

The Influence of Religious Culture on the Style and Concepts of Traditional Chinese Music

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Abstract: This paper explores the integration of religious culture and traditional Chinese music, analyzing the manifestation of religious culture in traditional Chinese music and its influence on musical styles and concepts. The paper first summarizes the phenomenon of the fusion of religious music, such as Buddhism and Taoism, with traditional music, and then delves into the specific impacts of religious culture on musical melody, rhythm, structure, and form. In addition, the paper investigates from the perspective of religious philosophical thought the profound influence on traditional music concepts and the attitudes and values of musicians. Finally, through case analysis, it specifically demonstrates the interactive relationship between religious culture and traditional music, summarizes the significant role of religious culture in traditional Chinese music, and looks forward to possible future development trends and research directions of both.

Keywords: Religious Culture, Traditional Chinese Music, Musical Styles, Musical Concepts, Interactive Relationship

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Integration of Religious Culture and Traditional Chinese Music

1.1.1 Manifestation of Religious Culture in Traditional Chinese Music

The integration between religious culture and traditional Chinese music is a profound and complex topic(Perlovsky, 2010). This integration is reflected not only in the mutual borrowing of musical forms but also in the mutual penetration of musical concepts. In traditional Chinese music, the shadows of religious culture can be clearly seen, especially the influences of Buddhist music and Taoist music(PEI et al., 2024). Since Buddhism was introduced to China, its musical forms have undergone profound integration with traditional Chinese music. Buddhist music, with its unique melodies, rhythms, and timbres, has infused new elements into traditional Chinese music(Huang et al., 2017). In Buddhist temples, the chanting sounds of monks and the sounds of ritual instruments have become precious treasures in the treasury of traditional Chinese music(Van der Schyff, 2015). These musical forms are not only transmitted within the temples but also spread to the folk through various channels, combining

with secular music to form a unique Buddhist-style music. This integration has not only enriched the connotations of traditional Chinese music but also revitalized Buddhist music in the process of localization (Tarocco, 2017). Compared to Buddhist music, Taoist music has a more profound influence on the style of traditional Chinese music. As a native Chinese religion, the roots of Taoist music in traditional Chinese music are deeper. Taoist music emphasizes inner cultivation and harmonious coexistence with nature; this concept is fully reflected in traditional Chinese music (Lu & Tan, 2021; Xie et al., 2022). Many traditional music pieces contain the essence of Taoist thought, such as the pursuit of nature and the appreciation of simplicity. These pieces, through the melodies and rhythms of the music, convey the core values of Taoist culture, allowing listeners to feel the charm of Taoist culture while appreciating the music (Park, 2015). In addition to Buddhism and Taoism, other forms of religious music are also preserved in traditional Chinese music. Although these musical forms have relatively less influence, their existence adds a diverse color to traditional Chinese music. For instance, Islamic music brings a unique melody and rhythm to traditional Chinese music; Christian music infuses new spiritual connotations into traditional Chinese music with its solemn and austere atmosphere (Belyalova & Yem, 2023; Caton, 2013). The fusion of these religious musical forms with traditional Chinese music not only demonstrates the inclusiveness and diversity of Chinese culture but also injects new vitality into the development of traditional Chinese music. In summary, the influence of religious culture on the styles and concepts of traditional Chinese music is profound and multifaceted. This influence is not only reflected in the fusion of musical forms but also in the mutual penetration and borrowing of musical concepts. By studying the integration phenomenon between religious culture and traditional Chinese music, we can gain a deeper understanding of the connotations and characteristics of traditional Chinese music, and further explore the unique value and significance of religious culture in the field of musical art.

