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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Translator's Adaptation and Choice in Hawkes's *Dream of the Red Chamber* Translation

Min Zhou

School of International Languages, Shanghai Ocean University, Shanghai, China

Corresponding Author: Min Zhou, E-mail: [173641631722163.com](mailto:173641631722163.com)

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#### ABSTRACT

This study investigates David Hawkes's English translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the perspective of Ecological Translation Theory. Focusing on the "Translation Adaptation and Selection" framework, the research explores how translators make adaptive choices in cross-cultural literary translation to achieve optimal communicative effects. The theoretical foundation derives from Hu Gengshen's Ecological Translation Theory, particularly the principles of multi-dimensional adaptation and three-dimensional transformation. The methodology involves a systematic analysis of translation strategies across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, examining how these approaches facilitate effective cultural transmission while maintaining literary integrity. Key findings demonstrate that successful literary translation requires comprehensive adaptation to both the source text's ecological environment and the target readers' cultural context. The study reveals that translators must balance fidelity to the original with necessary modifications to ensure accessibility, employing various strategies to mediate between different linguistic systems and cultural frameworks. The research concludes that Ecological Translation Theory provides a valuable paradigm for understanding and guiding literary translation practice. The findings highlight the translator's crucial role as a cultural mediator and the importance of holistic adaptation in achieving effective cross-cultural communication. The study contributes to translation studies by demonstrating the practical application of ecological principles in literary translation and suggests directions for future research in this field.

#### KEYWORDS

*A Dream of Red Mansions*; Ecological Translation; Adaptation and Selection; Three-dimensional Conversion.

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#### 1. Introduction

As one of the four great masterpieces of Chinese classics, *Dream of Red Mansions* enjoys a high reputation and wide influence at home and abroad, and its worldwide dissemination cannot be separated from excellent translated versions. The two most recognised English translations in the current academic world are those by the British sinologists Hawkes and Minford, and those by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidian. After an in-depth study of more than ten English translations over the past one hundred years, some scholars have found that compared with the Hawkes translation, the Yang translation is far inferior to the Hawkes translation in terms of the number of borrowings, the number of citations by researchers, and the number of copies issued. The repertoire of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a model of Chinese chapter book novels, which establishes the status of the eight-word repertoire, and the combination of poetry and perfect narrative makes the repertoire of *Dream of the Red Chamber* a mountainous monument in the history of the repertoire of Chinese classical novels that can both proudly look down on the sages who preceded it, and also leave a legacy for the generations to come. (Liu, 1998) At present, there are several kinds of studies on the translation of *Dream of Red Mansions*: firstly, the syntax and rhetoric of the repertoire are analysed to analyse the translation strategies adopted by the translators (Wen & Ren, 2012). The second is to study the linguistic, figurative and stylistic beauty of the translation from the perspective of translation aesthetics (Qu & Wang, 2011). Especially the first one has been studied from various theoretical bases, such as the study of back-to-back translation from the perspectives of purpose theory, conformity theory, comparative study and so on, but there are few attempts to apply ecological translation to back-to-back English translation. In this paper, we start from the 'translation adaptation theory' of ecological translation, and explore the adaptation and choice of translators in the translation

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process, including the selective adaptation of translators to themselves, readers, and the original work, and the adaptive choice of three-dimensional conversion strategies in their back translation.

## 2. Literature Review

The ecological translation theory proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen is a comprehensive and integrative study of translation from the perspective of ecology, which defines translation as the translator's selective activity of adapting to the ecological environment of translation (Hu, 2013). Under this theory, translation adaptation selection theory is the core theory of ecological translation. "Adaptation", "choice" and "translator" are the three core concepts of translation adaptation and selection theory. "Adaptation" means that the translator adapts to the world presented by the original text, the original language and the translated language in the process of translation; "Choice" refers to the translator's choice of the understanding of the original text and the choice of the final expression of the translated text (Hu, 2004). "Adaptation" and "choice" are the translator's instincts and the essence of the translation process. Translation is a process of alternating cycles of adaptation and selection by translators. According to the theory of ecological translation, the higher the quality of translation, the higher the degree of "integrated adaptation and selection" should be. (Hu, 2013)

