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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

was very self-motivated for his EE. He was also intensely interested in this topic. He ran into problems gathering primary source data but was able to overcome this by doing heavy secondary data research. If he had this to do again, he would be sure to integrate intensive participant observation: although he grew up in this region, he did not feel comfortable integrating personal anecdotes that he has not confirmed through his newly acquired anthropological methods and thoughts. He also ran into issues when trying to gather interviewees, but, through hard work and determination, he was able to succeed.

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I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Criteria	Achievement level					
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3	
A research question	2	2		2		
B introduction	2	2		2		
C investigation	3	4		4		
D knowledge and understanding	3	4		4		
E reasoned argument	3	4		4		
F analysis and evaluation	2	4		4		
G use of subject language	3	4		4		
H conclusion	2	2		2		
I formal presentation	3	4		4		
J abstract	2	2		2		
K holistic judgment	3	4		4		
Total out of 36	28					

Extended Essay-Social and Cultural Anthropology

Impacts of Yarsagumba collection on the individuals, groups and societies in Dolpa

Candidate Name:

Candidate number:

Subject: Social and Cultural Anthropology

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Supervisor:

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Abstract

From traditional use to the modern commercial trade of Yarsagumba-high altitude mixture of both plant and animal, is the most valuable medicinal herb found on highlands of Nepal, in particular Dolpa district. Starting from the month of May to two months later, locals start their trip to highland places converting into second home for two months of period where they can harvest Yarsagumba and earn money by selling it to Yarsagumba traders.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate "*how has a Yarsagumba harvesting brought social and cultural change (status and role, globalization, trade) in Dolpa?*"

Similarly this paper also explores how status and role of individuals has been changed by Yarsagumba harvesting. In order to obtain wide information to write this paper, personal interviews with Yarsagumba collectors and traders have been used to collect qualitative data. In conducting personal interviews, I interviews were conducted through various mediums; skype, phone, and direct interview. . In addition, various books, online journals, news articles and research papers from various experts in the field have been used as a source of information

From my research I found that before 1987, the local people of Dolpa were not aware of the commercial value of *Cordyceps sinensis*, but these days collecting Yarsagumba has become a major source of income for the people of Dolpa (besides outsiders coming to Dolpa in order to harvest it). My further research showed that boundary conflicts are causing social rivalry on the issue of Yarsagumba harvesting within neighboring societies in Dolpa. Finally, anthropological theoretical perspectives called structural functionalism with major works of Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. were used to analyze the findings

Word counts: 275

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Impacts of Yarsagumba (*Cordyceps*) collection on the individuals, groups and societies in Dolpa

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Dolpa, a mid-western highland situated at an altitude of 1225 meters to 7625 meters, is the largest district of Nepal with total area of 7932.3 km² where Shey Phoksundo, the biggest national park of Nepal (3552km²) lies. The scientific name of Yarsagumba is *Cordyceps Sinensis*. It was discovered about 1500 years ago by the Tibetan herdsmen who found their livestock were more energetic after eating certain types of mushrooms. *Cordyceps sinensis* is known by several names: in Nepali it is called Jiwan Buti (life herb) or Yarsagumba, Yar-Cha-Kun-Bhu (summer plant and winter insect) in Tibetan, Dong Chong Xia Cao (winter worm, summer grass) in Chinese, Tôchû Kasô in Japanese and in Latin as *Cordyceps Sinensis* (RedOrbit para.3).

