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Disciplinary Identity as the Missing Link: How Organizational Support Shapes—or Fails to Shape—the Scholarship of Teaching among Art Faculty in a Chinese Local University

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Article

Keywords:

Posted Date: November 13th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11327378/v1

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Disciplinary Identity as the Missing Link: How Organizational Support Shapes—or Fails to Shape—the Scholarship of Teaching among Art Faculty in a Chinese Local University

Abstract

Three decades after Boyer's call to recognize teaching as scholarly work, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) remains unevenly institutionalized, especially in practice-based disciplines such as art and design, where embodied, tacit knowledge resists scholarly formats. Drawing on a qualitatively led mixed-methods case study in the art school of a local university in western China, this paper asks how organizational support is converted—or fails to be converted—into SoTL competence among art faculty. Data comprise a census survey of 92 faculty members, 10 in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and institutional documents. Results reveal an uneven profile: strong identification with teaching as scholarly work, moderate inquiry-based instructional design capacity, and weaker engagement in evidence-based reflection and public dissemination. Hierarchical regression shows perceived organizational support predicted SoTL competence only in the first model, losing significance once educational leadership was added; leadership in turn lost significance once perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics entered the model ($\Delta R^2 = .319$), emerging as the strongest predictor. Qualitative analysis illuminates the mechanisms: formal support met conversion barriers in decoupled policies, misaligned resources, and fragmented collegial culture, while multi-level leadership was pseudo-distributed—formally dispersed yet substantively uncoordinated. The study advances disciplinary identity—developed primarily from the qualitative analysis—as an interpretive filter conditioning whether and how organizational support becomes SoTL competence, with implications for faculty development across Asia-Pacific higher education.

Keywords
scholarship of teaching and learning; organizational support; disciplinary identity; art and design education; educational leadership; Chinese higher education

Introduction

In 1990, Ernest Boyer published *Scholarship Reconsidered*, urging the academy to recognize teaching—alongside discovery, integration, and application—as a legitimate form of scholarship. The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) movement that followed has since become a global enterprise, with dedicated journals, conferences, and institutional centers on every continent. Yet more than three decades on, a sobering question posed by Hutchings et al. (2011) still stands: has SoTL actually become institutionalized—woven into the reward structures, cultures, and daily practices of universities—or does it remain the pursuit of a committed minority, celebrated in rhetoric but marginal in consequence? Across higher education systems, the evidence points more often to the latter. Teaching remains what Shulman (1993) called "community property" in aspiration but pedagogical solitude in practice: faculty labor over their teaching largely alone, their insights rarely made public, opened to critique, or built upon by others.

This institutionalization gap is arguably widest in practice-based disciplines such as art and design. SoTL's defining norms—making teaching public, subjecting it to peer review, and building systematically on the work of others (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999)—were forged primarily within text-based disciplines and fit awkwardly with the epistemology of the studio. In art education, professional knowledge is substantially tacit (Polanyi, 1966), embodied in demonstration, critique, and the iterative making of artifacts; learning unfolds through what Schön (1987) described as the "reflective practicum" rather than through propositional argument. When institutional SoTL frameworks demand that such knowledge be rendered as explicit

evidence and journal articles, art faculty face a double bind: either translate their practice into alien genres or remain invisible to the very systems meant to recognize scholarly teaching. Healey (2000) argued early on that SoTL must be pursued in discipline-sensitive ways, yet discipline-specific accounts of how SoTL takes hold—or fails to—in art and design remain scarce.

The Chinese context sharpens these tensions. Over the past two decades, China's massified higher education system has subjected universities to intensifying evaluation regimes in which research output dominates prestige and promotion (Zhao et al., 2026). Local universities—the teaching-intensive institutions that educate the majority of Chinese undergraduates—face acute resource constraints while being pressed to demonstrate both teaching quality and research productivity (Zhou et al., 2021). Within them, early-career faculty navigate heavy teaching loads, uncertain promotion prospects, and a pervasive teaching–research role conflict (Wang & Wang, 2024). Art schools housed in comprehensive, non-art universities occupy a doubly marginal position: their studio-based pedagogy and creative outputs sit uneasily within evaluation systems designed around the journal article, and their disciplinary voice is easily drowned out in institutions whose prestige rests elsewhere. Recent reforms have begun to gesture toward recognizing pedagogical achievement—teaching-focused promotion tracks now exist on paper in some institutions—but such provisions remain exceptions within systems still calibrated to the journal article and the competitive grant.

It is against this backdrop that the present study is situated. In the school of art of a local university in western China, formal organizational support for teaching is far from absent: teaching awards exist, curriculum reform grants are offered, faculty development workshops run regularly, and promotion documents have begun to gesture toward recognizing pedagogical

achievement. Yet encounters with faculty reveal a persistent puzzle—strong personal commitment to teaching coupled with strikingly thin engagement in the public, cumulative, evidence-based practices that define SoTL. Support, it seems, is present in the institution's formal structures but absent in its effects. This disjuncture points to a theoretical black box at the heart of SoTL institutionalization research: by what mechanisms is organizational support converted—or blocked from being converted—into SoTL competence, particularly in disciplines whose knowledge traditions diverge from SoTL's default assumptions?