Ecological translation theory has many theoretical research perspectives, and the theoretical paradigm has taken shape and formed a certain system (Hu, 2017), and "three-dimensional transformation" is one of the research perspectives. "Three-dimensional" means "linguistic dimension", "cultural dimension" and "communicative dimension". As the methodology of eco-translation, "three-dimensional conversion" is not only a simple conversion between language symbols, but also a complex conversion activity emphasising different levels and forms. Ecological translation research focuses on the macro and dynamic grasp of the textual information, and its theory of translation adaptation has an obvious practical tendency, which reflects the macro "selective adaptation and adaptive selection" translation principle and the micro "multi-dimensional" conversion. This tendency reflects the macroscopic "selective adaptation and adaptive selection" translation principle and the microscopic "multi-dimensional" conversion (especially the "three-dimensional" conversion of language, culture and communication) translation method (Hu, 2004), in which the translator should adopt corresponding conversion strategies according to different textual information in order to adapt to the target language system and the readers' communicative intention. The "three-dimensional" transformation does not exist in isolation. In short, the "linguistic dimension" refers to the appropriateness of the linguistic content and form in the target language text; the "cultural dimension" is the presentation of the source language's cultural connotations in the target language translation; and the "communicative dimension" is the presentation of the source language's cultural connotations in the target language translation. In short, "linguistic dimension" refers to the appropriateness of language content and form in the target language text; "cultural dimension" is the presentation of cultural connotations of the source language in the target language translation; and "communicative dimension" is the embodiment of the communicative purpose of the source language and target language translation. In the process of converting the source and target language texts, it is necessary to pay attention to the correctness of the language level, and also to retain the cultural connotation under the language appearance, so as to achieve the 'three-dimensional conversion' of language and culture communication.

*Dream of Red Mansions* has a distinctive repertoire with high artistic achievement and aesthetic value. From the aspect of rhetoric, the retrospectives in the book make use of such techniques as rhyming, metaphor, quoting allusions and idioms. The bibliography of *A Dream of Red Mansions* not only has the basic function of summarising the content of the book, but also complements and deepens the plot, character relationships, character characteristics, etc., which has a significant impact on the study of the whole book. The translator should be careful in choosing and choosing the bibliography and make choices on the basis of adapting to the translation ecological environment to keep the balance of the translation ecological environment. In this paper, we mainly use the translator's adaptation and choice as well as the ecological translation theory of 'three-dimensional conversion' to examine and interpret the English translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Adaptation of the translator

#### 3.1.1 Hawkes' Adaptation to Self

In ecological translation, the translator's adaptation is first of all the adaptation to himself, i.e. the adaptation to his own needs and abilities. The translator's own needs are the basis of choice. Hawkes chose to translate *Dream of the Red Chamber* because of his own interest. He liked *Dream of Red Mansions* very much. In the preface of the first volume of the translation, he wrote: Although this is an "unfinished work", it was written by a great artist with all his heart. Therefore, I believe that any detail in the book has a purpose and should be treated as such. I can't say that every part of the translation is a success, but if I can express a small part of the joy that this Chinese novel has brought to me, then my life will have been worth living. He hoped to fulfil his own needs as well as his existential values by translating *Dream of the Red Chamber*, so he spent ten years on this task with great enthusiasm.

In addition, Hawkes adapted to his own abilities and chose works that matched his own. Hawkes was a sinologist, a translator, and a renowned erythologist. In the process of translation, he, with a rigorous attitude, examined the base of the original Dream of Red Mansions, the author, the storyline and so on, and presented his research results through the form of a preface to the translation. Each of its prefaces can be taken as an excellent essay on red studies with high reference significance.

### **3.1.2 Hawkes' Adaptation to the Reader**

In the process of adapting to the translation ecosystem, the reader is one of the important elements in the translation ecosystem and will play a role in constraining the translator's translation choices to a certain extent. For translators and their translations to survive for a long time, they must adapt to the needs of readers in the translation ecosystem.

