



# The Effects of the Asian Quota System and Strategies on Expansion of Korean Wave of Sport: A Case of the Korean Professional Volleyball League

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## Abstract

The goal of this study was to prepare a practical strategy that can help the successful settlement of the Asian quota system and the success and development of Korean professional volleyball. Through in-depth interviews, participants were asked to respond about the expected effects of the introduction of the Asian quota, and the results were derived using content analysis and keyword analysis. The research results can be summarized as follows: (1) in the keyword analysis of expected effects, keywords such as performance improvement, competitiveness, fandom, profit generation, globalization, and the Korean wave of volleyball were frequently appeared. (2) Regarding the introduction of the Asian quota system, the participants showed a positive attitude rather than a negative attitude, and said that the Asian quota system would improve the league's performance and competitiveness. (3) Participants expected that a new fan base would flow into Korean professional volleyball and a fandom would be formed due to the player selected for the Asian Quota. (4) The introduction of the Asian quota could generate additional revenue for the V-League and clubs and would be of financial help. (5) The Asian Quota can play a role as a medium for the integration of Korean multicultural society and the development and growth of the Korean volleyball agent system was also identified. Based on the results, Korea Volleyball Federation (KOVO) will have to carry out marketing for the expansion of the V-League into the Asian market, using the introduction of the Asian quota system as a stepping stone. We hope that Korean professional volleyball will become the central axis of Korean sports through KOVO's global marketing including the Asian Quota.

**Key words:** Asian Quota, Korean professional volleyball, market expansion, Korean wave of sport, qualitative study

## Introduction

The Asian Quota system refers to a system that

allows additional players with Asian nationality to be recruited separately from the usual selection of foreign players in professional sports leagues. With the adoption of the Asian quota system, each team has been able to recruit additional talented Asian players, and intended to promote strategy and tactics reinforcement. In the

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case of Korea's major professional sports leagues, such as the Korean Professional Football League (K League) and Korean Men's Professional Basketball League (KBL) initiated with the Asian quota system in 2009 and 2020, respectively. Each football club in this quota is allowed to sign additional players who are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) but also have the nationality of Asian Football Confederation (AFC) member countries. In the case of Korean volleyball and baseball, the Asian quota system has been actively discussed for a long time. However, it has not been implemented due to negative opinions that domestic players would not have a chance to play.

In September 2022, the Korean Volleyball Federation (KOVO), which supervises Korea's professional volleyball league, decided to introduce an Asian quota system from the 2023-2024 season. The Volleyball Federation announced that Asian quota players will be selected through tryouts for a total of 10 countries, including four East Asian countries (Japan, Mongolia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) and six Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Myanmar). Looking at the detailed regulations of the Asian quota system of Korean professional volleyball, there is only one player per team who can be selected for the Asian quota, and there is no constraints for the position. In addition, the annual salary of the players selected for the Asian Quota was set at \$100,000 (including tax) for both men and women. The primary reason that KOVO advocates for the introduction of the Asian quota system can be seen as the enhancement of domestic players' competitiveness and the desire to show a more spectacular plays to the fans. Furthermore, it is driven by the expectation of overcoming the limitations of a poor domestic amateur sports environment and expanding the reach of the V-League. However, despite these reasons, negative opinions regarding the implementation of the Asian quota system coexist, primarily due to concerns about potential disadvantages that domestic players may face in terms of selection,

playing time, or contracts.

In April 2023, all men's and women's teams belonging to the V-League selected Asian Quota players through tryouts, and the Asian Quota finally took its first step in Korean professional volleyball. In the women's draft, a total of 7 players were selected, including 3 from Thailand, 2 from Indonesia, 1 from the Philippines, and 1 from Japan. In the men's draft, also, a total of 7 players were selected, 2 from Mongolia, 2 from Japan, 2 from Taiwan, and 1 from the Philippines. Some players are already regarded as key players and are evaluated as high-quality players. There is an opinion that the introduction of the Asian quota could cause domestic players to lose their seats, but the introduction of the Asian quota could bring positive effects such as fun and performance improvement, development and globalization of clubs and leagues, and profit generation. It foreshadows new changes.