This paper opens that black box through a qualitatively led, explanatory sequential mixed-methods case study. It asks three questions: (1) What characterizes the dimensional profile of art faculty's SoTL competence? (2) How are perceived organizational support, educational leadership, and perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics associated with the development of that competence? (3) Through what mechanisms does organizational support succeed or fail to translate into SoTL competence, and what role does disciplinary identity play in conditioning that translation? Drawing on a census survey of 92 faculty members, 10 in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and institutional documents, the study traces both the statistical associations and the lived mechanisms linking institutions to individuals. The survey covers the school's full faculty body (N = 92), with analyses attending to the early-career subsample (n = 39); the interview strand concentrates on early-career teachers' lived experience of support and constraint. Consistent with the case study logic, the paper makes no claim to statistical generalization; its ambition is analytic generalization—using a strategically chosen case to refine theory (Yin, 2018).

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literatures—SoTL and its institutionalization, SoTL in art and design, organizational support theory, educational

leadership, disciplinary identity, and faculty development in China—and identifies the gap this study addresses. The conceptual framework section then presents the study's guiding model and its empirically driven revision. The methodology section details the mixed-methods case study design, followed by findings, discussion, and implications for policy and practice. In doing so, the paper offers both an empirical account of a rarely studied population—art faculty in China's local universities—and a theoretical refinement with relevance beyond the case: a model of SoTL development in which disciplinary identity filters organizational influence.

Literature Review

SoTL: From Boyer to Institutionalization

Boyer's (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered* proposed four interdependent scholarships—discovery, integration, application, and teaching—arguing that the work of the professoriate had been impoverished by the exclusive prestige accorded to discovery. Teaching, Boyer contended, could itself be scholarly when it entailed deep disciplinary understanding, rigorous preparation, and critical reflection on student learning. Shulman (1993) sharpened the argument: for teaching to count as scholarship rather than merely scholarly teaching, it must become "community property"—made public, opened to critique, and built upon by others, thereby ending "pedagogical solitude." Hutchings and Shulman (1999) subsequently formalized the distinction between scholarly teaching (teaching informed by the literature and reflective practice) and the scholarship of teaching (systematic inquiry into student learning that is public, peer-reviewed, and cumulative), a distinction that has organized the field ever since.

Efforts to operationalize SoTL followed. Trigwell et al. (2000) proposed a multidimensional model encompassing being informed about teaching and learning, reflection, communication, and conception of teaching, while Kreber and Cranton (2000) and Kreber (2002) differentiated teaching excellence, teaching expertise, and the scholarship of teaching,

foregrounding disciplined reflection on experience as the dividing line. Yet as the movement matured, scholarly attention shifted from defining SoTL to a harder question: why has it proven so difficult to institutionalize? Hutchings et al. (2011), revisiting the movement after two decades, found SoTL thriving in networks, conferences, and publications but still peripheral to the reward systems, workload models, and cultural norms of most institutions. The institutionalization problem, in their account, is not primarily conceptual but organizational and cultural: SoTL requires not only willing individuals but enabling environments—and the mechanisms by which environments enable or constrain SoTL remain underspecified. That underspecification is the starting point for the present study.

SoTL in Art and Design Disciplines

Healey (2000) argued that SoTL cannot be a one-size-fits-all enterprise: because disciplines differ in what they count as knowledge, evidence, and legitimate inquiry, the scholarship of teaching must itself be discipline-sensitive. Few disciplines test this proposition more sharply than art and design. The signature pedagogy of these fields is the studio—what Schön (1987) described as the "reflective practicum," in which students learn by doing under the guidance of a coach, and where knowledge is demonstrated as much as it is stated. Professional knowing in such settings is substantially tacit: as Polanyi (1966) observed, "we can know more than we can tell," and the art teacher's expertise resides in embodied judgment exercised through demonstration, desk critique, and the curation of exemplars.

This epistemology complicates each of SoTL's defining moves. Frayling's (1993) classic distinction between research *into*, *for*, and *through* art and design captures the field's long-standing unease with conventional research genres: inquiry conducted *through* practice produces knowledge embedded in artifacts and processes that resists propositional summary—though Frayling's *through* still requires that process and discovery be made communicable, a demand

SoTL shares rather than a warrant for confining SoTL to the journal article. Sullivan (2010) has argued that art practice itself constitutes a legitimate form of research, while Borgdorff (2012) documents the persistent legitimacy struggles of artistic research within the academy. When SoTL frameworks—built around explicit research questions, systematic evidence, and text-based publication—encounter these traditions, the result is often misrecognition: either art faculty contort their practice into alien formats, or their scholarly engagement with teaching remains invisible to institutional accounting. The consequence is a distinctive SoTL predicament in art and design: not indifference to teaching, but a structural difficulty in converting rich pedagogical practice into the public, cumulative forms that SoTL requires. Understanding how organizational environments mediate that conversion is therefore especially urgent in these disciplines.

Organizational Support Theory in Higher Education

Perceived organizational support (POS) theory offers a lens on how institutional environments shape individual action. Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined POS as employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, showing that such beliefs strengthen affective commitment and discretionary effort. Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) review of the literature identified three major antecedents of POS—fairness of procedures and resource distribution, supervisor support, and favorable job conditions including rewards and developmental opportunities—and demonstrated its robust association with commitment, engagement, and performance.

