

RESEARCH AT GDR UNIVERSITIES ON LATIN AMERICA*

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As in other European socialist countries, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), research on Latin America has increased steadily since the 1960s. After the reopening in 1946 of the high schools and universities in what was then the Soviet Occupied Zone, research and teaching on problems of Latin America developed initially in a sporadic way according to the personal interests of scholars within various scientific disciplines. From the beginning, however, these efforts were founded upon the democratic and humanistic traditions of German research on Latin America. The scholars tried consciously to uphold the heritage of Alexander von Humboldt, above all his idea of mutual give-and-take and his sympathy for the fight for independence against the Spanish colonial regime.¹ By eschewing nationalistic, racist, and eurocentrist biases, Latin American studies in the German Democratic Republic aim, in the von Humboldt tradition, to avoid patronizing the Latin American people.²

This heritage also includes researchers like Carl Unckel-Nimuendaju, who investigated indigenous Brazilian tribes between 1905 and 1945 and who had become a vehement defender of the rights of the Brazilian Indians before his mysterious death.³ Those democratic and antifascist scholars who were forced into exile during the Nazi regime also form part of the progressive tradition. Unfortunately their scientific works and results have been insufficiently explored. Their contributions were not only in research and dissemination of a realistic view of Latin America, but in notable cases, they exercised scholarly influence in their host countries. Thus, Alfons Goldschmidt (1879–1940) taught at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the Universidad Obrera, where he finished his book *Tierra y libertad*. At his death, he was given an honorary funeral in the Mexican Panteón Civil, and the Mexican government characterized him as “the most meritorious German in Mexico since Alexander von Humboldt.”⁴ Another economist, Johann-Lorenz Schmidt (1900–1978), best personifies both the tradition

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and its continuation in the GDR. Like Goldschmidt, he worked at UNAM and at the Universidad Obrera, where he taught political economy, Marxist-Leninist philosophy, the theory of imperialism, and history of economic theory. After returning to the GDR in 1952, he laid the foundation for studying the economies of developing countries, trained many students and postgraduates (including students from Latin American countries), edited scientific journals, and published such works as *Developing Countries: Origins, Situation, Perspectives* (1974) and *International Monopolies* (1981, posthumously). Until his death in 1978, he remained firmly committed to the destiny of the Latin American nations, one of which (Mexico) had invited him to live and to work there during the Nazi era. Between 1961 and 1978, he was the President of the Friendship Society GDR–Latin America.⁵

Antifascist scholars such as Johann-Lorenz Schmidt at the Humboldt University in Berlin, the historian Walter Markov at the Leipzig Karl Marx University, and Traugott Boehme, the first scholar to lecture on Latin American literature at the Humboldt University after the Second World War, all decisively influenced the development of studying and teaching Latin American problems in GDR universities. Latin American studies began to be concentrated at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig, the Humboldt University and the University of Economy in Berlin, and the Wilhelm Pieck University in Rostock.

The first group of postwar scholars intensively dedicated to the development of Latin America arose around Walter Markov, professor of universal history in Leipzig. After having set the general point of departure for studying the history of colonialism and national liberation movements with his article *Genesis und Bedeutung der vorimperialistischen Kolonialsysteme* (Genesis and Importance of the Preimperialist Colonial Systems)⁶ in 1954, and with his work *Zur geschichtlichen Stellung der Siedlungskolonie* (On the Historical Position of the Settlement Colony),⁷ he and Manfred Kossok laid the foundations for the scientific study of Latin American matters with the *Konzept ueber das spanische Kolonialsystem* (Conceptus on the Spanish Colonial System),⁸ in 1955–56.

