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WE ARE WHAT WE EAT, OR DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING CULTURE-BOUND FOOD NOMINATIONS FROM CHINESE INTO UKRAINIAN AND ENGLISH

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The article is dedicated to the specifics of rendering Chinese culture-bound food nominations into Ukrainian and English. The relevance of the research is determined by the fact that it is conducted at the crossroads of cognitive and cultural paradigms of Translation Studies. FOOD is treated as a cultural concept whose linguistic embodiment reveals particular traits of the national culture and mentality and also as a category whose referential field covers a number of food-related domains. This broad definition of food provides for the better understanding of associations that permeate all the domains of the category tying together units within and outside them. In search of the material, we turned to the Chinese–Ukrainian Illustrated Dictionary that includes 413 food nominations (also referred to as “gastronyms”) located in 15 domains according to the method of mind-mapping. Each of the entries is supplemented with an object’s picture that contributes to its better understanding in foreign cultures. It was established that the level of cultural specificity as revealed in translation equivalents is not equal in different domains. It is relatively low for fruits and vegetables whose names were borrowed from other languages or coined on the basis of the European or classical languages. Such practice was typical for the colonial period when cultural specificity of the colonized nations was deliberately eliminated. At the same time, national coloring is especially high for the names of the dishes coined under the influence of different types of associations, namely those of color, size, shape, consistence, resemblance, etc. The com-

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parative analysis demonstrated that the associations underlying the Chinese names are lost for both Ukrainian-speaking and English-speaking recipients despite the application of loan translation for their transfer.

Keywords: association, category, concept, cultural specifics, food nomination, loan translation (calque), transliteration.

МИ – ТЕ, ЩО МИ ЇМО, АБО ТРУДНОЩІ ПЕРЕКЛАДУ КИТАЙСЬКИХ КУЛЬТУРНО ОРІЄНТОВАНИХ НОМІНАЦІЙ ЇЖІ З КИТАЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ УКРАЇНСЬКОЮ ТА АНГЛІЙСЬКОЮ

О. В. Ребрій, О. О. Ребрій

Статтю присвячено визначенню особливостей перекладу китайських культурно орієнтованих номінацій їжі українською та англійською мовами. Актуальність дослідження визначається тим, що воно проведене на перетині когнітивної та культурної парадигм сучасного перекладознавства. ЇЖА розглядається як культурний концепт, мовне втілення якого висвітлює певні риси національної культури та свідомості, а також як категорія, референційне поле якої охоплює низку пов'язаних з їжею доменів. Такий широкий підхід до визначення їжі забезпечує краще розуміння асоціацій, що пронизують всі домени категорії, пов'язуючи одиниці як всередині їх, так і за їхніми межами. В пошуках матеріалу дослідження ми звернулися до «Китайсько-українського ілюстрованого словника», що вміщує 413 найменувань їжі (також відомих як «гастроімі») у 15 доменах, згрупованих у відповідності до методу ментального мапування. Кожна одиниця словника супроводжується малюнком відповідного об'єкта, що сприяє його кращому розумінню представниками інших культур та носіями інших мов. Дослідження встановило, що рівень культурної специфічності, що проявляється в перекладних відповідниках, не є однаковим для всіх доменів. Він є відносно низьким для найменувань фруктів та овочів, назви яких було запозичено з інших мов або створено на основі європейських чи класичних мов. Така практика була типовою для колоніального періоду, коли культурна специфіка колонізованих народів навмисно вилучалася. Водночас національне забарвлення є особливо високим у назвах страв, що виникли на основі різноманітних асоціацій, а саме пов'язаних з кольором, розміром, формою, консистенцією, схожістю тощо. Порівняльний аналіз показав, що асоціації, що перебувають в основі китайських назв, втрачаються для українськомовних та англійськомовних реципієнтів, незважаючи на застосування перекладацького способу калькування.

Ключові слова: асоціація, калькування, категорія, концепт, культурна специфіка, номінація їжі, транслітерація.