Translating POS into higher education requires attention to the university's distinctive features. Unlike the firms in which POS was developed, universities are loosely coupled organizations in which "support" reaches faculty through multiple, sometimes contradictory channels: promotion criteria, funding schemes, teaching centers, workload policies, and the daily signals sent by academic leaders. Faculty do not simply receive support; they interpret it,

weighing formal promises against lived experience. Institutional theory alerts us to the possibility of systematic decoupling: as Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued, organizations often maintain formal structures as "myth and ceremony" to secure legitimacy while actual practice follows a different logic. A university may proclaim teaching-centered values while its promotion system continues to reward research above all—a disjuncture that faculty quickly learn to read. POS research has concentrated on other occupational groups (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002); applications to university faculty remain comparatively scarce—e.g., Guan et al.'s (2014) survey of faculty at Chinese universities—and rarely in connection with SoTL specifically. Most recently, Wang et al. (2026) investigated early-career academics' experiences of organizational support in Chinese universities, mapping the supports that matter most for scholar development. Their study establishes *which* supports count; the present study takes up the adjacent question of *why formally equivalent support yields divergent outcomes*, proposing disciplinary identity as the conditioning mechanism. The question of how organizational support—as perceived, interpreted, and sometimes discounted by faculty—relates to the development of scholarly teaching thus remains open.

Educational Leadership as a Translational Mechanism

If organizational support is the resource, educational leadership is arguably the mechanism by which it is translated into lived working conditions. Leaders interpret ambiguous policies, allocate scarce resources, model valued practices, and construct the local meanings within which faculty decide what is worth investing in. Several leadership traditions illuminate this translational role. Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) emphasizes vision-building and intellectual stimulation; instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003) focuses on the direct management of teaching and learning conditions; and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001) reconceives leadership not as a property of individuals but as practice

"stretched over" leaders, followers, and situations—an apt frame for universities, where influence flows through committees, departments, and informal networks as much as through formal hierarchy.

Of particular relevance is the layer of middle leadership—deans, associate deans, and department chairs—who occupy the hinge between institutional policy and departmental life (Bryman, 2007). These actors determine which university initiatives reach faculty in usable form, whose work gets recognized, and whether collegial spaces for pedagogical exchange actually function. In Chinese local universities, where administrative hierarchy is pronounced and dual governance structures add further complexity (Ruan et al., 2024), the translational work of middle leaders may matter even more—yet so does the risk of translation failure: leadership that is formally distributed across levels but substantively uncoordinated, leaving faculty to navigate contradictory signals alone. As the findings will show, this study encountered precisely such a pattern, in which multi-level leadership took the form of what the analysis terms "pseudo-distributed leadership."

Academic and Disciplinary Identity

A third strand of theory concerns identity. Becher and Trowler's (2001) *Academic Tribes and Territories* established that disciplines are not merely administrative groupings but cultures—"tribes" with distinctive norms, values, and criteria for what counts as legitimate intellectual work. Henkel (2000) showed how academics' identities—their sense of who they are as scholars and professionals—mediate their responses to policy change: reforms are embraced, resisted, or indifferently absorbed depending on whether they resonate with established self-understandings.

For art faculty, disciplinary identity is typically anchored in creative practice: one is first a painter, designer, or musician who also teaches, and the artist's identity carries a prestige that the "teacher" identity may not. This creates a characteristic tension: institutional SoTL agendas ask faculty to reimagine themselves as systematic inquirers into student learning, while their disciplinary socialization valorizes the studio, the exhibition, and the performed work. Whether faculty experience organizational support for teaching as meaningful may therefore depend less on the objective quantity of support than on whether that support affirms or threatens their disciplinary self-understanding (Henkel, 2000; see also Jones & Galloway, 2011). Identity, in this account, functions not as another independent predictor alongside support and leadership, but as an interpretive filter: the lens through which support signals are read, credited, or discounted. This proposition—developed inductively from the present study's findings—constitutes its central theoretical contribution.

SoTL and Faculty Development in China

The Chinese higher education context gives these dynamics a particular inflection. Massification has dramatically expanded enrollments while evaluation regimes—from ministry assessments to global rankings aspirations—have intensified research expectations across institutional types (Ngok, 2008; Zhao et al., 2026). For early-career faculty, the resulting teaching–research role conflict is widely documented: heavy teaching loads coexist with promotion criteria that privilege publications and grants, producing a structural squeeze on pedagogical investment (Liu et al., 2022). Local universities, which lack the resources and prestige of elite institutions, feel these pressures acutely even as they carry the heaviest teaching missions (Li et al., 2024).

Within this landscape, art and design education occupies an ambiguous position. On one hand, state promotion of cultural and creative industries has expanded art programs; on the other,

evaluation metrics designed for the sciences sit uneasily with studio pedagogy and creative outputs. China's recent evaluation reforms have acknowledged such metric tensions without fully resolving them (Zhao et al., 2026); for art disciplines, whose outputs resist bibliometric capture, the tension is especially acute. The SoTL discourse, meanwhile, has entered Chinese higher education more recently than in Anglophone systems, often rendered through the local language of "teaching research" (see Chng & Looker, 2013, for a broader Asian perspective on this translation). Empirical accounts of how Chinese art faculty navigate these cross-cutting demands—and of what enables some to develop sustained scholarly engagement with teaching—remain rare. This study addresses that empirical gap while using the Chinese case to speak to the broader, cross-national problem of SoTL institutionalization in practice-based disciplines.

Synthesis: The Black Box

Taken together, the literatures reviewed here establish several premises but leave a central mechanism unexplained. We know that SoTL institutionalization remains incomplete even where the movement is strongest (Hutchings et al., 2011); that disciplines—and art and design in particular—reshape what SoTL can mean in practice (Healey, 2000; Borgdorff, 2012); that perceived organizational support shapes professional commitment and effort (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) but may be decoupled from practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); that leadership translates institutional intentions into working conditions (Spillane, 2006); and that disciplinary identity conditions how academics respond to reform (Henkel, 2000; Becher & Trowler, 2001). What remains unexplained is how these elements combine in the concrete work of becoming a scholarly teacher. We know that SoTL scholars navigate identity conflicts and configurations in liminal spaces (Simmons et al., 2013), that departmental as well as university-level cultures—and the educational leaders who sustain them—shape whether SoTL takes hold (Webb & Tierney, 2020), and that creative-arts disciplines pose distinctive challenges for what counts as

scholarship (Ardzejewska et al., 2025). Yet we still lack an account of the conversion mechanism itself: through what pathways organizational support reaches (or fails to reach) the individual faculty member, how teachers interpret specific support events, and how those interpretations connect to observable SoTL practices in a Chinese local art college. In short, the conversion mechanism from organizational support to SoTL competence in this setting remains a black box. The present study opens it.

