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Special Section: Te Kōhao o Te Rangahau—The indigenous lens on research

General Section

Whatu: A Māori approach to research

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Abstract

Kaupapa Māori research can be viewed as a movement of resistance and revitalisation, incorporating theories that are embedded within te ao Māori (the Māori world) (Berryman, 2008). It operates from a Māori cultural frame upholding the validity and legitimacy of being Māori and acting Māori. For this reason it is more likely to reflect Māori truths and be articulated and endorsed by Māori (G. Smith, 1992). The objective of Kaupapa Māori research is initiatives that result in positive outcomes for Māori, such as improved services, more effective use of resources; more informed policy development and increased knowledge. "By taking a position that challenges norms and assumptions, Kaupapa Māori research involves a concept of the possibility and desirability of change" (Barnes, 2000, p. 5). Whatu (finger weaving) is an approach to Kaupapa Māori research which utilises the metaphor of weaving research kākahu (clothing), korowai (cloaks), kete (baskets) or garments. Whatu involves weaving participants' contributions, Kaupapa Māori theory, Māori ways of knowing and being, technologies and knowledge, across and within historical, cultural and socio-economic discourses and paradigms. These paradigms are described by L. Smith (1999) as sites or terrains of struggle which that are selected or select themselves because they are important to Māori.

This paper discusses a personal journey of discovery involving the development of a whatu kākahu framing for a Kaupapa Māori research project. The project involved the weaving of Māori values, understandings and epistemologies within and across the context of early childhood teaching, learning and assessment theory and practice.

Keywords

Weaving; kaupapa Māori; whakapapa; research

Introduction

Research on Māori began soon after first contact with Pākehā, and has been an ongoing feature of the colonisation process since. In fact it is claimed that Māori are one of the most researched peoples in the world (Bishop, 1997; L. Smith, 1999). L. Smith (1999) argues that western research and theory has legitimated colonial practices both in New Zealand and elsewhere. Research of indigenous peoples has effectively silenced minority voices while emphasising the voice of the powerful coloniser. The research methodologies, methods and ethics used have been based on western cultural constructs. The result is research findings that simultaneously uphold western cultural superiority and privilege while attacking the validity of Māori cultural integrity and positioning Māori in a subordinate 'other' category (Berryman, 2008; Bishop, 1997; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; A. Durie, 1998; Mahuika, 2008;

Mutu, 1998; L. Smith, 1992, 1999). L. Smith (1999) comments that this has caused deep cynicism and mistrust about the motives and methodologies of western-type research and its capacity to deliver benefits for Māori. It has not only left participants in the position of powerless victims but the research itself has contributed to the number of deficits and problems attributed to Māori. Years of research has resulted in little change for the participants and Māori are now aware that much of the research has been "simply intent on taking 'or stealing' knowledge in a non-reciprocal and often underhand way" (L. Smith, 1999, p. 176).

Kaupapa Māori research can be viewed as a movement of resistance and revitalisation, incorporating theories that are embedded within the Māori world (Berryman, 2008). It defies an exact definition (Powick, 2002). The difficulties in definition are due to the complex and multi-faceted use of the term, the different contexts in which it is utilised, and to the interwoven nature of matters related to it (Mahuika, 2008). It encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies while cutting across disciplines, fields and subject matters. Kaupapa Māori can simultaneously describe theory and practice, research methodologies, methods and culturally appropriate ethics. It focuses on areas of importance and concern including Māori aspirations and self-identified needs. Kaupapa Māori research locates Māori understandings as central to the research design, process, analysis and intended outcomes. In essence it is a theory for social change (Eketone, 2008). Kaupapa Māori research involves retrieving space for Māori voices to be heard. Mahuika (2008) explains:

> Arguably the ultimate goal of kaupapa Māori research, like much of the scholarship from indigenous and minority peoples, is to challenge and disrupt the commonly accepted forms of research in order to privilege our own unique approaches and perspectives, our own ways of knowing and being. (p. 4)

This paper discusses a personal journey of discovery involving the development of a whatu kākahu framing for a Kaupapa Māori research project. The project involved working with Māori early childhood services/te kohanga reo to weave Māori values, understandings and epistemologies within and across the context of early childhood teaching, learning and assessment theory and practice. I firstly discuss work completed on the Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Learning and Assessment Exemplars project (Ministry of Education-funded), which ran concurrently to Te Whatu Kākahu: Assessment in Kaupapa Māori Early Childhood Practice, my doctoral study. I then explore the different features of whatu and the Te Whatu Kākahu study. Finally I consider whatu as a methodology for Kaupapa Māori research.

Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Learning and Assessment Exemplars project

In 2003 I began to work on the project, later named Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Learning and Assessment Exemplars project. The project was an initial attempt to embed Māori knowledge and ways of knowing into early childhood assessment understandings. Launched in 2009, its primary aim was to produce a resource that would support quality teaching and learning experiences in Māori early childhood settings, as defined by Māori. It was, however, available to all early childhood services, and therefore aimed to provide support for non-Māori services to develop bicultural understandings and practices.

Te Whatu Pōkeka drew upon Kaupapa Māori theory, and traditional Māori world-views, values and concepts in order to articulate assessment understandings and framings that expressed Māori ways of knowing, being and valued learnings. The resource provided the basis for professional development support on teaching, learning, and assessment within Māori early childhood centres, including the development of Kaupapa Māori context-specific assessment approaches, based upon centre/community philosophical underpinnings, values and whānau aspirations for children. It was premised upon the idea that cultural contexts, values and understandings contribute significantly to children's learning and potential growth and that assessment is a vehicle for acknowledging, reifying and normalising this cultural capital.

Although Te Whatu Pōkeka referred to the metaphor of weaving a baby blanket or wrap, it was the pōkeka that was of significance for the project and assessment thinking rather than the weaving process. The pōkeka was described as a garment made of flax fibres or muka with albatross feathers

woven through to provide maximum warmth, comfort, and security for the child. Another feature that had relevance for the project and assessment was that the pōkeka took the shape of the child as it learnt and grew and was therefore a powerful metaphor for the development of assessment theory and practices that were not only determined and shaped by the child but provided warmth, security and fit for the Māori child (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Te Whatu Kākahu: Assessment in Kaupapa Māori Early Childhood Practice

I also began my doctoral study in 2003 with a very general idea of following the journeys of three to five Māori early childhood services towards the development of Kaupapa Māori framings of assessments. I was concerned with the effects of successive education policies on Māori children, resulting in high rates of Māori children disengaging from education and consistently receiving disproportionately lower outcomes, opportunities and benefits (Bishop, 1997; Educational Review Office, 2010; Marriot & Sim, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2010; L. Smith & Smith, 1990). I believed that reclaiming and reframing Māori ways of knowing and being within early childhood assessment thinking and practice was a means of addressing the cultural and educational disparities faced by Māori children within an education system that continued to uphold western cultural and educational superiority, privilege and truths.

The weaving of the kākahu involved weaving case studies service understandings, Kaupapa Māori theory, Māori ways of knowing and being, technologies and knowledge, across and within historical, cultural and educational discourses and paradigms. These paradigms are described by L. Smith (1999) as sites or terrains of struggle. She states:

> Kaupapa Māori is a social project; it weaves in and out of Māori cultural beliefs and values, Western ways of knowing, Māori histories and experiences under colonialism, Western forms of education, Māori cultural aspirations and socio-economic needs, and Western economic and global politics. Kaupapa Māori is concerned with sites and terrains. Each of these is a site of struggle…. They are selected or select themselves because they have some strategic importance for Māori. (pp. 190–191)

There were two phases of the research. The first involved the case study services utilising an action research cycle to develop Kaupapa Māori assessment understandings and practices within their particular contexts and communities. Koshy (2007) described action research as constructive enquiry, where the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from experience. It was a process of continuous learning to improve practice and share the newly generated knowledge with those who may benefit from it. The process involved "planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, reflecting on the processes and consequences and then re-planning, acting and observing, reflecting, and so on…" (p. 4). The second phase of the research, the reflective phase, involved follow-up interviews with kaiako/teachers. This entailed articulating their journey, experiences and understandings of Kaupapa Māori early childhood teaching, learning and assessment theory and practice.

