



## Bed and Breakfast operators' work and personal life balance: A cross-cultural comparison

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### ABSTRACT

Bed and Breakfasts (B&B) represent a unique sector in the tourism industry. This study expands on previous hospitality work and life balance studies by investigating the cultural influences on B&B operators' work and personal lives. The results indicated that Taiwanese B&B operators, who are in the collective culture, perceive less difficulty in their balancing work and personal lives, and they receive more family and social support compared to their American counterparts, who are within an individualistic culture. Both groups experienced equally satisfactory levels of successful balance. The implications and limitations of this study are discussed, and future studies are proposed.

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### 1. Introduction

Due to the growth of tourism industry, different types of accommodations were created to meet the needs of travelers. Of all the accommodations, Bed and Breakfast (B&B) presents a unique sector within the tourism industry, because it is run by operators who offer personalized service in a homely environment. This type of a small-scale operation attracts especially guests who are unhappy with the standard hotel rooms and seek something different. The B&B sector has experienced extraordinary growth worldwide (Karen and Berg, 2007). This boom has led many individuals to become interested in starting their own B&Bs for both personal and financial benefits.

It is often assumed that B&B operators have greater freedom in accommodating work and personal life because they are not restricted by the constraints imposed by employers or workplace expectations. Indeed, most of the B&Bs are operated by owners who live on the property. The boundary between work and personal life becomes blurred, and this situation can cause considerable stress. As is the case with all small business, running a B&B demands a significant personal commitment. The B&B operators take responsibility for the success of the business. Vallen and Rande's (2002) study on the burnout among B&B owner/operators found that B&B operators had the highest

Emotional Exhaustion burnout compared to industries, such as mental health, medicine, teaching, hospitality industry (hotels and restaurants), and social services. The resulting pressure may force these owners to sacrifice their personal lives, even though they are working at home. Unlike those who work at home but are paid by an employer, most B&B operators are self-employed individuals providing accommodation and services in their homes and fulfilling the role of both employers and employees. The occupational role and the domestic role are exercised at the same location. Thus, the current study of B&B management offers a more promising context for examining how people balance their work and personal lives than do other lodging organizations or other forms of home-based work, such as telemarketers and telecommuters. In addition, work and family issues are intricately related to cultural beliefs, values, and norms (Lobel, 1991; Schein, 1984). Therefore, it is clear that people in different cultures or countries may view work and family differently. The difference may affect how much interference from work will people permit to penetrate into their personal lives, and vice versa.

The purpose of this study was to (1) assess Taiwanese and American B&B operators' perceptions of the difficulty in balancing their personal lives with work, to determine the degree to which they think that they have achieved this balance, and to investigate if there is a cross-cultural difference in their perceptions, (2) compare the level of interference and enhancement between work and personal life for B&B operators from the cultural aspects, (3) investigate the level of support received by American and Taiwanese operators, and (4) examine the way these two groups allocate their time to work and personal life.

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Studies on work and family issues have been conducted predominantly in western countries. It was not until 1999 that researchers began to pay attention to the influence of the cultural factors on the issues of work and family conflict. Aryee et al. (1999) suggested that work to family conflict (WFC) has had an impact on Hong Kong employees' life satisfaction, while family to work conflict (FWC) has had an impact on American employees' life satisfaction. This finding might be attributable to a difference in cultural views between the two societies: In Confucian societies such as China, the family is believed to be the moral foundation of the culture. An interference of work with family responsibilities may be seen as a threat to a Hong Kong Chinese employee's family identity. By contrast, some Western societies like the one in the US, one's employment is generally considered a large part of one's identity. Within such a Western society, interference of family with work might be viewed as more of a threat to an employee's overall life satisfaction.

Yang et al. (2000) found that American employees experienced greater family demand compared to Chinese employees. Family demand had greater impact on work–family conflict in the American employees than the Chinese employees, while work demand had greater impact on work–family conflict in the Chinese employees than in the American employees. Lu et al. (2006) indicated that the work and family demands have an influence on work and family conflict and the psychological wellness as well. This phenomenon is universal across cultures. In addition, they also found the moderation effects of individualism and collectivism on work/family demands and conflict. There is a stronger relationship between both work and family demands and work–family conflict in an individualist society than the collectivist society.

