universal certification system. They are the cornerstone for domestic business schools walking towards the world and enhancing internationalization. On the other hand, the domestic business schools should make up for the deficiencies of the three major international certifications by participating in the domestic local certification. The aim of CAMEA is to promote the continuous improvement of the quality of MBA education in China. Compared with the international certification ‘AACSB’ and ‘EQUIS’, this certification more emphasizes the China’s national conditions, innovation and features. To domestic business schools, active participation in local certification will help to train qualified personnel in China market, but also help the development and improvement of the domestic MBA certification system.

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