

A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL FAIRNESS AND TRUST ON FARMERS' PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL IRRIGATION GOVERNANCE



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Abstract

Abstract: This article takes agricultural irrigation governance as an example to explore the impact of organizational fairness and trust on the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance behavior. Research has found that:(1) organizational fairness has a significant positive impact on the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance.The impact of distribution fairness on cooperative supply among farmers is most significant, while interactive fairness has a significant positive impact on interpersonal interaction among farmers.(2)Organizational fairness not only has a direct positive impact on the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance, but also indirectly enhances their willingness and degree to participate in agricultural irrigation governance by promoting social trust among farmers.Further testing shows that social trust partially mediates the relationship between organizational fairness and farmer participation in agricultural irrigation governance behavior.(3)The role of village level governance mechanisms in agricultural irrigation management is not satisfactory.The above research conclusions help to understand the impact mechanism of farmer participation in farmland irrigation governance under the new normal, enrich academic literature in related fields, and have reference significance for promoting farmland irrigation construction in China.

Keywords: organizational fairness, organizational trust, Farmer participation, Irrigation management of farmland

Introduction

China's per capita water resources account for about a quarter of the world's per capita water resources, making it a country with water scarcity. The distribution of water resources is extremely uneven, with more in the south and less in the north. The growth of population and economic development are constantly squeezing agricultural water use with domestic and industrial water use. Especially with the continuous deepening of the national rural tax and fee reform, grassroots farmland irrigation management is becoming increasingly inadequate. "The inability of the state to manage, grassroots organizations to manage, and farmers to manage" has put the agricultural irrigation management system in a predicament, which damages the foundation of national food security and hinders the development of the national economy and social stability (Chen L. 2012).

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Grassroots farmland irrigation governance is a collective action led by the state and supported by grassroots organizations for the participation of farmers (Yangliu). However, the grassroots farmland irrigation system is a public pond resource, and its public product attributes conflict with the private product attributes of various members of the system, especially the production and operation of rural households, resulting in inconsistent individual choices and village collective choices, which can easily lead to collective action difficulties (Wang ,B. 2020).In addition, problems such as inadequate governance mechanisms and inadequate incentive measures have led to frequent occurrences of misalignment and absence in collaborative governance of grassroots farmland irrigation, and the effectiveness of collaborative governance cannot be generated (Qin,G.Q. 2019). So, what affects the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation management and the improvement of agricultural irrigation management performance? The answer to this question can provide new ideas for solving the collective action dilemma of grassroots irrigation, and provide theoretical basis and practical reference for formulating a long-term governance mechanism for farmland irrigation.

In theory, organizational fairness and trust are important factors in solving the collective action dilemma of grassroots agricultural irrigation systems. On the one hand, a sense of organizational fairness can affect various organizational behavior and outcome variables. By enhancing organizational fairness, it can improve the psychological and organizational behavior of farmers, weaken their free riding psychology, and promote the achievement of collective action (Zheng,L.Q. 2023).On the other hand, trust is an essential part of social capital. In agricultural irrigation systems, the higher the level of trust, the greater the likelihood of farmers participating in cooperative supply of agricultural irrigation (Putnam, 1993). Currently, many scholars are paying attention to the research on the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance, but most of them start from the perspective of farmers themselves, such as population characteristics, heterogeneity, resource endowment (Wang ,Y. H. & Zang, L. Z. et al. 2020), behavioral preferences, and demand preferences. There are also studies on the external environment of agricultural irrigation systems, such as social trust, relationship networks, organizational support, and institutional changes, which affect farmers' willingness to participate in agricultural irrigation governance (Cai, Q. H. 2017; Yang ,L. 2018; Qin ,G. Q. 2021), but most of them overlook the practical issues in rural agricultural irrigation governance, namely the issue of fairness. Because in China, the wealth gap is increasing day by day, social class differentiation is severe, and people are more concerned about the reasonable or unreasonable relationship between people's interests (Dai,W. L. 1997). In view of this, this article analyzes the factors that affect the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance from the perspectives of organizational fairness and social trust, which has a good reference value for improving the performance of agricultural irrigation governance.

