



Adriana Merta-Staszczak<sup>1</sup>

## Rhododendrons in residential parks on Polish territory during the 19th and 20th centuries

### Abstract

Rhododendrons were a precious ornament of gardens and parks created in the ancestral homes and manor houses in the Polish lands, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. The seedlings came mainly from two places: the German nurseries of Seidl, and Polesie Volyn. However, the maintenance of the parks depended on the material situation of their owners, and the events of the First and Second World Wars devastated the country, causing not only material damage but also considerable social impoverishment. Two land reforms, involving the division of large estates (1920) and their nationalization (1944), also had a significant impact. Left unattended, the houses and their surroundings were often destroyed. As a result, after 1945, rhododendrons survived only in a few places, apart from landscape areas, reserves and arboretums.

**Keywords:** history, rhododendrons, azaleas, parks, cultural heritage

### Rhododendrony jako element parków rezydencjonalnych na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku

#### Streszczenie

Różaneczniki były cenioną ozdobą ogrodów i parków zakładanych przy siedzibach rodowych i magnackich na ziemiach polskich, szczególnie w XIX i XX wieku. Sadzonki pochodziły przede wszystkim z dwóch miejsc: niemieckich szkółek Seidla oraz Polesia Wołyńskiego. Utrzymanie parków było jednak zależne od sytuacji materialnej ich właścicieli, a działania I i II wojny światowej spustoszyły kraj, powodując nie tylko zniszczenia materialne, ale też znaczne zubożenie społeczne. Istotny wpływ miały także dwie

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<sup>1</sup> Dr hab. Adriana Merta-Staszczak, prof. uczelni, Katedra Systemów Zarządzania i Rozwoju Organizacji, Wydział Zarządzania, Politechnika Wrocławska, Wybrzeże Wyspiańskiego 27, 50-370 Wrocław, e-mail: [adriana.merta-staszczak@pwr.edu.pl](mailto:adriana.merta-staszczak@pwr.edu.pl), nr ORCID: 0000-0002-2692-1057.

reformy rolne związane z parcelacją wielkich majątków (1920 r.) oraz ich upaństwowieniem (1944 r.). Pozostawione bez opieki założenia rezydencjonalne wraz z otoczeniem często ulegały zniszczeniu. Między innymi z tego powodu po 1945 r. różaneczniki przetrwały w niewielu miejscach oprócz terenów krajobrazowych, rezerwatów i arboretów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** historia, rododendrony, azalie, parki, dziedzictwo kulturowe

## Introduction

Parks and gardens, now considered historical objects and protected areas, were created around royal residences, castles, palaces, manor houses, the residences of aristocrats and nobility, and monasteries. In the 18th century the Renaissance and Baroque styles were replaced by landscape parks and naturalistic and romantic gardens, and in the 19th century English and eclectic parks appeared on Polish soil (Drzał 1975). The creation of aristocratic residences and their surroundings had to follow certain rules, both in terms of the layout of the buildings and the variety of trees and shrubs. The building had to be built on a hill, facing the sun and protected from the wind by dense vegetation. Examples of manor park situated in this way can be found in Kielce, Galicia and Podolia (Jankowski 1888).

The ideal location was a gentle slope of the hill leading to a magnificent pond at the forest line. Such residences were especially recommended for people who needed rest, peace and isolation. Similar places, with surrounding gardens, were located in Soltanovka near Kyiv and Smarzynets near Rozan (today's Ukraine) (Jankowski 1888). A wide path was to lead from the manor house, while on the other side of the building there was space for a veranda and a magnificent garden. The creation of gardens at ancestral seats had a long tradition in the Polish lands, fuelling national pride and even taking on a patriotic dimension, as it was pointed out that aristocratic gardens predated the English tradition of landscape gardens (Gołębiewski 1884). In 19th and 20th-century Polish gardening textbooks, the creation and maintenance of gardens at aristocratic residences was seen not only as a matter of aesthetics, but also as an almost spiritual experience. One described the need to create gardens: "If man were to live by bread alone then we would convert churches into mills and theatres into bakeries. (...) Well, flowers have this wonderful property that they facilitate the ordinary man's poetry, and sometimes prayer, turn thoughts to beauty, and sometimes raise it to God" (Gałczyński 1929). It should be remembered, however, that the upkeep of a 19th-century palace or manor house was very expensive. The family residences were usually imposing, repeatedly rebuilt, and the surrounding gardens and parks covered an average of several to a dozen hectares, embellished with fountains, pavilions, monuments, gates and fences.

