

Soft power of Japan in India

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Abstract

'Soft Power' is a medium 'to get others to want what you want.' This research will study Japan's development of soft power among the 'Generation Z' (19-24 years of age) in India through Japanese kids' cartoons. The term 'Japanese cartoons' consists of a plethora of content from kids' comics to adult anime; therefore, in this research, the term is used only for cartoons created for an audience of below 18 years of age, for example Doraemon, Shinchan and Kiteretsu. Thus, we will understand the influence of cartoons people used to watch as kids on the choices they make as adults, the choices that are relevant for this research. We will discern why kids' cartoons and anime are more influential than adult anime in the long run. Japan was in the axis powers during the WW 2, yet has acquired a positive outlook, in India, than many Asian countries. Through survey, the research will analyze the cultural changes that Japanese cartoons have brought in India's Gen Z.

Keywords: Japan, India, Soft power, Joseph Nye, Anime, Gen Z, cartoons

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Introduction

Before contemplating the effects of kids' cartoons it is important to know why Japan dedicates enough resources of its foreign policy on promotion of entertainment industry. Since WW 2, Japan does not have an offensive army. Military was the only way to create an influence sphere across the globe before the concept of soft power arrived. WW 2 created a lot of challenges for Japan to overcome, recreate the destroyed cities, revive the economy, recreate its image before the world and then have some influence of its presence around the world. Thus, soft power became a important tool for Japan to fulfil these desires. Also, India is an important nation to study because of many reasons like its population, which makes it the largest market in Southeast Asia, its influence on various other countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. Cultures in India are so diverse that if any soft power tactic performs in India, it has the capability to appease major population across the globe.

Discussion of soft power mostly involves impact of food, sports brands, tech giants and other lifestyle choices. Seldom people talk about TV Shows, even when so only adult shows are considered. However, most subtle form soft power turns out to be 'kids' cartoons. Initial argument to back this statement is the fact that it is rarely mentioned thus let alone being scrutinized; it is not even taken seriously. Thus, scarce attention given to kids' cartoons gives a lot of scope and importance this research.

Another favorable characteristic of kids' cartoon is the deeper psychological effect they have on their target audience. Kids' choices of clothes, toys and stationery are not taken very seriously by adults yet are fulfilled. Childhood also tends to have a long-term effect on people. Thus, influence of kids' cartoons on later entertainment choices of people lives shall also be discovered. Since Japan also creates huge R rated or adult content for people, it is important to know if these cartoons help their audience in being glued to Japanese content throughout their life.

Not only entertainment choices but also food choices. This paper shall discover even the food aspect of Japanese entertainment industry. Chinese cuisine has become popular in India, among the Asian countries. The paper shall understand how successful Japanese cartoons are in endorsing their food. For instance, Kiteretsu cartoon had Korokke as a famous delicious Japanese dish but we do not know how popular it became among Indian children.

Kids being very impressionable, Japan gets a chance to recreate its image after WW 2. Through Doraemon and Kiteretsu, Japan is depicted as a land of innovation and technology. Through Pokémon, it is shown as a country filled with adventure. These cartoons do a great makeover of its image in India. Since children are not immediately taught about history, they fathom a very positive and fun-loving image of Japan at an early age. Later when they learn about history, their fundamental understanding of Japan remains the same, only knowledge about it increases. Thus, the fact that India fought against Japan in WW 2, has little effect on people in India today.

Soft Power

The concept of soft power was introduced by Joseph Nye. According to him soft power is 'a way to influence others to get the outcomes you want'. Soft power is the ability to influence unconscious choices of an individual. It can be conceptualized by liberalism with a pinch of cynicism. Thus, it comes out as a critique of realism as a theory as it steps out of the traditional framework for creating dominance (AKBAS, 2018). Soft power gives governments the ability to persuade other countries to embrace their values. This is frequently practiced by associating some traits of their society positively with the country's culture. The most prominent examples of these cultural traits are food, sports, television, films, and novels.

