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## AMERICAN PLACE NAMES AS THE REFLECTION OF AMERICAN MENTALITY

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**L.G. Brutian. American place names as the reflection of American mentality.** The paper is aimed at revealing the American mentality through toponyms. The object of the research are the names of towns and states of the USA with the exception of those of Indian origin. The following questions in the light of cognitive linguistics are analysed: carrying of the names from the native land, the repetitions of one and the same toponym, toponyms based on anthroponyms, toponyms based on common nouns, compound toponyms with atypical construction, abbreviations of place names, unofficial place names, etc. The analysis has revealed the following features of the American mentality: egocentrism of mind, individualism, leadership, superiority, imperial world-and-self-perception, enterprise, love for risk and challenge, independence, breaking of stereotypes, a positive view of the country, dynamism, mobility, devotion to law and truth, lack of hierarchy and official relations in communication, an informal style of interrelation.

**Key words:** abbreviation, American mentality, anthroponym, cognitive linguistics, extralinguistic, nickname, toponym.

**Л.Г. Брутян. Американські топоніми як відображення американської ментальності.** Метою статті є виявлення американської ментальності через призму топонімів. Об'єктом дослідження є назви міст і штатів США за винятком назв індіанського походження. Аналізуються такі питання в світлі когнітивної лінгвістики: перенесення імені з історичної батьківщини, повтори одного і того ж топоніма, топоніми, засновані на антропонімах, топоніми, засновані на номінальному іменнику, складові топоніми з нетиповою конструкцією, аббревіатури топонімів, неофіційні назви міст і штатів і т.д. Аналіз виявив такі риси американської ментальності: егоцентризм, індивідуалізм, лідерство, перевага, імперське світо-і-самосприйняття, підприємливість, любов до ризику і викликів, незалежність, руйнування стереотипів, позитивний погляд на країну, динамізм, мобільність, законслухняність, прагнення до правди, відсутність ієрархічності та офіціозу в комунікації, неформальний стиль у взаєминах.

**Ключові слова:** аббревіатура, американська ментальність, антропонім, екстралінгвальний, когнітивна лінгвістика, прізвисько, топонім.

**Л.Г. Брутян. Американские топонимы как отражение американской ментальности.** Целью статьи является выявление американской ментальности через призму топонимов. Объектом исследования являются названия городов и штатов США за исключением названий индейского происхождения. Анализируются следующие вопросы в свете когнитивной лингвистики: перенос имени с исторической родины, повторы одного и того же топонима, топонимы, основанные на антропонимах, топонимы, основанные на нарицательном имени существительном, составные топонимы с нетипичной конструкцией, аббревиатуры топонимов, неофициальные названия городов и штатов и т.д. Анализ выявил следующие черты американской ментальности: эгоцентризм, индивидуализм, лидерство, превосходство, имперское миро-и-самовосприятие, предприимчивость, любовь к риску и вызову, независимость, разрушение стереотипов, позитивный взгляд на страну, динамизм, мобильность, законопослушность, стремление к правде, отсутствие иерархичности и официоза в коммуникации, неформальный стиль во взаимоотношениях.

**Ключевые слова:** аббревиатура, американская ментальность, антропоним, когнитивная лингвистика, прозвище, топоним, экстралингвистический.

## 1. Introduction

Toponyms, being the reflection of various sociocultural, historical, geographical and other factors, are, as it is known, an essential part of the word-stock of each language. Therefore, the necessity to study toponyms in relation to extralinguistic data – in sociolinguistic, ethnopsycholinguistic, culturological and cognitive aspects which shed light upon the mentality of their creators and bearers is beyond doubt. In this respect American toponyms because of their specific character and, in a certain sense, uniqueness as a result of various extralinguistic factors are of utmost interest for researchers. It is, indeed, hard to mention another country where such names of towns can be met as *Paradise, Independence, Empire, Truth* or *Consequences*, or a country where toponyms with the first component *New* are met so widely, or a country where *London, Paris, Moscow* and *Rome* are met simultaneously. **The aim** of the paper is to reveal the American mentality through toponyms. **The object** of the research are the names of towns and states of the USA with the exception of those of Indian origin. **The material** for the research was taken from Webster's New World College Dictionary [2016], Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary [2007], New English-Russian Dictionary [1972], as well as Rand McNally Pocket Road Atlas [2006]. **The methods** of lexical, word-formative, lexico-semantic and statistical analysis have been used. The following **particular questions** in the context of cognitive linguistics will be analysed: carrying of the names from the native land; the numerous repetitions of one and the same toponym; toponyms based on anthroponyms; toponyms containing common nouns; the structure of toponyms, in particular, compound toponyms with atypical construction; abbreviations of toponyms, their slangish character; synonymous words and expressions denoting toponyms, their stylistic connotations, etc.

