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‘CREATIVE TRANSLATION’ AS POLITICAL DEFAMATION: HANUŠ KUFFNER’S GREAT CZECH STATE UTOPIA AND ITS PROPAGANDISTIC INSTRUMENTALIZATION AGAINST CZECHOSLOVAKIA¹

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*In seinem politischen Memorandum *Náš stát a světový mír*, das 1918 in Prag erschien, forderte der tschechische Militärgeschichtler und Nationalextremist Hanuš Kuffner eine grundlegende politische Neuordnung der Welt, die die territoriale Beschneidung und dauernde militärische Kontrolle Deutschlands sowie die Schaffung eines wehrhaften großtschechischen Staates, dem große Teile Deutschlands, Österreichs und Ungarns angegliedert werden sollten, beinhaltete. Obwohl in nur kleiner Auflage erschienen, geriet das Pamphlet schnell zum meistzitierten tschechischen Werk im völkisch-deutschnationalen Schrifttum der 1920er und 1930er Jahre, auf das laufend verwiesen wurde, um die ‚eigentlichen Ziele‘ der tschechoslowakischen Regierung gegenüber Deutschland zu ‚entlarven‘. Der Beitrag rekonstruiert die Facetten der politischen Instrumentalisierung der Streitschrift in sudeten- und reichsdeutschen Kreisen gegen die Tschechoslowakei. Im Fokus steht dabei zum einen ihre deutschsprachige Rezeptionsgrundlage: die 1922 in Warnsdorf/Böhmen herausgegebene Übersetzung *Unser Staat und der Weltfrieden*. Dabei soll gezeigt werden, dass es sich hierbei um keine wörtliche Textübertragung handelte, sondern um eine für eine deutsche Leserschaft ohne Tschechischkenntnisse bestimmte ‚didaktisierte‘ Fassung, die an entscheidenden Stellen zur Verschärfung des ohnehin gewaltaufgeladenen Pamphlets neigte, die bis zur Textverfälschung reichte. Zum anderen soll der ‚kreative‘ Umgang deutsch-nationalistischer Autoren mit dem Kartenmaterial, das Kuffner seiner Schrift beigelegt hatte, untersucht werden. Hier zeichnete sich eine im Laufe der Zeit in zahlreichen Reproduktionen eine immer deutlichere Identifizierung der Staatsutopie des Jahres 1918 mit der geopolitischen Realität der 1930er Jahre ab.*

Schlüsselwörter: Hanuš Kuffner, tschechischer Nationalextremismus, Territorialkonzept, völkisch-deutschnationales Schrifttum, Übersetzungskritik, Kartographie

¹ This paper is an expanded English version of Blahak (2023).

*In his political memorandum *Náš stát a světový mír*, published in Prague in 1918, the Czech military historian and national extremist Hanuš Kuffner called for a fundamental political reordering of the world that included the territorial curtailment and permanent military control of Germany and the creation of a defensible Great Czech state to which large parts of Germany, Austria and Hungary would be annexed. Although published in only a small number of copies, the pamphlet quickly became the most cited Czech work in the folkish German nationalist literature of the 1920s and 1930s, and was constantly referred to in order to 'expose' the 'real aims' of the Czechoslovak government towards Germany. The article reconstructs the facets of the political instrumentalization of the pamphlet in Sudeten and Reich German circles against Czechoslovakia. The focus is on its German-language basis: the translation *Unser Staat und der Weltfrieden* (Our State and World Peace), published in Warnsdorf/Bohemia in 1922. It will be shown that this was not a literal translation of the text, but a 'didacticised' version intended for a German readership with no knowledge of Czech, which tended to intensify the already violence-laden pamphlet at crucial points, even going so far to falsify the text. On the other hand, the 'creative' handling of the map material that Kuffner included in his pamphlet by German nationalist authors is to be examined. Here, in the course of time, an increasingly clear identification of the state utopia of 1918 with the geopolitical reality of the 1930s became apparent in numerous reproductions.*

Key words: Hanuš Kuffner, Czech national extremism, Czechoslovakia, territorial concept, folkish German nationalist literature, translation review, cartography

Благак Б. «Творчий переклад» як політична дефамация: велика чеська державницька утопія Гануша Куффнера та її пропагандистична інструменталізація проти Чехословаччини

