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Translating metaphors in Chinese satirical literature: A foreignization approach

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Abstract: The paper delves into the complexities of translating metaphors in Chinese satirical literature, emphasizing the cultural and linguistic nuances involved. It highlights the importance of metaphors in expressing satire and the challenges posed by cultural differences between Chinese and English. The paper advocates for a foreignization translation approach to preserve the original's cultural essence and satirical tone, balancing it with explanations to aid understanding in the target language. This method ensures the retention of literary value while facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and appreciation of the source culture's literary aesthetics.

Keywords: translating metaphors; Chinese satirical literature; cultural nuances; linguistic challenges; foreignization translation approach; cross-cultural dialogue

1. Introduction

In the scholarly discourse presented by Stinson (2019), satire emerges as a profoundly meaningful and purposeful literary genre, characterized by its humor and critical undertone. This genre of literature offers distinctive insights into a myriad of societal, political, and cultural quandaries, employing criticism, satire, and ridicule as its chief tools. Satirical compositions endeavor to instigate change beyond their literal narrative, serving dual functions of societal critique and entertainment (Declercq, 2021). Herein, criticism acts as a moral counterweight to societal follies, while the element of entertainment is manifested through a joyful aesthetic experience (Ebrahimi and Mahadi, 2020). Satirical literature, thus, stands at the intersection of engagement and enlightenment, facilitating the articulation of perspectives through techniques of exaggeration and diminution, and compelling readers to engage in profound reflections on societal matters.

The rhetorical device of metaphor, as elucidated by Poppel and Assaneo (2020), plays a pivotal role in literary creation. As is explored by Gibbs (1999), metaphor generates certain degree of engagement, curiosity, and attention among readers, listeners, and scholars. It further forges connections between ostensibly disparate entities through comparative or symbolic articulations, thereby augmenting the depth and expressiveness of literary works. More importantly, according to the research by Steen (2014), metaphors are not just linguistic or rhetorical devices used to embellish language, but they fundamentally shape the way we think, understand, and interact with the world. In other words, metaphors help construct the reality surrounding us. Furthermore, metaphors enable authors to construct more intricate and emotive imagery and sentiments, imbuing their narratives with greater imaginative allure. Several key features of metaphors unveiled by different research include: 1) conceptual framework through which understanding complex or abstract concepts is

possible and plausible; 2) thought and reasoning established by metaphors which guided our attention and shaping perceptions and decisions; 3) categorization which organizes experiences and knowledge to draw parallels between different domains; 4) emotions and attitudes evoked by metaphors which affect how we feel; 5) diverse cultural values and social norms strengthened by metaphors regarding even the same concept and 6) communication channels which allow clear and persuasive expression of complex ideas. Overall, metaphor as a cognitive tool plays a role in shaping our mental processes, perceptions, and interactions with the world, rather than merely a stylistic element of language. Meanwhile, the concept of metaphor as a cognitive tool has profound implications for literature, enriching both the creation and interpretation of literary works. In literature, metaphors transcend their role as mere decorative language and become fundamental in shaping the themes, characters, and worlds within texts (Wilson, 2011).

Within the realm of satirical literature, metaphors serve to materialize abstract viewpoints through comparison and symbolism, vividly conveying the author's stance. Furthermore, they add complexity to the narrative by suggesting and amplifying underlying meanings. The symbolic and layered nature of metaphors empowers authors to communicate their perspectives subtly and profoundly on specific themes, thereby expanding the work's expressive scope and spurring readers to engage in introspection.

The translation of metaphors encompasses a dual challenge of linguistic and cultural nuances (Forster, 2020). The structural and expressive divergences between Chinese and English pose substantial challenges in directly translating certain Chinese metaphors into English. Moreover, Li (2021) claims that the metaphorical expressions in satirical literature often hinge on specific cultural contexts and consensuses, necessitating that translators grasp the cultural undertones of the original text and the cultural disparities between Chinese and English. This is crucial to preserve the satirical and critical essence of the original work (Luo, 2021). The efficacy of metaphor translation significantly influences the conveyed viewpoints and critical stances within the metaphors of satirical literature. Thus, translators must enable target readers to comprehend and resonate with a similar satirical ambiance, ensuring the translation's accuracy and fluency (Kuleli, 2020). Investigating metaphor translation strategies is paramount to understanding the cultural underpinnings of satirical literature, thereby ensuring that translations retain the artistic integrity and literary merit of the original works. Such scholarly endeavors render translation practices more systematic and actionable, facilitating a conduit for cross-cultural discourse and understanding. This paper takes a focus on the background of modern Chinese satirical literature, particularly from the early to mid-20th century. In this specific context, I shed some light on how translation of metaphors can first be identified, and then shape and reshape the reality.