1.2. Yarsagumba: from local perspective

Although science has its own way of describing Yarsagumba, Dolpali (see Appendix B) describe it as Jiwan Buti ('Jiwan' refers to life and 'Buti' refers to herb), Chyau kira ('chyau' means mushroom and 'kira' means insect) which is energetic in nature traditionally used to cure diseases like rheumatism and headache. In the book, *Society and life*, Devkota writes, "In the early days people believed that Yarsagumba gives tonic hence they used to give it as gift to relatives and friends. Later, some people from Humla (see Appendix B) and Upper Dolpo area came there in search of this species and their commercial harvesting started." (40-41)

Cordyceps is the most valuable fungus found in the highlands of Dolpa. Regardless of traditional utilization of Yarsagumba, Dolpali use it as source of income by selling it to the Yarsagumba traders. The best quality of Cordyceps comes from Dolpa (globally known as Tibetan plateau) amongst more than 500 species of Cordyceps found in the world. Thousands of people head into the Himalayas to collect Yarsagumba at the beginning of May every year. Having been born and raised in Dolpa, I myself had four years of personal experience in collecting Yarsagumba. However, I didn't realize its impacts upon the individuals, groups and Dolpali society as a whole. Every year I went to harvest Yarsagumba, I had a notion that I was going to earn money by selling it whereas I did not think of any cultural or social impacts undergoing within Dolpa.

Yarsagumba harvesting, since past ten to fifteen years, has created a gold rush of hundreds of thousands of people to the fragile mountain ecological region taking particularly in example as Thapagaum village. Villagers start their trip to Jagadulla, highland place which is two days of walk from the village, leaving the rest of their work – either agricultural, livestock or running a local business – to collect Yarsagumba, of which most are unsure as to whether they will make money from it or not.

However, there arise questions about the sustainability of Yarsagumba itself, especially considering the local villagers' economic dependence upon it. What if Yarsagumba starts disappearing after ten to fifteen years? How will society change and how has it changed with Yarsagumba harvesting? What effects will Yarsagumba have upon the lifestyles and professions of villages?" Will they still be dependent upon Yarsagumba for their income sources or start looking for alternatives? These are some of questions that many local villagers of Dolpa have not yet considered.

So, in this paper I'll be analyzing how Yarsagumba harvesting in Dolpa has changed status and role of people, brought cultural and social changes and how it is changing the trade, especially transaction of local commodities through trade of Yarsagumba with Tibetan boarder and lower valleys of Nepal based on Radcliffe Brown, Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski's theory of structural functionalism and Fredric Barth's transactional theory.

1.3. Research Question, my hypothesis

The purpose of this research paper is to study and investigate "How has Yarsagumba harvesting brought social and cultural changes (status and role, globalization, trade) in Dolpa?"

In studying the outcomes of my research question, I assumed a hypothesis about Yarsagumba and its local impacts in Dolpa; as I think societies have undergone into cultural and social changes, especially status and role, gender roles and exchange of cultural ceremonies. Throughout the harvesting season, only old people who can barely take care of themselves with rarely one caretaker remain in the Thapagaun village (see Appendix B). It becomes difficult for single person to reach other works like taking care of cattle, work on the farm and also see elderly family members. This has significant effect upon the agricultural pattern in the Thapagaun village which is also the situation of most of villages of Dolpa, because almost all of the people who can contribute to agricultural work leave village and get busy collecting Yarsagumba which means there are very few people left up in the village to support the elderly or contribute to agricultural works and so as for taking care of cattle.

On one hand, Yarsagumba collections have boosted the income of most of the villagers and made their living standard better but, at the same time there have been many negative impacts too. Micro enterprises, which are more sustainable have been under shadow; since sowing of crop and harvesting of Yarsagumba season is the same, cultivation has been affected (this is okay if one earns enough to purchase grain that one grows but not sure, education is impacted since schools are closed for months). As the young kids also make good money out of it, kids prefer going after money than to schools even after harvesting is over. One borrows money during winter from local traders, which s/he may not afford to pay back without money which comes from selling Yarsagumba, in the condition of pay back during Yarsagumba season. This creates two different situations here: one, it's not sure whether or not one will get Yarsagumba enough for paying back the loan during season because of the unsustainable harvesting of Yarsagumba and constant change in climatic situation; two, the person still needs money even if s/he finds enough because s/he needs to pay her/his debt.

So, I presume that Yarsagumba collection has brought several positive impacts on the socio-economic status including improvement in living standard of locals and negative impacts on the education of children as well as the agricultural sector in Dolpa.

