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Introduction

MAP 1.1
INDONESIA AND
RIAU ISLANDS PROVINCE

--- National Border
..... Province Border
Ja Administrative Capital



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SITUATING THE RIAU ISLANDS

Francis E. Hutchinson and Siwage Dharma Negara

INTRODUCTION

To Singapore's immediate south, the Province of the Riau Islands has a population of 2.2 million, and a land area of 8,200 square kilometres scattered across some 2,000 islands in 240,000 square kilometres of water. The better-known island groups include: Batam, the province's economic motor; Bintan, its cultural heartland and the site of the provincial capital, Tanjungpinang; and Karimun, a fishing and shipping hub near the Straits of Malacca. These island groups are more outwardly oriented and multiethnic, but the province also includes another three other island groups, namely Natuna, Anambas and Lingga, which are more isolated, rural, and homogeneous.

Within Indonesia, the Province of the Riau Islands¹ (PRI) is relatively small in demographic terms, and very remote from the centre of power. Logistics connections between PRI and major population centres in Java and Sumatra are underdeveloped and overpriced, effectively barring significant commercial and cultural exchange between the "centre" of the country and this far-off province. For much of the recent past, government services and communication were routed through Pekanbaru, the provincial capital of Riau Province, to which the Riau Islands used to belong.

Yet, the province is strategically located next to major shipping lanes and telecommunications infrastructure, making it one of the most connected areas in Indonesia. Furthermore, it is close to Singapore and, through the city-state, able to access global capital and expertise. The Riau Islands has also long sought to capture spillover from Singapore, with policymakers looking north to identify trends and

commercial opportunities. Thus, the province is simultaneously affected by its marginality and centrality.

Despite its small size, the Riau Islands is an important site for manufacturing in Indonesia. In late 1989, spurred by considerable flows of foreign direct investment into Singapore and Johor, the Indonesian government liberalized the investment regulations for Batam, allowed more private sector participation, invested more resources in physical infrastructure and began to work with Singapore to develop its human resource base and market the island.

Enabled by these changes, and catalysed by a favourable international environment, manufacturing-related investment flowed into Batam, dramatically boosting incomes. Singapore and Singapore-based firms were important sources of investment, as well Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan. The bulk of investment was in the electrical and electronics sector, as well as supporting activities. Over time, manufacturing investment also began to spread to select locations in Bintan (Hutchinson 2015).

During the 1990–97 period, Batam's economy grew at or about 15 per cent per annum. The island's economy and the provincial economy more broadly underwent a structural transformation, away from primary sector activities such as fishing towards a deeper and more diversified industrial sector. Despite a small dip following the 1997/98 Asian Financial Crisis, this growth process continued during the early 2000s and in subsequent years.

Since its emergence in Batam, and subsequently Bintan in the 1990s, the export-oriented sector has changed the social fabric, urban centres, and daily life of its inhabitants. Beginning with electrical and electronics production, over the years the modern manufacturing sector has expanded to include shipbuilding and ship repair. Seeking formal sector employment, many people from across Indonesia have moved to the Riau Islands and, in the process, changed the face of the province.

As a result of this growth, living standards have improved dramatically in the province. Recent estimates show that per capita income of the Riau Islands has reached IDR117 million (US\$8,550). This is the second-highest per capita income in Indonesia, surpassed only by the Jakarta capital region (BPS 2017).

This dramatic change in economic structure and living standards has been accompanied by several other far-reaching processes.

First, from around 500,000 people in the Riau Islands in 1990, the area is now home to more than 2 million people. Much of this expansion has taken place in Batam, whose population is now about 1.37 million (*Batampos*, 8 July 2019). Natural population increase has only played a minor role in this process, with the constant arrival of migrants from all across the country a major driver of growth. The pace and scale of this expansion has placed considerable stress on urban areas and the provision of public services. Moreover, the large-scale influx of people and the province's manufacturing-reliant model of growth also has important environmental implications.

Second, following the end of the New Order, and the decentralization process put in motion in 2001, the Riau Islands sought to secede from the larger Riau province.

There were various drivers for this process, including the territory's: different economic model; ethnic composition; self-perception as a discrete political entity; and grievances related to the turnaround time for decisions to be routed through the Riau capital, Pekanbaru.

