Between 1854 and 1867, Japan was militarily forced by the USA, Britain and other powers to enter unequal treaties, which negatively pre-shaped Japan’s integration into Western trade and diplomacy by imposing asymmetrical contractual conditions. Facing 1) the most favoured nation clause denying Japan individual treaty talks, 2) detrimental tariffs, and 3) the compulsory opening of treaty ports, where new residing and trading foreigners enjoyed 4) extraterritorial status making it difficult to maintain control of their actions, the political sovereignty of Japan was considerably curtailed. Eager to dispose of the detrimental position within the international treaty system, the Japanese elite were divided over the debate on which course to take in order to effect the revision of the treaties.¹

While taking on the challenge of governmental system change in 1867–1868 and subsequent elite transformation, intellectuals and officials of the newly established Meiji government agreed that overcoming the detrimental status required programmatic learning of Western technical knowledge in order to promote industries, strengthen the military and thereby enhance Japan’s position within the treaty talks.²

However, knowing that treaty negotiations were a matter of «negotiating with imperialism», Japanese authorities realised early on that next to military and industrial technology, which was seen as the driving force of Western superiority, they needed to adapt and respond to Western diplomatic rhetoric and strategies.³ Therefore, it seemed essential to «discuss world affairs in terms of international law»⁴ and to

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² Hereby Meiji officials built on strategies that were already employed by political leaders prior to the Meiji Ishin, see H.J. Jones, «Bakumatsu Foreign Employees», in: Monumenta Nipponica 29 (1974) 3, 305–327.


win the «intellectual competition» with the Western powers, as the famous intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) put it.\textsuperscript{5} Underlying such statements was a strong sense of inter-Western competition that characterises international relations and seemingly contradicts the rhetoric of civilised cooperation. This early sense of Western diplomatic ambivalence correlated with the dual character of Japan’s prior diplomatic intercourse within the Chinese system of foreign relations, wherein Japan, for example, superficially acknowledged the superior status of China, while simultaneously preserving a full sense of its own political sovereignty.\textsuperscript{6} Being familiar with the double standards of hierarchical interstate relations, Western international association was evaluated early on as «exchanges of favours, threats, and secret treaties of war» guided by «violence» and «deceitful trickery».\textsuperscript{7} Accordingly, Meiji officials sought to gather intelligence on informal strategies of imperialism, which were not only not explicit and easily comprehensible, but also consciously hidden and concealed behind formal stipulations of international relations. Thus, while technological and juridical expertise was comparably easy to obtain, diplomatic insider knowledge was not.

The question regarding how such tacit knowledge was to be obtained is closely related to the context of informal imperialism being defined here as the specific character of diplomatic intercourse between the treaty powers and Meiji Japan prior to the revision of the unequal treaties in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{8} As the adjective «informal» in «informal imperialism» denotes, no treaty power exercised direct rule over Japan. By following national interests in order to increase trade figures and enlarge spheres of influence in East Asia, the treaty powers not only competed with each other, but also had to respond to a certain degree of Japanese political autonomy. Thus, to oust their fellow competitors, the treaty powers had to be responsive to Japanese interests. Conversely, the Japanese faced a coooperational front from the treaty powers. As Japan was not yet an imperial power – though already developing imperial ambitions\textsuperscript{9} – and was at the time an out-gunned non-European state, Japanese officials had to adapt to Western codes and norms of international relations in order to achieve revision of the unequal treaties. At the same time, Japan increasingly learned to take advantage of inter-Western commercial competition by informally

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{5}{Y. Fukuzawa, An Encouragement of Learning, Tokyo 1969, 65.}
\footnotetext{6}{For ambivalences within early modern Japan’s foreign intercourse, see for example D.C. Kang, East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute, New York 2012, 60, 71.}
\footnotetext{7}{Itō Hirobumi (Hishoruisan: Gaikō hen, Vol. 1) cited in: S. Suzuki, Civilization and Empire: China and Japan’s Encounter with European International Society, London 2009, 82.}
\footnotetext{9}{For Japanese imperialism, see for example, N. Hee, Imperiales Wissen und koloniale Gewalt: Japans Herrschaft in Taiwan 1895–1945, Frankfurt a.M. 2012; P. Duus et al. (eds.), The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937, Princeton 1989.}
\end{footnotes}
granting favourable conditions to single powers. In this diverse net of cooperation and competitive agendas, intelligence gathering proved a crucial means to gain national advantage. However, it was a specific feature of this setting of informal policies that sensitive knowledge was protected and therefore to be only hardly accessed. Because the treaty powers were not interested in giving up advantageous trading conditions provided by the unequal treaties, and because Japan was not interested in providing space for the imperialist encroachments on the part of the Western powers (that is, interests on both sides were opposed to each other), the governments restricted means of knowledge access in order to protect national interests. Thus, access to knowledge was confined and defined by political interests.

With regard to such political preconditioning for access to policy-relevant knowledge within the context of informal imperialism, this article will explore the methods of how officials of the involved governments circumvented obstacles to knowledge access by relying on the help of informal agents. Such agents were found in foreign experts in the service of the Japanese government (oyatoi gaikokujin, lit.: hired foreigners). I argue that the expert’s social status and unique access to knowledge was a helpful tool for governments in order to reach out into structures to which their official representatives had no access, and thereby enlarge national spheres of influence against the interests of competing powers. By addressing the question of accessibility of policy-relevant knowledge within the context of informal imperialism, the article will proceed in three steps. In the first part, I provide an example of Western techniques to enlarge spheres of influence by informally employing the agency of foreign experts in Japan. By referring to the role of engineers to secure lucrative commercial contracts, I will show that (next to experience and scientific knowledge) it was the social capital (Pierre Bourdieu)\(^\text{10}\) of experts, or more precisely, their ability to create trust, which was considered a valuable political resource. While this first part outlines the practices of Western informal-imperial policies, the second part refers to Japanese strategies to undermine such Western practices. With the informal help of single oyatoi, Japanese officials implemented a political press tactic in order to respond to Orientalist prejudices, which upheld Japan’s disadvantageous position in treaty talks. Again, it was the social capital ascribed to the experts, the attribution of scientific authority, and their reputation of having special experience and knowledge of Japan, which helped to informally spread Japanese views around the globe. Finally, the last part will summarise the aforementioned points with regard to the question of how policy-relevant knowl-

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10 By applying this term, I refer to the social status ascribed to and represented by the experts on the basis of their cultural capital, namely their education. The scientists’ reputation for impartiality and increased credibility solidified in contrast to other social groups, such as politicians and businessmen. See P. Bourdieu, «The Forms of Capital», in: J. Richardson (ed.), Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, New York 1986, 244–258; S. Shapin, A Social History of Truth, Chicago 1994.
edge was gathered and disseminated within a setting of power politics defined by the asymmetrical conditions of informal imperialism.