Introduction. Similar to many other Humanities, Translation Studies is branded as a multidisciplinary and polyparadigmatic research field whose dynamics is crucially dependent upon its ability to absorb and utilize all the new conceptions, theories and methods that can be adapted and successfully employed in regard to translation as its primary object. For several decades, Translation Studies has been evolving at the intersection of its cultural and cognitive paradigms. While the former refers to “any types of translation which function as a tool for cross-cultural or anthropological research, or indeed to any translation which is sensitive to cultural as well as linguistic factors” [Shuttleworth, Cowie 1997, 35], the latter may be broadly defined as “the field or branch of translation studies originally interested in the translating

mind” [Jaaskelainen, Lacruz 2018, 2] or “a cluster of research trends based on cognitive sciences and psycholinguistics” [Gambier, Doorslaer 2015, 9].

Thus, we find of particular *relevance* those research objects that get into the focus of interest of both paradigms and can contribute to their further elaboration in Ukraine as well as overseas. Among such objects, there are cultural concepts understood here as “collective mental formations reflecting specifics of a particular (linguistic) culture” [Martynyuk 2012, 65]. Cultural concepts’ main characteristics include the following: (1) they are markers of some ethnic culture; (2) they are poly-appellate, i.e. can be embodied in various linguistic forms; (3) they are multi-modal, i.e. in addition to language, can be embodied in various cultural modes, such as music, theater, painting, sculpture, etc. [ibid., 66].

Cultural concepts are in the core of a national worldview and that fact makes them especially difficult for reproducing via linguistic means of other languages. One such concept is FOOD, which is also a category, since food is present in our minds as “a conceptual integration, or integration of objects on the basis of a mutual concept” [ibid., 33].

Categories as complex mental structures “enable us to relate things to each other in terms of similarity and dissimilarity and are involved whenever we perceive, communicate, analyze, predict, or classify” [Glushko 2013, 615]. Moreover, cultural categories like FOOD “tend to describe our everyday experiences of the world and our accumulated cultural knowledge. Such categories describe objects, events, settings, internal experiences, physical orientation, relationships between entities, and many other aspects of human experience” [ibid., 619]. Understanding the ways in which cultural categories are organized and linguistically manifested in different communities will arguably help translators provide accurate rendering of food nominations and descriptions in all kinds of contexts – from professional to literary and colloquial.

According to Maria Tymoczko, exploration of cultural concepts “takes us deep into the realms... related to cultural practice and cultural knowledge” [2014, 89] because “such concepts are imbricated in Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus of a culture, and they depend on the nexus of ideas, beliefs, cognitive structures, knowledge, and practice” [ibid.]. As a result, “such concepts and categories will differ cross-culturally” [ibid.].

Proceeding from the above observations, we set the *aim* of our research to conduct a comparative analysis of food nominations as linguistic representations of concept-category FOOD in the Chinese, Ukrainian and English languages.

Methods of the research

The dual status of FOOD as a concept and as a category determines the methodology of its comparative analysis since categorization as a form of classificatory activity is closely tied to conceptualization. In fact, any knowledge obtained by human beings is a combinatory result of two parallel processes – conceptualization of the world and its categorization. Categories are built around groups of objects united on the basis of conceptual similarity (associations) and therefore can be best comprehended via distinguishing these objects and their arrangement in a designated order. Hence, we need firstly to determine these (groups of) objects and secondly to arrange them in regard to their cluster concept FOOD.

In order to decide which groups of objects are relevant for the FOOD concept we turn to the method of analyzing vocabulary definitions and begin with the Chinese

ones that according to our observations generally navigate towards more concrete descriptions that nevertheless are not quite suitable for distinguishing the groups of objects relevant to the FOOD concept. For instance, the Chinese word 食物 (shíwù) is defined in one source as “products and drinks that are necessary for everyday consumption” [食物 (a)] and in another source as “(1) food products and drinks; (2) anything used for nutrition; (3) anything included in the ration” [食物 (b)].

Let us switch to the Ukrainian sources. Here, Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine offers probably the most common definition of food as “everything necessary for a human being and other living creatures for sustaining life: albumens, vitamins, carbohydrates, fats, microelements, proteins” [Yizha (a)]. Though this definition is based at least upon two criteria – food composition (in terms of chemistry) and its functional destination – it does not seem illuminating enough for our aim. The largest in Ukraine Academic Explanatory Dictionary is even more laconic stating that food is “something that is eaten or drunk” [Yizha (b)].