In our study, we compared Bed and Breakfast operators from two nations, Taiwan and the United States, whose cultures are noticeably different on two primary cultural constructs: *time orientation* and *collectivist/individualistic cultural dimensions*.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1. Time orientation: monochronic versus polychronic cultures

Researchers have recognized that concepts of time and its usage differ across cultures. A widely discussed cultural dimension of time marks it as either monochronic or polychronic (Feldam and Hornik, 1981; Hall and Hall, 1987; Kaufman et al., 1991). Monochronic-time cultures treat time as linear and separable, emphasizing the performance of one task at a time with insistence on deadlines and appointments. Typically, employees in Western Europe and the United States are mapped in the monochronic-time oriented context. They are more likely to compartmentalize their work time and their personal time into, strictly scheduled time units. In contrast to monochronic-time cultures, polychronic-time cultures treat time as naturally reoccurring and are more flexible, doing many tasks at one time with little regard for formal time constraints. Expanding on this characterization, people from polychronic-time cultures would be expected to have unclear boundaries between their work and non-work life. Middle-Easterners, Latin Americans, and people from South Asia are characterized as polychronic-time oriented (Hall and Hall, 1987). Unlike other business settings where work and non-work domains are separate, B&B operators operate the business in their homes, which allows the boundary between work and personal life to permeate. This situation might favor B&B operators who are from polychronic-time cultures rather than monochronic-time cultures.

Hence, it is hypothesized that:

**H1.** Taiwanese B&B operators will perceive less difficulty compared to their American counterparts' in balancing work and personal life.

**H2.** Taiwanese B&B operators will have a more successful work and personal life balance than their American counterparts.

### 2.2. Social obligation orientation: individualism versus collectivism

According to Hofstede (1980, 1991), people in individualistic cultures emphasize their private wealth and defend their individual and family interests whenever possible. They especially value the quality of their personal lives. Quality of life has been widely emphasized in American society (Inglehart, 1990). Freedom and safety from workplace hazards and poor work conditions is a cornerstone of American liberty. Therefore, whenever there is a conflict between work and personal life, Americans are expected to defend their right to have gratifying personal lives. In contrast, people from collectivist cultures, like the Taiwanese, put a great emphasis on groups, work, and the wealth as well as the needs of the company. According to Chinese culture, work is also viewed as a key for bringing honor and well-being to the family. Hence, extra work after regular shifts is a sacrifice made for the benefit of the family rather than a sacrifice of the family for the fulfillment of one's own career (Redding, 1993). Compared to individualistic societies, family and personal social networks in collectivist societies are more extensive and are critical to the delivery of tangible and intangible social support. In individualistic societies, impersonal governmental agencies and grassroots organizations play a stronger role in these activities.

Therefore, it is further hypothesized:

**H3.** Taiwanese B&B operators will experience more interference from work to personal life compared to their American counterparts (Taiwanese WIP > American WIP).

**H4.** Taiwanese B&B operators will experience less interference from personal life to work compared to their American counterparts (Taiwanese PIW < American PIW).

**H5.** Taiwanese B&B operators will experience a greater enhancement from work to personal life compared to their American counterparts (Taiwanese WEP > American WEP).

**H6.** Taiwanese B&B operators will experience a greater enhancement from personal life to work compared to their American counterparts (Taiwanese PEW > American PEW).

**H7.** Taiwanese B&B operators will experience more support from their colleagues compared to their American counterparts.

**H8.** Taiwanese B&B operators will experience more support from their family compared to their American counterpart.

## 3. Methodology

The American data were collected via a survey website from 1976 members of all state B&B associations in the United States. The Taiwanese data were collected at the Taiwanese B&B Association's annual meeting. The survey consisted of three parts. Part 1 consisted of two questions that measured B&B operators' perceived balance: "How easy or difficult is it for you to balance the demands of your work and your personal life (measured on a scale from 1 = very difficult to 5 = very easy)?" and "All in all, how successful do you feel in balancing your work and personal life (measured on a scale from 1 = very unsuccessful to 5 = very successful)?" To obtain the most unbiased answer concerning

work/life balance issues, these two questions were purposely placed first on the questionnaire. A short note urged the respondents to answer the questions honestly.