The establishment and expansion of the relations between the GDR and various Latin American countries in the mid-1950s (most importantly in commerce), as well as social, economic, and political developments on the subcontinent (most notably the Cuban revolution), resulted in an increasing interest in Latin America. The consequence was that a greater development of Latin American studies took place at the end of the 1950s and in the beginning of the 1960s. The previously mentioned historians united in the Latin America group within the German Society of Historians. In 1959 the Romance Institute at the University of Rostock began an interdisciplinary institute for research on social development in Latin America and for the training of students. At

the Humboldt University, in addition to the work of Johann-Lorenz Schmidt, the Institute of Universal History carried out various research projects, particularly on the relations between imperial Germany and Latin America. The Institute for Ethnography and German Folklore increasingly turned to the ethnography of Latin America.⁹

Linguistic and literary research advanced not only at the Wilhelm Pieck University, but also within what currently is the Institute for Theoretical and Applied Linguistics at the Karl Marx University and in the Romance Institute at Humboldt University. The Institute of the Economy of Developing Countries at the University of Economy in Berlin, under the direction of Heinz Joswig, began to consider important economic problems of Latin America within comparative studies of the economic development in Asian, African, and Latin American countries after it was founded in 1964.

The increasing importance of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the world as well as considerably amplified research capacity resulted in the foundation in March 1966 of a coordinating research organ, the Central Council for Asian, African and Latin American Studies, under the leadership of the present rector of the Karl Marx University, Lothar Rathmann. The group of Latin Americanists works actively on the committees (economy, history, international relations, policy, literature and culture, and so on) of this council. With the founding of three complex institutes, the Institute for African, Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the Karl Marx University, the Institute for Asian Studies at the Humboldt University, and the Institute for Latin American Studies at the Wilhelm Pieck University, the present framework of research and teaching on the Asian, African, and Latin American countries was created. These institutes are being developed as interdisciplinary scientific centers and teaching institutions on developing countries.

A small country like the GDR cannot observe and analyze all the intriguing questions necessary for understanding the social development processes in Latin America, but must select instead the most important issues. Despite these limitations, the spectrum of research topics is manifold. The research agenda begins with the investigation of the pre-Columbian period and ends with questions of current economic, social, political, ideological, cultural, and linguistic development. In all of the participating disciplines, scholars share the intention of revealing the context and the laws of social development.

Ethnological research is concentrated on questions of the emergence of class society in pre-Columbian America, the economic and social structure of pre-Columbian state entities, and the position of the indios in modern capitalist society.¹⁰ In studies on Iberian colonization and the Spanish colonial system, overriding questions included the driving forces and character of the colonization, and the determination

of the character of social relations in the Spanish colonies, which has been commonly defined as "colonial feudalism" mixed with elements of early capitalism.¹¹ These conceptions have been further developed by discussing dependency theories, for example, that of André Gunder Frank.¹² The course and the character of the Latin American revolutions of independence is yet another issue, one considered to be a partial process within a universal upheaval in which bourgeois society replaces the feudal society.¹³ The work of the liberator Simon Bolivar was assessed within this context.¹⁴ From the viewpoint of the comparative history of revolution, as developed in the Karl Marx University and other GDR institutions, the Latin American revolutions of independence represent a part of the cycle of bourgeois revolutions that lasted in some countries with "after pains" beyond 1917.¹⁵ In this context, such problems as revolution and reform in nineteenth-century Latin America, development of capitalism in agriculture, and the shaping of political and ideological currents were also analyzed.¹⁶

German–Latin American relations also have been extensively explored. The crucial points are the relations during the Latin American revolutions of independence (from the end of the eighteenth century until the third decade of the nineteenth century), the emergence of German imperialism and its penetration into Latin America (1871–1917), and the period of fascism (1933–45). Some works also have analyzed the intermediate years.¹⁷ Research on the activities of German antifascists in exile in Latin America also has begun.¹⁸

A relatively new field consists of investigation of the democratic and anti-imperialist movement in Latin America between 1917 and 1945. Studies on José Carlos Mariátegui and Julio Antonio Mella, as well as the activities of the Communist International, have received a distinguished place.¹⁹

Since the 1960s, the contemporary development of Latin American countries has been emphasized. Central attention is given to such questions as the development of class and social structure, especially the working class, middle strata, and bourgeoisie,²⁰ in addition to the situation in the countryside,²¹ strategy and tactics of Latin America's Communist and workers' parties,²² the development of the union movement,²³ the roles of the church and the army in Latin American society,²⁴ and an assessment of events in Chile.²⁵ The problem of fascism in Latin America has been discussed in this context.²⁶ The essence and importance of non-Marxist ideologies, including bourgeois theories of society, social reformism, and "ultra-radical" theories and conceptions,²⁷ as well as religious ideas²⁸ all have emerged as special research topics in the last few years, especially at the Wilhelm Pieck University.