У своєму політичному меморандумі *Náš stát a světový mír*, опублікованому в Празі в 1918 році, чеський військовий історик і національний екстреміст Гануш Куффнер закликав до фундаментального політичного перевпорядкування світу, яке включало територіальне обмеження, постійний військовий контроль Німеччини та створення обороноздатної Великої Чеської держава, до якої мали бути приєднані значні частини Німеччини, Австрії та Угорщини. Незважаючи на те, що брошура була опублікована лише невеликим накладом, вона швидко стала найбільш цитованою чеською працею в народній німецькій націоналістичній літературі 1920-х і 1930-х років, і на неї постійно посилалися, щоб «викрити» «справжні цілі» чехословацького уряду щодо Німеччини. У статті реконструйовано грані політичної інструменталізації памфлету в колах судетської та рейхської Німеччини проти Чехословаччини. Основна увага зосереджена на його німецькомовній основі: переклад *Unser Staat und der Weltfrieden* (Наша держава і мир у всьому світі), опублікований у Варнсдорфі (Богемія) у 1922 році. Стаття доводить, що це був не дослівний переклад тексту, а «дидактизована» версія, призначена для німецької аудиторії, котра не знає чеської мови, що призводило до акцентуації і без того насильницького забарвлення ключових моментів памфлету. З іншого боку, стаття розглядає «творче» поводження німецьких націоналістичних авторів з мапами, які Куффнер включив до своєї брошури. Тут з плином часу в численних репродукціях простежується дедалі чіткіше ототожнення державної утопії 1918 року з геополітичною реальністю 30-х років.

Ключові слова: Гануш Куффнер, чеський національний екстремізм, Чехословаччина, територіальний концепт, народна німецька націоналістична література, критика перекладу, картографування

1. “Nedochůdče” – guidance for the improvement of a ‘misconstruction’

“Miscarriage [or: premature birth]. There is no more appropriate name for the proposed [...] map of the ‘Czechoslovak Republic’” (“Nedochůdče. Není trefnějšího názvu pro navrhovaný [...] obraz ‘Československé republiky’”) (Kuffner, 1918, p. 6). With this derogatory statement, the Czech military historian Hanuš Kuffner introduced his pamphlet *Our State and World Peace* (*Náš stát a světový mír*) published in Prague in 1918, 150 copies of which, according to the imprint, had been distributed to the Czechoslovak delegates at the Versailles Peace Conference.

From an ultra-nationalist point of view, Kuffner outlined the territorial reorganisation of Europe that he regarded as necessary for a lasting peace. He envisaged the main role for a new state, which he called “Bohemia” (“Čechy”), but which clearly exceeded not only the historical borders of the former Bohemian kingdom, but also those of the Czechoslovak state founded in 1918. The indispensable prerequisite for a peace order was a division of Europe into three large zones of interest under Russian, French and British leadership. Germany, the disturber of the peace situated at their intersection, was to be massively reduced territorially to a “German reservation” (“Německá rezervace”) and rendered permanently incapable of disturbance by a system of buffer states. The large part of German Austria was to be divided between Switzerland, Italy and a South Slavic state; its remainder – together with a diminished Hungary – was to guarantee a land bridge between Czechs and Yugoslavs.

According to Kuffner, the Czech people had the task of keeping the rest of Germany in check. Accordingly, he considerably enlarged the territory of the Czech state: In addition to Lusatia, he claimed Upper and Lower Silesia south of the Oder in the north, the Ore Mountains in Saxony and all territory east of the Elbe. In the west, Bohemia was extended to the rivers Naab and Danube. The border then followed the middle Danube eastwards to Vienna and extended the likewise claimed Slovakian settlement area to include northern Hungarian counties. The territory thus gained, according to Kuffner (1918, p. 16), subsequently had to be thoroughly “de-Germanised” (“odněmčít”). All this was demanded in an aggressive, sometimes racist tone, which did not miss any opportunity to vilify ‘Germanness’ as “robber” (“loupežník”), “perpetrator of violence” (“násilník”), “pest” (“škůdec”), “lawbreaker” (“rušitel práv”) and even “vampire” (“upír”) (Kuffner 1918, pp. 7, 9, 13–14, 29).

