

Divine Election of David in Psalm 78 and the Chinese Notion of the Mandate of Heaven

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Abstract:

This paper intends to revisit the divine election of King David of Judah and the rejection of the house of Israel as presented in the historical recitation of history in the biblical tradition of Psalm 78 from the perspective of the Chinese conception of Mandate of Heaven in the choice or the abandonment of an emperor. The cross-textual approach will be employed to read the rise of the Zhou people and fall of the Shang people in the retelling of the past in the *Book of Songs*. The aim is to understand the process of how God/Heaven is co-opted and politicized to legitimize the sovereign power on earth. Furthermore, some cross-textual insights will be gained from the notion of inconstancy of the Mandate of Heaven, which depends on morality and ethical behavior of the king in power. This will contribute to the discussion of the ideology of an everlasting kingship as developed from the divine promise to David to its reinterpretation at the subsequent historical event of the devastation of nation in the Exile.

Keywords: divine election, King David, Psalm 78, the Mandate of Heaven, *The Book of Songs* (Shijing), Wen Wang of Zhou, cross-textual interpretation, *The Bible* in Chinese context, ideology of kingship

I. Introduction

As a didactic psalm, Psalm 78 is both highly politicized and intensively religious for the edification of the community with the enigmas of history and the riddle (תּוֹדָה) of Israel's memory of the past. The perplexing problem of history is presented as a

paradigmatic lesson (משל). It is striking that at the end of the psalm, the election of David as God's servant, the choice of the tribe of Judah and designation of Mount Zion where God's temple stands, are presented in drastic contrast with the utter rejection of Ephraim, the disfavor of the tribe of Joseph and the desertion of God's former dwelling in Shilo. The celebrative mood in the divine election of David is set against the disastrous departure of God from the sons of Ephraim and the people of Israel. What was the context that has given rise to the election of one people (Judah) and rejection of another (Israel)? This paper proposes to revisit this biblical tradition of Psalm 78 from the perspective of the Chinese conception of Heaven's choice or abandonment of an emperor in cross-textual perspective of the rise of the Zhou people and fall of the Shang people in the retelling of the past in the *Book of Songs*. The aim is to understand the process of how God/Heaven is co-opted and politicized to legitimize the sovereign power. Furthermore, some cross-textual insights will be gained from the notion of inconstancy of the Mandate of Heaven, which depends on morality and ethical behavior of the king in power. This will contribute to the discussion of the ideology of an everlasting kingship in the divine promise to David and its subsequent development in the historical fact of devastation. Since the kings in Judah are designated as Yahweh's chosen ones via David and his dynasty (Psa. 78:70-72; 89:3, 20, 35; 132:1, 10, 17; 144:10) and as Yahweh's anointed (Psa. 2:2; 20:7; 84:8; 89:38,51; 132:10), the fall of Davidic dynasty and the destruction of God's Temple on Zion in 586 B.C.E. called for a theological revision of the eternal validity of the Davidic kingship.¹ In this respect, the Chinese notion of the Mandate of Heaven being not always constant in its support of the dynastic rule in power will lead us to the deliberation of the issue of God's conditional/unconditional promise to David.

II. Psalm 78: The Enigma of Divine Election and Rejection

Ps.78 is a didactic historical psalm with the first section (vv. 1-8) being an invitation of the audience to listen to the teaching (תורה) drawn from a recitation of the past. Verse 1 resembles the opening formula characteristic of the prophetic and wisdom teaching of ancient Israel (Ps.49:1; Isa.28:23 etc.) in the claim for an attentive hearing to what is to be said and taught with regard to God's mighty acts to be known from one generation to another. There are roughly two recitals each of which embodies a twofold rejection, a rejection of God by Israel and then a rejection

1 On the king in the Psalms, see the chapter on "The King" in Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 107-23.

of Israel by God. The recitals are framed between an introductory accusation and eventual forgiveness that leads to a new hope at the end. This pattern can be outlined as below:

	I	I
General accusation	9-11	40-42
God's saving acts	12-16	43-55
Sin & punishment	17-37	56-64
Forgiveness and restoration	38-39	65-72

The response to Yahweh's mighty acts of salvation (78:12-16) is the repeated rebellion of the people. It was intensified in the wilderness (vv.17-29) and even worse after the settlement in the land (vv.56-68). Both of these sections make it clear that the people's sin is directed to the God Most High (v.17, עליון; v.35, אל עליון ; v.56, אלהים עליון).² The ancestors of the audience is strangely referred to as "a stubborn and rebellious generation" (דור סורר ומרה) and the central warning to the present congregation of the children of Israel is in v. 8: "they should not be like their ancestors" (לא יהיו כאבותם). Their ancestors are accused throughout the psalm: they did not keep Yahweh's covenant (10a), they did not stand firm in the law (10b), they forgot God's wonderful deeds of salvation (11), they sinned against God (17), they tempted God (18), they had no faith in His wonderful acts (22, 32), they deceived God (36), they were not faithful to His covenant (37), they rebelled against Him in the desert (40), they provoked Him to anger (41), they did not keep His decrees (56) and finally they roused God's anger with their high places and image worship (58). All these accusations are directed against the sons of Ephraim in verse 9 ("The Ephraimites, armed with the bow, turned back on the day of battle"³) which is one of the keys to the understanding of the theme of this psalm, but unfortunately the verse also presents us with the most serious difficulties. Many scholars think that it interrupts the sequence of thought between v. 8 and v. 10. The verse, therefore, has

2 עליון is an appellation given to Yahweh in the Psalms, especially in the Asaphite Psalms, Pss.50:14; 73:11; 77:10[11]; 78:17, 35, 56; 82:6; 83:19. It is closely connected with Jerusalem, Gen.14:18, 19, 20, 22; Ps.89:27[28]; Isa.14:14; Lam.3:35, 38 etc.). The use of the title implies the Jerusalem setting of this psalm. In v.17 and v.56, "the Most-High" is probably a contrast to the rebellious people. Later in the next section on forgiveness and hope we shall see that the Most High God is understood to be the compassionate God who takes into account man's weaknesses. It is also this God who has chosen David and Zion.