1.1.2 Inheritance and Development of Religious Culture in Traditional Chinese Music

There exists a deep connection between traditional Chinese music and religious culture, which is reflected in both musical styles and concepts. Religious culture not only influences the creation and performance of traditional music but also plays a crucial role in the inheritance and development of music. Particularly in religious ceremonies, the function and role of music are especially prominent; it serves as both a creator of

the ceremonial atmosphere and a transmitter of religious beliefs. In religious ceremonies, traditional music plays multiple roles (Suswandari et al., 2022). Firstly, music, through its unique melodies and rhythms, creates a solemn and sacred atmosphere for the ceremony. This atmosphere helps participants enter a specific religious emotional state, allowing them to better experience and comprehend religious doctrines. Secondly, music also undertakes structural functions such as guidance, transition, and conclusion during the ceremony, making the entire ceremonial process more orderly and complete. Furthermore, music often serves as a carrier of important information in the ceremony, conveying religious beliefs, historical traditions, and moral concepts through lyrics or specific musical forms (Kakhramonovich, 2021). The inheritance and variation of religious music in folk music is a topic worth in-depth study. On one hand, religious music has been widely spread and inherited in the folk context, becoming an important component of the folk music treasury. Many folk singers and musicians are deeply influenced by religious music, incorporating a great deal of religious elements in their singing and playing processes, which adds rich religious color to folk music. On the other hand, religious music has also undergone a certain degree of variation after entering the folk sphere. This variation is reflected both in musical forms, such as changes in melody, rhythm, and musical structure, and in musical content, such as the adaptation and creation of lyrics. These variations make religious music more relatable to folk life and easier to be accepted and loved by the general public. To deeply explore the influence of religious culture on the styles and concepts of traditional Chinese music, we can analyze specific cases. For example, in the Tibetan region, the music of Tibetan Buddhism has had a profound impact on traditional Tibetan music. Tibetan singers often employ melody and rhythm elements from Tibetan Buddhist music in their performances, giving traditional Tibetan music a unique religious charm. At the same time, Tibetan Buddhist music has also been widely spread and inherited among the folk, becoming an indispensable part of the daily lives of the Tibetan people. Moreover, the influence of Daoist music on traditional Chinese music cannot be overlooked (Andrijauskas, 2016; Strehovec, 2023). Daoist music is renowned for its fresh, ethereal, and transcendent qualities, which have profoundly influenced ancient Chinese literati musical creations. Many ancient literati incorporated elements of Daoist music into their musical works, resulting in a transcendent artistic realm in these pieces. At the same time, Daoist music has also been widely transmitted in the folk context, becoming an important part of ancient Chinese folk music. The influence of religious culture on the styles and

concepts of traditional Chinese music is both profound and extensive. It not only enriches the connotations and forms of expression of traditional music but also plays a crucial role in the transmission and development of music. By studying the interrelationship between religious culture and traditional music, we can gain a deeper understanding of the unique charm and cultural value of traditional Chinese music.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE ON THE STYLES OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MUSIC

2.1 The Influence of Religious Culture on Musical Melodies and Rhythms

Religious culture has played a crucial role in the development of traditional Chinese music, leaving an indelible mark not only on the sources of inspiration for musical creation but also on the shaping of musical styles and concepts. Especially in the characteristics of religious musical melodies and rhythms, as well as the influence of religious ceremony rhythms on the sense of rhythm in traditional music, the impact of religious culture is particularly significant(Beck, 2019; Gabrielsson & Lindström, 2010). First of all, the melodies of religious music often possess unique stylistic characteristics that subtly influence the melodic creation of traditional Chinese music. The melodies of religious music typically convey a solemn and austere quality, with smooth and meaningful melodic lines. This melodic feature is widely reflected in traditional music, not only dominating religious ritual music but also integrating into secular music, becoming an important element of traditional music melody creation. For example, in Daoist music, one can hear gentle and ethereal melodies that reflect Daoism's pursuit of nature and transcendence; whereas, in Buddhist music, it often expresses a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere, reflecting the spirit of compassion and wisdom in Buddhism. Secondly, the rhythm of religious ceremonies plays a crucial role in shaping the sense of rhythm in traditional music. The rhythms in religious ceremonies typically exhibit distinct characteristics and patterns, such as Buddhist chanting and Daoist rituals, as shown in Figure 1, these rhythmic forms not only add a sense of mystery and solemnity to religious ceremonies but also subtly influence the rhythm of traditional music. Traditional music, based on the absorption of the rhythms of religious ceremonies, has innovated and developed, forming a uniquely characteristic sense of rhythm. This sense of rhythm retains the solemnity and mystery of the rhythms of religious ceremonies while incorporating the flexibility and variability of secular music, resulting in a

rich and colorful appearance in the rhythm of traditional music.