2. Identifying metaphors in language: A cognitive approach

The cognitive approach to metaphors, primarily developed and advocated by George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and other cognitive linguists, posits that metaphors are not just a matter of language but are fundamental to human thought, understanding,

and perception. This perspective diverges from the traditional view of metaphors as mere rhetorical or stylistic devices used for embellishment in language. Instead, it suggests that metaphors shape the very way we conceptualize and engage with the world around us (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008).

As a result, incorporating a cognitive approach to the identification of ironic metaphor within the realm of translating metaphors in Chinese satirical literature involves a deep understanding of the intricate interplay between language, thought, and cultural context. The cognitive approach to metaphor, as proposed by scholars like Lakoff and Johnson (1980), emphasizes the idea that metaphors are not merely linguistic decorations but fundamental structures of our thought that shape how we understand and interact with the world. This perspective is particularly pertinent when dealing with satirical literature, where metaphors often serve to convey complex and nuanced critiques of societal norms, political systems, and cultural practices.

To identify and translate ironic metaphors effectively, one must first recognize the dual-layered nature of irony in metaphorical expressions. Ironic metaphors in satire often function by presenting a surface meaning that, upon deeper examination, reveals a secondary, often contradictory or critical, layer of meaning. This duality is central to the humor and critique inherent in satirical works, making the accurate identification and translation of such metaphors critical to preserving the original's literary and cultural essence. A cognitive approach to this task involves several key steps:

1) Contextual analysis: Understanding the broader sociopolitical and cultural context of the original work is crucial. This includes familiarity with the historical period, prevailing societal norms, and the specific issues or practices being satirized. Such knowledge allows the translator to grasp the metaphor's intended critique or commentary, which is essential for identifying the underlying irony.

2) Cognitive framing: Metaphors structure our thought by mapping conceptual domains from familiar, concrete experiences to understand more abstract or complex phenomena (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Identifying the source and target domains in an ironic metaphor helps reveal the intended contrast or critique. For instance, in Chinese satirical literature, a metaphor comparing a corrupt official to a "flood dragon in a pond" (an ostensibly powerful creature in a limited space) might be used to ironically critique the official's delusions of grandeur and limited real-world influence.

3) Cultural schemata: Different cultures have unique schemas that shape the interpretation of metaphors. A cognitive approach acknowledges these cultural frames of reference and leverages them to understand how the original audience would have perceived the metaphor's irony. For example, traditional Chinese literary themes, such as the heroic vs. the mundane or the individual vs. society, might inform the interpretation of metaphors in a way that would differ significantly from a Western perspective.

4) Semantic analysis: At the linguistic level, analyzing the metaphor's semantic properties—such as the connotations of the words used, their historical usage, and their place in the syntactic structure of the sentence—can provide insights into the metaphor's ironic intent. This analysis must consider both the literal and figurative meanings of the words and how they interact to produce an ironic effect.

5) Pragmatic considerations: The use of metaphor in communication relies on shared knowledge and assumptions between the speaker and the listener (or, in this

case, the writer and the reader). Identifying ironic metaphors requires a sensitivity to these pragmatic aspects, such as the expected knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of the original audience, and how these might differ from those of the target audience.

6) Cognitive dissonance: Irony often relies on creating a sense of cognitive dissonance or surprise by subverting expectations. Identifying moments in the text where there is a clear departure from the expected or literal interpretation can signal the presence of ironic metaphor.

7) Translational equivalence: Once identified, the challenge lies in translating the ironic metaphor in a way that preserves its dual-layered meaning and cultural specificity. This may involve creative solutions, such as finding or creating equivalent metaphors in the target language that maintain the original's cognitive and cultural resonance or providing explanatory notes to elucidate the metaphor's context and intended irony.