3 Unless specified otherwise, English translation of biblical verses are taken from NRSV.

been considered an insertion.⁴ It is, however, possible to discern the significance of v. 9 in its present position. The verse points forward to v. 57 (“they twisted like a treacherous bow”) and the subsequent rejection of Ephraim and choice of Judah which is the climax of the Psalm (vv. 67-72).⁵ It is difficult to assign any historical situation to the verse and scholars’ proposals are not conclusive and also unnecessary.⁶ It is better to understand the verse generally and figuratively in connection with the accusation of Ephraim in v. 57.

Before we proceed further to discuss the historical context and intention of the psalm, we are to give a tentative date to Ps.78. Though it is difficult to be definite on the dating of liturgical poetry, in the case of the present psalm, certain clues may be considered:⁷

1. The range of history covered stretches from Exodus to the house of David.
2. The Davidic dynasty apparently still in existence.
3. The Solomonic Temple is still standing; at least no evidence of the destruction of the Temple can be found.
4. Nothing is mentioned of the Exile and destruction of Jerusalem, which would hardly have escaped the attention of the psalmist if they were within the historical experience of the people.
5. The general outlook suggests the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.E) and the deliverance of Jerusalem (701 B.C.E.), though these events are not referred to explicitly.
6. Some Deuteronomistic attitudes can be traced such as the condemnation of high places and image worship, etc.

4 Kraus, *Die Psalmen*, 702. Some older commentaries will be used in this article as they are concerned more with philology and historical setting of the Psalms. B. D. Eerdmans proposes that “it is a marginal note inserted by a copyist in the wrong place. Originally it explained v.67 telling why Ephraim was rejected.” *The Hebrew Book of Psalms*, 376. He also raises the questions of no war being mentioned in the context and the fathers of v.8 being the fathers of all Israel. Butterwieser transposes it to follow v.62, see his *The Psalms, Chronologically Treated with a New Translation*, 125, 147.

5 A. Weiser refers to Ephraim as a particularly telling example of the fate of disobedience to God, *The Psalms*, 540.

6 Several attempts have been made in the past; the final battle of Saul on the mountains of Gilboa (Weiser, 540), the refusal of Israel to advance into Canaan after hearing the report of the spies in Num.13-14 (W. E. Barnes, *The Psalms*), the slackness of Ephraim in prosecuting the conquest of Canaan in Judg.1 (A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 467) and the defeat at Ebenezer (1 Sam. 4), see A. F. Campbell, *The Ark Narratives*, 212-16, and “Psalm 78: A Contribution to the Theology of Tenth Century Israel,” *CBQ* 41, 1979, 60-61

7 Some of the clues are listed by A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, II, 562.

7. The divine title of Yahweh, “the Holy One of Israel”, “the God Most High” etc., suggests a Jerusalem setting.
8. There is a clear merging of the two great traditional streams: The Exodus-Wilderness-Conquest tradition and the Davidic-Zion tradition.⁸
9. The psalm shows an explicit didactic character in the two-fold introduction (vv.1-4, 5-8) and the two long historical recitals (vv.9-39, 40-72).
10. The historical traditions referred to in the psalm is comparable with those in the Pentateuch except that there is the absence of the Patriarchs narratives.⁹

If we take all of these factors into consideration, we shall arrive at the most likely date of the psalm’s origin in the period between the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.E) on the one hand and the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple (586 B.C.E.) on the other.¹⁰ The proposals of Moses Bittenwieser and H. Junker based on the historical evidence from Hezekiah’s time are to be taken seriously. Both scholars have directed us to the fall of Samaria when Israel was destroyed as an independent state by Assyrians who deported some of the Israelites. Judah in the south then became the sole hope and claimant to the sacral traditions. The influx of Israelites to Judah added new impetus to the revival of the Northern traditions and Yahwistic faith in the context of the theology and cultic setting of Jerusalem.

If this is the proper context, the hope of restoration lies in Yahweh’s election of Judah, David and the Temple of Zion (vv.68-72). The election of Judah in verse 68

- 8 G. W. Coats has an analysis of the tradition incorporated in the psalm, *Rebellion in the Wilderness, the Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament*, 199-224. Robert Carroll also regards the Exodus-Wilderness-Conquest traditions as essentially the property of the Joseph tribes, i.e., the Ephraim-Manasseh tribe complex, p.139. Such traditions are preserved in the covenant by Joshua, an Ephraimite (Josh.24), Samuel, another Ephraimite, and King Jeroboam, also an Ephraimite (1 Kg.12:26-29). It is true that there are different emphases in the tradition of the two Kingdoms: the Exodus tradition does not engage the attention of Isaiah of Jerusalem while the Davidic-Zion tradition does not play a significant role in Hosea in the North. But exclusive and rigid division is not possible.
- 9 Schildenberger, “Psalm 78 (77) und die Pentateuchquellen,” *Lex Tua Veritas*, 240-56.
- 10 Moses Bittenwieser (*The Psalms, Chronologically Treated with a New Translation*), H. Junker, “Die Entstehungszeit des Ps.78 und des Deuteronomiums,” *Biblica*, 34, 1953. The suggestion by Eissfeldt that the psalm together with Deut. 32 are derived from the background of the Philistine events in the elven century (1070-1020) (*Das Lied Moses Dt 32:1-43 und das Lehrgedicht Asaphs Ps 78 samt einer Analyse der Umgebung des Mose-Liedes*, 1958, 42) is not possible on the ground of the strong sense of the inviolability of Zion and the condemnation of the worship at high places. The defeat in 1 Sam. 4 could not be described as a defeat of the “sons of Ephraim” only. Early dates of the psalm are given by W. Albright, N. Freedman, F. M. Cross, G. E. Wright, A. F. Campbell, A. R. Johnson etc. The post-Exilic date is held by Hermann Gunkel (*Die Psalmen*, 1925-26) and Hans J. Kraus (*Die Psalmen, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag*, 704).