The triumph of the Cuban revolution and the construction of socialism in Cuba have a special place within Latin American research in

the GDR. After publishing studies in the 1960s on the essential conditions, periods, and results of the Cuban revolution,²⁹ as well as a national history of Cuba,³⁰ problems of the construction of socialism were emphasized, while necessarily defining more precisely the concepts of the preconditions and course of the revolution. Research on the economic development of Cuba after 1959 was initiated.³¹ Current events also have occasioned studies of several aspects of the development of Central American and Caribbean countries in the last few years.³²

Economic research on Latin America began at the end of the 1950s with analyses of the influence of West German capital and U.S. corporations in Latin America.³³ The activities of the international monopolies and Latin America's dependency on international monopoly capital have taken an important place up to the present.³⁴ Dependency and relative backwardness are considered the two main characteristics of capitalism in Latin America, *without* intending to postulate a special socioeconomic formation of dependent capitalism, as some dependency theorists have done.³⁵ The studies concerning technological dependency and transfer of technology can also be placed in this context.³⁶

Another special theme was the course and the assessment of the level of capitalist development in Latin American countries. Research on the formation of the development structure, and the development of different levels of industrialization pertains to this issue, together with analyses of the concentration in productive processes and capital accumulation in selected countries,³⁷ and efforts to group these Latin American countries.³⁸ Economists, historians, and agricultural scientists have studied problems of land tenure, social structure in the countryside, the relations among dependency and imperialism and large landed property, the development of capitalism in agriculture, and the essence, contents, and results of agrarian reform projects in Latin America.³⁹

Economic policy and direct and indirect state regulation of the economy have become central themes. The majority of scholars share the viewpoint that the most advanced capitalist countries of Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina) show evidence of more or less strong development tendencies towards state monopoly capitalism, consisting of an increasing interrelationship between international or native monopoly capital and the state.⁴⁰ The numerous integration entities that emerged in Latin America (CACM, ALALC, ALADI, Andean Bloc, SELA, and others) were analyzed,⁴¹ and the fundamentals were set for investigating bourgeois and radical petty-bourgeois economic theories.⁴²

Other fields have also generated research. In the field of international policy, the development tendencies of U.S. Latin America policy,⁴³ the policy of the Federal Republic of Germany,⁴⁴ and aspects of the

foreign policies of several Latin American countries were explored.⁴⁵ Democratic and socialist tendencies in twentieth-century Latin American literature, and their historical traditions, are the central subject of literary research.⁴⁶ In Adalbert Dessau's book *Der mexikanische Revolutionsroman* (The Novel of the Mexican Revolution), questions of the dialectic between sociopolitical and spiritual cultural emancipation are discussed. Bourgeois-democratic tendencies and proletarian literature were also debated.⁴⁷ One of the primary subjects of literary research is the development of Cuban literature.⁴⁸ In the field of linguistics, the emergence and the particularities of Latin American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese, as well as the relations between language and social development, have been treated.⁴⁹

The Institute of Latin American Studies at the Wilhelm Pieck University in Rostock is assuming the profile of an interdisciplinary center for research on Latin America. Latin American studies represents one of the most important disciplines at the Wilhelm Pieck University. In February 1959, Adalbert Dessau began to restructure what was then the Romance Institute. After attracting scholars from social sciences for an institute originally dedicated to literature and linguistics, the organization developed in such a manner that by 1964 its name was changed to the Institute of Latin American Studies. In the context of the Third Superior School Reform in 1968, the Section (Institute) of Latin American Studies was founded after a further clarification of the long-term tasks in research, teaching, and education. In the 1970s, the institute gained more scientific and administrative personnel. Today the institute consists of departments of economics, history (including sociology and ethnology), literature and ideology, and Spanish and Portuguese. In 1981 Max Zeuske was introduced as the new director, replacing Adalbert Dessau. The students of the institute receive a thorough language education, study one basic discipline in the social sciences and its application to Latin America, and acquire specific knowledge of Latin American countries.

