

Oe Kenzaburo A Personal Matter Ebook

Oe Kenzaburo: A Personal Matter

Oe Kenzaburo, one of Japan's most acclaimed writers, has left an indelible mark on world literature through his profound exploration of personal and societal struggles. His work often delves into themes of identity, family, disability, and the complexities of human existence, making his stories resonate deeply with readers across the globe. Among his numerous works, *A Personal Matter* stands out as a seminal novel that encapsulates his narrative style and philosophical outlook, offering a compelling glimpse into the author's personal life and the socio-cultural issues of his time.

This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of Oe Kenzaburo's *A Personal Matter*, exploring its themes, background, and significance within his oeuvre. We will also examine how the novel reflects Oe's personal experiences and the broader context of post-war Japan, making it a vital piece for both literary scholars and general readers interested in understanding Japanese literature and society.

Background and Context of Oe Kenzaburo's A Personal Matter

About Oe Kenzaburo

Born in 1935 in Okaido, a small town in Japan's Shikoku region, Oe Kenzaburo emerged as a voice of post-war Japan. His early life was marked by personal tragedy and societal upheaval, which deeply influenced his writing. Oe's father was a schoolteacher, and his family experienced the hardships of Japan's wartime and post-war reconstruction periods.

Oe's literary career began in the 1950s, and he gained international recognition with his novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* (1958). His works are characterized by their philosophical depth, social critique, and exploration of human consciousness. In 1994, Oe was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, cementing his status as a leading figure in global literature.

Overview of A Personal Matter

Published in 1964, *A Personal Matter* is a semi-autobiographical novel that narrates the internal struggles of a young father, Bird, as he grapples with the birth of his disabled son, Bird's emotional turmoil, and societal expectations. The novel is a candid portrayal of grief, responsibility, and the search for meaning amid suffering.

Set against the backdrop of post-war Japan, the story reflects the nation's rapid modernization and

the often-unspoken emotional conflicts faced by individuals. Oe uses Bird's personal crisis as a lens to explore universal themes of parenthood, identity, and existential despair.

Plot Summary and Main Themes

Plot Summary

The novel centers around Bird, a young man living with his wife on a remote island in Japan. When their son is born with a brain hernia, Bird is overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness, shame, and anger. He initially considers abandoning the child but is haunted by conflicting emotions and societal pressures.

Key events include:

- Bird's internal debate over whether to keep or abandon the child.
- His interactions with family, friends, and community members, revealing societal attitudes toward disability.
- Bird's personal reflections on his own identity and responsibilities.
- The climax involves Bird's decision to accept his role as the child's father, despite the pain and uncertainty.

Throughout the narrative, Bird's emotional journey is depicted with raw honesty, illustrating the complexities of human response to tragedy.

Main Themes

- Parenthood and Responsibility

The novel examines the profound emotional and moral dilemmas faced by parents, especially when confronted with a disabled child. Bird's internal conflict highlights society's often stigmatizing attitudes and the personal sacrifices involved in caregiving.

- Disability and Society

Oe explores societal perceptions of disability, questioning how social norms influence individual choices. The novel challenges readers to consider compassion, acceptance, and the social stigma associated with difference.

- Personal Identity and Existence

Bird's crisis prompts reflection on personal identity beyond societal roles. The novel delves into existential themes, contemplating what it means to find purpose amid suffering and uncertainty.

- Post-War Japan and Modernization

The setting reflects Japan's rapid post-war modernization, with societal values shifting and traditional beliefs being challenged. The novel subtly critiques societal indifference and the alienation experienced by individuals.

Analysis of Literary Techniques and Style

Narrative Perspective

Oe employs a first-person narrative, immersing readers directly into Bird's thoughts and emotions. This perspective enhances the novel's intimacy and allows for a nuanced portrayal of internal conflict.

Language and Symbolism

The language is visceral and unflinching, capturing the rawness of Bird's psychological state. Symbols such as the disabled child represent broader themes of alienation and societal judgment.

Use of Silence and Reflection

Oe strategically incorporates moments of silence and introspection, emphasizing the weight of unspoken emotions and inner turmoil. This technique invites readers to engage deeply with Bird's internal world.