Finally, we find it necessary to take a look at the English sources for two reasons: (1) this article is written in English, which serves as an interim language for both Chinese and Ukrainian definitions and descriptions; (2) for some units we will also consider Chinese–English translations to verify the correctness and/or appropriateness/suitability of the Ukrainian equivalents.

Influential Encyclopedia Britannica explicates food as “substance consisting essentially of protein, carbohydrate, fat, and other nutrients used in the body of an organism to sustain growth and vital processes and to furnish energy” [Food (a)]. This definition is line with the one from Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine discussed above. The most spacious definition among those offered by English-language referential sources is as follows: “(1) any nourishing substance that is eaten, drunk, or otherwise taken into the body to sustain life, provide energy, promote growth, etc.; (2) more or less solid nourishment, as distinguished from liquids; (3) a particular kind of solid nourishment; (4) whatever supplies nourishment to organisms; (5) anything serving for consumption or use” [Food (b)]. Entry (1) of this definition is almost identical to that by Britannica; entry (2) simply separates food from drinks; and entry (5) is of a metaphorical character. The remaining two entries could have been of help were they formulated in less abstract terms.

According to Carolyn Daniel, “all cultures are highly selective in their definitions of food and non-food and their definitions do not necessarily relate to nutritional value” [2009, 5]. Needless to say that in this respect all of the above definitions given in three languages are not culture-bound, which makes us search for some other solution to our problem.

In their attempt to outline the borders of the FOOD category, Ulrike Oster and Teresa Molés-Cases developed a rather elaborated procedure of identifying its domains on the basis of a parallel corpus of literary texts in German and their translations into Spanish and Catalan. In order to spot what they call “food-related lexemes” the authors “proceeded through the lemmatized wordlist of the German corpus to classify them by semantic subtype” [2016, 56]. As a result, 15 domains were identified (such as “types of food/drink”, “properties of food”, “types of meals”, “ways of preparing food”, etc.) and 3 of them analyzed translation-wise. The value of this research is immense because it provides computerized representation of the FOOD concept as a cluster of domains that can be applied as a foundation

for corresponding research in any other language. By assuming this, we stipulate that the above domains are of more or less universal character while their linguistic filling is always culture-specific. In other words, as Oster and Molés-Cases put it, “some of the most visible differences among cultures are precisely those concerning eating habits, types of foods, the social roles of different meals and the rules related to them, and also the way some of these are encoded linguistically, in spite of the fact that there should be ample physiological common ground” [ibid., 53].

Another term for food nominations gaining rapid popularity is “gastronym”. Romanian researcher Nadia-Nicoleta Morarasu somewhat narrows its referential field “to names of dishes/culinary products and beverages, registered in cookery books or on culinary websites, which can be studied from an onomastic and socio-cultural perspective” [2020, 207]. The advantage of the author’s approach is that she adds a cultural dimension to defining and studying food-related vocabulary. Jolanta Tambor who researches the ways of adapting foreign gastronyms to the specifics of the Polish language, instead defines them very broadly as “lexical items related to cuisine” [2019, 241]. Similar terminological tendencies are also observed in Ukraine where gastronyms are understood in both senses. For instance, while Oksana Podvoys’ka sees gastronyms as “lexical units that reflect the process of making food products or cooking, serving or consuming food” [Viznichak, Podvoys’ka 2019, 30], Yanina Branyts’ka in her PhD thesis reduces them to “the names of dishes” only [2008].

In search of the material for our own case study, we turned to the available sources, which unfortunately are few. This fact can be accounted for by the sad preponderance of Chinese–Russian dictionaries, glossaries, corpora and other referential sources on the Ukrainian market. Finally, we made our choice in favor of the Chinese–Ukrainian Illustrated Dictionary [Kytays’ko-ukrayins’kyy ...]. The choice was determined by the following factors: (1) the dictionary provides lexis already grouped around 15 food-related domains, which is in line with our understanding of FOOD as a category; (2) it lists a relatively considerable number of units – 413 – each of which is accompanied with a picture that allows a recipient to better understand its meaning through the mechanism of visualization.