Part II assessed the interaction between work and personal life domains. Unlike previous studies on work/family conflict, this study adopted a broader approach to the investigation of balance between the work and personal life by operationalizing the interaction between work and personal life as the bidirectional conflict and facilitation between work and personal life. This measurement included four subscales. Each subscale had multiple items and measured the degree to which respondents' jobs interfere with their personal life (WIP), the degree to which their personal life interferes with their jobs (PIW), the degree to which their jobs enhance their personal life (WEP), and the extent to which their personal life enhances their job (PEW). Survey questions measuring work and personal life interaction were derived from previous work and family conflict research. Respondents were asked to indicate, using a five-point Likert scale, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The overall work interference with personal life (WIP), personal life interference with work (PIW), work enhancement of personal life (WEP), and personal life enhancement of work (PEW) variables were determined by averaging their respective items and scoring the answers, so that a high score indicated higher levels of each type of interference or enhancement.

Three statements were used to measure the level of work interference with personal life (WIP). The three statements were: (a) "Because of managing the bed and breakfast, I did not have enough time to participate in other activities I find relaxing and enjoyable" (Bond et al., 1997, 2002); (b) "My bed and breakfast business made it difficult to maintain the kind of relationships with my family and friends that I would have liked" (Stephens and Sommer, 1996); (c) "Because of running my bed and breakfast, I didn't have the energy to do things with my family or other important people in my life" (Bond et al., 1997).

Questions used to measure the interference of personal life in work (PIW) included: (a) "The schedule demands of my personal responsibilities kept me from getting my bed and breakfast work done on time" (Bond et al., 1997); (b) "I was preoccupied with personal responsibilities while I was managing my bed and breakfast" (Guttek et al., 1991); (c) "I was too tired to be effective at managing my bed and breakfast because of personal responsibilities" (Guttek et al., 1991).

Five statements were used to measure the level with which the work enhanced personal life (WEP). These statements were: (a) "My work schedule was sufficiently flexible to enable me to take care of personal responsibilities," (b) "Having a good day running my bed and breakfast made me a better companion at home or to my friends" (Grzywacz and Marks, 1998), (c) "Running my bed and breakfast gave me energy to do things with my family or other important people in my life" (Bond et al., 1997), (d) "Skills I used at the bed and breakfast helped me deal with personal and practical issues at home" (Grzywacz and Marks, 1998), (e) "My colleagues gave me support that helped me face difficulties at home" (Bond et al., 1997).

Five other statements were used to measure the levels of enhancement of personal life to work (PEW). These questions were: (a) "My personal responsibilities allowed me enough time to run my bed and breakfast;" (b) "I was in a better mood at work because of my family or personal life" (Grzywacz and Marks, 1998); (c) "My family or personal life gave me the energy to manage my bed and breakfast" (Bond et al., 1997); (d) "Skills I used at home helped me deal with personal and practical issues at my bed and breakfast" (Stephens and Sommer, 1996).

Part III of the survey contained demographic items, including B&B operator's age, gender, educational background, working hours, and time devoted to non-work activities.

A pilot study was conducted both in Taiwan and in the US before the administration of the survey. Minor modifications to the wording of several items were made to fit into the current study. For example, several B&B operators indicated that they felt the word "job" was not an appropriate word for this study. They considered managing a Bed and Breakfast was a lifestyle not a job. Therefore, "B&B operation" was used to replace the word "job". Internal consistency reliability estimates obtained in the present study was 0.76 for the Taiwanese WIP Scale, 0.88 for the American WIP Scale; 0.76 for the Taiwanese WEP Scale, 0.71 for the American WEP Scale; 0.77 for the Taiwanese PIW Scale, 0.81 for American PIW Scale; 0.85 for the Taiwanese PEW Scale, 0.86 for the American PEW Scale.

Since the survey was also conducted in Taiwan, the survey was translated into Chinese. A panel consisting of three language experts was formed to evaluate the accuracy of the translation. Discrepancies were resolved by agreement of all three experts. Then a back-translation method was employed to confirm the accuracy of the translation. The version was then pretested before the final version was distributed. Descriptive statistics were obtained and *t*-tests were conducted for each of the specified hypotheses.