## 2. Carrying of place names from the native land

In the comment to Mark Twain's famous novel "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" it is stated: "The Americans often give to their petty townships high-sounding names of capitals. They have several Parises, three or four Jerusalems, Constantinople and so on". This sentence can well serve as a key to understanding the mentality of Americans through their toponyms. Let us interpret this statement, singling out first the idea that "petty townships" are given "high-sounding names of capitals". It is worth mentioning first of all that the expression "petty townships" is used with great deal of irony, not to say sarcasm. It is common knowledge that emigrants who settle new lands endeavour to deaden to some extent their nostalgia by transferring geographical names from native land, thus as if recreating its image on a new land. At the same time, giving to their provincial town or a small settlement a name of a large capital sort of exalts their inhabitants, attaches past status and importance both to the new settlements and their inhabitants. And it doesn't matter that new Paris or new London are far from being world-famous Paris and London – the important thing is that the vanity of "New Americans" is being flattered. And, perhaps, inhabitant of American Paris deep in his heart thinks with satisfaction that he still lives in the "capital of the world". In connection with what has been said let us mention also such transferred names of large and famous cities (not only capitals), as, for example, *Alexandria, Amsterdam, Athens, Berlin, Birmingham, Cairo, Florence, Geneva, Glasgow, Manchester, Melbourne, Milan, Moscow, Naples, Odessa, Oxford, Petersburg, Rome, Venice, Warsaw*. The enumeration can be very long taking into account that "Americans often give ... names of capitals". By the way "the shabby township" described in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" is called after the then Russian capital, the magnificent city Saint Petersburg.

Among American toponyms transferred names of famous ancient cities are met as well, e.g. *Palmyra* – an ancient city in Syria. Moreover, there are great many small American towns named after a whole country, e.g. *Albion* (the poetic name of England), *Angola, Brazil, Columbia, Holland, Lebanon, Mexico, Palestine, Peru, Russia*. There are also names of towns which coincide with names of historic places, e.g. *Arcadia* – ancient province in Greece, *Olimpia* – region in Ancient Greece, etc.

It is worth mentioning that among names of American towns there are such that are identical with names of American states. And what's more, these towns are not necessarily situated in the states called similarly. Examples: *Nevada* (MO), *Virginia* (MN). This fact, too, speaks about the exaltation of the own town by means of giving a name of a whole state. Also cases of identical names of small American towns and well-known islands, like, for example, *Grenada*, *Trinidad*, should be mentioned. Finally, there are great many toponyms with the word "new" preceding the name of a town from the historic land (*New Bern*, *New London*, *New Madrid*, *New York*) or the name of the historic land itself (*New Albany*, *New Britain*, *New England*, *New Iberia*). This group includes also names of towns containing adjectives denoting a country, e.g. *French Lick*, *Spanish Fork*.

