

Influential Factors towards Political Participation of Thai Local Senior Citizens

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to investigate the levels of knowledge and political participation of local senior citizens and discriminant factors inhibiting the participation in local politics of senior citizens. The population of this quantitative research was senior citizens aged over 60 years old in Nakhon Pathom province. The sample size of 420 senior citizens was drawn by a multi-stage random sampling technique. A questionnaire was used as a research instrument. The findings revealed that a majority of senior citizens participated in a local politics at a low-to-moderate level (60.95%), followed by a high level (39.05%). Regarding their knowledge about political participation, the findings revealed that both groups of participants were most aware about rights in political participation. For political participation, both groups showed that they had low engagement in political auditing and local politics activities. Discriminant analysis of two groups revealed influencing predictors of local political participation among senior citizens in the following order: were (1) knowledge of duties, (2) knowledge of freedoms, (3) being informed about political participation, (4) knowledge of rights, and (5) income. The discriminant analysis of influential factors on local political participation of senior citizens had its discriminant power at a high level of 80.70%. The study revealed that the government must promote and prioritize political participation by providing knowledge of political rights, duties, and freedoms.

Keywords: Political Participation, Senior Citizens, Thailand

Introduction

Thailand has adopted democracy as its rule of governance. For democracy, its ultimate goal is that its people are able to express their thoughts towards their governing body. The National Constitution C.E. 1997 has promoted the participation of the people. The constitution designated decentralization so that local people could participate or voice their own living conditions. The constitution clearly stated that the government is mandated to promote and support participation from its residents in setting policy, deciding on political issues, deciding on socioeconomic and political development plans, as well as auditing its government practices. In addition, the constitution, in Article 5, mentioned that decentralization must be carried out. Resulting from these constitutional commands, the government has decentralized into 5 types of local administration, including 1) Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 2) City of Pattaya, 3) Municipality, 4) Provincial Administration, and Tumbol (Sub-district) Administration. The roles of local administrations have been designated by the Local Administration Foundation Act (King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2002: 349).

The government should reform power structure by decentralization to the local administration (Whangmahaporn, Pratyaphruet & Simmonds, 2018). In principle, decentralization is the opening of opportunities for political participation for locals, such as through policy determination, political judgment, socioeconomic and political judgment, and through

auditing governmental performance at all levels. However, political participation at a local level has long been very low. Low level of local political participation may be due to the fact that local people got involved in casting their votes only. Therefore, the performance of the Tumbol Administration somehow represented only a small amount of people in the area, or it was designated by some members in the administrative board or in the council. It was often the case that people got involved only when elections occurred. Then they turned their attention to something else. This therefore caused problems because performances were not based on what local people want, and thus did not follow what the government longs for their participation.

In the near future, Thailand will have a higher number of senior citizens in its population structure due to decreasing birthrate, resulting from a birth control policy, as well economic conditions. The Institute of Population and Social Studies, Mahidol University reported that in 2014 Thailand had 9,928,300 senior citizens, which accounted for 15.3 percent of Thailand's population (the Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2014). In addition, Chayovan (2005) conducted research about a fragile group of senior citizens in Thailand. She found that about one quarter of senior citizens in Thailand were categorized as poor people (earning less than THB 10,000, or USD 300 per annum). Moreover, about 13.7 percent of senior citizens were poor and unable to provide for their living. Besides poverty, another major concern for senior citizens in Thailand was health and well-being.

According to the Local Decentralization Act of C.E. 1999, local administrations consented to provide training and life development appropriately to local senior citizens. In order to monitor senior citizens' participation in local politics, the researcher of this study aims to investigate factors influencing the participation in local politics of local senior citizens. The findings from this study will be used as a guideline to promote local political participation among senior citizens so that they can have a better quality of life.

Research Objectives

- 1) To investigate the levels of knowledge of political participation in local senior citizens regarding the terms of their rights, duties, freedoms, and being informed of political participation;
- 2) To investigate the levels of political participation of local senior citizens in terms of rights in casting votes, participation in local development planning, participation in local political activities, and participation in political auditing;
- 3) To investigate discriminant factors that influence political participation among local senior citizens between low-to-moderate and high participation groups.