Significance and Impact of A Personal Matter

Literary Significance

A Personal Matter is considered a landmark in Japanese literature, notable for its candid portrayal of personal trauma and societal critique. It exemplifies Oe's mastery in blending autobiographical elements with universal themes, making it accessible and profound.

Cultural and Societal Impact

The novel challenged societal taboos around disability and mental health in Japan, fostering conversations about compassion and acceptance. It also reflected broader questions about individual responsibility in a rapidly changing society.

Influence on Readers and Writers

Oe's honest depiction of human vulnerability has inspired countless writers and readers to confront uncomfortable truths about personal suffering and societal expectations. The novel's emotional depth continues to resonate globally.

Oe Kenzaburo's Personal Life and Its Reflection in the Novel

Autobiographical Elements

Oe's own life experiences, including the birth of his disabled son, are echoed in *A Personal Matter*. His son, Hikari, was born with a brain hernia, and Oe's struggles with acceptance and responsibility are woven into the narrative.

Philosophy and Personal Beliefs

Oe's philosophical outlook emphasizes human dignity, compassion, and the importance of confronting suffering. These beliefs underpin the novel's themes and character development.

Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of A Personal Matter

Oe Kenzaburo's *A Personal Matter* remains a poignant exploration of human vulnerability, societal expectations, and personal responsibility. Its honest portrayal of a father's internal battle resonates across cultures and generations, making it a crucial work in understanding not only Japanese literature but also the universal human condition.

For readers seeking an emotionally honest and intellectually stimulating novel, *A Personal Matter* offers a profound reflection on the struggles of acceptance, identity, and love. It exemplifies Oe's literary mastery and his unwavering commitment to exploring the depths of human experience.

SEO Keywords: Oe Kenzaburo, *A Personal Matter*, Japanese literature, post-war Japan, disability portrayal in literature, parenting struggles, existential themes, societal critique, autobiographical novel, human vulnerability in literature

Oe Kenzaburo: *A Personal Matter* ? An In-Depth Investigation

Introduction

Oe Kenzaburo stands as one of Japan's most influential and critically acclaimed authors, renowned for his profound narratives that explore the depths of human consciousness, societal issues, and personal struggles. Among his extensive body of work, *A Personal Matter* (originally titled *Kojin*) holds a distinctive place, not only for its intense portrayal of individual trauma but also for its reflection of broader existential themes. This investigative article delves into the origins, themes, and cultural significance of *A Personal Matter*, unraveling its layers to understand why it remains a pivotal work in modern Japanese literature.

Background of Oe Kenzaburo

Born in 1935 in Ōse, a small village in Ehime Prefecture, Oe Kenzaburo emerged as a voice of post-war Japan, grappling with the nation's rapid modernization, cultural shifts, and personal identity crises. His early life was marked by the trauma of World War II, which shaped much of his worldview. As a writer, Oe's works often blend autobiographical elements with sharp social critique, exploring themes such as disability, mental health, political activism, and the individual's place within society.

Oe Kenzaburo's Literary Style and Philosophy

Oe's narrative style is characterized by a lyrical yet incisive prose, often infused with philosophical reflections. He employs symbolism and allegory to question societal norms and human morality. His commitment to moral integrity and social consciousness is evident throughout his oeuvre, which has earned him numerous awards, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1994.

Understanding *A Personal Matter*

Published in 1964, *A Personal Matter* is Oe's semi-autobiographical novel that narrates the inner turmoil of a young man confronting an unexpected and devastating personal crisis. The novel is lauded for its raw honesty, psychological depth, and exploration of the moral dilemmas faced when confronting extraordinary circumstances.

Summary of the Plot

The protagonist, Bird, is a 30-year-old writer living with his wife and newborn son in post-war Japan. His life takes a drastic turn when his newborn is diagnosed with a severe brain condition, leading to the decision made by Bird and his wife to consider euthanasia. The novel chronicles Bird's internal struggle, feelings of guilt, societal judgment, and his search for meaning amid despair.

Key Themes and Symbols

- **Motherhood and Responsibility:** The novel examines the burden of parental responsibility in the face of suffering and societal expectation.

- **Existential Crisis:** Bird's internal conflict embodies the human confrontation with mortality, morality, and personal identity.

- **Isolation and Alienation:** The narrative explores feelings of loneliness, both self-imposed and societal, as Bird grapples with his decision.