With this exaggerated memorandum, Kuffner was to provide permanent ammunition for anti-Czech propaganda for 20 years: Within a short time, it became the most cited Czech work in the folkish German nationalist literature of the 1920s and 1930s. It was believed that Kuffner's writing revealed "the secret basic concept of Czech imperialism" ("das heimliche Grundkonzept des tschechischen Imperialismus") (Jaworski, 1978, p. 259). Kuffner's claims were not only equated with the actual intentions of the 'Czech leaders' at the Versailles Peace Conference (Heuwieser, 1928, p. 7; Schauwecker, 1929, p. 323; Walch, 1932, pp. 41–42; Wächtler, 1938, p. 28), but even with the "all-Slavic Western policy towards Germanness" ("gesamtslawischen Westpolitik gegenüber dem Deutschtum") (Trampler, 1932, p. 33).

In the following, the facets of the instrumentalization of the pamphlet in (Sudeten) German circles against Czechoslovakia will be elaborated; special attention will be paid to its German-language reception basis. On the methodological basis of text-contrastive translation criticism, the aim is to illustrate that it was a 'didacticised' version intended for German readers, which tended to exacerbate the pamphlet at crucial points up to and including text falsification and – especially regarding the map material added by Kuffner – found numerous imitators until the end of the 1930s, who took themselves every liberty in dealing with the original.

2. Steps on the way to translation

Outside Czech circles, Kuffner's memorandum first attracted attention in Austria: As early as 1919, it became the subject of a treatise on Czech imperialism published in Vienna (*Imperialismus*, 1919). The first impulse for a broader Sudeten German reception came from Alois Baeran, a representative of the *German National Party (Deutsche Nationalpartei)* in the Chamber of Deputies of Czechoslovakia, to whom a Hungarian intelligence service had leaked a copy of Kuffner's pamphlet (Hofmann, 1978, p. 49). In 1921 Baeran informed his readers of the contents of the pamphlet in his *Brno Monday Paper (Brünner Montagszeitung)*. At election rallies and in his newspaper, he spread the claim that the position paper actually came from Edvard Beneš, Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia since 1918, who had presented it to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 (*Gesandtschaftsberichte*, 2004, p. 58).

At about the same time, another copy came into the hands of Eduard Bauer, the chairman of the *Aid Association for South Bohemia (Hilfsvereinigung für*

Südböhmen), which was founded in Vienna in 1918 (Sudetenpost, 1958, p. 5). Bauer passed the document on to the Austrian state chancellor Karl Renner (Hofmann, 1978, p. 49). It is unclear whether and, if so, to what extent the Austrian state government is to be associated with the translation into German initiated by the *Aid Association*. A benevolent acquiescence can at least not be ruled out due to the proximity of the translator Anton Klement to Renner.

Thus, in 1922 *Unser Staat und der Weltfrieden* (Kuffner, 1922) was published in Warnsdorf in northern Bohemia, with a reference to the *Aid Association* as the sponsor. This created the basis for a broad reception in German-speaking reader circles who did not know Czech. In the preface, Klement (1922, p. 4) decidedly recommended reading the book “to our brothers in the German Reich and in German Austria as well as to our closer compatriots” (“unseren Brüdern im Deutschen Reiche und in Deutschösterreich ebenso wie unseren engeren Landsleuten”).

3. ‘Tightened translation’: the Warnsdorf version in textual criticism

A critical look at the basis of Kuffner’s further German reception shows that Klement presented more than a mere ‘literal translation’ (Klement, 1922, p. 3). For he took the liberty, without labelling, of intervening in the text and thus ‘didactising’ it for the target group he wanted to open the eyes of. Klement thus acted both as an interpreter and as a ‘co-author’.