is to be contrasted with Yahweh's rejection of the house of Joseph¹¹ in v. 67a. This can hardly be a psalm used to antagonize or alienate the Northern Kingdom. The psalmist, on the contrary, intended to bring the whole people of Israel together, to unite them under the leadership of the house of David. Yahweh's love for Zion and His Temple (מקדש) which was enduring like the high heavens and firm as the earth. Instead of the bitter experience of the destruction of Jerusalem we can sense the rise of the belief in the inviolability of Zion, which is most probably consequential of the miraculous escape of Jerusalem from Assyrian invasion in 701 B.C.E. Hezekiah-Josiah's reform would provide the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the psalm. The election of the tribe of Judah, the mountain of Zion and the house of David in Ps.78:68-72 may also reflect the oracle of Nathan to David in 2 Sam.7 (cf. Pss.89 and 132).¹² The belief in God's choice of Zion where the Temple was still standing high like the heavens was so absolute that it is unlikely that Jerusalem had experienced its tragic fall in 586 B.C.E.. Ps.78 cannot therefore be later than God's word of 2 Kg. 23:27 in which Yahweh is about to remove Judah and to cast off the Temple.

The elements of wisdom and law in Ps.78 can also find their place in the time of Hezekiah¹³ when a group of "men of Hezekiah" (Prov.25:1)¹⁴ with similar concerns as being incorporated in Psalm 78 was said to be supported by the royal court in Jerusalem. We may well be open to the possibility that among the "men

11 Joseph in the Psalms 77:16; 78:67; 80:2-3; 81:6; 105:17, only in the last case is the story of Joseph referred to. For the history of the tribes, see C. H. J Geus, *The Tribes of Israel, An Investigation into the Presupposition of Martin Noth's Amphictyony Hypothesis*.

12 Dennis J. McCarthy adds 2 Sam.7 to Martin Noth's list of passages with meditation on Israel's history at the turning points of history (Josh.1:11-15, 12-13; Judg.2:11-13; 2 Sam.12; 1 Kg.8:14-61; 2 Kg.17:7-23) and attributes to it an important role in the structure of the Deuteronomic history as a whole, "II Sam 7 and The Structure of the Deuteronomic History," *JBL* 84 (1965), 131-38. T. N. D. Mettinger gives a survey of previous research on the problem the prophecy of Nathan, *Kingship and Messiah, The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings*, 48-51.

13 H. Junker links these two elements in Ps.78 with Deut. 4:6-8 and prophet Isaiah (5:21; 10:12; 19:15; 28:29; 29:14; 31:2-3) in "Die Entstehungszeit des Ps.78 und des Deuteronomiums," *Biblica*, 34, 1953, 498.

14 On the role of Hezekiah in wisdom tradition, see R. B. Y. Scott, "Solomon and the Beginning of Wisdom in Israel," *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, *VT*, 3, 1955, 262-79. Scott remarks that the reign of Hezekiah is the most probable time for the blending together of historical traditions, prophetic records and psalm collections of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Therefore, Hezekiah's time is a period of literary activity in Judah, 277.

of Hezekiah” were Northerners from Israel.¹⁵ Joseph Blenkinsopp asserts that the time of Hezekiah is the right time to further develop and consolidate the traditions about David as the servant chosen by God to rule Judah and Israel in Jerusalem where the temple is still standing, “especially with a view to attracting survivors of the Assyrian conquest of Samaria in 722 B.C.E.”¹⁶ Hezekiah is portrayed as “a second David” and praised by the Deuteronomistic writers as being incomparable (II Kg 18:5).¹⁷ Psalm 78 is most probably a product of the religious ideology of Hezekiah’s time in its advocacy of the divine election of David and the rejection of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In order to further explicate the conception of heavenly justification of earthly rule, a cross-textual reading with the notion of the Mandate of Heaven in the transition from the Shang Dynasty to the Zhou Dynasty in ancient China as found expressed in *Shijing (Book of Songs)* is here proposed.

III. The Moral Dimension of Mandate of Heaven in Zhou Dynasty

Chinese culture owes a great deal to the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) which has left human civilization with the first written Chinese language on the Oracles Bones (turtle shells and animal scapula bones) which were used in divination, a practice of seeking the divine will on military expedition or on court decisions in daily endeavors by reading cracks of bones after heating in fire. The Shang characters written on the bones have been taken “as the etymological ancestors of the Chinese writing system”.¹⁸ Though being conquered by the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) military might and overturned by the latter, Shang’s legacy survived and continued to exert its influence in the subsequent ages. The Chinese religious practice of ancestor veneration, according to Chad Hansen, goes back to the Shang period.¹⁹ It is generally held among Chinese historians and literary scholars that it is the Zhou’s major cultural achievement in its shifting the philosophical tradition of China from focused attention on the religious world to that of humanistic concern on social dimensions of humanity that characterizes

15 M. J. Buss presupposes that some of the psalms of Asaph with ideological and verbal affinities with Hosea and the Deuteronomists may have been “adopted or formulated by former North-Israelites in order to clarify the reason for their new worship in the South,” in “The Psalms of Asaph and Korah,” *JBL* 82, 385. But Buss regard these Israelites as Levites from the North, who were engaged in the religious education of the people, 386. He also perceives that wisdom themes and forms of address which show a special tone of exhortation proper for a religious teacher are characteristic of the psalms of Asaph, 387.

16 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered*, 6.

17 Note a similar statement is also ascribed to Josiah in II Kg 23:25.

18 Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought, A Philosophical Interpretation*, 31.