Literature Review

1. Organizational Fairness and Farmer Participation

The theory of fairness tells us that when the distribution of benefits is unfair, employees feel uneasy and they will achieve "balance" by modifying the variables involved (Adams, 1965). For example, when a farmer does not receive fair distribution of irrigation water, they may correspondingly reduce their investment in the management and maintenance of agricultural irrigation projects, and even delay or refuse to pay irrigation fees. As Guo,Z (2017) pointed out in her research, unfair aversion motives can also develop a "distorted" negative form of reciprocity, that is, punishing those "free riding" behaviors by destroying agricultural water resources, which is not conducive to improving the level of cooperative governance.In addition, unfair distribution of water can lead to differences in field harvest and widen the wealth gap between farmers. Shu,Q.F. et al. (2018) found that the wealth gap in villages has a significant negative impact on the governance performance of agricultural

irrigation systems. The poorer the village, the less willing the farmers are to invest in the construction of agricultural irrigation facilities, and they prefer to abandon or harvest less. The wealth gap caused by unfair distribution also makes it difficult for low-income farmers to maintain reciprocal relationships in interpersonal communication, leading to the gradual loss of social capital such as the social network of irrigation organizations. The weakening of reciprocal relationships and the reduction of social networks can both make it difficult for technology, information, and other resources to be effectively shared among members, resulting in a decrease in member income and possibly a decrease in member satisfaction (Chen, T.Q. 2023). Unequal distribution undermines the social network relationships in rural areas, creates barriers between farmers and village committees, as well as between farmers and farmers, and loses the trust factor that has developed in rural homogenization, making it more difficult for farmers to participate in collective actions (Cai, Q.H. 2015).

Finally, humans are not isolated entities, but participants in the social environment network (Chen, X.P. 2020). A good sense of interactive fairness among farmers can easily form a good social network, which has coordination and incentive functions, can enhance specialized investment, enhance the sustained stability of cooperation, and improve alliance performance (Wan, J.Y. et al., 2014). Interpersonal fairness is an individual's fair experience in decision-making, institutional arrangements, and related measures within an organization. In the atmosphere of agricultural irrigation, a high sense of interpersonal fairness brings a high sense of interpersonal control. Members of a high sense of interpersonal control group have self-control over the impulse to obtain short-term benefits, resist competitive temptations that threaten group interests, weaken individual uncertainty, and thereby strengthen farmer participation. Organizational fairness promotes the satisfaction and loyalty of water users, leading to spillover of organizational citizenship behavior in the entire agricultural irrigation system (Folger, 1999), and effectively improves the performance of agricultural irrigation governance.

2. Social Trust and Farmer Participation

Social trust was initially defined as the expectation of future time, and it was pointed out that this expectation will have a significant impact on public behavioral decision-making (Deutsch, M., 1958). Due to the development of agricultural irrigation organizations in homogeneous villages, trust factors in organizational capital are easily generated here. Once this social trust relationship is formed, it means that members of the organization, especially farmers, will be willing to give credit or rely on the advice of others to take action. Farmers will have a stronger awareness of resource or information sharing. Information sharing among farmers can enable other farmers and agricultural irrigation decision-makers to understand irrigation demand and supply more timely and accurately, and make corresponding responses. At the same time, it can also deter bad behavior in irrigation, reduce the probability of free riding, and improve the overall governance level of agricultural irrigation (Yang, L. 2018).

The trust in rural China is built on a "differential order pattern". Mr. Fei Xiaotong once vividly portrayed this relationship as a series of relationship ripples splashed out by small stones in a river from the inside out. These ripples demonstrate the trust relationship from near to far, where family trust is greater than family trust, family trust is greater than neighbor trust, and neighbor trust is greater than stranger trust. The trust in this relationship greatly affects the authenticity and speed of information sharing among farmers. Meanwhile, the reputation mechanism contained in trust can generate more reciprocal behaviors among organizational members, simplifying the incentive mechanism for grassroots irrigation collaboration. High frequency communication and interaction among farmers, village officials, and farmers and village officials in irrigation organizations make it easy for them to learn from each other, make progress together, and establish individual reputation. In order to gain a better reputation, individual organizations tend to be willing to contribute and help others, or put themselves in others' shoes when doing things, and worry that their unsociable behavior will damage their reputation, face, and prestige in the village. Interpersonal interaction increases trust, and in turn, the increase in mutual trust further deepens communication and forms a positive