Conceptual Framework: Organizational Support as Filtered through Disciplinary Identity

The initial model guiding this inquiry was straightforward: perceived organizational support and educational leadership were treated as parallel antecedents of SoTL competence, with disciplinary identity positioned as a third, co-equal predictor. This input–output logic mirrors much of the existing faculty development literature, in which institutional factors are assumed to act on individuals more or less directly, and in which the residual variance not explained by support is attributed to individual differences. The empirical work reported here did not cooperate with that logic. As the findings will show, support was statistically associated with SoTL competence only in the first model—its conditional association fading once leadership was entered—while leadership remained significant until perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics entered the model, at which point they emerged as the strongest predictor. Qualitative evidence converged on the same revision: faculty did not passively receive support; they read it, credited or discredited it, and acted on it selectively, with their reading governed by whether institutional signals affirmed or threatened their sense of self as artists who teach.

The revised framework therefore reconceives disciplinary identity not as another variable alongside support and leadership but as an **interpretive filter** positioned between institutional inputs and the individual's SoTL competence. Organizational support—funding schemes, awards, promotion criteria, development programs—and multi-level leadership—signals from

university administrators, the college dean's office, and department heads—do not act on SoTL competence in a vacuum. Their signals are interpreted through the teacher's disciplinary self-understanding. A grant opportunity can be experienced as an enabling resource or as an irrelevant ritual depending on whether the teacher sees grant-seeking as something "people like us" do. A dean's encouragement of teaching inquiry can land as genuine recognition or as empty ceremony depending on whether the teacher trusts that the institution's espoused values match its reward practices. Identity, in this framework, does the filtering work: it interprets, trusts, discounts, or deflects support signals before they can become SoTL competence.

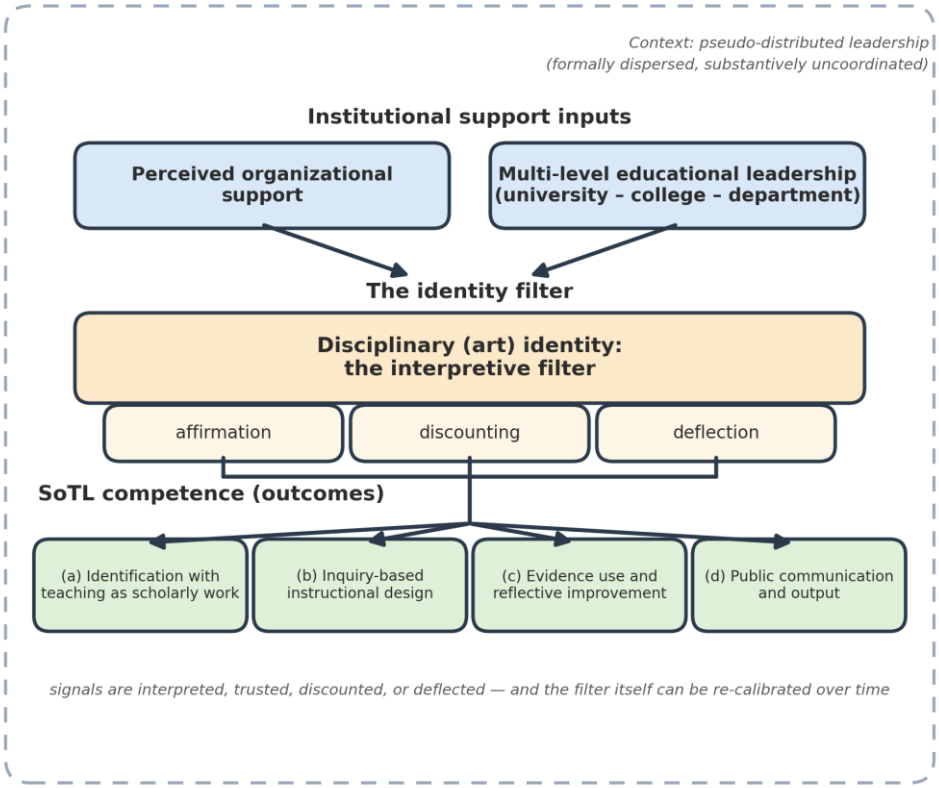
The model can be described in three layers, with a contextual backdrop:

1. **Institutional support inputs (layer 1):** formal organizational support (perceived organizational support as experienced by faculty) and multi-level educational leadership practices (university, college, department). These are the resources and signals the institution emits.
2. **The identity filter (layer 2):** artistic disciplinary identity—faculty members' identification with their creative discipline, their artist-versus-teacher self-understanding, and their beliefs about what counts as legitimate intellectual work in their field. The filter has three characteristic operations: *affirmation* (signals consistent with identity are amplified), *discounting* (signals read as inconsistent with or irrelevant to identity are set aside), and *deflection* (signals perceived as threatening to identity provoke resistance or withdrawal). The filter is not static: identity can be re-authored over time—a process the case analysis terms *re-calibration*—shifting which operation dominates and re-opening channels that a settled identity had kept closed.