2. Methodology

In order to obtain the valid information, I used both primary and secondary sources for data collection. Primary source data included questionnaires and interviews with Dolpalis, experts, anthropologists and Yarsagumba traders. The questionnaires included open-ended questions with oral consents to gather information about local lifestyle, economic status and

cultural change. Personal interviews were used for seeing further impacts of Yarsagumba collection from local people's insights and perspectives. Apart from these sources of data, secondary source data was comprised of numerous official websites, newspaper articles and blogs of anthropologists who did the research on Yarsagumba.

Various books, articles, journals and research papers were used as literature review for this research paper, which are included in the Works Cited page at the end. I conducted personal interviews with Dolpali people who had extensive background information, experience and knowledge about Yarsagumba. People whom I interviewed are given below.

1. Mr. Shiva Devkota (Member at SAFE Concern, Kathmandu)
2. Mr. Ravindra Shahi (Program coordinator of DESERT Dolpa)
3. Mr. Rajendra Shahi (Teacher at Dunai Boarding School)
4. Mr. Nagendra Budhathoki (Yarsagumba trader).
5. Mrs. Sunita Thapa (local Yarsagumba harvester)
6. Mrs. Radhika Hirachan (local Yarsagumba harvester)
7. Mr. Tek Bahadur Shahi (local Yarsagumba harvester)
8. Karna Bahadur Budha (local student, class 9 running)
9. Gyanu Terali (local Yarsagumba harvester)

2.1. Evaluation of Methods and Ethical issues

Information required for writing this paper was prior from interviews and questionnaires. In order to understand local insights on Yarsagumba harvesting, I used personal interviews as method to obtain quantitative data. Because of the time limitations, I

had to leave participant observation. Hence, this paper heavily relies on data collected through other methods. Although these methods used for obtaining data are reliable sources but at the same time they have certain limitations. I could have been biased during personal interviews by only focusing on social and cultural impacts of Yarsagumba and also I might have made interviewees or participant of my research uncomfortable while asking straight forward questions which participants felt too personal to answer. So, as an anthropologist, to overcome this problem, my task was to make sure not to be so biased and include too personal questions that might affect data collection.

Even though I tried to maintain my position as an anthropologist or as a researcher, I sensed some of interviewees not feeling comfortable while answering the questions, especially when it came to the section about money they earn through Yarsagumba harvest. That might be because of age difference because most of interviewees I interviewed were married and above 25 as Dolpali societies have cultural notion where Youngers are not told about financial activities and value of money by elders.

As I mentioned above, not being able to conduct participant observation left me no other choices than questionnaires and personal interviews with people who came to Kathmandu (capital city of Nepal) right after their Yarsagumba harvest. So, I had to contact each individual and find their exact location and preferable time for interview. However, it was much easier to find Dolpali as I would have thought because most of participants lived near to each other so, all I needed to do is conform preferable time with them for personal interviews. Although participants were from diverse societal background within Dolpa, there arose translation problem when some of participants used different words from their own ethnic language which I simply was not able to translate into English. This is because in

Upper parts of Dolpa, they speak Kaike language which is the rarest language of Nepal spoken only by Kaike of Dolpa and the language was unfamiliar to me.

3. Theory

British anthropologist Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown introduced the idea of structural functionalism in social anthropology. The main idea of structural-functionalism is that the structure – “sum of mutually defined statuses in a society” – is an organized arrangement of parts. Society functions based on the relationship between individuals controlled by norms and patterns (Upadhaya 137). Radcliffe Brown defines function as an institutional support to maintain society. He believed that “all institutions that survived in the long run, almost by definition had a function of this kind, and those dysfunctional institutions-which, in other word, contributed to the weakening of society as a whole- would eventually petrify or vanish” (Erikson 61-62).