Culture can be divided into two segments, high culture, and popular culture. High culture consists of traits that interest the elites of a society, for example fine art, literature, or opera (Agyeiwaah, et al., 2018). Meanwhile, popular culture consists of commercial entertainment like comics, cartoons, and TV shows (Agyeiwaah, et al., 2018). Popular culture has a greater impact on the masses of any country. It spreads the country's values to a bigger audience. The goal of soft power is to boost the economy of a country. Thus, influence does not stop at spreading mere awareness of culture of the country. It needs to incentivize people to either buy products related to their culture or travel to the country.

Two kinds of factors play a role in alluring travelers towards a destination i.e., pull and push factors. Pull factors are the characteristics of a destination that attract an individual towards a place (Agyeiwaah, et al., 2018). Push factors are internal psychological needs that instigate the desire to travel (Agyeiwaah, et al., 2018). For example, COVID-19 pandemic was a push factor for people to travel 'somewhere'. Somewhere here is any place, to define that 'somewhere', pull factors come into play. Thus, cartoons contribute as pull factors.

Japan is a country worth studying in the field of soft power because it gives special attention to it. Since Japan cannot create any influence through hard power, after WW 2, it has resorted to other ways to do it. Thus, studying the impact of soft power can be done only when looking at countries that are trying to assert it. This is so important for Japan that PM Shinzo Abe even dressed as 'Super Mario' in Rio de Janeiro Olympics of 2016. He had done this to 'demonstrate the soft power of Japan' (Winkler, 2019). Thus, Japan's cultural diplomacy deserves special attention.

Childhood and Popular Culture

Children are very impressionable people. The manipulation of their demand is an easy task and has long term returns. As (Mitchell & Reid-Walsch, 2002) mentions that series fiction spoils children for good books and Barbie is a well-recognized example of massification of a child's demand. Their attention towards certain characters and shows can be easily orchestrated. Toys and merchandize is the material evidence of this demand. The raw emotion starting with "I want" in a toyshop reflects the magnitude of appeal to the masses (Mitchell & Reid-Walsch, 2002). The measure of influence of popular culture in childhood is from Barbie. Her image of 'dressed up and going out' has made this a standard practice among young women of Generation Y as Barbie gained popularity when they

were children (Mitchell & Reid-Walsch, 2002). Similar trends can be seen in the generation from the hangover of Dragon Ball Z, Pokémon, and Hello Kitty from their childhood. If Barbie contributed to 'dressing up and going out' culture, these shows have promoted action culture among the Indian generation.

(Mitchell & Reid-Walsch, 2002) compares children's pop culture to junk food. This explains how junk food is liked, wanted, and consumed by children while adults mostly advocate a healthy lifestyle. Even though adults do not prefer such a lifestyle, junk food leaves a lingering influence in their life and many adults find junk food tasty, even in their adulthood. Such an effect is also observed in childhood popular culture as well.

Cartoons have a great influence on children than TV shows on adults. The cartoons people watch as children determine their choices as adults too. Cartoons are the first stage when children learn about the idea of physical attractiveness i.e., pretty, or unattractive (Øvrendi & Özdemir, 2010). Not only cartoons determine some characteristics of a person, but they also need the validation of parents to be watched. Thus, the ability of any foreign cartoon to assimilate itself with culture of the host country becomes a deciding factor on whether parents are on board with the cartoons or not which is very important.

Japanese Cartoons in India

Before Japanese cartoons could enter the Indian demographics, the entertainment industry has created their audience and learnt exactly what influenced the children in India through Takeshi's Castle. Takeshi's Castle was one of the earliest Japanese shows that was telecasted in India on POGO channel. It blended two entertainments industries, and cultures, by having Javed Jaffrey's commentary on the show. After the show was a huge hit on television, Doraemon, Ninja Hattori, Samurai and Shinnchan achieved huge audiences.

Shinnchan, despite being controversial, was a popular show. In Indian society, parents and teachers are accorded with respect and are very attentive towards the content their kids are watching. Thus, their disapproval towards a TV show damps the level of involvement. It was, once, stopped from being telecasted for some time due to these reasons. With lessons from Shinnchan, Japanese cartoons industry took notes on the quality of content that needs to be telecasted in India. With this understanding, Japanese cartoons paved way for 'Eastern Version of Disney'. Cartoons combined the two cultures, making Indian kids excited about Japanese cultural terms like Ninja and Samurai. Apart from being a symbol of action and innovation, it also endorsed cuteness through the character 'Hello Kitty'. This character even went to challenge the American product "Barbie". It swayed a lot of children to buy its merchandise.