3. **SoTL competence (layer 3):** the four-dimensional outcome—identification with teaching as scholarly work, inquiry-based instructional design, evidence use and reflective improvement, and public communication and output.

Surrounding all three layers is the **contextual backdrop of pseudo-distributed leadership**: leadership that is formally distributed across the university, college, and department levels but substantively uncoordinated, emitting contradictory signals. This backdrop matters because it is precisely what makes the identity filter decisive. When institutional signals are coherent and credible, faculty can follow them with relatively little interpretive labor; when signals are fragmented and decoupled from reward practices—as institutional theory predicts under conditions of legitimacy-seeking (Meyer & Rowan, 1977)—teachers fall back on the most stable interpretive resource available: who they understand themselves to be.

Fig. 1 summarizes this interpretive framework.



The framework generates three precise research questions:

- **RQ1.** What characterizes the dimensional profile of art faculty's SoTL competence in a local Chinese university?
- **RQ2.** How are perceived organizational support, educational leadership, and perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics associated with the development of SoTL competence?
- **RQ3.** Through what mechanisms does organizational support succeed or fail to translate into SoTL competence, and what role does disciplinary identity play in conditioning that translation?

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a single-case design (Yin, 2018), situated in the school of art of a local (non-elite, teaching-intensive) university in western China. The case was selected strategically rather than conveniently: a local university art school represents the institutional type where China's teaching mission is heaviest, resources thinnest, and the tension between studio-based disciplinary traditions and metric-driven evaluation regimes most acute—making it a revelatory setting for examining how organizational support is (or is not) converted into SoTL competence. Consistent with case study logic, the study claims analytic rather than statistical generalization: the case is used to refine theory about the identity-filter mechanism, not to estimate population parameters.

The design is a qualitatively led, explanatory sequential mixed-methods case study. A census questionnaire survey of the school's faculty established the distributional pattern of SoTL competence and its statistical associations with organizational support, leadership, and perceived disciplinary characteristics; the qualitative strand—semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and institutional document analysis—then traced the mechanisms behind those patterns. Quantitative and qualitative data were integrated at the interpretation stage, with the qualitative findings given explanatory priority.

Data Sources

Institutional documents. Promotion regulations, teaching award policies, curriculum reform grant guidelines, and faculty development plans were collected and analyzed to reconstruct the formal support architecture—what the institution officially offers and rewards.

Questionnaire survey. A census survey was administered to the school's full faculty body (N = 92, valid responses). The early-career subsample (n = 39) comprises faculty aged 40 or below who had not yet been promoted to associate professor, following the definition used in

the original doctoral study; it provides the demographic context for the interview strand, which concentrates on early-career teachers' lived experience.

Semi-structured interviews. Ten interviews were conducted with six early-career art faculty members, two department heads (one of whom is also an early-career teacher), the college dean, and one deputy director of the university's Academic Affairs Office. Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and was transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol probed teachers' experiences of organizational support, their reading of leadership signals at different levels, their disciplinary self-understanding, and concrete episodes of pedagogical inquiry, reflection, and public sharing.

Non-participant observation. The researcher observed teaching-related events and collegial settings (e.g., faculty development workshops, teaching exchange activities) to triangulate interview accounts against situated practice.

Instruments

Four scales were used, all rendered on five-point Likert formats and adapted to the art-education context:

- **SoTL competence scale** (16 items, four dimensions: identification with teaching as scholarly work; inquiry-based instructional design; evidence use and reflective improvement; public communication and output). Developed for this study from the SoTL definitional literature (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Trigwell et al., 2000; Healey, 2000). Total-scale Cronbach's α = .748, acceptable for the study's purposes.
- **Perceived organizational support scale** (8 items), adapted from Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) perceived organizational support scale to the college context. Cronbach's α = .596. This is a marginal reliability, and all inferences involving this measure are interpreted cautiously;

results are treated as indicative patterns to be corroborated qualitatively rather than as precise estimates.

- **Perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics scale** (8 items), developed for this study to capture faculty members' perceptions of their discipline's distinctive characteristics (practice-based epistemology, subjective evaluation criteria, stylistic individuality, interdisciplinarity, and industry linkage). Cronbach's α = .592, likewise marginal. The scale measures perceived characteristics of the discipline, not personal identity as such; it is used here to detect directional patterns consistent (or inconsistent) with the qualitative evidence, not to support fine-grained claims or to validate the identity-filter interpretation directly.
- **Educational leadership practice scale** (11 items), developed for this study to capture department-level leadership practices supporting teaching. The scale captures department-level practices; leadership dynamics spanning the university, college, and department levels are examined through the qualitative strand. Cronbach's α = .681. One item from the original 12-item pool was removed after pilot item analysis; all reported statistics for this scale are based on the 11-item version.

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics and reliabilities of all scales. Given the single-source self-report design, a Harman's single-factor test was conducted on all 43 Likert items (final scale versions) as a post-hoc check for common method bias; the first unrotated principal component accounted for 14.7% of the total variance, well below the conventional 50% threshold, suggesting that severe common method bias is unlikely—though as a post-hoc diagnostic this check cannot rule out method effects entirely (see Limitations).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and reliabilities of the study scales (N = 92).

