

Peripheral Selection of V δ 1⁺ Cells with Restricted T Cell Receptor δ Gene Junctional Repertoire in the Peripheral Blood of Healthy Donors

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Summary

To characterize the T cell receptor (TCR) repertoire expressed by the V δ 1⁺ γ/δ T cell population, we have studied the V δ 1-J δ 1 junctional sequences from peripheral blood samples of healthy donors. We show that, surprisingly, this repertoire is restricted in most healthy adults, with a donor-specific and relatively stable pattern, whereas this repertoire remains unrestricted in infants, and is similar to that of thymocytes. These data contrast with the general assumption that the junctional repertoire of V δ 1⁺ γ/δ T cells is extensive, and strongly suggest that peripheral recruitment of V δ 1⁺ cells bearing particular TCR occurs in humans during the postnatal stage.

The majority of peripheral blood (PB)¹ T cells express the TCR- α/β and use this receptor to recognize peptides presented by the products of the MHC polymorphic genes. A minor population of T lymphocytes express another TCR composed of γ and δ chains (TCR- γ/δ). The diversity of this latter TCR is mainly due to random and clone-specific nucleotide sequence deletions/additions that occur at the V(D)J junctions or CDR3, based on analogy with Ig genes. It is generally assumed that this diversity is fundamental to the establishment of the antigen repertoire of these cells (1). Circulating human γ/δ T cells fall into two distinct subsets expressing reciprocal profiles. The major one (>70% of γ/δ T cells in most adult individuals) (2) coexpresses the V γ 9 and V δ 2 variable gene segments, whereas the minor one uses a V δ 1 gene that is usually rearranged to the J δ 1 junctional segment and is mainly paired with a V γ gene other than V γ 9 (3). The latter is the predominant γ/δ subset found in the human thymus (4) and large intestine (5). To date, very little is known about the biology of these cells (6).

To define the TCR- δ repertoire of V δ 1⁺ cells, we have characterized the V δ 1-J δ 1 junctional diversity in the PB of healthy donors. We show that the junctional repertoire of normal infants displays extensive diversity, whereas this repertoire is restricted in most healthy adults with a donor-specific

and relatively stable pattern. These data strongly suggest that peripheral selection occurs in the postnatal period.

Materials and Methods

Donors and Cells. Blood samples were obtained from 29 healthy adult blood donors. Cells from two pediatric thymuses (obtained from children undergoing heart surgery) and PBL from healthy infants ($n = 8$; 5-d-24-mo-old) and children ($n = 6$; 25-72-mo-old) were studied. Four umbilical cord blood samples were also used in some experiments. Immunophenotypes of fresh or frozen PBMC were determined by direct fluorescence analysis on a FACScan[®] flow cytometer (Becton Dickinson & Co., Mountain View, CA) using the FITC- δ TCS1 (V δ 1-J δ 1/J δ 2 specific) mAb (3) from T Cell Sciences (Cambridge, MA). The V δ 1⁺ cell count was found to be normal in all cases ($n = 20$).

PCR Analysis of V δ 1(D)J δ 1 Junctional Sequences. Genomic DNA from PBL was phenol-chloroform extracted. Total cellular RNA was isolated by the Chomczynski and Sacchi method (7) using RNeasy (Qiagen, Crawley, UK). cDNA were synthesized from 1-5 μ g of total RNA using random hexanucleotide primers and Moloney murine leukemia virus reverse transcriptase in the presence of RNasin (Promega Corp., Madison, WI). RNA were primed at 42°C for 30 min in a final vol of 20 μ l. PCR reactions (8) were performed in a thermocycler (Perkin-Elmer Corp., Norwalk, CT) using either whole cDNA or 500 ng of genomic DNA, 2.5 U of Taq DNA Polymerase (Perkin-Elmer Corp.), and 25 pmoles of each primer. Amplifications were carried out in a total vol of 100 μ l containing 67 mM Tris-HCl (pH, 8.8), 16.6 mM (NH₄)₂SO₄, 6.7 mM MgCl₂, 10% DMSO (vol/vol), and

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper: AJO, antijunctional oligonucleotide; PB, peripheral blood; PBL, peripheral blood leukocyte; SSCP, single-strand conformation polymorphism.

