



## Cultural Tourism and Architecture Heritage: Question of Authenticity

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### Abstract

Tourism industry is the largest industry that has grown dramatically fast. Sustaining cultural authenticity is essential within the field of cultural tourism, as the interest of tourists in travelling is closely related to natural as well as cultural heritage sites. Thus, it has led different destinations to focus on the authenticity and has significantly increased cultural tourism industry in such countries. The desire of tourists to get indulged in the culture of the other countries has made it essential for the tourism authorities to maintain and sustain the originality and authenticity of the cultural heritage.

This study radiates more light on the question of cultural and architectural heritage and authenticity. It has also been observed that cultural heritage resources are consistently offered as the central aspect for prompting the development of cultural tourism. The visitor's consumption of the preferred experiences provided by cultural heritage attractions helps in increasing the cultural tourism. Travellers want the hotels to represent the local neighborhood, have a strong sense of place with local food, art and traditions. Therefore, restoring, preserving, keeping alive and managing historical buildings or making them look old and authentic could fulfill quest for authenticity in the accommodation market. Therefore, based on the study findings, it can be stated that the cultural factors are becoming more popular in Thailand. It has hence been marked that, with the drastically increasing number of tourists in Thailand over the years, the cultural tourism has taken the position as one of the most important segments of Thailand's economy.

There are many possibilities for future research in this area. Authenticity is subjectivity of human beings. As beauty is in the eye of the beholder, what is real to one person can be very fake to another. Also there can be more factors that should take into consideration for measuring authenticity. Finally, the focus of the study was on heritage accommodation, there is a varied area in the tourism industry to be further studied.

**Keywords:** Cultural, Architectural, Heritage, Authenticity, Sustainable Tourism

### Introduction

Cultural tourism seems to draw a lot of attention from tourists. The current generation of the tourists with search for depth and breadth of tourism experiences which support the principle of heritage preservation and cultural diversity (Chambers, 2009). Interest in history and everything old is now universal. Archaeological excavations, historical ruins, old battlefields, buildings from the past, landscapes and their narratives, areas with traditional folklore, they all have become favourite destinations for tourists (Lengkeek, 2008). This interest in the past has grown rapidly in the last decades.

Cultural tourism forms a significant component of worldwide tourism in the world today. It is about experiencing and delighting the lifestyle of the local people, local area, and what establishes its identity and character. In Thailand, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) tries to encourage both Thai and foreigner tourist to seek for trips that could experience the Kingdom's cultural heritage ([www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)). In 2015, TAT organized the biggest tourism event, Thai Thailand Tourism Festival (TTF). Moreover, the year 2015 is the grand opening ceremony of the '2015 Discover Thainess' campaign to showcase our unique cultural heritage and the Thai way of happiness go international visitors as well as to encourage Thai people to take part in this event.

Hall (2007) states that cultural tourism is experiential tourism based on being involved in and stimulated by the performing arts, visual arts and festivals. Figure 1 below shows Chicken Bowl Museum where the legends of

the chicken bowl begins. Visitors can have chance to do the workshop and the bowl will be sent to their homes if they want. Visitors can enjoy walking around the factory with the guide and learn about the founder of the company and also the history. Heritage tourism, whether in the form of visiting desired landscape, historic places, buildings or monuments, is also experiential tourism in the sense of seeking an encounter with nature or feeling part of the history of a place.



Figure 1 Dhanabodee Ceramic Museum, Lampang, Thailand

There are many destinations only made for tourism around the world especially those replicas of outstanding architecture heritages for example Madurodum, The Netherlands, Muang Boran or Ancient City in Samut Prakan, Palio, in Khao Yai National Park (Figure 2), Santorini Park Cha-Am or folk museums in many European countries that give you the feeling of the real places. Those attractions are packed with local and international tourists interested to see different kinds of buildings. Therefore, it is essential to understand that authenticity makes the memorable experience of tourists worthwhile and that it is necessary for the successful of cultural heritage tourism. Authenticity is a concept that has continuously and widely developed in many fields. At the beginning, the concept was introduced in area of philosophy to explain about critical participation in life. In other words, it is the time that individual considers about their lives and abide with values, inspiration, attitude, and plan their life by themselves or live their lives differently from others. From this concept, following others is 'inauthentic' (Starr, 2008). The concept of authentic in the context of cultural resource management has been developed since WW II till now and continued arguable among scholars about cultural resources, archeology, museology, and tourism management. Primarily, the concept of authentic was used to examine or evaluate the genuineness of the objects of art in museums worth the price or worth the admiration they are being given (MacCannell I, 1973).