After World War II, a wave of Asian studies ensued as a result of geopolitics and increasingly frequent exchanges between East and West. A large number of scholars engaged in Sinological studies began to launch the study of Dream of the Red Chamber. However, there was no authoritative translation of Dream of the Red Chamber at that time, which could not satisfy the needs of these scholars in Chinese studies. Against this background, readers needed a professional and authoritative translation.

In order to meet the needs of readers, Hawkes began the translation of Dream of the Red Chamber. Due to the complexity of the process of formation and circulation of Dream of the Red Chamber, Hawkes's translation activities brought great difficulties. Hawkes said, "In translating the novel, I found it impossible to be faithful to a particular version. In the first edition, I relied mainly on the Gao Osprey text because it was more coherent than the other editions, although it was less interesting. But in the subsequent instalments, I referred to the handwritten version from time to time, while in very few places I even made small changes myself." (Tang, 2008) His alterations to the original are precisely an adaptation to the ecological activity of translation. In the process of translation, Hawkes does not spare any small word, Hawkes not only expresses the surface meaning of the original text, but also endeavours to present the hidden meaning and cultural implications of the original work. For example, the maids of the four ladies of Jiafu, Holding Qin, Si-Qi, Serving Book, and Entering Picture, represent the identities and preferences of the four ladies respectively, and Hawkes translates them as Lutany, Chess, Scribe, and Picture respectively to convey the basic meanings of the original names. In order to adapt to the readers' needs, Hawkes adopts the translation strategy of naturalisation in many places so that the readers can better understand the original texts.

### **3.1.3 Hawkes' adaptation of the original work**

Dream of Red Mansions is a classic work of Chinese culture, and Hawkes also positioned Dream of Red Mansions as a classic literature when he cooperated with Penguin Press. Hawkes' translation focuses on the cultural aspects of the work and makes multi-dimensional adaptive choices, aiming at spreading traditional Chinese culture. The first three volumes of Hawkes' translation were translated by himself, while the last two volumes were translated by his son-in-law Minford under his guidance. Since the original work was also done by two authors, it was inevitable that there would be discrepancies between the front and back parts of the work, and in order to adapt to the original work and maintain such discrepancies, Hawkes decided to divide the translation into two parts. Once again, the Huo translation shows its uniqueness in the way it is divided into volumes; Hawkes divides the content of the original text into five volumes, each with a different name to highlight the theme of each part. In terms of the form of the translation, the translation is printed with famous Chinese paintings, which also shows Hawkes's adaptation of the original work.

## **3.2 Translator's Choice**

As the main body of translation, the translator has to constantly and repeatedly adapt and choose between the source language and the target language in order to achieve a balance with the ecological translation environment. In translation activities, translators have been making choices, and translators' adaptation is mainly reflected through translators' choice of translation methods. This paper analyses the translation of Dream of Red Mansions from the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension to explore the adaptive choices made by translators in the face of the translation ecological environment.

### **3.2.1 Linguistic Dimension**

The adaptive choice of linguistic dimension emphasises 'the translator's adaptive choice of linguistic form in the translation process'. This linguistic dimension of adaptive choice transformation is carried out in different aspects and at different levels. Hawkes has successfully achieved the adaptive selection of linguistic dimension in the process of translation.

Example 1: 茉莉粉替去蔷薇硝 玫瑰露引出茯苓霜

Huo's translation: As a substitute for rose-orris Jia Huan is given jasm in face powder ; And in return for rose essence Cook Liu is given lycoperdon snow

Example 1 is a translation of the 60th chapter. The original text is very neat, jasmine powder versus rose-orris, and rose-orris corresponds to Poria Cream. Jasmine powder and rosebud nitrate, rosebud and Poria cream also form a pairing in meaning and form. We can see that Huo's translation also basically maintains the counterpoint, but the word order has been relatively adjusted. Huo's translation adds some names of two characters related to the episode, which are formally different from the original, and Hawkes translates it this way in order to adapt to the reader and convey the meaning of the original text, so that the reader can better understand it, and so he chooses the translation strategy of naturalisation.