Scale / Dimension	**Items**	**Cronbach's α**	**M**	**SD**
SoTL competence (total)	16	.748	3.578	0.542
Identification with teaching as scholarly work	—	—	3.845	0.701
Inquiry-based instructional design	—	—	3.622	0.670
Evidence use and reflective improvement	—	—	3.370	0.825
Public communication and output	—	—	3.476	0.616
Perceived organizational support	8	.596	3.374	0.548
Perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics	8	.592	3.520	0.578
Educational	11	.681	3.442	0.531

leadership practice				

Note. N = 92 (full faculty census; early-career subsample n = 39). Dashes indicate dimension-level item counts and reliabilities, which were not reported separately.

Quantitative analysis (N = 92) employed descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and hierarchical ordinary least squares regression in SPSS (version 26). Composite scores approximated normality: skewness ranged from −0.06 to 1.05 and excess kurtosis from −0.85 to 3.46 (Table S1); Q–Q plots showed no severe departures, and bootstrapped standard errors (5,000 resamples) produced 95% confidence intervals consistent with the ordinary least squares estimates (Table S2), justifying the use of Pearson correlations and ordinary least squares regression. Regression diagnostics showed no multicollinearity (VIF = 1.12–1.62; Table S2) and a Durbin–Watson statistic of 1.58. All tests were two-tailed with $\alpha = .05$. Demographic variables (gender, age band, teaching experience, highest degree, and rank) were examined as potential controls but jointly explained little variance ($R^2 = .11$; $F(5, 86) = 2.08$, $p = .075$) and were omitted from the final hierarchical models, which focus on the three focal constructs. Exact p values, unstandardised coefficients, standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals are reported for all regression coefficients; R^2 and ΔR^2 are reported as effect-size measures, with $f^2 = .061$ for Model 2 and $f^2 = .616$ for Model 3. All statistics were recomputed directly from the raw questionnaire data; the leadership scale uses the 11-item version throughout. Qualitative analysis proceeded through iterative thematic coding of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, with case narratives constructed through within-case and cross-case comparison (Yin, 2018).

Positionality and Ethics

The author held a middle leadership position at the participating institution during data collection. This insider position afforded unusual access and contextual understanding but also entailed formal authority over some participants, raising risks of over-rapport, blind spots, and perceived pressure to participate. Reflexivity measures included maintaining a reflexive journal throughout fieldwork, conducting member checks with interviewees on interpretive summaries, and discussing emergent interpretations with a colleague outside the case institution. Interview participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from all interviewees; questionnaire respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could decline to answer. All identifying information has been removed, and the interviewees are reported here under newly assigned pseudonyms (Cases A, B, and C) that replace the coding scheme of the original doctoral study. Quantitative data are reported only in aggregate. Ethical approval and consent details are reported in the Ethics declaration at the end of the article.

Limitations (Preview)

The study's constraints are stated plainly because they bound what the findings can claim. Two key measures carry marginal reliabilities ($\alpha = .596$ and $\alpha = .592$), which limits the precision of the quantitative estimates. The data are cross-sectional, so no causal ordering can be established statistically. The single-case design supports analytic generalization only. And the author's insider position, while managed through reflexivity measures, inevitably shapes interpretation. These limitations are revisited in the Discussion.

Findings

The Quantitative Pattern: An Uneven Dimensional Profile

The survey reveals a moderate overall level of SoTL competence ($M = 3.578$, $SD = 0.542$, $N = 92$) with a distinctive internal profile: faculty report strong identification with teaching as scholarly work ($M = 3.845$, $SD = 0.701$), moderate capacity for inquiry-based instructional design ($M = 3.622$, $SD = 0.670$), and markedly weaker engagement in public

communication and output (M = 3.476, SD = 0.616) and evidence use and reflective improvement (M = 3.370, SD = 0.825). Commitment, in other words, is high; reported engagement is relatively lower. The profile dips precisely at the points where SoTL demands that private pedagogical knowing be rendered systematic, evidential, and public—the "short-board" pattern anticipated by the studio epistemology discussed in the literature review.

The correlational pattern is equally telling (N = 92). Perceived organizational support correlated positively with SoTL competence ($r = .333$, $p = .001$), as did educational leadership ($r = .380$, $p < .001$), but perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics correlated far more strongly ($r = .666$, $p < .001$); support and perceived characteristics were themselves modestly associated ($r = .261$, $p = .012$). In hierarchical regression (N = 92), perceived organizational support alone explained 11.1% of the variance in SoTL competence (Model 1: $R^2 = .111$, $F(1, 90) = 11.24$, $p = .001$; $\beta = .333$, $t(90) = 3.35$, $p = .001$; $b = 0.330$, 95% CI [0.134, 0.525]). Adding educational leadership (Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .051$, $F(1, 89) = 5.47$, $p = .022$; leadership $\beta = .282$, $t(89) = 2.34$, $p = .022$; support $\beta = .166$, $t(89) = 1.37$, $p = .173$) improved prediction modestly, but once perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics were entered (Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .319$, $F(1, 88) = 54.18$, $p < .001$; total $R^2 = .482$, $F(3, 88) = 27.25$, $p < .001$), leadership's association also became non-significant ($\beta = .133$, $t(88) = 1.37$, $p = .175$; support $\beta = .098$, $t(88) = 1.02$, $p = .310$) while perceived characteristics emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .598$, $t(88) = 7.36$, $p < .001$; $b = 0.560$, 95% CI [0.409, 0.712]). Full model results are reported in Table 2. This pattern is consistent with the proposed filtering mechanism—perceived disciplinary characteristics absorbing the explanatory work previously attributed to support—but it is explicitly not a formal causal mediation test: with cross-sectional data and a small sample, temporal ordering cannot be established, and the marginal reliabilities of the support and characteristics measures further

counsel restraint. The quantitative pattern is therefore best read as a directional signal that the qualitative analysis must explain: support matters, but its influence appears to be conditioned by how faculty perceive their discipline. Notably, perceived characteristics correlated most strongly with the evidence-use/reflection dimension ($r = .623$, $p < .001$) and least with the value-identification dimension ($r = .440$, $p < .001$).