- **The "Personal Matter" as a Metaphor:** The title itself symbolizes the profound moral dilemma—what is personal, what is societal, and where does one draw the line?

Analysis of Major Themes

Autonomy and Moral Dilemmas

At the core of *A Personal Matter* lies the question of moral autonomy. Bird's decision about his son's life is not presented as a straightforward moral choice but as an agonizing dilemma that pits personal conviction against societal norms. The novel challenges readers to consider the limits of individual morality, especially when faced with life-and-death decisions.

Psychological Realism and Inner Conflict

Oe masterfully captures Bird's psychological landscape, portraying his oscillation between hope, despair, guilt, and numbness. The narrative's introspective style immerses the reader into Bird's mind, emphasizing the complexity of human emotion when confronting tragedy.

Societal Judgment and Privacy

The novel scrutinizes societal attitudes towards disability, morality, and personal privacy. Bird's internal conflict is compounded by external pressures—medical professionals, family expectations, and societal judgments—highlighting the tension between individual choice and societal oversight.

Historical and Cultural Context

Published during a period of rapid economic growth and social change in Japan, *A Personal Matter* reflects broader societal tensions. Post-war Japan was grappling with modernization, the legacy of wartime trauma, and shifting moral values. The novel's themes resonate with the national

consciousness, touching on issues of human dignity, social responsibility, and personal freedom.

Criticism and Reception

Initially met with mixed reactions, the novel gradually gained recognition for its unflinching portrayal of moral ambiguity. Critics praised Oe's psychological depth and literary craftsmanship, while some conservative voices criticized its challenging themes.

The novel's influence extends beyond literature, sparking debates about bioethics, parental rights, and mental health. It remains a seminal work for understanding Japan's grappling with moral complexities in a rapidly changing society.

Impact and Legacy

Oe Kenzaburo: A Personal Matter is more than just a personal narrative; it functions as a mirror to societal anxieties and moral questions that transcend Japanese borders. Its influence can be seen in subsequent literature addressing personal autonomy, disability rights, and ethical decision-making.

The novel's legacy endures in academic discussions, ethical debates, and literary circles, cementing its status as a profound reflection on human morality and personal matter.

Conclusion

Oe Kenzaburo: A Personal Matter exemplifies the profound power of literature to explore the depths of human morality and psychological resilience. Through its candid portrayal of a father's agonizing decision, the novel invites readers to reflect on complex issues surrounding autonomy, responsibility, and societal judgment.

As a work rooted in personal experience yet universally resonant, A Personal Matter continues to challenge and inspire, reminding us that the most profound human dilemmas often lie within the quiet, personal spaces of our lives. Its enduring relevance underscores Oe Kenzaburo's mastery in transforming personal trauma into universal inquiry, securing his place among the most significant voices in modern literature.

In examining A Personal Matter, we are reminded that some issues are inescapably personal, yet their implications ripple through society, prompting ongoing reflection on the moral fabric that binds us all.

QuestionAnswer What is the central theme of 'A Personal Matter' by Kenzaburo Oe? The novel explores themes of personal responsibility, identity, and the struggles of parenthood, particularly

focusing on a father's emotional conflict after his newborn's birth with a deformity. How does Kenzaburo Oe depict the protagonist's internal conflict in 'A Personal Matter'? Oe portrays the protagonist's internal conflict through his feelings of shame, guilt, and helplessness regarding his son's condition, highlighting the emotional turmoil faced by parents in challenging circumstances. What role does the setting play in 'A Personal Matter'? The setting, primarily in rural Japan, underscores the protagonist's isolation and societal pressures, emphasizing the personal and cultural struggles surrounding disability and motherhood. How has 'A Personal Matter' influenced contemporary literature on parenthood and disability? Oe's candid portrayal of complex emotions has contributed to discussions on parental guilt and acceptance, inspiring authors to explore nuanced perspectives on disability and personal responsibility in literature. What awards or recognitions has Kenzaburo Oe received for 'A Personal Matter' or related works? Kenzaburo Oe was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1994, with 'A Personal Matter' being one of his significant works that contributed to his international recognition for its profound exploration of human experience.

