



Marriage as a Mechanism of Power in Regency Era in Quinn's *Bridgerton the Duke and I*

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-04-22 Revised: 2026-05-15 Accepted: 2026-05-19</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Liberal Feminism;</i> <i>Marriage;</i> <i>Power Mechanism;</i> <i>Regency Era,</i> <i>Women</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10237</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Putri Ayresti Sukmaningsih putriayresti@students.unnes.ac.id English Literature, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Jawa Tengah</p>	<p><i>This study examines marriage as a mechanism of power in the Regency Era in Julia Quinn's novel <i>Bridgerton: The Duke and I</i> (2000). It explores the representation of marriage in the novel, the construction of power through marriage, and the implications of this construction for women's positions. This study employs a qualitative approach through close textual analysis using John Stuart Mill's liberal feminist theory. The primary data are obtained from the novel, and the secondary data are taken from journal articles, books, and other sources related to the topic. The findings show that marriage is not just an individual's relationship, but it is also portrayed as a social tradition, a life purpose, a continuation of lineage, and an economic status. Through its romantic narrative, marriage eventually operates as a form of power in Regency society through social pressure, reproductive obligations, legal and economic authority, and limitations on women's life choices. This power construction shapes women's positions, thus leading some female characters to resist rather than passively accept this marriage power. This study suggests that marriage in the novel is not only depicted as a romantic relationship but also as a mechanism of power that shapes women's lives.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Marriage is a form of relationship grounded in commitment and affection, regardless of the presence or absence of children (Vitayala & Candraningrum, 2024). In this modern era, there should be equality of rights and responsibilities between husband and wife in a marital relationship, for instance, in choosing career paths, dividing household chores, and parenting the children (Cornell Law School, 1999). However, the practice of marriage does not necessarily reflect these principles. The relationship

between men and women in marriage has most likely been shaped by social norms and structures, resulting in a division of labor and authority (Garfield et al., 2023; Fernandez, 2025)

This condition is more clearly described in history, such as in Regency Era England. During this period, women were placed in a subordinate position and had limited access to education, careers, and social authority (Hashmi et al., 2023). Moreover, women were not entitled to receive an inheritance from their families; thus, the only way for them to lead a decent and prosperous life was to marry a wealthy man (Badjinki, 2019). Marriage was used to transfer wealth and social status, not merely about emotional attachment between husband and wife (Dashwood & Lipsedge, 2021). This situation also encouraged many parents to matchmake their daughters with wealthy men, although marriages were not founded upon love (Benton & Keister, 2017; Marrero, 2016).

This practice creates a power imbalance in marriage in which men hold primary authority over domestic life, while women are placed in a submissive position. This phenomenon not only occurs in real life but is also reflected in literary works. Society constructs and normalizes power within marriage, and this has long been a subject explored through storytelling, as literature serves as a mirror that captures social realities. Considering that literature is a representation of social life, it becomes a valuable lens through which power dynamics can be examined and critiqued, including the power within the institution of marriage (Laeli et al., 2024).

Therefore, the issue of unequal power relations in marriage is frequently explored in various literary works (Noor, 2019). This issue becomes a central theme in many literary works, specifically in the novels set in the Regency Era, such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen. These novels depict how women are positioned under the patriarchal system and how they cope with restrictions within marriage (Husain, 2020; Zhou, 2016)

Although feminism has grown rapidly in this modern era, the power relations in marriage have not completely vanished. In the contemporary era, the Regency Era setting is portrayed in the novel *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000). This novel is written by Julia Quinn and focuses on the romantic relationship of Daphne Bridgerton in the midst of the English Aristocracy (Harries & Sanders, 2023). As a work presented in a romantic manner, the Regency Era setting still conveys social values and structures that shape relationships among the characters.

This novel is popular in many countries, having already been translated into several languages, including Indonesian. Its popularity has increased significantly since the Netflix series adaptation was aired in 2020. According to Netflix, *Bridgerton* series has become one of the most-watched series in its history. This adaptation also sparks a popular culture phenomenon that reintroduces public interest in social norms of the Regency Era (Taddeo, 2023). This achievement shows that the issues of marriage, social class, and gender relations in a historical context are still relevant and significant for examination within modern social structures.