Figure 2 Palio Khao Yai, Thailand



The quest of authentic experiences is considered as one of the key trends in tourism. Authenticity is therefore crucially important for tourism, from all the sectors, especially in heritage tourism (Yeoman, Brass and McMahon-Beattie, 2007). Consequently, authenticity is reflected as a basic and a particular interest for cultural heritage marketing. It is important to understand tourist motivation and behaviour as well as strategic and marketing implications concerning tourist destination management and the pursuit for authentic tourism experiences. Drawing on this approach, authors such as MacCannell (1973) and Cohen (1972) showed the importance of authenticity in tourism experiences and defined tourism activities as the modern quest for authenticity.

From this study, the attribute of perceived authenticity will be explored and examined from all parts. It will be vibrant for developing a better understanding of cultural heritage in which authenticity reflects the cultural significance of heritage places. The outcome, then, will help us to find the appropriate balance between the two parties that both local community and tourists can benefit from commoditisation in tourism.

### Objectives of the Study

Specific objectives are including as follow:

1. To examine how visitors perceived authenticity regarding cultural and architectural heritage.
2. To examine how administrative perceive and define authenticity of cultural heritage.
3. To understand tourist's perspective to cultural heritage whether they would like to see authentic destinations or the replica ones.

### Research Methodology

The research method for this study is based on qualitative research methods. The scope of population for this study consists of four groups of stakeholders: **three** local communities; three tourism and hospitality business owners; four tourists (two International and two Thai); and two government officers. The in-depth interview, participant observation, survey and literature review are also analysed and interpreted according to the research objectives, theoretical framework, and concepts in order to explain and analyze the findings more reasonably.

Since the purpose of the study is to study such social phenomenon as authenticity, qualitative research strategy is the most recommended. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) mentioned that in order to describe authenticity one needs to understand the perspectives of the actors' answers. Furthermore, observation of the answers is necessary, when making conclusions as they might give hints of possible biases or even lies.

The primary data collection method used in this particular research can be perceived as one of the most important factors that help in obtaining reliable conclusions with respect to the identified issue (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Consequently, based on the determined objectives, the population considered in this research includes the Thai professionals working in the field of the cultural tourism and architectural heritage. In accordance, the process of questionnaire interview comprised a total of 12 key informants working in the cultural tourism sector and architectural heritage domain selected with the support of random sampling technique. Contextually, the use of this sampling technique has significantly helped in the obtaining and understanding their viewpoints on the cultural tourism and architectural heritage in Thailand (Mitchell and Jolley, 2012). A random sampling method thus assumes the sample represents the overall unit that is to be sampled. So, in this context, the sampling unit



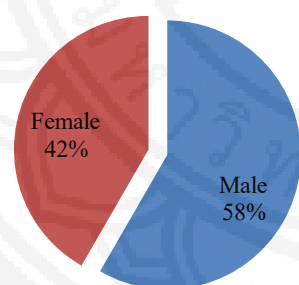
consists of the individuals engaged in the domain of cultural tourism and architectural heritage. The projected sample size included the unbiased selection of the 12 key informants has along with their full responses to the questionnaire. This is due to the fact that all the key informants were interested in the issues related to cultural tourism and heritage.

The data were conducted based on the interview method, which involved the use of questionnaires. The use of the interview technique in this study is due to its adaptable and flexible nature. The interview method has thus assisted in observing the overall respondents, who answered to the questions (Szolnoki and Hoffmann, 2013). Additionally, the use of this approach has significantly helped in understanding the issue in-depth along with determining the viewpoints of the individuals on the authenticity of the cultural heritage of Thailand. Interview method has further assisted in obtaining detailed information related to the respondent's personal views and opinions on cultural tourism and architectural heritage. This method has therefore helped in portraying the responses of the respondents precisely, thereby obtaining meaningful information, through which adequate conclusion can be obtained (Evidence Base, 2006).

