



Extra-Mundane Communication Practices in Conflict Resolution among the Tiv People of Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Conflict resolution in pre-literate Tiv societies, just like other African societies, was primarily achieved through extra-mundane communication practices. However, the cradle of civilisation has reduced the reliance of Tiv people on these traditional conflict resolution methods. Yet, the effectiveness of the modern methods in addressing the complex and deeply ingrained nature of communal conflicts in Tiv land has remained limited. Meanwhile, despite the growing body of research on conflict resolution in Africa, there remains a significant knowledge gap on the role of extra-mundane communication practices in resolving disputes among diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria, including among the Tiv people.

Objectives: This study examined the extent to which extra-mundane communication practices are used for conflict resolution, their credibility and reliability, and factors affecting their use for conflict resolution among the Tiv people.

Methods: Survey was adopted as the study's design. Interviews were used to collect data for the study. Data generated were presented in themes, and analyzed using Yin's explanation building method.

Results: Results showed that Tiv people still use extra-mundane to resolve conflicts. Extra-mundane methods of conflict resolution are considered credible and reliable in Tiv societies. Factors like Christianity, stigmatization, etc., affect the use of extra-mundane in Tiv for conflict resolution.

Conclusion: Extra-mundane methods of conflict resolution are regarded credible and reliable among the Tiv people.

Unique Contribution: Extra-mundane remains a viable method of conflict resolution among the Tiv people in spite of civilization.

Recommendations: Use of extra-mundane practices should be encouraged among the Tiv people as a viable conflict resolution method.

Keywords: Ritual, witchcraft, necromancy, spirits.



INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural part of human existence which takes place at all levels of social reality. In every society, conflicts erupt among individuals at interpersonal, family or community levels, as well as between humans and supernatural forces, due to man's insatiable desires, breach of sacred sanctions, insolence, wickedness, selfishness, greed and impatience. Even though such conflicts, as Aboh, Ngele, Okom, Iteh and Eze (2023) note, play a substantial role in promoting and sustaining social bonds among members

of the society, they also have the propensity to instigate societal chaos and disunity. This has therefore, created the need for individuals to adopt effective conflict resolution approaches that are aimed at achieving a harmonious and peaceful co-existence between individuals, supernatural agents and nature.

From time immemorial, indigenous societies had conflict resolution mechanisms which were deeply ingrained in their cultural milieus, customs, traditions, belief systems, practices and values (Kpae, 2018). These indigenous societies had an organized social system that was anchored on the tenets of fairness, peace and social justice. Such communal principles were entrenched to maintain social harmony, through peaceful mediation and reconciliation processes. According to Okpan (2019), one of the approaches used by indigenous people to foster peace and social harmony in their families and communities was the adoption of extra-mundane communication practices.

Extra-mundane approaches to conflict resolution involve seeking information from the gods, spirits, deities, or the Supreme Being on how a conflicting social issue can be resolved. This spiritual mediation, reconciliation or healing process, as Wilson (1987) notes, manifests through incantations, spiritual chant, rituals, prayers, sacrifices, invocation, séances, trance, hysterics or libation. In traditional Tiv societies where human existence is closely associated with the sacred realm of the gods, spirits, rituals and ancestral deities, extra-mundane conflict resolution structures are still validly deployed as instruments of peace, and maintenance of social harmony in their communities. This underscores the rationale why the Tiv people still fervently believe in the efficacy of extra-mundane structures such as *Swem*, *Azov*, *Akombo*, *Tsav*, etc., in promoting peace and social justice in their communities.

Over the years, several scholars conducted studies on the role of extra-mundane modes of communication in conflict resolution among the Tiv people, but most of the studies were overwhelmingly preoccupied with investigating the efficacy of extra-mundane communication practices in resolving armed conflicts (Aluaigba, 2012; and Agena, 2018). However, scholarly studies which examined the efficacy of extra-mundane practices in resolving non-violent social conflicts, especially among the Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria, are nearly non-existent. It is against this backdrop that this study is necessitated.