The article describes the influence of selected factors on the preservation of residential gardens, and especially the rhododendrons found in them - considered one of the most valuable species, and analyzes the situation of three properties under conservation protection: the Książ castle, the palace in Ząbkowice Śląskie and the Cistercian monastery in Henryków. The source basis for the study was primarily diaries, gardening manuals from the 19th century and early 20th century and the archives of Książ Castle and Pszczyna Castle. To verify the current presence of rhododendrons in historical layouts, a search was conducted in the National Heritage Institute's (NID) database, focusing on dendrological documentation and conservation measures. Analysis of the results shows that only a small proportion of the original plantings have survived to this day.

## Rhododendrons as part of gardens of the aristocracy

Izabela Czartoryska wrote about her love of gardens at the beginning of the 19th century, and included foreign varieties of azaleas in her catalog of trees, shrubs and plants and flowers - white azalea (*azalia viscosa alba*) with spotted leaves (*foliis variegatis*), crimson for growing in conservatories, (*nudiflora carnea*), frieze (*crispa*), smooth (*glauca glabra*), moss (*tomentosa*) and Polish varieties from Volhynia – yellow azalea (*pontica*) and red (*rubra*) (Czartoryska 1805). The most widespread variety, the yellow azalea, was described as follows: “the leaf bright and prominent, the flower yellow, delicious, abundant and fragrant” (Czartoryska 1805).

Also, in other publications of the period, it was recommended to plant a range of shrubs including rhododendrons and azaleas in parks and gardens (Jankowski, 1888). The 19th-century handbook provides a detailed description of the rhododendron and advice related to its planting: “Woody plants with persistent foliage, not easy to cultivate, which, however, they fully deserve for their rich bloom and general appearance, unusual in our climate and country, where persistent-leaved plants are rare. Some of them come from the Alps, others from America, others from the Caucasus and Siberia, and finally others are hybrids obtained by gardeners, especially Ghent gardeners. The latter are distinguished by their beautiful flowers. From rhododendrons create clusters of different varieties and species, among which you can also mix azaleas. We usually consider them part of the flower garden and plant them near the house, as they can be a real decoration. They are best suited for a position be-

tween or even under trees, especially conifers, which protect them from the midday sun. (...)” (Jankowski 1888). The description also continues to list individual species with their characteristic features, also providing an interesting source of information on which species were particularly recommended to maintain home gardens: “Of the species, *R. brachycarpum*, Don., Japanese, withstands the Petersburg winter (under snow); *R. chrysanthum*, Pall., blooms yellow; *R. caucasicum*, Pall., whitish yellow or red; *R. ferrugineum*, L., dark pink, alpine, excellent for dressing rocks; *R. hirsutum*, L., pale pink, also alpine; *R. maximum*, L., alpine, red, greenish, yellow or purple flowers, from it numerous varieties; *R. metternichii*, Bl., Japanese, taller than others, with few but large pink flowers; *R. ponticum*, D.Don. up to 2 m. tall bush with pale purple flowers, in numerous garden varieties pink, flesh-colored, white and purple, most often cultivated.” (Jankowski 1888)

The plants were brought to Polish soil from Seidel's nurseries, famous in Europe, established in the village of Grüngräbchen in Upper Lusatia. German horticulturist Rudolf Seidel has grown 600 new frost-resistant shrubs there since 1877 (Karczmarszuk 2010). Among other things, plants were obtained from this place for the owner of Wojsławice, Fritz von Oheimb. From the seedlings brought in 1899-1918, a total of 60 plants survived the next several decades, forming the beginning of the “national collection of rhododendrons Seidl in Wojsławice” (Karczmarszuk 2010). The second place where these plants were grown was Volyn Polesie. Dionizy Mikler discovered the yellow rhododendron there in 1795 and then propagated it in an orangery in Pulawy and sold it on the London Stock Exchange (Dubiel, Piorecki 2011). The distribution of the yellow rhododendron in Volhynia was also the result of the activities of the Krzemieniec Lyceum (1806–1832), where famous botanists worked, including Willibald Besser and Antoni Andrzejowski (Dubiel, Piorecki 2011). The plant, transplanted from the forest, was accepted in gardens, and its cultivation made it possible to obtain a large number of seeds, which were sold in Europe (mainly in Germany, France, England, Belgium) in the early 19th century.