Thus, Indian response to Japanese cartoons has been very positive. Japan had 1.76 lakh visitors from India in 2019. It was an increment of 14.2% compared to 2018. Moreover, the number has more than doubled since 2012 which was 69,000 that year. Thus, this proves that there has been an increase in motivation of Indian people to travel to Japan. Since Japan introduced 'Cool Japan' initiative to promote their soft power, this research shall discern the role of kids cartoons in it. Although, while 'promoting' their culture, the strategy needs to be very subtle to avoid any counter-intuitive results.

Over-dominance of any state's soft power raises propaganda suspicions (Agyeiwaah, et al., 2018). This will be counter-productive for any country. This always remains an insecurity for any country while promoting their culture. As doubt is raised against the US when discussion on McDonald's, Burger King and Nike are held. But kids' cartoons go unrealized while these discussions are held because famous American cartoons like Powerpuff girls and Ben10 are never brought into these discussions and their influence, often, goes unnoticed.

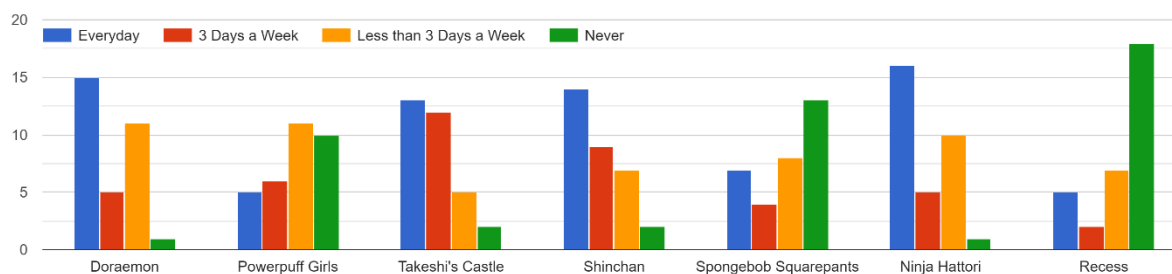
Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used. The tool used was an online survey form (google form). The participants had to answer several questions pertaining to cartoons they used to watch as kids and their views on certain traits of soft power. The sample size is 32. This would easily draw a relation between kids' cartoon and soft power of Japan in India. The participants are in an age group of 20-24 years. This makes their birth year from 2001-

1997. Thus, the cartoons used to estimate magnitude of soft power are the ones which were telecasted hugely on Indian television, roughly, from 2005-2010. Since the survey was online and it could be only through a phone or a PC, the economic background of all participants can be expected to be a little more than average Indian household income. No participant in survey comes from underdeveloped or undeveloped city of India. Thus, the survey most reflects the audience of tier 1 and 2 cities of India. Also, gendered perspectives have not been analyzed.

Popularity: Creating an audience

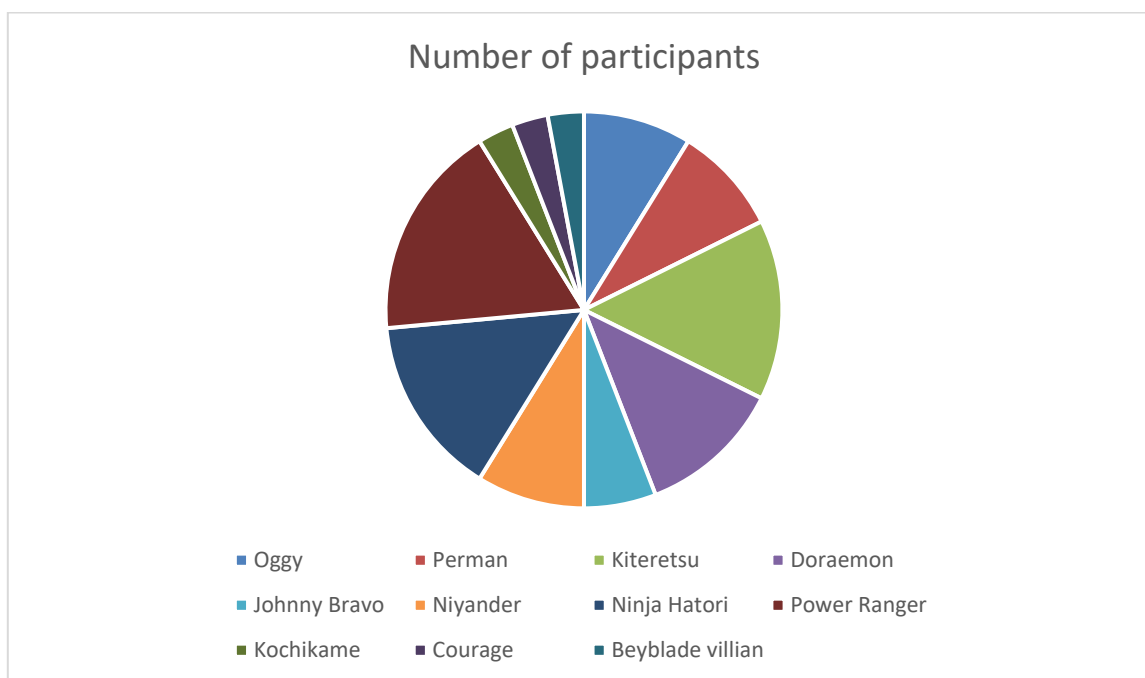
Which of the following have you watched?