Important research topics have dealt with such problems as the position of the Latin American countries in the capitalist world economy, concentration of production and capital, monopolization of the economy, state enterprises and economic policies, integration processes, economic theories, Latin American history of the nineteenth and twentieth century, history of the Latin American workers' movement, development of class and social structure, construction of socialism in Cuba, development of the social consciousness of the Latin American people, their literary heritage and contemporary literary production, the heritage of the Indian cultures and their importance for the contemporary development processes, and the relations between social development and languages in Latin America.

Since 1965 the institute has published biannually the journal *Lateinamerika: Semesterbericht der Sektion Lateinamerikawissenschaften*, which contains four or five scientific articles, a detailed summary of important political and economic events in Latin American countries, the most comprehensive bibliography of articles and books on Latin America published in the GDR, book reviews, and summaries of conferences and colloquiums. The journal is mainly edited in German, with a summary in Spanish, but it also includes articles in Spanish. Additionally, GDR scholars are regularly publishing in the journal *Asien Afrika Lateinamerika*, edited by the Central Council for Asian, African, and Latin American Studies. In 1978, in the series *Studien ueber Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika*, Adalbert Dessau edited the book *Lateinamerika im antiimperialistischen Kampf: Probleme eines Kontinents* (Latin America in the Anti-imperialist Struggle: Problems of a Continent), which was written by eighteen GDR Latin Americanists, with significant participation by the members of the institute. An international research project on the formation and development of ideological currents was recently completed, and the manuscript has been submitted to the publisher.

Since 1961 the institute has sponsored colloquiums and conferences, first in the form of student seminars, and since 1970, in the form of German-Soviet workshops, with participation of Latin Americans; since the mid-1970s, these workshops have been held within the Multilateral Problem Commission of the Academies of Science of the Socialist Countries for Economy and Politics of the Developing Countries. The themes were: in 1970 and 1972, the struggle of the workers' movement in the countries of Latin America; in 1974, action unity and politics of alliances in the anti-imperialist struggle of the people of Latin America; in 1976, revolutionary processes and ideological struggle in the countries of Latin America; in 1977, democratic and socialist tendencies in the Latin American literature of the twentieth century; and in 1978, current tendencies in the development of dependent capitalism in Latin America.⁵⁰

The institute maintains scientific relations with the most important research centers in the European socialist countries, such as the Latin America Institute in the Academy of Science of the USSR, and the Institute of World Economy in the Hungarian Academy of Science, as well as with some scientific institutions in Cuba, Mexico, Peru, and Colombia. Relations also exist with some relevant institutes in Western Europe and in the United States. The important U.S. Latin Americanists Robert Quirk and Carmelo Mesa-Lago visited the institute. With approximately forty thousand books and periodicals, the library is the largest of its type in the GDR.

Beyond research and teaching, the institute's faculty has undertaken efforts to acquaint the populace of the GDR with the problems of

the Latin American countries and their historical and cultural traditions. Public lectures, newspaper articles, and scholarly publications have attempted to promote a better understanding of Latin American development and to contribute to keeping peace in the world.

The immediate tasks facing the GDR's Latin Americanist scholars are several. The institutionalization of research facilities and the improvement of the scientific level of research must be the first priority. Extensive efforts are also in progress to disseminate the results of our research abroad. Finally, increased linkages to other research institutions are of continuing importance for our work.