Example 2: 慧紫鹃情辞试忙玉 慈姨妈爱语慰痴颦

Huo's translation: Nightingale tests Jade Boy with a startling message ; And Aunt Xue comforts Frowner with words of loving kindness

This example is a translation of the 57th chapter. The characters are depicted in a few words: 'Wise', 'Busy', 'Compassionate' and 'Foolish' refer to Zijuan, Baoyu, Aunt Xue, Aunt Xue, and Aunt Xue, respectively. The words 'wise', 'busy', 'kind', and 'foolish' refer to the characters of Zijuan, Baoyu, Aunt Xue, and Daiyu respectively. In the Huo translation, Jia Baoyu is called 'Jade boy' and Daiyu is called 'frowner', which to a certain extent reflects their characters.

### 3.2.2 Cultural Dimension

Based on the cultural dimension, the translator converts the cultural background and connotation between two different languages accordingly. In *Dream of Red Mansions*, there are many Chinese words with profound connotations. If the translator ignores the profound connotations of the words in the translation process and loses the content information, the cultural connotations of the original text will be neglected or even misinterpreted. Therefore, translators should realise that translation is a cross-cultural act, grasp the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in depth, convert languages on the level of cultural dimensions, and try their best to avoid and overcome the obstacles caused by the differences between the two cultures, so as to prevent the cultural conflicts between different languages and fill in the cultural gaps, and to achieve the goal of unimpeded cultural exchanges.

Example 3: 薛文龙悔娶河东狮 贾迎春误嫁中山狼

Huo's translation: Xue Pan finds, to his sorrow that he is married to termagant and Ying Chun's parents bet on him. ; And Ying Chun's parents betroth her to Zhong-shan wolf

This example is a translation of the seventy-ninth cycle. Two allusions are used in this episode, the first one is 'Hedong lion' and the second one is 'Zhongshan wolf'. In a poem written by Su Dongpo, a great literary figure of the Song Dynasty, it is written: 'Suddenly I heard the lion roaring in the east of the river, and I was bewildered when I dropped my staff.' The term 'Hedong lion' comes from this poem and is used to describe a very tough wife. Here, the Huo translation does not use the Hedong lion in the translation, but directly translates the meaning of the shrewish wife, eliminating the need to explain the Hedong lion, which is simple and clear, and easy to understand. The name 'Zhongshan Wolf' comes from 'Zhongshan Wolf Biography' written by Ma Zhongxi in the Ming Dynasty. In Chinese culture, 'Zhongshan Wolf' represents ferocity and viciousness. The Huo translation adopts the method of phonetic translation + Italian translation, which retains its Chinese characteristics, because it is not good to add notes for the back translation, if the notes can be added here, it can introduce Chinese culture to the readers, which can also be a desirable way. In the face of these two Chinese cultural terms, Huo's translation chooses two ways. For 'Hedong lion', Huo understands the meaning behind it and adapts it to the reader by choosing the word 'termagant', which has the same meaning in the target language, for translation. As for 'Zhongshan Wolf', the word 'Wolf' in 'Zhong-shan Wolf' can show the characteristic of cruelty and ferocity, so the choice of retaining it can reflect the characteristics of Chinese culture and adapt to the original text.

Example 4: 史太君破陈腐旧套 王熙凤效戏彩斑衣

Huo's translation: Lady Jia ridicules the clichés of romantic function ; And Wang Xi-feng emulates the filial antics of Lao Lai-zi

This example is a translation of the 54th episode. The allusion to the filial antics of Lao Lai-zi is used in this cycle. The story of this episode is that Wang Xifeng amuses Jia mother by playing a funny play, and then claims to be 'following the example of the play with colourful clothes'. The Huo translation reflects the story behind Wang Xifeng and gives the reader a clearer understanding of the content of this cycle.

The translator's adaptation to 'needs' includes adaptation to emotions, interests, hobbies and achievements. Translator's adaptation to 'ability' includes adaptation to bilingualism, biculturalism and translation style. The translator's adaptation to the translation ecosystem includes adaptation to the original text, the client and the reader.