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Indigenous Tiv societies had conflict resolution mechanisms which were designed to align with their cultural ethos, customs and belief systems, for maintaining peace and social harmony, even before the cradle of human civilization. One of those conflict resolution mechanism that has continued to serve as a viable instrument of mediation, intercession and reconciliation among the Tiv people is the use of extra-mundane communication. Extra-mundane communication practices such as invocation, rituals, libation, necromancy, divination, etc., are used as effective mechanisms through which social conflicts are resolved among the Tiv people.

In spite of this substantial role of extra-mundane in maintaining peace and social harmony among the Tiv people, the extent to which extra-mundane communication practices are utilized in resolving social conflicts; the credibility and reliability of extra-mundane communication practices; and factors affecting the use of extra-mundane communication practices in settling conflicts among the Tiv people are largely unknown. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the extent to which extra-mundane practices are still used in resolving conflicts; the credibility and reliability of extra-mundane approaches in resolving conflicts, and factors affecting the use of extra-mundane methods in resolving conflicts among the Tiv people.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study seeks to:

1. determine the extent to which extra-mundane communication practices are used in resolving conflicts among the Tiv people;
2. assess the level of credibility and reliability of extra-mundane communication practices in resolving conflicts among the Tiv people;
3. find out the factors affecting the use of extra-mundane communication practices for conflict resolution among the Tiv people.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Extra-Mundane Communication

The concept of extra-mundane communication has been defined by different communication and media scholars. According to Wilson (1987, p. 93), extra-mundane communication refers to “the mode of communication between the living and the dead, the supernatural or supreme being”. Duru, Pepple and Tahir (2025), see extra-mundane communication as an indigenous form of communication which occurs between the living and the dead, invisible spirits and the supernatural being. Saawuan, Ackar and Umoh (2023), also define extra-mundane communication as a communal means of information exchange which ensues between the living and the dead, the supernatural being or the cosmic authority. Aruku, Omelagah, Ikangkang and Inyali (2024), describe it as a form of communication that takes place between the living and cosmological elements that are beyond the confines of normal domain of human knowledge.

Extra-mundane communication practices are those approaches deployed by indigenous people to exchange information between the living, supernatural being or spirits of the dead. According to



Wilson (1987), extra-mundane communication practices include prayers, sacrifices, incantations, spiritual chant, rituals, invocation, vision, séances, hysterics or libation. Extra-mundane communication practices such as prayers, sacrifices, libation, rituals, etc., are done or offered by individuals (the living) to the supernatural being or spirits of the dead. This happens especially when the living are in need of information from the world beneath to resolve a challenging social issue.

Conflict Resolution

According to Familugba and Adedayo (2020), conflict resolution is the use of various strategies aimed at bringing a particular conflict to an end. Relatedly, Sikander (2011), defines conflict resolution as the initiation and application of peaceful approaches for resolving conflicts using non-confrontational method. Wani (2011), refers to conflict resolution as a range of process aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict. It is a process where the conflicting parties engage in an accord that dilutes their grievances, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other (Odoemelam et al., 2013). Conflict resolution involves adopting peaceful mediation and reconciliation methods to resolve conflicts in ways that satisfy and sustains the cordial rapport between the parties involved.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the Cultural Identity Theory of communication. Cultural identity theory was propounded in the late 1980s and 1990s by Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas; and Mary Jane Collier, Micheal Hecht and Sidney Ribau respectively. Cultural identity theory represents one of the many theories which explains how individuals utilize communication tools to form their cultural uniqueness and social relations in particular situations (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). The thesis of the cultural identity theory is that, people develop and become more conscious of their identities by engaging in communication that defines their web of social interactions and sense of self (Duru, Pepple and Tahir, 2025). The theory believes that, people utilize their rich cultural values to establish a unique social relationship with the world – believing that an individual's social identity is significantly induced by several intervening factors such as tradition, ancestry, customs, language, culture, norms, race, nationality, religion, and so on.