#### 4. Results

Overall, 1976 survey invitations were e-mailed to members of all state B&B associations in the United States. Overall, 336 on-line surveys were completed, of which 276 were usable. A total of 330 questionnaires were distributed to the B&B operators in Taiwan. Overall, 238 questionnaires were returned, of which 238 were usable. The response rates were 76.4% for the Taiwanese survey and 17% for the American survey. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of these Taiwanese and American B&B operators. All hypotheses, except for Hypotheses 2–4, were supported.

##### 4.1. Objective 1: perceptions of work and personal life balance

The results of the *t*-test indicated that Taiwanese B&B operators found it easier than American B&B operators to balance work and personal life (Taiwan  $M = 3.33$ , US  $M = 2.52$ ,  $t(490) = 9.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, there was no statistically significant difference between Taiwanese and American B&B operators on the level of success in balancing work and personal life. Both groups reported a moderately successful level (Taiwan  $M = 3.29$ , US  $M = 3.31$ ,  $t(489) = -.25$ ,  $p > .05$ ) located between the neutral (=3) and successful (=4) scale responses. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported (Table 2).

##### 4.2. Objective 2: interactions between work and personal life domains

Taiwanese B&B operators experienced less interference from work to personal life (WIP) compared to their American counterparts (Taiwan  $M = 2.55$ , US  $M = 3.04$ ,  $t(507) = -6.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. In terms of the interference from personal life to work (PIW), there was no statistically significant difference between Taiwanese B&B operators and American B&B operators (Taiwan  $M = 2.19$ , US  $M = 2.09$ ,  $t(505) = 1.69$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Hypothesis 4 was also not supported. Both Taiwanese and American B&B operators experienced low levels of conflict from personal life to their work. This result implies that work is very important to B&B operators and they want to keep it separate from their personal lives. Work supports life, provides for economic livelihoods, provides a sense of financial security, and

**Table 1**  
Demographic profile of Taiwanese & American B&B innkeepers.

Variables	Taiwanese	American
Gender		
Male	43.5%	33.9%
Female	56.5%	66.1%
Age		
21–29	8.1%	1.7%
30–39	18.0%	7.8%
40–49	33.3%	20.3%
50–59	30.8%	44.2%
60 and 60+	9.8%	26.0%
Average	46.24	49.83
Marital status		
Married	81.6%	80.8%
Single	18.4%	19.2%
Educational background		
Some high school	10.2%	1.2%
Graduated in high school	39.1%	4.1%
Some college	8.1%	21.6%
Associate degree	22.1%	9.4%
Bachelor	14.9%	32.2%
Graduate degree	5.1%	31.4%
Other	0.4%	0.0%
Work hour per week (high season)	51.05	66.68
Work hour per week (low season)	26.86	40.94
Household chores (h/week)	13.15	20.73
Community activities (h/week)	4.94	6.22
Self-development (h/week)	10.13	4.49
Relaxing hours (h/week)	10.11	10.78
Child-elder care (h/week)	11.61	6.23

**Table 2**  
Statistical comparisons of level of difficulty and success in work and personal life balance.

	Taiwanese M	American M	t	p
Difficulty	3.33	2.52	-9.62	<.01
Success	3.29	3.31	-.25	>.05

sustains families (Ciulla, 2000). Hence, respondents tried not to let their personal lives interfere with their work. The belief in the value of work was consistent across the two cross-cultural groups.

With regard to the bidirectional enhancement between work and personal life (WEP & PEW), Taiwanese B&B operators experienced more enhancements from both work and personal life domains compared to their American counterparts (WEP: Taiwan M = 3.56, US M = 3.37,  $t(506) = 2.63, p < .01$ ; PEW: Taiwan M = 3.82, US M = 3.27,  $t(497) = 6.58, p < .01$ ). Therefore, Hypotheses 5 and 6 were supported. Both groups reported a score on the level of enhancement greater than 3.25 (on a five-point Likert scale), conveying their belief that running a B&B has a positive impact on their personal lives, but also that their personal lives have a positive impact on their work (Table 3).