3. Metaphor in satirical literary work

Burgers et al. (2016) claim that ironic metaphor can be defined as the intersection between metaphor and irony to convey a meaning that is opposite or significantly different from what is explicitly stated. Barnden (2021) further support this statement and declares that in an ironic metaphor, the intended meaning contrasts with the literal interpretation of the metaphorical expression, often to emphasize a point, create humor, or critique something.

Meanwhile, ironic metaphors play a pivotal role in satirical literature, serving as a powerful tool to critique societal norms, political systems, behaviors, and various ideologies. In satire, ironic metaphors are employed to exaggerate, ridicule, or highlight the absurdities and contradictions within the subject matter, often with the intent of provoking thought, inciting change, or simply entertaining.

Longxi (2021) discovers that metaphors enhance the expressiveness and impact of satirical literature. They introduce humor into satirical works by constructing absurd and overstated scenarios, thereby rendering the satire on particular themes more compelling. This approach allows readers to assimilate critical viewpoints within a more amenable context (Wawrzyniuk, 2020). Metaphors communicate multifaceted meanings through symbolism, offering profound and incisive critiques on social, political, or cultural issues. Readers incrementally discern the criticism and reflections on specific thematic phenomena through the interpretation of symbols during the reading process (Pym, 2020). The symbolism inherent in metaphors not only infuses artistry into the work but also empowers writers to express their discontent and contemplation regarding issues more emphatically.

Satirical literature is discovered by Barnden (2021) to exhibit significant cultural sensitivity, as it often conveys perspectives through criticism and satire rooted in specific cultural milieus. In satire, the effectiveness of ironic metaphors hinges on a shared cultural understanding, as they are most potent and comprehensible within the specific cultural contexts they arise from. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2020), individuals from divergent cultural backgrounds, such as those in China and the West, may interpret the same metaphor differently, resulting in varied impacts of the metaphor across cultures. For instance, a metaphor prevalent in Western culture might

be perceived with dissimilar symbolic meanings in Eastern culture. This disparity necessitates that translators consider cultural factors and reader receptivity when translating metaphors in satirical literary works. Such consideration is crucial to ensure that the metaphor's meaning and the satire's intent are effectively communicated across different cultures.

3.1. Foreignization translation strategies

Venuti (1995) introduces two seminal translation strategies: domestication and foreignization. Domestication, as a strategy, aligns the translated content closely with the cultural context and reader expectations of the target language, thereby enhancing its relatability and accessibility. Foreignization, conversely, focuses on preserving the source language's cultural nuances during the translation process, thereby exposing target language readers to the distinctiveness of foreign cultures. Employing a foreignization strategy in the translation of metaphors, especially within satirical literature, emphasizes the crucial role of conveying the original text's cultural nuances and distinct linguistic characteristics. This method preserves the inherent cultural differences, ensuring an authentic replication of the source material's satirical essence and intended message. By maintaining these unique elements, the translation honors the original work's depth, humor, and critical commentary, allowing readers to appreciate the satire in its culturally specific context.

On the other hand, domestication, by aligning metaphor translations with the target culture's context, can bolster reader comprehension but at the cost of diluting the source text's cultural elements and linguistic characteristics (Tian, 2023). This loss can diminish the literary value and uniqueness of the translation. In the realm of satirical literature, domestication of metaphors may also lead to a diminished representation of the original text's humor and critical stance, thereby weakening its satirical impact (Yin, 2023).

3.2. Foreignization translation strategies and cognitive approach to metaphors

Foreignization translation strategies, as advocated by Lawrence Venuti, emphasize retaining the source language's nuances and cultural specifics in translations, thus preserving its inherent foreignness. This approach resonates with the cognitive approach to metaphors, which posits that metaphors are deeply rooted in cultural and experiential schemas, shaping how abstract concepts and emotions are conceptualized. By maintaining the original metaphors, foreignization allows the target audience to directly engage with these cultural schemas, providing a window into the source culture's unique cognitive mappings and enriching readers' understanding of diverse metaphorical thought processes.