Several studies have examined many aspects of *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000). Camilo & Menezes (2024) and Pokulevska & Nazaryan (2024) examine the novel from a translation perspective. These studies analyze aspects of semiotic translation and substitutional strategies in the translation of English into other languages. Fatharani (2022) and Widayanti (2021) examine aspects of the novel's characters: the psychology of the main male character and the romanticization of women's innocence in marriage. There is also a discourse analysis conducted by Rusdianti (2023).

In terms of gender studies, Gayà (2022), Isabell (2023), Ivana (2023), and Vitayala dan Cahyaningrum (2024) contribute to examining gender inequality, forms of discrimination against women, and patriarchy across many aspects, including social, political, work, domestic, and educational fields. Luque (2023) also highlights the romantic aspect, examining romantic relationships in this novel.

Although several studies have contributed to revealing various forms of gender inequality, these studies tend to focus on the general representation of gender issues and have not specifically examined marriage as a mechanism of power formation and its implications for women's position using John Stuart Mill's liberal feminist perspective. This theory is used because it addresses marriage as an institution that supports gender inequality. Mill also states that women's oppression is not a natural condition, but it is from social and cultural construction, with the way power operates in marriage.

In response to this gap, this study applies John Stuart Mill's Liberal Feminism theory, from *The Subjection of Women* (1869), to focus on answering the following aspects: 1) How is marriage depicted in the Regency Era in the story?, 2) How is power constructed through marriage in the Regency Era in the story?, 3) What are the implications of this power construction on the position of women in the Regency Era in the story?

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze marriage as a mechanism of power in the Regency Era setting of *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000). According to Creswell (2018), a qualitative approach is used to examine texts, employing interpretive methods to comprehend meaning. Because this study focuses on the analysis of a literary work, a qualitative approach is considered suitable for identifying and interpreting how power is constructed through the institution of marriage in the story. The object of this study is *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000) by Julia Quinn. The primary data are drawn from the novel, especially the sections that portray marriage as a mechanism of power and its implications for women's positions in the story.

The criteria for data selection are passages that 1) describe marriage as traditions, norms, and expectations, 2) depict power dynamics between men and women, and 3) reflect the implications of the power dynamics on women's positions. The secondary data are obtained from articles, academic journals, and theoretical books relevant to the topic and its research questions, specifically regarding marriage in the Regency Era in the novel *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000), being analyzed.

The analytical framework of this study is John Stuart Mill's Liberal Feminist theory, drawn from his book *The Subjection of Women*. Mill argues that women's oppression is not a natural or biological condition; it exists because of societal norms and customs. Mill also states that one institution, such as marriage, perpetuates gender inequality through legal, economic, and social mechanisms. This theory provides an analytical foundation for examining how marriage operates as a mechanism of power. Data collection is conducted through several steps: 1) a close reading of the novel is conducted to identify quotes that demonstrate powerful constructions within marriage, 2) the identified passages are then classified into recurring themes based on the same characteristics, 3) the classified data then are interpreted using John Stuart Mill's Liberal Feminism to explain how marriage is depicted as a mechanism of power in the novel and how this power construction influences women's positions. It is important to acknowledge that, as a qualitative study employing a close reading, this research is interpretive in nature.

The findings reflect the researcher's analytical interpretation of the text using Mills' Liberal Feminist theory and do not claim to represent an exhaustive or objective reading of the novel.

3. Result & Discussion

This section presents the results of the data analysis to address the research questions, beginning with the representation of marriage, then the construction of power through marriage, and finally the implications for women's positions in the novel, using John Stuart Mill's Liberal Feminism.

The Representation of Marriage in the Regency Era in the Story

Social Tradition

Marriage in the novel *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000) is not only described as an individual's life choice but also as part of social tradition in Regency society. One representation in the novel is the existence of a marriage market in *The Season*. *The Season* is an annual social gathering, and the sequence of events is balls, dinners, and other social gatherings (Bohang et al., 2025). In the novel, this event serves not only as socialization but also as a public introduction of young eligible women who are already suitable for marriage.