Figure 1: The Influence of Religious Culture on Musical Melody and Rhythm

Specifically, the rhythms in religious ceremonies often adopt a cyclical and progressive approach to create a solemn and mysterious atmosphere. This rhythmic characteristic is thoroughly reflected in traditional music; for instance, in some ancient musical forms, one can hear repetitive rhythmic patterns and techniques that push musical development through rhythmic changes. These techniques not only enhance the sense of movement in music but also make musical expression more diverse and rich. Moreover, elements such as pauses and accents from religious ceremonial rhythms have been borrowed by traditional music, making the music's rhythm more layered and tense. The influence of religious culture on the style of traditional Chinese music is profound and extensive. It not only shapes the unique melodic style and rhythmic sense of traditional music but also subtly influences the concepts and aesthetic orientations of traditional music. Therefore, when studying and appreciating traditional Chinese music, we cannot overlook the importance of religious culture as a significant factor.

2.2 The Influence of Religious Culture on Music Structure and Form

Religious culture plays a pivotal role in the development of traditional music in China, and its influence on music structure and form is profound and diverse. This influence is evident not only in the widespread use of religious music structures in traditional music composition but also in the driving effect of religious forms on the development of traditional music forms (Meyer, 2010). First, the structure of religious music, with its unique organizational forms and internal logic, provides a wealth of inspiration and material for traditional music composition. Throughout a long historical journey, religious ceremonies and musical activities have been closely intertwined, forming a distinct structure of religious music. These structures often exhibit rigorous symmetry, repetition, and variability,

making the expression of religious emotions and concepts more profound and moving (Atran & Henrich, 2010). Traditional music creators, in borrowing from the structures of religious music, not only inherit its aesthetic form but also incorporate its connotations into their works, thus enriching the layers and expressiveness of traditional music. To provide concrete examples, many classical masterpieces reflect the influence of religious music structures. For instance, "Pu'an's Mantra," with Buddhist verses as lyrics, has a music structure that is rigorous and varied, embodying both a solemn and austere atmosphere as well as graceful and flowing melodies, as shown in Figure 2. The clever use of this structure makes Pu'an's Mantra a classic in traditional Chinese music (Mak, 2013).

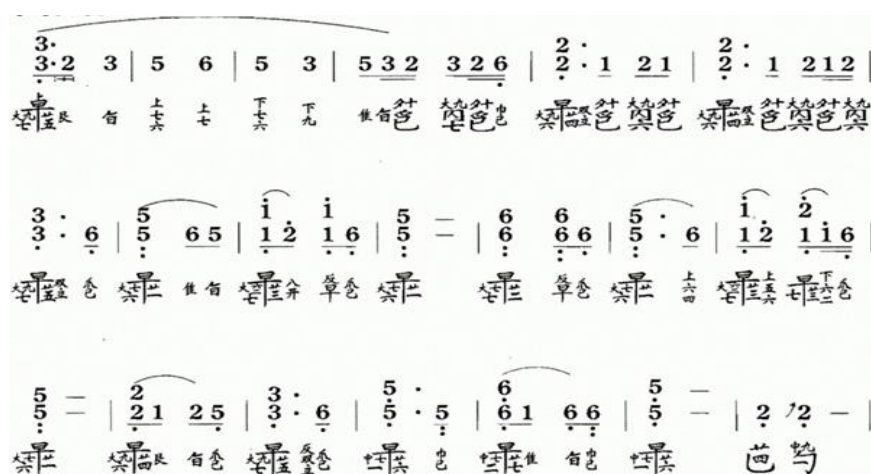


Figure 2: The Influence of Religious Culture on Musical Structure and Musical Form