1 mM of all four deoxynucleotides. Amplifications before single-strand conformation polymorphisms (SSCP) analysis (9) were performed with α -[32 P]dCTP (Amersham International, Amersham, Bucks, UK). The reaction mixture was heated at 94°C for 7 min and 57°C for 2 min in the first round of denaturation and annealing. Afterward, 35 cycles were performed (50 s at 94°C, 50 s at 57°C, and 50 s at 72°C). The last cycle was followed by an incubation at 72°C for 7 min. The sequences of the specific primers used are as follows: V δ 1, 5'-AAAGTGGTCGCTATTCTGTC and J δ 1 5'-GGAAAAGGAACCCGTGTGACT (10).

Extensive precautions were taken to minimize carry-over of amplified DNA (11).

PCR Analysis by PAGE and SSCP. PCR products were analyzed by 6% PAGE, visualized by ethidium bromide staining, and then transferred to a nylon membrane (Hybond N; Amersham) in 20 \times SSC. For SSCP analysis, after ethanol precipitation, products were applied on a nondenaturing 6% polyacrylamide gel and run at 4 W at room temperature (9).

Cloning and Sequencing. The amplified products were purified from 6% PAGE and the appropriate sized bands were cut out and extracted overnight in Maxam-Gilbert buffer (12). After two ethanol precipitations, the purified product was filled-in with Kleenow followed by kinasing with T4 polynucleotide kinase and ATP. After phenol and chloroform extraction, the blunt-ended and kinased inserts were ligated into the SmaI site of M13mp18. The plaques were screened with a 32 P end-labeled oligoprobe recognizing V δ 1 sequences located 3' to those specific for the V δ 1 amplicon (5'-AAAGCAGCGAAATCCGTCGCCTTA). Filters (Hybond N; Amersham) were prehybridized for 4 h at 55°C in 2 \times SSC, 5 \times Denhart's solution, 0.1% SDS, and then hybridized overnight in the same solution with addition of the oligoprobe. The filters were washed in 2 \times SSC for 15 min at room temperature, and twice in 2 \times SSC, 0.1% SDS for 15 min at room temperature, and then again at 55°C for 20 min. The washed filters were exposed for 4–16 h to Kodak XAR-5 film at –80°C with intensifying screens. Clones containing appropriate inserts were picked out at random. Single-stranded DNA clones were prepared and sequencing was done by the dideoxy chain termination method using Sequenase version 2.0-kit and universal M13 primer (United States Biochemical Corp., Cleveland, OH).

Results

Restriction of the V δ 1-J δ 1 Junctional Diversity in Adults. To define the CDR3 repertoire of normal V δ 1-J δ 1 rearrangements, the junctional sequences from two pediatric thymocyte samples and 29 unselected healthy adult donor peripheral blood leukocytes (PBL) were amplified by PCR. Sizes of amplified products were analyzed by PAGE. Representative experiments are shown in Fig. 1.

As expected, in the case of postnatal thymocytes, major variations of PCR product size were observed, leading to a smearlike electrophoresis pattern due to the extensive junctional diversity of TCR- δ rearrangements (13).

In marked contrast, very different results were obtained with healthy donor PBL (Fig. 1). A smearlike pattern similar to that observed in thymus DNA was found in only 8 of 29 cases. Predominant rearrangements were present in the other cases. Each pattern appeared to be specific for a given individual and was reproducible in independent PCR performed at least twice in two different laboratories (data not

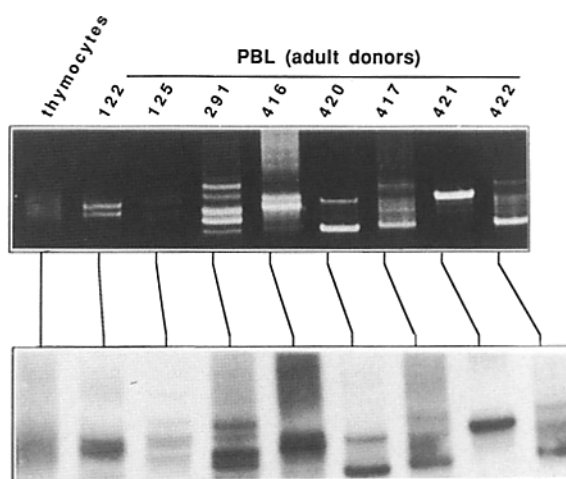


Figure 1. PCR analysis of the peripheral blood V δ 1-J δ 1 CDR3 repertoire from healthy adult donors. PAGE of PCR-amplified V δ 1-J δ 1 junctions. (Top) Ethidium bromide staining. Highly restricted patterns are observed in cases 122, 291, 416, 420, and 421. The sample 422 is characterized by a smearlike pattern associated with a predominant band. A predominantly unrestricted pattern is observed in cases 125 and 417. (Bottom) Hybridization of the blot with a V δ 1 probe.