Starting with the 2004-2005 season, Korea's professional volleyball began to be recognized as a spectator sport that could be used for leisure. Since the professional league started, it has steadily received interest and love from sports fans and has established itself as the best spectator sport in winter. In particular, in the case of Korean women's volleyball, based on excellent results in recent international competitions, the popularity of star players, and various attractions inside and outside the game, it is strengthening its position as a new powerhouse in spectator sports by establishing a competitive edge compared to other sports events. The point to keep an eye on is that Korean women's volleyball is becoming popular not only in Korea but also in Southeast Asian countries. Specifically, the 'Korea-Thai Women's Volleyball All-Star Super Match', which was held alternately between Thailand and Korea from 2017 to 2019, can be seen as a sports event that confirmed the Korean wave potential of Korean women's volleyball as well as sports exchanges between the two countries (Jeon et al., 2022). Right after the Korea-Pacific Super Match ended in 2017, Southeast

Asian countries including Vietnam are sending a Super Match love call to Korea, so it is expected what kind of scalability the Korea-Pacific Super Match will have in the future (Korea Volleyball Federation, 2019). Although the current Super Match has been suspended due to the pandemic, it is expected that the Super Match will resume when the situation stabilizes in the future. As such, Korean professional volleyball can be an axis that will lead the Sports Korean wave, and it is considered an event with high potential for globalization and expansion of the league.

The introduction of the Asian quota system for Korean professional volleyball, be adopted from the 2023-2024 season, should be an opportunity to further expand the globalization of Korean professional volleyball and the Korean wave of volleyball. For the successful settlement of the Asian quota system, it is necessary to analyze the expected effects and thoroughly prepare for it. Based on the results of the expected effect analysis, the growth and development of Korean professional volleyball can be expected through the derivation of practical strategies and plans for the success of Korean volleyball.

However, systematic academic research on the Asian quota system in the Korean professional sports industry has been sparse. In related studies, examining the relationship between the recruitment of foreign players and broadcast viewership (Lee & Shin, 2013), fan perception of the foreign player management system (Maeng & Cho, 2012), or the impact of foreign players on professional volleyball (Kim & Cho, 2021) has been conducted, but it has limitations in analyzing the expected effects of the introduction of the Asian quota system. Overall, studies regarding the Korea professional sports mainly focused on the expected effect or fan recognition to the mercenaries, which are somewhat insufficient to solidify the knowledge or insight about the perception or expected effect of the introduction of a new sports system. In addition, despite the recognition that sports can also be an important K-wave content, studies on the globalization of

domestic professional sports events and sports K-wave strategies have not been received extensive attention. This can be seen as a contrast to active studies on the spread of Korean Wave in popular culture such as K-pop, dramas, and movies (Hogarth, 2013; Ryoo, 2009).

Therefore, this study conducted an in-depth interview with Korean professional volleyball stakeholders (federation and club officials, media officials, fans) to explore the perception and expected effects of the introduction of the Asian quota system in Korean professional volleyball, and to provide fundamental data for the successful settlement of the Asian quota system. The research questions of this study are as follows:

- 1) What changes are expected in the competitiveness of the Korean professional volleyball league with the introduction of the Asian quota system?
- 2) What changes are expected from Korean professional volleyball league fans with the introduction of the Asian Quarter System?
- 3) What are your expectations for the economic effect of Korean professional volleyball due to the introduction of the Asian quota system?

In addition, based on the results of this study, we discuss the practical strategies that can help the success and development of Korean professional volleyball, and furthermore, plan to spread the Korean wave of volleyball.

## Methods

This qualitative study explores the perception and expected effect of the introduction of the Asian quota system in Korean professional volleyball, and based on the results, derives strategies for the successful settlement of the Asian quota system and the success and expansion of Korean professional volleyball. In order to achieve this purpose, the results were derived with the following research method.