This compares the popularity of American and Japanese cartoons in India. Japanese cartoons are Doraemon, Takeshi's Castle, Shinnchan and Ninja Hattori meanwhile American cartoons are Powerpuff Girls, Spongebob Squarepants and Recess. Thus, looking at Japanese cartoons, the bar of 'everyday' is higher than any other while in American cartoons, the bar graph is quite opposite. Thus, Japanese entertainment has certainly understood the behavioral patterns of Indian audience as their cartoons have attracted a wider audience. Once the industry performs well with its shows, it is easy to influence them into other profitable sectors as well. Therefore, this confirms the success of initial step of building soft power i.e., creating an influence sphere of Japanese cartoons in India.

Understanding your audience

When asked which character in their childhood inspired them the most or was a role model, the answers were as follows

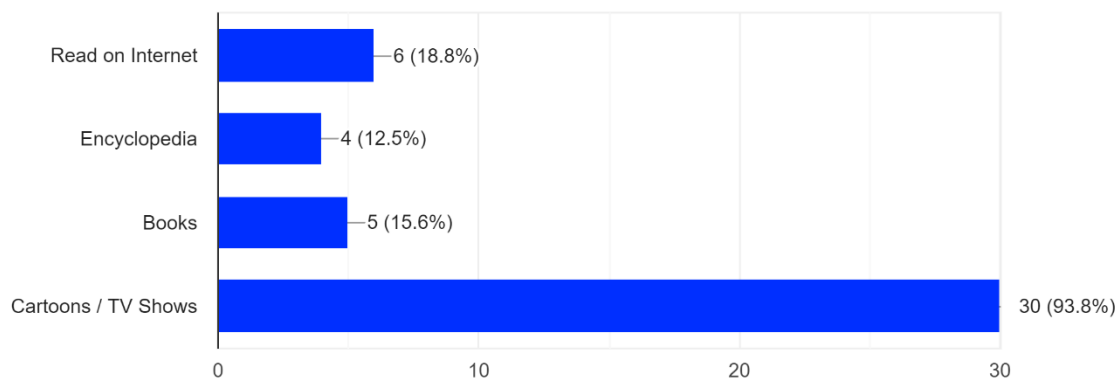


Thus, many people (10/30) saw themselves as Kiteretsu and Ninja Hattori, mostly because their innovative abilities and moral high ground. This means that audiences of these characters were impressed with most qualities that they stood for. Similarly, cartoons also depict their country's culture, thus children see that culture in the same positive light too. Although Power Ranger (American) is the most popular cartoon among Indian generation Y, Japan cartoons were more in number and thus dominate the pie chart, country wise.

Exporting culture

How did you get to know about Ninjas and Samurai?