Towards the end of the writing-up phase of the doctoral study I was searching for an organising frame that would give the thesis structure and coherence. I had a number of literature chapters that covered topics such as education for Māori children and learners, the image/construct of the Māori child, identity development, the history of assessment, and Kaupapa Māori theory and research. I had also almost completed the three case study chapters. However I lacked an organisational framework that would draw all the different pieces together. My issue was how to meld these somewhat disparate topics and understandings into a coherent inherently Māori piece of work. I felt a Māori metaphor would provide the required coherency. According to Bishop and Glynn (1999), metaphors not only provide organising principles but have the potential to shape the content of our thinking, so they are powerful representations that both reflect and define thinking.

Over many months, I explored a number of different Māori frameworks including Mason Durie's Whare Tapa Wha, Rose Pere's Wheke, as well as frameworks based on the whakapapa of creation and Ngā Atua Māori, but none fit. It has been my experience that desperation breeds innovation and

creativity. My desperation grew as the submission date drew closer. With little more than 8 weeks to go the framework of 'whatu' emerged. It was like a light going on. I suddenly saw and understood what had been there all the time, what I had known but not realised, what I had actually done without realising it. Whatu made sense. Whatu allowed me to bring all the disparate but hugely significant components of the thesis together in a meaningful, comprehensive and coherent way.

Background to Whatu

When Māori first arrived from the Pacific, they found an abundance of space and natural resources. However the climate was much cooler than their tropical homelands and therefore clothing that offered both warmth and protection in the cooler climate was essential. Utilising technology and knowledge brought with them from their homelands, including knowledge of whatu (finger weaving) kākahu (cloaks and clothing), early Māori explored and experimented with the vast array of available resources to develop appropriate new clothing (Te Rau Matatini, 2010).

Whatu techniques have remained the same over the generations, while materials, styles and designs have changed. As Puketapu-Hetet (2000) explains: "Styles and presentation of Māori weaving have never been rigidly fixed. There has always been room for originality and invention" (p. 6). Thus just as early Māori made use of available materials such as harakeke, kiekie, pīngao and ti-kāuka (Te Rau Matatini, 2010), in weaving the thesis kākahu I utilised available resources to develop contemporary patterns and styles. These included resources such as digital cameras, computers, memory sticks, emails, literature and online materials, and whanau/communities, Māori academics, kaumātua interviews and discussions.

I believed the framing utilised in the thesis kākahu could be utilised by others as a basis for the creation of their own Kaupapa Māori assessment kākahu which reflects their particular contexts, understandings, aspirations and patterning. These assessment kākahu wrap around the child as they explore their new, developing, global world; much like the kākahu of the first Māori to Aotearoa. Like the kākahu of early Māori these assessment garments needed to be not only practical, offering warmth and security, but also dynamic, allowing movement and growth. They also needed to be beautiful, reflecting a strong sense of pride and identity. M. Durie (2004), articulates these goals for Māori education:

- to live as Māori;
- to actively participate as citizens of the world; and
- to enjoy good health and a high standard of living. (p. 2)

Important questions that arise when commencing any type of kākahu include who is the garment for? And what will it be used for? For me, the goal for the research was to support the development of Kaupapa Māori assessment understandings, perspectives and framings that could aid all teachers in early childhood services, whether Māori or non-Māori, to weave appropriate assessment framings or understandings for Māori children. This involved me asking questions such as the following:

- Whose truths are being reflected? And how are these truths constructed?
- Who are we and what does it mean to be Māori in this place?
- What do we want for our children and who do we want our children to be?
- How can the research help us get there?

Another important consideration in the research process was the spiritual dimensions of weaving. Puketapu-Hetet (2000) claims that weaving is not just an art or a skill but is "endowed with the very essence of the spiritual values of Māori people" and the weavers are the "vehicle through whom the gods create" (p. 2). When involved in the work of this thesis there was a sense of trusting in the universe and believing that if something was meant to happen it would, and if it didn't happen it was not meant to. This provided a sense of security, confidence and assurance in the appropriateness of the research processes, in terms of when and how interviews and meeting should or could take place and when they shouldn't. It also impacted on research findings, in terms of what should be discussed and included in the research and sometimes what may be discussed but not included.