### 3.2.3 Communicative Dimension

Based on the perspective of the communicative dimension, translators need to adapt to the final communication and application results when translating. *Dream of Red Mansions* is concise but profound, which contains a large number of 'metaphors' to summarise the content of the chapters, provide clues to the plot of the whole book, imply the character traits and fate of the characters as well and indicate the author's preference, which is strongly communicative between the author and the readers, so

the translator should pay attention to the communicative function of the original text that implies or provides information to the readers, and try to adapt to the final communication and application results. Therefore, translators should pay attention to the communicative function of the original text in suggesting or providing information to the readers, try to fit the original text as much as possible, and present a successful transformation of the communicative dimension.

Example 5: 撕扇子作千金一笑 因麒麟伏白首双星

Huo's translation: A torn fan is the price of silver laughter ; And a lost kylin is the clue to a happy marriage

This example is a translation of the 31st chapter. The phrase 'a thousand gold smiles' comes from 'A thousand gold smiles on the night of meeting, like the joyful coziness near the Blue Bridge'. In order to make his concubine smile, King Yu of Zhou made a fire to play with the lords of the kingdom, so it is called 'A Thousand Gold Smiles'. In the original text, Jia Baoyu brought the fan to Qingwen to tear it in order to make her happy, so as to highlight Qingwen's straightforward character and her position in Baoyu's heart. Through this episode, the author is trying to show Baoyu's innocence and his attitude towards women, so how should 'A Thousand Golden Smiles' be translated to show the meaning that the author is trying to convey to the readers? The Huo translation renders 'a thousand gold smiles' as 'silver laughter', which retains the meaning of the original text, and 'silver' also reflects the importance of this smile in Baoyu's heart. The second sentence is about Xiangyun's relationship with her husband. The second line is about Xiangyun and Baoyu both having a golden unicorn, which also implies 'white heads and two stars'. The phrase 'wishing for a single heart, white heads will never part' means that husband and wife will grow old together. The 'two stars' generally refer to the stars Altair and Vega, meaning that the couple is happy and fulfilled. In the Huo translation, the translator translates the word kylin as 'kylin', which is in line with the original text. Although Western readers may be puzzled by it, the Huo translation still chooses to translate it this way in order to convey the mythological imagery of ancient China, to promote the dissemination of Chinese culture through foreign translation, to adapt to the needs of the spreading of culture, and to achieve the communicative function.

Example 6: 投鼠忌器宝玉瞒赃 判冤决狱平儿行权

Huo's translation: Bao-yu owns up to a crime he did not commit. ; And Patience bends authority in order that the innocent may be spared

This example is a translation of the sixty-first instalment. The phrase 'to throw a rat against a weapon' comes from 'The Li proverb says: "To throw a rat against a weapon", which is also a good oracle. If I don't throw it, I am afraid of hurting its weapon, not to mention the nearness of your minister to his master.', meaning there are scruples about something, do not dare to do things easily. In this chapter, Caiyun stole something and was found out, Ping'er was not good at delivering so she makes Baoyu take the blame. The author uses this idiom to highlight the fact that Ping'er does things properly, and also highlights Jia Baoyu's soft-heartedness in speaking well. Huo's translation explains that Baoyu is taking the blame for someone else, translates the meaning of the recapitulation, and conveys the meaning behind it to the reader to complete the adaptive transformation of the communicative dimension.

It can be seen that Hawkes has made adaptive choices for the ecological environment of translation. As far as the linguistic dimension is concerned, the meaning and content conveyed in the translation should be in line with the original text; as far as the cultural dimension is concerned, the translator should find the commonality between the cultures of different countries, eliminate cultural differences and help the readers of the translated text to achieve a real understanding; as far as the communicative dimension is concerned, the translator should, on the basis of accurate translation of the content and concepts of the original text, establish effective communication. On the communicative dimension, the translator should establish effective communication on the basis of accurate translation of the content and concepts of the original text. Hawkes's translation is a good example of his application of the theory of translation adaptation and the use of appropriate three-dimensional translation strategies under the guidance of this theory to form a translation that best meets the ecological environment of translation.

## 4. Results

The study reveals that David Hawkes's translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* exemplifies the principles of Ecological Translation, particularly through the lens of "Translation Adaptation and Selection Theory." The findings are presented in three key dimensions: linguistic, cultural, and communicative, aligning with the "three-dimensional conversion" methodology.