We would like to add that the material inside the Chinese–Ukrainian Illustrated Dictionary is organized according to the method of mind-mapping (also, concept-mapping), that is a popular methodological instrument in Cognitive Linguistics. Apparently, it can also be successfully applied in Contrastive Linguistics and Translation Studies. The method stems from the experiments by the American psychologist Edward C. Tolman described in his article “Cognitive maps in Rats and Men”. The article proposed a new psychological concept of cognitive maps according to which in the process of learning the brain forms something like a map “indicating routes and paths and environmental relationships, which finally determines what responses (if any) the animal will finally release” [1948, p. 190]. This definition brings forward the conclusion that Tolman uses the term “map” metaphorically meaning the order of actions fixed in a brain rather than a real route of an animal’s wanderings in the labyrinth. Therefore, when in the 1970s the term was picked up by cognitive psychologists it underwent a de-metaphorization when a cognitive map turned from a mental plan of actions into a specific form of organizing information that permits to create a coherent image of an object in a human mind.

We believe that presenting information in dictionaries in the form of cognitive maps (either radial or hierarchical) stimulates the assimilation of information. Without doubt, cognitive mapping is of a huge potential for translation and its study because it opens prospects for comparing linguistic manifestation of concepts in different languages, identifying interlinguistic and intercultural lacunae and thus streamlining their elimination. By exposing the associations between different objects within conceptual categories we can better understand structure, meaning and function of their nominations that lay a foundation for successful translation. According to the Ukrainian scholar Tetiana Anokhina, “mind mapping of lacunicon has emerged attempting to establish equivalence between various lacunar concepts known as vague elements of culture (national specifics), lacunae in speech (speech lacunas), and lacunae in the language” [2013, 171]. According to her, “the lacunae (gaps) are often associated with the problem of translation difficulties” because “there are some specific elements in the national picture of the world that cannot correspond to one-word notion, the lexical equivalent or have some differences compared to the other language” [ibid., 172].

The role of associations in translating Chinese food nominations

Association is an important mechanism of both nomination and translation. If “associations are defined as complex representations that comprise unqualified relations between elementary representations” [Moors 2014, 25], the associative mechanism can be characterized “as the activation of an association in memory” [ibid.]. But more importantly, activated associations may have significant effect on performing all kinds of tasks, in our case both creating names for objects in one language and re-creating them in another one.

It is necessary to remember that associations underlying food-related units in the source language are not always reproduced in the target language, they can as well be lost or replaced with some other associations – embedded in the target culture and language. This fact, in our opinion, indicates cultural reference of associations turning them into a bridge uniting linguistic, cognitive and cultural paradigms of Translation Studies.

In the Chinese language, associations permeate all the domains of the FOOD category tying them together and with other categories. Take, for instance, domain “Foods of plant origin” (subdomain “Produce” (“Fruits” and “Vegetables”). Here we find luffa, a popular vegetable in China belonging to the cucumber family. In Chinese its name 丝瓜 (sīguā) consists of two parts: 丝 “thread” and 瓜 “pumpkin”, literally meaning “a pumpkin hanging on a thread”. Its English (“luffa” or “loofah”) and Ukrainian («люфа») names are transcribed from the Arabic name of the vegetable and therefore bear no such an association for the speakers. The same is true for another vegetable – momordica. Its Chinese name 苦瓜 (kǔguā) is composed of hieroglyphs 苦 “bitter” and 瓜 “pumpkin”, literally meaning “a bitter pumpkin”. Its English (“momordica”) and Ukrainian («момордика») nominations reveal some other association since they come from Latin “momordicus” – “biting”, but obviously for modern speakers this association is lost as well. At the same time, there exists one more English variant of this vegetable’s name – “bitter melon”/“bittermelon”, which bears the same connotation as the Chinese original and may have been borrowed from China.

Popular tropical fruit papaya comes from Mexico but in Chinese has its own name 木瓜 (mùguā), which consists of 木 “tree” and 瓜 “pumpkin”, literally meaning “a pumpkin on a tree”. In both Ukrainian («папайя») and English (“papaya”), the name of the fruit comes from Arawak, the eponymous language from South America.

