

Aligning Institutional and National Contexts with Internationalization Efforts

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Abstract In this article we report on our study that explored internationalization in higher education institutions as it relates to two levels of “culture” – institutional culture and national higher education culture. We examined two leading research-intensive universities, “Coastal University” (Australia) and “Prairie University” (U.S.A.), which have similar institutional cultures (as theorized by Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) yet reside in different national higher education contexts. Through cross-case analysis, we examined internationalization strategies as they relate to institutional culture and sought to draw inferences about the influence of national higher education cultures on these strategies. We propose the need to examine these cultures when developing internationalization strategies within institutions.

Keywords Internationalization · Higher Education · Institutional Culture · Case Study

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The internationalization of higher education has garnered increasing attention over the past several decades. While debates persist about what is meant by “internationalization” and how it should best be understood within and outside the academy (Jones & de Wit, 2014; Knight, 2011a), many higher education institutions have adopted internationalization strategies that impact on core institutional functions (Childress, 2009). The results of the 4th global survey conducted in 2013 by the International Association of Universities indicate that 91% of responding institutions ($n = 1336$, from 131 countries) had some form of strategic plan for internationalization (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). Although internationalization has been an important topic for several decades, it is still a complex and challenging issue for some higher education institutions (de Haan, 2014).

For example, Jones, Coelen, Beelen, and de Wit (2016) noted that, while strongly connected to the globalization of our society, internationalization is simultaneously deeply embedded in local political, economic and social structures, systems, and cultures. De Haan has also noted that individuals within institutions are more likely to describe internationalization as “a loose collection of ideas rather than as a coherently structured definition” (p. 256). Indeed, the term has been understood differently by administrators, faculty members, and students within the same institution (Schoorman, 1999).

Definitions of Internationalization and Background

Definitions of internationalization as a process of institutional change have received broad acceptance within both scholarly and practitioner groups (Maringe, 2012; Olson, Green, & Hill, 2005; Van Der Wende, 1997; Denman & Welch, 1997). Scholars recognize, nonetheless, that internationalization at the institutional level can be seen to occur on a continuum, from symbolic and limited activity at one end through to a synergistic process of transformation at the other end (Bartell, 2003). Knight, for example, pointed to the fact that the term “internationalization of higher education” has been defined, re-defined, and re-labelled to the point where it is now frequently seen to be a catch-all term to refer to almost anything global, worldwide, or intercultural (Knight, 2011b). With this study we sought to identify mediating factors that may influence institutional focus on internationalization, and we understand internationalization as a process of change, in line with the following definition:

. . . the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make meaningful contribution to society (de Wit, Hunter, Howard, & Egron-Polak, 2015, p. 3).

The focus of our study was on how institutions engage in the process of internationalization, what the activities are that they report related to internationalization, and how institutional and national higher education cultures mediated such processes.

We built this study on the work of Agnew and VanBalkom (2009), who theorized that campuses have either strong or weak cultures in relation to internationalization. Those with strong cultures, as defined by Sporn, 1996, were more likely to be prepared for international activities than those with weak institutional cultures. Strong and weak cultures for internationalization were built upon indicators such as professional memberships, alignment of goals with internationalization, senior leadership backing, and economic/political influences. Building on their findings, we worked from the assumption that internationalization is an important process

in higher education institutions (Egroun-Polak & Hudson, 2014) and that it can be understood as a structured set of activities designed to respond to globalization within the arena of higher education. Identification of the importance of internationalization provides an opportunity to understand how and why this phenomenon exists within institutional and national higher education frameworks.

To this end, the purpose of this study was to examine institutional and national higher education cultures as mediating factors of internationalization strategy. Our perspective was that every institution has one or more institutional cultures at work within itself and that it is situated within a national higher education culture. We understood the term “national culture” to mean the broad approach to higher education adopted by institutions and their personnel in response to local and national policy frameworks, as well as community aspirations. We believe that the understanding of how institutional culture(s), national higher education culture, and internationalization relate to one another is of critical importance.