In 2002, the establishment of the Province of the Riau Islands was announced and operationalized in 2004. In Bintan, a new provincial capital is emerging, with white administrative buildings being constructed on a small island ringed by mangrove trees. The young provincial civil service is still finding its feet, and is reaching out to the more remote parts of the province to foster a common identity.

Third, this increase in population has also changed the Riau Islands' demographic and political complexion. Long a region open to trade and commerce, the islands have absorbed diverse communities over the past centuries. Nonetheless, the rapidity and scale of the recent increase in population has given rise to an influential ethno-nationalist sentiment in the local political context. This has caused the Riau Islands to episodically change policy frameworks, away from manufacturing-related growth towards traditional activities such as fishing and farming (Hutchinson 2015).

Furthermore, despite the long run of rapid economic growth, there are indications that the Riau Islands may need to revisit its economic model. First, the growth of the manufacturing sector could be reaching its limit. Electronics production has gone through several rounds of contraction, with notable episodes in 2004 and 2010. The shipyard sector has also been hit by a global slump in prices. Thus, in parts of Batam, there are empty warehouses and shipyards sitting idle. And, in sharp contrast to the earlier breakneck pace of growth, in 2017 the province grew at a mere 2 per cent—well under the national average.

The economy also seems to be moving in new directions, with the services sector offering interesting possibilities. The tourism sector is growing consistently, with increasing numbers of domestic as well as international travellers. The number and range of ancillary services is expanding, generating demand for additional services-based jobs in the process. And, in the northeastern part of Batam, a cluster of digital economy firms is emerging. Young programmers from the Riau Islands and beyond are working in areas such as fin-tech, animation and website design. As with many of its other economic sectors, the island's digital economy is deeply intertwined with Singaporean firms, but also showing interesting potential for tapping the domestic market.

This volume is part of a trilogy that looks at the interactions between Singapore, the Malaysian state of Johor, and the Riau Islands. This book, *The Riau Islands: Setting Sail*, takes the early 1990s and the emergence and consolidation of PRI's manufacturing sector as a point of departure. It looks at the political, social, and environmental effects of this economic transformation within the Riau Islands, including the creation of the new province. It then explores the sustainability of this development process, including whether the province needs to revisit its manufacture-for-export model.

To this end, after this introduction, the second section locates the Riau Islands within the Indonesian context. The third one sets out its relationship with its

neighbouring territories of Singapore and the Malaysian state of Johor. The final section sets out the aims and structure of this book.

THE RIAU ISLANDS IN INDONESIA

Despite the Dutch claiming formal sovereignty over the Riau Islands from the 1800s, their presence on the ground was limited until the early twentieth century. In 1911, the Dutch established a Residency (*Residentie*), with a capital in Tanjungpinang on Bintan Island. The Residency consisted of two aspects, namely the Indragiri Division which encompassed part of Sumatra, and the Tanjungpinang Division, which covered the Riau Islands. For its part, the Tanjungpinang Division was subdivided into four areas: Lingga, Karimun, Tanjungpinang and Pulau Tujuh.

During the Second World War, the Japanese divided the mainland and island aspects of Riau, with the first administered as part of Sumatra, and the second grouped with Singapore and Malaya (Andaya 1997). Following the Second World War, the incorporation of Riau into the emerging Republic of Indonesia was not a straightforward process. From 1945 to 1950, it was the site of contest between a group of elite Riau Malays, who wanted to re-establish the precolonial political entity of the sultanate, rather than joining the nationalist and unitary republic. It was only in April of 1950, that Riau was finally incorporated in the new nation as one of the last “recovered regions” (Wee 2016).

During the early 1950s, the mainland and island aspects of Riau were brought together again as part of the province of Central Sumatra. In 1958, the Province of Riau was established, which largely mirrored the contours of the Residency established during the Dutch period. Consisting of the two aspects of Riau, its capital was initially in Tanjungpinang. However, recognizing the economic importance of the oil-rich mainland portion of Riau, the provincial capital was subsequently moved to Pekanbaru in mainland Sumatra later that year.

