



ISSN: 2158-7051

INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF
RUSSIAN STUDIES

ISSUE NO. 2 (2013/1)

MODERNIZATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY AMONG RUSSIANS AND MUSLIMS OF THE VOLGA REGION

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Summary

Russian modernization opened a gate to other nationalities within the empire. Muslims of the Volga region faced the greatest experimental field of developments in Russian history. Modernization and nationalization were mainly carried out by the religious elites. Their main concern was to establish a Muslim identity. Establishing a civil society was not a primary issue for the Volga Muslims. Their primary concerns were their political and social independence through national and religious consciousness. Although they were in the same geographical area, Russians and Muslims under Russian rule faced different conditions during the process of modernization.

Key Words: Russian modernization, Volga Urals region, civil society, professional elites, Muslim identity, national consciousness.

Late imperial Russia witnessed a series of dramatic events during its evolution. Some components of Russian modernization as well as the modernization of its Western predecessors include the process of change and detachment from tradition, re-distribution of economic knowledge and power, cultural differentiation, achieving autonomy, and political participation. These features of modernization can be seen through the emergence of civil society against the autocratic state, economic changes and a flourishing middle class, the spread of literacy and mass education, an increase in the use of the printing press and printed publications.

Decomposing the static structures of tradition gave way to a new world based on change. This process of change was the sign of a new era for communities.^[1] In my opinion, the real problem is naming this process of transition. Questions such as, “What is the nature of this process? How did it begin? What are the dynamics of it? When is it going to end?” remain unanswered.

Russian modernization opened a gate to other nationalities within the empire. Ukrainians, Jews, Muslims, and the other ethnic and religious groups have had their own experiences based on the modernization. Muslims of the Volga region, sharing a long history over many stages of Russian behavior, faced the greatest experimental field of developments in Russian history. My aim is to analyze whether or not the experience of Russian Modernization and compare it to the modernization of the Volga Muslims during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Imperial Russia.

1. Modernity and Modernization

Although there is no agreed upon definition of modernity, there is a consensus that it is a process of change. According to Salcedo's definition, modern society changes randomly and only for the sake of the change itself.^[2] Daniel Lerner emphasizes the participatory aspects of the modern society over than the traditional one. Lerner believes that modern society is a community where political participation and economic knowledge are more widely distributed to the masses. This process of continuous redistribution naturally needs and causes constant change within society.^[3] Habermas indicates that "it is an incomplete project" and is the process of detachment from what tradition represents.^[4] Scott Lash, following Weber and Habermas, describes modernity as "cultural differentiation and social structure's achieving the autonomy."^[5]

"Why did things change?" is the major question for most historians. A major trend in history is seeing "the logic of industrial capitalism as the dominant force explaining changes in human affairs after 1750."^[6] Changing the nature of relationships also influenced the political and ideological sphere. Bayly considers these changes catastrophic due to the inability to predict them, as they are based on contradictions and conflicts. This period saw the rise of capitalism and industrialization. Industrialization opened paths to new resources and new weapons and techniques for armies. Therefore industrialization introduced a new concept of professionalism in dealing with changes in economy, establishment of ideological constructions, and new mechanisms of the state.^[7]

The term "modernity" was first used in the 1950s and 1960s by authors such as S. N. Einstadt to describe global developments that touched every unit of human life—individuals, their families, and their relationships with society, economy, and power centers—quite rapidly and interacted with each other... profoundly. Bayly observes:

This period could reasonably be described as 'the birth of the modern world.' It encompassed the rise of nation-state, demanding centralization of power or loyalty to an ethnic solidarity, alongside a massive expansion of global commercial and intellectual links. The international spread of industrialization and a new style of urban living compounded these profound developments. The merging of all these trends does point to a step-change in human social organization. The scope and scale of change broadened dramatically. Modernity, then, was not only a process, but also a *period* which began at the end of the eighteenth century and has continued up to the present day in various forms.^[8]

Complexity and rapid changes are the key elements of modernity. Powerful central political entities, 'ambitious ideologies of civilization' powered this change toward 'the modern.'^[9] The term 'modernity' used in Russia by the philosopher Peter Struve in the early 20th century. In 1907 he introduced the term by describing the Russian Revolution as a 'modern' one.