"London is awash these days with Ambitious Mamas at Lady Worth's ball last week. This Author saw no fewer than eleven Determined Bachelors, cowering in corners and eventually fleeing the premises with those Ambitious Mamas hot on their heels."
(*Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000), page 27)

Through this finding, it can be interpreted that *The Season* is not merely a space for socialization; it is also an annual social event held to find partners through a marriage market. This tradition is evident in how mothers actively participate in finding suitable husbands for their daughters. Marriage market functions as the primary arena for the formation of marriage as a social tradition widely practiced and embedded in the lives of Regency society. Therefore, marriage is not only about an individual's romantic relationship, but also related to the customs and social norms of Regency society in *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000).

Life Purpose

In addition to being depicted as a social tradition, marriage is also portrayed as one of the primary goals of Regency society. This desire arises because the universal tradition of marriage has previously shaped their perspectives on life. One representation described in the novel is Daphne's desire to marry and live happily.

Simon looked at her thoughtfully. "Do you want to marry?"
"Well, of course." Her face registered her surprise. "Doesn't everyone?"
"I don't."
She smiled condescendingly. "You think you don't. All men think they don't. But you will"
(*Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000), page 96)

The finding shows that Daphne assumes everyone shares the same goals as her. This can be seen in her spontaneous response to Simon's question, which is not necessarily something that needs to be asked, since marriage is something that will happen to everyone. When Simon emphasizes that he does not want to get married, Daphne reaffirms the idea that all individuals, including men, are destined for marriage, particularly since Simon is a duke with a noble title and high social status in society. This finding indicates that the novel presents marriage as a life purpose sought by Regency society, offering either a sense of certainty in life or emotional and romantic fulfillment. Marriage is also socially constructed as an inevitable life goal to the point that refusing marriage is something unusual.

Lineage Continuation

Marriage is also portrayed as the formation of a family through the continuation of the lineage. This is reflected in some characters' statements.

She snapped back to attention and looked back at his face, her dark eyes meltingly honest. "I want a husband. I want a family. It's not silly when you think about it. I'm fourth of eight children..." (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 97)

Daphne not only wishes to have a happy marriage, but also to form a family with children. Her desire arises from her background, being born into a large family; thus, she has always imagined that marriage is a space to form a similar family. Another representation can also be seen in Simon's father.

"I have a son!" he boomed. "A perfect little son!" And while the servants cheered and wept with relief... (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 11)

Through these findings, it can be seen that marriage in the novel is portrayed not only as an individual's relationship but also as a means of continuing the family by having children. Regency society widely anticipated the existence of a child to continue the lineage, making it one of the main purposes of marriage. Therefore, marriage is also presented as an important way for lineage continuation.

Economic Status

Marriage is also represented in relation to someone's social status in Regency society. In this case, family background and social status are important considerations in choosing a partner. This is evident in several characters who frequently consider the prospect of marriage. The presence of a character like Simon Basset, the Duke of Hastings, attracts many mothers to bring their daughters closer to him because of his elevated social status.

And so, two hours later, Simon, he'd been introduced to every unmarried lady at the ball, every mother of every unmarried lady at the ball, and of course, every older married sister of every unmarried lady at the ball. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 74)

This portrayal suggests that people in the Regency Era tend to evaluate individuals based on their social status. Someone in an elevated status, such as a duke, is the most sought-after person to become a suitable husband. Thus, the novel also describes marriage as an economic status.

The Construction of Power through Marriage in the Regency Era in the Story

Marriage in *Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000) is narrated through romantic tropes; however, upon closer examination, the novel reveals the power that operates subtly in marriage and remains unnoticed by the characters. Like the concept of power that can influence individuals across many aspects of social relations, the institution of marriage can also create power that shapes and influences individuals' roles and positions within the marriage.