interaction. The emotional identification and mutual trust between farmers, as well as between farmers and irrigation organizations, can promote mutual communication and cooperation, move towards mutual benefit, and form a mechanism for sharing benefits and risks (Li, Y.X. 2014), thereby achieving collective action in the management and management of agricultural irrigation systems. In addition, we can also consider trust in national policies and village cadres as institutional trust (Zou, Y.C. & Ao, D. 2011). This institutional trust relies on legal, political, and other institutional environments, and is triggered by a social phenomenon based on "non interpersonal" relationships. With the progress of society, this trust will become an important mechanism that affects the willingness and action of farmers to participate (Zhang, L.Y. & Tan, K.R. 2005). Therefore, this article proposes the following assumptions:

3. The mediating role of social trust

Organizational fairness can enhance member trust, which is an important condition for the existence and development of an organization. In the process of agricultural irrigation governance, the sense of organizational fairness among farmers affects the trust among members of the organization and ultimately affects their participation behavior. On the one hand, organizational fairness makes farmers feel needed and respected, satisfies their psychological and social needs, and forms a positive emotional bond between farmers and village committees or water use associations (Xu, B.H. & Zhang, X.G. 2005; Newman et al., 2012), promoting communication and cooperation between farmers and village committees or water use associations, as well as other farmers, and enhancing mutual trust in relationships; On the other hand, as a key indicator of social exchange, social trust has predictability and reliability (Buchan et al. 2002). When farmers trust the village committee or water use association, they are confident that what the village committee or water use association does is necessarily correct, feasible, and for their well-being. In this situation, farmers are more willing to respond to the call put forward by the village committee or water use association, and participate in collective actions for farmland irrigation governance with unparalleled enthusiasm, in order to achieve effective governance of the farmland irrigation system.

In addition, after reviewing the literature, we found that many studies have shown that self fairness and mutual trust are both influenced by employee behavior, forming an interactive effect (Liao, J. Q. & Zhang, Y. J. 2010). In the context of agricultural irrigation governance, the enhancement of farmers' sense of fairness will directly increase their trust in the village committee, farmer water use association, and other farmers. Trust is the foundation of cooperation. When farmers trust other participants, they will increase their investment. At the same time, when the village committee or farmer water use association perceives being trusted by others, they will give more support to participating farmers and sincerely lead them to participate in agricultural irrigation governance. Through mutual feedback, they promote the development of agricultural irrigation governance. Therefore, this article proposes the following assumptions:

Research Methods

1. Data sources

The data for this study is sourced from village level tracking surveys conducted by the "Hundred Village Observation" holiday research group of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Research in Hunan and Hubei provinces from July to September in 2022 and July to September in 2023. By combining questionnaire surveys and farmer interviews, a total of 510 valid questionnaires were obtained from 48 administrative villages in two provinces using random sampling method. The questionnaire covers organizational fairness, social trust, farmer participation, farmer, family characteristics, village characteristics, etc.

2. Variable Definition

2.1 Organizational fairness

Scholars such as James (2010) and Russell (2007) define organizational fairness as "the sense of fairness that members of an organization have towards the organizational

environment.". The organizational fairness scale developed by Niehoff&Moorman (1993), applied in the context of China, also has good quality (He,X. 2010). In view of this, this study takes this as a reference and combines it with the actual situation of agricultural irrigation governance in China to measure organizational fairness in three dimensions: distribution fairness, procedural fairness, and interactive fairness, totaling 12 items.

2.2 Farmer participation

Hsieh, Yen, and Chin (2004) believe that farmer participation refers to the degree to which farmers invest resources in the process of service production and transmission. The forms of resource investment include time, information provision, level of care, and collaborative production. This study first referred to the research findings of Bettencourt (1997), Yang , L(2018), Zhou, C (2022), and others in measuring farmer participation. Secondly, as agricultural irrigation supply services are an industry with high levels of farmer participation, considering the current situation of agricultural irrigation governance, for most farmers, they complete the transmission of their relevant information through communication and interaction with village committees, farmer water associations, and other participating farmers. Therefore, this article sets the dimensions of farmer participation as cooperative supply and interpersonal interaction, with a total of 11 items to measure.