Modernization is a context defining progressivism as an ideology and a mindset dominated by civil society.^[10] New progressive intellectual elites are actively involved in the process of reforms. Started in international communities, reformism echoed Russia's progressive educated society

(*obshchestvennost'*), often described as “civil society.”^[11]

2. Civil Society in Russia

Civil society is the requirement for a liberal regime, along with rule of law, property rights, freedom of speech and suitable habits of mind. Civil society serves as a primary force ensuring that governments are also subject to the law.^[12] Therefore a question of which comes first—a civil society or a liberal environment—arises. Although they are not a prerequisite for each other, each one helps the other grow. A liberal system helps a civil society become stronger, and civil society efforts help establish a liberal system. As Stephen F. Williams states, no government can follow the rule of law voluntarily. There must be a counterbalance within the society, requiring organized efforts “that give people practice at self-rule and participation in constructive groups.”^[13]

The institutional core of the civil society is comprised of previously excluded groups in the public sphere making “transitions from authoritarian rule” through associations and institutions outside the state domain.^[14] Subsequently, the question comes up, why and how could a civil society survive under a government such as Tsarist Russia, which was considered an autocrat state and failed civil society? Despite state suspicion, Russians formed a civil society and associational life in the 19th century. Bradley says, “The public sphere of civil society emerged under royal absolutism in the institutions and practices of market capitalism, the emergence of the bourgeoisie, new forms of urban sociability, and a lively print culture.”^[15] According to this concept, Bradley summarizes the dynamics of civil society:

First, the relationship between civil society and the state is ambiguous. The autonomy of the former is rarely absolute, latter may always impose conditions on the activities of the public sphere of civil society. Collaboration and cooperation are just as likely as confrontation to define the relationship, and civil society is more likely to grow in scope when it avoids political activities that directly challenge absolutism. Second, the institutional core of civil society constituted by voluntary associations frequently precedes written constitutions and national representative bodies. Third, associations offer new forms of sociability and self-definition, and, even in authoritarian regimes, many associations are able to define collective goals by means of a variety of “outreach” projects of philanthropy, cultural stewardship, and applied science. Fourth, since the values and practices commonly associated with the middle class are often present in other groups of the population, various social groups may spearhead such projects, and a small “economic” bourgeoisie with little political clout need not spell doom for the appearance of civil society. Finally, recognizing the ways in which civil society is gendered may help us to understand the meaning of public participation in autocratic polities, such as Russia’s where not just women (or workers) but all groups were deprived of citizenship.^[16]

When Russia reached the 19th century as an “underdeveloped society,” it faced the challenge of modernization. Previously, the physical setting of Russian society was militarized and loyal to the Tsar. The Orthodox Church was weakened by the reforms of Peter the Great. The Tsar’s absolute power over his subjects gained power over the years. The nobility were semi-independent, controlling their territories and serfs, but had no power over the central system. Russia was very late in creating a middle class. According to Seton-Watson, “There were three separate ‘middle classes’—the businessmen, the government servants, and the intellectual elite.” These groups were distinct from each other. The importance of each group became visible during modernization, and

their unification under a common ethos took more time. Capitalists and bureaucrats were the representatives of the middle class; secular intellectuals joined the group later.^[17]

The structure of Russian society was traditional: an Empire, loyal bureaucrats and army, and many distant peasants. Therefore, many authors have named Russian society a peasant dominated community. Following Western examples, Russia initiated a series of reforms in the 19th Century. Under these reforms, the idea of a civil society was developed by the intellectuals, featuring technological developments, improved education, and new ways of communication that created a power center outside of the state. Civil society and voluntary organizations “should be detached from their ‘sociological base,’ that is, from the bourgeoisie.”^[18] Russia’s creation of a public sphere and an associational life, as Bradley notes, became widespread in 19th century:

The Moscow Architectural Society, founded in 1867, organized competitions to design the pavilions; the Russian Music Society, founded in 1860, presented a music program; the Society of Russian Physicians, founded in 1859, helped organize the medical displays; the Association for the Dissemination of Technical Knowledge, founded in 1868, organized the photography display. The list could go on and before it ended would include the Russian Technical Society, the Russian Geographical Society, the Moscow Literacy Committee, the Moscow Agricultural Society, the Horticultural Society, the Moscow Racing Society, the Moscow Sailing Club, and the Society for Improving the Morals of Artisans and Workers. A representative of each of these associations sat on the relevant subcommittee, frequently alongside government officials. As one organizing committee member put it in October 1870, “All of Russia came to our aid.” The cooperation of a broad range of business, scientific, and philanthropic organizations demonstrated the fruits of private initiative, as well as providing evidence of the horizontal linkages between organizations that were characteristic of Russia’s growing civil society.^[19]

The Russian system in the 19th century was still a strong state and weak society, and the late imperial Russian history is a history of “failures, absences, weaknesses, fragmentation, fragility, backwardness, lost opportunities, and tragedy.”^[20] On the other hand, the growing economy, civic and intellectual mobility, urbanization, developments in education, and the State’s initiation of the reforms of the 1860s, furthered the growth of “organized structures that mediated between the individual and the state.”^[21] By the end of the 19th century, civil society in Russia was developed due to the printing press, the university, the representative body in cities and rural areas, the judiciary, the growing economy, urbanization, professionalization, and voluntary organizations. Scientific explorations and applications, the study of natural and human resources, and improvements in agriculture and production also helped Russian society achieve modernization.^[22]

The government’s dependence on professionals paved the way for the professional elites to be able to speak authoritatively on the fate of the Russian Empire, both intellectually and practically, representing the social authority of science.^[23] Laura Engelstein describes the professionals’ loyalty to the authoritarian system and its tradition while at the same time defending the rule of law regarding civic autonomy:

The professionals outside government were in the position of having to defend both law and discipline at the same time, to insist on the interdependence, rather than the opposition, between institutional and dispersed authority. Insofar as they engaged in the business of social discipline, these professionals were the natural heirs to the autocratic *Polizeistaat* tradition, yet they actively opposed the official incarnation of *Polizeistaat* administrative rule in the interests of a civic autonomy protected by the rule of law (the *Rechtsstaat*

principle).^[24]

After the revolution of 1905, professional elites pioneered the liberalization of the relationship between state and subjects. Their position was to mediate between the central authority and local masses, although there was suspicion that the government and the professional based civil society cooperated to modernize peasants. Locally organized groups were more efficient than the state.^[25] The new agricultural, medical, and legal professionalisms created more authority over the people than the state itself.

The emerging civil society, or the *obshchestvennost'* in the language of the epoch, gained control over reforming the largest part of Russia as well as over the redistribution of resources. That was done mainly outside the sphere of politics proper, but it had tremendous political significance and thus performed a political *function*.^[26]

After the reforms of 1863, universities gained more autonomy establishing societies and associations, leading to more freedom working on scientific issues: "In 1863, a group of specialists, amateurs, and students affiliated with Moscow University, founded the Society of Friends of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography." One of the goals of the society was the "democratization of the knowledge."^[27]

By the end of the 19th century, and especially after the 1905 crisis, civil society became the center of political activities. Literary circles and social networks turned into anti-government propaganda groups. Government complaints occurred frequently about some groups such as the "Free Economic Society" for being political and anti-government. Their meetings involved political discussions, demonstrations, and propaganda.^[28] In Bradley's words, the Empire wanted to build vertical linkages between each community and the state. Contacts between societies, public meetings, and common goals and projects created horizontal linkages that bypassed the government.^[29]

3. Developments among the Intelligentsia/Professionals in the Volga Ural Region

Subjects of various ethnicities in Tsarist Russia were granted citizenship at varying degrees and times. Social movements and individual efforts among Volga Muslims to mobilize their society towards modernity through economic activities, education, printing, and publication were not far behind that of the Russians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Russia's modernizing activities cannot be ignored.