## Participants

Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to select study participants. The research participants consisted of experts with practical experience and insight into the sustainable development of Korean professional volleyball, media officials with knowledge of professional volleyball, and volleyball fans who are direct consumers. Participants consisted of 5 volleyball federation and club officials, 5 media officials, and 5 volleyball fans who were direct consumers, a total of 15 people. Federation and club officials have more than 8 years of experience, and media officials have more than 5 years of experience who are constantly producing professional volleyball-related coverage and contents and are currently active. Volleyball fans regularly watched the game and selected fans with high interest. As shown in Table 1, in order to avoid bias in the research results, we tried to increase diversity by considering the gender, age, and career of each group of respondents. First, as the main consumer group, participants consisted of individuals aged 20–40 years and taking into account the number of female respondents in each group. Furthermore, we broadened the range of professional experience from 4 to 15 years. According to Taylor

(2011), using insiders in a qualitative study can be advantageous due to the rapport already established with the researcher, which increases the reliability of the data collected, it also has the disadvantage of a propensity to omit or barely cover well-known information or sensitive issues. In order to ensure an adequate ratio of insiders to non-insiders and to establish a sufficiently strong relationship with non-insiders during in-depth interviews, extra attention was taken. Table 1 shows the general information of the participants.

## Data Collection

The researcher met the participants in person from April 1 to May 5, 2023, conducted interviews 2–3 times per person and averaged about an hour per session, and collected and analyzed data through recording. An open-ended questionnaire survey was provided to participants in order to acquire thorough data on the study issue. The use of an open-ended questionnaire can avoid influence from the researcher's subjective opinions and so directly reflects the interviewees' opinions. The principal researcher developed the open-ended questions based on the technique presented in the existing qualitative research paradigm and previous studies.

In the first interview, an unstructured interview was conducted to focus on collecting various data, and in the second and subsequent interviews, data were collected using structured questions. In addition, additional information was collected through phone calls and messengers when additional confirmation of the data was required after the second interview was conducted. The interview questionnaire was constructed based on previous research on the influence of foreign players on professional sports leagues: (1) Jewell (2017)'s study on the influence of famous foreign players on the American professional soccer league, (2) Mills & Fort (2014)'s study on the relationship between foreign players, spectators and league revenue, and (3) Royuela & Gásquez (2019)'s study on the

**Table 1.** Description of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Years in Field
A	Male	42		12
B	Male	40	League & Club Official	8
C	Female	35		10
D	Male	38		8
E	Male	48		15
F	Female	35		5
G	Female	37	Journalist & Reporter	7
H	Male	42		10
I	Male	42		13
J	Male	36		8
K	Female	28		10
L	Female	28		10
M	Female	35	Fan	5
N	Male	40		10
O	Male	41		4

**Table 2.** Key questions in the open-ended questionnaire

Key Questions	Previous Literature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What changes are expected in the league with the introduction of the Asian quota system? (League Level)</li> <li>• What changes are expected in the competitiveness of league with the introduction of the Asian quota system? (Competitiveness of league)</li> <li>• What changes are expected in the attendance and fandom with the introduction of the Asian quota system? (Attendance &amp; Fandom)</li> <li>• What changes are expected in the revenue of the league with the introduction of the Asian quota system? (Revenue)</li> <li>• What other changes are expected in the league with the introduction of the Asian quota system? (Other)</li> </ul>	<p>Jewell (2017) Mills and Fort (2014) Royuela and Gásquez (2019)</p>

competitiveness of league and sports clubs. The detailed questions based on previous research were composed of the level of the league, the competitiveness of the league, spectators, revenue, and finally questions that could lead to free answers from the research participants. The key questions of the interview are shown in Table 2.

### Data Analysis

Based on the collected data, text analysis was conducted by transcription, encoding, and the meaning generation stage (Patton, 1990). First of all, based on the transcribed data, keywords generated using Python (ver. 3.10) were organized by frequency, and keywords were extracted and visualized using the word cloud method. The data categorized through the text analysis were regrouped into related themes and derived as higher categories through a conceptualization process. Finally, the expected effects of the introduction of the Asian quota system in the Korean professional volleyball league were generated, and the contents of the transcript data and the categorized results were compared to ensure that the meaning was properly reflected without being distorted.

### Validity and Reliability of the Data

Triangulation, peer debriefing, and member check

were conducted to enhance the validity and truthfulness regarding the contents of the open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interviews. For the triangulation, expert audit review with three professors majoring in sports management and sports psychology have experience in in-depth interviews and qualitative research were conducted to improve objectivity and logic by reviewing data such as questionnaire items, contents, and research results. The experts acted as critical friends for peer debriefing to enhance the rigor and quality of the data.