2.3 Social trust

The so-called trust refers to "believing and daring to entrust" (Peter L. Berger, 1991), which includes both concepts and actions. Due to the fact that the subject of trust can be both an individual, a collective, an organization, and a system (Welter, 2012), the dimensions of social trust vary from the perspective of different subjects. Drawing on the research of He, K (2015), Yang, L (2018), Zhao, J.J. (2023), and others, this article divides social trust into interpersonal trust and institutional trust. Among them, interpersonal trust reflects the degree of trust that farmers have in their family, friends, and neighbors. Institutional trust selects the trust that farmers have in the agricultural irrigation management system and village committee cadres. Design a total of 7 items to measure.

2.4 Control variables

This article draws on the practices of Ostrom (2007), Yang, L(2018), Wang, B (2020) and others in studying farmland irrigation governance, and sets the control variables of this article as farmer gender, age, educational level, and economic income. The statistical description of the basic situation of villages and participating farmers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Statistical Description of Basic Information of Villages and Participating Farmers

Village characteristics	Ratio (%)	Characteristics of members of grassroots irrigation organizations	Ratio (%)
The main terrain of the village		Gender	
mountainous region	12.36	male	52.6
hill	14.21	female	47.4
plain	73.44		
Main planting situation in the village		Age	
wheat	10.24	35 years old and below	3.89
corn	9.76	35-45 years old	15.16
rice	80.00	45-55 years old	33.34
Cultivated land area		55 to 65 years old	31.73
Under 3000 acres	6.10	Over 65 years old	15.88
3000-4000 acres	21.20	Education level	
4000-5000 acres	40.10	Primary school and below	24.1
Over 5000 acres	32.60	junior high school	49.7
What are the main irrigation facilities in the village?		High school or vocational school	20.1
Rivers, ditches, and ponds	66.20	Associate degree	4.84
Irrigation and drainage station	20.10	Undergraduate or above	1.26

Reservoir	8.5	Household agricultural income	
Mechanical well	5.20	Below 20000	18.85
Is the drainage and irrigation situation in the village good?		20000 to 40000 yuan	22.85
self-identity	33.50	40000 to 60000 yuan	29.75
Disagree	66.50	60000 to 80000 yuan	17.66
Is there a plumber in the village		Over 80000 yuan	10.89
have	25.00		
nothing	75.00		

Research result

1.Propose research hypotheses

This article proposes the following assumptions:

H1: Organizational fairness positively affects the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance behavior

H2: Social trust positively affects the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance behavior

H3: Social trust plays a mediating role between organizational fairness and farmer participation in agricultural irrigation governance behavior

It is a complex process for farmers to generate a sense of organizational fairness and actively participate in agricultural irrigation governance. Currently, research on agricultural irrigation governance mostly focuses on the influence of factors on the behavior of individual members, including external environment, policies, laws, as well as their own characteristics and personality endowments. However, research on the concept of farmer participation is too limited and has not been able to interpret the importance of farmer participation as equivalent to customer participation from the perspective of the irrigation service industry. The research on its antecedents and outcome variables has not yet formed mature conclusions. Therefore, this study focuses on how organizational fairness and social trust affect farmer participation, thereby affecting the performance of agricultural irrigation governance. Given the research hypotheses proposed above, and based on collective action theory, stakeholder theory, social cognition theory, and social exchange theory, the following theoretical hypothesis model is constructed as shown in Figure 1:

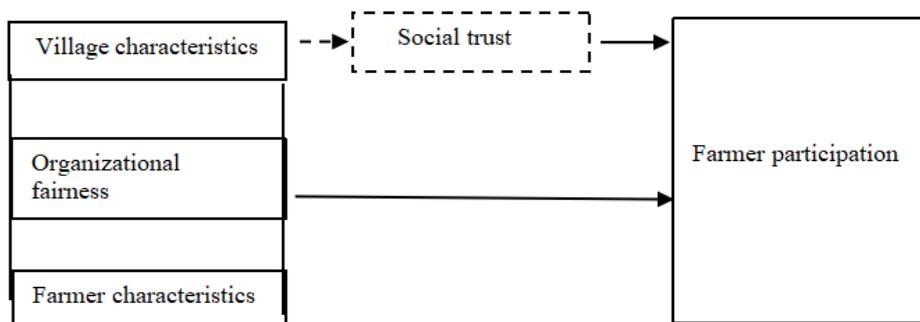


Figure 1 Theoretical Hypothesis Model of Organizational Fairness and Social Trust on Farmer's Participation in Irrigation Governance Behavior

2. Variable processing

Organizational fairness, social trust, and farmer participation involve multivariate issues. Therefore, this article selects factor analysis to simplify the variables and analyze the validity and reliability of each indicator. The indicators of organizational fairness, social trust, and farmer participation were designed based on existing research, and the KMO values of each latent variable exceeded 0.7. The Bartlett's spherical test results were significant, and Cronbach's α All are above 0.8 (see Table 2), indicating that the data has good validity and reliability and is suitable for factor analysis.

Table 2 Validity and Reliability Analysis Results

Scale	KMO	Accumulated explanatory variance (%)	Cronbach's α
Organizational fairness	0.912	73.120	0.862
Social trust	0.927	76.466	0.914
Farmer participation	0.872	68.623	0.846

3. Construction of econometric models

Based on the measurement and analysis results of the above variables, first perform linear regression on the three variables of organizational fairness, social trust, and farmer participation. The regression equation is:

$$Y_{jion} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * jt + \beta_2 * tr + \sum_{i=3}^n (\beta_i * t_i) + \epsilon \dots \dots \text{Equation (1)}$$

Among them, the participation of farmers is represented as the dependent variable; Organizational fairness is represented as independent variable 1; Social trust is represented by tr as independent variable 2; Represents all control variables, and represents a random disturbance term.

Subsequently, the Bootstrap sampling test was used to examine the mediating role of social trust between organizational fairness and farmer participation in agricultural irrigation governance behavior.

4. Empirical analysis

4.1 OLS regression results

The OLS regression results are shown in Table 3. Model 1 is a model with only explanatory variables without control variables, while Model 2 is a model with control variables such as gender, age, education level, and income added to the explanatory variables.

Table 3 Summary of the Regression Model Content of Organizational Fairness and Social Trust on Farmer's Participation in Irrigation Governance Behavior

	R	R 2	Adjusted R 2	Standard error
Model 1	0.802	0.642	0.640	0.254
Model 2	0.814	0.645	0.642	0.246

In Table 3, the R of Model 1 is 0.802, R 2 is 0.642, and after adjustment, R 2 is 0.640; Model 2 has R=0.814, R 2=0.645, and adjusted R 2=0.642. Among them, R2 represents a comprehensive measure of the degree of fit of the regression model. According to the model summary table, the adjusted R2 of regression model 1 is 0.640, indicating that the explanatory power of the regression equation of model 1 has reached 64%; The adjusted R2 for regression model 2 is 0.642, indicating that the explanatory power of the regression equation in model 2 has reached 64.2%. Assuming that both H1 and H2 are valid.

4.2 Mediation effect testing

This article is based on the Bootstrap sampling test method to conduct a mediation effect test, with a sampling frequency of 5000 times. The test results, as shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, indicate that the direct effect of organizational fairness on farmer participation is 0.164, the mediating effect is 0.196, and the total effect is 0.360. The mediating effect

accounts for 54.72%, and the confidence interval of the model does not include 0, indicating a significant mediating effect. Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that the research hypothesis H3 is valid.