By focusing on the role of the oyatoi within informal policies between Western treaty powers and Meiji Japan, there are several aspects of the oyatoi research that will not be touched upon in this article.11 Drawing attention to the social status of scientists and the mobilisation of political resources derived from such social attributions, the article addresses recent research questions concerning the correlation of science and imperial policies. By exploring how the expert oyatoi’s professional reputation was instrumentalised to hide imperial interferences, and by examining the informal agency that some influential oyatoi performed beyond the provisions of their employment contracts, the article deals with aspects of the oyatoi phenomenon, which have not yet been investigated systematically.12

1. Oyatoi and British-German Diplomacy in Meiji Japan

Within the vast reform programme initiated by the Meiji government, knowledge gathering and the education of Japanese students constituted a key element. In the fifth article of the Charter Oath of 1868, the newly established Meiji government declared the following as one of its main policy objectives: «Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of the Imperial rule.»13 Aiming to gain equal status with the Western powers and to revise the unfavourable treaties, the Japanese elite systematically accumulated knowledge to meet the requirements of industrialisation, military strengthening, and constitutional and societal re-framing. By sending out Japanese students to various countries, establishing networks with academic, economic and political elites of the West, and employing lower-skilled workers and professionals from abroad, Meiji officials opened up multiple channels for the inflow of knowledge. However, with regard to sensitive intelligence for diplomatic purposes, the foreign employees of the Meiji government (more precisely, the experts within this group) not only provided unique insider knowledge, but also represented a distinct authority, which converted into valuable political resources to officials of the involved governments. Before discussing this in more detail, a brief review of general information on foreign employees of the Meiji government will be given.

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11 The role of the oyatoi under the Tokugawa, within Meiji Japan’s structural reforms or Japanese imperialism in Asia, will not be analysed here, and their relative meaning will not compared to other agents of knowledge transfer, for example, the Japanese students abroad (ryūgakusei). See, for example N. Umetani, The Role of Foreign Employees in the Meiji Era in Japan, Tokyo 1971; H.J. Jones, Live Machines. Hired Foreigners and Meiji Japan, Vancouver 1980; A. Iriye / E.R. Beauchamp (eds.), Foreign Employees in Nineteenth-Century Japan, Boulder 1990.

12 Recent oyatoi-related research discusses transnational entanglements within single disciplines, such as chemistry and medicine, but does not deal with the informal agency of oyatoi for imperial purposes. See Y. Kikuchi, Anglo-American Connections in Japanese Chemistry: The Lab as Contact Zone, New York 2013; H.-E. Kim, Doctors of Empire: Medical and Cultural Encounters between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan, Buffalo, NY 2014.

The oyatoi gaikokujin were high in number (approximately 2500)14 but only a fifth of them could be designated as experts. While lower-skilled workers were drawn from all over the world, notably China, the more highly skilled personnel mainly came from Britain, the USA, France and Germany. As professors in Japanese universities, instructors of large technological construction projects and advisers to various Meiji ministries, these professional oyatoi formed an auxiliary elite that enabled the Meiji government to accelerate the implementation of its reform programme. Specific features of their distinguished status included their higher educational backgrounds and promising career prospects in their home countries. The experts were recruited via mediation and recommendations from diplomats, foreign ministries, leading scientists at Western universities and individual agents. Offering pays two to three times of the expected equivalent at home, the lucrative working contracts were not only often a strong motive for experts to enter the Japanese service, but also ensured their professional dedication. In Japan, the average oyatoi’s tenure of office was contractually bound to three years. In the case of highly skilled professionals, the contracts were often prolonged so that they stayed in Meiji Japan for an average of five years. There are also many examples of expert oyatoi working up to twenty years or longer for the Meiji government.

The oyatoi were bound to instructions of their Japanese superiors. After years of bad experiences in which amateurs often only pretended to possess professional skills and thereby capitalised on their working positions by becoming involved in trade, the Meiji government drew consequences by setting up strict working contract provisions in 1870.15 Unlike their trading countrymen in the treaty ports, oyatoi were allowed to travel into the interior of Japan for work purposes. With respect to this privilege, one that was highly desired by Western merchants but denied to them in order to protect domestic trade, from 1872 on, the oyatoi were contractually forbidden to be commercially active or to provide insider knowledge to their countrymen. In addition, the oyatoi’s qualifications were now checked carefully. With regard to the prohibition of disclosure of knowledge, Meiji officials knew all too well that Western diplomats saw the oyatoi as «quasi-commercial» agents, whose knowledge on local conditions formed precious commercial capital to their countrymen. Since Western powers benefited from the Japanese modernisation programme, which resulted in an increased demand for steel and machinery, Meiji officials were aware of the fact that from the perspective of Euro-American diplomats, the informal use of experts, notably engineers, who controlled construction projects and were therefore responsible for ordering materials, was a crucial means of enabling the entry of foreign products into the Japanese market.
During the 1870s, the dominant behaviour of the British diplomat Harry Parkes (1828–1885), who commanded the installation of British personnel by capitalising on Japanese dependence on British goodwill concerning treaty talks, confirmed and fuelled Japanese fears of Western practices of exploitation. By closely communicating with British engineers in the Japanese service and notwithstanding the contractual restrictions on knowledge exchange, Parkes benefited from insider knowledge delivered by engineers and was thus able to maintain the British technology monopoly. While it was comparably easy in these days to undermine formal restrictions, conditions changed in the 1880s. Substitution of foreign personnel through trained Japanese youth, increased autonomous action on the part of Japanese leaders within their widening global networks, and growing Western commercial and political competition, made British trade imperialism more difficult. Accordingly, Parkes’ successor, Francis Plunkett (1835–1907), in a letter to the Foreign Office in London in 1885, raised awareness regarding the problem of how «the days of ›Foreign settlements‹ and ›enforced Tariffs‹ are rapidly passing away» and that «the small profits on which Trade must now be carried on will make it every day more and more difficult for the English merchant to compete on the spot with the native, whom education and the Telegraph are every day placing more on a par with him».