### 3. Toponyms based on anthroponyms

It is known that in many languages a huge group of toponyms is based on anthroponyms, the analysis of which gives a vivid understanding of the importance and role of this or that proper name for the given culture. What concerns this group of American toponyms, it is rather heterogeneous, e.g. *Lincoln* – name of American President, *Aurora* – name of the goddess in Greek mythology, *Bismarck* – name of German chancellor, *Bolivar* – name of Venezuelan revolutionary, *Euclid* – name of ancient Greek mathematician, *Hannibal* – name of Karfagen general, *Racine* – name of the French writer, *Shelley* – name of the English poet, etc. This group of toponyms which contains names of famous historic and state figures, writers, mythological names, names of saints, etc. very often denotes settlements far from being large and significant. At the same time, it is important to stress that in the given group of toponyms often can be met place-names based on anthroponyms (male and female names and surnames) which do not speak for themselves at all or which are of local importance. A large number of such toponyms speaks to the fact that the American (new settler) himself comes to a decision what is important, what is of great significance for him. In other words, here is the manifestation of personal "self" which is in the base of American mentality; it represents the egocentrism of Americans' mind. As examples can serve *Ada*, *Alma*, *Elmira*, *Marietta*, *Selma*, etc. (female names), *Frederick*, *Jerome*, *Pierre*, *Somerset*, etc. (male names), *Adams*, *Andrews*, *Clemson*, *Dawson*, *Harrison*, *Henderson*, *Jackson*, *Thompson*, *Jackman*, *Norman*, *Sherman*, *McAllen*, *McKeesport*, *McPherson*, *McRae*, etc. (surnames belonging to different cultures). In the light of what has been said quite opposite are Russian and Armenian toponyms which contain anthroponyms of famous people only, though to different extent.

### 4. Repetition of place names

Let us, yet, go back to the analysed comment to Mark Twain's novel where it is mentioned that Americans "have several Parises, three or four Jerusalems... and so on". This is also a very important phrase for understanding the Americans' mentality. The reference is to the fact that one and the same name of a town is very often repeated twice or thrice or even more times in different states, and to avoid confusion the state is indicated after the name of a town. This is a unique case which has, in fact, no analogs in other cultures. Thus, for example, *Aberdeen*, *Athens*, *Burlington*, *Cambridge*, *Clinton*, *Columbus*, *Freeport*, *Jackson*, *Lebanon*, *Middletown*, *Newton* are met in four different states, toponyms *Ashland*, *Columbia*, *Franklin*, *Newport*, *Washington* are met in five states, six times in different states are used such place-names, as *Greensville*, *Jacksonville*, *Springfield*, and the toponym *Salem* "wanders" from a state to state for seven times. What is the reason of such a "nomadic life" of American toponyms? In our opinion, there are several reasons. Such repetitions can be explained, first of all, by the fact that the people living in the country or the new settlers have poor knowledge of the country, they limit themselves by the borders of their states and, as a rule, have no wish (as superfluous) to "poke their nose into another state" as a result of their quite prosperous life. There is another explanation which does not exclude the first one: the American lives as he wants (yet, strictly observing the law), his personal interests are **above everything** for him, he is an individualist and egocentric by nature, for him his country comes first of all to **himself**,

to **his** house, **his** town. That is why he will use, if he wants, for the fourth or fifth or even sixth time the toponym with reference to his town or township: he doesn't care whether there might be such toponyms in other places – in any case **his** *Franklin* or *Washington* or *Salem* is the first among the towns having the same name because it is **his** town.

### 5. Toponyms based on common nouns

The names of North American towns include also a large group of toponyms based on common nouns. This group of toponyms, in its turn, consists of various names of flora and fauna, names connected with topographic division of land, names of town building objects, etc., which can be met in the toponymical layer of vocabulary of many other cultures as well. In the context of the given research we have focused on the place-names based on common nouns that reflect the specific mentality of the inhabitants of the country. Here are some examples: *Alliance*, *Concord*, *Defiance*, *Faith*, *Hazard*, *Hope*, *Independence*, *Paradise*, *Globe*, *Empire*, *Enterprise*. As can be easily seen, there is a reference to the typical features of American people and American way of life, such as risk, danger, hazard, challenge, enterprise, independence, faith, etc. There are also place-names with “imperial orientatedness”, e.g. *Empire*, *Globe*, which testifies to “imperial” world – and self-perception of the Americans. In the light of what has been said of significance are also names of towns which contain words “love” and “sun”, e.g. *Loveland*, *Lovelock*, *Sun City*, *Sunbary*, etc. These are toponyms which reflect the bright and positive view of the world and land settled by Americans.