shown). The PAGE pattern did not correlate with the V δ 1 $^{+}$ cell count (data not shown).

To assess whether the predominantly amplified band(s) correspond(s) to repeated junctional sequences and not merely to junctions of identical size, genomic DNA PCR products obtained from eight adult donors, selected to be representative of restricted and unrestricted PAGE patterns, were cloned and sequenced (Fig. 2). Diverse and nonrepeated V δ 1-J δ 1 sequences were found in the two samples displaying a predominantly nonrestricted PAGE pattern (samples 125 and 134). Conversely, repeated junctions were observed in all six cases demonstrating a more or less discrete V δ 1-J δ 1 PAGE pattern (Figs. 1 and 3, and data not shown). None of these sequences were shared by different donors. The predominant rearrangement in most cases includes extensive random nucleotide deletions/additions and the use of D regions. In all but one case (sample 127), repeated sequences were in-frame and could therefore encode a functional δ chain. In one case (sample 119), cloning procedures were used on both DNA- and cDNA-derived V δ 1-J δ 1 PCR products. The same predominant V δ 1-J δ 1 junction was observed in both experiments (of 14 cDNA PCR-derived clones hybridizing to an internal V δ 1 probe, 8 also hybridized to an antijunctional oligonucleotide (AJO)-specific for the predominant DNA junctional sequence), suggesting that the restricted sequence may be expressed at the cell surface of at least a part of the V δ 1 $^{+}$ γ/δ T cells in this donor.

An alternative strategy based on SSCP was used to confirm the CDR3 restriction in selected samples, including three samples also studied by sequence analysis. PCR carried out with α -[32 P]dCTP were performed on genomic DNA and the resulting products fully denatured. One aliquot was loaded as a control on a high resolution denaturing acrylamide gel and another aliquot on a nondenaturing one to analyze single-