Secondly, the religious musical forms have played a positive role in the development of traditional music forms. Because of their specific functions and situational needs, religious forms have developed unique styles and characteristics. These forms have gradually been absorbed and referenced by traditional music during their dissemination, thus promoting innovation and development in traditional music forms. For example, the “chanting melody” music form in Daoist music, with its unique melodic progression and rhythmic characteristics, has injected new elements and vitality into traditional music forms. This cross-boundary integration and innovation not only enrich the stylistic diversity of traditional music but also expands its expressive scope. Moreover, the influence of religious culture on musical concepts and aesthetic viewpoints cannot be ignored. The exploration of the inner world and the spiritual sublimation advocated by religious culture bear a remarkable similarity to the profound artistic conception and endless charm pursued by traditional music. Guided by this concept, traditional music works often transcend the constraints of form,

reaching a higher artistic realm. For example, the guqin piece “Plum Blossoms in the Breeze” imitates the scenes of geese flying and landing, expressing the author's reverence for nature and insights about life. This profound artistic conception and far-reaching charm is a classic example of the combination of religious culture and traditional music. The influence of religious culture on the style and concepts of Chinese traditional music is multifaceted and profound. It not only provides rich materials and sources of inspiration for traditional music creation but also promotes innovation and development in traditional music forms. At the same time, the musical concepts and aesthetic viewpoints embodied by religious culture have injected new vitality and connotation into traditional music. In future research, we can further explore the interactive relationship between religious culture and traditional music and the issues of their inheritance and development in modern society.

3. THREE, THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE ON THE CONCEPTS OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL MUSIC

3.1 The Penetration of Religious Philosophical Thought in Musical Concepts

Religious culture has played a crucial role in the development of Chinese traditional music, and its profound influence is reflected not only in the shaping of musical styles but also permeates the level of musical concepts, as shown in Figure3. Among them, Buddhism and Daoism, as the two major mainstream religions, have particularly significant influences on the concepts of traditional music.