19 Hansen, like most scholars, uses the term “ancestor worship”, 32.

the subsequent culture in Chinese history and literature. There may be some truth in the view that the Shang's reverence for the anthropomorphic *Shangdi* (the Lord on High) has been given way to the Zhou's conception of an ambiguously formulated *Tian* (Heaven). While the former *Shangdi* was not being completely eliminated and substituted, the Zhou's notion of *Tian* has opened up a wider space for a more theoretical notion of Heaven, a clearer moral dimension of nature and a mature philosophical perception of the *Dao*. At Zhou times, *Shangdi* and *Tian* have acquired similar identity and close affinity to the extent that they are interchangeable and interconnected. There are endless debates on the understanding of *Shangdi* and whether the idea of God or god(s) from Western conception can be employed to explain or even to be seen as being equivalent to it.²⁰ According to Chen Mengjia, a scholar in the field of Chinese literature and the study of Shang Oracle Bones, Heaven was not being regarded as a deity of the Shang people in the Oracle Bones and only in the Zhou Dynasty did Heaven convey the notion of the Supreme God, gradually taking the place of the *Di* or *Shangdi* of the Shang people.²¹

When defeating the Shang Dynasty, the new Zhou leadership under King Wu had to legitimize its power and explain the fall of the former in its own rise to power in order to succeed the Shang traditions and unite the two peoples into one country under *Tian*, the Sovereign Ruler in heaven. We will take from the *Book of Songs* the poem "King Wen" ("文王") which is assumed to be composed by the Duke of Zhou in praise and honor of the virtuous King Wen in Zhou Dynasty. The religious-political context of the poetry is the celebration of the victory of Zhou over the Shang in the grand occasions of royal ritual to Zhou's ancestors. Scholarly position takes it as a dynastic hymn as it is incorporated in the ritual collection of Zhou and used when the Zhou Empire was at the peak of its strength and power. The local rulers and princes of the vassal states of the confederation were invited to assemble to celebrate the illuminous achievement of the Zhou emperor.²² The hymn constitutes the important political epic of King Wen, the ancestor who was believed to receive the Mandate of Heaven to rule as the Son of Heaven (天子) ("King Wen

20 Most of the Jesuits who worked in China after Matteo Ricci were in favor of taking the Chinese *Shangdi* as the same God as the Catholic Lord of Heaven (*Tianzu*), at least up till the Rite Controversy in the early 18th Century. The Protestant disputes on naming God in Chinese either adopting the ancient term *Shangdi* or just using the generic term *Shen* for the Hebrew *Elohim* and the Greek *Theos* has not been resolved even up till today. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom insistent on following *Shangdi* of the German missionary Karl Gutzlaff's rendering of *Shangdi* in the translation of the Bible.

21 Chen Mengjia, *Integrated Presentation on the Oracle Bones of the Yin Ruins*, 581. Milton M. Chiu, *The Tao of Chinese Religion*, 96.

22 Chen Zizhan, *Commentary on the Three-Hundred Songs*, 909-10.

was commissioned by the Mandate of Heaven to rule the heaven and earth” 【“文王受天命而王天下”】²³). The repeated use of the word “命” (“mandate”) for 8 times in a short poem of 7 stanzas well illustrate the importance of the theme not only for the divine legitimization of the human sovereign embodied in King Wen and his successors based on his moral and ethical behaviors²⁴, but also the rejection of the Shang Dynasty which has been formerly endowed with a similar mandate from heaven. In this poem it is also underlined that the defeat and therefore rejection of Shang in the east would serve as an example of warning for the current powerful generation of Zhou in the west. The last emperor of Shang, King Zhou (纣王, a different Chinese character from the name of “Zhou Dynasty”) has been portrayed as conducting a brutal and tyrannical regime (无道) that justified the revolt by the Zhou people. In Chinese, the term for revolution (革命) literally means revoking against the Mandate. The fact that a grand “metropolitan-state of Shang” (大邑商) was being replaced by a “tiny city-state of Zhou” (小邦周) is something of an enigma of history that lessons are to be drawn and warnings to be issued. The complete hymn is translated into English²⁵ as follows:

1. King Wen is on high (文王在上), Oh! bright is he in heaven (於昭于天).
Although Zhou is an old state (周雖舊邦), Its Mandate is still new (其命維新).
Illustrious²⁶ is the House of Zhou (有周不顯), The Mandate of *Di*
endowed timely (帝命不時).

23 See Chapter 15, section 65 of *Chuxiu Fanlu* (“Suburban Sacrifice” 《春秋繁露·郊祭篇》). Sarah A. Queen classified this section under “The Ritual Chapters”, *From Chronicle to Canon, The Hermeneutics of Spring and Autumn, according to Tung Chung-shu*, 105. On “Son of Heaven”, see 202-03. 《采菽-Cai Shu》 in *Book of Songs* refers to “The son of Heaven decrees” (天子命之), 《国风桑扈之什》 (Decade Of Sang Hu, Odes of the Kingdom).

24 Chen, *Commentary on the Three-Hundred Songs*, 912. See also the confirmation of the heaven’s mandate to the Zhou in three other songs in the same collections of 10 epics of Wen Wang (大明，皇矣，文王有声).

25 There are several English translations of *Shijing*: Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry*, edited with additional translations by Joseph R. Allen; foreword by Stephen Owen; postface by Joseph R. Allen, (New York: Grove Press, 1996), Xu Yuanchong (许渊冲), *Book of Poetry* (The Chinese-English Bilingual Series of Chinese Classics), Hunan Publishing Co. 1993, *Book of Songs*, translated into modern Chinese by Tang Ziheng (唐子恒) and Liao Qun (廖群), translated into English by An Zengcai (安增才), (Shandong: Shandong Friendship Press, 1999).

26 The word for “不” in “有周不顯” carries the meaning of “great” in ancient Chinese dictionary of “Shuowen”, see the reference to it by Yao Jiheng (姚际恒), *Collection of Yao Jiheng Writings*, (姚际恒著作集), Vol 1, General Comments on the Book of Poetry (诗经通论), (Taipei: Institute of Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, 1994), 383.