As one can see, in all the above examples the associations relevant for the Chinese names of the plants are irrelevant for their Ukrainian and English counterparts, which can be accounted for by the fact that they were borrowed from other sources. A quite different situation is observed in the “Dishes” domain abundant with the names of authentic Chinese courses that are directly translated into both Ukrainian and English. The words in this domain not only have associative character but also demonstrate the highest level of cultural specificity. Let us consider several examples.

The first example is the dish 蚂蚁上树 (mǎyǐ shàng shù), whose name consists of the three elements: 蚂蚁 “ants”, 上 “up, climb” and 树 “tree”. Where does this name come from? The dish is made of minced meat and noodles and small pieces of meat sticking to noodles visually remind ants on twigs. Since the Chinese nomination is a three-component compound it is translated into Ukrainian with the help of their direct equivalents. The resulting variant «мурахи, що піднімаються деревом» is identical to its English counterpart “Ants climbing a tree”.

Another interesting example is the dish 水晶饼 (Shuǐjīng bǐng) whose name consists of the two elements – 水晶 “crystal” and 饼 “pancake/cake”. The association with crystal is caused by the crisp consistency of pancakes; it is preserved in the Ukrainian translation («кришталеві млинці») and becomes obvious to anybody who tastes the dish. The English equivalent “crystal cake” is coined similarly and defined as “a crispy dessert” that “gained its name from its crystal-like transparency” [Crystal Cake].

Our next example 松鼠鳜鱼 (sōngshǔ guīyú) is the name of a popular dish incorporating two other names: 松鼠 “squirrel” and 鳜鱼 “Chinese perch”. At first glance, this combination seems impossible unless you are familiar with the manner in which the dish is cooked. In fact, it is made of fried fish that is cut and bent “into the shape of a squirrel with its head and tail soaring high” [Squirrel-shaped Mandarin...]. Like with our previous examples, the Ukrainian equivalent «білка-окунь» is almost identical to the English one “squirrel-fish”.

Our final example in this section is the dish called 佛跳墙 (fó tiào qiáng). The nomination includes three hieroglyphs: 佛 “Buddha, Buddhism”, 跳 “jump” and 墙 “wall”. Once again, this combination seems bizarre until you know the story behind the name. According to it, a scholar was travelling across China and kept all his food in a clay pot. Every time he felt hungry he had to heat the pot contents over the fire. One day, the scholar placed himself near the Buddhist monastery wall and when the monks smelled his pot they immediately jumped over the wall to taste it though they were forbidden to eat meat. To justify themselves they said that Buddha himself would not have resisted such a temptation. The Ukrainian translation is once again literal «Будда стрибає через стіну» just like the English one “Buddha jumps over the wall”, which fact once again confirms the similarity of approaches of Ukrainian and English translators aimed at preserving cultural specificity of the Chinese cuisine in their languages. Another possible explanation of such a similarity lies in the fact that English could have been an interim language for the Ukrainian translators who worked not with the Chinese originals but with their English versions.

Difficulties of translating Chinese food nominations into Ukrainian

As we mentioned before, the method of translation strongly depends on the extra-linguistic factors including those of cultural character. A lot of food nominations associated with China as their country of origin or habitat still have both English and Ukrainian equivalents borrowed and/or adapted from languages other than Chinese because they were first discovered by Europeans somewhere else or were given new European names (including proper or Latin ones). This trend was particularly strong in the colonial period when cultural specifics of the colonized nations was deliberately ignored. But if we speak about translation per se, we should be ready to face the fact that traditional translation methods developed by scholars for alphabetic languages may not work very well or may need some adjustments in both their meaning and application when dealing with hieroglyphic writing systems like the Chinese one. Proceeding from these considerations, we distinguish two main translation methods as traced in our material.

The first method in question is transliteration. John Catford defined transliteration as a process in which “source language graphological units are replaced by target language graphological units” [1965, 66]. There are two types of such transference relevant for translation of lexical units: (1) when source language letters are replaced by target language letters (also known as transliteration proper) and (2) when source language phonological units are replaced by target language letters (also known as transcription). Due to the differences between hieroglyphic and alphabetic writing, transliteration proper seems hardly relevant for the Chinese–Ukrainian translation. At the same time, transcription is quite applicable, and in particular for food nominations. We find it used in a lot of names of products, fruits/vegetables and dishes that come from China, though due to remoteness and historical circumstances none of these borrowings was apparently made directly from Chinese into Ukrainian.