This theory is applicable to the study because, the extra-mundane communication practices adopted in resolving social conflicts among the Tiv people are indigenous and culturally oriented. These extra-mundane practices are ingrained in the cultural milieu of the indigenous Tiv people, which serve as their unique identity markers, which are expressed through communication to promote social harmony and interpersonal relationships in their communities. Despite the alien nature of these extra-mundane structures to natives of other cultures, they represent the cultural and indigenous worldview of the Tiv tribe in peace-making.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Extra-mundane Practices and Conflict Resolution among the Tiv People

The Tiv people believe in an all-powerful being called *Aondo* (God), however, their beliefs are more deeply rooted in some mystic, ancestral and metaphysical practices such as *Tsav*, *Azov*, and *Akombo* (Doki, 2005). In this context, therefore, human existence in traditional Tiv societies is connected to the sacred realm of the gods, supernatural beings and ancestral deities. This is why indigenous Tiv people do not only profess their belief in ancestral and supernatural forces, but also believe in their potential to promote social harmony between the living and the dead, and even beyond. This also explains why, in spite of civilization, an indigenous Tiv person still clings tenaciously to extra-mundane communication practices as instruments for maintaining peace and social stability.

Extra-mundane plays essential role in resolving social conflicts and promoting peace and harmony in rural communities, where they are mostly used and are still valid (Okpan, 2019). In traditional Tiv societies for instance, extra-mundane communication plays a critical role in fostering sustainable peace and social harmony, especially when conflicts are woven in spiritual nexus, or are believed to involve ancestral intermediaries. Besides, there is a common belief in indigenous Tiv societies that, there are always concessions from both parties when the gods, spirits, and ancestral deities are involved in resolving human conflicts. This is why the indigenous Tiv people highly respect the wisdom of the gods in their peace-making efforts.

One of the means through which extra-mundane communication is used to resolve social conflicts in Tiv is through the intervening influence of *Adzov* (spirits). According to Doki (2005), *Adzov* are spirits of deceased members of the society who were either unjustly killed or possessed strong spiritual powers while alive. The existence of *Adzov* in indigenous Tiv societies, essentially, is to act as watchdogs over the excesses of *Mbatsav* (cult of witches and wizards). The Tiv people, as Doki (2005), further argues, believe profoundly in the cosmological powers of these *Adzov* (spirits), who are regarded as agents of social control. These spirits are communicated with by their members or worshipers through invocation, incantation, sacrifices, songs and music; using items like spiritual beads, *Binta sudan* (spiritual scent), small bell, small clay pot of water, kola nuts, tobacco, etc., to provide valid information on how a conflicting social issue affecting their members or community can be resolved. Membership of the *Adzov* cult in Tiv is through initiation.

Tsav (Witchcraft), is another extra-mundane practice that has been instrumental to conflict resolution in communal Tiv societies. In its broad context, *Tsav*, as Sylvanus (2022) notes, means witchcraft, while *mbatsav* refers to a clandestine assembly of men and women (witches and wizards) who uphold and thrive on *Tsav*. According to Doki (2005), witchcraft refers to the possession of mystic or cosmic powers capable of affecting some supernatural forces by certain individuals who either possessed such powers by birth, acquired it through transactional means, or through initiation. He further argues that, witchcraft power can be used for good or bad intentions. Thus, Sylvanus (2022), classified witches and wizards (*mbatsav*) into two – the bad or evil *mbatsav* and good *mbatsav*. In this context, the cult of good *mbatsav* uses their mystical or



supernatural powers to control cosmic forces, protect their people, and promote fairness and social justice in the spiritual realm.

Traditional Tiv people strongly believe in the discerning and intervening influence of their ancestral spirits in human conflicts. The Tiv ethnic group, as Ushe (2009) notes, have a time-proven belief that, the souls of deceased members of their family transit to reside in the home of the dead or ancestral dwelling known as “*adom u kuu*”, “*kumun u tamen*” or “*alugbem*” (the world of spirits). This worldview sees death as a mere transition into another phase of existence in the unseen world where the souls of the departed are eternally reposed. This has also underscored the Tiv people’s conviction that, their departed are somewhere in another world as spirits, and should be consulted, appeased, pacified or invoked to provide information on how conflicting social issues can be resolved among the living, or between the living and the supernatural beings.