Under the New Order, provincial governments were subsumed under the central government, which had exclusive control over a wide range of state functions, from fiscal policy to land management. This was particularly the case for issues pertaining to industrialization, science and technology, and regional policy. Provincial governments, for their part, were responsible for regulating business, urban services, and providing financing for regional development. However, the operational division of responsibilities differed across the country’s provinces (Shah et al. 1994).

Beyond oversight of administrative issues, the central government was very influential over the political leadership of Indonesia’s provinces, particularly in Riau. From the late 1970s onwards, the governors nominated to the province were Javanese military officers, who were personally known to Soeharto. This was met with resistance in Riau, where in keeping with tradition, elites preferred a locally born Malay to head the province. Nonetheless, central preferences prevailed. Given the mechanisms of selection, and the incentive structures within which these leaders operated, they were seen to prioritize central government issues rather than provincial ones (Malley 1999).

During the 1970s, the Riau Islands—and Batam in particular—acquired particular salience as part of Indonesia’s strategy to develop its oil and gas sector. Much of the petroleum obtained in the mainland aspect of Riau was sent to Singapore for refining. Seeking to break into this higher value-added sector, the central government targeted Batam as a site for petroleum refining in the early 1970s (Nur 2000). To this end, the Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) was created, with a mandate to attract capital and liaise with investors (BIDA 1980). This agency was funded by the central government and even had its headquarters, not in Batam, but in Jakarta (BIDA 1980).

In the late 1970s, under the stewardship of BJ Habibie, the Minister for Research and Technology, the priority for Batam shifted towards manufacturing. To this end, Batam was made a bonded zone in 1978, which enabled the duty-free import of inputs and subsequent export of finished goods. The central government also moved to upgrade the island’s infrastructure, such as telecommunications, power, and air and seaports (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 February 1985).

Despite central government attention, investment and the provision of incentives, this was insufficient to kick-start Batam’s industrialization process. Of key concern was an overly restrictive foreign investment regime that required the divestment of a majority stake within a fifteen year period. Other issues included a shortage of industrial property, as well as water and electricity outages. Consequently, a mere thirteen foreign-owned firms were in operation in 1988 (Smith 1996).

Spurred by the realization that manufacturing-related investment was flowing into Singapore and Johor, the central government changed tack. In 1989, it enacted a number of liberalization measures, including allowing the private sector to own and operate industrial parks and dramatically watering down the divestment criteria (Pangestu 1991). A bilateral agreement was also signed with Singapore, covering the joint development and marketing of Riau Province. And, in 1992, Batam, along with its neighbouring islands of Rempang and Galang, were joined via a network of bridges, and collectively designated as bonded zones (Wong and Ng 2009).

As before, the central government continued to exercise control and influence over the Riau Islands. Referring to the growing links between Batam and Bintan to Singapore and Singapore-based firms, Habibie famously declared “don’t consider SIJORI as owned by Riau, because Riau does not have the funds and the skills” (*Antara*, 28 October 1991).

As the islands began to grow, disputes between the central and provincial governments arose over the sharing of revenue arising from the sale of sand to Singapore, as well as the provision of infrastructure and services in Batam. Seeing the development potential offered by Bintan and Karimun, other central government agencies such as Home Affairs and Industry also sought to exercise influence over policy decisions (Smith 1996). As both Batam and Bintan began to develop, Jakarta-based conglomerates also established a presence on the two islands. This included the Salim Group, active in real estate and agri-business, as well as Soeharto’s family members (Smith 1996; Wee 2016).

This top-down dynamic was upended in 2001, with the implementation of Indonesia's sweeping decentralization reforms. With the exception of a limited number of prerogatives, a wide selection of responsibilities were devolved to the provincial and particularly the local level. Elections for subnational office were established, and specific mechanisms for the transfer of resources from the centre downwards were formulated (Crouch 2010).

In the run-up to these reforms, political elites in the Riau Islands began to push for the establishment of a separate province. One key aspect of this drive was the development of the gas sector in Natuna, which would provide the financial wherewithal for the fledgling province. Other aspects of this argument were cultural, citing the historical specificity of the Riau Islands and its unique identity. This were complemented with grievances pertaining to the low number of Riau Islanders in the provincial administration, as well as the focus of the Pekanbaru-based government on palm oil and petroleum, rather than manufacturing (Hutchinson 2015).²

Legislated in 2002 and implemented in 2004, the Province of the Riau Islands was carved out of the larger Riau entity. Ismeth Abdullah, the former head of BIDA, was named as the governor of the caretaker administration, charged with establishing the provincial government and organizing the first gubernatorial elections (*Jakarta Post*, 26 June 2004).