Studies by Altbach and Knight helped to explain why universities internationalize and what their rationales and motives for doing so were (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). Knight (2004) stated that institutional motivations related to internationalization – whether pragmatic, dubious, egalitarian, or otherwise – do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, she noted that leaders in institutions make decisions based on the perceived needs of the institution. Consequently, an internationalization strategy often “reflects or characterizes the values, priorities, and actions that are exhibited during the work toward implementing internationalization” (Knight, 2004, p.18).

According to the seminal work of Altbach and Knight (2007) and Knight (2004), the motivations or rationales for internationalization can be categorized as follows:

- Profit (designing international programs to generate revenue),
- Demand absorption (designing international programs to relieve high demand for services within a national context),
- Educational benefits for students,
- Political and social integration (e.g., Bologna Process, European Commission, 2017),
- Strategic alliances,
- Staff development,
- Profile/reputation,
- Research and knowledge production.

Theoretical Framework

Through this study we examined the ways in which institutional culture and national higher educational culture mediate internationalization (Agnew & VanBalkom, 2009). In order to accomplish this task, we build on two primary theoretical assumptions. As noted above, we first understand that individual higher education institutions have a culture that is comprised of distinguishing features (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Second, all higher education institutions are located within national policy and educational cultural contexts.

Institutional Culture

Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) identified six broad categories of cultures in higher education institutions; and their conceptualization included Collegial Culture, Managerial Culture,

Developmental Culture, Advocacy Culture, Virtual Culture, and Tangible Culture. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the six cultures, which, according to Bergquist and Pawlak, may coexist simultaneously in an institution.

Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) subsequently concluded that institutions may be more or less culturally ready to engage in internationalization based on the indicators such as professional memberships or senior leadership backing. Each indicator may impact the level of strength of their institutional culture toward internationalization. Using Sporn's (1996) dichotomous "strong" and "weak" cultures as variables, the authors demonstrated through case studies how institutional culture intersected with internationalization. They proposed a "Cultural Readiness Model" that helped predict the level of readiness as well as the institutional factors needed to create an enabling environment for internationalization.

Based on the widespread implementation of internationalization strategies in higher education institutions (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014), the diversity of cultures which may exist in institutions (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008), and the theoretical link between institutional culture and internationalization (Agnew & VanBalkom, 2009), we propose an extension of Agnew and VanBalkom's model focused on understanding institutional culture and internationalization in order to discern more clearly the connection between these two phenomena.

National Higher Education Culture

A variety of studies focused on internationalization have examined the influence of national frameworks and policies relating to higher education. Many of these studies explored a particular national context, whilst others sought to compare different national frameworks by documenting them on a country-by-country basis (e.g., de Wit et al., 2015; Ilieva & Peak, 2016; Kälveborn & Van Der Wende, 1997). Helms, Rumbley, Brajkovic, and Mihut (2015) also sought to identify the key characteristics of different national frameworks for internationalization.

However, few studies have addressed the question of whether or not the particular culture of a national higher education system has an influence on the internationalization process. "National higher education culture," in this context, is taken to mean the broad approach to higher education adopted by institutions and their academic staff in response to local and national policy frameworks, as well as community agendas within the particular nation. National higher education culture is influenced by broad national cultural phenomena and policy frameworks, but it is distinctly focused on policy and strategy in higher education institutions.

Table 1 Cultures of the academy

Culture	Role of faculty	Governance	Mission
Collegial	Experts	Consultative	Culture of Research
Managerial	Employees	Hierarchical	Efficiency
Developmental	Partners in process	Aims-oriented	Continuous improvement
Advocacy	Advocates	Negotiated	Fair working practices
Virtual	Outreach, collaborators	Negotiated with partners	High levels of external engagement
Tangible	Content experts	Hierarchical	Robust infrastructure

Adapted from Bergquist and Pawlak (2008)

The Study

The Institutions

We focused on two institutions that appear to have co-existent collegial and managerial cultures. Our rationale for this approach was to examine institutions that could focus on similar aspects of internationalization, yet would exhibit differences because they are located within different national contexts. The similarity and difference allow for comparison related to activities that may be influenced by the institutional culture and those that may be influenced by the national higher education culture.