At last, member check was done to verify the accuracy and validity of the data collection with participants.

Before the in-depth interview was done, each participant was given all pertinent information and knowledge, including the researcher's affiliation, contact information, and the objective and methodology of the research, to ensure compliance with the ethical requirements of the study. They were also given thorough explanations of how their private information will be kept private and kept from the public.

## Results

### Keyword Analysis

As a result of analysis through open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interview, frequently appeared keywords were as follows: Performance enhancement, competitiveness, new fans, fun, revenue,



*Figure 1. High frequency keywords. Large letters indicate high frequencies.*

broadcasting rights, merchandise, sponsorship, Southeast Asia, globalization, social integration, multiculturalism, volleyball agents, volleyball K-wave, Korea-Thailand women's volleyball all-stars.

As a result of keyword analysis of responses from volleyball stakeholders, including volleyball fans, expectations for the introduction of the Asian Quota were high, and positive perceptions of the introduction of the system were stronger than negative perceptions. First of all, the main opinion regarding the negative perceptions was that as the number of foreign players increased, opportunities for domestic players to compete in games would decrease and barriers to professional advancement for amateur and student players would increase. This opinion can be seen as a concern that the competitiveness of Korean players will decrease and their skill growth will be slow from a long-term perspective. Although there are concerns that there will be fewer seats for domestic players, most of the participants cited the expectation that the introduction of the Asian quota system would improve the performance and competitiveness of the Korean professional leagues. There was an opinion that the capabilities of Asian players selected from each club would become the team's main players. In addition, some players already had experience as national-team

players in their countries, so they expected the overall performance of Korean professional volleyball to improve due to the participation of Asian quota players. Participants expected that the introduction of the Asian quota system would attract new audiences to Korean professional volleyball and form a new fandom. Since most of the players selected for the Asian Quota are symbolic in their country and represent the country, there was an opinion that volleyball fans in that country would be more interested in Korean professional volleyball. The introduction of this Asian quota was regarded as an opportunity for Korean professional volleyball to become global. The federation and club officials considered the introduction of the Asian quota system as an opportunity to generate new profits in Korean professional volleyball, and there were answers that they would provide financial help. In addition, social integration in a multicultural society due to Asian mercenary players and the growth of the volleyball agent industry were presented as expected effects. Based on the transcribed content, the expected effects of the introduction of the Asian quota system were classified into league performance, influx of new fans, revenue generation, and other opinions, and the representative answers of the participants were organized and analyzed.

### Expectations for Improving League Performance and Competitiveness

As a result of the analysis, participants' the opinion that the Asian quota system would improve the league's performance and competitiveness were predominant. Among the expected effects of the Asian quota system, improvement in performance was the highest. In particular, domestic media officials highly evaluated the skills and performance of Asian players selected for the Asian quota tryout for the 2023-2024 season and fans were also looking forward to their performance. The result of previous study, Jeon & Maeng (2015), partially supports the results of this study that the most fundamental reason for the introduction of the foreign player system in domestic professional sports is to improve the competitiveness of domestic players and to show more spectacular play to fans. In addition, Korean professional sports are limited to the supply and demand of high-quality players, so Kim (2020)'s study that the introduction of foreign players' attempts to level the team power and improve the competitiveness of the league supports the results of this study. Similar to the expected effects of introducing foreign players in the previous studies, the main expected effect of introducing an Asian quota in this study is the improvement in the level and competitiveness of the league. The specific answers related to the league's performance and competitiveness are as follows.