Marriage and Social Powers

Marriage as a mechanism of power can be seen through social pressure. One of the social pressures operates through the marriage market. The marriage market is a social arena shaped by the institution of marriage. Before marriage, women are already subjected to pressure to present themselves in the best possible way in order to attract potential partners, such as through beauty, propriety, and domestic skills. This is demonstrated in the passage below.

"Prudence is quite accomplished on the pianoforte," Mrs. Featherington said, with forced brightness. Simon noted the oldest girl's pained expression and quickly decided never to attend a musical chez Featherington. "And my darling Philipa is an expert watercolorist." Philipa beamed. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 77)

The finding demonstrates that the marriage market in *The Season* forces women to prepare themselves in terms of appearance and abilities to attract men's attention. This can be interpreted to mean that what women do, from the way they present themselves, behave, to skills such as playing instrumental music and engaging in literature, is not merely for themselves, but rather to fulfill social expectations and men's preferences. Thus, social practices such as the marriage market in *The Season* can be understood as mechanisms that direct women's behavior in preparation for marriage.

The mechanism of power in marriage also operates through social gossip, which extends marriage's role in controlling women's behavior. In the novel, *Lady Whistledown* is a popular anonymous writer from a society gossip column. Gossip is not only utilized as a source of information in this case, but it is also used as a social control to regulate women's behavior, particularly in matters related to marriage.

"The new Duchess of Hastings was spotted in Mayfair today. Philipa Featherington saw the former Miss Daphne Bridgerton taking a bit of air as she walked briskly around the block." (*Lady Whistledown's Society Paper*) She left Castle Clyvedon the day after Simon's departure, heading to London with every intention of returning to Bridgerton House. But going back to her family's house somehow seemed like an admission of failure, and so at the last minute, she instructed the driver to take her to Hastings House instead. (*Bridgerton: The Duke and I* (2000), page 327)

Daphne remains unable to escape gossip even after her marriage. Her marital issue even becomes public scrutiny, placing her at a disadvantage because she is a woman. As a result, she strives to behave carefully in accordance with the prevailing norms and social expectations to preserve her reputation. This scene indicates that gossip in the novel operates as a mechanism of power that enforces women to remain compliant with marital norms.

Through these representations, marriage can be understood as a mechanism of power that operates through social pressure, indirectly shaping and directing women's behaviour in accordance with prevailing social norms. This aligns with Mill's perspective in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), in which he describes such a phenomenon as the "bondage of custom," where social pressure becomes internalized and operates effectively without being visibly coercive, yet still compels women to conform without the need for physical force.

Marriage and Reproductive Obligation

Power constructed in marriage is also reflected in the reproductive obligation that is imposed on women, particularly among aristocrats. The aim is not merely to have a child, but rather an obligation to bear an heir to ensure family lineage and the continuation of the title.

After the fifth pregnancy, which had ended with a bloody miscarriage in the fifth month, surgeons and physicians alike had warned their graces that they absolutely must not make another attempt to have a child. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 9)

Simon's father has always wanted to have a son because he needs an heir to continue the family title. His obsession intensifies to the extent that he forces his wife to fulfill his desire without considering her condition. From this statement, it can be concluded that, in the novel, men exercise control over their wives' bodies. Siring an heir serves as an obligation that must be complied with by wives under any circumstances without regard for their condition.

Reproductive decisions in the novel are also evident; there is power constructed through marriage. This is presented in the relationship between Simon and Daphne, as depicted in the narrative.

*"I told you that before we married. I gave you every option to back out. Don't you forget that," he said hotly. "Don't you dare forget it."
"You made me feel sorry for you!"
"Oh, now, that's what a man wants to hear," he sneered. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 293)*

Simon said that if Daphne wants to marry him, she needs to accept that he cannot have children. In reality, Simon lies to her. He does not want to have a child because of his childhood trauma. He makes a unilateral decision without Daphne's consent, and he even manipulates her into believing that, from the beginning, everything is Daphne's mistake.