The two institutions we selected are Coastal University (Australia) and Prairie University (U.S.A.); both names have been changed so as to provide anonymity. We, the authors, are former administrators at these institutions; and we are very familiar with the respective international strategies as well as publicly available information, particularly strategic plans. Both universities were founded in the 1800s and have a mix of old and new academic units. They both have broad institutional missions of research, teaching, and outreach/engagement; and each has a distinct institutional culture and mission. They are situated within very different national higher education contexts. Australian higher education is governed by central policy, and it has experienced consistent drops in central financial support over the past 20 years. Higher education in the United States is highly decentralized and driven by market forces. Funding by institutions varies, with some institutions receiving public support for a portion of operating costs. Private institutions receive no public funding other than what might be obtained through grant programs.

Case #1: Coastal University Coastal University (Australia) is a comprehensive research and teaching institution. Founded in 1853 in what was then a small colonial city, it is now a thriving internationally acknowledged research university with a public mission encompassing research, teaching and learning, and engagement. It is a member of the prestigious Group of Eight Australian universities and, with over 55,000 students in 2014, is one of the largest universities in the country. As is the case at the other Australian universities, the international student population is large, representing 29.1% of all student enrolments in 2014.

Case #2: Prairie University Prairie University (U.S.A.) is a research-intensive, land-grant institution. Founded in 1851, its historical function was to educate the citizenry of its state and produce new knowledge through research. The University still focuses on teaching, research, and engagement as its core mission; but it has gradually evolved from an institution that serves a regional constituency to an increasingly global institution. Its new priority for undergraduate education, like many other institutions in the U.S., is Student Learning and Student Development Outcomes.¹ Further, the research mission of the university is now focused on a set of global priorities, which the University calls Grand Challenges, that are faced by the region and the world. Prairie University is one of the largest institutions in the United States, with over 50,000 students at its flagship metropolitan campus. International students comprise approximately 13% of its total student body.

¹ Refers to a specific initiative and set of documents which include the institution's name.

Research Methods

In order to understand any potential connection between institutional culture, national higher education culture, and internationalization, we employed exploratory research methods that were both deductive and inductive in nature (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Using a jointly developed list of themes (based on Bergquist and Pawlak's work), we investigated public documents and websites from the two institutions. We identified themes associated with institutional culture based on existing literature and our emic perspective as insiders within the institutions. Our goal was to identify and describe institutional culture themes as a reference point for internationalization strategies.

Second, we inductively created connections between “cultures” and the observable institutional cultures found in our preliminary searches, specifically referring to the strategic plans of the institutions and their approaches to internationalization. We reached consensus on institutional culture based on key themes found in strategic plans and other available sources as well as our experience. Finally, we referenced current trends in higher education in both Australia and the U.S. to understand how those trends might mediate internationalization activity at the two universities. We examined the current trends in national systems based on external influences at the institutions with national significance and trends that we noted in articles we reviewed (e.g., Helms et al., 2015; Ilieva & Peak, 2016; Proctor & Arkoudis, 2017; Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2008).

Findings

Coastal University

We analysed the data collected from publicly available documents so as to provide an indication of the “internationality” of Coastal University, that is, the broad framework and culture of internationalization at the institution. In the Australian context, the strategic plan and annual reports of an institution provide an indication of its international focus and the relative importance of internationalization to its planning and formal reporting. As Coastal University had recently renewed its strategic plan, it is interesting to note a shift in emphasis in relation to internationalization between the 2011–2014 and 2015–2020 plans. While the earlier 2011–2014 plan included two references to internationalization in a one-page “Strategic Statement,” the 2015–2020 plan contains a shorter outline of international engagement as a strategic priority but no direct reference to internationalization itself. That being said, both plans make frequent references to international activities, in particular in relation to international collaboration and research, the University's status as a global institution, and institutional ranking and reputation. Comparing the two documents, greater emphasis appears to have been placed on international collaboration in the current strategic plan, with a reduced emphasis on ranking and reputation.

Despite possible shifts in focus between the two strategic plans, reference to international matters is given similar weight in annual reports published in 2012, 2013, and 2014. As with the planning documents, these references are embedded throughout the annual reports with only very limited reference to internationalization itself. Looking at the 282 media releases issued by the University in 2014, 57 of these (20.2%) refer to international activities such as international research collaborations, international recognition for academic staff, and the global reputation and ranking of the institution.