32 responses

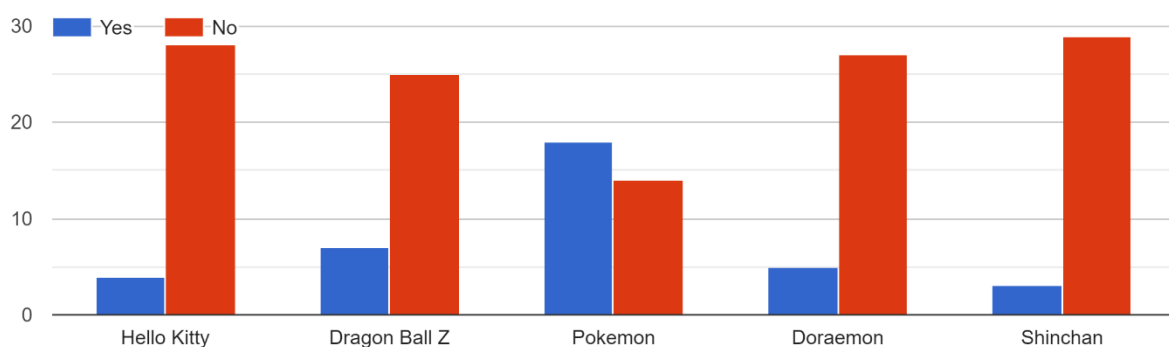


One of primary aims of soft power is to export one's culture and thus, internationalize their perspectives. Through the above question, we understand that 93.8% of Indian Generation Y has learnt about Ninja and Samurai culture via cartoons. Thus, a person's idea of Japanese army has a very positive and adventurous image. Despite the aggression that Japanese army showed during WW 2, through these cartoons an image recreation is done. When people learn about WW 2 in later stages of their lives, only information is absorbed, the image remains positive. So, another step of exporting Japanese culture through cartoons is also successful as seen in the survey.

Such images remain with people for a long time because when asked, "What do you think of Samurais?". 12/30 participants said, "Saviors or Safeguards". Remaining participants also had a positive outlook towards Samurais. When it was highlighted, that India fought against Japan during WW 2, 17 participants remained of the opinion that 'we should not dwell on the past' while remaining 15 were not aware of this part of history.

Cartoons are not just for watching

Have you ever bought merchandize of any the following themes?

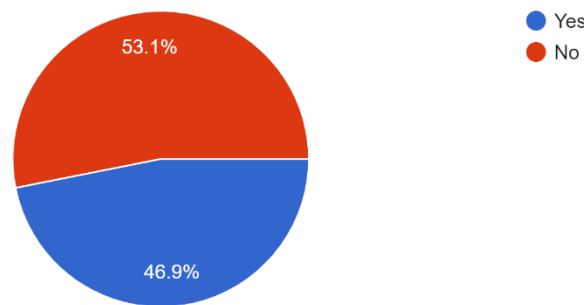


After gaining popularity and recreation of image, contribution to economy is another incentive to build soft power. One of the direct implications of kids' cartoons is the sale of merchandise. Demand for merchandise of any cartoon among kids reflects the magnitude of their want towards the character or the product. Thus, with revenue generated through viewership in entertainment industry, many vendors also earn from manufacturing merchandise. In the graph above, around 18/32 people have had bought Pokémon merchandise. This depicts the strength of influence sphere that Japan has built through its cartoons.

Kids' content influencing adult content

Do you watch Anime?

32 responses

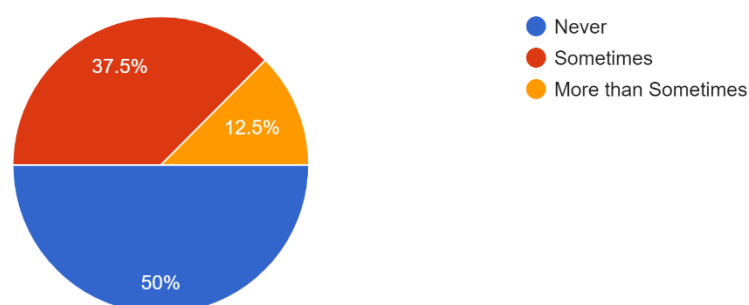


One of the pros that specifically Japanese cartoons have is the long-term influence. Anime is mostly watched by adults since it creates adult content, mostly. Thus, as suggested in the pie chart above, 46.9% of the people who used to watch Japanese cartoons as kids, also watch Anime as adult. With such a high conversion rate, people are inclined towards buying Japanese perspective and their culture even at later stages of their life. Like cartoons, Anime also sells merchandize. Also, huge viewership of Anime in India could also come only due to earlier inclination towards Japanese content. Thus, very early exposure to Japanese content has good returns.