The cognitive approach underscores the embodiment of metaphors, suggesting that many metaphors arise from universal bodily experiences. Foreignization highlights the cultural interpretations of these embodied experiences, showcasing the similarities and differences in metaphorical expressions across cultures. This not only aligns with the cognitive perspective's emphasis on the embodied basis of metaphors but also fosters an appreciation for the variability and specificity of metaphorical thought as influenced by distinct cultural contexts.

Foreignization can enhance cognitive engagement among readers by presenting them with metaphors embedded in unfamiliar cultural contexts, thus challenging them to navigate and interpret alternative conceptual mappings. This heightened cognitive activity aligns with the cognitive approach's view on the active role of metaphors in shaping thought and communication. Additionally, by preserving the original culture's metaphors, foreignization encourages a deeper cross-cultural understanding, inviting readers to explore the underlying cognitive processes of metaphorical thinking across different linguistic landscapes, thereby deepening their appreciation for the diversity of human cognition and expression.

However, the application of foreignization in metaphor translation is not without challenges. It may introduce cognitive dissonance for readers unacquainted with the source culture's conceptual frameworks, potentially hindering their understanding of the metaphors' intended meanings. To mitigate this, translators might complement foreignization with explanatory notes, balancing the preservation of cultural and cognitive depth with the need for accessibility. This nuanced approach underscores the intricate interplay between maintaining cultural integrity in translation and ensuring the metaphors remain resonant and comprehensible to the target audience, fostering a richer engagement with the translated text.

Consider the example of the Chinese phrase "加油加酱" (add oil and sauce) from Wei-Cheng's work (1980), metaphorically used to denote excessive embellishment in narration or paraphrasing. The phrase satirizes hypocrisy and invokes the reader's imagination through exaggerated language. The translation into English as "He was sure Su Wen-wan had exaggerated everything" (Fortress Besieged, 2003) adopts a domestication strategy, accurately conveying the metaphor's surface meaning but sacrificing the original's humor and satirical tone. A foreignization approach, translating it as "exaggerate the details to spice up," could better retain the original metaphor's literary value and the author's intent.

The cognitive characteristic of this metaphor lies in its ability to evoke vivid imagery and associative thinking, a hallmark of how metaphors engage the human cognitive apparatus. By invoking the act of adding oil and sauce—a practice that can enhance or overwhelm the taste of a dish—the metaphor creatively captures the notion of over-embellishment to the point of distortion, thereby satirizing the act of hypocrisy. This metaphor engages the reader's imagination and cognitive flexibility, encouraging the mental construction of parallels between culinary excess and linguistic hyperbole.

Moreover, this metaphor's effectiveness and humor are deeply rooted in the cultural context of its origin, reflecting the cognitive approach's emphasis on the role of culture in shaping metaphorical thought. The phrase draws on a shared cultural understanding of cooking practices and their implications, leveraging this shared knowledge to create a satirical critique that resonates with the original audience.

In transitioning this metaphor into English, the challenge lies in preserving its cognitive impact—how it engages the reader's imagination, evokes vivid imagery, and invites associative thinking—while also maintaining its cultural specificity and humor. The foreignization approach, by translating it more literally as "exaggerate the details to spice up," attempts to retain the original metaphor's cognitive and cultural richness.

This translation strategy not only respects the metaphor's cognitive function—encouraging readers to map the concept of culinary enhancement onto linguistic embellishment—but also preserves its cultural flavor, allowing the target audience to appreciate the metaphor's original context and satirical intent.

Besides, in Chinese satirical literature, the metaphorical use of traditional idioms or phrases often serves to imbue narratives with deeper cultural and historical resonance. An illustrative example is found in Lu Xun's "阿 Q 正传" ("The True Story of Ah Q"), a seminal work of modern Chinese literature that employs rich metaphorical language to critique societal follies and the character's delusional self-importance. Lu Xun masterfully uses traditional imagery and idioms to satirize the protagonist's misadventures and rationalizations. For instance, he might describe Ah Q's inflated self-perception through the metaphor of "painting a dragon and dotting the eyes" ("画龙点睛"), a phrase that traditionally signifies the finishing touch that brings a painting to life but here ironically highlights Ah Q's disconnect from reality.