Finally, the toponym *Truth or Consequences* should be singled out. It is, first, from the structural-semantic point of view, a curtailed text, a whole message, an implicit conditional warning or threat which can be explicated the following way: “Tell me the truth, otherwise you'll have the consequences” = “If you do not tell me the truth, you'll have the consequences”. From the point of view of meaning the stress in the given toponym is laid on the word “truth” which denotes one of the most important concepts in the system of values of Americans – the concept opposite to that of falsehood, lie for which a person must undergo a punishment. The toponym under consideration is, no doubt, interesting also because of its extraordinary construction. While among American toponyms there are a lot of compound place-names (which is typical also for many other languages), the given toponym is remarkable for the inclusion of a conjunction. Moreover, even if it is possible to assume the inclusion in a toponym of the coordinate conjunction “and” (something like, for example, *Forest and Mountains*), the inclusion in the compound toponym of the conjunction “or” is a unique case, and it is hard to find the analog of this toponym in any other culture. Americans challenge in this as well, and in this they are leaders, in this case, too, they proceed from personal interests, breaking stereotypes and traditions. And these are features which, as has been already mentioned, are typical for their mentality. To prove the abovesaid, let us quote the following words by G. Tomakhin: “As one of the peculiar features of the toponyms of the USA many scholars indicate their being “extraordinary” and “picturesque”. American place-names are, indeed, colourful and quaint, and this refers both to the form and meaning...” [Томахин 1982:45].

### 6. Abbreviation of toponyms

An extremely quick tempo of living (for Americans, indeed, “Time is money”), dynamism, mobility, quick and sharp change of events, the mosaic character of continuum (it is not by chance that the homeland of animated cartoon is the USA) – all this creates the world-image of Americans, their mentality and way of life and is manifested in such a widely-spread phenomenon as an intensive use of abbreviated forms of words and elliptical constructions in the American variant of the English language. Numerous abbreviations are met also among American toponyms. Both names of towns and states are being abbreviated. It should be mentioned that not only toponyms consisting of two parts are being abbreviated (*New Orleans* – *NO*, *New York* – *NY*, *Los Angeles* – *LA*, etc.) but also those consisting of one part (*Boston* – *B.*, *Philadelphia* – *Phila.*, *Philly*, etc.). Moreover, in some cases this or that toponym is being abbreviated minimally, that is, it is being shortened to one or two

letters. For example, *Boston – B., Washington – W., Florida – Fl., Ohio – O., Virginia – Va.*, etc. It is interesting that one and the same toponym can have two or even three variants of shortened forms. Examples: *Cambridge – Cam., Camb; San Francisco – Frisco, SF; Washington – W., Wash.; California – Cal., Calif.; Kansas – Kan., Kans., Kas.; Nebraska – Na., Neb., Nebr.; North Dakota – ND., N. Dak.; Pennsylvania – Pa., Penn., Penna.; Vermont – Ver., Verm., Vt.*, etc. It should be mentioned that abbreviated forms are used also in case of toponyms which name several states (*New England – N.E.; North-Western States – NWS*) or all the states (*United States of America – USA*), as well as USA and Canada as a whole (*North America – NA*).

In conversational speech it is, of course, more convenient for the American to say instead of “I live in Los Angeles” “I live in LA”, instead of “I love San Francisco” – “I love Frisco”. It should be added, nevertheless, that these and other abbreviations have vivid slangish character. Compare: “The abbreviations of toponyms are often associated with slang and have the shade of familiarity, humour, low character” [Беленькая 1967: 140], “... when in San Francisco, one shouldn’t say “Frisco”. In native inhabitants’ opinion, to use in conversation this nickname known to everybody means to be rude, vulgar, to have pretensions to familiarity with regard to something cherished” [Томахин 1982:104].