Of all these efforts, two main trends emerge: a) the elimination of the otherness of non-Russian subjects, making them loyal citizens, and b) melting the population into one big pot of Orthodox Russian national identity. These two goals were often in conflict and garnered strong reactions from the local non-Russian population. In late 18th century, Catherine II's "enlightened despotism" involved turning *inorodets* into loyal subjects who remained under the control of their own confessional central organizations. In an oath, the Muslims of the Russian Empire swear:

We, the below-named, promise and vow before almighty God and the great Prophet Muhammad on four of his most just books, the Gospels, the Torah, Psalms of David, and the Qur'an, that we . . . must serve as loyal subjects of his imperial majesty . . . In concluding this our oath we kiss the Qur'an of our Prophet Muhammad. Amen.^[30]

When Russian medieval enlightenment transformed into modernization in the 19th century, Russia's policies toward others (*inorodtsy*) began including more education and the introduction of modern techniques. To control their loyalty, the government did not interfere with a region's

traditional relationships with its center. *Muftiyat* (Muslim religious authority) remained central until 1917.^[31]

During this time period, Tsarist policies varied by region and time, even though the main goals were the same, to control and rule the non-Russian regions.^[32] The limited tolerance of Catherine II gave way to more authoritative policies necessary for the aim of the tsarist regime, as well as the Westernization, systematization, and reorganization of the complicated relations of Russia.^[33]

a. Intellectuals

It is difficult to separate modernization of Muslims from the greater Russian Modernization. Standardizing, modernizing, and spreading education required the involvement of non-Russian elements.^[34] At this time, Oriental studies at Russian academies and universities also became popular. Social sciences and humanities were priority interest areas. Departments of philology, history, and oriental languages opened at many universities. Kazan was an important center for Oriental studies in Russia in between 1826-1845.^[35] Research, publications, and conferences on Tatars and Bulgars intensified.^[36] Local Muslim intellectuals were in close contact with Kazan University professors. One of the leading scholars, Turkologist Wilhelm Radloff (1837-1918), and Joseph Gottwaldt (1813-1897) are examples of those in contact with Shihabeddin Marjani (1818-1889), an important figure among the Tatar intellectuals.^[37]

The first Russian high school opened in 1738 in Kazan and began to accept Tatar students. Tatars suspicion about Russian schools prevented many students from enrolling in this school. An early graduate, Said Halfin, was appointed as a teacher of the Tatar language, and several other Tatars later found jobs at the high school and Kazan University.^[38]

While Russian authorities continued modernization activities, Muslim religious authority started to reorganize the *madrassa* (Muslim religious schooling) system. Tatar religious scholar Marjani's position at the Russian high school accelerated Muslim involvement in Russian organizational activities. Moreover, independent Volga Muslim reformist activities fueled Muslim reformation in the region, including those of reformist religious scholar Abd an-Nasr Kursavi (1771-1812); secular intellectual and newspaper founder, educator, and publisher Abd al-Kayyum Nasiri (1825-1902), educator Huseyin Feyizhani, (1826-1886).^[39]

Movements towards the modernization of the educational system started earlier than the *Jadid* movement. Because of the social and political environment, their struggles to modernize were not very influential. Later, the proliferation of the printing press, newspapers, journals, and western educated intellectuals created a mass mobilization for issues of modernity. According to 19th century Tatar intellectuals, teaching secular sciences in a traditional schooling system would allow Muslim students to understand their world better, and learning Russian was necessary for interaction with their neighbors.^[40]

However, in reality, the ideas of the early intellectuals did not spread rapidly to the general public until the end of the 19th century: a) modernity was imposed forcefully by religion and culture, b) channels between intellectuals and the masses were not openly accessible, c) reforms in education were also necessary to change peoples' religious and cultural worldview, and d) education reforms did not demonstrate immediate results for the people.

Waves of reformation and modernization spread by the Russian center were generally accepted by the Muslim peoples of the Empire. Starting with the establishment of religious authority

and its role designing Muslim life according to new realities, reactionary intellectuals were also part of the reformations. By the last quarter of the 19th century, reformation of the social structure was considered almost unavoidable. Increasing relationships with the modern world and concerns about the survival of the Muslim community within these relationships necessitated their active participation in the modernization process.^[41]