- King Wen ascends and descends²⁷(文王陟降), At *Di*'s left and the right (在帝左右).
2. Earnest and dedicated was King Wen (亶亶文王), And his fame is without end (令聞不已).
The gifts to Zhou (陳錫哉周), Extend to the descendants of King Wen (侯文王孫子),
To the descendants of King Wen (文王孫子), The direct line and branches in hundred generations (本支百世),
All the officers of Zhou (凡周之士), Shall be illustrious from age to age (不顯亦世)
3. Being illustrious from age to age (世之不顯), Zealously and reverently pursuing their tasks (厥猶翼翼)
Brilliant are the many officers (思皇多士), Born in this royal kingdom (生此王國).
The royal kingdom is able to produce them (王國克生), The backbones of Zhou (維周之楨).
Numerous is the array of officers (濟濟多士), King Wen enjoys his repose (文王以寧).
4. How dignified is King Wen (穆穆文王); Oh! Reverence to him will be extended without end (於緝熙敬止),
Great is the Mandate of Heaven (假哉天命)! There the descendants of former Shang (有商孫子);
The descendants of Shang (商之孫子), Are numerous in hundreds of thousands (其麗不億);
But when *Di* gave the Mandate (上帝既命), They are to submit to Zhou (侯于周服)
5. Submitted to Zhou they did (侯服于周), The Mandate of Heaven is not permanent (天命靡常)
The officers of Yin, admirable and alert (殷士膚敏), Assist at the libations in the (Zhou) capital (裸將于京).
They assist and serve at those libations (厥作裸將), Always wearing their Shang style cap and garment (常服黼黻)
O you loyal ministers of the king (王之蓋臣), Ever remember your ancestor (無念爾祖)!

27 Some exegetes assume that this refers to the spirit of King Wen, Ma Chiyang (马持盈), *Modern Commentary and Translation of Shijing* (诗经今注今译), (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Publishing Co, 1972), 398.

6. Ever remember your ancestor (無念爾祖), Cultivating your virtue (聿脩厥德).
 Should always accord with the Mandate (永言配命), Seeking to secure for abundant blessing (自求多福)
 Before Yin lost the multitudes (殷之未喪師), [Its kings] were in accord with *Shangdi* (克配上帝)
 You should take lesson from Yin (宜鑒于殷), The great Mandate is not easily kept (駿命不易)
7. The Mandate is not easily kept (命之不易), Do not bring about your own extinction (無遏爾躬).
 Display and radiate your righteousness and fame (宣昭義問), And take warnings from Heaven for Yin (有虞殷自天).
 The doings of High Heaven (上天之載), Have no sound nor smell (無聲無臭)
 Take your model from King Wen (儀刑文王), And the all the states will have confidence in you (萬邦作孚).

Due to the limited scope of this article we can just outline a few significant aspects of the Chinese dynastic hymn relevant to the discussion of Psalm 78. King Wen is at the outset thought as a benevolent and brilliant ancestor who has ascended at the left and right side of *Di*, the Sovereign Lord of the Zhou people in heaven. He is in possession of the Mandate which is considered as being still new for the old state and is applicable to the present generation of King Wu who is the son of King Wen. Indeed, the Mandate is believed to be extended to hundreds of generations. King Wen is both in heaven and present on earth as he ascends and descends between heaven and earth. In drawing lessons from the revoke of the Mandate of Heaven, the Shang people are invited to submit to Zhou.

It is at this point that two important aspects of the development of the Mandate of Heaven is introduced. The first is its changing character: “The Mandate of Heaven is not permanent (天命靡常)” (Stanza 4). This is one of the stages of development of the notion of the “Mandate of Heaven” from Shang’s idea of constancy (天命恒常) to the new understanding of inconstancy (天命靡常) (Stanza 5) with a conception of it being able to transfer (天命转移) from one dynasty to another, depending on the virtue of the person concerned. It is also admitted that the Mandate of Heaven is not easy to keep (Stanza 6-7: “The great Mandate is not easily kept [駿命不易]”). The second aspect is that of invitation to assemble in the Zhou capital to participate in the cultic ritual of the Zhou: “Assist at the libations in the (Zhou) capital (裸將于京)” (Stanza 4). The Shang people are allowed to wear

their Shang ritual costumes (Stanza 5), but are to identify with the Zhou ancestors. It is further claimed that the Shang ancestors had once the Mandate and were once in accord with the will of *Shangdi*, but they have subsequently gone astray. Their fall becomes a warning given by *Tian* to the present generation which is advised to cultivate its virtue (聿脩厥德) in order to be “in accord with the Mandate [of Heaven] (永言配命)” (Stanza 6). The example of King Wen is then lifted up as a model to be followed at the end of the hymn: “Take your model from king Wen (儀刑文王)”.

What is presented in this hymn is also supported from a rich collection of archaeological finds in China, especially by inscriptions on bronze vessels uncovered from archaeological sites of the Zhou period.²⁸ The Dai Yu Tripot (大盂鼎) is one of the major representations of the bronze corpus known to us so far:

In the ninth month, King Kang, at the temple of the Zhou royal family, issued an order to his minister, Yu. Thus said the King, “Oh Yu, the most illustrious King Wen has received the Great Mandate possessed by Heaven (*Tian*). And King Wu, succeeding King Wen, has established the national boundary, eradicated the enemies, and pacified the people.”²⁹

IV. Contextual Reconstruction from Cross-Textual Insights

From the Chinese dynastic ritual hymn above we can take a glimpse at the position held by scholars in the field of ancient Chinese culture that certain degree of discontinuity sets in from the transition of power from Shang Dynasty to that of that of the Zhou in the total transformation of the basic tenet of the world of thought and the idea of divine-human relationship. While it is often assumed that the change was from the dependence on the divine and spiritual realm to the empowerment of the human in an anthropocentric outlook, we can argue that though the Zhou people developed and formulated the idea of “Mandate of Heaven” endowed on the emperor with great emphasis on morality and virtue, there is also the belief in the role of *Shangdi* as commanding the submission of the Shang to the Zhou in Stanza 4: “But when *Shangdi* gave the Mandate (上帝既命)” and “They are to submit to Zhou (侯于周服)”. Heaven is assumed to work mysteriously in human history, “the doings of High Heaven” (上天之載) have no “sound and smell” (無聲無臭).

Similar approach to the transfer of power is seen in Psalm 78. According to

28 On the rich sources, both literary from the classics and archaeologically from under the earth, see Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of thought in Ancient China*, chapter 2 (“Early Chou Thought: Continuity and Breakthrough”).