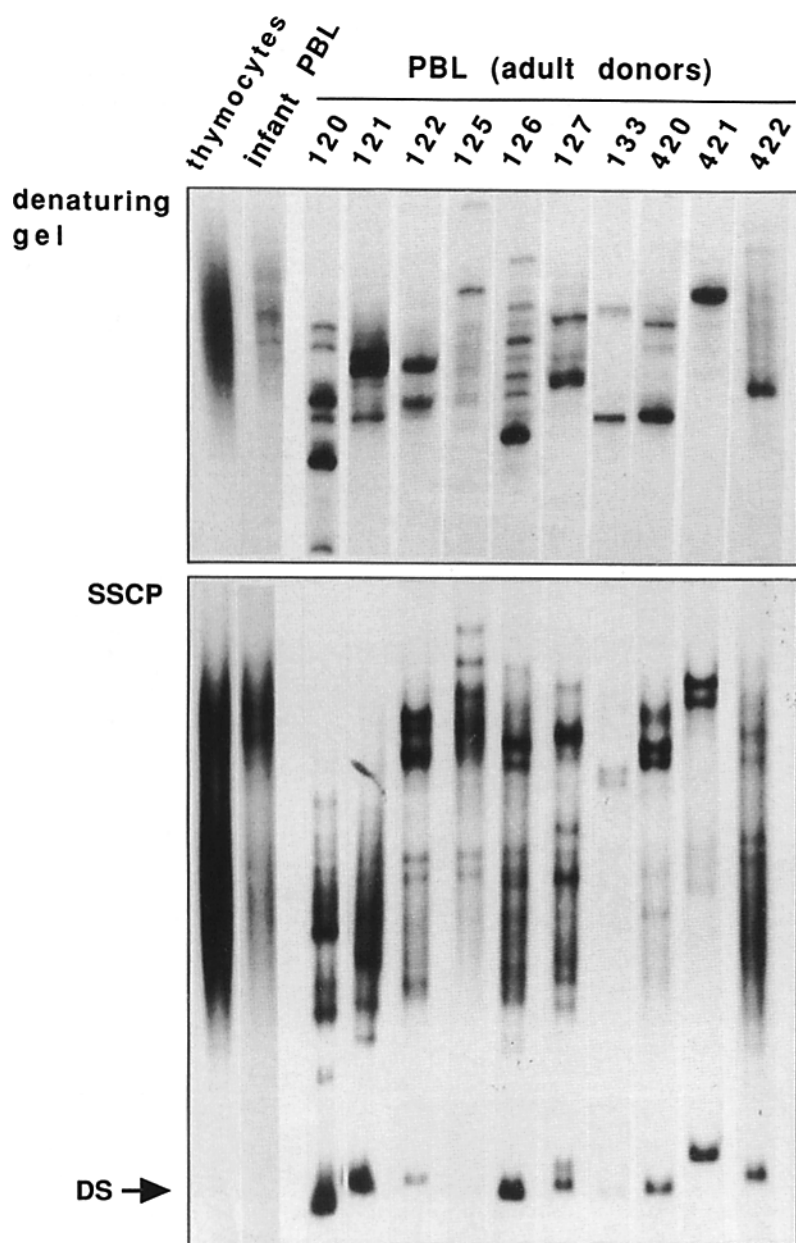


Figure 3. Demonstration by SSCP analysis of the presence of restricted junctional sequences. (*Top*) Electrophoresis on denaturing gels used as a control for the presence of junctions with identical sequences and/or sizes. (*Bottom*) SSCP analysis. (DS) double-stranded DNA. Single-stranded DNA predominantly migrates at the top of the gel and the smear of heteroduplexes is predominantly found in the middle part of the gel. Note the lack of discrete bands in lanes corresponding to thymocyte and 655 (3-mo-old infant) PBL DNA.

analyze the stability of the V δ 1-J δ 1 CDR3 repertoire, sequential studies were performed in six healthy adult donors (Fig. 5).

In one of these (sample 813), a complex unrestricted PAGE pattern was evident, that remained unchanged 15 mo later.

In the five other donors (samples 119, 120, 127, 811, and 815), a more or less restricted repertoire was documented. In three cases (samples 119, 120, and 127), the PAGE pattern was again found to be identical 4 yr later. V δ 1-J δ 1 fragments amplified from two 119 samples taken at 2-yr intervals were hybridized with the AJO specific for the predominant and formerly identified sequence. As shown in Fig. 5, the same dominant junctional sequence was found. In the sample 811, the PAGE pattern was roughly similar at 3-yr intervals, al-

though some alterations could be observed. Contrasting with these findings, significant alterations were documented in the last case (sample 815).

Unrestricted V δ 1-J δ 1 Junctional Repertoire in Infants. We wondered whether the nonrandom presence of certain V δ 1 junctions might be related to the donor's age. To answer this question, PB from 5-d-24-mo-old infants ($n = 8$) and from 25-72-mo-old children ($n = 6$) were evaluated. Four umbilical cord blood samples were also studied. Representative experiments are shown in Fig. 6 and all data are summarized in Table 1.

Samples from infants aged <2 yr and umbilical cord blood samples display a smearlike PAGE pattern, comparable with

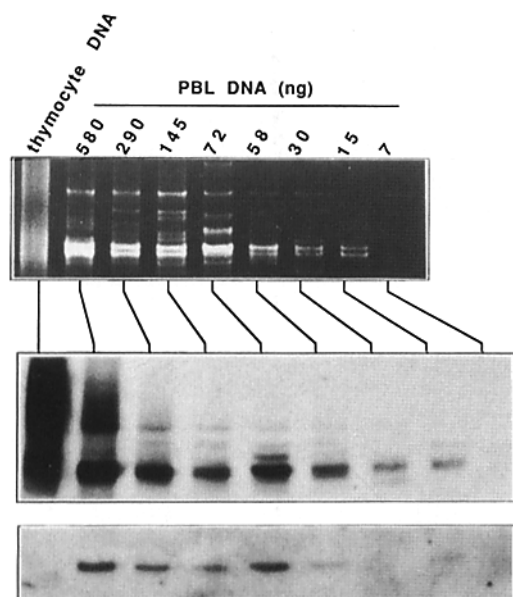


Figure 4. Dilution analysis of the V δ 1-J δ 1 predominant sequence in the 119 healthy donor. (Top) Ethidium bromide staining. (Middle) Hybridization with a V δ 1 probe. (Bottom) Hybridization with a clone-specific AJO recognizing the predominant sequence AATCAAGTTTCCGCGGCCCC.