“It can be seen that foreign players have a great influence on the team. Foreign players also determine the season's performance. The newly introduced Asian Quota players are also expected to help improve performance. Fans will be able to watch a high-level and fun match due to the brilliant play of the Asian Quota players.”  
-Participant A

“I think the overall level of Korean professional volleyball will rise. I heard through the media that the Asian Quota players selected this time have

high skills and many are members of the national team. Having players representing Asian countries participate in the Korean professional league will bring more spectacle both inside and outside the game.” -Participant K

### Expectations for the Influx of New Fans (Audience) and Globalization of the League

Federation and club officials expected the introduction of the Asian quota system to attract new fans and expand and globalize the V-League in the Asian market. The Asian players who will play in the Korean professional volleyball league are symbolic of their country's volleyball world. There was a response that if they play in the V-League, interest from volleyball fans in their country will increase and the V-League can rise to an international level. Apart from the introduction of the Asian quota system, interest in Korean women's volleyball and players is already high in Asia, especially in Southeast Asia (Jeon et al., 2022). The Korean wave of Korean women's volleyball in Southeast Asia is currently on going, and the introduction of the Asian Quarter for Korean professional volleyball can be expected to have a more positive effect in terms of league expansion. The globalization of the league revealed in this study can be expected that the Asian quota system will become a catalyst for a more effective volleyball Korean wave in the already existing volleyball Korean wave. Media officials expressed that the globalization of Korean professional volleyball and the expansion of the base of the Korean volleyball wave will be expanded due to the introduction of the Asian quota system along with the existing volleyball Korean wave. Specific answers related to the globalization of the league are as follows.

“Six out of seven female players selected in this Asian Quota Draft are from Southeast Asia. In a situation where there is already high interest in Korean women's volleyball in Southeast Asia, the

careers of Southeast Asian players in Korea are expected to accelerate the influx of Southeast Asian volleyball fans.” -Participant F

“As for our club, which selected a Thai player, I think Thai fans will be more interested in the club due to the Asian quota. Marketing for Southeast Asian audiences and fans, including Thailand, is also being planned.” -Participant B

### Expectations of Economic Effects and Revenue Generation

Participants expressed that the introduction of the Asian Quota can expect economic effects for the V-League and clubs. Through an interview, it was revealed that as new fans flowed in and a fandom for Korean professional volleyball was formed in the Asian region, profits could be expected through sales of broadcasting rights, sales of merchandise, the attraction of sponsors, and the development of sports tourism products. The effect of introducing the Asian Quota is not only to improve game performance and present spectacular scenes to fans but also to achieve additional revenue generation effects and maximize profits for leagues and clubs. Exporting Korean professional volleyball content and related products to generate profits and attract new sponsors will help the league's finances. Korea's professional volleyball is producing economic effects by actively creating tourist attractions based on the Korean Wave, such as filming locations for dramas, streets, and restaurants featured in movies, and local attractions used as backgrounds for music videos (An & Lee, 2015). It is also possible to develop various types of tour packages, such as stadium tours and tour products linked to game viewing. In other words, the economic expectation effect shown in this study shows results in line with previous studies on the analysis of the economic expectation effect of popular culture, the Korean Wave. The detailed answers on the economic effects of the study participants are as follows.

“From next season, when Asian Quota players participate in the game, we expect that many fans from their country will come to the stadium and consume Korean professional volleyball-related products. At the federation and club level, we are discussing the development of content for Asian fans.” -Participant C

“I think it will be possible to sell V-League broadcasting rights to various countries due to the Asian quota players. In addition to broadcasting rights, I think we can see economic effects such as producing and selling volleyball-related goods or attracting sponsors. However, I think we need to come up with a good strategy and plan to generate profits.” -Participant I

### Other Expected Effects

Participants mentioned competitive performance, globalization, and economic effects as representative expected effects of the introduction of the Asian Quota, but answered that other effects such as multicultural social integration and development of the volleyball agent industry could be obtained. It is true that there are currently many multicultural families in Korea and many foreign workers who do hard work in their places. They need a medium to comfort them in their difficult life in a foreign country. There was an answer from participants that if symbolic players who would soothe their nostalgia for their home country played in the V-League, it would be easier for them to adapt to Korean society and culture. In a multicultural society, sports play a role in social integration. This result partially supported by the previous study that previous research by Kim (2014) partially supports the results of this study. Participants also commented that the introduction of the Asian quota system would lead to active transfer of players and the development of the volleyball agent industry. Korea's currently insufficient



volleyball agent system is a point where systematic system establishment and development can be expected due to the introduction of the Asian quota.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions and expected effects of the newly introduced Asian quota system targeting volleyball stakeholders in order to develop practical strategies for the development of Korean professional volleyball and the spread of the Korean Wave in volleyball.