4.3. Objective 3: social and family support

Taiwanese B&B operators reported receiving more support from work and family than their American counterparts (support from

**Table 3**  
Statistical comparisons of four interactions.

	Taiwanese M	American M	t	p
WIP	2.55	3.04	-6.16	<.01
PIW	2.19	2.09	1.69	>.10
WEP	3.56	3.37	2.63	<.01
PEW	3.82	3.27	6.58	<.01

**Table 4**  
Statistical comparisons of social and family support.

	Taiwanese M	American M	t	p
Support from work to family	3.11	2.31	7.44	<.01
Support from family to work	3.91	3.44	4.74	<.01

**Table 5**  
Statistical comparisons of time allocation.

	Taiwanese M (h/week)	American M (h/week)	t	p
Work	34.58	55.69	-5.73	<.01
Household chores	13.15	20.73	-5.11	<.01
Community service	4.94	6.22	-1.98	<.01
Child and elder care	11.61	6.23	3.31	<.01
Self-development	10.13	4.49	6.78	<.01
Personal relaxation	10.11	10.78	-8.26	>.01

work to their personal life: Taiwan M = 3.11, US M = 2.31,  $t(510) = 7.44, p < .01$ ; support from family to work: Taiwan M = 3.91, US M = 3.44,  $t(508) = 4.74, p < .01$ ) supporting Hypotheses 7 and 8. This was expected because Taiwan is a collectivist culture where individuals depend on mutual support and cooperation (Table 4).

4.4. Objective 4: time allocation

In terms of the time allocation on work and personal life, Taiwanese B&B operators spent less time working (34.58 h/week) than their American counterparts (55.69 h/week). Taiwanese B&B operators spent also less time than American B&B operators on household chores (13.15 h/week versus 20.73 h/week) and community service (4.94 h/week versus 6.22 h/week). Taiwanese B&B operators spend more time than the American B&B operators on child and elder care (11.61 h/week versus 6.23 h/week) and self-development (10.13 h/week versus 4.49 h/week). There was no significant difference between the two groups on the time spent on activities involving personal relaxation (Table 5).

5. Discussion and implications

Of the eight hypotheses, generated on the bases of time orientation and the cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism, only three were not supported. It was hypothesized that Taiwanese B&B operators will perceive less difficulty than their American counterparts' in balancing work and personal life. This hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Taiwanese B&B operators did not have a more successful work and personal balance than their American counterparts as was proposed by this study. It would seem that cultural factors might make the work and personal life balance more difficult for people in monochronic culture such as American B&B operators. However, based on these results, both groups had an equal level of balance success. This implies that B&B operators can still strike a balance between their work and personal life regardless of their culture background. The possible explanation is that working at home and being a self-employer might allow B&B operators to be more flexible and autonomous in controlling their work and personal lives regardless of cultural background and influence.

In terms of the interference between work and personal life domains, American B&B operators experienced more inference from work to personal life compared to their Taiwanese counter-



parts, which was contrary to the proposed hypothesis. Based on the general culture rule, the American operators should have experienced less interference from work to personal life because people in a monochronic culture value their personal life more than their work. They generally prevent the inference from work to their personal lives. However, we also found that American operators spent more hours in work compared to their Taiwanese counterparts (55.69 h/week versus 34.58 h/week). This might explain why American B&B operators experience more inference from work to personal life.

In addition, it is worth noting that several Taiwanese operators made additional comments regarding their motives to start the B&B business and many of the reasons were related to pursuing a desired lifestyle. One of the Taiwanese operators stated that both she and her husband are artists working in a big city. They experienced too many hassles related to working in a big city and chose to move to the beach and pursue a life they want. They bought a big house and decided to open their house to the guests. They also mentioned that running this B&B is not a profitable business. Several Taiwanese B&B operators expressed the same feelings. One said that he was interested in architecture and interior design. Running a B&B allows him to apply his interests. The other said that he was interested in gardening. The garden in his B&B attracts people to stay at his B&B. He had the opportunity to make friends with those who shared the same interests. Many of them mentioned that financial reward is not their main purpose of running a B&B business. They just wanted to have company and to share the nice environment with those who share the same interests. With these motives, it is not surprising that these Taiwanese B&B operators would not let their work interfere with their personal lives. This specific group of Taiwanese B&B operators tends to value their personal life more compared to the general population. Their value of personal life over work resembles that of the American operators.