Related keywords: Kenzaburo Oe, A Personal Matter, Japanese literature, postwar Japan, existential themes, coming-of-age, family dynamics, mental health, literary fiction, autobiographical novel

PERSONAL RELIGION AMONG THE GREE

Personal religion among the Gree is a fascinating aspect of their cultural and spiritual identity that offers insight into their beliefs, practices, and social dynamics. As a community with a rich history and diverse influences, the Gree have developed a unique approach to spirituality that emphasizes personal connection, tradition, and community cohesion. This article explores the various dimensions of personal religion among the Gree, including its historical roots, core beliefs, rituals, and contemporary expressions.

Understanding the Gree: A Brief Cultural Overview

Before delving into their religious practices, it's essential to understand who the Gree are. The Gree are an indigenous ethnic group primarily residing in the mountainous regions of the northern territories. They are known for their vibrant cultural traditions, distinct language, and a deep-seated connection to nature. Their social structure is often communal, with strong emphasis on kinship and ancestral ties.

The Role of Personal Religion in Gree Society

Unlike monolithic religious systems, the Gree's spiritual outlook is highly individualistic yet intertwined with community practices. Personal religion among the Gree is characterized by a focus on individual spiritual experiences, personal rituals, and a flexible approach to traditional beliefs.

Core Principles of Gree Personal Religion

The spiritual beliefs of the Gree revolve around several core principles:

- **Animism:** The belief that natural objects, landscapes, and animals possess spirits.
- **Ancestor Veneration:** Respect and communication with ancestors are central to individual spiritual life.
- **Harmony with Nature:** Maintaining balance with the environment is seen as a spiritual obligation.
- **Personal Connection:** Each individual is encouraged to develop their own understanding and relationship with the divine or spiritual realm.

Historical Roots of Personal Religion Among the Gree

The Gree's spiritual practices have evolved over centuries, influenced by their interactions with neighboring cultures, environmental changes, and internal community developments.

Ancient Beliefs and Practices

Historically, Gree spirituality was deeply rooted in animistic practices, with shamans serving as spiritual mediators. These shamans conducted rituals to invoke spirits, seek guidance, and ensure harmony within the community.

Influence of External Cultures

Trade routes and intercultural exchanges introduced new religious ideas, including elements of Buddhism, Christianity, and local folk traditions. While some external influences were integrated, the Gree maintained a distinct personal approach that prioritized individual spiritual exploration.

Modern Expressions of Personal Religion among the Gree

Today, personal religion among the Gree continues to thrive, adapting to modern influences while preserving traditional elements.

Individual Spiritual Practices

Many Gree individuals practice personal rituals such as:

- Personal meditation or reflection at sacred natural sites.
- Creating altars at home with symbols representing ancestors and spirits.
- Engaging in seasonal ceremonies that reflect personal spiritual calendars.

Community and Personal Belief

While personal beliefs are highly individualized, they often coexist with communal rituals and festivals that reinforce shared cultural values. This duality allows for flexibility and personal expression within a collective framework.

Contemporary Challenges and Adaptations

Modernization, urbanization, and globalization pose challenges to traditional spiritual practices. Many Gree have incorporated contemporary elements, such as meditation apps or eco-spiritual movements, into their personal religious lives.

Practices and Rituals of Personal Religion among the Gree

The rituals practiced by Gree individuals are often simple yet meaningful, emphasizing personal connection and reflection.

Common Rituals and Symbols

- **Sacred Sites:** Personal visits to forests, rivers, or mountains believed to be spiritually significant.
- **Offerings:** Leaving herbs, food, or symbolic objects at natural altars or ancestral shrines.
- **Symbols:** Using talismans, amulets, or carvings representing spiritual entities or protective spirits.

Festivals and Personal Celebrations

Although many festivals are communal, individuals often mark personal milestones?such as birthdays or seasonal changes?with private ceremonies that reinforce their spiritual journey.

The Significance of Personal Religion in Gree Identity

Personal religion plays a vital role in shaping Gree identity and worldview. It fosters:

- Self-awareness and spiritual growth
- Resilience against cultural homogenization
- Deepened respect for nature and ancestors
- Personal empowerment and agency in spiritual matters

Challenges and Future Directions

Despite its resilience, personal religion among the Gree faces several challenges:

- Loss of traditional knowledge due to modernization
- Influence of dominant religious and secular ideologies
- Environmental threats impacting sacred natural sites
- Generational shifts in spiritual priorities

To preserve and adapt their spiritual heritage, many Gree are engaging in cultural revival initiatives, documenting their practices, and integrating traditional beliefs with contemporary spirituality.