Research Hypothesis

Sex, age, education, income, residency length, knowledge of rights, knowledge of duties, knowledge of freedoms, and being informed about political participation all relate to and influence the differentiation of levels of political participation among local senior citizens.

Literature Review

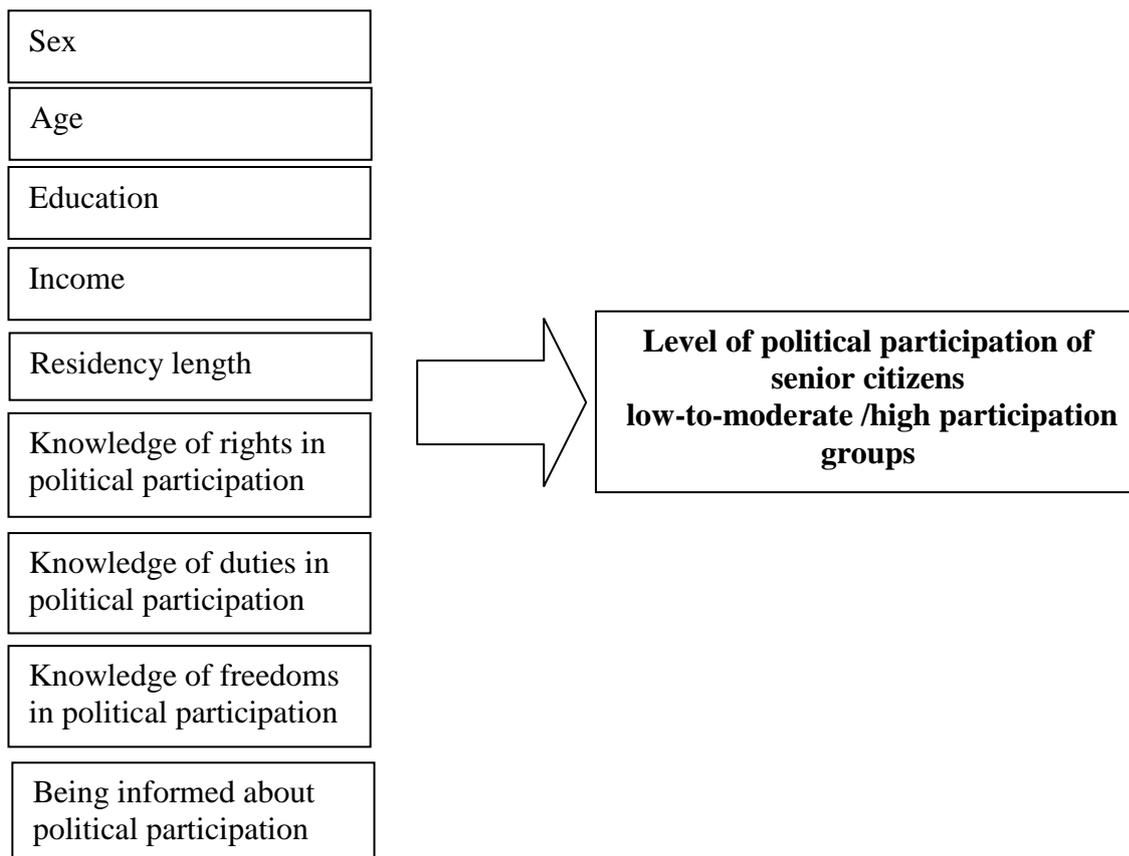
The Theory of Reasoned Action, developed by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), holds the assumption that all actions are based on reasons. This theory is related to the political participation of local senior citizens in that the senior citizens get involved in the local politics because they want to express their political rights and freedoms by participating in activities including expressing opinions and casting votes for local developments through

many perspectives. This participation would make local organizations operate to improve the living conditions of local members, as well as their own lives.

The political participation in an action-theory model of personality (Krampen, 1991) refers to the personality variables, such as self-concept, political knowledge, political information perception, etc. The level of political knowledge is defined as the individual's generalized expectancy that more or less complex political processes are understood and can be predicted of the political participation. Political information and knowledge as well as intelligence and variables of cognitive will be associated with subjective level of conceptualization.