Through these descriptions, it can be seen that reproductive decisions are controlled by men, either through direct force or more subtly, which may not be recognized as coercion. In some cases, this control operates implicitly, so that women may not realize it also constitutes pressure. When these expectations are not met, women face burdens, blame, and even male anger. Fundamentally, reproduction should be a matter of women's choice, as it is directly related to their bodies. This reflects Mill's view that marriage has the power to cause women to lose their autonomy, including control over their bodies and reproductive decisions (Mill, 1869).

Marriage and Legal Economic Power

The power of marriage is also constructed through legal and economic authority that binds women throughout their lives. Before marriage, women in the novel are not even represented as holding authority over themselves. All things, such as marriage

preparation, including dowry, are under their fathers' or eldest brother's authority. Women do not have the right to live by their own choices. It is as depicted in the novel.

Much to Anthony's surprise, Simon had refused to accept even a penny as dowry. Finally, the two men had decided that Anthony would put the money his father had put aside for Daphne's marriage in a separate estate with himself as the trustee. It would be hers to spend or save as she liked. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 227)

After marriage, women are also illustrated as if they are legally and economically owned by their husbands, which means that women do not have the right to defend themselves or live according to their own choices.

"You have chosen to withhold something from me. Well, I have chosen to withhold something from you. Me." Daphne.

"Get out of my room." Simon started to shake with rage, "I own this room," he growled. "I own you." (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 307)

From the finding, it indicates that men utilize their economic power to suppress women's resistance. The aim is to remind women of their positions, forcing them to comply in marriage because they are not financially independent and lack economic support. This is consistent with Mill's critique of the doctrine of coverture, which subsumed women's legal identity under that of their husbands. This explains that marriage has the power to regulate ownership, limit women's legal autonomy, and create economic dependence (Mill, 1869).

Marriage and Restrictions on Women's Life Choices

Marriage as a mechanism of power also operates through restrictions on women's life choices, one of which is restriction to education. In the novel, women have limited access to proper education; even reading is considered an uncommon activity and is socially discouraged for women. This situation is stated by Daphne.

"If you spend time on a ship, you learn."

"Well, I'm afraid it wasn't the sort of thing one learned in the Bridgerton nursery. Most of my learning was restricted to what my governess knew."

"Pity," he murmured. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 145)

Based on the data, when examined more closely, this restriction is not simply prohibiting women from studying, but is also one of the means to ensure that women do not have another option besides marriage. With limitations on education, marriage holds the power to prevent women from being financially and intellectually independent. Thus, women must marry and comply with marriage norms (Mill, 1869).

The Implications of the Power Construction on Women's Position in the Regency Era in the Story

The power mechanism of marriage in the novel impacts women's lives and positions in Regency society. Women face subordination, objectification, and dependency on men. These effects are interconnected and reinforce one another, creating a condition in which women do not fully hold authority over themselves. However, women characters are not described as passively accepting this condition; they engage in forms of resistance. According to Mill's Liberal Feminism (1869), women have the same capacity as men; therefore, they are entitled to the same freedom in their lives.

Resistance to Marriage Market Pressure

The form of resistance depicted in the novel is Daphne's refusal to be a passive party in the marriage market. She realizes that the marriage market has positioned women as passive parties to be chosen, without having the right to decide which man they prefer. Consequently, Daphne enters a fake courtship with Simon. The purpose is to attract many suitors after ending the fake courtship so that she has the opportunity to choose a man who meets her criteria or whom she loves. This scene is depicted in the novel.

“Meaning?”

“If all the world thinks I intend to make you my duchess, all of those men who see you as nothing more than an affable friend will begin to view you in a new light.” Her lips pursed. “Meaning that once you throw me over, I shall have hordes of suitors at my beck and call?” (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 102)

The scene shows that Daphne's action is not a common strategy, but it is also a form of resistance since she lacks the freedom to choose a partner based on love. Essentially, she does not reject the idea of marriage, but she ensures that marriage aligns with her desires rather than conforming to the existing Regency-era marital norms, which are already embedded with power.

Resistance to Career Limitations

The presence of Lady Whistledown in the novel serves as a form of resistance to the limitations on women's careers. When women are not allowed to have careers publicly, Lady Whistledown presents herself as an anonymous female writer with significant influence over society through her works.