Balancing the downsides while re-writing history?

Did you ever think of Japanese cartoons or Anime as cultural propaganda?

32 responses

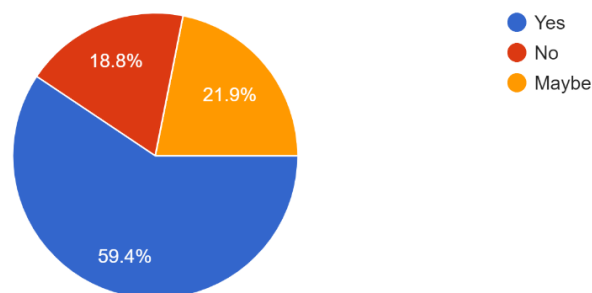


A downside, as mentioned in the paper, is building soft power too ambitiously. Usually, adults are more conscious of the content they are consuming. Thus, kids' cartoons tend to be safer when concerns regarding propaganda are raised. Children are more pliable and therefore a softer target to build an influence sphere. Thus, as the survey suggests, 50% of people never thought of cartoons as a cultural propaganda and 37.5% seldom thought of it. Thus, considering this figure and figure [2], we understand that combination of credulity and export of culture plays a vital role.

Cartoons: 'X' factor for Tourism?

Do you want to travel to Japan?

32 responses

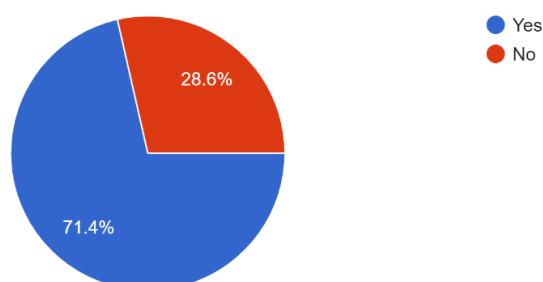


The most desired outcome of soft power is attracting tourists. This explains if the tactics adopted for building soft power will even give results or not. The pie chart suggests that 59.4% of people who watched Japanese cartoons as kids wish to travel to Japan. Thus, this proves that contributions of cartoons are not frivolous. They have a significant effect on travel choices of a person and act as a good 'pull factor'. Also, when asked about the reasons for willing to travel to Japan, 3 participants directly termed cartoons as their motivation and 4 participants stated as Japan being a land of innovation and adventure. Thus, this is a lucid and direct relation between cartoons and the will to travel to a place.

Anything that Japan missed?

Have you ever tried Japanese food?

7 responses



In the 21st century, desire to travel is a banal parameter to analyze soft power. Since the world is closely knit, there are more parameters. As discovered before, Indian people caught a very positive outlook towards the army because of these cartoons. So positive that people are ready to not count Japanese invasion of India as a major historical event. The survey finds that 71.4% of kids who watch Japanese cartoons will try Japanese food. But when asked about the reasons, no participant listed cartoons as their motivation to try Japanese cuisine. Thus, we find that these cartoons missed the opportunity to promote their cuisine like the US and Latin American countries have done.

As one of the aims of 'Cool Japan' strategy was to recoup the image of Japan post WW 2. Thus, positive image building also needs to be analyzed. As a part of the survey, the participants were also asked about their overall view on Japan. A participant wanted to witness if the images of Japan, as shown in Pokémon, are real. Another participant (anonymous) even said, "Japan has been able come back stronger despite being prone to do many natural disasters. The spirit of the country and it is commendable."

Conclusion

The paper discovers that cartoons and kids content dig deeper into a person's psychology and choices, influencing their opinions for life. Kids cartoons, are most certainly, an underrated way of building soft power and 'getting into

their head', to be more novel. To be more unadulterated, mass manipulation is much easier with kids' content than with adult content. The paper finds that Japan has been successful in recreating its image in India. Escaping historical criticism is a stain that even the US and colonial countries have not been able to wash. Although another finding is that Japan failed at promoting its food and sports like some countries. Japan is not an example but also a case study for countries aspiring such soft power.

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