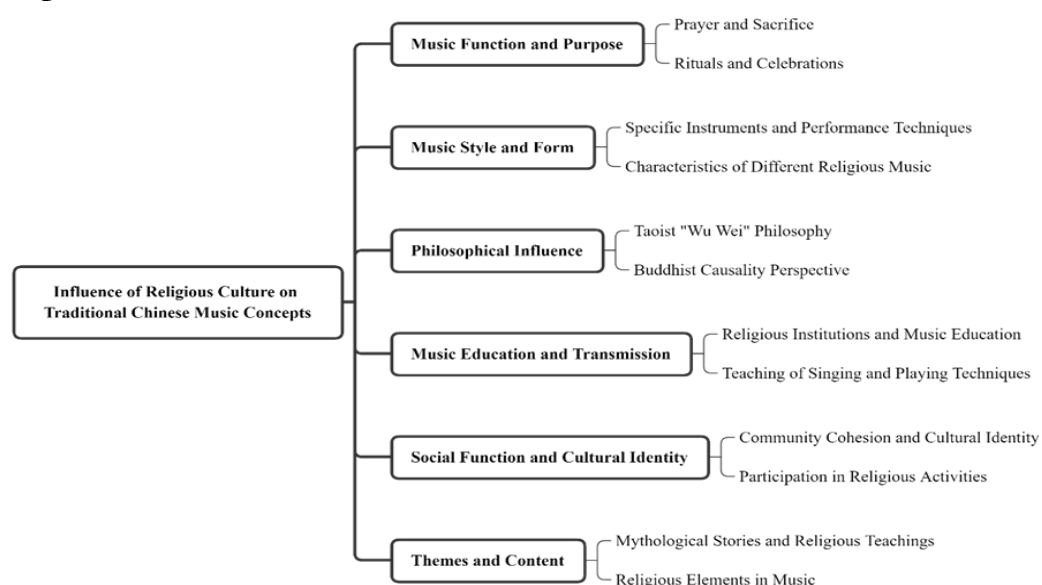


Figure 3: Influence of Religious Culture on Traditional Chinese Music Concepts

Buddhism's "Zen essence" is closely linked to the pursuit of artistic conception in traditional music. Zen, as a practice of Buddhism, emphasizes inner peace and transcendence, achieving spiritual purification through meditation. This pursuit of inner tranquility resonates with the artistic conception emphasized in traditional music. "Artistic conception" Traditional music often creates a profound artistic conception through a clever combination of melody, rhythm, and timbre, allowing listeners to experience spiritual enjoyment that transcends reality. For example, in the guqin piece "Falling Wild Geese on the Plain," the melodious sound of the guqin and the imitation of the geese's call successfully create a tranquil and deep artistic conception, making listeners feel as if they are in nature, experiencing peace and transcendence of the spirit. This pursuit of artistic conception is a concrete manifestation of Buddhist Zen essence in music. Daoism's "natural" perspective similarly profoundly influences the aesthetics of traditional music. Daoism emphasizes "the way follows nature", which means to comply with natural laws and pursue a harmonious coexistence with nature. This view of nature has a profound impact on the creation and appreciation of traditional music. In the creation process, traditional music often focuses on expressing the rhythms and beats of nature, as well as musical imagery that resonates with natural landscapes. For instance, in the bamboo flute solo "New Song of the Herdsman," the imitation of horse hooves and the herdsman's singing vividly portray the natural scenery of the grassland and the lifestyle of herdsman. These music pieces centered on nature not only allow listeners to appreciate the beauty and harmony of nature but also guide people to pay attention to and respect nature, thus achieving harmonious coexistence with nature. In addition to influencing music creation, religious culture also plays an important role in music performance and appreciation. In religious rituals, music often serves as an important medium to help believers communicate and connect with deities. Such religious music performances not only require performers to possess exceptional skills and a deep understanding of music but also emphasize the need for performers to be fully engaged in the performance to resonate with the divine. At the same time, under the influence of religious culture, people gradually develop a unique aesthetic perspective towards music. They not only focus on the external expression and technical level of music but also value the inner spirit and pursuit of artistic conception embedded in music. The formation of this aesthetic perspective undoubtedly provides strong support and assurance for the inheritance and development of traditional music. In summary, the influence of religious culture on the concepts of traditional

Chinese music is comprehensive and profound. It not only shapes the style and characteristics of traditional music but also plays an indispensable role in music creation, performance, and appreciation. By deeply exploring the inherent connections and developmental patterns between religious culture and traditional music, we can better understand and inherit this invaluable cultural heritage, while also providing new ideas and inspirations for the innovation and development of traditional music.

3.2 The Influence of Religious Culture on Musicians' Attitudes and Values

Religious culture occupies a pivotal position in traditional Chinese music, with its far-reaching impact evident not only in shaping musical styles and forms but also leaving a profound imprint on musicians' attitudes towards life and values. This article aims to explore how religious culture influences the inner journeys and attitudes of music creators, as well as the value orientations of musicians in the context of religious culture. In China, the integration of religious culture and musical art has a long history. In numerous religious rituals, music plays an important role in communicating between people and deities, expressing faith and emotions. This unique musical practice environment provides musicians with a distinct life stage, shaping their unique life attitudes and values. Creators of religious music are often deeply influenced by religious teachings during their creative processes. They interpret religious ideas through music and convey the power of faith. In this process, they not only hone their musical skills but also attain a spiritual elevation. The qualities advocated by religious culture, such as compassion, tolerance, and introspection, subtly influence musicians' life attitudes. They seek solace in music and express reverence for life and gratitude for the world through it. Furthermore, musicians with a religious cultural background exhibit distinctive value orientations. They often view music as a sacred vocation rather than merely a means of making a living. To them, music is a bridge connecting people with deities and nature, an important avenue for purifying the soul and elevating the spiritual realm. Therefore, in their musical creation, they pursue a unity of truth, goodness, and beauty, emphasizing the content and artistic conception of music. This value orientation not only enhances the spiritual character of musical art but also injects positive energy into the prosperity and development of social culture. To illustrate more concretely the impact of religious culture on musicians' life attitudes and values, we can analyze some specific cases. For example, in Tibetan Buddhist music, musicians express their sincere faith in the Buddha's teachings through singing scriptures and reciting mantras. Their musical works are filled with

reverence for life, love for nature, and prayers for peace. This musical practice not only enriches the cultural life of Tibet*** but also shapes the unique life attitudes and values of the musicians. Similarly, in Daoist music in Han Chinese areas, musicians pass on Daoist culture through performing ancient tunes and chanting Daoist scriptures. Their musical works reflect a deep understanding of Daoist thoughts and respect and inheritance of traditional culture. This musical practice not only showcases the unique charm of Daoist music but also reflects musicians' profound contemplation of life and values. The influence of religious culture on traditional Chinese music styles and concepts is multifaceted, with the most significant impact being on musicians' life attitudes and values. Under the influence of religious culture, creators of religious music have not only honed their musical skills but also achieved spiritual elevation. Their life attitudes and value orientations embody the profound connotations of religious culture while highlighting the unique charm of musical art. In future research, we can further explore the interactive relationship between religious culture and musical art, and how this relationship affects the inheritance and development of musical culture.