The Kākahu structure

The thesis kākahu was made up of a number of elements. The first is Te Aho Tapu.

Te aho tapu–te rangahau/the research

Defining the basic form of the kākahu requires careful consideration. The aho tapu is the first weft (horizontal) strand. It is the most important strand as it establishes and defines the basic form of the kākahu. It provides the basic structure for the thesis while framing the kākahu patterns and styles. These patterns and styles are built up from a number of elements: Ngā Aho or the weft (horizontal) strands and Ngā Whenu or the warp (vertical) strands. Ngā Kaiwhatu refers to the weavers of the kākahu. Ngā Tapa are the side borders of the kākahu which can include Tāniko or decorative elements (Te Rangi hiroa, 1987).

The first chapter outlined the thesis aho tapu. This chapter established the structure for the thesis kākahu styles and patterning within a Kaupapa Māori research paradigm. I began with a brief overview of past research on Māori, highlighting ongoing concerns with western research including claims that western research has mainly served the needs of non-Māori interest groups with few gains made for Māori (L. Smith, 1999); ignored or dismissed Māori aspirations, and utilised a deficit, victim-blaming orientation (G. Smith, 1990); and commodified, simplified and misrepresented Māori knowledge for non-Māori comprehension (Bishop, 1997; L. Smith, 1992). Next I introduced the research and the emergence of my interest in the topic. This involved a brief history of my experiences in different groups and the questions/concerns that emerged from the conversations and theorising. I then discussed the case study approach utilised in the research, and introduced each of the case study services, the recruitment methods, and the roles of the participants. This was followed by an explanation of the research design, procedures and a discussion on the methodological and ethical considerations inherent in Kaupapa Māori research including links to questions around Initiation, Benefits, Representation, Legitimacy and Accountability. Lastly the data analysis processes were outlined.

Each of the following chapters represented one of the key elements of the thesis kākahu:

Ngā Aho *(weft strands)*	-	Te Ariā/ Kaupapa Māori Theory
Ngā Whenu *(warp strands)*	-	Te Akoranga /Māori Schooling
	-	Ngā Tuakiri Te Tangata/Māori Identities
	-	Te Āhua o te Mokopuna/The Child
	-	Aromatawai/Assessment
Ngā Kaiwhatu *(weavers)*	-	Case Study One Findings
	-	Case Study Two Findings
	-	Case Study Three Findings
Ngā Tapa *(side borders)*	-	Summary of Findings

 Each row of weaving has at least two aho (horizontal) strands which are twisted around the whenu, binding the kākahu together as a wearable garment. There can be a number of structural and colour elements that make up the aho strands; however only the active strands are visible on the front of the piece at any one time. Others, the passive strands, are not visible. Kākahu patterns are the result of forefronting active aho strands at certain points in the weaving and backgrounding others to achieve the desired patterning, strength and form (Mead, 1999; Te Rangi hiroa, 1950).

Ngā Aho—te Aria/Kaupapa Māori theory

Ngā Aho was the next chapter. This chapter examined the literature on Te Ariā/Kaupapa Māori Theory. In this chapter I introduced Kaupapa Māori theory, including its emergence to become a theory of transformation involving Māori-defined philosophies, frameworks and practices. I explored key aspects of Kaupapa Māori including Māori ways of knowing and being, Conscientisation, Resistance and Transformation Praxis. I concluded by reflecting on Kaupapa Māori as an

emancipatory tool that could support Māori to reclaim, reframe and reconcile Māori ways of knowing and being within contemporary early childhood assessment practices. My objective in this chapter was to establish a theoretically coherent analytical tool to investigate the thesis blocks or whenu, and seek alternatives to dominant educational cultural discourses.

Ngā Whenu—thesis blocks

The whenu of the kākahu descend from te aho tapu. The aho strands are woven across the whenu blocks, binding the garment together. There were four thesis whenu chapters incorporated into the body of this thesis—Te Akoranga/Māori Education, Ngā Tuakiri o Te Tangata/Māori Identities, Te Āhua o Te Mokopuna/The View of The Child, and Aromatawai/Assessment. Each explored a key area of significance that continues to impact upon Māori children, early childhood education and assessment theory and practice.