Among other aspects, two phenomena troubled British commercial diplomacy in the 1880s. On the one hand, Germany began to compete in the field of technology exports. On the other, Japanese officials started to take advantage of the strong commercial competition between the treaty powers. For the Meiji officials, as a result of failed treaty talks, it became increasingly apparent that Britain, representing the interests of the largest merchant community in Japan, was hampering treaty revision in order to maintain advantageous trading conditions. With the aim of weakening Britain’s leading role in delaying treaty talks, the Meiji government began to lean to the German side, which desired the establishment of German technology in Japan. Accordingly, the Japanese premier minister, Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), and the Japanese diplomat to Berlin, Aoki Shūzō (1844–1914), arranged during talks with the German diplomat to Japan, Theodor von Holleben (1838–1913), and the German chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, that German products would be given preference in Japanese government-funded construction projects. In return, Germany assured support regarding treaty revision. Thus, while Germany pursued a diplomatic strategy to support trade relations (but was not profoundly interested in accelerating treaty talks or fundamentally opposing the Foreign Office

16 The National Archives (TNA), FO 46/191, Tokyo, 8.3.1875, Parkes to Earl of Derby.
17 TNA, FO 46/330, Tokyo, 25.5.1885, Plunkett to Granville.
in London), the Meiji officials pursued a strategy on their own. The Japanese government converted the employment of oyatoi, which was highly desired by Western diplomats, into a means to secure support in treaty talks. In this way, commercial contracts were used as political capital to be distributed among treaty powers.

The informal arrangements between Japanese and German officials, which resulted, for example, in the hiring of Hermann Rümschöttel (1844–1918) as the chief instructor for the construction of the Kyūshū railway line in 1887, became partially known to the British Consular Office through rumours circulating around the foreign community in Japan. While political intervention in the commercial field had been a common practice of the British legation in the 1870s, when there was no real challenge to British supremacy in the field and the Japanese were more reliant on British products and personnel, a practice of this kind caused grave ill feelings within the competitive atmosphere of the 1880s. Thus, regarding the multiplication of international confrontation in East Asia, Francis Plunkett urged the London office to be allowed to abandon the policy of «identic action» with the other treaty powers and «to foster a stronger national line» in Japan. Following this, Plunkett frankly criticised the employment of a growing number of German legal experts within Meiji Japan’s constitutional reform, and made it clear in talks with the Japanese Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru (1836–1915) and Itō Hirobumi, that such a «German favouritism» on the part of the Meiji government would cause the British government to delay treaty revision. As compensation, he then extorted the engagement of new British personnel. In reaction to Plunkett’s threats, Itō dryly replied that «the moment any Foreign Power attempted to control the action of Japan, the influence of that power would disappear in a moment».

Behind this clash of multilateral political interests, the contradiction between diplomatic rhetoric and practice in the context of informal imperialism unfolded. Given the intensified competition and the fact that Western diplomats had to respond to an increasing Japanese autonomy of action (albeit still limited through the unequal treaties), they not only had to hide their interest in enlarging national spheres of influence in East Asia, but also partially abandoned cooperation with other treaty powers. As a means of discrediting their rivals in the eyes of the Japanese officials, diplomats accused other powers of pursuing illicit strategies. Thus, in order to discredit the trustworthiness of their German rival, Francis Plunkett accused the Germans of pursuing political interests in Japan and of politically intervening in the commercial field, whereas he claimed that the British only held commercial interests. Conversely, the German representative, von Holleben, assured Itō and Inoue that there were only commercial interests on their behalf, whereas the

19 Bundesarchiv / Lichterfelde (BArch) R 901/12737, Tokyo, 20.4.1887, Holleben to Bismarck.
20 TNA, FO 46/331, Tokyo, 19.6.1885, Plunkett to Granville.
21 TNA, FO 46/366, Tokyo, 8.3.1887, Plunkett to Salisbury.
22 TNA, FO 46/331, Tokyo, 3.6.1885, Plunkett to Granville.
British, like Russia and France, would be eager to gain political influence in Japan as in East Asia.23

Contrary to this rhetoric, the diplomats of both countries had stimulated political interests of their governments in Japan and East Asia for a long time. Following Harry Parkes’ eagerness to enlarge British spheres of influence in East Asia, Francis Plunkett wrote in 1885 to the London office: «How much more then in a country like Japan, where we have both political and commercial interests of great importance to defend and advance, should Great Britain consider her own advantage first and give up trusting to «identic» action here?»24 Just like his rival, Holleben insisted in a letter to Bismarck that Germany not only pursued commercial but also «political interests» in Japan.25 Thus, although European imperialism in East Asia was stronger than ever before in the 1880s, and the British and German representatives thoroughly measured the political interests of their own and other governments, it was imperative not to play this card openly. While political and economic interests were essentially interwoven on the part of the contracting powers, these two categories were artificially distinguished in terms of international relations. In contemporary thinking, international law relations were divided into commercial relations based on free trade agreements that were guided by the principles of *laissez-faire* on the one hand, and protectorates, which were installed by political and military control, on the other. This artificial distinction26 made political intervention in commercial relations based on free trade agreements an unofficial strategy to secure national advantages over competitors. At the same time, it was officially vilified as an illicit manipulation of the free trade principles and as an illegitimate praxis of imperial usurpation.