As a result of the First and Second World Wars, the material situation of the manor owners in the Polish lands deteriorated considerably. In the inter-war period, after regaining its independence in 1918, Poland had to solve many economic, social and political problems, the most serious of which were the devastation of the country caused by military operations, and the accompanying poverty. Many valuable gardens were destroyed and landowners had no money to maintain their estates. Court gardeners lost their jobs and in 1925 their situation was described as fol-

lows: "The destruction and decline of gardens entails a grave tragedy for the state of gardening, for the multitude of court gardeners who have already lost their jobs, have had to move on to other professions, or on the ruins of their dwellings, greenhouses and plantations, are living a miserable life in hopeless work, trying to rebuild from nothing, at least a fraction of the former glory of their beloved workshops. (...) The so-called good jobs are becoming fewer and fewer, more and more gardens are winding up ornamental departments, and unless this ceases, the humble and socially lowly position of court gardeners may fall completely." (Kubik 1925).

The war years and subsequent period of attempted national reconstruction meant that the protection of monuments and scenic areas was way down on the list of government priorities. Parks were subject to the laws of 1928 (Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 6 marca 1928 r. o opiece nad zabytkami, DzU 1928, nr 29, poz. 265.), 1933 (Ustawa z dnia 25 stycznia 1933 r. o zmianie rozporządzenia Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 6 marca 1928 r. o opiece nad zabytkami, DzU 1933, nr 10, poz. 62.) on the protection of historical monuments, and 1934 on the protection of nature (Ustawa z dnia 10 marca 1934 r. o ochronie przyrody, DzU 1934, nr 31, poz. 274).

Interwar regulations indicated the need for the legal protection of old gardens, avenues, orchards and individual trees. However, while efforts were made to secure the most important architectural monuments and to reclaim works of art confiscated during the partitions and the war, parks and gardens were in a completely different situation. They were neglected, greenhouses were not heated, and valuable trees, which were both building material and fuel, were cut down (Kubik 1925). Some of the parks at mansions were transferred to state ownership and used as city parks, but this was only in the case of those located in metropolitan areas. In contrast, rural estates were usually left unattended. Also at a disadvantage were harsh weather conditions, to which most ornamental garden plants were highly susceptible. The highest daily air temperature in Centigrade was recorded on July 29, 1921 in Prószków near Opole (40.2 C) and on July 30, 1994 in Słubice (39.5 C). In contrast, the lowest daily temperature was recorded on February 10-12, 1929 in Żywiec (-40.6 C) and January 11, 1940 in Siedlce (-41 C). Equally severe was the so-called "winter of the century", which was recorded in 1929. Siberian frosts brought with them temperatures as low as -45 C and snow blizzards paralyzing communications and even cutting off cities (including Ternopil) (Relacja prasowa z zimy 1929 w Polsce, 1929). Such low temperatures destroyed the planting complexes of many garden and park layouts.

A change in the way farms were run, financial shortages, and the parcelling out of land brought about by the 1920 (Ustawa z dnia 15 lipca 1920 r. o wykonaniu reformy rolnej, DzU 1920, nr 70, poz. 462) agrarian reform meant that ornamental gardens persisted mainly around the great magnate residences and depended on the property status of their owners