In the subsequent years, the Riau Islands has established itself as a discrete political entity, with a new provincial government administration, and three rounds of gubernatorial elections. Under Indonesia's decentralized framework, the province now has a significantly bigger budget, as well as a more extensive range of responsibilities, not least supervising the budgets of a growing number of local governments.

Nonetheless, legacy issues of the early period remain, and these pose important questions for the relationship with the central government.

The first pending issue concerns the stewardship of the renamed Batam Industrial Development Authority, the Batam Indonesia Free Zone Authority (BIFZA).³ In 2008, the agency's assets and employees were transferred from the central government to the provincial government, which also assumed responsibility for naming its Chairman (*Jakarta Post*, 13 October 2008). In 2016, following unhappiness over Batam's lagging economic growth, President Joko Widodo reasserted central authority over key appointments in the organization (*Straits Times*, 2 November 2017).

The second issue concerns the functional overlap between BIFZA and the Batam municipal government. In other parts of Indonesia, responsibilities pertaining to business licensing, investment liaison, and local infrastructure are carried out by the relevant local governments. However, due to its unique development and degree of central government control, these responsibilities have been carried out by BIDA/BIFZA. This has generated a great deal of tension between the two agencies, and added to investor uncertainties. Various organizational restructuring exercises have been proposed, with the latest decision being to subsume BIDA/BIFZA under the Batam municipal government (*Batampost*, 16 September 2019).

The third issue pertains to the legal status of Batam, Bintan and Karimun, and how these can be reconciled with the central government's move towards setting

up a network of special economic zones. These islands have long received unique legal status under various guises, such as bonded zones or free trade zones (FTZ). This status, while enabling the duty-free import and export of goods, can also raise issues for firms present on the island who want to cater to the domestic market. In addition, this special customs status raises the complexity of procuring staples and daily foodstuffs, which much leave the domestic market and enter the free trade zone. Last, as Indonesia establishes a new generation of special economic zones, it is not clear how and whether this can be reconciled with Batam, Bintan and Karimun's current FTZ status (Negara and Hutchinson 2020).

The Riau Islands is a part, albeit small, of the sprawling Indonesian nation. As a province in a decentralized political structure, it has a degree of independence on issues such as investment policy and infrastructure investment. The province's geographic position is fixed as are its factor endowments, but there have been certain policy choices that have undeniably shaped the province's direction and the policy choices it faces today. However, despite this, the Riau Islands is still negotiating key aspects of its relationship with the central government. Thus, developments in the province are an amalgam of national policy frameworks, locally taken decisions and local dynamics.

THE RIAU ISLANDS AS PART OF SIJORI

When many look at the Riau Islands and its relationship with Singapore and Johor, they ground the relationship in 1990. This date is associated with the launch of the Singapore, Johor and Riau (SIJORI) Growth Triangle. This concept was supported by the governments of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia as a way to market the three territories with their differing factor endowments as one integrated whole.

It was this cross-border construct, and the potential benefits that it offered that catalysed the relationship between Batam, Bintan and eventually Karimun with its neighbours to the north. However, while an important date, this is not the beginning of the interactions between these three territories. Indeed, their interactions are much more complex, wide-ranging and rooted in history.

From the early 1700s until 1824, the areas along the Johor River and its close connections with the Riau Archipelago were the core of the Johor-Riau Kingdom. The kingdom was a sultanate—the prevailing political entity in archipelagic Southeast Asia at the time. This sultanate was in a strategic location, at the crossroads of two important maritime trading routes—the first running east and west, linking India and China; and the second north and south, connecting Java and the islands east of it with the South China Sea (Wee 2016).

The contours of the Johor-Riau Kingdom changed over time but, at its height, encompassed what are now: the states of Johor and Pahang in Malaysia; Singapore; and part of the Sumatran coast as well as the Riau Archipelago in Indonesia (Wee 2016). During this period, the capital city moved back and forth between Johor and Bintan (Carruthers 2018).