Institutional Culture and Internationalization Coastal University's strategic plan places high emphasis on areas of research, and its long-term plan for research developed in 2012 focused on achievements through until 2025. This research plan makes a number of references to international partnerships and collaboration as well as to the international reputation of the University and to the international experiences offered to its graduate research students. In order to achieve the University's aspirations for 2025, the plan includes goals relating to the recruitment and retention of the best academic staff from around the world and the development and/or continued support of international research collaborations with regions of strategic importance (such as Europe, North America, China, India, and Latin America). Tied to the research plan, funding is available to support research collaboration with and to attract graduate and postdoctoral researchers from certain strategic locations.

Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) described a collegial culture as "a culture that finds meaning primarily in the disciplines represented by the faculty in the institution.; that values faculty research and scholarship...and that conceives of the institution's enterprise as the generation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge" (p, 15). In this case, Coastal University defines itself in its strategic plan as a research-focused university. This identity is an important element of its institutional culture, which supports research in areas of the world beyond Australia and promotes research connections through central funding and incentives. Coastal University seeks to increase the international standing, profile, and impact of its research by building on the relationships established by researchers and strengthening international alliances and partnerships to support collaboration and exchange with leading institutions. International partnerships in research are generally fostered by faculty members with support as necessary from staff in central research and international relations offices. Indeed, research at Coastal University is distinctly international, with 43.5% of all publications between 2010 and 2014 co-authored with an institution in another country (Scopus data up to 30 March 2015 drawn from www.scival.com, © 2015 Elsevier B.V.). However, international partnerships involving student mobility or collaboration in course delivery are governed more closely by Academic Board policies.

National Higher Education Culture Since changes to national legislation in the 1990s allowed Australian universities to recruit fee-paying international students, Australia's national higher education culture has shifted significantly in that international education is now understood to be core business (Proctor & Arkoudis, 2017). According to a recent cross-national analysis, Coastal University enrolled the largest number of campus-based international students of any university in the world in 2013 (Choudaha, 2015). Its large enrollment is supported by a significant student recruitment and admissions function (both centrally and within academic divisions), including a network of representational offices in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and North America. Coastal University's response to a changing national policy framework is indicative of a broader shift in national higher education culture, whereby the presence of large numbers of international students on Australian campuses is now an accepted part of the landscape. Although stimulated by a shift in government policy, the national culture of Australian higher education has since begun to incorporate the recruitment of international students as part of a central strategy.

The two elements of Coastal University's internationalization plan discussed above are not the entire picture. Coastal University's international infrastructure (consisting of a Deputy Vice-Chancellor – International, a Pro Vice-Chancellor – International, and an Executive Director – International) demonstrates the University's *managerial* culture. Coastal University

has 220 formal partnerships with other higher education institutions, which are listed on the International Office² website. Among the 220 agreements, 127 of these – approximately 58% – are university-wide agreements, which may also exemplify its *developmental* culture. In sum, Coastal University embodies more than one category of academic cultures; but it is primarily a research-driven operation that is located in a larger Australian higher education context. To this end, we highlight how the collegial culture of Coastal University can be easily found in its internationalization plan and how the national educational context of Australia’s higher education funding models have strong relevance to Coastal University’s focus on international students.

Prairie University

Prairie University’s strategic plan was approved by its governing body (Regents) in 2016 but had been originally drafted in 2014. The plan makes multiple references to engagement in an increasingly “changing world” but makes no specific reference to internationalization. The most relevant section of this University’s strategic plan focuses on “Grand Challenges,” which were designed to promote cross-disciplinary research collaborations and focused on food, climate change, and vibrant communities. As stated in this plan, Prairie University seeks to be “preeminent in solving Grand Challenges in a changing world” (p. 9). It aims to be a “vitaly engaged 21st Century research university” through four cornerstones: the Grand Challenge research and curriculum efforts, efforts to recruit and retain field-changing researchers, and becoming a locally and globally-engaged university, and rejection of complacency. The word “international” is used sparsely throughout the plan, but is most frequently found in areas focused on grand challenges research and the international reputation of the University.