However, the large estates divided in accordance with the land reform were no longer self-sufficient. In estates of less than 50 hectares in the 1920s, the production of basic agricultural products notably declined. The role and importance of such estates was diminishing. They were losing their function as centers of agricultural knowledge and culture, and, in view of the reduced amount of land, it was harder for them to make a living. This led to a significant impoverishment of the nobility and, consequently, a lack of sponsors and protectors of unique park and garden settings. One of the few surviving photographs from that period, testifying to the maintenance of rhododendrons in the palace garden, is a photo of the park of a residence in Zielin (Western Pomerania) from 1919, in which the dominant feature was these plants (*Park pałacowy...*, sygn. 3/8/0/37/5). In the same year the estate was parceled out among the villagers, and Count Gerd Finck von Finkenstein donated the palace for educational purposes (an agricultural school for girls was established there) (Pałac Zielin). This suggests that the garden underwent many changes and that the rhododendrons have not survived. Another place about which archival materials survived was the residence of the Szembek family in Poręba near Alwernia (Poręba Żegoty, Małopolskie Voivodeship). In the park there, in addition to a collection of magnolias, there was a “large group of swamp (*Azalea pontica*)” (Jankowski 1922).

In 1928, seedlings were brought from Volhynia to his forests and nursery at the Ujazd palace in the village of Małecz by Count Jan Krystyn Ostrowski (Kurzac, Olaczek 1995). They were described in the press of 1938: “His nurseries are not established for commercial purposes for profit. But it is an ideological object, not reckoning with the significant costs of maintenance and the contribution of a huge amount of energy and knowledge, just to give the countrymen the opportunity to get acquainted with the wealth of flora, setting prices for them as low as possible and accessible to every pocket” (Makowiecki, 1938). From the crops of Count Ostrowski, around 1935 the yellow rhododendron was transferred to the “Blue Springs” reserve near Tomaszów Mazowiecki (Kurzac, Olaczek 1995).

## Rhododendrons as an element of garden design on selected examples

During World War II, most of the parks and gardens in Poland were devastated due to warfare, the predatory exploitation of the forest, the lack of any care, and deliberate destruction. Due to the lack of protection and the natural and uncontrolled development of plants (degeneration, excess, overgrowth, defects) (Chrabelski, Ciołek 1949), gardens also lost their original stocks.

In September 1944, the temporary executive authority of the Republic of Poland, the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), issued a manifesto announcing economic and social reforms and the establishment of a state and territorial governmental organisation. Former estates of more than 50 hectares were nationalized. In addition to agricultural land, palaces, manor houses, castles, farm buildings and historic parks were taken over as part of the reform. Across Poland, this amounted to some 20,000 historic properties (Pruszyński 2001). These buildings thus lost their former rightful owners. The situation was similar in the modern-days areas of Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine, which were then a part of the Russia's sphere of influence. The situation was completely different in France and England, where historic buildings usually remained in the hands of their original owners or were returned to them (Rosłon-Szeryńska, Łukaszewicz, Fortuna-Antoszkiewicz 2020). Historic properties in Poland were in a very peculiar situation: on the one hand, they were a public good as part of the cultural heritage, and on the other hand, they were owned by the state, but assigned to many different departments. Parks and gardens changed their function and were often used for cultural and educational purposes as well as for recreation. However, as in the case of historic houses and their settings, their use and protection were determined primarily by their utility rather than their historic value.

In the early post-war period, parks in housing estates were subject to inter-war legislation and the Nature Conservation Acts of 1949 (Ustawa z dnia 7 kwietnia 1949 r. o ochronie przyrody, DzU 1949, nr 25, poz. 180.) and 1950 (Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 1 kwietnia 1950 r. w sprawie organizacji Państwowej Rady Ochrony Przyrody. DzU 1950 nr 13, poz. 127). The 1950 Act established the State Council for Nature Conservation and the Nature Conservators, who were subordinated to the Ministry of Forestry and assigned to individual voivodeships. In the immediate post-war years, however, the conservation services carried out work to protect the most important historical monuments in individual regions.