Emile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski also discuss the idea of structure and function. Durkheim considers social structure as something which shapes an individual's emotions, sentiments, beliefs and actions, while Malinowski focuses more on functions rather than structures and believes that the functions of institutions is to satisfy biological needs (Barrett 64-6). As a backup theory to structural functionalism, I have used Fredric Barth's transactional theory. By taking the theoretical perspectives of Radcliffe-Brown, Durkheim, Malinowski, and Fredric Barth Yarsagumba harvesting and it's social and cultural impacts in Dolpa can be understood in-depth.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Status and Role

One of a way to see social mobility is to understand the status and roles of individuals in a society; particularly in a family. Nearly all of the communities in Dolpa are patriarchal. The eldest son of the family is given more priority because he will eventually be the head of the family after the death of his father. Most rural villagers in Dolpa, as from my survey, believe that the primary role of females is to do household chores and help in agricultural activities like growing and harvesting maize, potatoes and barley. The reason that women do these works is because farms require regular hard work to grow and harvest crops and locals believe that women are good at growing and harvesting crops.

From my interview and research, I figured out that women working on the farm and men involving in trade, raising cattle and engaging on business have been their practice since ancient time. Upper valleys of Dolpa called as Sahartara and Dho (see Appendix C) have this tradition in practice. Their fathers and forefathers used to trade local goods with Tibet which lies just on northern border of Dolpa. "You see, our ancestors did not give much priority on farming which we still do because of unfavorable climatic condition to grow crops; with few exceptions like buck wheat and potatoes," said Gyanu Terali- a villager from Sahartara (Terali). But, one might wonder how they sustained their lives. The reason is they had had good trade relation with Tibet and lower valleys of Nepal from which profit could be taken to buy necessary goods needed to run the family.

However, this is not the situation now. "Since commercialization of Yarsagumba pattern of works that we do have been changed. Although we run small businesses women

have equal control over the family resources as men do because men and women, no matter what sort of works they do, these days, everyone goes to harvest Yarsagumba which means there is no guarantee that men earn more than women,” Gyanu continued saying (Terali). This can potentially be connected to sex roles because it reveals the roles of men and women before and after commercialization of Yarsagumba. Emile Durkheim believed that “individual’s beliefs, emotions, sentiments, and actions were a product of the social structure, or what he labeled the collective conscience” (Barrett 64) and I would definitely agree with his idea because people believed upon the society and acted the way that society has changed.

4.2. Serious Games

The idea of “serious games” came from the ethnography *Life and Death on Mount Everest* by Sherry Ortner. Serious games in context of Yarsagumba collection is the risk during harvesting by harvesters (Yarsagumba collectors) as living at high altitudes with improper and untimely food can have significant risks on one's health, mainly causing diarrhea, altitude sickness, and headache. Nowadays, harvesting of Yarsagumba has taken the form of serious game as living in snowy highlands for months with unfavorable climatic conditions, improper food and cold environment is no other than risking life for harvesting Yarsagumba believing to earn large money out of it. Regardless of just earning money from selling harvested Yarsagumba, more than ten people every year lose their lives due to

unfavorable climatic conditions, oxygen deprivation in the highlands, or due to food indigestion.

Similarly, there are other risks created by Yarsagumba in the villages of Dolpa which has recently been one of the major concerns of local people: muggings of Yarsagumba traders and disputes between local villagers about Yarsagumba harvesting boundaries. This is creating internal conflicts among the Dolpalis and taking boundary as serious issue, gangs fight on behalf of their communities are increasing as recently locals said that several people got injured and dead during gangs fight in Dolpa.

Even though they know that they have to face consequences, they go through all the hardships and earn money by risking their own lives. A.R. Radcliff Brown, who gave more priority to social structures than functions, believed that social functions were to satisfy mechanical needs. Here, individuals are risking their lives because they have to gain power in the society meaning that if one earns more money from Yarsagumba then he/she can become economically powerful in the society. However, I would agree more with Bronislaw Malinowski who believed that function of society was to satisfy biological needs because every hardship that Dolpalis have to undergo during Yarsagumba harvesting season is to make sure that they earn enough money to support for their own as well as family's biological needs like food, clothing and shelter.