Given this ambivalence of informally intended and formally admitted motives, the Western governments regarded high-ranking experts in the Japanese service as key agents when it came to realising interests in a secret way. It was the very high-ranking experts that were especially believed to have a large degree of influence due to their closeness to Japanese officials and their decision-making. Although the Japanese government was well aware of the position the oyatoi occupied in Western strategies of informal diplomacy, and contractually forbade transgressions of competencies, there was one key factor that made the expert oyatoi precious agents for channelling unofficial interests: their ability to engender trust from the Meiji officials. Unlike foreign merchants in the treaty ports or diplomats, who were felt to be working toward the exploitation of the Japanese and were not believed to be interested in giving up the profitable conditions provided by the unequal treaties, the expert oyatoi represented Western scientific progress. They were linked to middle-

23 BArch R 901/12739, Tokyo, 8.3.1888, Doernberg to Bismarck.
24 TNA, FO 46/331, Tokyo, 18.6.1885, Plunkett to Granville.
25 BArch R 901/12737, Tokyo, 28.5.1887, Holleben to Bismarck.
26 See Gallagher / Robinson, «The Imperialism of Free Trade».
class values, such as modesty, diligence and virtuousness. This positive representation helped to promote the Western civilising mission and to simultaneously disguise underlying power policies.

Here, an ideology of expertise came into effect. According to sociological research on experts in modern societies, the expert is a scientist who operates in the practical field of economy or politics, where he or she introduces scientific criteria of efficiency and thus provides resources for accumulating power or capital. Due to the scientific approach, the expert helps to disguise these practices by universalising and decontextualising them. The detachment of political power contexts is accompanied by an ideology of expertise claiming that science is autonomous, and free from both economic and political interests. This ambivalent relationship between science and politics is described by sociological literature as a structural phenomenon.27 It also applies to the ambivalent status of the expert oyatoi. While the claimed absence of commercial interests on the part of the experts was criticised by treaty port merchants, who accusing them of being pro-Japanese and lacking in patriotism, the diplomats found this reputation helpful gaining the trust of Meiji officials. The contractual limitation of the experts’ scope and the autonomy of Japanese elites made it necessary for Western diplomats to react to the needs and demands of the Meiji officials, if they wanted to realise their interests. The diplomats clearly wanted the experts to play a dual role by officially serving the Japanese and unofficially serving their home governments. Therefore, the agency that the oyatoi would take over on behalf of the diplomats’ interests was to be realised indirectly.

By the mid–1880s, the diplomats had a clear idea of how to generate trust from the Meiji officials. Amongst the experts, especially the engineers were especially seen as «quasi-commercial agents», who should, next to their primary competency of professional knowledge, possess a secondary, personality-related skill. The engineers’ primary competencies, such as technical expertise and insights into local market conditions (for instance, knowledge of price standards and demanded delivery times) provided valuable information and enabled merchants to properly order and sell material. The expert also thereby equipped the diplomat with the latest news and helped to extend the scope of intervention in the commercial field to which the diplomat officially had no access. During the 1870s, the British representative was continually and secretly informed by the British staff in Japan about running construction projects, and was thus qualified to react more quickly to changes in the field than their colleagues. The German representative, who had hitherto lacked comparable structures of knowledge access, also considered such unofficial information to be a crucial means to back up German trade.28 This com-

28 BArch R 901/12737, Tokyo, 14.2.1887, Holleben to Bismarck.
petitive advantage on the basis of the presence of an engineer was considered to be boosted if the expert managed to exercise influence through gaining the trust of the Japanese officials on the grounds of particular personality traits. Thus, beyond the actual technical know-how, the expert required a knowledge of foreign affairs in general and Japanese affairs in particular, intercultural sensitivity, an absence of chauvinism, and the ability to balance loyalty towards the Japanese and his home country at the same time. Holleben and his German colleague in Yokohama, Eduard Zappe, stated in their consular reports that important commercial contracts had been lost to the British because some German engineers had demonstrated pretentious attitudes.\textsuperscript{29} Therefore, the Foreign Office in Berlin wanted the prospective engineer for the Kyūshū railway construction, Hermann Rumschöttel, to correctly judge Japanese affairs and to fairly treat Japanese superiors. Zappe insisted that Rumschöttel should, upon his arrival in Japan, refer to him and follow his advice regarding local conditions as long as Rumschöttel was not capable of judging it on his own. However, while a functional loyalty of experts towards the Japanese was seen as a necessary component to attain the prolongation of employment contracts, an exceedingly strong loyalty was not desired either. As in the case of Hermann Roesler (1834–1894), who was one of the closest and most trusted legal advisers to Itō Hirobumi, the Germans feared his pro-Japanese loyalty and apparent lack to German patriotism to be dangerous for German interests.

The duplicitous British and German policy towards the Meiji government corresponded to the dual role that the experts occupied within diplomatic strategies: 1) to secure commercial contracts by occupying strategically important positions and to broaden the diplomat’s scope through the provision of decisive intelligence, and 2) to help to disguise these unofficial impacts through the experts’ special reputation of being detached from commercial interests. Underlying this instrumentalisation of expertise and of the experts’ social status, the special conditions of informal imperialism were concealed. Not only knowledge in itself, but also the social capital owned by the actors of knowledge transfer proved politically valuable insofar as the informal practice of imperial interference made it necessary to maintain moral credibility on the part of the treaty powers. The divergence between political rhetoric and practice implied that the powers represented the Western civilising mission and thus legitimised the international hierarchical system based on Western legal structures, but politically referred to the concept of «civilisation» only in a functional way. The European Foreign Offices were not interested in elevating the Japanese to an equal legal status and evaluated the Japanese modernisation efforts only under functional aspects. Accordingly, in 1885 Plunkett summarised British interests towards Japan, claiming that Japan should be «strong enough» and «prosper-
ous and rich enough» to resist the encroachments of other powers and «to take large quantities of our manufactures». However, concerning treaty revision, the legal expert Lorenz von Stein (1815–1890), among others, advised Itō Hirobumi in 1887 that the British tactically stuck to the stigma of the semi-civilised status of Japan only to maintain the lucrative provisions of the unequal treaties. Since the Meiji officials were well aware of such tactics and in turn pursued strategies of their own by taking advantage of Western commercial competition, this was advice that Itō no longer needed to be given.