that found in thymic cells (Fig. 6). V δ 1-J δ 1 PCR products from two samples, 649 (2-mo-old) and 655 (3-mo-old) were sequenced. As expected from the PAGE pattern, no repeated sequences were found (Fig. 2). One sample (sample 655) was also studied by SSCP analysis. As expected, a smearlike pattern was observed (Fig. 3).

In four children (36–60-mo-old), an unrestricted pattern was found. A discrete band associated with a predominantly

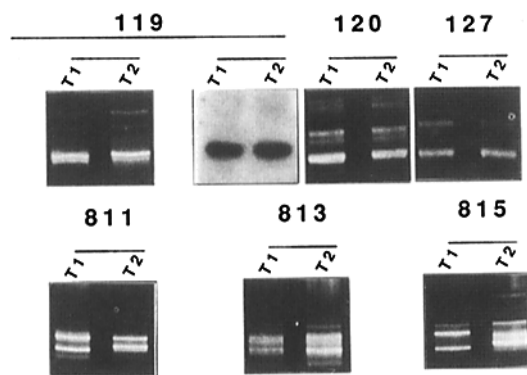


Figure 5. Sequential analysis of the V δ 1-J δ 1 CDR3 repertoire in healthy adult donors. PBL DNAs from donors 119, 120, 127, 811, 813, and 815 were analyzed on two separate occasions (T1, T2). Delays between T1 and T2: 119, 24 mo; 120, 44 mo; 127, 44 mo; 811, 36 mo; 813, 15 mo; and 815, 44 mo. Ethidium bromide stained gels are shown in all cases including 119 (119, left). (119, right) Southern analysis of PCR products with a clone-specific probe corresponding to the predominant junctional sequence characterized in sample T1 after cloning and sequencing (see Fig. 2 and the legend to Fig. 4 for the relevant sequence). An identical PAGE pattern was documented in a sample from the donor 119 taken 43 mo after T1 (data not shown).

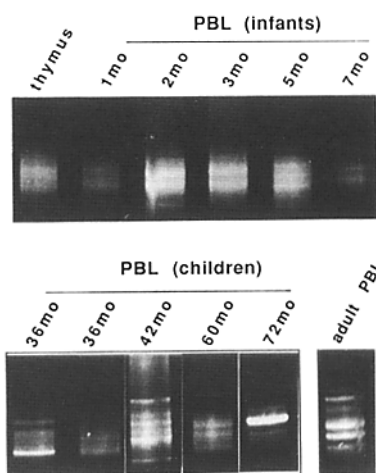


Figure 6. V δ 1-J δ 1 CDR3 repertoire in PBL from infants and children. Ages are indicated in months. Thymic DNA (3-mo-old child) and one PBL DNA samples from an adult donor (sample 291) are included as controls.

unrestricted pattern was documented in two donors (25- and 36-mo-old). Finally, a clearly restricted repertoire is evident in the sample from the oldest child (72-mo-old).

As is shown in Table 1, there is an evident increase in the number of individuals demonstrating a restricted repertoire with increasing age.

Collectively, these data clearly demonstrate that a restriction of the PB lymphocyte V δ 1-J δ 1 junctional repertoire is frequent among healthy donors, that this restriction is acquired during the postnatal period, and finally, that this repertoire is generally a stable feature. These results are strongly suggestive of a postnatal positive selection process involving V δ 1⁺ γ/δ T cells expressing specific CDR3 sequences.