Local true story:

A lohar (blacksmith) once earned 500 thousands NPRs from Yarsagumba. When he came back home with the bunch of money, he kept it in a box. He slept that night. When he woke up next morning, he remembered the money he kept but he was confused if he had a nice dream. To make himself assured, he went to the box, thank god, the money was there for real. He checked and rechecked the money several times till he was fully assured that the money was there for real. Now the question is: Will he be able to expend that huge amount (for him) of money in good things and for good purposes? (Shahi, Ravindra)

4.3. Globalization

Rural villages of Dolpa were limited within their localities before the commercialization of Yarsagumba and they did not have many individual, social or cultural connections with outsiders, especially with societies of neighboring districts. They were isolated and untouched by so-called modernity. Since commercialization of Yarsagumba, Dolpalis were able to establish social relations with neighboring societies and people from across Nepal, especially from the lowlands of Nepal called '*Terai*'. Not only this, in recent years, Dolpalis have access to communication and almost each household has a cell phone.

"It was almost a dream for every one of us whose major income relies on Yarsagumba to use cell phones in the past years and now we have access to lots of technologies including cell phones, computers and internet. Personally, now I've television, mobile and lots of technological instruments at my home and this was after my family earned from Yarsagumba in recent years," said Tek Bahadur Shahi (Shahi, Tek Bahadur). So, there has been significant improvement in terms of development on technology.

4.4. Schools and Education

Schools throughout the district start to close by the beginning of May as Yarsagumba harvesting season starts to near and most of students miss their school days in preparing for their trip to search Yarsagumba. “I know that I have to go to school but because of family situation I have to go to harvest Yarsagumba from which I can at least pay my examination fees and buy stationaries. If I am able to earn more money, that will be big support for my family,” said Rita Thapa, a student studying in grade seven.

Every person I interviewed gave nearly the same response. They said it was better off leaving school for few weeks in order to harvest Yarsagumba which, in return, help students to buy the stationaries they need. A local teacher, Rajendra Shahi said, “Study of student can get disturbed if not being able to support financially than keeping study off for few weeks. This trend of closing schools just for harvesting Yarsagumba in Dolpa has become engrained within the culture since the commercialization of Yarsagumba in Dolpa.” (Shahi, Rajendra) So, despite my hypothesis on schools and education, it gives clear idea about student's education financially supported through money earned from Yarsagumba harvest in Dolpa.

4.5. Economy

Nepal's more than 50% of Yarsagumba supply comes from Dolpa. Nowadays, Yarsagumba provides economic support for locals of Dolpa to buy daily household necessities. One can make more than NRs. 20,000 just by selling harvested Yarsagumba which is more than annual income of families with no paid jobs. Since the economic value of

Yarsagumba has been appreciated, locals have been able to earn money to support their families.

Living standard of people has been improved and economic statuses of families have been raised by Yarsagumba harvest in remote villages of Dolpa. During one month's of stay and hardships on highlands, one can earn more than two month's salary of job holders whose average monthly salary is about NRs.12, 000. Due to this reason, Dolpali people's focus tend to go for harvesting Yarsagumba rather than earning by involving in service or local business which is the characteristics of uncontrolled and unsustainable economy as there is no guarantee about how long Yarsagumba will sustain on highlands and also the money which one can earn from Yarsagumba is instant money.

4.6. Culture

Outsiders coming to harvest Yarsagumba have a cultural influence (other way to say it is the perceived culture) on the locals of Dolpa in terms of clothing, ways of celebrating festivals and even the eating system (more likely about food items). Ever since 2040 B.S people from outside of Dolpa started coming to harvest Yarsagumba and of course, there has been cultural exchange between locals of Dolpa and outsiders as these two groups have culturally extended and mutually shared relationships. These relationships are determined by connection of two male members from two different cultural backgrounds (one as Dolpali and another as outsider) which are called "the mit" (in Nepali, it means brother) relationship which is "formal, lifelong and blood brother bond," and "the ishta" (in Nepali it is similar to being friends) (Fisher 90) relationship which in contrast to 'mit' is a weaker relationship as;