The first of the whenu chapters explored the literature on Te Akoranga/Māori Schooling. It firstly provided an introduction to Māori perspectives of knowledge, knowers and knowing, highlighting key differences in rights to knowledge; knowledge transmission processes; realms of knowledge; and views of valued learning and knowledge; and it examined traditional Māori education processes, methods, pedagogy and content. Next it described educational practices for young children in pre-European Māori society and the provision of early childhood education and kōhanga reo. The history, goals and legacy of schooling for Māori from the arrival of Europeans to the present day, including the ideologies and practices that continue to perpetuate Māori educational underachievement, were then investigated. Finally the chapter explored the literature on Māori early childhood education. My intention in the chapter was to provide a critical overview of Māori education, and in so doing to highlight the discourses that continue to impact upon contemporary educational policy and practice.

The next whenu examined the changing views of 'being Māori'. It firstly provided a brief overview of identity theory, focusing on personal, social, cultural and spiritual identities. It then explored historical Māori identities and what contributed to constructs of identity, including wairuatanga, whakapapa, whānau, hapu, iwi, whenua and reo. Next it discussed contemporary Māori identities, highlighting the multifaceted and increasingly varied nature of 'being Māori' in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand and its importance to assessment. Identity, or ideas of being, and who the learner is impact upon assessment theory and practice, just as assessment impacts upon identity. My intent in this chapter was to demonstrate the complex and increasingly diverse nature of Māori identities in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand. This included a discussion of the implications this diversity might have in terms of being and acting Māori within contemporary settings. Finally I looked at the importance of reclaiming and reframing aspects of historical Māori identities within contemporary early childhood education contexts.

The next whenu was Te Āhua o Te Mokopuna/Views of the Child. This chapter described traditional Māori perspectives of the child and learning, before contrasting this with changing European perspectives of the child and learning. My intent in this chapter was to describe structures and practices that have pathologised the Māori child in the past and continue to influence how teachers view and engage with the Māori child today. In order to understand assessment it was critical that one understood how the learner was constructed, the historical, social and cultural factors that impacted upon constructs of the child and the ways these constructs shape teaching, learning and assessment theory and practice.

The final whenu was Aromatawai/Assessment. This chapter examined literature on educational assessment and learning. It firstly explored traditional Māori ideas of teaching, learning and assessment. It then discussed the different European theoretical perspectives of learning and purposes for educational assessment that have emerged over the last century. It examined sociocultural assessment purposes, narrative assessment, formative and summative assessment understandings, then considered contemporary Kaupapa Māori assessment theory and practices. Finally, implications for early childhood assessment were discussed. My objective in this chapter was to highlight the power of assessment to shape educational experiences and therefore its importance as a contemporary educational, social and cultural tool in early childhood education.

Ngā Kaiwhatu—Weavers/the Case Studies

The findings of the three case study services were outlined in the next three chapters. Ngā kaiwhatu or the weavers of the kākahu refers to the case study services and their findings. The process involved case study services weaving the Kaupapa Māori theory aho across the four whenu, engaging in their own way with the whenu, making sense of, critiquing, questioning, and looking for fit. The study required that kaiwhatu grapple with assessment understandings and articulate Kaupapa Māori assessment, framings and practices for their particular service. In the process they were able to deepen their understandings of, and comfort with, Kaupapa Māori, being Māori and more specifically being Māori in early childhood education. Competence and confidence in assessment understandings ran alongside competence and confidence in being and reflecting Kaupapa Māori in the services. An important point to be cognisant of is that this weaving process was not always a conscious action and in some cases only became evident upon reflection.

The case study chapters provided a brief introduction to each of the services. Next the chapter discussed information on the background to the service's rationale for establishment, philosophy and history. Links were made to understandings of the history of Māori schooling—Te Akoranga /Māori Schooling—with an emphasis on the importance of utilising a 'Māori' perspective on Māori children's learning. Next the chapters explored participants' views of the child—Te Āhua o te Mokopuna/The Child. The following section, Ngā Tuakiri o Te Tangata/Māori Identities, described the importance of 'being Māori' to the centre's developing assessment understandings and practices. This was followed by Aromatawai/Assessment, which articulated the centre's emergent understandings of assessment; Te Haerenga/the Assessment Journey, the centre's assessment journey; Te Whakapiki Whakaaro/Emergent Thinking; and finally Te Taniko/Kaupapa Māori Assessment, which outlined the service's assessment framing developed through the research.