In most parts of Tiv, such deceased spirits are revered on their graves through libations, songs, prayers, incantations, invocation, and animal sacrifice (Ushe, 2021). Such veneration is deemed necessary, especially when the living are in dire need of information from the dead’s spirit to resolve a challenging social conflict. The dead’s spirits, as Ushe (2021) reiterates, are communicated, invoked or consulted using incantations by a diviner, who seeks their intercession and guidance on issues affecting them. This explains why extra-mundane practices, such as kneeling and pleading on the grave of the departed and pouring of libations on their grave, are performed for forgiveness, or to be freed from a curse or misfortune are common among the Tiv people. This is based on their belief that, their ancestors are watching them wherever they are; and can hear them, forgive them, intercede for them, or reverse a curse for their well-being.

In Tiv traditional settings, Necromancy is a form of divination that involves consulting or communicating with spirits of the dead (Ushe, 2021). This communication with spirit of the dead takes various forms in Tiv tribal settings such as remembrance of the dead, use of incantations, trance mediumship, performance of *Timbe Mku* rituals, and spiritual consultation using the spirit boards (Ushe, 2021). These dead’s spirits are believed to possess supernatural powers to settle disputes between the living and the dead whenever they are invoked. This belief rests on the Tiv people’s worldview that, certain spirits, through their spiritual height, can see both the past and future, and provide information to settle human problems with precision.

Tiv traditional oath on ancestral deities such as *Swem*, has continued to be the most potent means of curbing wrongdoing and detecting crimes, affirming innocence, administering justice, proving faithfulness and uncovering truth among Tiv people, and their ancestors (Sylvanus, 2022). According to Uwaezuoke and Udominyang (2023), *Swem* is an indigenous oath of the Tiv people with mystical powers used by Tiv elders to resolve disputes and dispense justice in matters arising from the evil actions of *Mbatsav*. The *Swem* oath punishes false swearers with acute headache, swollen legs and protruded stomach, and subsequent death, for both public and hidden offenses committed. This sacred oath serves as a mystical communication tool for conflict resolution among the Tiv people.



Relatedly, extra-mundane practices in Tiv such as ritual performance serves to cleanse, protect, and guide the people when the appropriate force responsible is sought and appeased (Doki, 2005). Cleansing rituals are seen as healing processes between the living and supernatural beings. This also explains why rites of purification or cleansing rituals such as *Igbe*, *swende*, *akombo a dam*, *ityumbe mku*, *veekombu*, *ikyogbenda*, etc., are performed among the Tiv people. These rites are performed by their custodians using incantations and libations to purge the afflicted person using emblems like alligator pepper, kola nuts, egg shells, calabash of water, animal blood, and so on.

Credibility and Reliability of Extra-Mundane Practices in Conflict Resolution in Tiv

The fact that extra-mundane modes of conflict resolution are rural oriented and compatible with the tribal people, it is common that they would embrace conflict resolution mechanisms that calibrate with their belief systems, customs, practices and values. Thus, the indigenous people's conviction in extra-mundane as a potent mechanism for conflict resolution, has earned their trust and confidence in the mediating powers of the gods, ancestors and spirits. This convincing posture of extra-mundane in conflict resolution has fueled their relevance among the Tiv people.

In Tiv folk societies, extra-mundane structures such as deities, spirits, gods and the Supreme Being are highly respected and recognized. Conceding to this submission is Saawuan, Ackar and Umoh (2023), who contend that, due to the trust of indigenous people in extra-mundane sources, messages sent through these channels are embraced and acted upon without doubt. According to Okpan (2019), the credibility and distinctiveness of extra-mundane practices is based on the fact that, unlike human mediators who possess limited information about the dispute, these entities leverage on the wisdom of the gods and other supernatural forces, believed to be all-knowing to resolve human disputes.