Concerning the concept of political participation, Verba, Nie & Kim (1978) stated that political participation includes legal activities that people carry out with the aim of democratic participation. This kind of political participation emphasizes the acts that people do for the purpose of results and influence over governmental performance and ceremonial of support participation. The second type of participation is people's participation supported by the government. Thus people participate because they just do as advertised by the government. This current study emphasizes democratic participation through which is expressed the rights, duties, freedoms, and political participation of local senior citizens. Based on the literature review, the researcher of this study has determined the framework as follows:

Independent Variables Dependent Variables



Research Methodology

This study into political participation among local Thai senior citizens took the form of a quantitative research design to fulfill its objectives. The followings are details of the research methodology.

The population in this study were senior citizens aged over 60 years old, and registered as resident in their household under the Tambol Administration Organization in Nakhon Pathom province, in a total of 7 districts, including Muaeng, Kampheangsaen, Nakhorn Chai See, Don Toom, Bang Laen, Sam Phran, and Putthamonthon. One hundred and one Tambol organizations were included in the study. There were 132,500 senior citizens eligible as the population in this study (Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2014).

The study sample was recruited by a multi-stage random sampling technique. From the population, 7 districts were randomly selected. One Tambol organization administration was randomly selected from each district. Then, 60 senior citizens in each Tambol administration organization were drawn by a simple random sampling technique. The sample size of the study was 420. The research requested permission for data collection from the chair person in each Tambol administration organization.

Research Instrument: A questionnaire was used in this study. The research grounded the items from the literature review. The questionnaire consisted of four parts, as follows:

Part I: Questions about demographic data, i.e. sex, age, education, career, income, and residency length.

Part 2: Questions about citizens' knowledge of rights, duties, and freedoms. The answers were given in a yes/no format. The maximum score for each category was 3. The scoring interpretation for each level was low, moderate, and high.

Part 3: Questions about being informed of political participation. The answers were given on a 3-level scale. The scoring interpretation was in 3 levels of low, moderate, and high.

Part 4: Questions about the level of participation in local politics from 4 aspects, including rights for casting votes, participation in local development, participation in local political activities, and participation in political auditing. The answers were given in a 3-scale format. Scoring interpretation was in 3 levels of low, moderate, and high.

Scoring interpretation in part 2 to part 4 of the questionnaire was divided into 4 bands, according to the average scores as follows: average score of 1.00-1.66 means low, average score of 1.67-2.33 means moderate and average score of 2.34-3.00 means high.

Validation of the instrument: The researcher had the questionnaire validated by three experts, while the reliability was checked by a pilot test with 30 senior citizens in Nakhon Pathom province, who were not recruited as the sample group. Chronbach's alpha coefficient was reached at .911 for the whole set of instrument.

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed in terms of descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. In addition, a discriminant analysis was done to identify factors relating to and influencing different levels political participation (low-to-medium and high) of senior citizens. The alpha level was set at .05.

Research Results

Demographic data revealed some personal information of the sample in the study, such as the level of political participation of senior citizens. It was revealed that there were 256 of the senior citizens who have low to moderate levels of political participation (60.95%), and 164 senior citizens who have a high level of political participation (39.05%). Most of them (64%) were female, aged between 60-69 years old (both groups combined as 53.10%). Most of them finished primary school (both groups combined as 59%). Both groups had a monthly income

of less than 10,000 baht (both groups combined as 83.10%). Both groups had been living in the area for more than 5 years (both groups combined as 98.60%). Details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Discriminant factors, as identified by levels of political participation