While his preface already epigrammatically summarized Kuffner’s theses in an indictment against the entire Czech people, in addition to some changes in the text structure (paragraph division, structure signals), interventions in the punctuation of the original were intended to strengthen the character of Kuffner’s pamphlet as an ‘anti-German diatribe’ and to emphasise the particularly outrageous demands and invectives: Thus, Klement replaced full stops at the end of sentences with exclamation marks, where the writing was to be given appealing emphasis, e. g.: “Das Deutschtum zahlenmäßig schwächen[!]” (weakening the Germans in numbers) or “dieses verderbliche Vermächtnis des überlebten Deutschtums[!]” (this pernicious legacy of retarded Germanness) (Kuffner, 1918, pp. 7, 27; 1922, pp. 9, 27). A similar function was fulfilled by highlighting (bold, blocking), which originated from Klement: These were on the one hand intended to mark the areas claimed by Kuffner in a keyword-like manner, e. g.: “Serben von **Meißen** und **Sajda**” (Sorbs of Meissen and Seidau), “Der K a m p f um die E l b e l i n i e und die D o n a u r i n n e!” (the struggle for the Elbe line and the Danube channel)

(Kuffner, 1922, pp. 11, 13). On the other hand, threats against Germany could also be emphasized graphically in this way, e. g.: “**Auch nach dem Kriege werden wir Deutschland an der Gurgel bleiben**” (Even after the war we will remain at Germany’s throat). “Deutschland wird [...] **von allen Welt-Zonen-Verbänden ausgeschlossen bleiben und unter der gemeinsamen Bewachung aller Nachbarn stehen**” (Germany will remain excluded from all world zone associations and under the common guard of all neighbours) (Kuffner, 1918, pp. 21, 24; 1922, pp. 22, 24).

Conversely, elsewhere the translator did not take over the emphasis of the original, namely in order to weaken arguments that Kuffner had put forward to legitimise his claims. For example, the translation “nur durch die dauernde Befreiung der Friesen” (only through the permanent liberation of the Frisians) appeared typographically much more inconspicuous than its original “pouze trvalou o s v o b o d o u Fryzů”. The same applies to the unbolded reproduction of text passages in bold, e. g.: “**Chce-li se Praha udržet, musí ovládat Labe až k ústí**” (If Prague wants to assert itself, it must dominate the Elbe to its mouth) as “Wenn sich Prag behaupten will, muß es die Elbe bis zur Mündung beherrschen” (Kuffner, 1918, pp. 11, 22; 1922, pp. 9, 21). By arbitrarily placing certain terms in inverted commas, the German version also suggested a (non-existent) distancing of the author, such as: “durch falsche ‘Schlagwörter’ eine gründliche militärische Organisation nicht zu erschweren” (“not to make thorough military organisation more difficult by using false ‘keywords’”) (Kuffner, 1922, p. 21). Conversely, Klement was able to disguise Kuffner’s distancing from certain terms, which he had expressed primarily with regard to the Czechoslovakian borders he had rejected in 1918, by deleting inverted commas: Thus, “tvar dnes malovaného obrazu ‘československé’ republiky” (“the unfortunate entity of the ‘Czechoslovak Republic’”) became “das unglückliche Gebilde der tschechoslowakischen Republik”; and “zmínka o nazvu našeho ‘státu’ po stránce politiky” (“a remark – in political terms – about the naming of our ‘state’”) became “eine Bemerkung – in politischer Hinsicht – über die Benennung unseres Staates” (Kuffner, 1918, pp. 9, 31; 1922, pp. 11, 32).

Finally, Klement’s version documents the translator’s tendency to resort to aggravating or falsifying word variants. This was partly to make Germany’s insult even more obvious, and partly to make Kuffner’s proposals seem even more unscrupulous and outrageous. There are examples of the arbitrary doubling of vituperative attributes, for example in the rhetorical question “proč nepotřit

současně hned i bezprávnou *ješitnost* německou [...]?” (“why not at the same time wipe out the unrighteous German vanity [...]?”); in German this reads: “[W]arum jetzt nicht gleichzeitig auch der rechtswidrigen *Eitelkeit und Prahlerei* [vanity and ostentation] ein Ende bereiten [...]?”

Kuffner followed up the postulate of making Germany harmless forever with the wish: “Kéž děje se tak *pravými* prostředky!” (“May it be done in the *right* way!”); the translation, however, speaks of “*geeigneten* Mitteln” (“*appropriate* measures”). Kuffner’s confidence, that “naši zástupcové na konferencích mírových mohou *směle* vystupovat” (“our advocates at the peace conferences can speak *boldly*”), seems much more chauvinistic when it says in German: “[U]nsere Vertreter auf den Friedenskonferenzen können *dreist* [*brazenly*] auftreten” (Kuffner, 1918, pp. 9, 13, 21; 1922, pp. 11, 14, 22).