In terms of the number of objects saved and renovated in the first decade, parks and gardens accounted for only 1.3% (Guerquin 1974). The group included parks in Wilanów, Warsaw, the Saxon Garden, Łazienki and Królikarnia, as well as Nieborów, Arkadia, Rogalin, Natolin, and Łańcut. At the end of the 1960s, among the parks belonging to the zero, first and partly second categories of monuments – 67 parks were in good condition, 63 in fairly good condition, 30 were undergoing reconstruction, conservation and adaptation works, and 100 parks required conservation (Guerquin 1974). However, these were only approximate figures, as there were no detailed inventories of the parks. However, in terms of usage, there were 50 public, recreational city parks, 9 public recreational parks in rural areas, 13 public parks in spas, 10 parks at holiday homes (with limited access), 16 parks at sanatoriums, hospitals and nursing homes (open only to patients), 32 parks at schools and universities, 21 parks at museums, 3 parks at government residences, 26 parks at scientific institutions, 7 monastery gardens, 43 parks at state farms and forester's lodges, while 30 parks had no users at all (Guerquin 1974). The register of parks from the 1970s includes a list of parks in individual Voivodeships, together with their state of preservation and dendrological information. According to this, the parks with clusters of rhododendrons were mainly those located in the Lower Silesia region: Laskowice Oławskie (now Jelcz Laskowice) used by the Institute of Soil Science and Plant Cultivation (a large proportion of acclimatized species were kept there, including rhododendrons), Stradomia Wierzchnia belonging to the State Farm (Syców) with plants including native and foreign species, old yews, rhododendrons, and Szczodrowice (Oleśnica) with a large number of rhododendrons. rhododendrons), and Szczawno Zdrój managed by the State Health Resort Company, which contained native and foreign species, including rhododendrons and azaleas (Drzał 1975). The list includes three parks that are part of historical sites under the care of a conservator – Książ (Wałbrzych district), Kamieniec Ząbkowicki and Henryków (Ząbkowice district).

The history of rhododendrons in the historic castle in Książ is connected with Prince Jan Henryk XI Hochberg von Pless (1833–1907), during whose reign invoices for seedlings imported from Berlin have been preserved (Sakowska 2017), and Jan Henryk XV von Hochberg, Duke von Pless (1861–1938) and his wife Maria Teresa Oliwia Hochberg von Pless (1873–1943), the famous Duchess Daisy. They imported professional gardeners to look after the gardens and the park, transforming them and, above all, keeping them interesting. In 1847, 25 shrubs of various varieties of azaleas were imported to Książ from the park in Małomice

(Brzezowski, Jagiełło-Kołaczyk 2010). The plant list of 1865 included 114 varieties of azaleas and 63 varieties of rhododendrons, as well as camellias (144 varieties), geraniums (45 varieties) and fuchsias (34 varieties) (Brzezowski, Jagiełło-Kołaczyk 2010).

The expansion of the park at the turn of the 20th century was of great importance to the growing rhododendron collection. A path with stone bridges was built and the slopes were planted with rhododendrons (Eysymontt, Eysymontt 1993). Rhododendrons and Pontic azaleas, which flower in white, pink and red at the end of May and beginning of June, were also planted in the shade of spruces, larches, firs, pines, sycamores, elms and oaks (Szyperski 1983). They were mainly imported from the nurseries of T.J. Rudolf Seidel, who named one of the varieties he bred in 1902 "Daisy". This plant was created by crossing the Caucasian rhododendron Smirnov with the English variety "Mrs. Milner". In 1911–1913, the owners of Książ built a palm house in the nearby village of Lubiechów, next to which they planted a Japanese garden, a rosarium, a vegetable garden, and a part of it was reserved for the cultivation of thousands of rhododendrons and pontic azaleas for the use of the residence in Książ (Brzezowski, Jagiełło-Kołaczyk 2010). The rhododendrons were a unique decoration of the garden, but also undoubtedly one of Duchess Daisy's favourite shrubs. In her diaries, the aristocrat wrote: "And now I must tell you a little about my own 'secret garden' in Książ. On both sides and at the end there were double herbaceous borders, separated by strips of short lawn, with sundials in the centre. Here and there sculptures peeped out from behind the clipped yew hedge. At the back of the farthest bed I planted all kinds of lilacs, azaleas, golden chains, fragrant jasmines, Japanese quinces, white and pink hawthorns, and other flowering trees and shrubs, which at the end of May and in June surrounded her with a wonderful frame of colour" (*Lepiej przemilczeć, Prywatne pamiętniki Księżnej Daisy von Pless z lat 1895–1914*, 2013). The princess was often photographed and painted surrounded by rhododendrons. In 1906, Reginald Arthur's 1896 painting of Daisy with her black dog Fien was repainted and the dog was replaced by a bouquet of azaleas (Borkowy 2021).