### Results and Findings

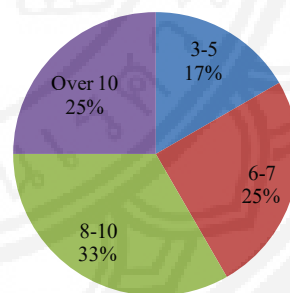
This section focuses on reflecting the perceptions of key informants, who were chosen for the interviews related to cultural tourism and cultural heritage. In addition, it concentrates on the significance of authenticity as related to cultural heritage in Thailand. All informants were working in cultural tourism and architectural heritage areas from both the public and private sectors. The interview was conducted using questionnaires including both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions significantly assisted in understanding the insights of the key informants. On the contrary, close-ended questions were used in this research to obtain direct answers to the questions asked.

**Gender of the Participants**



**Figure 3** Gender of the participants

**Working Experience (Years)**



**Figure 4** Key informants' working experiences

The total number of key informants selected for this particular study is 12, out of which the majority (58%) of the individual were found to be male and the remaining 42% were female (Figure 3). This indicates that 7 male and 5 female were significantly involved in the field of cultural tourism and architectural heritage in Thailand. They are from both public and private sectors. This implies that majority of the individuals, who participated in the interview were found to be male. The females were mostly observed to stay away from such kind of interview sessions.



Figure 4 given above depicts that out of the total key informants amid whom the interview was taken, 17% of the individuals were found to possess a working experience of the 3–5 years in both cultural tourism and architectural heritage in Thailand. On the other hand, the 25% of the key informants had working experience of 6–7 years. The professional experts engaged within the domain of cultural tourism and architectural heritage with experience of 8–10 years accounted for 33% of the total participants. In addition, 25% of the individuals possessed experience of over 10 years. This implies that the interview conducted has helped to obtain accurate information on the authenticity of the cultural heritage in Thailand from the people involved with this field of work from three years to over 10 years.

The Figure 5 below focuses on highlighting the responses of the interview key informants on whether cultural heritage helps to attract tourists in Thailand. Based on the interview conducted, 10 out of the total interviewees believed that cultural heritage plays a significant role in attracting foreigners into Thailand while 2 of the individuals stated that cultural heritage has no role in attracting the tourists to visit Thailand. This implies that 83% of the overall 12 key informants agreed to it, whereas 17% of the individuals stated that Thailand is a tourist destination regardless of its cultural and architectural sites. Hence, the professionals working in this industry were found to possess a positive attitude towards tourism in Thailand. However, there still existed of those group of individuals, who believed that maintaining the cultural heritage of Thailand required more attention for attracting the target visitors.

Does Cultural Heritage Attract Tourist to Visit Thailand?

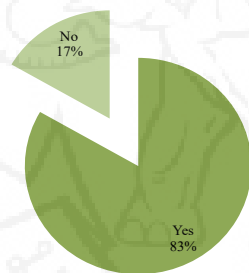


Figure 5 Cultural Heritage Attract Tourists to Visit Thailand

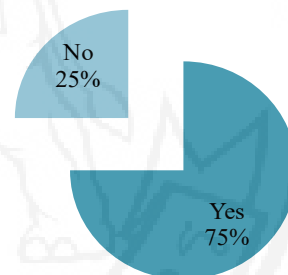


Figure 6 Cultural Tourism helps in attracting the tourists

Based on Figure 6, it can be stated that majority of the key informants (75%) agreed to the fact that the cultural tourism helps in attracting tourists while only 25% of them disagreed that cultural tourism does not influence the visit of tourists in other countries. This implies that the interviewees mostly believed cultural tourism to pose a positive influence on the number of tourists in their respective countries such as Thailand.

Figure 7 illustrated below reflects the overall responses obtained from the interviewees on whether cultural tourism affects the overall authenticity of the heritage. Hence, based on the responses of the key informants among whom the interviews were conducted, it was found that 67% of the individuals believed cultural tourism to have a significant impact on the conservation of architectural monuments. On the other hand, 33% of the key informants had opposing views, and stated that cultural heritage is not affected by cultural tourism.