### 7. Unofficial place names

In this connection it should be stressed that typical for the American society informal, unofficial style of interrelation, the lack of hierarchy are reflected in the American variant of English (as opposite to British English) with its conversational, slangish and often humorous and ironic colouring. Compare: “There is no other country where it is possible to find so many place-names based on conversational expressions and slang as in USA” [Томахин 1982:45]. This, in its turn, is proved by the presence of various synonymous words and expressions denoting both towns and states. In addition, it should be mentioned that some toponyms have two and more synonyms (this fact, by the way, speaks about the free use of a toponym, about not being attached to one official place-name). Here are some examples: *Big Apple* (humorously), *Fun City*, *Empire City*, *Gateway of the USA – New York*; *Quaker City*, *City of Brotherly Love* (with humour or irony from the Greek “brotherly love”) – *Philadelphia*; *City of Magnificent Distances*, *Federal City – Washington, DC.*; *City of Monuments*, *City of Painted Window Screens – Baltimore*; *City of Notions*, *the Athens of America*, *Puritan City*, *the Hub*, *the Trimount (ain) City*, etc. – *Boston*; *City of the Golden Gate*, *Golden City*, *Queen City of the Pacific – San Francisco* (by the way, more than fifty variants of naming San Francisco are known [see Томахин 1982:121]; *Windy City*, *Crossroads of the Continent – Chicago*; *City of the Angels*, *Roadsville* (humorously) – *Los Angeles*. In connection with *Roadsville*, S. Vlahov and S. Florin with reference to S. Kondrashov’s book “A Visit to California” write: “In joke Los Angeles is called Roadsville”. They add: “The author has elucidated questions of road construction in this city, describing the roads in detail, so the witty nickname as if summarizes the abovesaid” [Влахов, Флорин 2012: 219]. It is worth mentioning that witty Armenians have recently created another nickname for the city – *Los Armenios*, which speaks about the dominating influence of Armenians there. The enumeration of synonymous words and expressions denoting American towns can be long continued. As G. Tomakhin correctly mentions: “It is significant that the majority of expressively coloured variants is based on the term “city” (but not “town”), which deepens their meliorative orientation in accordance with the perception of the word “city”” [Томахин 1982: 122].

The unofficial city names (nicknames) of advertizing nature, characterize them as *centres* (italic is mine – L.B.) of the country’s economic and cultural life” [Томахин 1982:122]. Examples: *The Hub* (humorously “the centre of civilization, culture”) – *Boston*, *the Empire City – New York*, *Capital of the West – Denver*, *Maple–Sugar Center*, *Capital of the World – St Johnsbury, VT*, *Rice Capital of the World – Crawly, LA*, *World’s Leading Convention City*, *Crossroads of the Continent – Chicago*, *City of Tomorrow – Oklahoma City*. Here we come across the words “hub”, “capital”, “center”, etc. It’s worth mentioning that among these places with high-sounding names there are also

small provincial towns. Besides, often are met expressions with the word “queen”: *Queen City – Cincinnati*, *Queen City of the Lakes – Chicago and Buffalo*, *Queen City of the Plains – Denver*, etc. Also such names can be mentioned, as *Pride of the West – Cincinnati*, *Grand Dame of the Delta – New Orleans*. There are also parallel expressions with the word “most”: *Most Interesting City in the USA – New Orleans*, *America’s Most Beautiful City – Savannah, Georgia and Talsa, Oklahoma* (It is noteworthy that two different cities are named similarly).

Among parallel (variative) expressions transferred names of famous toponyms (denoting large cultural and industrial centres), both own and foreign, are met: *Athens of America*, *Athens of the New World – Boston*; *Paris of America*, *Monmartre on the Mississippi – New Orleans*; *Chicago of the South – Houston*, etc.

Of special interest are the following expressions of occasional character: *Nineteen Suburbs Looking for a Town (in Search of a Metropolis)*, *Life on a Horizontal without a Plan* – both about *Los Angeles*. Of interest is also the parallel expression *Believe It or Not Town (Eureka Springs)*.