These reformist ideas gained popularity throughout the 19th century. By the end of the century, they became concrete projects of secular educated intellectuals. Ismail Gasprinskii [*Gaspralı*] (1851-1914) was one of the leading intellectuals of the time, turning reformist ideas into an ideology of all Turkic peoples of the empire. Often called *Jadidism* or *Usul-u Jadid* (literally, the new style), this philosophy quickly grew into a mass movement. In the beginning, it was only a name of the alphabet reform, but it later became the name of the modernist ideology.^[42] Gasprinskii studied in the Russian Gymnasium and military school in Moscow after obtaining a traditional religious education. Unlike many other intellectuals, he aimed to spread his ideas to a wide population. He wanted to join traditional education with a modern perspective.^[43] His election as mayor of *Bakhcesaray* in Crimea led to the realization of his ideas. His initiation of a newspaper was rejected many times by Russian officials.^[44] In 1883, he finally succeeded, when he first published his long lasting newspaper, *Tercüman/Perevodçik*; permission was granted with the condition of publishing half of the paper in Russian.^[45]

b. Printing Press and Publications

In the 19th century, Muslim societies made efforts to catch up with their Western counterparts' modernizations, as they were already behind. In Benedict Anderson's opinion, the printing press was used in the West as an instrument of secularization, political centralization, and nationalization during the period of enlightenment.^[46] In the Volga region, the printing press started with Alexander I's decree in 1801. Asian publishing (*Aziatskaya Tipografiya*) provided books for the Muslims of the region until it merged with the Kazan University printing facilities. Gasprinskii established the first Muslim publishing company in 1881. By 1896, a publishing company was established to publish the newspapers *Nur* and *Duma* by Ilyas Mirza Boraganski and Ataullah Bayezidov in St. Petersburg. After 1905, Muslim owned printing companies and newspapers flourished.^[47]

From 1802, the year of the first book published with the permission of the Muslim Religious authority, to 1917, tens of Muslim owned printing companies and millions of published books show that Russian authorities' were the first driving force for Muslim publication. Russian authorities' suspicion over the Muslim population prevented them from allowing Muslims to operate a printing press or publish publications freely. For example, the first newspaper in Tatar permitted by authorities was published on September 2, 1905, coinciding with the 1905 Russian Revolutions.^[48] Many attempts to establish such a newspaper had previously been rejected by the Russian regional authorities:

Among all the *Inorodtsy* living in Russian lands these people (Tatars) were went too far developing their language and religion. Developments on the Language and literature among *Inorodtsy* will help them gain self-confidence on the political issues.^[49]

The Russian government's tendency towards its non-Russian population is to give controlled and limited freedoms. At the same time, fear of discontent and revolutionary movements forced them to relinquish such rights.^[50] Later, liberalization of the Russian political and social systems

offered new opportunities for non-Russians; 1905 was the turning point for the *inorodtsy*.^[51]

According to Charles Kurzman, the printing press and publications constitute a modern language among Muslim societies. Historical writing, philosophy, and reformist religious texts were the first step in the creation of the modern language, followed by spreading new ideas to a broader population.^[52] This pattern is accurate for almost all the Muslim societies. Kurzman’s categorization seems true in the case of Volga Muslims. Starting with traditional religious narratives and moving to secular, political newspapers and journals, the printing press and publications played a crucial role for Volga Muslim modernization.

Economic Developments

The Industrial revolution in Russia accelerated after the 1890s and became the fastest growing economy in Europe. Growing Russian industry and commerce allowed for many places in the country to join the economic system. In Russia, the traditional system mainly consisted of a peasant economy. Approximately 96% of Muslim communities in the Volga-Urals region (Tatars, Bashkirs, and Kazaks) worked in farming and livestock production. Two major exceptions were the Azerbaijanis, working in the oil industry, and the urban Tatars, who had trade privileges bridging Central Asia and Russian Europe.^[53] Being on major trade routes, the Volga region attracted Russia’s attention. After 1840s, Kazan became a center for the textile industry. Close to both Central Asian cotton fields and railway routes, the Volga region of central Russia became a key industrial center.^{[54] [55]}

By the mid 19th century, the Tatar commercial and industrial bourgeoisie increased in numbers. According to statistics, in 1851, the number of Muslim Traders was very high in Kazan and Orenburg. Although they were not of the highest rank, mid and low income traders were higher than Russians in number.