"The mit relationship is sometimes formalized by the slaughter of a goat or sheep, or by the exchange of coins. A mit brother would in theory perform all the traditional obligations that a consanguineal brother would, and mit brothers observe the same kinds of marriage restrictions toward the women of one another's families that pertain between ritual or fictive brothers in India" (Fisher 90)

However, both relationships target one's ability to extend support as a family member and provide comfort when needed which in relation to Yarsagumba harvesting is the state when one coming from outside of Dolpa stays with the family of Dolpali during the harvesting season and takes benefit from the 'mit' or 'ishta' relationship and this form of reciprocity is continued. As trade and harvesting of Yarsagumba is causing the mobility of individuals in intra district, inter district, intra national and transnational level, it is influencing both the groups culturally where they one is adapted to other's culture which means both of them are sharing and getting benefit of each other's culture.

5. Conclusion

Harvesting Yarsagumba from a local perspective is to grasp an opportunity to boost up the economic status of a family, use it to cure diseases and strengthen through traditional use. In the name of harvesting Yarsagumba, there has been a cultural shift among ethnic and rural villages of Dolpa. Similar to the idea of Durkheim, social structures shaping individual's beliefs, emotions and sentiments, social recognition of economic value, and rush for harvesting the high altitude herb (Yarsagumba) has become tradition and culture for local people.

However, from my research, I came to the conclusion that actually there have not been negative impacts on education and agriculture rather there has been positive progress on economic status of the Dolpali families. My hypothesis about agricultural activities slowly being unpracticed in Dolpali communities, proved to be wrong because my assumption was based on my real life experience of particular village (Thapagaun) whereas taking into account of other villages and also from my study I came to conclusion that geography is another reason for agricultural activities being less in practice. Another result I found from my research, which I was not previously aware of, is that there have been internal conflicts between different villages on the matter of the Yarsagumba harvesting boundary which means besides the economic improvement of the family, Yarsagumba harvesting has established internal conflicts and quarrel between societies. So, Yarsagumba is not only financially supporting Dolpali (which is positive and good) but at the same time internal conflict amongst Dolpali societies is driving them into worst situation where members of rivalry societies are restricted to enter each other's village. In conclusion, from my research, regardless of conflicts and potential negative consequences, I found that Yarsagumba harvest has been one of the major income generating sources for individuals, groups and societies in Dolpa.

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Appendix A

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Km²- Square Kilometer

B.S.- Bikram Sambat (Nepal has different calendar than western Gregorian calendar)

NPRs. – Nepalese Rupees

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms

Dolpa- Largest district of Nepal (see map on Appendix D) , also known as Dolpo

Dolpali- local people of Dolpa

Nepali- Citizens of Nepal

Terai- Southern low lands of Nepal bordered with Northern parts of India

Sahar tārā- Village situated in upper part of Dolpa (see map on Appendix D)

Terali- people who live in Sahar tārā village who, besides Nepali language, have their own language called kaike and they are the only one to speak in whole Nepal.

Thapagaun- small village on lower Dolpa

Jagadulla- high altitude lands on lap of mountains where people go to harvest Yarsagumba

Humla- one of district of Nepal

Cordyceps- scientific name of Yarsagumba

Appendix C

Map of Dolpa



Questionnaires

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Name of village:
4. Number of family members who went to harvest Yarsagumba:
5. Number of days spent on highlands during Yarsagumba harvest:
6. Number of Yarsagumba harvested:
7. Average income from harvested Yarsagumba:
8. What do you do by the money you earned from Yarsagumba harvest?
9. How do you manage food on highlands (self-service or bought from others)?
10. What some consequences can you mention which you had to face during Yarsagumba harvest?
11. What do you think you learnt from Yarsagumba harvest beside the money you earned?
12. What is the main reason for you going to harvest Yarsagumba?
13. What are negative consequences of Yarsagumba harvest? Name them.
14. How do you see Yarsagumba harvest as medium of globalization?
15. What sort of cultural interaction do societies have during harvesting season?

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