### Does Cultural Tourism Affects the Authenticity of Cultural Heritage?

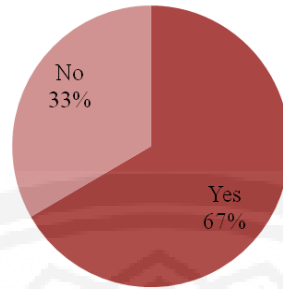


Figure 7 Cultural Tourism Affects the Authenticity of cultural heritage

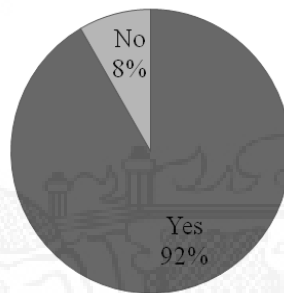


Figure 8 Do you think Cultural Tourism play an essential role in attracting visitors?

Figure 8 above depicts the responses of the interviewees and their perspectives on whether cultural tourism plays any role in attracting the customers to visit Thailand. Based on the interview conducted, it has been found that the 92% of the individuals significantly believed that the cultural tourism helps Thailand to attract more customers. On the other hand, 8% of the individuals were observed to disagree on the question relating to the fact that cultural tourism assist in attracting tourist to Thailand. This implies that majority of the key informants had a positive reaction towards the question asked.

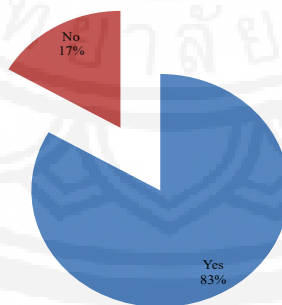


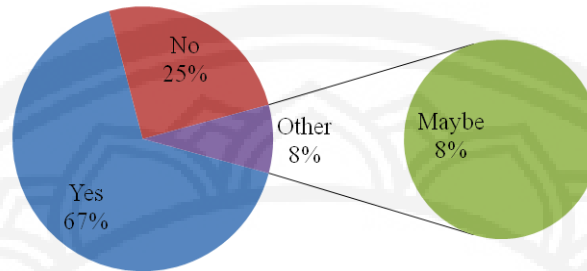
Figure 9 Impact of Cultural Heritage Tourism on Developing Local Economies of Thailand

Figure 9 above focuses on depicting the affect of cultural heritage on the overall development of the local economy in Thailand. Therefore, on the basis of conducting interviewees with the 12 key informants, it was found that 10 out of the total key informants significantly stated that the cultural heritage tourism has a positive impact on enhancing Thailand's local economy. In addition, 2 of the remaining individuals had different



viewpoint stating that the cultural heritage does not assist in improving the local economy of the country. This therefore implies that almost all the individuals focus on cultural heritage tourism, as it is able to have an optimistic affect on the economy.

### Does the Conservation of Architectural Monuments Helps in Increasing Tourism?



**Figure 10** Conservation of Architectural Monuments Helps in Increasing Tourism

Figure 10 represents the impact of conserving architectural monuments on tourism of Thailand. Based on the interview conducted, it has been observed that 67% of the total selected key informants agree to the fact that preserving architectural monuments significantly assists in enhancing tourism within Thailand. On the contrary, 25% of the individuals opposed stating that tourism cannot be enhanced by conserving architectural heritages. On the other hand, 8% of the key informants were found to be neutral on the issue. This implies that majority of the interviewees have positive perspective with respect to the question that was asked to them.

When focusing on authenticity, 52% of key informants mentioned that the experience is better when visiting a place that preserves its natural, historical and cultural setting. They are very likely to revisit places destinations. And 48% said they would take trips to places that have different lifestyle and cultures from their own. Most visitors understand that ‘originality’ is the meaning opposite to a ‘Copy’ ‘Uniqueness’ and ‘Rarity’ of the buildings are among their judgment of authenticity, like the heritage building in Figure 11: Praya Pallazzo Hotel which offers traditional and unique meals for guests in the very heritage but comfortable environment. Information about the place could affect objective authenticity if the visitors do not understand the history of the buildings or even the features are changed. It is found that things can be changed if the visitors understand the buildings.