In general, internationalization is not a key feature of the University’s strategic plan, but the plan frequently refers to the University as an agent of change, tackling major global challenges. Furthermore, it focuses on global reputation through the pursuit of world-class academics in fields of research and practice.

Institutional Culture and Internationalization Similar to Coastal University and other research-intensive universities, Prairie University appears to ground its identity in the work of its faculty. Research is at the core of much of its strategic plan, and research then follows as part of the implementation of the strategic plan. As part of the launch of this plan, the University put forth \$3.6 million to support faculty research. The original call for proposals did not specify whether the grants needed to be international in nature, but supplemental funding was provided by the University’s central international unit, the Global Programs and Strategies Alliance, to support international proposals. Of the 29 proposals that were funded in 2016, eight received international supplements. An additional three to four proposals had international or global elements but were not awarded supplements. The evolution of financial support for international research culminated in the alignment of contributions from the Provost’s Office for general research grants coupled with Global Programs and Strategies international supplements. These supplements replaced the previously-administered “Global Spotlight” research program, which had focused on grants to faculty members conducting research in particular world regions.

² The name of this office has been changed for the sake of anonymity.

The research focus at Prairie University is also evident in its international office. The office, staffed by the Associate Vice President and Dean for International Programs, is supported by two Assistant Deans (one for Learning Abroad and one for International Students and Scholars). These units participate in day-to-day operations but are also engaged in research related to their fields of operation. For example, the Learning Abroad Center is currently engaged in research related to curriculum integration and study abroad and staff members within International Student and Scholar Services investigate international student experiences on campus.

National Higher Education Culture While the institutional culture of Prairie University is driven by its ambition to be a globally-engaged university that seeks to solve problems through research, U.S. higher education internationalization is, in general, also driven by the industry of study abroad. In 2014–15, over 300,000 U.S. students studied abroad (Institute of International Education, 2016). U.S. student desire to study abroad is often met with a wide variety of program options, including faculty-led, short-term and long-term center-based programming and (to a lesser extent) student exchanges. The multi-program approach differs from Australian models, which primarily focus on 1:1 exchanges between universities and direct student enrollment in partner universities.

Student desire to study abroad is increasingly market-driven in the U.S. context. The Council for International Educational Exchange (Trooboff et al., 2008) confirmed the commonly-held belief that employers desire students to have study abroad experience. This message is often repeated in U.S. advising and study abroad offices. At Prairie University, approximately 30% of undergraduate students study abroad, which creates a need for both infrastructure in the sending office and central review of all programs against risk and liability. University policies and procedures are guided by state law that requires mandatory reporting on all injuries, illnesses that require hospitalization, and deaths that occur during study abroad (Forum on Study Abroad, 2014). New laws and University policy responses have led to increased structure and oversight of study abroad over the past several years. The centralization of all activities under central policy reflects a *managerial* culture.

The two examples cited (Prairie University's institutional focus on research and managerial response to U.S. higher education cultural shifts) represent two influences upon the institution's internationalization work. These examples are most visible in the strategic plan and international staffing patterns of the University, but other cultures simultaneously exist. For example, several units at Prairie University are engaged in international development work (supported by agencies such as United States Agency for International Development and the United Nations) and reflect a "developmental" culture with partners abroad. The University also has research and outreach centers that focus on topics such as global change, a Confucius Institute, and a center specifically focused on relations with China (referred to by Bergquist and Pawlak as "tangible" academic culture).

In sum, Prairie University has a structure and support mechanism similar to Coastal University. Its faculty members drive much of the international work through research connections. The vast majority of faculty international work at Prairie University is related to research (data collection, collaboration meetings, and dissemination). At the same time, national trends in relation to student activity drive particular aspects of internationalization. In the case of Prairie University, central units oversee study abroad in order to be responsive to market demand for students wishing to gain the desirable experience of a study abroad opportunity and to comply with state laws and national trends around risk and liability protection.