NOTES

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2. Gerhard Engel, "Die Asien-, Afrika- und Lateinamerikawissenschaften an den Universitaeten im dreissigsten Jahr der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: Gedanken zur Bilanz und zu kommenden Aufgaben," *AALA*, 1979, no. 5:776; Ursula Schlenther, "Rassenideologie der Nazis in der ethnographischen Literatur ueber Lateinamerika," in *Der deutsche Faschismus in Lateinamerika, 1933–1945* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 71–80.
3. Georg Menchen, *Nimuendaju: Bruder der Indianer* (Leipzig, 1979).
4. Ruth Greuner, "Im Feuer der Veraenderung," in Alfons Goldschmidt, *Grosse Liebe: weite Welt* (Berlin, 1974), pp. 316–66; and Wolfgang Kiessling, *Exil in Lateinamerika: Kunst und Literatur im antifaschistischen Exil 1933–1945*, vol. 4 (Leipzig, 1980), pp. 37–46.
5. According to "Johann-Lorenz Schmidt: 75 Jahre," *Asien Afrika Lateinamerika (AALA)*, 1976, no. 1:157–58; and "Nachruf des Zentralen Rates fuer Asien-, Afrikaund Lateinamerikawissenschaften," *AALA*, 1978, no. 5:1033–34.
6. Published in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx-Universitaet Leipzig (WZ/KMU)* (Leipzig), 1954–55, nos. 1–2:43–60. Also in Walter Markov, *Weltgeschichte im Revolutionsquadrat* (Berlin, 1979), pp. 16–41.
7. Published in Hellmut Kretschmar, ed., *Vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit: Zum 65. Geburtstag von Heinrich Sproemberg* (Berlin, 1956), pp. 312–49. Also in Walter Markov, *Weltgeschichte*, pp. 42–70.
8. Published in *WZ/KMU*, 1955–56, nos. 2–3, parts 1 and 2.
10. Ursula Schlenther, *Lateinamerika und seine Ureinwohner* (Berlin, 1976); Ursula Schlenther, "Ueber die Aufloesung der Theokratien im praekolumbischen Amerika," *Ethnographisch-Archaeologische Zeitschrift (EAZ)* (Berlin, 1961, no. 2; Ursula Thiemer-Sachse, "Zum Problem der zweiten gesellschaftlichen Arbeitsteilung bei den Azteken," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universitaet (WZ/HU)* (Berlin, 1963, nos. 7–8; Friedrich Katz, "Vergleichsmomente zwischen der sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Organisation der Inka in Peru und der Azteken in Mexiko," in *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl*, vol. 2 (Mexico, 1960); Friedrich Katz, "Evolution de la situation de la noblesse indigene au Mexique depuis la conquete jusqu'a la fin du XVI siecle," in *Congresso Internacional de Historia dos Descobrimentos, Actas*, vol. 5/1 (Lisbon, 1961); Friedrich Katz, "El papel del comercio en el imperio Azteca," in *Actas del 36 Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*, vol. 2 (Sevilla, 1966); Vera Hartwig, *Die Indianer-Agrarfrage in Chile bis 1970* (Berlin, 1976).
11. See Walter Markov, *Sistemi coloniali e movimento de liberazione* (Roma, 1961); Manfred