### 4.1 Linguistic Dimension

Hawkes demonstrates remarkable adaptability in transforming the linguistic form of the original text to suit the target language while preserving its poetic and narrative essence. For instance, in translating the chapter titles (e.g., "Wise Purple Cuckoo's Love Speech Tests Busy Jade"), Hawkes adjusts the word order and simplifies complex expressions (e.g., "Jade Boy" for Baoyu) to enhance readability without sacrificing meaning. His translations maintain the rhythmic and rhetorical features of the original, such as parallelism and metaphor, ensuring linguistic appropriateness in English.

## 4.2 Cultural Dimension

The cultural dimension highlights Hawkes's strategic choices to bridge Chinese and Western cultural gaps. For culturally specific terms like "河东狮" (Hedong lion) and "中山狼" (Zhongshan wolf), Hawkes employs a hybrid approach:

- Meaning-based translation: "Hedong lion" is rendered as "termagant," conveying the shrewish wife archetype familiar to Western readers.
- Phonetic translation + Explanation: "Zhong-shan wolf" retains the Chinese cultural marker ("wolf") while implicitly conveying ferocity.

These choices reflect his prioritization of cultural fidelity where feasible and functional equivalence where necessary, balancing accessibility and authenticity.

## 4.3 Communicative Dimension

Hawkes prioritizes the communicative intent of the original text, ensuring that implied narratives and character traits are preserved. For example:

- In translating "千金一笑" (a thousand gold smiles) as "silver laughter," he captures Baoyu's devotion to Qingwen while adapting the idiom for clarity.
- The allusion to "彩衣娱亲" (filial antics of Lao Lai-zi) is explicitly explained ("filial antics"), aiding reader comprehension without omitting cultural context.

## Comparative Insights

Compared to Yang Xianyi's more literal translations, Hawkes's version excels in dynamic equivalence, achieving higher "integrated adaptation and selection" by prioritizing reader engagement and cultural resonance. This aligns with Hu Gengshen's theory, affirming that successful translation requires multidimensional adaptation to the ecological environment of the target language.

## 5. Conclusion

This study compellingly validates the efficacy of Ecological Translation Theory as both an analytical framework and a practical guide for literary translation. Through meticulous examination of Hawkes's *\*Dream of the Red Chamber\** translation, the research demonstrates how the "three-dimensional conversion" model—encompassing linguistic, cultural, and communicative adaptation—provides a systematic methodology for navigating the intricate interplay between source-text authenticity and target-reader reception. The theoretical framework's strength lies in its capacity to reconcile seemingly competing priorities: preserving the original's artistic integrity while ensuring cross-cultural intelligibility.

Hawkes's strategies offer profound practical insights for translators of culturally dense literature. His nuanced approach—whether adapting idioms for Western comprehension or retaining culturally significant terms like "kylin"—exemplifies the translator's dual role as cultural ambassador and creative interpreter. Particularly noteworthy is his ability to mediate between the novel's poetic richness and the expectations of English readers, achieving what might be termed "cultural resonance" rather than mere equivalence. This balance establishes a replicable model for translating classical texts with complex symbolic ecosystems.

The study's findings extend beyond academic discourse, bearing significant implications for cultural diplomacy and global literary exchange. By demonstrating how Ecological Translation Theory facilitates nuanced cultural transmission, the research underscores translation's role in fostering mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world. Future investigations could productively explore several avenues: the theory's applicability to contemporary genres, its implementation in digital translation platforms employing AI-assisted tools, or comparative studies across different language pairs. Additionally, the framework's potential for training translators merits exploration, particularly in developing adaptive competencies for literary and cultural translation.

Ultimately, this research reaffirms that effective literary translation is neither mechanical reproduction nor wholesale adaptation, but rather an ecological process of dynamic negotiation—one that Hawkes's work masterfully exemplifies. As the demand for cross-cultural literary access grows, Ecological Translation Theory offers both a conceptual compass and practical toolkit for bridging worlds through language.

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References to the work should follow the 7<sup>th</sup> APA style and carefully checked for accuracy and consistency. Please ensure that every reference cited in the text is also present in the reference list and vice versa.

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