In terms of the interference from personal life to work, both groups reported minor interference from their personal life to work equally. This result did not support our hypothesis. It implies that these two groups value their work and do not let personal life to interfere too much with their work. Work is a vehicle for the realization of our individual emotional, social, and psychological aspirations (Allen, 1997). Devoting one's life to work certainly has its rewards. Even though B&B operators tend to pay more attention to personal life, work remains a priority. This could be the reason that both Taiwanese and American B&B operators did not let their personal lives interfere with their work too much.

It was hypothesized that Taiwanese B&B operators will experience more enhancements from work to personal life compared to their American counterparts. In addition, it was expected that Taiwanese B&B operators would experience more enhancements from personal life to work compared to their American counterparts. Both hypotheses were supported. This finding is consistent with the assumption that people from polychronic-time cultures, such as Taiwanese B&B operators seem to be comfortable with blurred boundaries between their work and non-work life, enhancing the spillover effect between these two domains. On the contrary, people from monochronic-time cultures tend to compartmentalize their work and their non-work life, therefore, reducing the influence of the spillover between these two domains.

It was predicted that Taiwanese B&B operators would experience more support from their colleagues compared to their American counterparts. It was also predicted that Taiwanese B&B operators would experience more support from their family compared to their American counterparts. People in the collectivist cultures either sacrifice their personal goals or help each other to achieve the goal of the group. It explains why Taiwanese B&B operators receive more support from their co-workers compared

to their American counterparts. In addition, people in America tend to live in nuclear families that are often remote from close as well as distant. In contrast, people from a collectivist culture, such as the Taiwanese, are more likely to live in close proximity to their extended family (Triandis, 1995). Hence, Taiwanese B&B operators tend to have easier access to support from their families. This also partly explains Hypothesis 1 that Taiwanese B&B operators feel easier to maintain a balance between work and personal life compared to their American counterparts. It seems logical that having a greater social support would make it easier to maintain a more successful balance between work and personal life. In collectivist societies, family and personal social networks are more extensive and critical to the delivery of tangible and intangible social support. In individualistic societies, impersonal governmental agencies and grassroots organizations play a stronger role in these activities.

This study provides several insights to B&B associations and operators operating the B&B business. Overall, B&B operators could maintain a satisfactory success in work and personal life balance, which provides a positive attraction to those who are interested in B&B operation but have a concern about the quality of life. To combat the lack of personal support embedded in individualistic cultures, American B&B associations should offer the information regarding the sources of social support for their members, or form a support network for members so that members can support each other and provide necessary help whenever problems occur. Both Taiwanese and American B&B associations can offer training workshops related to time management, conflict management, and courses teaching personal relaxation in order for operators to maintain a balanced life.

## 6. Limitations and future study

According to the results, B&B operators from both cultures reported a moderately successful balance between work and personal life. The overlap between the workplace and personal life may allow for more flexibility as well as the autonomy so that both American and Taiwanese B&B operators can maintain a satisfactory balance between work and personal life. However, due to the design of the study, we had no idea what are the factors that lead to this result. Future study can examine possible factors related to a satisfactory balance between work and personal life.

Second, B&B operators from both cultures might have their own strategies to cope with the fine boundaries between work and personal life. It is worthwhile to discover the methods that operators use to maintain a balanced life.

Third, B&B operators are different from other employees who work in a hotel with a formal organizational context in several perspectives, such as the organizational support, and the level of flexibility and autonomy. Some characteristics of these B&B operators might have an influence on the way they perceive, manage, and balance their work and personal life even beyond the assumption of general culture rule. A lifestyle B&B operator may try to avoid the inference from work to his/her personal life, while an entrepreneurship B&B operator may try to avoid the inference from his/her personal life to work. Future studies can investigate the relationship between B&B operators' motives of starting a B&B and their perceptions of work and personal life. They can also explore differences between B&B operators and hotel employees in terms of their work and personal life balance.

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