Table 2. Hierarchical regression predicting SoTL competence (N = 92).

Predictor	**Model 1 b (SE)**	**β**	**Model 2 b (SE)**	**β**	**Model 3 b (SE)**	**β**
Perceived organizational support	0.330 (0.098)	.333**	0.164 (0.119)	.166	0.097 (0.095)	.098
Educational leadership	—	—	0.288 (0.123)	.282*	0.136 (0.100)	.133
Perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics	—	—	—	—	0.560 (0.076)	.598***
R^2	.111		.163		.482	
ΔR^2	.111**		.051*		.319***	
F	F(1, 90) = 11.24**		F(2, 89) = 8.63***		F(3, 88) = 27.25***	

Note. b = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. All tests were two-tailed. Exact p values: Model 1, perceived organizational support p = .001; Model 2, perceived organizational support p = .173, educational leadership p = .022; Model 3, perceived organizational support p = .310, educational leadership p = .175, perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics p < .001. R^2 and ΔR^2 are reported as effect-size measures (f^2 = .061 for Model 2; f^2 = .616 for Model 3).

Three Trajectories: The Filter at Work

The interview strand produced three contrasting developmental trajectories among faculty exposed to formally similar support environments. The three cases were purposively selected for maximum contrast in identity configuration and support uptake rather than for career-stage typicality; contrasts were defined by the combination of identity configuration (affirming, strained, or re-authored) and support uptake (amplified, discounted, or re-activated) evident across the interview accounts. They are presented here as Cases A, B, and C—newly assigned pseudonyms. To protect anonymity, identifying details have been disguised, and each narrative reconstructs a single participant's trajectory, synthesizing that participant's interview with related observations and documentary materials. Case C, a longer-serving teacher, is included as a contrastive case: his trajectory reveals the filter changing over time, a dynamic the early-career cases alone could not show.

Case A — "the sprinter": support amplified through identity alignment. Case A teaches fashion and apparel design, having joined the university in the mid-2010s. In the early 2020s she led a provincial teaching-reform project on outcome-based (OBE) techniques in fashion design, through which she ran two rounds of classroom experiments with a comparison group, collected and compared student performance data, and converted the inquiry into public outputs: a university journal article, a paper in a provincial-level journal, a teaching achievement

award, a university-level classroom teaching competition award, and an award in a provincial teaching innovation competition. "With this teaching-reform project behind me," she reflected, "when I later entered competitions, I knew what I was doing and how to do it." What distinguishes her trajectory is not the volume of support she received but her stance toward it: her disciplinary identity was still forming, and she experienced institutional signals—grants, competitions, course projects—as affirmations of an emerging self-understanding as someone who could become excellent at teaching. Support was interpreted as credible, taken up actively, and converted into cumulative SoTL competence: each success supplied resources, channels, and recognition that amplified the next. In filter terms, this is *affirmation*: signals consistent with an open, forming identity pass through and are magnified.

Case B — "the stalled": support discounted against a threatened identity. Case B graduated from a well-regarded professional art academy and has taught at the university for nearly a decade. Despite strong professional foundations, she remains a lecturer, has won no teaching award above the college level, and has published almost no teaching-research work. Her narrative is dominated by a sense of exhaustion: she describes herself as a spinning top—constantly in motion yet going nowhere—cycling through the same courses each semester while drowning in teaching loads, forms, and meetings. Her disciplinary identity is firmly anchored in the artist self, and she experiences the institution's metric regime—journal articles, competitive grants—as fundamentally alien to what she understands good art teaching to be. Formal support exists around her, but she reads it as illegitimate: teaching awards feel like rituals calibrated to the wrong game, and development programs feel disconnected from studio realities. In filter terms, this is *discounting shading into deflection*: support signals are judged inconsistent with

identity and set aside, and the evaluation regime is experienced as a threat to the artist self, producing withdrawal rather than engagement.

Case C — "the transformer": identity re-authored, support re-activated. Case C is a senior lecturer with more than fifteen years of service, trained in oil painting. For much of his career he taught heavy loads of foundational painting courses, saw his promotion prospects capped at the lecturer rank as a "pure teaching" type, and spent the better part of a decade, by his own account, coasting. The turning point came about four years ago with the wave of AI-generated painting—an external shock he experienced as an existential threat to his professional identity. Unlike colleagues who dismissed or ignored the development, he taught himself digital art, entered interdisciplinary exchanges with faculty from an engineering school, and, with the college leadership's explicit backing, opened new courses bridging traditional and digital media. He describes the experience as regrowth as a teacher. Crucially, the support structures that enabled his breakthrough—college-level endorsement, course-development channels—had existed for years; what changed was the identity through which they were read. Once his self-understanding was re-authored around a new artistic frontier, previously inert support became usable. In filter terms, this is *re-calibration*: a transformed identity re-opens the channel that a settled identity had kept closed. What the materials document is the re-activation of support use and renewed teaching engagement; they do not yet show the systematic inquiry and public dissemination that would mark a complete SoTL trajectory.