Translating such metaphors into English while preserving their satirical edge and cultural depth poses significant challenges. A domestication strategy might replace these culturally specific metaphors with Western equivalents or more straightforward descriptions, making the text more accessible to English readers but potentially diluting the original's nuanced critique and humor. For example, "painting a dragon and dotting the eyes" could be flattened to "delusions of grandeur," accurately conveying Ah Q's self-deception but losing the metaphor's rich cultural implications and ironic tone. On the other hand, a foreignization approach might retain the original metaphor, accompanied by explanatory notes, thus preserving its cultural specificity and enhancing the reader's engagement with the text's satirical layers. This method invites readers to explore the cultural and historical contexts that shape the narrative, offering a deeper, more authentic encounter with Lu Xun's critique of early 20th-century Chinese society.

Foreignization emphasizes transplanting the cultural essence of the source language into the translation, enabling readers to appreciate the cultural connotations within metaphors. This approach involves adding suitable explanations, annotations, or background information to guide readers in their cultural interpretation. As Newmark (2001) points out, the diversity of linguistic means in a text amplifies the significance of its form. Satirical literature's metaphors, laden with specific cultural symbols and implicit meanings, enrich the form with exquisite and powerful artistic expression. In translating such metaphors, retaining their metaphorical form through foreignization can ensure fidelity to the original text in terms of language style, satirical tone, and literary value.

For example, in Wei-Cheng's portrayal of an altercation involving an Irishman and a Chinese person (1980), the metaphorical usage satirizes the then-feudal Chinese government's corruption and diplomatic ineptitude. A foreignization approach in translation can maintain the metaphor's impact, enabling readers to grasp the historical backdrop and the original text's satirical stance without cultural misunderstandings.

In Lao She's "骆驼祥子" ("Rickshaw Boy" or "Camel Xiangzi"), the rickshaw serves as a potent metaphor that embodies the cognitive approach to understanding and interpreting metaphors. Through the character of Xiangzi, Lao She interweaves

the concrete experience of pulling a rickshaw with the abstract notions of societal oppression and personal struggle, exemplifying how metaphors bridge tangible experiences with complex abstract ideas. This metaphorical use of the rickshaw demonstrates the cognitive principle that our understanding of abstract concepts is often grounded in our physical and sensory experiences.

The rickshaw, as a metaphorical "yoke," leverages the cognitive mechanism of embodied experience, where the physical strain and labor associated with pulling the rickshaw become a vivid representation of the broader, more abstract burdens imposed by an exploitative society. This metaphor engages readers' cognitive faculties by prompting them to draw on their bodily knowledge and sensory experiences to grasp the weight of Xiangzi's struggles, making the abstract suffering tangible and relatable. It encourages a cognitive process of mapping the physical act of pulling a heavy load to the psychological and emotional weight of living under societal constraints, thereby deepening readers' understanding of the protagonist's plight.

Moreover, this metaphor's effectiveness is intricately tied to its cultural context, highlighting the cognitive approach's emphasis on the influence of culture in shaping metaphorical thought. The rickshaw, a common sight in early 20th-century Beijing, serves as a culturally specific symbol that resonates with the original audience's experiences and perceptions. This cultural grounding enriches the metaphor, providing a specific socio-historical framework within which the readers can interpret and understand the metaphor's implications.

In translating this metaphor, the challenge lies in preserving its dual function as both a concrete object and a symbol of broader thematic concerns while ensuring that the metaphor's cultural and historical specificity remains accessible to a foreign audience. A translation that retains the reference to the rickshaw while elucidating its symbolic significance can maintain the metaphor's cognitive impact, inviting readers to engage in the mental exercise of mapping between the physical experience of pulling the rickshaw and the abstract concepts of oppression and struggle. This approach respects the metaphor's role in engaging cognitive and cultural frameworks, allowing the target audience to appreciate the depth and nuance of Lao She's critique.

However, literary translation is not a mechanical process and must consider cultural context and audience receptivity. In translating metaphors from Chinese to English, acknowledging cultural background differences presents a complex challenge. Metaphors often rely on cultural consensus or specific contexts, making equivalent expressions in the target language elusive. Excessive emphasis on foreignization may distort the translation or lead to reader misconceptions. Thus, translators need to balance the social background and effective metaphor communication in the target culture to authentically reproduce the original metaphors' satirical and critical effects.