29 Modified from the translation of Milton M. Chiu, *The Tao of Chinese Religion*, 96.

R. P. Carroll the psalm is a vestige of a tribal polemic, “a polemic directed against the holders of the older faith in favor of the more recent claimants.”³⁰ He proposes that the occurrence of בחר (“to choose”) in the negative form לא בחר (“not to choose”, v.67) suggests a polemical intent.³¹ It is very unlikely that the intention of the psalmist was to alienate part of the people of Israel or to promote hostility against the Northern Kingdom. Taking a more positive position does not mean to undermine the tension and controversy between Israel and Judah. The address in the introduction (vv.1-8) points to “our ancestors” as the rebellious generation of the wilderness (v.8; cf.17-31, 40-41) and the stubborn generation of the conquest (vv.9-11, 56-58). They were referred to as the ancestors of the audience. With a cross-textual reading from Chinese discourse on kingship and its historical transformation we will argue below that alienation of former dynasty and polemical opposition to the defeated people may not be the major concern of a new ruling power.

This Chinese hymn may have something to offer in enlightening our understanding of Psalm 78 in a cross-textual context. Not that there is any indication of influence and interaction between the two texts historically, but a similar situation of two states (Shang-Zhou and Israel-Judah) in contest may give some insights to the construction of a trajectory from the relatively well-established Chinese tradition for the comprehension of Ps. 78, the context and setting of which are open to dispute. There are richer sources of Chinese texts from the Zhou period to allow us to ascertain and establish some historical information. Though many of the written texts have been edited and redacted with perspectives of Confucius who regarded the Zhou as an ideal of an ideal society and a good religious-political world to return to, the text of the *Book of Songs* is believed to be relatively free from extensive Confucian outlook.³² We will reply on some consensus that have been arrived at by scholars on the Chinese dynastic hymn to see ways it will contribute to the construction of some of the issues in Ps. 78.

First, there is the notion of the Mandate of Heaven previously endowed on the Shang ancestors, but now being removed to give to the royal house of Zhou. The rejection of the last king of Shang is explained as a result of his departure from the accord with Heaven in his oppressing government. The basis of the appeal to the Zhou Mandate is on the ideal ruler, King Wen at the time of King Wu or other Zhou kings. This is similar to the climax of Ps.78:68-72, which is the election of Judah

30 Carroll, “Psalm 78: Vestiges of a Tribal Polemic,” *VT*, 21, 1971, 144.

31 Carroll, 136.

32 In terms of interpretation of the 305 poems of the Book of Poetry, Confucianism has its great impact from Han times, see Schwartz, 41-46.

and David, the selected tribe and chosen king respectively. In the psalm, the use of *בחר* (vv.68, 70) and *לא בחר* (v.67) clearly indicates an election theme, a tradition formulated clearly in Deuteronomic terminology and conception.

Reading the Chinese text with the biblical passage, we immediately spot the difference in the latter having the choice of Zion as the site of the Temple (vv.68-70) and the absence in the former of a cultic site where the name of God is to rest. Though there is no mention of any rejection of former house of Heaven in the Chinese hymn, such as that of the rejection of Shiloh (v.60) and the choice of the Temple on Zion, the context of inviting the defeated Shang remnants to come to the Zhou capital to participate in the ritual of reverence to the ancestor with the aim to unite the two peoples as one, is clearly expressed. With this we may explore whether something in that direction is plausible for Ps. 78.

The Books of Chronicles actually recorded a message to the northerners after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E. Israelites in the North were reported to be invited to come to Jerusalem in the South and celebrate the Passover (2 Chron. 30) together with the Judeans.³³ Passover was the occasion to rehearse and celebrate the Exodus events (Exod.12:1-28; Deut.16:1-8). Hezekiah sent a letter with an explanation to invite the people of the North to come to Jerusalem for that particular occasion (2 Chron. 30:1-10). The invitation stresses the need to return to the Lord: “Do not be like your fathers (*לא תהיו כאבותיכם*) and your brethren who were faithless to the Lord... (v.7)”. Similar themes in Ps. 78 are also found expressed in Chronicles: the importance of coming to the Holy Temple (*ובאו למקדשו*, v.8); the idea that the desolation was the result of Yahweh’s fierce anger (*חרון אפו*, v.9a) and the gracious-merciful nature of Yahweh (*כי־חנן ורחום יהוה*, v.9b). All these emphases, hardly accidental, are presupposed by Ps.78. Presumably when the people came together, not only the story of Passover was recited but also a lesson on the mysteries of history, past and contemporary, was drawn with the hope to center the people’s future on the Temple, the Davidic king and the Southern State of Judah. The celebration of Passover by people of North and South at the time was appropriate

33 S. Talmon supports the Chronicler’s report of the Passover as of great historicity. He even argues for its accuracy in detail by proposing a theory for the Passover celebration in the second month, *VT* 8, 1958, 48-74. His proposal remains a theory and lacks substantial evidence to support it. But one thing is sure, if the Chronicler simply inserts into the reign of Hezekiah the Passover celebration of Josiah (de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 487) or invented it totally out of his imagination, he would not create such difficult problems of celebration at an unorthodox date which he had to explain in 2 Chron.30:3 nor would he allow to take place such an observation not according to regulations, which he attempted to resolve in 2 Chron. 30:17-20. See F. L. Moriarty, “The Chronicler’s Account of Hezekiah’s Reform,” *CBQ*, 27,1965, 404-406.

for reconceiving the context of Ps.78 to be produced in an occasion which “recalled the memories of freedom from Egyptian slavery and the covenant with Yahweh”.³⁴

In Chronicles, the tribe of Ephraim is also being blamed and condemned in its fundamental sin of splintering off from Judah and the House of David. In the leadership of Jeroboam, the so-called United Monarchy was divided into two kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The division was supported by prophet Ahijah, an Ephraimite (I Kg. 11). The whole Northern Kingdom is sometimes figuratively referred to under the name Ephraim (Isa. 7: 2-5; Hos 5: 2, 5, 9; 6:4). The tribe is portrayed as resisting the reform programs of Hezekiah (II Chron. 30:1, 10, 18) and Josiah (II Chron. 34:6).