Due to the coercive nature by which Japan was integrated into the treaty system, the leading Japanese officials well understood the political power implications of the Western international order and also of the functional use of the concept of «civilisation». By studying the premises of Western international law, Meiji officials concluded that international competition prevailed over cooperation. Despite officially acting on behalf of cooperational interests and representing a common civilising mission, the Western powers were seen as basically pursuing individual interests. It was believed that in case these interests were endangered, they would not hesitate to give up cooperation in order to militarily defend national interests. Thus, in 1869, Iwakura Tomomi (1825–1883), the leading statesman, doubted international cooperation as stipulated by legal contracts and stated that «[...] the following [I]n the end all states overseas are our country’s enemies. [...] All states wish to stand above other states: state A wants to stand above B, B over C. It is for these reasons that I say that foreign states are all our enemies.» Similarly, other officials saw competition as the hegemonic principle of international relations within the Western world order. Western states were seen as «greedy wolves», which «eye each other like tigers, trying to take advantage of the slightest chance presented to them». Itō also summarised his far-sighted understanding of Western diplomacy by characterising it as «exchanges of favours, threats, and secret treaties of war». Regarding the possibility that Japan «could fall under the tricks of European diplomats», he deemed it necessary for Japan to maintain «extreme bravery and deep knowledge of European diplomacy».

Given the historical Japanese integration into the Sino-centric world system, the Meiji officials were familiar with double standards of hierarchical interstate relations, and they showed this awareness by superficially acknowledging the supremacy of a foreign power, while simultaneously maintaining a full sense of Japan’s sovereignty. However, by struggling for integration in the Western international system in order to attain treaty revision, and thus also for concepts around which reform

30 TNA, FO 46/328, Tokyo, 16.2.1885, Plunkett to Granville.  
31 Cited in S. Suzuki, Civilization and Empire, 66, 82.
agendas should be centred, especially during the early Meiji period, the precise implications of the Western system of diplomatic representation and policies for Japan were not clear from the beginning. Within this early orientation phase, the advice of individual experts in Japanese service was of great value. By drawing attention to the growing importance of the press in parliamentarian societies, and thus of public opinion in political decision-making processes, expert oyatoi, such as Charles LeGendre, Edward House, Captain Francis Brinkley, as well as (for the mid-Meiji period) Alexander von Siebold, Lorenz von Stein and Henry Dyer, provided precious advice and assistance. By assisting Meiji officials within their growing awareness that public opinion was, when channelled wisely, a helpful tool for politicians, and that international representation within political power contexts was of central importance, these oyatoi helped to realise new strategies of imperial diplomacy.

Already by the early 1870s, Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922), then Minister of Finance and Dajōkan-Councillor, considered taking action against the British press in the treaty ports. Mainly edited by British merchants, numerous foreign newspapers were permeated with Orientalist narratives depicting the Japanese political and economic elite as incompetent and deceitful. Such anti-Japanese narratives spread by Yokohama newspapers, such as the Japan Mail, the Japan Herald and the Japan Gazette, represented the interests of foreign merchants to maintain advantageous trading conditions as provided by the unequal treaties. Thus, foreign journalists regularly reproduced Orientalist topoi referring to the barbaric brutality of xenophobic samurai, the arbitrariness of Japanese jurisprudence, the notorious mendacity of Japanese merchants and the profound incompetency of Japanese statesmen.32 On the grounds of such topoi, a lasting safety risk was constructed and the maintenance of consular jurisdiction as stipulated in the unequal treaties was legitimised. Also, the control of tariffs through the treaty powers, which ensured advantageous deals on the part of foreign merchants, was justified by such regularly iterated chauvinism.

In order to prevent this reporting style, in 1873 Ōkuma concluded an agreement with the editor of the Japan Mail, William G. Howell, granting the newspaper government subsidies and obligating its staff to report in a favourable manner about Japan’s modernisation efforts.33 Facing the fact that Howell did not keep his promise and detrimental articles continued to be published, which was particularly considered a problem in the context of the Taiwan Expedition of 1874, Ōkuma requested a memorandum from Charles LeGendre (1830–1899), in which the latter sketched
LeGendre, a former U.S. consul to Amoy in China, had been employed by the Meiji government in 1872 in order to provide advice on behalf of the Taiwan Expedition, to which he was able to supply decisive intelligence on the southern region of Taiwan. Next to expertise concerning strategies to justify the expedition in line with international law, he gave advice on the decisive role that the foreign press played in discrediting the expedition and (in a broader scope) in hampering treaty revision. Emphasising that the foreign press in Japan had been «the only channel through which intelligence concerning Japan had reached Europe for many years», he pointed to the problem of how the foreign press mainly represented chauvinistic perspectives of the British consul and British merchants. «Reared in a political school hostile to the interest of [Japan],» he stated, these papers spread «calumnies and falsehoods» and had done «so much mischief in misinterpreting the [Japanese] government». The problem was considered serious because the treaty port newspapers exerted significant influence not only within the diplomatic community in East Asia. LeGendre insisted that these newspapers also influenced public opinion in Europe because they were «circulated to a considerable extent in the cabinet and in the other influential circles in Europe», and were associated with large newspapers such as the London Times, for which the editor of the Japan Mail acted as correspondent on Japanese affairs. Regarding the absence of profound European knowledge of Japan the information provided by these newspapers was «accepted as undisputed», hence LeGendre advised the creation of a government-sponsored newspaper to counterbalance biased news coverage.

While Ōkuma was already aware of this problem and had unsuccessfully attempted to redirect the reporting style of the Japan Mail, LeGendre offered a new approach to the problem. According to LeGendre, the proposed government-subsidised publication, which would be published in English in order to reach the Euro-American public, was to be divided into an official and unofficial part of political news-reporting: the official part providing only news based on facts, and the unofficial part containing instead opinion-led discussions of these facts. Whereas the Japanese government would only be held responsible for the official part by openly referring to its authorship, the unofficial part, while also provided by the government, would have the pretence of being «open to all communication» and of

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35 The expedition to Taiwan, launched by the Meiji government in 1874, was officially intended to punish the murder of 54 Ryūkyūan sailors at the south-western coast of Taiwan in December 1871. Unofficially, the expedition channelled expansionist interests of the militarist faction surrounding Saigō Takamori.
36 Ōkuma Shigenobu Monjō (ŌM), Waseda University Library, C 479: Tokyo, 23.12.1874, LeGendre to Ōkuma.
37 Ibid.
«not [being] within its [the Meiji government] control». Hiding the source, LeGendre stated, would enable the minister to be «entirely at liberty to express his own views through it in any way that might suit his convenience». Thus, the Meiji government needed to employ agents under whose names the political discussion should be led. Concerning these agents, LeGendre sketched the following profile: «Too much stress cannot be attached to the importance of ascertaining with absolute conviction the trustworthiness of these assistants. It is not enough that they be men of integrity and ability, but they should, if possible, be selected from among those whose education and experience have led them to view the political situation and necessities of Japan with sympathetic eyes and with similar feelings to those held by her own most advanced public men.».\(^{37}\) The last part of the quote refers to the question of the group from which these assistants were to be recruited. The mere fact that they would have to show similar loyalty to Japan’s political fate to the loyalty «held by her own most advanced public men» indicates that these assistants were not considered Japanese, just as references to qualities such as «education and experience» highlight the fact that these secret assistants were to be chosen from among the expert oyatoi. Before demonstrating how Meiji officials implemented political press measures in line with LeGendre’s advice, a brief review of the standards of press policies in Europe and Japan will be given in order to contextualise LeGendre’s proposal of 1874.