**Figure 11** The light yellow building in the Chino-Italian Style

However, over 42% believed that “Beauty” is the most important aspect for cultural and heritage property followed by “Authenticity” (33%), and Comfort (25%). On the other hand, earlier, those 12 key informants in the working field believed that authenticity is significantly impacted by the cultural tourism. There is difference between visitors and administrator on what is most important aspect for them. Hence, when visitors choose their destination, they are looking for the places where preserve fabric and form of the heritage with old-looking materials because that will be used to determine heritage value. ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Route (2008) states that the central quality which is the root criterion of life and spirit in a man, a town or a building or what we called ‘spirit of place’ should be maintained and re-injected for the sake of authenticity.

The interview in addition to the close-ended questions also comprised open-ended questions to obtain the detailed perspective of the respondents with relation to cultural tourism and heritage. The use of the open-ended questions has further helped in understanding the viewpoints of the professionals based on the authenticity of the cultural heritage within Thailand.

The interviewees were asked regarding their views on why cultural tourism affects the overall authenticity of the cultural heritage. This would help in providing adequate responses of the individuals. Based on the responses obtained from the interviews, two of the female professionals stated that in the overall process of enhancing cultural tourism, the architectural heritage of the country needs to be modified, which may have a significant impact on its original authenticity. Moreover, out of the 12 participants, five professionals working in the same field were found to have similar perceptions. They therefore believed that cultural tourism affects cultural heritage along with cultural tourism mostly focusing on packaging and presenting the heritage to attract the customers into the country. They further believed that the tourism industry conduct these activities for their personal benefits rather than conserving the national architectural heritage. In addition, the interviewees also believes that commercialization of the ancient cultural events degrades the aesthetic values of the country. The respondents hence emphasized that tourism can also bring about negative changes at certain points of time.



**Figure 12** Woodcarving above the doors and the bathroom with the stained colour glass above window at Ptaya Palazzo

### Discussion

Based on the overall interview conducted, it was recorded that three of the respondents shared a common opinion regarding the impact of tourism on cultural heritage. These interviewees believed that the shortage in presenting the significance of cultural heritage to the tourist as well as to the locals can lead to lack of appreciation of the architectural heritage. Thus, the selected interviewees must consider that it can lead to hamper funding from the government to conserve the architectural heritage. Similarly, two participants stated that





the lack of proper integration related to the protection of the cultural heritage along with the cultural tourism policies can reduce its protection over time. In addition, the last two interviews also deem that lack of proper tourist facilities can affect features of the architectural heritages. Therefore, based on the interviews conducted, it can be stated that the selected professionals working on the field of cultural tourism and architectural heritage are found to believe that cultural tourism affects cultural heritage. It can thus be inferred that the professionals possess a similar views on the issue.

The concepts of cultural tourism and heritage are closely related to one another. Contextually, the culture is defined as the number of distinctive features characterized by material, spiritual along with intellectual and emotional aspects of a particular country, which in this case is Thailand. The culture mostly encourages self-recognition and motivation with respect to the regional performances. However, culture develops within people similar to the living system. On the other hand, tourism focuses on generating revenues and assists in increasing the knowledge relating to a specific country and its culture. Thus, it has been widely accepted that tourism has a significant impact on the place identities (Pinto, Carvalho and Pais, 2015).

Culture also helps in creating authenticity along with distinctiveness in the field of global tourism market. Therefore, tourism experiences, which are able to connect people and the tourists towards local cultures are of the utmost significance. In most of the cases, the theme of various destinations is associated with particular cultural events, which play a significant role in the overall process of development. Hence, to develop distinctiveness, the regions are also required to look outside the commercial providers. It is often found to be suggestive with respect to the attitude of the tourism industry, as the non-commercial activities are viewed problematic rather than the factors, which assists in the creation of opportunities. On the other hand, the cultural tourists are constantly seeking authentic experience and daily culture and are more expected to avoid commercial products. A country focused on developing opportunities such as authentic tourism, thereby helping to add value, which culturally helps in enhancing brand and create differentiation (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2009). At present, cultural tourism is considered to be omnipresent. Cultural tourism has hence been embraced internationally by national, local and transnational bodies. Contextually, UNESCO focuses on promoting cultural tourism for conserving word heritage and the European Union therefore supports it adequately (Richards, 2007).