Factor	Low-to-medium level of political participation (%)	High level of political participation (%)	Total (%)
Sex			
Male	94 (22.40)	57 (13.6)	151 (36.00)
Female	162 (38.6)	107 (25.50)	269 (64.00)
age			
60-69	148 (35.20)	75 (17.90)	223 (53.10)
70-79	75 (17.90)	53 (12.60)	128 (30.50)
80 and beyond	33 (7.90)	36 (8.60)	69 (16.40)
Education			
Below primary school	70 (16.70)	68 (16.2)	138 (32.90)
Primary school	167 (39.80)	81 (19.30)	248 (59.00)
High school	14 (3.30)	6 (1.40)	20 (4.80)
Diploma	3 (0.70)	3 (0.70)	6 (1.40)
Bachelor's degree	2 (0.50)	5 (1.20)	7 (1.70)
Postgraduate	0 (0)	1 (0.20)	1 (0.20)
Monthly income			
Less than 10,000 baht	204 (48.60)	145 (34.50)	349 (83.10)
10,001 - 20,000 baht	45 (10.70)	17 (4.00)	62 (14.80)
20,001 bath or more	7 (1.70)	2 (0.50)	9 (2.10)
Residency length			
Below 5 years	4 (1.00)	2 (0.50)	6 (1.40)
5 years of more	252 (60.00)	162 (38.60)	414 (98.60)
Levels of political participation	256 (60.95)	164 (39.05)	420 (100.00)

Knowledge of political participation: The findings revealed levels of political participation of the sample group as follows:

Knowledge of rights in political participation: The findings revealed that most senior citizens had a high level of knowledge about their rights in political participation ($\bar{X} = 2.62$, S.D. = 0.67 for the low-to-medium group and = 2.94, S.D. = 0.22 for the high group).

Knowledge of duties in political participation: The findings revealed that the senior citizens who had low to moderate levels of political participation had low levels of knowledge about political participation ($\bar{X} = 1.13$, S.D. = 1.04), while the senior citizens who had a high level of political participation also had a high level of knowledge of duties in political participation ($\bar{X} = 2.34$, S.D. = 0.96)

Knowledge of freedoms in political involvement: The findings revealed that the senior citizens, who had low-to-moderate levels of political participation, had low levels of knowledge of freedoms in political involvement ($\bar{X} = 1.49$, S.D. = 0.91), while the senior citizens, who had a high level of political participation, had a high level of knowledge of freedoms in political involvement ($\bar{X} = 2.41$, S.D. = 0.92).

Being informed about political participation: The findings revealed that all groups of senior citizens had high level of being inform about political participation; ($\bar{X} = 2.53$, S.D. = 0.49) for the low-to-moderate group and ($\bar{X} = 2.82$, S.D. = 0.29) for the high level group.

Table 2 Mean, standard deviation of knowledge about political participation of the low-to-moderate and high groups.

Factor	Low-to-medium level of political participation (%)		High level of political participation (%)		Mean difference
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
Knowledge of rights in political participation	2.62	0.67	2.94	0.22	0.11
Knowledge of duties in political participation	1.13	1.04	2.34	0.96	0.41
Knowledge of freedoms in political participation	1.49	0.91	2.41	0.92	0.31
Being informed about political participation	2.53	0.49	2.82	0.29	0.29

Political participation of local senior citizens: The findings revealed that the level of political participation of local senior citizens was at a moderate level ($\bar{X} = 2.17$, S.D. = 0.50). When inspecting individual aspects, the details can be presented as follows:

The aspect of rights to cast votes: The findings revealed that the senior citizens who had low to moderate levels of political participation had moderate levels of casting votes ($\bar{X} = 2.11$, S.D. = 0.42), while the senior citizens who had a high level of political participation had a high level of casting votes ($\bar{X} = 2.71$, S.D. = 0.27).

The aspect of participation in local development planning: The findings revealed that the senior citizens who had low to moderate levels of political participation had moderate levels of participation in local development planning ($\bar{X} = 2.04$, S.D. = 0.56), while the senior citizens who had a high level of political participation had a high level of participation in local development planning ($\bar{X} = 2.76$, S.D. = 0.29).

The aspect of participating in local political activities: The findings revealed that the senior citizens who had low to moderate levels of political participation participated in local political activities at low levels ($\bar{X} = 1.60$, S.D. = 0.41), while the senior citizens who had a high level of political participation, participated in local political activities at a high level ($\bar{X} = 2.56$, S.D. = 0.34).

The aspect of participating in political auditing: The findings revealed that the senior citizens, who had low to moderate levels of political participation, had low levels of participating in political auditing ($\bar{X} = 1.62$, S.D. = 0.46), while the senior citizens, who had a high level of political participation, had a high level of participating in political auditing ($\bar{X} = 2.64$, S.D. = 0.37).