Facing the growing influence that the press gained on shaping public opinion within parliamentarian societies and, simultaneously, facing increasingly independent news coverage by professional journalists in the wake of laws granting the freedom of the press, by the 1870s, Western governments considered indirect means of influencing the press. By informally subsidising journalists and newspapers, governments tried to stimulate positive news coverage in order to thereby counterweigh political scandals, which were more and more frequently launched by opposition parties in order to contest governmental authority.\(^{38}\) Similarly, in the 1870s the Meiji government investigated the new status of the press and considered it a destabilising factor within the fragmenting political scene. Though the Meiji government retained measures of controlling the press by passing press laws in 1869, 1871, 1873 and 1875, an awareness rose concerning the increasing importance of public opinion in political decision-making.\(^{39}\) The political discourse on public opinion in Europe as well as in Japan framed the problem as such: The «masses» were not believed to be politically mature enough to correctly assess the news spread by the partisan press. However, governments recognised a growing necessity to


react to the demands of the mass audience – a necessity that became more pressing when the popular mass press gained influence in the 1880s. Out of these considerations, especially Western politicians who had fewer tools to officially control press publications, concluded that public opinion should be influenced in an indirect manner. With the help of such informal interference, politicians deemed it possible to produce public opinion by design.

In this way, Charles LeGendre’s advice on political press measures was fully up to date with contemporary political debates. In some respects, his advice was ahead of Western intelligence on press policies. Political press strategies on behalf of European Foreign Offices (that is press policy in the realm of foreign relations) were barely discussed until the late 1890s, and they were discussed in a profound way only by the start of the twentieth century when intensified international competition in the context of imperialism was accompanied by «press wars», which compelled the Foreign Offices to react to self-reinforcing tendencies of heated public discussions on foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{40} LeGendre realised, as early as in 1874, the value of press relations in the realm of foreign policy by referring to an emerging world public and thus recognised the political value of national representation in an international context. By highlighting that the Japanese call for treaty revision as well as Japanese policies towards East Asia would be assessed from the perspective of whether Japan was progressing towards Western standards of modernisation or not, LeGendre urged that all efforts on behalf of the Japanese government should focus on «the [...] illustration of modern Japanese principles and ideas». If the judgements of the treaty port press were contested by publications (sponsored by the Meiji government) and disproved, LeGendre assured that not only would European governments be compelled to reassert their policies towards Japan, but that public opinion would also influence Western policies on behalf of Japanese interests when the West was provided access to proper knowledge on Japan. In order to illustrate the power of public opinion, LeGendre emphasised its influence on the abolition of slavery in the USA and on sanctioning British colonial wars. Thus, he concluded: «Appeals to public opinion, and the creation of a public influence that may be made to control the most powerful forces have, within the last half century, been undertaken chiefly by means of the press. The irresistible power that can be exercised by this engine, when properly directed, is shown by the effect it produces upon important events in Europe and America.»\textsuperscript{41} To properly conduct such press strategies, LeGendre saw it necessary to form a corps of foreign assistants to spread governmental views under their names. The concealment of the origin of the articles and the hidding of the fact that these articles were written only by the experts were political measures of deliberate deception, which were not new but

\textsuperscript{40} See for example D. Geppert, Pressekriege. Öffentlichkeit und Diplomatie in den deutsch-britischen Beziehungen 1896–1912, Munich 2007.

\textsuperscript{41} ÖM, C 479.
innovative in handling of foreign public relations. Only by the beginning of the twentieth century did the European foreign offices institutionalise propaganda strategies in the context of foreign relations.

It is not recorded if or how Ōkuma responded to LeGendre’s proposal. By the time LeGendre delivered his memorandum in December 1874, Ōkuma had already undertaken multilateral press policies within the context of the Taiwan expedition. Thus, in 1873, the American journalist and oyatoi Edward House (1836–1901), who was well acquainted with LeGendre, was hired to accompany the expedition in order to prepare a monograph depicting the expedition according to the official narrative of the Meiji government and its projected mission civilise the «barbarians of Formosa». House was considered qualified not only because he was acquainted with Ōkuma and therefore known to be pro-Japanese in his outlook, but also because he was a correspondent for the New York Herald, which ensured that his news coverage was known to a wider public. For Japanese news coverage, Kishida Ginkō from the government-sponsored Tōkyō Nichi-Nichi Shimbun was hired. With House referring to modern and humanistic principles of Japanese policies and therefore to specific Western values towards a Western audience, and with Ginkō depicting the expedition in terms of Sino-Japanese ethics towards the domestic audience, Ōkuma implemented different strategies of representation on different audiences. While the Meiji officials were capable of exerting a considerable amount of control towards the Japanese newspapers, LeGendre’s proposal helped to consolidate strategies towards the treaty powers and to structure future Japanese press policies towards Western media.

By founding the Tokio Times in 1876, to which Edward House was appointed editor, the Meiji government set up an informally government-funded, English-language journal to counterbalance the negative news coverage of the British treaty port press. Through his editorials and monographs, House not only spread official narratives and his own pro-Japanese views, but also never got tired of criticising Western diplomacy in East Asia as greedy and chauvinistic. Although House was often blamed for his rather biased coverage and polemical style, he was widely respected for his writing skills and profound knowledge on East Asian affairs. In acknowledging the positive effects of subsidising a foreign newspaper in Japan and the valuable assistance that renowned men such as House could provide in favour of
of Japanese interests, the Meiji government maintained informal sponsorship of oyatoi for publishing narratives on their behalf.