A well-known case is bean curd product known as “tofu”, which has a Chinese origin. In the original it is labeled as 豆腐 (dòufu) – a combination of two elements: 豆 “bean” and 腐 “rotten”, but in the alphabetic languages all over the world its transcribed equivalents are used, like English “tofu” or Ukrainian «тофу».

A similar process occurs when food nominations from the West are borrowed into the Chinese language and culture. The method employed in such situations reminds transcription because involves hieroglyphs that sound like original words or their parts (morphemes or even arbitrary fragments). Put together, they make little sense literally but the society accepts them for their sound and not meaning. Take, for instance, such a popular brand name as Coca Cola, whose Chinese version 可口可乐 (kěkǒukělè) is made of two elements: 可口 “tasty” and 可乐 “amusing”. In this particular case, the components though not related to the nominated object directly still can correlate with it via associations. Our next example is another brand name drink Sprite that is known in China under the name 雪碧 (xuě bì) that falls into two parts: 雪 “snow” and 碧 “turquoise” hardly associable with the nominated object.

The second method in question is calque also known as loan translation. It was first described by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet as “a special kind of borrowing whereby a language borrows an expression form of another, but then translates literally each of its elements” [1995, 32]. One interesting example here is traditional Suqian dish 霸王别姬 (bà wáng bié jī) that is soup made of chicken

and soft-shell turtle. Its name consists of three elements: 霸王 “emperor”, 别 “leave” and 姬 “concubine”. According to the legend, this dish was given by concubine Yu Ji to the Emperor Xiang Yu while he was waiting for execution. The name is also grounded on the wordplay since “turtle” in Chinese is 王八 (wángba) where 八 (bā) is assonant with 霸 (bà) that, in its turn, is part of 霸王 (bàwáng) “Emperor”. Accordingly, “chicken” in Chinese is 鸡 (jī) that is assonant with 姬 (jī) “concubine”. Both English (“Farewell my concubine”) and Ukrainian («Прощавай, моя наложнице») equivalents may be considered loan translations though accompanied with some additional transformation: “Emperor leaves (his) concubine” equals “Emperor (says) farewell (to his) concubine”.

Accompanying calques with transformations is a typical translation practice for many pairs of languages conditioned by numerous factors beginning with their fusional or agglutinative character and ending with different explicitness implicitness ratio. Similar tendency is observed in case of both Chinese-Ukrainian and Chinese-English directions. Some of these transformations are more of a semantic character while others of a formal one. Take, for instance, the name of a dessert 龙须糖 (lóngxū táng) that has three components: 龙 “dragon”, 须 “beard” and 糖 “candy”. Its English equivalent “Dragon beard candy” preserves all of them while the Ukrainian one «Борода дракона» omits the third one that was deleted as a redundant generic name.

Conclusions

The conducted research was conceived to demonstrate similarities and dissimilarities in Chinese food nominations and their Ukrainian and English equivalents. Conducting our research in terms of both cognitive and cultural paradigms of Translation Studies, we defined FOOD as a concept and a category which provided for a better comprehension not only of the scope of its linguistic filling but also of the role of associations in both coining food nominations in Chinese and reproducing them in the Ukrainian and English languages. The application of the method of mind-mapping allowed us to establish the main domains of the FOOD category as well as to trace down how the objects within them are interconnected via different types of associations (based on the form, resemblance, taste, color, consistence, etc.).

Due to treating FOOD as a cultural concept, we could see how the cultural specificity of food nominations (namely within “dishes” domain) was reproduced in both Ukrainian and English translations. High level of similarity between Ukrainian and English translations confirmed the analogy of pursued strategies in both languages in regard to the names of the dishes, which, unlike the names of fruits and vegetables, are relatively recent borrowings. Because of their mostly complex metaphorical character, the method of loan translation prevails here. Comparative analysis also confirmed that in most cases the associations underlying the source food nominations are completely lost for both Ukrainian-speaking and English-speaking recipients.

The *prospect* of further research implies the verification of the preliminary conclusions and assumptions made in the course of the current investigation with the help of corpus-based methods involving vast linguistic material.

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