The bankruptcy of the Hochbergs, the takeover of the palace in 1941 and the conversion of the palace for military use by the Third Reich meant the end of the famous gardens. The estate remained in a state of disrepair until the early 1960s, caused by German rebuilding, the stationing of the Soviet army there and the subsequent lack of maintenance.

The palace in Kamieniec Ząbkowicki was funded by a Dutch duchess, Marianne Wilhelmina, née Oranje. The palace and its gardens were located on a natural hill and covered an area of 126 hectares. In the

1980s, the vegetation consisted of 58 species of deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs (Ciesielski 1994). The greatest variety of species was found near the palace. Among them were valuable specimens of the *Magnolia grandiflora* and two American tulip trees with a trunk diameter of 0.7 meters. On the north side of the palace, there were coniferous trees consisting of yew, pine, Canadian hemlock, giant arborvitae, and false cypress. On the east side, there were rows of hornbeams, Canadian hemlocks and giant arborvitae. The average age of the trees ranged from 70 to 150 years, with the oldest trees, including English oaks, estimated to be 200-250 years old. At the highest point of the park, there was an English-style park, and among the trees, ornamental bushes of the Canadian rhododendron and Pontic azalea survived, planted in large groups or isolated (Grajewski 2014). At the beginning of the 20th century, there were ponds and reservoirs on the site, which also supplied water to the fountains that drained the water back into the valley.

The third listed park was located at the Cistercian abbey in Henryków. The date of the first buildings is unknown, but the oldest parts are estimated to date back to the middle of the 13th century. In the following centuries, the monastery was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Around 1701, a 2.5-hectare abbey garden was established (completed around 1727), which included a summer pavilion, orangeries and a gardener's house (Szymański 1958). Fig, orange and laurel trees, palm trees and myrtles that were several hundred years old grew in the orangery. The other areas were a former baroque garden, an Italian garden, a patio and a landscape park designed by the famous Silesian garden designer Edward Petzold. After World War II, it was planned to plant yews, rhododendrons and begonias in the completely destroyed patio as part of the renovation work, thus complementing the existing plantings (Szymański 1958). In the eastern part of the park, there was a natural hill, on top of which there was a commemorative cross and a marble sarcophagus of the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, Wilhelm Ernst von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, dating from 1923. The square was connected to the road and the road was closed off with stone pillars and decorative cast iron gates. The western gate led to a small garden with catawbiense rhododendrons that has been preserved (Ciesielski, Wrabec 1994). Until the early 1990s, the park underwent some transformations – the layout of the walking paths and the water system were destroyed, part of the clearing was afforested, a housing estate was built, and a transport base of the Forest Transport Center was established in the northeastern part of the park (Ciesielski, Wrabec 1994). The property was taken over by the state and only returned to the church in 1989, but without the park, which still belonged to the Henryków Forest District.

## Conclusion

The diversity of gardens and parks, both in terms of vegetation and the location or use of water – ponds, lakes and pools – favoured the maintenance of rhododendrons in historic architectural complexes. Gardens and parks provided a varied environment, but they also had to be visually pleasing. Monumental oaks and larches, often planted in palace grounds, provided the perfect backdrop for flowering rhododendrons. The Pontic azalea and Japanese rhododendron were particularly popular in historic gardens. These species also appear to be the most resistant to adverse conditions, having survived for decades alongside intensively used historic sites. Unprotected areas were vulnerable to climatic conditions – including the severe frosts of 1928–1929, which destroyed the planting complexes of many historic sites. The preservation of these specific plants reflects a much wider problem, which is the preservation of historic spaces during various crises. The devastation caused by war, the mining of large areas and the need to use historic sites for economic purposes have all contributed to the significant destruction of historic parks and gardens. It is extremely difficult to determine the extent to which ornamental shrubs were used or when they were imported due to the lack of archival material on the subject. It is worth noting that conservation documentation of historic residential layouts rarely specifies the species of ornamental shrubs used, including rhododendrons. These require additional, in-depth dendrological analysis. Dendrological studies and inventories contain only references to the use of rhododendrons in gardens and a few photographs showing their survival. However, some renovation plans, such as those for Książ, have paid attention to restoring 19th-century plant compositions, including rhododendrons.

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