Table 1. Muslim Bourgeoisie Income Compared to Christians (Russian and others)

Regions	Christians			Muslims			Muslim/Christian Ratio			General M/C Ratio
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	%
Penza	1	39	1399	0	0	189	0	0	11.8	11.6
Samara	0	27	5057	0	0	608	0	0	12	12
Viatka	15	101	1843	1	0	122	0.6	0	0.6	0.6
Kazan	24	90	1341	9	40	713	27	31	35	34
Orenburg	12	43	1259	0	6	1746	0	12	58	57
Tobolsk	27	60	747	3	7	922	9	9	12	9

Figure: Muslim and Christian Merchants in Volga-Urals regions in 1851^[56]

Aleksandr Benningsen notes that Islamic mobility in Siberia and Central Asia developed in parallel with the growth of the Muslim bourgeoisie.^[57] Muslim merchants supported reformist movements, the education of Tatar youth, the establishing of *madrasas* and modern schools, the publishing of newspapers and journals, and the founding of philanthropic centers.^[58]

Conclusion

Ilya Gerasimov states that Russian agriculture professionals were sent to the Volga-Urals region for agricultural reformation among peasants, planning to train local cadres for that purpose. The young Turko-Muslim intellectuals were not very enthusiastic about farming, however; they generally “preferred other forms of public activism in politics or literature.”^[59]

Although Muslim intellectuals had close contact with villagers, they had little interest in modernizing their lives or production styles. Their main concern was to establish a Muslim identity.^[60] Another problem of miscommunication was that the majority of rural professionals did not know Turkic languages. To find a solution, they tried to train locals, but disinterest in a Turkic Muslim education prevented this project from being successful. Sultan-Girei Taichinov was the only known exception. He graduated from agricultural school and became an agronomist in the district of Belebey in 1907. He started as a lecturer in the Tatar language, and after three years stepped down to a less active position. Other than Taichinov, local Muslim elites had no interest in professional careers.^[61] Russian officials’ and *zemstvo* professionals’ efforts to mobilize Muslim villagers did not meet with success.

There are several reasons for these results. First of all, the semi-nomadic culture of animal herding had a long tradition, and it was very difficult to change. No immediate improvements had been seen using new techniques. Secondly their distrust of Russians, a centuries-long enemy, prevented them from believing that Russians were doing something for their good. Third the government efforts coincided with the efforts of the Orthodox Church’s Christianization activities, and the Orthodox Church’s aggressive attacks on Islamic tradition gave rise to Muslim suspicion over the government’s activities as well. Finally, from living under Russian rule for over 400 years, the Tatar social structure was shaped differently from that of political or economical class systems. Prince Bariatinskii, Vice-Regent of the Caucasus, in his memorandum concerning internal conditions in the Caucasus wrote on July 10, 1859:

With the fall of the aristocracy, the population, which had until then been broken into separate communities as a result of the continual dissensions among their rulers, thus presenting us with the most convenient situation for the establishment of our rule, coalesced into a single spiritual nationality, making it for one man [Shamyl] to become the secular and spiritual leader of the entire territory. ...We must endeavor above all to restore the upper class wherever its traces are still preserved.^[62]

Conditions were similar in the Volga region. After the annexation of Kazan by Ivan IV, the nobility forced many citizens to convert to Christianity to maintain their privileges. After a while, the nobility mixed with Russians. For a long time, the only people who demonstrated power over Muslims of the region were independent religious scholars. The established societal structure led to Catherine II appointing a religious authority over Muslim population, strengthening the traditional relationship over Muslims of the region.

In the 19th century, some secular institutions were established in the region under the efforts of the Central Government. Therefore secularly educated intellectuals entering the scene was not enough to mobilize the society toward modernization. Modernization and nationalization were carried out by the religious elites. By being in the periphery, for a long time, Muslims lived in relatively independence from the state. The only connection between the people and the government was the religious authority [*Muftiat*], though the Muftiat’s control over the people was limited to religious affairs. Tatar merchants had enjoyed trade privileges in their region since before the time of

the Golden Horde, and the region was a major trade center between the Russian core and Eastern centers.

Considering all these facts, establishing a civil society was not a primary issue for the Volga Muslims. Their primary concerns were their political and social independence through national and religious consciousness, as for all colonial nationalities. Although they were in the same geographical area, Russians and Muslims under Russian rule faced different conditions during the process of modernization.

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^[14]Joseph Bradley, “Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy in Tsarist Russia,” 1094.

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