Discussion

As internationalization becomes increasingly central in higher education, understanding the factors that influence strategy and activity is essential. Stensaker (2015) noted that understanding organizational identity is a helpful lens through which to view such strategy and activity, while Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) specifically focused on the cultural readiness of institutions to engage in internationalization.

For our study we examined two institutions using a cross-case analysis. In a study of institutions within one national context, it may have been strategic to choose institutions with prominent differences in academic cultures. Because of the international nature of this study, however, we chose institutions with similar academic cultures that are embedded in different national higher education cultures. Our approach was designed to understand similarities that may arise as a result of academic culture while at the same time examining differences in national higher education culture.

Results from this exploratory case study reveal interesting results. In both institutions, academic staff (faculty members) enact internationalization through publishing with international partners, engaging in international research projects, and connecting with colleagues from around the world. Further, in both institutions, curricular change designed to support student development in a globalized world is centrally initiated. Neither institution is centrally pursuing large international development projects, but units within the institutions participate in international development projects based on their expertise and capacity to solicit external funding. Both Coastal and Prairie have enacted faculty-centric internationalization approaches, which appear to align well with Bergquist and Pawlak's (2008) *collegial* culture.

At the same time, both institutions have a *managerial* function that relates to internationalization and appears to be mediated by national culture. At Coastal University, the enrolment of international students is both a strategic form of campus internationalization and a fiscal necessity in the Australian context. To this end, the recruitment of international students has a strong central focus. In the U.S. context learning abroad is an important national indicator of internationalization and an activity that is increasingly expected of university applicants to private sector jobs (Trooboff et al., 2008). While U.S. institutions are focusing central efforts on sending students abroad, the litigious culture of the U.S. requires strict managerial oversight to ensure that study abroad participation is accurately tracked and avoids legal risk. Both of the managerial functions listed above appear to be influenced by national higher education cultures and institutional reactions to such context. Therefore, both institutions studied are faculty-driven, but national contexts also necessitate formal organizational boundaries, which spill into internationalization activity.

The implications of this study provide a preliminary theory of action related to internationalization strategy that can be tested in future studies. Our data indicate that internationalization is indeed a comprehensive process (Knight, 2015), but how that process is initiated and implemented may be a function of two powerful influences: institutional culture and national higher education culture. Figure 1 (below) demonstrates a simple representation of this finding.

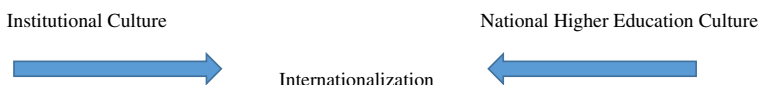


Fig. 1 Influences of internationalization

These findings are important for the study of higher education for two reasons. First, in terms of the scholarship of internationalization, our framework provides additional structure to Agnew and VanBalkom's conceptualizations of strong and weak cultures. By utilizing Bergquist and Pawlak's framework, scholars can view the internationalization process through both a lens of strong/weak institutional culture as well as a particular *type* of culture that may be present in an institution. This information may explain why particular activities may be favored within broad comprehensive frameworks and help internationalization leaders predict alignment between and among initiatives, institutional culture, and national higher education culture.

This study has limitations – it was conducted in two institutions using extant data. We did not conduct interviews to validate how internationalization approaches were constructed by senior leaders, and the study may have benefited from additional institutions that were less similar than Coastal and Prairie. At the same time, the authors spent multiple years in administrative positions at the institutions and, we believe, can therefore rely on their experiences to help interpret publicly available data on internationalization. To this end, this study should be read as a preliminary investigation of the influences of institutional and national higher education cultures in relation to internationalization. Our findings require further study and analysis.

Further research is also needed on other potential influences, such as local political demands and institutional isomorphism (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). However, our preliminary data indicate that the internationalization process and activities do not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, internationalization in higher education is a global phenomenon that is understood, interpreted, and enacted at national and institutional levels. Our study examined institutional strategies, policies, and activities. The implications for researchers and leaders are that those who identify and understand the institutional culture and national higher education context as mediators of internationalization may be better equipped to craft policy, strategy, research, and activity and thereby address issues relating to the growing importance of internationalization.

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