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 13. Manfred Kossok, "Der iberische Revolutionszyklus 1789–1830: Bemerkungen zu einem Thema der vergleichenden Revolutionsgeschichte," in *Studien ueber die Revolution* (Berlin, 1969); Manfred Kossok, "Charakter und historischer Ort der Unabhaengigkeitskriege Lateinamerikas," *AALA*, 1976, no. 6:937–60; Manfred Kossok, "Probleme einer vergleichenden Analyse der lateinamerikanischen Unabhaengigkeit-srevolution," *ZfG*, 1977, no. 2:143–55.
 14. Max Zeuske, "Simón Bolívar 1783–1830, Zum 150. Jahrestag seines Todes," *LA*, fall 1980:5–18.
 15. See Max Zeuske, "Grundlagen und Hauptergebnisse des buergerlichen Revolutionszyklus in Lateinamerika," in "Lateinamerika im antiimperialistischen Kampf: Probleme eines Kontinents" (Berlin, 1978), pp. 1–47.
 16. Adalbert Dessau, "Revolution und Reform in der Geschichte der buergerlichen Ideologie in Lateinamerika: Vorbemerkungen zum 19. Jahrhundert," *AALA*, 1978, no. 5:895–902; Manfred Kossok, Juergen Kuebler, and Max Zeuske, "Ein Versuch zur Dialektik von Revolution und Reform in der historischen Entwicklung Lateinamerikas (1809–1917)," in *Studien zur vergleichenden Revolutionsgeschichte 1500–1917* (Berlin, 1974); Max Zeuske, "Grundzuege und Spezifik der Agrargeschichte Lateinamerikas im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg 1524/25: Geschichte Traditionen, Lehren* (Berlin, 1977); Max Zeuske, "Sozialökonomische Entwicklung und demokratische Bewegung im buergerlichen Uebergangsprozess Lateinamerikas, 1825–1917," Diss., B, Leipzig, 1980.
 17. Manfred Kossok, "Zur Geschichte der deutsch-lateinamerikanischen Beziehungen (Forschungs- und Periodisierungsprobleme)," *Hansische Geschichtsblaetter*, 1966; Manfred Kossok, *Im Schatten der Heiligen Allianz: Deutschland und Lateinamerika 1815–1930* (Berlin, 1964); Friedrich Katz, *Deutschland, Diaz und die mexikanische Revolution: Die deutsche Politik in Mexiko 1870–1920* (Berlin, 1964); Juergen Hell, "Deutschland und Chile von 1871 bis 1918," in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universitaet Rostock*, 1965, nos. 1–2; Juergen Hell, "Die Politik des deutschen Reiches zur Verwandlung der drei brasilianischen Suedstaaten in ein ueberseeisches Neudeutschland (1870–1914)," *LA*, Fall 1966: 45–60; Werner Pade, "Die Politik des deutschen Kapitals gegeneuber Lateinamerika 1918–1933," *ZfG*, 1974, no. 6:578–90; *Der deutsche Faschismus in Lateinamerika 1933–1943* (Berlin, 1966).
 18. Wolfgang Kiessling, *Alemania Libre in Mexico*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1974); Wolfgang Kiessling, *Exil in Lateinamerika* (Leipzig, 1980).
 19. Adalbert Dessau, Manfred Kossok, and Max Zeuske, "José Carlos Mariátegui: Lehrer und Organisator der peruanischen Arbeiterklasse," *AALA*, 1974, no. 6:959–81; A. Melos, Manfred Kossok, and Max Zeuske, *Mariátegui* (Lima, 1971); Manfred Kossok and Max Zeuske, "Bor'ba Jose Carlos Mariátegui i Julio Antonio Melli za utverzdenije marksizma leninizma v Latinskoj Amerike," in *Leninizm i Latinskaja Amerika*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1972), pp. 179–93; Max Zeuske, "Julio Antonio Mella und das Geschichtsbild des sozialistischen Kuba," in *Zur Entwicklung des Geschichtsdenkens und -bildes in der KPD (1917/18–1945/46)*, shortened minute book of the scientific conference of the Institute of History at the Karl Marx University, 2–3 April 1979 (Leipzig,

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 21. Max Zeuske, "Grundzuege der Agrarfrage in Lateinamerika," *WZ/IKMU*, 1963, no. 1; Max Zeuske, "Zur Struktur der Landwirtschaft und zur Rolle der Bauernschaft in Lateinamerika," *Deutsche Aussenpolitik (DAP)* (Berlin), special issue no. 2, 1972:107–17.
 22. Adalbert Dessau, "Der antiimperialistische Kampf der Voelker Lateinamerikas in den sechziger Jahren," *DAP*, 1972, special issue no. 2:22–39; Adalbert Dessau, "Der antiimperialistische Kampf der Voelker Lateinamerikas im revolutionaeren Weltprozess der Gegenwart," in *Lateinamerika im antiimperialistischen Kampf: Probleme eines Kontinents* (Berlin, 1978), pp. 542–84; Adalbert Dessau, "Zur Entwicklung und Verbreitung des Marxismus-Leninismus in Lateinamerika," *DAP*, 1974, no. 4:871–94; Adalbert Dessau and Wolfhard Strauch, "Die Rolle der Arbeiterklasse in der neuen Phase der antiimperialistischen Befreiungsbewegung der Voelker Lateinamerikas," *AALA*, 1973, no. 1:77–100.
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