The names of American states, of several states taken together, as well as the whole country also have unofficial variants (often more than one) pointing to the most typical features or the most important historic facts and events, sometimes – in an ironical form. Compare: “The specificity of American toponyms is in the wide use of both official and unofficial names of states (nicknames): in everyday discourse, in press, in fiction. Suffice it to refer to the fact that car number-plates have these striking and well known to every American names... Each state has several such nicknames and one of them (as a rule, of advertizing character) is used as an official one. This, quite a legalized nickname together with the slogan of the state, its flag, song, bird, animal and plant is mentioned in reference-books” [Томахин 1982:54-55]. Below are some examples: *The Land of Stars and Stripes*, *The Land of the Bone-Dry Free* (about the country during the period of prohibition), *The New World – USA*; *The Land of Opportunity* (the state of Arkansas); *The Land of Steady Habits* (the name of *New England* and *State of Connecticut*; *New England* is named also *Town Meeting Country* and *Connecticut* has the names *The Arsenal of the Nation* because of numerous weapon factories, *The Blue Law State*, *The Nutmeg State*); *The Mother of Statesmen*, *The Mother of Presidents* (seven out of the first twelve American Presidents came from State of Virginia), *The Mother of States* (the State of Virginia was the first which had been colonized), *Down Where the South Begins* (a high-flown nickname of the state which is the most southern state among Middle-Atlantic states); *Boomer State* (humorous name of Oklahoma); *The Centennial State* (the state of Colorado became a part of the USA in 1876 when the centennial of the USA Independence was celebrated); *Dry State* (about the state where alcoholic drinks were prohibited); *The Hoosier State*, *The Crossroads of America* (the official nickname of Indiana); *The Empire State*, *The Excelsior State* (from Latin “excelsior” meaning “higher and higher”; both denote the state of New York); *The Evergreen State* (ironical name of State of Washington which is situated in the far North-West of USA); *Little Rhody* (diminutive name of Rhode Island, the smallest American state); *Wet State* (a historic name of a state where it is allowed to sell alcoholic drinks); *Show-me State* (literally: “prove me state”, “a distrustful state”, “a state of sceptics” – about Missouri); *The Treasure State* (Montana); *The Land of Enchantment* (is given to New Mexico with its deserted scenery aiming to attract tourists); *Uncle Sam’s Handkerchief* (a disdainful, ironic and witty nickname of Delaware which was given for its small sizes); *Uncle Sam’s Attic* (disdainful nickname for Alaska which is perceived as the backyards of the country), *Seward’s Folly*, *Seward’s Icebox* (other disdainful nicknames for Alaska which was bought from Russia in 1867 on the initiative of State Secretary Seward); *The Child of the Mississippi River* (stylistically lofty nickname of Louisiana which is situated in the delta of the Mississippi river); *The Hard-Case State* (the nickname given to Oregon due to hard living conditions of the first settlers during the colonization of the state), *The Beaver State* (another nickname of Oregon which is associated with the role of fur-trade in the state; besides, for Americans beavers are associated with such features as inventiveness, quick wit and diligence); *The Auto State* (the nickname of Michigan due to the developed car industry in Detroit); *The Land of Lincoln*, *The Sucker State* (scornful

nickname of Illinois the inhabitants of which became victims of machination of black marketeers during the colonization of the state); *Baked Bean State* (witty nickname of Massachusetts reminding of puritan days when baked beans were traditional Sunday meal).

Among nicknames of states having advertizing character there are such that contain names of other countries, e.g.: *Switzerland of America* (states of Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, West Virginia, Colorado, and again the same name is repeated from state to state); *The Italy of America* (Arizona); *The Holland of America* (Louisiana). Of interest are also such nicknames as, for example, *The Sportsman's Paradise* (Louisiana); *The Wonderland of America* (the name is given to Wyoming because of beautiful mountain landscapes); *The Wonder State* (by the decision of the Senate Arkansas was given this name in 1923 for advertising purposes. Just like the official nickname of the state – *The Land of Opportunity* it has aimed at covering up the unattractive picture of chronic unemployment and economic decline of one of the most backward states in US).

Of interest are also names of states based on their mottos, flags and coat-armours, e.g. *Excelsior State* (in the motto of New York State is the Latin word “excelsior” – the highest), *North to the Future* (the motto of Alaska), *The Lone Star State* (the official nickname of Texas, on the flag of which one star is depicted. Seized from Mexico by the slave-owners of the southern part of America, Texas was for some time an independent country, the economy of which was based on the hard work of slaves. Since that time on “the lone star” has symbolized the independent soul of Texas). In the given examples the key concepts are “highest”, “future”, “independence”.

## 8. Conclusion

To sum up, the above-made analysis of toponyms in the cognitive linguistics context has revealed the following features of American mentality: egocentrism of mind, individualism (the dominance of “self”, the preponderance of personal interests over social ones), leadership, superiority, imperial world-and-self-perception, enterprise, love for risk and challenge, independence, breaking of stereotypes and traditions, a positive view of the country, dynamism, mobility, devotion to law and truth, lack of hierarchy and official relations in communication, an informal style of interrelation. The research, thus, allows to come closer to understanding of the mentality of Americans through toponyms. Yet, a further and a more comprehensive analysis of the material under investigation in the suggested above aspect seems to be fruitful and perspective.

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