Strictly speaking, the translation of the introductory “nedochůdče” as “Mißgeburt” (“miscarriage”) (Kuffner, 1918, p. 6; 1922, p. 8), as which Czechoslovakia henceforth haunted folkish German nationalist literature, already represented an aggravation. For the translation alternative – ‘Frühgeburt’ (premature birth) – would theoretically have left open a future improvement of what had been judged unsuitable; the variant chosen by Klement, on the other hand, seemed more conducive to a fundamentally no longer modifiable negative attitude of many Sudeten Germans towards the Czechoslovakian state.

The fact that Klement’s transmission was primarily intended for a readership in the immediately neighbouring German-speaking countries is shown by a change in content at a striking point: Where the borders of the imagined “Bohemia” (“Čechy”) are drawn, the Warnsdorf version speaks of the “possession of the middle Danube and the associated bridgeheads on it in the area from Regensburg to Passau” (“Besitz der mittleren Donau und der zugehörigen Brückenköpfe an ihr in dem Raume von Regensburg bis Passau”). In contrast, the original spoke of the area “from Regensburg to *Buda*” (“od Řezna až po *Budín*”) (Kuffner, 1918, p. 30; 1922, p. 30). The territorial claims to German territory were thus brought to the fore. Thus, what was declared to be a ‘literal translation’ became a document of proof, intensified by an ‘accuser’, of the threat to Sudeten and Reich German existence by a Czechoslovak state stylised as a hostile national antagonist ‘lurking’ in the immediate vicinity.

4. ‘Creative reproductions’: versions of Kuffner’s map material

But not only the text, also the map material that Kuffner had attached to his pamphlet was to become the object of ‘creative’ reproductions and adaptations aimed at aggravation: Kuffner’s original map No. 3 was entitled “Central Europe for the sake of world peace – the system of political ‘nettles’ (buffers)” (“Střední Evropa v zájmu světového míru – Soustava politických ‘netýkavek’ (nárazníky)”); it represented a simple black-and-white sketch without colour or other highlighting (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Central Europe for the sake of world peace – the system of political ‘nettles’ (buffers) (Kuffner, 1918, map No. 3)

In his Warnsdorf version, Anton Klement had translated the map heading coherently in itself: “Mitteleuropa im Interesse des Weltfriedens. Das System politischer ‘Rührmichnichtan’ (Pufferstaaten)”. When reproducing the map, however, he added tendentious visual highlights (see Figure 2): With one exception, the propagated Czech state territory was the only territory to be given a surface colour: the signal colour red, which visually emphasised its threatening dimension. Only the “Obchodní stát Slovanský” (Slavic trading state) to be

established in Istria according to Kuffner had the same colour. This was obviously intended to create the impression of a ‘Czech exclave’ and thus of a further increase in the power of Kuffner's ‘Čechy’ all the way to the Mediterranean.



Figure 2. Central Europe for the sake of world peace – the system of political ‘netles’ (buffers) (Kuffner, 1922, map No. 3)

This instrumentalization of Kuffner's maps, increasingly aimed at defaming Czechoslovakia, was to continue in the 1920s and 1930s in folkish German nationalist writing: In 1927, the geopolitician Karl Haushofer (1927, p. 210) published a new version of map No. 3. from *Náš stát a světový mír* (see figure 3) in an essay.

attracted attention before Hitler's seizure of power with writings on the Czech threat to Eastern Bavaria; within a short time, he distinguished himself as the unofficial 'chief ideologist' of the Nazi rulers regarding the public interpretation of Kuffner's writing in connection with the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia.