When analyzing differences in political participation, it was found that the group of senior citizens who had low to moderate levels of political participation had lower involvement overall in aspects of political participation on average as compared to the high participation group. Details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Political Participation of the Senior citizens with low-to-moderate and high levels of political participation

Factor	Low-to-medium level of political participation (%)		High level of political participation (%)		Mean Difference
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
Participation in casting votes	2.11	0.42	2.71	0.27	0.60
Participation in local development planning	2.04	0.56	2.76	0.29	0.72
Participation in local political activities	1.60	0.41	2.56	0.34	0.96
Participation in political auditing	1.62	0.46	2.64	0.37	1.02

Discriminant factors that influence the local political participation of senior citizens:

The researcher of this study employed a group discriminant analysis to discriminate two or more groups. In this study, the researcher compared two levels of political participation; low-to-moderate and high. To serve the purposes of the study, the standard canonical coefficients and structural coefficients were used to identify factors. The factors that have positive values of .10 or more, and negative values of -.10 or less were considered as discriminant factors. From the analysis, it was found that influential factors to discriminate levels of local political participation, from highest to lowest, were (1) knowledge of duties, (2) knowledge of freedoms, (3) being informed about political participation, (4) knowledge of rights, and (5) income. The findings confirmed the hypothesis, as shown in Table 4. In contrast, the factors that were not considered influential factors but categorized as participatory factors in the equation included (1) sex, (2) age, (3) education, (4) length of residency. These factors contradicted the study hypothesis.

Table 4 Unstandardized Canonical Coefficients, Standardized Canonical coefficients, and Structure Coefficients

Discriminant Factors	Unstandardized Cannonical Coefficients	Standardized Cannonical Coefficients	Structure Coefficients	Analytical Pathway	Influential Rank
Income (X ₁)	-.269	-.119	-.153*	-	5
Knowledge of rights (X ₂)	.720	.131	.392*	+	4
Knowledge of duties (X ₃)	1.894	.640	.791*	+	1
Knowledge of freedoms (X ₄)	1.488	.455	.665*	+	2
Being informed about political participation (X ₅)	.534	.229	.439*	+	3

The constant value in the equation was -3.160. Discriminant equation was as follows:

$$D = -3.160 + (.640 (X_3)) + (.455 (X_4)) + (.229 (X_5)) + (.131 (X_2)) + (-.119 (X_1))$$

The analysis of the relationship between discriminant factors and the local political participation of senior citizens in the Nakhon Pathom Provincial Organization, as determined by a Canonical Discriminant Function (a.k.a. Function-Variables Correlation), revealed 4 factors that positively related with local political participation among senior citizens: knowledge of duties, knowledge of freedoms, being informed about political participation, and knowledge of rights. On the other hand, income had a negative relationship with local political participation among senior citizens. In addition, the analysis found that the equation from the discriminant analysis of influential factors on local political participation of senior citizens had its discriminant power at a high level of 80.70%, while misplacing the factors for only 19.30%. Details are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Estimates of Group Discriminants

True groups	Groups estimated by the equation		Total
	Low-to-moderate political participation	High political participation	
Low-to-moderate political participation	209 (81.60 %)	47 (18.40 %)	256
High political participation	34 (20.70 %)	130 (79.30 %)	164

$$\text{Predictive Coefficients} = \frac{209 + 130 \times 100}{420} = 80.70 \%$$

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study revealed the personal factors of income, knowledge of rights, knowledge of duties, knowledge of freedoms, and being informed about political participation as having influence on the local political participation among senior citizens. The analysis confirmed that the two groups of senior citizens: low-to-moderate and high in political participation were different due to these factors. The influencing factors were ranked as follows:

First, the factor of knowledge of duties enabled the discrimination of two groups of senior citizens in local political participation at a high level. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted. That is, there was a positive relationship between the senior citizens who frequently

participated in political activities and knowledge about duties. This finding is supported by Rosenbaum (1975), who showed that political culture related to political activities has an influence on the political participation of individuals. It is a reflection of those people in the political process. People participate in politics due to their knowledge about politics, and in line with their desire to participate in political activities of interest. Chuncharoen (2014) also found that the factors of knowledge and understanding of politics had a positive relationship with the political participation of people in Chonburi Municipality at a significance level of .01.