Discussion

In this work, we have characterized the TCR- δ gene diversity in the PBL of healthy donors. We have demonstrated that the V δ 1-J δ 1 junctional repertoire is restricted in a majority

Table 1. Correlation between the V δ 1-J δ 1 Junctional Repertoire and the Donor Age

	Total number of cases	Number of cases with a restricted PAGE pattern
Umbilical cord blood	4	0
Infants (5 d–24 mo)	8	0
Children (25–72 mo)	6	3*
Adults	29	21

* Includes two cases with a discrete band associated with a predominantly unrestricted pattern.

of healthy adult donors, leading to a relatively stable and donor-specific pattern. Moreover, we have also shown that this repertoire is not restricted in the PBL of infants, and is therefore similar to that observed in postnatal thymus.

It is generally assumed that γ/δ T cells function as a first line of defense against infectious pathogens. The nature of presenting molecules that may be potentially involved in antigen recognition is unclear, at least for the majority of γ/δ T cells, although evidence for allorecognition of MHC class I (15) and II (16), and of other less polymorphic molecules (17–19) has been documented. A few examples of clones recognizing nominal antigens in the context of MHC molecules have also been described (20, 21).

Little is known about the function of the V δ 1 subset. It has been shown, however, that the binding to V δ 1⁺ cells of a V δ 1-specific mAb elicits Ca²⁺ signaling and cell proliferation (22), and that activated V δ 1⁺-expressing clones are cytolytic and can secrete IL-5, IFN- γ , and GM-CSF (23). Moreover, TCR-dependent recognition of CD1c (17) and CD48 (TCT.1) (18, 19) molecules by V δ 1⁺ cells has been documented. More recently, it has been shown that the V δ 1⁺ subset of γ/δ T cells may be triggered to proliferate by cell-cell interaction with EBV-infected Burkitt's lymphoma cells or EBV-transformed B cells (24).

The new molecular data we have obtained regarding V δ 1⁺ cells in healthy donors are consistent with the involvement of V δ 1⁺ cells in the recognition of processed peptides. Peptide plus MHC recognition by α/β T cells is mainly mediated by the V(D)J junctional CDR3 (25, 26), and the role of TCR- γ/δ junctional sequences in the specificity of antigen recognition has been recently stressed (27). In the present work, we have shown that V δ 1-J δ 1 junctions, while displaying the extensive alterations of germline sequences that are characteristic of post fetal stages (14), are not randomly represented among PBL V δ 1⁺ cells in a large fraction of healthy donors. The description of such repeated sequences in the PBL of healthy donors is unprecedented since only a few V δ 1-J δ 1 sequences have been published to date (28–31). Two studies showed an unrestricted repertoire in PBL from patients and

normal controls, but predominant sequences in acute multiple sclerosis (29) and leprosy lesions (28), respectively, suggesting in situ selection of particular V δ 1⁺ cells by so far undefined antigens. One further study demonstrated a restricted V δ 1 repertoire in the peripheral blood of certain patients with rheumatoid arthritis but not in four healthy controls (30). However, it is worth noting that a recent report of preferential V δ 1-J δ 1 junctional repertoires in sarcoidosis, demonstrated a repetitive sequence in cDNA from the PBL of one of the normal control (31).

The occurrence of dominant receptors in PBL demonstrated here may be due to thymic selection, since it has been suggested that negative thymic selection of a limited part of the γ/δ T cell population can occur in appropriate transgenic mice (32). In addition, it is generally assumed that V δ 1⁺ PBL derive from the predominant V δ 1⁺ thymic γ/δ T cell subset. On the other hand, the hypothesis of thymic selection of defined V δ 1-J δ 1 junctions is not substantially supported by our demonstration that these junctions are not restricted in infant PBL, in whom the pattern is roughly similar to the one observed in thymus. The age corresponding to the switch between an unrestricted and a restricted repertoire remain to be determined. However, it is worth noting that a clearly restricted repertoire was documented in a 72-mo-old child in our series. We therefore favor the hypothesis that the restricted repertoire we have found in the majority of healthy donors is due to a recruitment of γ/δ T cells that express particular V δ 1-J δ 1 junctions. A similar mechanism has been speculated to occur in the case of murine pulmonary γ/δ T cells with canonical invariant TCR- δ sequence (33). Since the deduced CDR3 amino acid sequences vary from one donor to another, the results suggest that these cells recognize a limited number of nominal antigens, distinct from one donor to another, and presented by nonclassical proteins like the CD1 family. Alternatively, these antigens may be similar in all donors, but could be presented by highly polymorphic molecules. Studies of identical twins should be performed to further clarify this point.

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