4. THE INTERACTIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Taking Tibetan Buddhism as an example, it is an important part of Tibetan culture, where musical forms are not only rich and diverse but also closely linked to the lives of the Tibetan people. In Tibetan areas, whether it is the ritual ceremonies of temples or folk festive activities, Buddhist music plays an important role. By analyzing the similarities and differences between Tibetan Buddhist music and Tibetan traditional music in terms of melody, rhythm, and instrument usage, we can reveal how religious culture influences and shapes the unique style of Tibetan music. Moreover, the relationship between Han Buddhist music and Chinese traditional music is also a case worth exploring. Han Buddhism has had a profound influence throughout Chinese history; its musical culture has deeply merged with Chinese traditional music culture. For instance, in temple music, one can hear many melodies and instrumental sounds characteristic of Chinese traditional music, such as flutes and pipa. At the same time, Han Buddhist music has also significantly influenced the creation and performance of Chinese traditional music, promoting the evolution and innovation of musical styles. Furthermore, the connection between Daoist music and

Chinese traditional music cannot be overlooked either. As a native Chinese religion, Daoism's music possesses a strong national characteristic and local flavor. Daoist music reflects the essence of Chinese traditional music in melody, rhythm, and singing styles. By studying the interrelationship between Daoist music and traditional music, we can further understand how religious culture permeates various aspects of Chinese traditional music and profoundly influences its style and philosophy. The influence of religious culture on the development of Chinese traditional music is profound and extensive, not only permeating the creative concepts of musical works but also leaving a unique mark on musical styles and forms of expression. This article aims to analyze the influence of religious culture on traditional music through specific cases and explore the manifestation and interpretation of religious elements in musical works, as well as the shaping role of religious culture on the creative concepts of musicians. The embodiment of religious elements in musical works often presents itself through various means such as melody, rhythm, timbre, and lyrics. Taking Chinese traditional Daoist music as an example, its unique melodic trajectory and rhythmic patterns often exude an ethereal, tranquil aura. Instruments commonly used in Daoist music, such as bells, stone chimes, and drums, produce a rustic and rich timbre, adding a mysterious and solemn color to musical works. Simultaneously, the lyrics of Daoist music often draw from Daoist classics, encompassing themes of self-cultivation, prayers for blessings, and disaster alleviation, further reinforcing the expression of religious elements in music. In addition to Daoist music, Buddhist music is also an indispensable part of Chinese traditional music. With its tranquil and harmonious melodies along with profound lyrical content, Buddhist music provides spiritual solace and enlightenment for practitioners. In Buddhist music, one often hears distinctive religious singing forms such as chanting and hymns, which convey the teachings and beliefs of Buddhism using unique musical language and expression techniques. The influence of religious culture on the creative concepts of musicians cannot be ignored either. In the creation of Chinese traditional music, many musicians are profoundly influenced by religious culture; their musical works not only reflect a pursuit of religious spirit but also integrate philosophical contemplation and aesthetic concepts of religious culture into the creation process. For example, some musicians may draw on melodic materials and rhythmic patterns from religious music during the creation process, using them as a basis for re-creation, thus forming a musical style imbued with religious charm. Additionally, philosophical ideas from religious culture, such as Daoism's "the Way follows Nature"

and Buddhism's "cause and effect," etc., subtly influence the creative concepts of musicians, leading them to focus more on the exploration and expression of themes such as nature, life, and humanity in their musical creations.

5. CONCLUSION

The profound influence of religious culture on the styles and concepts of traditional Chinese music. The manifestation and interpretation of religious elements in musical works not only enrich the artistic expressiveness of music but also provide listeners with a unique cultural experience on a spiritual level. At the same time, the shaping role of religious culture on the creative concepts of musicians has further promoted the development and innovation of traditional Chinese music. In future research, we can continue to explore the interactive relationship between religious culture and traditional music in depth, with the aim of understanding the unique charm and cultural connotation of traditional Chinese music from a broader perspective.

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