Table 4 Analysis of the mediating effect of social trust

effect	path	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effects	Organizational fairness → Farmer participation	0.1642	0.0234	0.1168	0.2092
Indirect effects	Organizational fairness → Social trust	0.4738	0.0501	0.3810	0.5766
	Social trust → Farmer participation	0.3526	0.0362	0.2851	0.4281
Total effect	Organizational fairness → Farmer participation	0.3598	0.0227	0.3045	0.4124

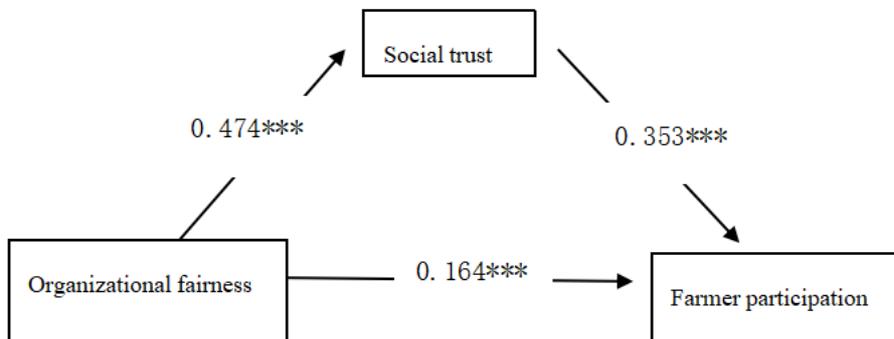


Figure 2 Indirect and direct effects of organizational fairness and social trust on farmer participation

Discuss

This article provides empirical evidence that organizational fairness and social trust affect the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance, enriches research on customer participation, expands theoretical research on organizational behavior, and proposes possible new paths for agricultural irrigation governance in China. Specifically, firstly, to improve and perfect the distribution system and decision-making participation mechanism, and promote the enhancement of farmers' perception of fairness. Encourage farmers to actively participate in agricultural irrigation affairs, pay attention to exploring the education and training functions of irrigation cooperation organizations, continuously improve the fairness concept and awareness of participating farmers, thereby effectively maintaining the fairness of agricultural irrigation system organization, promoting the willingness and action of farmers to participate; Secondly, establish a social trust mechanism for the governance of agricultural irrigation systems. Enhancing mutual trust, reducing governance friction, and lowering governance transaction costs are conducive to achieving collective actions in agricultural irrigation management and improving the performance of agricultural irrigation governance; Thirdly, attach importance to the participation of farmers and improve the performance evaluation mechanism for farmland irrigation management. Taking the route of "coming from the masses, going to the masses" and constructing a "bottom-up" performance evaluation mechanism for farmland irrigation system governance can not only fully understand whether farmers are satisfied with the governance status of the farmland irrigation system, but also facilitate the government's design of more reasonable farmland irrigation system governance plans, which helps to provide fair supply of farmland irrigation systems between different regions and stimulate the enthusiasm of farmers to participate in the management and

management of farmland irrigation systems, Improve governance performance. The analysis of organizational fairness and social trust in this article is still relatively rough. In the future, it can be further divided into more detailed categories to analyze the differences in the roles of different types of organizational fairness and social trust in agricultural irrigation governance.

Summary and suggestion

This article is based on the IAD framework and investigates the effects of organizational fairness and social trust on the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance behavior. The results indicate that firstly, organizational fairness has a significant positive impact on the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance behavior. Farmers are respected in participating in agricultural irrigation activities and believe that the relevant institutional procedures are fair. Farmers are willing to interact with village officials, and the frequency of interaction increases, deepening mutual understanding. Everyone can treat each other sincerely, increasing their satisfaction with water use. Their free riding behavior will be reduced, and the performance of agricultural irrigation governance will be improved; Secondly, social trust has a significant positive impact on the participation of farmers in agricultural irrigation governance. Trust is the foundation of cooperation. The trust between farmers, between farmers, and between farmers and village committees or farmers using water associations enables information to be shared, reducing the cost of information search in agricultural irrigation. At the same time, trust reduces negotiation costs and lowers transaction costs throughout agricultural irrigation, thereby promoting the generation of farmers' willingness to participate and the implementation of actions; Thirdly, social trust plays a mediating role between organizational fairness and farmer participation in agricultural irrigation governance. Organizational fairness can significantly enhance the institutional and interpersonal trust of farmers, and their institutional and interpersonal trust have a positive driving effect on their participation in agricultural irrigation governance.

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