First, the participants in this study showed a positive attitude rather than a negative attitude toward the introduction of the Asian quota system in Korean professional volleyball, and the results showed that they had high expectations for the introduction of the Asian quota system. In the keyword analysis through the in-depth interviews, keywords related to expected effects such as performance improvement, competitiveness, new fans, revenue generation, Southeast Asia, globalization, multiculturalism, and the Korean Wave of volleyball were frequently appeared. Second, participants mentioned their expectation that the introduction of the Asian Quota would improve the league's performance and competitiveness. All participant groups, including federation and club officials, media officials, and fans, highly praised the skills and performances of the Asian players selected in the 2023-2024 season Asian Quota Tryout, which was expected to improve the performance and competitiveness of Korean professional volleyball. Third, participants expected that a new fan base would flow into Korean professional volleyball and a fandom would be formed due to the players selected for the Asian Quota. Since the players selected for the Asian Quota are symbolic in their country and represent their country, the main opinion was that volleyball fans in that country would be more interested in Korean professional volleyball. The introduction of the Asian quota is expected to globalize Korean professional

volleyball and expand the base of the Korean wave along with the existing volleyball Korean wave. Fourth, the results found that the introduction of the Asian quota would lead to additional revenue generation and financial help for the V-League and clubs. With the influx of new fans and the formation of a fandom for Korean professional volleyball in the Asian region, revenue generation can be expected through the sale of broadcasting rights, sales of merchandise, attraction of sponsors, and development of sports tourism products. In addition, the introduction of the Asian Quota could play a role in integrating Korean multicultural society, and other expected effects appeared that the growth and development of Korea's insufficient volleyball agent system could be expected.

There is no doubt that the foreign player management system, including the Asian quota, is a generalized phenomenon in professional sports leagues around the world. This is because the free movement of transnational capital and labor due to the industrialization and globalization of sports has activated the international transfer of sports players (Jeon & Maeng, 2015). The introduction of the Asian quota system in Korean professional volleyball can bring various effects as shown in the results of this study. In particular, due to the Asian quota, the base of professional volleyball in Korea is expanding, and volleyball can become a central content that will lead the Korean Wave in sports. KOVO, which oversees Korean professional volleyball, needs to set up a global marketing strategy for the continued development of Korean volleyball and align the league's new drive with the expansion of the Asian market. In addition, there is a need to actively promote two-way exchanges with Asian countries from a long-term perspective.

The V-League can take a cue from the case of the Japanese J-League to develop strategies for the globalization of Korean professional volleyball. The J-League has implemented various strategies under the banner of the "Asia Project." It aims to enhance the overall level of Asian volleyball by centralizing around

the J-League and strives to increase its influence within Asia. Each club in the J-League has been actively promoting mutual development with professional teams from major Southeast Asian countries through sister club partnerships. They share operational know-how in terms of professional football management, administration, and marketing. Additionally, the J-League has introduced Southeast Asian quotas to enable Southeast Asian players to play in Japan, thereby activating the league and garnering interest from Southeast Asian football fans. Following the example of the J-League, the KOVO and Korean professional volleyball clubs can also develop strategies to secure the Asian market. The KOVO can exchange necessary information with professional volleyball leagues in various Asian countries and foster cooperation in the marketing field. By implementing exchange programs and initiatives for referees, coaches, players, match operations, medical support, and academies, the interest of Asian volleyball fans towards Korean professional volleyball can be increased. By building upon the introduction of the Asian quota system in Korean professional volleyball, the league and clubs can execute global marketing efforts, thereby expanding the V-League into the Asian market.

The limitations of this study and suggestions for future research are as follows. This study was conducted through qualitative research using in-depth interviews with volleyball stakeholders before the implementation of the Asian quota system. However, conducting additional quantitative and qualitative research after the implementation of the Asian quota system would allow for more systematic and specific analysis of its effects, leading to the identification of new avenues for development. Due to the lack of prior research on the expected effects of the Asian quota system, it was challenging to present a wide range of expected effects in this study. Therefore, future research should explore and apply various factors, such as a cultural value as K-sports or player competitiveness after the introduction of the Asian Quota, to investigate the effects in a more

comprehensive manner.

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