The Kingdom existed as a cohesive political entity up until 1824, when the Treaty of London was signed by the British and the Dutch. The agreement divided

the area into a British-controlled northern aspect, comprising Singapore and the Malayan Peninsula, and a Dutch-controlled south. At that point in time, the political capital of the Johor-Riau Kingdom was in Tanjungpinang. The sultanate persisted as a political entity until 1911 at which point, rather than formally yielding control to the Dutch who sought to establish a direct presence there, the last Sultan of Riau renounced his position and moved to Singapore (Wee 2016).

Despite the formal separation of these territories, many ties persisted. The long maritime coastline between the territories as well as the different economic models imposed by the British and Dutch gave rise to a long-running and lively smuggling trade. In particular, the Dutch preference for awarding monopolies and the British preference for free trade gave rise to a lively flow of goods, drugs, weapons, and people between the two territories, which lasted well into the twentieth century (Tagliacozzo 2005).

Indeed, the Riau Islands retained close economic links with Singapore and Malaysia up until the 1960s, when travel between the countries for business or social purposes was possible without passports (Dedees 2015). However, in 1963, the tensions between Indonesia on one hand, and the newly constituted Malaysia on the other disrupted trade links behind tariff barriers and customs walls (Hutchinson 2016). It was these obstacles to trade that the Growth Triangle sought to reduce some thirty years later.

Beyond networks of electronics manufacture linking the Riau Islands with Singapore, trade linkages are deep and diverse, ranging from the provision of fresh fish to the export of live pork to the city-state. Furthermore, tourism is becoming an important nexus between the three territories. Singapore and Johor are major sources of visitors for the Riau Islands, most particularly Batam, Bintan and Karimun. In turn, growing numbers of residents from the Riau Islands are looking northwards, particularly towards Johor for healthcare services and higher education (Hutchinson 2020).

In addition, the Riau Islands has become an important gateway region for Indonesia, with migrants coming from across the country to the province before heading north into Johor and beyond. Many of these workers stay in Malaysia for the long term, but many others go back to Indonesia periodically to renew their visas, hence preferring to be based in the Riau Islands (Hutchinson 2020).

Beyond economic linkages, there are important cultural linkages binding the various territories. Given the movement of the Sultanate's capital between Johor and Bintan, there are important historic sites in and around Tanjungpinang. This includes the Grand Mosque of the Sultan of Riau, mausoleums of important sultans of the Johor-Riau Kingdom, as well as the grave of Raja Ali Haji, who is credited with codifying the Malay language (Carruthers 2018). Resun waterfall in Lingga is also an important site for religious pilgrimage for Malays from Singapore and Johor (Hutchinson 2020).

Thus, while the Riau Islands is undeniably a part of Indonesia, its proximity to both Singapore and Johor is also a fundamental part of its identity. Deep-rooted cultural and historical linkages bind the three territories. Economic ties run the gamut

from electronics manufacture to the export of agricultural produce. And, people-to-people ties are also growing in size and complexity. It is exactly this duality that this book seeks to explore.

THE AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The first volume in the series, *The SIJORI Cross-Border Region: Transnational Politics, Economics, and Culture* was published in 2016. It arose out of a three-year project that brought together twenty-two specialists based in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia to explore cross-border dynamics between the three territories.

Collectively, the book's eighteen chapters explored two central questions: first, how have the component territories of the Cross-Border Region (CBR) evolved over the past twenty-five years as a result of deeper interactions; second, how will these territories look in the medium term, if some of the trends witnessed continue?

Seeking to widen the frame of analysis beyond the traditional Growth Triangle framework, the project referenced work on Cross-Border Regions, which are defined as territorial units from two or more nation-states (Perkmann and Sum 2002, p. 1). Consequently, the aggregate of the three territories—one national and two subnational, are taken as the unit of analysis.

In contrast to the Growth Triangle framework, which has varying geographical scales and privileges formal economic interactions, the CBR framework clearly specified the territorial extent of the entity under study, which allowed the centres of political power to be identified. Furthermore, rather than treating the border uniquely as a source of friction to trade between the components, the new framework incorporated it as a central element of Cross-Border Region's identity (Hutchinson and Chong 2016).