Fashionable London was positively addicted to Lady Whistledown's Society Papers. The mysterious newspaper had arrived on the doorstep of every member of the ton three months earlier. Everyone forked over their pennies, and somewhere, some meddling woman was getting very rich. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 25)

This scene demonstrates that Lady Whistledown's anonymity is a significant indicator of power dynamics in Regency society. The reason she must conceal her identity is to write and publish freely because the system does not provide a legitimate space for women. Thus, her anonymity is not a sign of weakness but a strategic act of resistance, a way to subvert a system that would otherwise silence her. Her choice to remain anonymous can be interpreted as a form of resistance that exposes the limitations imposed on women by the system and demonstrates women's ability to find ways around those limitations. This finding also indicates that women are capable of making an influence and have intellectual and capacities that should not be suppressed by the system (Mill, 1869)

Resistance to Educational Limitations

Women also engage in resistance due to educational limitations. This scene is seen in Daphne, who has the habit of visiting the library when she wants to learn something. Although the book collection is limited to history and literature, which aligns with what is considered appropriate for women in that era, Daphne still seeks to make use of what is available in the library to expand her knowledge.

If there was something that interested me, I could usually find several books to read on the topic in our library."

"What, then, were your favorite subjects?" "Hmm, oh, history and literature. Which was fortunate, since we had no end of books on those topics." (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 145)

This passage shows that women's desire to obtain education cannot be restricted by anything else. Daphne's action in seeking knowledge, although she is under limitations, demonstrates that she refuses to remain ignorant and solely preoccupied with marriage. Instead, she seeks knowledge in order to avoid being entirely compliant within the institution of marriage.

Resistance to Reproductive Control

The most explicit form of resistance depicted in the novel is Daphne's challenge to Simon's control over reproductive decisions. After discovering that Simon was lying to her, that he does not want to have a child but claims that he cannot have one, Daphne takes action to fulfill her desire to have children, as depicted in the novel.

He saw the expression of pure ecstasy on her face, and then he suddenly realized that she had done this on purpose. She had planned this. Daphne had aroused him in his sleep, taken advantage of him while he was still slightly intoxicated. (Bridgerton: The Duke and I (2000), page 321)

The data show that Daphne bravely takes action against what she believes is wrong. She does not passively accept the fact that reproductive decisions are under male control. This action demonstrates that women attempt to reclaim their reproductive rights, which should belong to them, rather than merely complying with a marital system that grants power to men. However, it is important to acknowledge that while her action can be read as a reclamation of reproductive autonomy, from the foundation of liberal feminism, individual autonomy and freedom apply to both men and women. This complexity invites a deeper understanding of how the power that operates in marriage can lead someone to engage in ambiguous actions.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzes marriage as a mechanism of power in the Regency Era in *Bridgerton The Duke and I (2000)* by Julia Quinn. Although the story is presented as a romantic narrative, marriage is portrayed not only as a relationship between two individuals but also as a social tradition, a life purpose, a means of lineage continuation, and an economic status in Regency society. These representations are analyzed using John Stuart Mill's liberal feminist perspective to examine how power is constructed through marriage. The analysis demonstrates that this construction of power shapes women's positions and, in turn, gives rise to various forms of resistance by female characters.

This study contributes to feminist literary criticism by using Mill's liberal feminism as an analytical tool to examine power dynamics in marriage in historical romance fiction. These findings carry broader implications for readers of historical romance fiction. One that encourages readers to recognize and question the power that has historically shaped women's lives and may continue to influence contemporary understandings of marriage and gender roles.

This study is limited to a single novel, and the findings cannot be generalized to other historical romance novels. Future researchers may consider comparing *Bridgerton* and *The Duke and I* with other contemporary romance novels to examine how power

dynamics in marriage have evolved over time, or apply different feminist perspectives to deepen the analysis of gender relations. Additionally, this study affirms that what *Bridgerton, the Duke and I* novel reveals is that behind every love story might lie a power story, and that, through deeper understanding, the full complexity of women's lives, then and now, can be understood.

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