Besides, there is profound advantage when immortals - elusive spirits, or the gods intervene in any social conflict. The exalted status of these supernatural elements often revered as ancestors whom the people venerate and depend on for protection, makes it impossible for anyone to publicly oppose or reject the decision of the gods given their vindictive capacity (Okpan, 2019). In traditional Tiv settings, these supernatural beings are dreaded and thought to possess powers over life and death. This belief in the powers of supernatural beings has made the Tiv people to redouble their trust and confidence in the decisions of the gods in any conflicting situation. As such, the efficacy of extra-mundane communication methods in restoring social order in Tiv land cannot be compromised, since the fear of the gods is supposedly the beginning of sustainable peace in traditional Tiv societies.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey as its design. Survey research design as Emaikwu (2021) notes, can be used to identify current trends, beliefs, attitudes and opinions of people in a large population. In-depth interviews were used to collect data for the study. Five (5) key respondents were drawn from the five (5) socio-political blocs in Tiv land namely, Sankera, Kwande, Jechira, Jemgbagh, and Minda. One (1) respondent was selected from each of the socio-political blocs using purposive sampling technique. The selected key respondents were traditionalists with deep



knowledge of how extra-mundane communication practices are used for conflict resolution among the Tiv people. Data generated from the interviews were presented in themes, and were analyzed using Yin's explanation building method.

INTERVIEW DATA

Extent to which extra-mundane Practices are used in resolving conflicts in Tiv

Majority of people in traditional Tiv societies rely on extra-mundane methods to resolve their conflicts. Data from the interviews revealed that, all of the five respondents interviewed admitted using extra-mundane to a large extent in settling their personal and family disputes. However, libation, cleansing rituals, seeking help from spirits of the dead, praying to the gods, and consulting the gods through oracles or diviners, were some of the extra-mundane communication practices mostly used by the respondents.

Credibility and reliability of extra-mundane approaches to conflict resolution in Tiv

Majority of people in traditional Tiv societies consider extra-mundane approaches to conflict resolution to be credible and reliable. The interviews confirmed that, all the five respondents strongly believed in the efficacy of extra-mundane in settling their conflicts. The respondents believed that, since the gods are wise and infallible, their decisions in resolving human conflicts are based on fairness. One of the respondents from Turan, Kwande local government area explained thus:

Our deities, rituals and ancestors are citadels of peace and social justice in our community. We believe in their existence. We rally around them in times of uncertainty for information that would promote social harmony. Even in situations where human mediation and reconciliations have failed us, our ancestral structures provide the needed direction for us to sail through our challenges.

Also stressing on the credibility and reliability of extra-mundane practices in conflict resolution among the Tiv people, a respondent from Agidi - Mbakena, Mbayongo, Vandeikya local government area revealed that:

We engage in extra-mundane practices here (referring to Mbakena) on a daily basis as situations permit. Cleansing rituals such as *Igbe*, *Swende*, *Veekombu*, *Akombo agbande*, etc., are routinely performed here for spiritual healing. Libation (*ifan i hamber*) and animal sacrifices are performed in some cases for peace to reign. We do all of these because we believe in the efficacy of our rituals and ancestral deities in setting the afflicted free.

Another elder from Mbagune, Makurdi local government area also admitted believing in the efficacy of extra-mundane communication practices for conflict resolution. His belief was based on the fact that, the feedback mechanisms in extra-mundane engagements are practical realities of happenings in their families and community. In order to drive his point home, the traditionalist recounted an incident that happened in his family some year ago. He recounted a story of a girl who got married to someone against her mother's wish. He continued thus:



The girl's mother vowed that since her daughter humiliated her by getting married to the man, "she would never hear the cry of a baby from her womb." Unfortunately, her mother died shortly after the marriage. But after many years of childlessness, she remembered her mother's curse and returned to her grave in tears to plead for forgiveness. She was accompanied by her maternal aunt, who also knelt on her late sister's grave and pleaded for the curse to be reversed by pouring libation (*ifan i hamber*) on her late sister's grave. Do you believe that two markets ago, I was told she gave birth to a set of twins? These are ways of our ancestors!