Conclusion: Embracing Personal Spirituality for Cultural Continuity

Personal religion among the Gree exemplifies a vibrant, adaptive, and deeply individual approach to spirituality. It underscores the importance of personal connection, respect for nature, and ancestral reverence in maintaining their cultural identity. As they navigate modern challenges, the Gree's commitment to their spiritual roots ensures that their unique worldview continues to thrive, inspiring future generations to find their own paths within their rich spiritual tapestry.

Key Takeaways:

- The Gree's personal religion emphasizes individual spiritual experiences within a cultural context.
- Animism, ancestor veneration, and harmony with nature are central themes.
- Practices include natural site visits, offerings, and personal ceremonies.
- Modern influences bring both challenges and opportunities for spiritual renewal.
- Preserving personal religious practices is vital for maintaining Gree cultural heritage.

This exploration of personal religion among the Gree highlights the dynamic interplay between tradition and personal expression, illustrating how spirituality remains a vital and evolving part of their identity.

Personal religion among the Gree is a fascinating subject that offers a window into how individual

belief systems can shape and reflect broader cultural, social, and spiritual identities. While the Gree people are often characterized by their communal practices and shared traditions, understanding the nuances of personal religious expression reveals a deeper layer of their spiritual landscape. In this article, we will explore the origins, practices, significance, and contemporary developments of personal religion among the Gree, illustrating how individual faith interacts with collective identity.

Understanding the Gree Cultural Context

Who are the Gree?

The Gree are an indigenous ethnic group primarily residing in the mountainous regions of the northern territories of the country. Their society is traditionally organized around kinship ties, oral traditions, and a spiritual worldview that emphasizes harmony with nature. Their history is rich with myths, rituals, and ancestral veneration, all of which influence religious expression.

Collective vs. Personal Religion

Historically, Gree society has prioritized collective religious practices?communal ceremonies, festivals, and rites performed for the community?s well-being. However, within this collective framework, there exists a vibrant undercurrent of personal religious belief. Individuals often interpret and adapt traditional beliefs to fit their personal experiences, needs, and spiritual inquiries.

Origins of Personal Religion among the Gree

Traditional Foundations

The roots of personal religion among the Gree are deeply intertwined with their ancestral traditions and shamanic practices. Shamans, known locally as "Sakara," serve as spiritual mediators, guiding individuals and communities through rites of passage, healing, and communication with spirits.

Evolving Spirituality

Over generations, some Gree individuals have begun to develop personalized spiritual paths that incorporate traditional elements while integrating new ideas?sometimes influenced by contact with other cultures, modern religious movements, or personal revelations. This evolution signifies a dynamic and adaptable spiritual identity.

Key Aspects of Personal Religion among the Gree

Personal Rituals and Practices

While communal rituals remain central, many Gree individuals engage in private spiritual practices, such as:

- Personal prayer or meditation: Communicating with spirits or ancestors outside of formal ceremonies.
- Sacred offerings: Placing personal tokens or small offerings at natural sites believed to be spiritually significant.
- Dream interpretation: Viewing dreams as messages from ancestors or spirits guiding personal decisions.
- Nature-based practices: Engaging in solitary walks or rituals in forests, mountains, or rivers to connect with nature spirits.

Beliefs and Theological Perspectives

Personal beliefs among the Gree often include:

- Animism: Belief that spirits inhabit natural objects and phenomena.
- Ancestor reverence: Personal relationships with ancestors can be nurtured outside of communal rituals.
- Spirit guides: Some individuals claim to have personal spirit guides who provide guidance and protection.
- Syncretism: Incorporation of elements from other religions or spiritual practices, such as Christianity or new age beliefs.

Personal Symbols and Talismans

Many Gree individuals craft or carry personal symbols, such as amulets, feathers, or stones, believed to offer protection or spiritual insight. These items often have personal significance and are used in solitary rituals.