After Edward House left Japan for the USA in 1880, while continuing to provide lifelong assistance to Ōkuma and other Meiji officials, the former professor of Mathematics at the Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo, Captain Francis Brinkley (1841–1912), was offered an equivalent post in order to fill the gap left by House. Thus, in 1880, Brinkley was requested to take up the now-vacant post as editor of the Japan Mail, to which House, after the pro-Japanese turn of the newspaper, also began to submit articles from 1883 onwards. Brinkley remained in this position until his death in 1912 and rendered continuous service by writing in favour of Japanese interests. Like House, Brinkley emphasised in numerous articles since the early 1880s that delaying treaty revision on the part of the treaty powers was becoming more and more inopportune and criticised that the treaty powers only did so in order to maintain imperial privileges. Brinkley’s writing additionally reached a wider public when he became a correspondent for the Times in 1894. How far his influence actually grew concerning his journalistic activity is shown in an article published in August 1912 in the German newspaper Hamburger Nachrichten, which stated that Brinkley had influenced public opinion in Europe over the course of three decades with such strength that many societal circles depended on his opinion.47

Next to Brinkley and House, other oyatoi also wrote in favour of official Japanese narratives. As treaty revision depended mainly on the external evaluation of how Japan succeeded in adopting Western (that is, «modern») legal structures in particular, and on the question of the extent to which the Meiji elite was capable of adopting Western mentality in general, single oyatoi were asked to highlight Japanese progress toward Western standards. The strategy of the Meiji government was thereby to refute the Western narrative of Japanese backwardness by implementing a narrative of Japanese progressiveness in terms of the Western definition of modernity. Thus, not only did LeGendre publish a monograph entitled «Progressive Japan» (1878), but (among others) Henry Spencer Palmer (1838–1893), the projected British chief engineer for the construction of the Yokohama Waterworks, was also approached by Inoue Kaoru to write in favour of Japanese interests. Before eventually employing him for the lucrative Yokohama construction project, Inoue wanted Palmer, who was already known for having spread pro-Japanese views via journal articles, to become a permanent Times-correspondent. Thus Inoue wrote to Palmer in 1884: «[…] [T]here is one thing I am very anxious that you should accomplish, that is to get the Times and other high standing papers, with which you have

47 Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan), Gaimushō kiroku, 3-9-3-20, 2.
established connection, to appoint you as their special correspondent in Japan.»

By requesting Palmer to publish articles similar to his «Recent Japanese Progress» of 1882, Inoue employed Palmer to write positively about the recent achievements in Japan in order to generate confidence among the British public towards the Japanese legal and economic status, and to stimulate a more favourable opinion towards treaty revision. This arrangement was not concluded within the official employment contract, but made informally through personal correspondence.

The Meiji government maintained this press strategy covering the global diffusion of pro-Japanese narratives throughout the entire Meiji period. While Japanese writers also eagerly published English-language monographs in order to favourably portray Japanese culture and politics towards the Western public, the role of Western experts was significant in many ways. Individual expert oyatoi not only wrote voluntarily about the Japanese «modernisation progress» and added latest knowledge to the outdated inventory of Orientalist and exotic Western depictions of Japan, they were also encouraged by the Meiji officials to do so. In correlating the oyatoi’s output with Japanese interests, especially in the early Meiji period, such services rendered valuable assistance for opening up channels of distribution of knowledge towards the West, which were not yet accessible to Japanese authors. In addition to access to platforms of knowledge diffusion provided by the experts’ networks and their sideline activities as correspondents and authors, there was another feature that was a valuable resource within political press strategies throughout the Meiji period: the credibility accredited to the experts. It is for this reason that even after the first successes regarding treaty revision in the 1890s, former oyatoi, lsuch as the British engineer Henry Dyer (1848–1918) and the U.S. American professor of Philosophy at Harvard, George Trumbull Ladd (1842–1921), were approached to write positively about Japanese economics in order to attract foreign investors – as in the case with Dyer –, and about the Japanese colonisation of Korea in order to refute critics and to highlight the civilisational strength of Japan – as in the case with Ladd. Even when Japanese press policies in the realm of foreign relations became more institutionalised since the 1880s, which was mainly stimulated by the Japanese diplomat to Berlin, Aoki Shūzō, and the adviser to the Meiji government, Alexander von Siebold (1846–1911), informal agreements with oyatoi remained an effective method to undermine Western Orientalist narratives about Japan.

On the basis of the oyatoi’s experiences of living and working in Japan for several years, they were ascribed the status of not only having been experts in Japan, but moreover as being experts on Japan. Several former oyatoi began at the time of their return home to give lectures on specialised topics, such as geology, architec-

48 Ibid., 3-13-4-1, Tokyo, 13.9.1884, Inoue Kaoru to Henry S. Palmer.
ture and seismicity in Japan, hosted by internationally oriented scientific societies. However, it was not only specialised knowledge on Japan that reached an interested audience. Japanese culture in general exerted a strong appeal on Western audiences, which was considerably triggered by the fashionable exoticsm of Japonism. Since European painters and poets often only fantasised about Japan, portraying it as the static feudal culture of samurai, geishas and teahouses, the expert oyatoi felt called to set the picture straight. Therefore, most of the high-ranking oyatoi published monographs that drew on Japanese culture in a more general way in order to assess the Japanese present and expected future. However, the way the oyatoi evaluated the Japanese modernisation process depended on their individual perspective. Thus the plurality of evaluations correlated with the plurality of their personal characters. While all of them were united in their criticism of the superficial, outdated and hedonistic perspectives of European Japonists and tourists, they were divided over the question of how far Japanese modernisation was expected to ultimately succeed. Some of them interpreted the future of Japan along contemporary scientific-Orientalist narratives that emphasised fundamental cultural differences, on which grounds a Japanese fate of inferiority, however framed, seemed unchangeable. Others were able to cut across such narratives on the basis of their personal experiences. They emphasised cultural relativity and had less reservation about the idea of a «modern» Japan on par with Western countries. It was this last group of oyatoi that formed the corps from which press agents of the Meiji government were recruited. The Meiji officials combined political interests with the oyatoi’s own sense of professional mission. Thus, such an unofficial linkage of governmental interests to individual experts was only possible because the experts themselves possessed a strong sense of status consciousness and were eager to display political and public efficacy, a phenomenon resulting from the broader context of professionalisation towards the end of the nineteenth century.