In his essay *The apron of the Bavarian border region (Das Vorfeld der Bayerischen Grenzmark)*, Trampler published Kuffner's map No. 5 *Municipality of the Czech Nation (Obec českého národa)* and the allegedly "accurately reproduced division of Central Europe" ("genau wiedergegebene Aufteilung Mitteleuropas") (Trampler, 1932, p. 60) here. By renaming various territories, he was the first to take the step from the utopia of 1918 to the reality of 1932 (see figure 4): The territorial prunings outlined by Kuffner, which leave behind territories named "Germanness" ("Němectvo") and "Central Borderlands" ("Středomezí"), concern state units of the present in Trampler's map: namely the "German Reich" ("Deutsches Reich") as well as "Upper and Lower Austria" ("Ober- und Niederösterreich"). The name "Čechy", which the new Czech state bore on Kuffner's map and which Klement translated more or less coherently as "Tschechien", was unceremoniously rendered by Trampler as "Tschechei", a short form of "Tschech(oslowak)ei", which from the 1920s was used in German nationalist circles as a pejorative term for the Czechoslovakian state. With this choice of words, he established clear links between Kuffner's projection and Czechoslovakia of the present. This 'aggravated' map would subsequently also find reproducers, for example in the former Sudeten German DNSAP deputy, later Nazi politician and district president of Aussig (Ústí nad Labem) Hans Krebs (Krebs/Lehmann, 1937, p. 16).



Figure 4. The “State of the Czech People” (Trampler, 1932, p. 60).

Trampler (1933a, p. 33) also presented his ‘own version’ of Kuffner’s map No. 3 to the public in his monograph *Bavaria in the German border struggle* (*Bayern im deutschen Grenzkampf*, see figure 5). In stark contradiction to his assurance that his map was “an exact replica of the sketch that Kuffner attached to his writing” (“eine genaue Nachbildung der Skizze, die Kuffner seiner Schrift beifügte”), in Trampler’s work the buffer states explicitly constructed by Kuffner as ‘defensible’ to contain German expansionism appear undifferentiated and nameless as “defenceless buffer states” (“Wehrlose Pufferstaaten”) occupying the north of the Reich’s territory. Trampler also went one step further in naming the Great Czech state and now spoke directly of “Czechoslovakia” (“Tschechoslowakei”). Trampler incorporated this map into countless other publications in the following years (Trampler, 1933b, p. 8; 1934a, p. 45; 1934b, p. 42; 1934c, p. 8). Among their imitators was the NSDAP Gauleiter of the Bavarian Ostmark, Fritz Wächtler (1938, p. 30).



Figure 5. The partition of Germany according to the plan of the Czech Hanus Kuffner (Trampler, 1933a, p. 33)

5. Conclusion

A synopsis makes clear how ‘creatively’ folkish German nationalist circles in the 1920s and 1930s dealt with the – admittedly: extremely chauvinistic – state utopia of a Czech private citizen in order to defame Czechoslovakia, a state that in their eyes had no right to exist. The strategy of the ‘translators’ was based on the one hand on the production of a ‘didacticised’, intensified German version, which was intended to demonstrate the monstrosity of Kuffner’s projection to a German readership through added or suppressed emphasis, but also lexical and content-related deviations from the original. The freely developed map material, in which Kuffner’s territorial concept was brought more and more blatantly into line with the political goals of Czechoslovakia, probably had a particularly broad impact.

That this approach served its purpose is indicated by the after-effects of this propaganda, which can still be felt today – partly fused with relics of anti-Czech resentment from the interwar period and the Sudeten German expulsion trauma of

1945/46. On the internet, for example, the search term ‘Kuffner’ leads to numerous tendentious websites that denounce his writing (always in the Warnsdorf version) – as “the Czech delegation’s idea of a future for Europe [in Versailles]” (“Vorstellung der tschechischen Delegation [in Versailles] von einer Zukunft Europas”) (Lügen, 2023), as proof “of how things really stood for the ‘peace-loving Czech Republic, bullied by Germany’!” (“wie es wirklich um die ‘friedliebende, von Deutschland drangsalierte’ Tschechei stand!”) (Scriptorium, 2023), as a precursor of “similar demands by Czech politicians at the end of the Second World War” (“ähnlichen Forderungen [...] tschechische[r] Politike[r] zum Ende des zweiten Weltkriegs”) (Landskron, 2023) or as an indication “of a latent striving for power on the part of Czech national circles (even in the current Czech republic)” (“auf ein latentes Machtstreben der tschechischen, nationalen Kreise (auch in der jetzigen CR[!])”) (Rensieg, 2023). For a slim booklet printed in a small edition a good 100 years ago by a military historian who is nowadays almost forgotten in the Czech Republic, these are considerable, although not flattering, after-effects.

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