The application of the CBR framework enabled the analysis of formal and informal economic linkages between the territories, ranging from semiconductors to piracy and contraband. In addition, it also allowed us to appreciate the many directions the interactions took, from Singapore outward to these two territories, but also from Johor and the Riau Islands inwards to Singapore.

Nonetheless, due to its primacy in political and economic terms, the city-state loomed large in this work, almost always featuring as the central node in the relationship. The fieldwork carried out by the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute team cast light on interesting dynamics taking place within both Johor and the Riau Islands, which, while often influenced by the trends taking place in the city-state, were also shaped by events taking place within their own respective countries.

Consequently, the second part of this project aims to complement this perspective through focusing more directly on the other two components of the Cross-Border Region. The second volume on Johor and this third volume on the Riau Islands seek to focus specifically on each of these subnational territories, with the aim of understanding their challenges as they navigate the gravitational pull towards their national capitals on one hand, and their linkages with Singapore and, through the city-state, international markets on the other.

To this end, the guiding questions for this volume are as follows:

- What have been the political, social, and environmental impacts on the Riau Islands of the rapid economic development seen since 1990?
- What can be said about the province's policy frameworks and the future of the manufacture-for-export economic model?
- How is the Riau Islands and its position within Indonesia evolving in response to these economic and political developments?

The project on the Riau Islands ran from 2016 to 2019, with the bulk of the fieldwork carried out in Indonesia in 2017 and 2018. There were sixteen researchers involved, with ten from ISEAS, and the remainder largely based in Indonesia.

In order to generate a shared framework for analysis, two conferences were held in ISEAS in 2017 and one in 2019. Following the conferences in 2017, some of the emerging findings were released as ISEAS publications. These publications have been compiled for inclusion into this book and updated where necessary. In addition, this volume has brought together additional research which has not been previously published.

As with its companion volume on Johor, the book is divided into three broad sections. The first section of the book takes the Riau Island's economic base as a starting point. It begins by reviewing Batam's manufacturing sector, long the key driver of the province's formal sector. This is complemented by analyses of two more dynamic sectors, namely tourism and the fledgling digital economy. The subsequent chapter revisits the crucial issue of Batam's special status as a free trade zone, and whether this can or should be altered in a significant way. The final chapter looks at ways of diversifying the province's economic base away from manufacturing as well as catalysing economic growth in its more remote regions.

The second section of the volume looks at the province's political context. It first places the creation of the Riau Islands Province in historical perspective, before looking at the processes inherent in establishing the new provincial government to administer and deliver public services. The section also analyses the conduct of political parties in the province, particularly how they operate at such a geographical remove from the national capital. Finally, it looks at industrial relations in Batam, which nicely exemplifies the interplay between formal sector employment generated via links with Singapore and political dynamics emanating from Java.

The third section looks at social and environmental issues, many of which have been directly affected by the province's rise in living standards and growing industrial base, as well as the sizeable influx of migrants from different parts of the country. This involves analysing urban and environmental challenges emerging from the rapid increase in population, as well as increasing religious diversity. And, the section also contains an analysis of four of the largest ethnic communities in the province, namely, Malay, Javanese, Batak and Chinese, and how they relate to each other.

The final section of the book sets out the main conclusions, highlighting the main themes raised in the chapters and returning to the central questions set out in the beginning. Having done this, it will identify areas to future research.

As with the first and second volumes in the series, this book is not just a theoretical or empirical enterprise, but it is also a cartographic one. Consequently, ISEAS researchers worked with the Professorial Chair of Territory and Urban Planning of ETH Zurich on a series of maps to accompany the book, and illustrate many of the interactions within the province as well as a selection of important sites. In addition to the Zurich team, two GIS specialists based at the ISEAS, Pearlyn Pang and Benjamin Hu, designed and produced the various maps within the chapters themselves.

Notes

1. In this book, the Province of the Riau Islands will also be referred to by its Indonesian name Provinsi Kepulauan Riau or Kepri for short.
2. For a fuller discussion of the negotiations between Riau Islands leaders and then President Megawati, consult Kimura (2013).
3. The entity is often referred to by its Indonesian name BP Batam, which stands for Badan Pengusahaan Batam.

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