The metaphor "仿佛洋车夫辛辛苦苦把坐车人拉到了饭店，依然拖着空车子吃西风" vividly encapsulates the cognitive approach to metaphors by engaging the readers' ability to conceptualize and empathize with the rickshaw boy's plight. This metaphor, which translates to a rickshaw boy toiling to transport passengers only to be left "feeding on the west wind," utilizes the physical and culturally specific experience of a rickshaw puller to convey the abstract and universal themes of

hardship and unrewarded effort. The cognitive process here involves mapping the sensory and physical experience of facing the cold, harsh wind—something tangible and immediate—to the more abstract experiences of hunger, poverty, and the lack of recompense for hard labor.

This metaphor's cognitive impact lies in its ability to evoke a vivid sensory experience that readers can almost physically feel, thereby deepening their understanding of the rickshaw boy's emotional and economic desolation. It draws on the embodied cognition principle, where our understanding of abstract concepts is often grounded in bodily experiences—in this case, the feeling of cold, hunger, and exhaustion. The metaphor's effectiveness is also rooted in its cultural specificity, drawing on the imagery of the "west wind," which carries particular connotations in Chinese culture but may not resonate in the same way with Western audiences due to differing cultural schemas associated with wind and direction.

The challenge in translating this metaphor while maintaining its cognitive and cultural richness lies in bridging the gap between these cultural schemas. A foreignization approach that preserves the original imagery of "feeding on the west wind" risks losing the metaphor's full impact due to the differing connotations of "west wind" in Western contexts. A more nuanced translation, such as "feeding on the west wind with cold and anger," attempts to maintain the metaphor's sensory and emotional dimensions, thereby facilitating the cognitive mapping process for the target audience. This adjusted translation not only preserves the metaphor's embodied experience but also adds an emotional layer of anger, potentially bridging cultural differences by highlighting the injustice of the rickshaw boy's situation, thus ensuring the metaphor retains its power to evoke empathy and understanding across cultural divides.

In summary, while foreignization fosters intercultural communication, it can also create cultural dissonance. Balancing foreignization in translating metaphors in satirical literature with explanations of metaphorical meanings can bridge cultural gaps, aiding target language readers in understanding the source culture's nuances and the original work's symbolic and satirical elements, thus eliminating comprehension barriers arising from cultural differences.

4. Conclusion

The application of foreignization strategies in the translation of satirical literary works plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural connotations and symbolic satire inherent in the original text. This approach not only retains the unique cultural essence of the source material but also introduces target language readers to novel cultural perspectives. It stimulates their curiosity and engagement with different cultures, thereby fostering a rich dialogue and exchange between diverse cultural paradigms. The core strength of foreignization lies in its ability to maintain the integrity of the original text's cultural and satirical nuances, providing readers with an authentic experience of the source culture's literary aesthetics.

However, the inherent challenge in this approach arises from the varying symbolic representations and cultural connotations that metaphors may hold in different cultural contexts. In certain instances, a metaphor in the source language may

have no direct or equivalent cultural symbol or satirical reference in the target language. This discrepancy can lead to misinterpretations or a loss of the metaphor's original impact and meaning. To navigate these challenges, translators may opt for domestication strategies, where necessary, to align the translation more closely with the cultural context and idiomatic expressions of the target language. This adjustment can enhance the natural fluency and readability of the translation, making it more accessible and relatable to the target audience.

Additionally, translators can utilize a hybrid approach, combining foreignization with the inclusion of explanations or annotations. This method allows for the preservation of the original metaphor's cultural depth while providing the necessary contextual information to aid target language readers in understanding and appreciating the metaphor within their own cultural framework. Such annotations can clarify cultural references, explain historical contexts, or provide insights into the original text's satirical implications, thereby bridging cultural gaps.

The translation of satirical literature, particularly its metaphorical content, requires a delicate balance between domestication and foreignization. This equilibrium ensures that the translation not only retains the cultural and artistic value of the original work but also effectively conveys its intended satirical impact. Simultaneously, it is imperative that the translation remains comprehensible and resonant with the target language audience. By carefully navigating between these two strategies, translators can create a translation that is both faithful to the source text and culturally coherent for the target audience, thus successfully extending the reach and impact of satirical literary works across cultural boundaries.

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