Based on the theoretical understanding and study findings, it can be stated that there is a significant relationship between culture and tourism. Cultural tourism can therefore be stated as the engagement of the visitors with the culture of the other countries. This involves history, art, religion and architecture that help in shaping their lifestyles. To conduct the interview, 12 individuals were selected amid the individuals, who were engaged in the field of cultural tourism and heritage. Based on the study findings obtained from the interviews, it can be stated that majority of the key informants agreed that the cultural tourism and heritage are essential for attracting tourists. The key informants were selected through random sampling and had work experience ranging from three years to over 10 years. This indicates that interviewees chosen had an adequate knowledge on the importance of cultural tourism along with architectural heritage.

It was also found that most of the individuals had a positive perspective on the impact of cultural tourism on attracting the visitors. In addition, it was also observed that Thailand attracts large number of tourists due to their cultural heritage. The interview conducted also focused on understanding the cultural heritage on its authenticity. From the study conducted, it can be inferred that most of the participating individuals stated that cultural tourism



significantly affects the overall authenticity of the cultural and architectural heritage. With respect to Thailand, cultural tourism is considered to play an important role in attracting visitors in the country, as majority of the key informants gave positive feedback when asked about it. Furthermore, they believed that the cultural tourism in Thailand assists in developing the nation's local economy. They further stated that it is essential to conserve the architectural monuments, as it can help in attracting more tourists into the country, which can further assist in increasing the overall revenue margin of the respective industry.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Tourism is often regarded as the most essential driver related to the growth of the economy, which significantly helps in contributing towards direct and indirect employment. The biggest trend in the past few years is the way tourists are looking for more authentic local experiences. Today, cultural tourism is seen as one way of integrating socio economic development and heritage conservation (Winter, 2008). Most people do not just look for a place to stay or eat, but they are looking for something unique and creative. Therefore, those accommodations offer unique heritage architecture, traditional food and drinks serve by Thai people in the traditional costumes, and smell of lemongrass or Thai herbs.

A key factor for attracting the tourists is authentic natural heritage and environment along with tranquility and emotion (Ndlovu, 2015). Authenticity, in addition to the commodification of the culture is considered an essential issue within the field of cultural tourism. The authenticity of the heritages therefore can be stated as an important aspect of the cultural tourism. Authenticity can be perceived in terms of materiality, design, setting and artisanship mostly associated with the overall physicality of the cultural heritage sites (Lawless and Silva, 2016).

Authentic experience is often considered the key to growing cultural tourism all over the world. The tourism industry at present is more focused on creating authentic along with diverse experiences (Wilson, 2013). Based on the study findings, it can be inferred that the growing competition among the tourist destinations relies on its offers along with information accessibility. On the contrary, the tourists at present are becoming aware of the pitfalls relating to mass communication, which has in turn led to the demand for utmost authenticity and differentiation. Authenticity has certainly increased the interests and motivation of the tourists.

Authenticity tracks the appearance of the New Realists who are not influenced by corporate technologists and globalizers, and are gradually committed to real cuisine, real culture, real politics, real community, or real stories. Although there are large numbers of New Realists who may eat fast food sometimes but will defend their right to an authentic option with increasing passion to seek for authenticity. The culture mostly boosts self-recognition and inspiration with respect to the regional performances. On the other hand, tourism focuses on generating revenues and assists in increasing the knowledge relating to a specific country and its culture. It should be acknowledged that heritage sites especially accommodation play an important role in communicating the features and value of Thainess. It should be counted that heritage accommodation is not only a place for visitors to stay overnight, but rather be an institution of art and culture of the host country.

This study encourages cultural and architectural heritage sites, accommodation particularly, to study possibility to promote cultural heritage and also giving authenticity to the visitors in the right way. Therefore, visitors can perceive the real, genuine, and authentic experience. In order to maintain the cultural authenticity, it is vital that the authorities at both national and local level promote conservation of the cultural heritage, as it



helps in attracting the tourists. Proper maintenance of culture can also be maintained by forming organisations that focus on restoring and protecting the historical sites. The cultural heritage sites can also be protected by passing laws and acts by the government of the nation. The organisations can also concentrate on promoting awareness programs among the public for preserving the heritage sites. Authenticity can be changed through times. It is not a conservation force but they are more like adapting traditional wisdom to modern life.

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