Although whatu kākahu is a linear process, the patterning requires that elements be engaged with at different times throughout the process. This was also the case with the thesis kākahu, with services creating patterns by foregrounding particular thinking and perceptions at certain times and backgrounding others.

Te Tapa—Taniko/Kaupapa Māori assessment framings

The Tapa or side borders of the kākahu not only frame the kākahu but often include decorative elements or tāniko patterning. At no time did I see the thesis to be a thing of beauty like a kahu huruhuru, or feather cloak; rather I viewed it more as a functional hieke or rain cape, which served as protection from the elements and doubled as a bed cover. I felt that like the hieke, the thesis kākahu would provide appropriate protection from contemporary elements. It needed to be strong (able to withstand the critique of early childhood education and Māori); warm (made sense to Māori); flexible (allowed for growth, movement and diversity); and able to hold its shape (highlighting and maintaining its Māori-ness). The thesis kākahu did, however, have decorative aspects that highlighted the beauty, strength and variety of the elements utilised in its creation. These could be likened to the tāniko borders often found on kākahu to retain the shape and purpose of the kākahu. Te Rau Matatini (2010) states: "The tāniko tells the story of what you learnt while you were weaving" (p. 43). The decorative tāniko borders of the thesis kākahu had a similar purpose: highlighting the patterns of the weavers, while reflecting their learning; and helping to retain the form of the kākahu, to create a coherent, robust, versatile final garment.

The final chapter, the thesis Tapa, was informed by the earlier reflections and summarised the research findings. It provided a brief personal reflection, a final summation on the weaving of the thesis kākahu. Māwhitiwhiti is a term that refers to a weaver's understandings gained from the weaving process. This section outlined my māwhitiwhiti.

Further thoughts

My final comments relate to my experiences of weaving the thesis kākahu. My role as a weaver was multidimensional, sometimes to the fore, and at other times working from the back in a more supportive role: asking questions, discussing, debating, theorising, but not necessarily visible. As the researcher my contributions were inextricably woven through the kākahu to strengthen it, ensuring the edges were straight and maintaining the shape and integrity of the final garment.

Te Rau Matatini (2010) states that "every korowai [kākahu] has a whakapapa" (p. 42), a narrative of where it came from and who made it. The thesis kākahu articulated the whakapapa or combined stories, histories, experiences and understandings of all those who contributed to it, including the early childhood services/kohanga reo and advisors. The patterns and form of the thesis kākahu emerged over the research period and were developed and shaped by all the participants as we worked on developing understandings and knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment in kaupapa Māori early childhood services. Furthermore, according to Te Rau Matatini (2010), the final kākahu may emerge with a different pattern from what we originally expected: "Sometimes you start the journey then realise you need to go in a different direction. Sometimes other things in your life change or you end up with other materials" (p. 42). This certainly reflects the thesis journey. I can truthfully say that I did not know what would be produced—in fact, this was the case for much of the research journey.

Furthermore whatu is not just an art or a skill. According to Puketapu-Hetet (2000), it is a spiritual endeavour that encapsulates the essence of Māori spiritual beliefs and values. Weavers are the conduit for the gods to create; thus weaving can be seen as a deeply spiritual experience. Weaving the thesis kākahu was a spiritual experience for me, which I must admit was a surprise. I had no inkling when I commenced this thesis that spirituality would be such a large part of it. In fact it never crossed my mind that it would play any part.

In conclusion, I believe whatu has the potential to be a powerful methodological framing for kaupapa Māori research. It is an inherently Māori methodology that is able to bring together different and sometimes disparate strands or topics into a coherent piece that can shape and reflect thinking. It involves weaving Kaupapa Māori theory, Māori ways of knowing and being, across and within historical, cultural and socio-economic discourses and paradigms that impact on Māori communities and whānau. It therefore has significance for Māori development and social change that supports Māori aspirations and achievement.

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