In evaluating the «Japanese publicity project», the U.S. American journalist Frederic Haskin stated in 1909: «To the imperial government at Tokio belongs credit for the keenest appreciation for the power of printer’s ink that has ever been manifested by a world power in the form of systematic and for-reaching [sic] efforts to mould public opinion favorably to national enterprises affecting international affairs. Her efforts in this direction compel admiration by their magnitude. [...] In the matter of promoting publicity to forward her interests in international affairs, Japan takes the lead over all of the countries of the world.»51 By admiring the efficiency of such global public relations, Haskin accentuated the role of Western writers, who had continuously been sponsored by the Meiji government and who had carried out strategies, which, according to Haskin, were not yet fully under-

51 Gaimushō Kiroku, 1-3-1-19, 1, Los Angeles Herald, 7.10.1909.
stood by Western diplomats or experts on international relations. Haskin evaluated this strategy of informally influencing public opinion abroad as explicitly «modern». Indeed, such a political strategy was not systematically theorised until the 1920s when authors such as Edward Bernays reflected on the new techniques of «Propaganda». Interestingly, in struggling to be publicly acknowledged as «modern», the Meiji officials employed strategies that were ahead of their time and considered to be «more modern» than the established practices of Western governments.

3. Conclusion

With respect to the question of within which structures policy-relevant knowledge in the context of late nineteenth century imperialism was channelled or made accessible, it may be stated that the context of informal imperialism set special conditions that influenced the ways in which knowledge was obtained, disseminated or displayed. While in colonial or postcolonial contexts officials and experts occupied an explicit top-down position that enabled them to channel interests in a rather direct manner, the context of informal imperialism required means of indirect influence and enhanced responsivity. Because informal imperialism was defined by political power asymmetries with no formal power at the centre of indirect rule, national interests were only to be realised by diplomatic means and through careful balancing of multilateral interests. Thus, within the multifaceted mesh of cooperative and competitive international relations on the basis of the unequal treaty system, a specific kind of knowledge gained vital political relevance, namely the knowledge that increased the governmental representatives’ scope to act and react. However, while representation, responsivity and diplomatic dialogue were crucial to back up national interests, means of creating trust and goodwill were not easily applied in an atmosphere of informal power policies, in which political perception was driven by distrust, prejudice and hidden agendas.

According to the diverging interests of different governments within the multilateral and asymmetrical treaty system, different functions of knowledge were of political value. Because Western governments were interested in expanding their global reach and wanted to strengthen trade and political influence in East Asia, they considered knowledge that helped them to gain access to markets to be crucial. However, precisely because local knowledge was desired, the Japanese government restricted knowledge access by denying merchants entry into the Japanese interior and forbidding the oyatoi from forwarding insider knowledge, thereby attempting to limit exploitation within the treaty system. In order to overcome such restrictions, access to knowledge and networks was seen to be more likely gained through

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an expert’s authority and social reputation. Likewise, the Japanese government drew on the special authority of foreign experts in Japanese employment, because they were interested in obtaining treaty revisions and in contesting anti-Japanese narratives that supported imperial interests on the part of Western treaty port merchants and diplomats. With the help of individual experts, they not only solidified diplomatic strategies, but also gained extra access to platforms of knowledge distribution such as national newspapers and periodicals in the USA and Europe. Other than Japanese authors, who also regularly published articles in Euro-American journals, the expert oyatoi were accredited with superior authority of speaking truth on the grounds of structural (cultural / identity and social / professional attribution) and individual (experience, career path) effects.

On the basis of the experts’ authority (that is, their professional status that, along with their specialised know-how, enabled the experts to gain access to knowledge, decision-making elites and public platforms), the political officials’ scope to act and react increased. The experts’ social status bestowed high credibility upon them, which, in political considerations, converted into a precious capital of generating trust. By instrumentalising the experts’ social capital and thereby creating an atmosphere of confidence, political officials were enabled to interfere in an informal way and thus to pursue political power interests. However, only because the experts themselves were eager to display political efficacy – a phenomenon resulting from the broader context of elite transformation, middle-class consolidation and professionalisation towards the end of the nineteenth century –, such unofficial linkage between governmental and individual experts’ interests was possible. Thus, the experts’ strive for professional reputation and social status was simultaneously the basis for its political value in the officials’ mind, as well as for the experts’ motive to balance multiple loyalties and to serve informal political ends.

Considering the experts’ potential to enhance imperial dialogue, the findings of this article also adapt to this issue’s theme of «imperial cloud». Approaching the «imperial cloud» metaphor from its pluralistic meaning and regarding Japan’s specific (discursive and concrete) political embeddedness, the expert oyatoi can be seen as agents who made informal knowledge within the Western «imperial cloud» accessible to Japan and vice versa.
Responsivity within the Context of Informal Imperialism:

Oyatoi in Meiji Japan

The article explores ways in which diplomatic strategies within the unequal treaty system between Meiji Japan and Western powers were enhanced by employing the informal agency of foreign experts in the service of the Meiji government. Before Japan was able to revise the unequal treaties in the 1890s, international intercourse within the treaty system had been conditioned by policies of informal imperialism, wherein the entanglement of multilateral national interests and an atmosphere of hidden agendas restricted diplomatic scope. The article analyses how governmental representatives intensified diplomatic dialogue and gained access to foreign expertise by making use of the social capital of high-ranking oyatoi gaikokujin (literally hired foreigners). The instrumentalisation of their knowledge and, moreover, of their image as experts detached from the political sphere, enabled officials to gather informal intelligence, hide unofficial impacts and thus promote national interests, be it to secure lucrative commercial contracts on the part of the British and German government or to implement diplomatic press strategies on the part of the Meiji government. By seeking to understand the political basis of access to knowledge within the context of informal imperialism, the article deals with the strategic value of social image and representation, thereby elaborating on the informal agency of the oyatoi, which has not yet been sufficiently investigated.

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https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2016-2-268

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