In the Books of Kings, Jeroboam, an Ephraimite (1 Kg.11:26), is accused of leading the people of the North into great sins. He is the first king of the North, who disrupted the United Monarchy. He is blamed in the making of two calves at Dan and Bethel for the Israelites, which is regarded as the greatest sin of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kg. 12:28-29; 13:33-34; 14:16, etc.).³⁵ This is why a prediction of doom is immediately announced in the narrative, which also forecast the reform by Josiah (1 Kg.13:1ff). Since Ps.78 attempts to debase the election of Israel, Ephraim-Joseph and Shiloh in favor of that of Judah, David and Zion, the psalm is presumably post-Ahijah of Shiloh (1 Kg. 11: 29-33; 12:15).³⁶ A. F. Campbell rightly remarks that “so terrible a statement of rejection might never have come to expression were it not to be followed by the claim of election.”³⁷

Shiloh, in the area of Ephraim where the Ark was housed in the time of Samuel (1 Sam.4-6), is considered by Ps. 78 as once the dwelling place of God (v.61). The transfer of the Ark signified the succession and continuation of the ancient tradition

34 B. Oded in *Israelite and Judaeon History*, ed. John Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller.

35 “The ultimate and crowning wickedness of the Northern Kingdom, according to the Deuteronomic compiler, was the break-away from the Southern Kingdom, involving worship elsewhere than in Jerusalem,” N. H. Snaith, “1 and 2 Kings,” *IB*, III, 281.

36 Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom who was from the tribe of Ephraim and was appointed to be head over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph before becoming king of Israel. “Ephraim” is used 22 times in Isaiah of Jerusalem to refer to Israel. Usually in apposition to Judah: Ephraim departed from Judah (7:17); Manasseh-Ephraim are against Judah (9:21); pride and arrogance of Ephraim 9:8-12, cf.28:1, 3. Only in the passage where the prophecy of salvation is proclaimed are Judah and Ephraim seen to be in harmony (11:13). The name “Ephraim” is frequently used to refer to Israel in the Book of Hosea.

37 A. F. Campbell, *CBQ* 41 (1979), 57. The Deuteronomistic historian worked in the shadow of the two great events, the catastrophes of 722 and 586 B.C. von Rad, *PHOE*, 207. For a structural analysis of 2 Kg.17 and comments on works by scholars, see J. MacDonald, “The Structure of 2 Kings, XVII,” *TGUOS* 23 (1969-70), 29-41.

of Shiloh by the house of David.³⁸ Later the link between Shiloh and Jerusalem was also cited as an example of threat to Jerusalem and Judah; the Temple itself could not give any guarantee of security for Jerusalem (Jer.7:12-14; 26:1-9). Tracing the probable origin of the affirmation of the inviolability of the Temple of Jerusalem may lead us back to the experience of the deliverance of the city from the Assyrian siege (II Kg.19:32-37)³⁹ as it is proclaimed in the speech of Yahweh to Hezekiah: “I will defend this city, to save it, for my own sake, and for my servant David’s sake” (II Kg.19:34; 20:6). Similar claim for divine election of Zion in Ps. 78 as being an unconditional promise of to David may have further developed at the time of Jeremiah who then had to risk his life in attacking directly the root of this popular belief.⁴⁰ Jeremiah drew similar analogy as that in Ps.78, but using Shiloh as an example of the judgment of Yahweh that would fall upon Jerusalem should the people refuse to return and repent.⁴¹

The attempt to restore the United Monarchy under a Davidic king and the effort to bring the Northern Kingdom to the cult at Jerusalem may have its early formulation at the time of Hezekiah. But obviously Hezekiah’s reform activity did not gain widespread acceptance when we read of the apostasy of his son Manasseh. This, however, does not in any way lead us to the conception that Hezekiah’s attempt was a complete failure. The effective reform of Josiah would not come

38 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 75. The transfer of the Ark acts as “a token of the unification of Israel and Judah under the House of David.” (Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, 146). See also M. Harran, *Temple and Temple Services*, 27.

39 Nicholson, *Jeremiah*, (CBC), 77; R. de Vaux, “Jerusalem and the Prophets,” *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition*, Harry M. Orlinsky (ed), 277-300, also de Vaux’s *Ancient Israel*, 327-28; J. Bright, *History of Israel*, 1972, 297; G. Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, 135.

40 John Bright’s Currie Lectures, *Covenant and Promise: the Future in the Preaching of the Pre-exilic Prophets London: SCM, 1977*, considers this very question of the clash between Jeremiah and his contemporaries who, Bright presumes, were just as sincere as Jeremiah and just as committed to the traditions of the people, 16-17.

41 R. de Vaux, “Jerusalem and the Prophets,” *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition*, 288-93. The close historical link of Shiloh and Jerusalem is further seen in the “Shiloh Oracle”. The enigmatic words עַד כִּי יבֹא שִׁילוֹ in the Blessing of Jacob (Gen.49:10) are interpreted as “till he comes to Shiloh” by Nielson, who even paraphrases it: “as soon as the Judean ruler arrives at Shiloh his kingship shall be firmly established. It shall even surpass the narrow tribal borders.” Nielson, Shechem, 1955, 321. M. Treves speculates that the phrase was added after Solomon’s death as a sarcastic remark pointing to Ahijah of Shiloh: “As a man of Shiloh come” in “Shiloh (Genesis 49:10),” *JBL* 85, 1966, 353-56. LXX has שְׁלוֹ “until he comes into his own” or “until that which belongs to him comes”, while most medieval Jewish authorities read שְׁלֵוֹ, “tribute to him” (cf. Isa.18:7). See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, (AB), 1964, 366; von Rad, *Genesis*, 425. This line of interpretation has already suggested and argued convincingly by Jon Lindblom in “The Political Background of the Shiloh Oracle,” *SVT 3 Congress Volume*, 1953, 78-106.

about without his work and the spirit of reform carried on by the Deuteronomist. The historical situation of the gradual disintegration of the Assyrian Empire facilitated extensive reform carried out even to the former Northern Kingdom by Josiah (II Kg. 23:4; 2 Chron. 34:6-7).⁴²

According to Finkelstein's archaeological surveys, the fall of the kingdom of Israel after 722 B.C.E. has brought about dramatic growth in terms of total built-up area in Judea. The doubling, if not trebling, in the number of settlements and increase of population of Judah in just a couple of decades in the second half of the Eighth Century may well be explained by the influx of a large number of Israelite refugees.⁴³ The following words from Finkelstein may be cited to support the pan-Israel ideological frame for the socio-political context of the time of Hezekiah as expressed in Ps. 78:

The author incorporated the northern and southern traditions but subjected them to his main ideological goals: to promote the Davidic kings as the only legitimate rulers over all Israel and the Jerusalem temple as the only legitimate cult-place for all *Bene Israel*.⁴⁴

It was needed in order to provide historical legitimacy to the Jerusalem claim for dominance over all Hebrew territories and all Hebrew people—in both the north and south. Evidently, another side of the same coin was the need to downplay the importance of the northern kingdom of Israel, which was historically the more important of the two Hebrew kingdoms.⁴⁵

Secondly, on the notion of the changing character of the Mandate of Heaven in the Chinese hymn (“The mandate of Heaven is not always permanent”, 天命靡常), it is worth noting that the human dimension of virtuous behavior in Zhou time has superseded Shang's idea of the Heavenly Mandate's constancy (天命恒常). Heaven's Mandate being inconstant (天命靡常) and not unconditionally eternal has facilitated dynastic changes with its transfer (天命转移) from one dynasty to another. This aspect will lead us to consider the issue of conditional and unconditional dynastic

42 B. Oded, 467; M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, p.113; and still earlier F. M. Cross, Jr. and D. N. Freedman, “Josiah's Revolt Against Assyria,” *JNES* 12, 1953, 56-58, support that the political occasion for the reform was probably the death of the king Assur-etel-ilani and the consequent disorders in Assyria.

43 Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom, The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, 154.

44 Finkelstein, 157.

45 Finkelstein, 158.

promise to David in the Bible. We have at least two forms of the promise being articulated in the Psalms: the unconditional (Ps.89:30-34) and the conditional (Ps.132:12)⁴⁶.

If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances, if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with scourges; but I will not remove from him my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips (Ps. 89:30-34)

If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies which I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit upon your throne (Ps.132:12).

God's unconditional promise to David may go back to Nathan's formulation in II Sam 7:14-15 which is taken as the original unconditional formulation by T. Mettinger who is also of the opinion that the conditional expression of Ps.132 reveals some Deuteronomistic influence.⁴⁷ He further argues that the Exilic and post-Exilic situations have given rise to the stress on the eternal validity of covenant ("eternal covenant", ברית עלם) in the Priestly code and in the Prophets.⁴⁸ Ps.89 is to him then a return to the unconditional formulation of II Sam. 7:14-15 in the Exile. Whichever is the case, the biblical traditions did go through a change to a notion of human dimension of divine election and the problem of its continued validity. But they have never gone so far as to take the human behavior as dictating the course of history as the presumably anthropocentric view expressed in China.

In addition to the issue of conditional/unconditional promise there is the belief in the supremacy of Judah and certain degree of inviolability of Zion and the Temple. This reflects a biased position as expressed in II Kg 17. When at the tragic devastation of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, the deportation

46 Considering both the affinities between the two royal psalms with oracles (Pss.89 and 132) and Ps.78, as well as the differences in the mood and intention between them, we may regard Pss.89 and 132 as dramatic rituals while Ps.78 a didactic admonition. Most probably as A. R. Johnson suggests, all three psalms exhibit prophetic functions of representing the past for didactic purpose, see Johnson, *Cultic Prophet*, 1979, 83; on the role of the cultic prophet in intercession and cultic oracle, 166.

47 Tryggve Mettinger, *King and Messiah*, 276.

48 The phrase is applied by P in connection with Sabbath (Exod.31:16; Lev.24:8), with Aaron (Num.18:19), with Phinehas (Num.25:13), with Noah (Gen.9:16) and with Abraham (Gen.17:7, 13, 19; cf. Ps.105:8-10). The covenant with David is renewed to the people after the dethronement of the last Davidic king (Isa.55:3; 61:60; Jer.32:40; 50:5).

of the leadership and the population of Judah and the fall of the dynasty, the excessed confidence in the choice of David was confronted by the hard historical experience of disorientation, we see the development of another stage of the relationship between the North and the South. We read of the attempt of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel to re-envisage a hope of reunion of God's people. The "Book of Consolation" (Jer. 30-31) and the "Good Shepherd" in Ezekiel take Yahweh, not David, as the good shepherd to gather God's scattered flock (Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34). The Oracle of the Two Sticks (Ezek. 37) and the restoration of the Temple (Ezek. 40-48) articulate a different approach to the relationship between North and South in a later date and a dissimilar context from those of Ps. 78. Charles H. H. Scobie says it well in the following quotation:

The fall of the Northern Kingdom was a great temptation to Judah to see itself as alone the chosen of God. The impending, and then actual, fall of the South evened the score, as it were, so that neither side could vaunt itself.⁴⁹

V. Concluding Remarks

To sum up, Ps.78 may well be a didactic psalm composed in Jerusalem after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The rejection of Ephraim-Joseph became a historical reality in the catastrophe of the defeat of Samaria. History of the past is remembered and interpreted to illustrate a puzzling historical problem of the present situation of the fall of the North and the desire to unite the North with the South. The Mosaic traditions of the Exodus and wilderness period are attached to the royal theology to form a whole piece of historical recitation for didactic purpose. If the historical, prophetic, sapiential and royal traditions are blended together in the time of Hezekiah, Ps. 78 reflects similar context and may play a role in such a stage of development.

Divine rejection can be understood properly in connection with human rejection of God. It is almost always understood in the Bible as a response to human abomination. The reaction of Yahweh to having been first rejected by humans is illustrated in the case of the Northern Kingdom. The Chinese notion of Heaven's Mandate being withdrawn from the ill-behaved Shang Dynasty and newly endowed on the virtuous king of the Zhou well elaborates the human dimension of rejection

49 Charles H. H. Scobie, "North and South: Tension and Reconciliation in Biblical History," *Biblical Studies: Essays in Honour of William Barclay*, 92.

and election. The invitation of Zhou leadership to the former officials to participate in the ritual celebration of the new era for the unification of the two states may provide some insights for our reading of the divine election of Judah, Zion and David in Psalm 78.

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