Significance of Personal Religion in Gree Society

Identity and Individual Agency

Personal religious practices allow Gree individuals to forge a more intimate and autonomous spiritual identity. This personal agency fosters a sense of empowerment and self-awareness within the broader cultural context.

Spiritual Healing and Guidance

Many turn to personal practices for healing, decision-making, or comfort, especially during times of hardship or transition. Personal religion thus becomes a vital resource for emotional resilience.

Preservation of Tradition

Personal adaptations of traditional beliefs help preserve Gree spirituality amid changing social environments. They serve as a bridge between ancestral practices and contemporary life.

Contemporary Developments and Challenges

Modern Influences

Globalization, education, and exposure to other religious traditions have introduced new ideas and practices into Gree spirituality. Some individuals blend traditional beliefs with Christianity, Buddhism, or New Age philosophies, creating hybrid spiritual paths.

Challenges to Personal Religious Expression

- Cultural pressures: Younger generations may feel pressured to conform to mainstream or state-sanctioned religions.
- Loss of traditions: Rapid societal changes threaten the transmission of traditional knowledge and practices.
- Urbanization: Increased migration to cities can isolate individuals from natural sites and community-based rituals.

Resilience and Adaptation

Despite these challenges, many Gree individuals continue to cultivate personal spirituality, emphasizing its importance in maintaining cultural identity and personal well-being.

Supporting Personal Religion among the Gree

Community and Education

Efforts to support personal religion include:

- Educational programs: Teaching traditional beliefs and practices in ways that respect individual expression.
- Cultural preservation initiatives: Documenting personal stories and rituals to keep spiritual

diversity alive.

- Interfaith dialogues: Encouraging respectful exchanges between different belief systems within Gree communities.

Spiritual Autonomy and Respect

Acknowledging and respecting personal spiritual journeys fosters a more inclusive and resilient cultural environment. It affirms the importance of individual agency within collective traditions.

Conclusion

Personal religion among the Gree exemplifies the dynamic interplay between tradition and individual expression. While rooted in ancestral practices and communal rituals, personal spirituality offers Gree individuals a pathway to connect more intimately with their beliefs, find personal meaning, and adapt to changing social landscapes. Recognizing and supporting this facet of Gree spirituality enriches our understanding of how indigenous cultures sustain their spiritual vitality in a modern world, emphasizing the importance of respecting diverse paths to the sacred.

In summary, the personal religion among the Gree is a vibrant, evolving aspect of their spiritual identity that balances tradition with personal agency. It encompasses private rituals, individualized beliefs, symbols, and practices that serve individual needs while contributing to the broader cultural fabric. As the Gree navigate contemporary challenges, their personal spirituality remains a powerful testament to resilience, adaptability, and the enduring human quest for meaning.

Question What role did personal religion play in ancient Greek society? In ancient Greece, personal religion was integral to daily life, with individuals practicing rituals, making offerings, and seeking divine favor to ensure personal well-being, success, and protection, alongside communal religious festivals. How did personal beliefs about gods differ among Greek individuals? While some Greeks maintained traditional beliefs in gods like Zeus or Athena, others developed personal interpretations or focused on specific deities that resonated with their personal needs, reflecting a diverse and individualized approach to religion. Did ancient Greeks practice personal prayer or devotion outside of public rituals? Yes, many Greeks engaged in personal prayer, dedications, and small offerings at household shrines or temples, expressing their individual piety and seeking divine assistance in everyday matters. How did personal religion influence Greek art and literature? Personal religious beliefs inspired a wide range of artistic and literary expressions, including personal dedications, mythological themes, and philosophical writings exploring individual spirituality and moral values. Were there any Greek philosophical movements that emphasized personal spirituality over traditional religion? Yes, schools like Stoicism and Epicureanism promoted personal virtue, inner peace, and rational understanding of the divine, often emphasizing individual spiritual development over formal religious rituals. How is the concept of personal religion among the ancient Greeks relevant to modern spiritual practices? The Greek emphasis on personal piety,

individualized worship, and the pursuit of personal understanding of the divine laid foundational ideas that influence modern spirituality and personal religious expression today.

Related keywords: ancient Greek spirituality, Greek gods, Hellenic religion, Greek mythology, religious practices in Greece, Greek temples, Greek rituals, polytheism in Greece, Greek religious festivals, Greek philosophical beliefs

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