Factors affecting use of extra-mundane for conflict resolution in Tiv

The use of extra-mundane mode of communication for conflict resolution among the Tiv people has been constrained by factors such as influence of Christianity, human biases by custodians of extra-mundane, stigmatization, and doubt in the efficacy of extra-mundane communication. Most of the interviewees revealed that, the advent of Christianity in communal Tiv societies has affected the patronage of extra-mundane for conflict resolution. One of the respondents in Tongov, Katsina-Ala local government area revealed that:

Before the arrival of the white-man (*or nyian*) to our land, religion and conflict resolution were basically traditional. But today, our communities have been taken over by churches whose teachings are against our ancestral practices. Most of our people today run to these churches for prayers and healing, abandoning our age-long proven traditional healing practices.

A related response further confirmed that:

Most of us in this community who still use these ancestral means to seek solutions to our problems have been labelled as evil. Most people avoid us in this community because they are Christians. But most of them (Christians), come here in the night to do these same things (referring to rituals) they avoid us for in the day time.

Most of the respondents interviewed confirmed that, despite the potency of extra-mundane practices in resolving social conflicts in traditional Tiv settings, they are sometimes compromised by their custodians due to personal biases and primordial sentiments. For instance, a respondent from Kwande lamented at the inherent biases perpetrated by elders to influence the outcome of ancestral oaths such as *Kor* and *Swem*, which has raised questions on the sanctity and credibility of extra-mundane modes of conflict resolution in Tiv.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the extent to which extra-mundane communication practices are utilized in resolving conflicts, the credibility and reliability of extra-mundane for conflict resolution, and factors affecting the use of extra-mundane for conflict resolution among the Tiv people. The results showed that, majority of people in traditional Tiv societies adopted extra-mundane communication practices such as libations, incantations, ritual performance, seeking help from spirits of the dead, and consulting the gods through diviners to a large extent in settling conflicts. This result corroborates the submission of Kpae (2018), who reported that, despite the influence



of modernization, traditional communication mechanisms are still being used in most societies for settling conflicts between individuals and supernatural beings and beyond.

The results also revealed that, majority of Tiv people consider extra-mundane communication practices as credible and reliable tools for conflict resolution. Most of them believed, that the gods are just and fair in their interventions in human affairs. This result agrees with the submission of Saawuan, Ackar and Umoh (2023) who reported that, in most societies where indigenous modes of communication are still used, they are highly trusted and respected by the people, and messages emanating from ancestral sources are embraced, trusted, and acted upon without hesitations.

The findings further showed that, use of extra-mundane for conflict resolution among the Tiv people has been constrained by factors such as the influence of Christianity, human biases by custodians of extra-mundane, stigmatization from members of the society, and doubt in the efficacy of extra-mundane communication practices for conflict resolution. This result agrees with the submission of Anibueze (2012), who opined that, in most traditional societies today, individuals perceived to have affiliation with extra-mundane mode of communication are avoided as agents of anti-Christ, which has discouraged many people from seeking help from the gods.

CONCLUSION

Despite the advent of western civilization, extra-mundane communication practices are still largely used among the Tiv people for settling social disputes. This is based on the fact that, extra-mundane communication practices are seen as credible and reliable conflict resolution mechanisms among the Tiv people. The study also concluded that, factors such as influence of Christianity, human biases, stigmatization and doubt in the efficacy of extra-mundane methods of conflict resolution have affected their patronage for conflict resolution in traditional Tiv societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended as follows:

1. In order to promote the sustenance of indigenous media systems in communal Tiv societies, use of extra-mundane communication practices should be entrenched in tribal Tiv societies as instruments of conflict resolution.
2. Use of extra-mundane for conflict resolution purposes should be encouraged in communal Tiv societies, since they have been adjudged to be credible and reliable for brokering peace and social harmony in tribal Tiv societies.
3. Custodians of extra-mundane structures such as *Swem*, *igbe*, *ishor*, etc., should use them to promote tradition and value system of the Tiv people. This will go a long way in promoting trust and confidence in their traditional mediation mechanisms.



Ethical Clearance

The consent of all participants in this study was sought and obtained. They were made to understand that the exercise was strictly for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest

The authors wish to attest that they know of no conflict of interest in the authorship of this research.

Authors' contributions

Dr. Saawuan Aondowase conceived the study and provided materials for the study. Mr. Solomon T. Chile conducted interviews to generate data for the study. While data analysis was handled by Mr. Andrew A. Ackar. The authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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