Second, knowledge of freedoms enabled the discrimination of groups of senior citizens for local political participation. The hypothesis was confirmed in that those senior citizens who had a high level of political participation also had a higher level of knowledge of freedoms that led them to participate in political activities. This finding was in line with that of Tantisoonthorn (2015), who found that citizens in democratic societies are required to emphasize political participation. Citizens of this type need political literacy, equality, justice and freedom so that they can act and express themselves for their society. Moreover, these findings were in line with Khemnachit (2014) in that the predictive factors of political participation were knowledge and understanding about local administration, which together had predictive power at a significance level of .01.

The level of being informed about political participation was also able to be used to separate groups of senior citizens. That is, those who had a high level of political participation had a correspondingly positive relationship with levels of being informed about political participation, i.e. a high level of being informed. If senior citizens received information about politics at a high level of frequency, then they would be more likely to participate in local politics to a higher degree. This finding was in line with Wattanakorn (1999) who studied the local political participation of people in Bang Rak Noi Tumbol Administration, Muang Nonthaburi. She found that the reception of information or news, or having talks with government officials, politicians, and members of the Tumbol organization, correlated positively with political participation. Moreover, these findings are further supported by the research of Khantikul (2010), who studied the political participation of people in Dusit, Bangkok. These findings revealed that the predictive factors for political participation among people were the reception of information and news about politics. The study was also in line with Nie and Verba (1975) in that the reception of news and information about politics through the media influences people to participate in political activities.

Knowledge of rights was able to be used as a factor to separate groups of seniors, and thus confirmed the research hypothesis. There was a positive relationship between local political participation and knowledge of rights. If the senior citizens had a high level of knowledge of rights then they would also be more likely to have high levels of local political participation. This finding was in line with the study of Khemnachit (2014) who studied the factors influencing the participation of people in local administrative organizations in Petchaboon province. The findings of this study suggested that knowledge and understanding about local administration was a predictive factor on the participation of people in local administration at a significance level of .01. These findings were also in line with Chuncharoen (2014), who found that the factors of knowledge and understanding of politics had a positive relationship with the political participation of people in Chonburi Municipality at a significance level of .01.

Lastly, income had a significant predictive power as a factor to discriminate between groups of senior citizens in political participation. That is, there was a negative relationship between income and level of political participation. Senior citizens who had higher incomes had lower levels of political participation, as compared to those who earned lower incomes. This finding was in line with Conway (2000), who found that the income factor, independent from sex,

age, and career, was a predictive factor of political participation. Wamae (2015) studied the political participation of local females in Sri Sakorn, Narathiwas province. She found that those who had a low income went to cast their votes and engaged in political activities more than those who had higher income levels. Poolput (2005) studied factors affecting the vote casting of the Chief Executive of the local administration in Phitsanulok province. He found that the sample group of low income people participated more in casting their votes in the election. This may be due to the fact that those with lower income wanted local politicians to help promote their interests. In contrast, those who had a sufficient income may neglect to participate in political activities because they don't need help from those representatives. The findings in Thailand were in contrast to those in the United States. In the USA, those who are of higher SES tend to participate more in political activities (Nie & Verba, 1975). The findings from the study emphasize that knowledge of duties, freedoms, rights, and being informed about political participation had positive correlating relationships with local political participation among senior citizens. The study provides a few recommendations that could support higher levels of political participation among senior citizens as follows.

1) The government and local administrative organization must promote and prioritize political participation of senior citizens by providing knowledge of political rights, duties, and freedoms. They should encourage senior citizens to participate in local political activities of various kinds.

2) Administrators of local administrative organizations should support and enhance the political participation of local senior citizens. They should determine strategies and action plans that provide more opportunities for the senior citizens to participate in local political participation. Moreover, they should publicize news and updates about political information in a wider and more accessible way for the purposes of participation and auditing of political activities.

3) Local administrative organizations should provide and prioritize modes of public relations so that people can access news and information. The information must be up to date so the community members do not get lost because of its accuracy. Gazettes, electronic news boards, local radio, or broadcasting services should be provided to community members.

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