Together, the three cases illustrate the filter mechanism in its three operations. Case A shows affirmation under an open identity; Case B shows discounting and deflection under a threatened one; Case C shows that the filter is not fixed—when identity is re-authored, the same institutional environment yields different outcomes. Formal support was present in all three

settings; what varied was whether, and how, it passed through identity. The cases also differ in career stage, workload, and access to sponsorship, which this analysis does not fully disentangle; identity is offered here as the consistent interpretive thread across these differences, not as the sole cause of the divergent outcomes.

The Organizational Backdrop: Pseudo-Distributed Leadership

These individual trajectories unfolded against a consistent organizational backdrop. Leadership across the university, college, and department levels was formally distributed—each level had its mandates, committees, and initiatives regarding teaching—yet substantively uncoordinated. University-level policies gestured toward recognizing pedagogical achievement; college-level implementation translated them into metrics that privileged research outputs; department-level practice, in turn, often reduced teaching development to perfunctory workshops and paperwork. Faculty encountered not a coherent support system but a stack of contradictory signals: be innovative, but publish in indexed journals; invest in teaching, but only research counts for promotion; collaborate, but compete for the same scarce grants.

Interviewees described this decoupling in concrete terms. The deputy director of the Academic Affairs Office characterized teaching as "really just a matter of the bottom line" in promotion decisions—"it's all about research." One department head named the hard threshold that empties teaching awards of value: "three C-journal articles—stuck fast... If you can't publish three C-journal articles... even a teaching achievement award counts for nothing." Another department head captured the gap between rhetorical and substantive support: "Encouragement—there is plenty of encouragement. But I don't see what encouragement is for; I just want someone to solve real problems." And an early-career teacher explained why grassroots

teaching-research activities had hollowed out: "People stop voicing their ideas, because they feel nothing will be adopted anyway... and then they just lie flat" (躺平, disengaging entirely).

This pseudo-distributed pattern—formally dispersed, substantively decoupled—matters for the present argument because it is the condition that makes the identity filter decisive. When signals are coherent, teachers can follow them with little interpretive effort; when they are contradictory, teachers must decide for themselves which signals to credit, and the most stable basis for that decision is identity. Case B's withdrawal and Case C's selective uptake are both, in part, responses to the same incoherence: lacking trustworthy institutional guidance, each fell back on a different self-understanding to adjudicate what the institution was "really" asking. The leadership analysis is developed at length elsewhere; here it serves as the contextual explanation for *why* the filter, rather than the support inputs themselves, does the main explanatory work in this case.

Discussion

Theoretical Contribution: Identity as Explanatory Filter

The study's central theoretical claim is that disciplinary identity should be modeled not as one more predictor of SoTL development but as the interpretive filter that conditions how organizational influences reach the individual. This reframes a familiar empirical regularity—support correlates with SoTL competence—by specifying the condition under which the correlation materializes. The hierarchical regression pattern, in which the conditional associations of support and then leadership faded as further predictors entered and perceived disciplinary characteristics emerged dominant, together with the three contrasting trajectories under formally similar support environments, jointly suggests that the influence of support is conditioned by identity: its effects seem to depend on whether faculty identity renders it legible, legitimate, and actionable. That support is a filtered experience rather than an objective stock is

underscored by a striking divergence at the same organizational level: the two department heads interviewed described the college's support environment in opposite terms—one reporting no obstacles from the college, the other describing repeated advocacy on teachers' behalf that "basically ended in failure." This filtering proposition emerges from the case materials and is offered as an interpretive account, not a causally verified mechanism.

This account extends the SoTL-identity literature in two ways. First, where Jones and Galloway (2011) described the tension between academics' disciplinary identities and their identification with SoTL, the present study specifies the *mechanism* of that tension—affirmation, discounting, deflection—and offers case-based evidence that identity may operate as the interpretive link between institution and individual. Second, where Henkel (2000) showed identities mediating responses to policy change in general, this study locates that mediation at the precise point where SoTL institutionalization most often stalls: the conversion of formal support into the public, cumulative, evidence-based practices that define scholarship. Art faculty are a strategic case for this argument precisely because their disciplinary epistemology—tacit, embodied, artifact-centered (Polanyi, 1966; Schön, 1987)—maximizes the distance between institutional SoTL templates and disciplinary self-understanding, making the filter's operation visible in a way that text-based disciplines may obscure.

Competing Accounts

Two alternative readings fit the present material and deserve explicit acknowledgment. First, a demand–resource account: what participants described as exhaustion and withdrawal—Case B's "spinning top"—is equally readable as the familiar pattern of high teaching demands combined with constrained resources, without invoking identity. Second, provision may simply have been thin: the study has no objective record of what was offered—grant amounts, workload relief, participation rates—so it cannot rule out that the thin engagement documented here

reflects a shortfall in provision rather than a failure of conversion. These alternatives cannot be adjudicated with the present data; the filter account is preferred because the quantitative pattern and the three contrasting trajectories converge on it, whereas the alternatives leave the systematic divergence among Cases A, B, and C unexplained.

Practical Implications for Local Universities

If identity filters support, then faculty development in local universities should be designed to pass through the filter rather than collide with it. Three implications follow. First, evaluation reform must recognize the outputs through which art faculty already enact scholarly seriousness—exhibitions, curated works, studio-based pedagogical innovations—rather than requiring translation into journal articles as the price of recognition; China's recent evaluation reforms have acknowledged this tension without resolving it (Zhao et al., 2026), and local universities have latitude in how they operationalize national directives. Second, teaching development programs should be anchored in the discipline's own traditions of critique and demonstration—the desk crit, the studio review—rather than imported wholesale from generic pedagogical templates, so that participation affirms rather than threatens the artist-teacher identity. Third, leadership at the college and department levels should attend to signal coherence: the pseudo-distributed pattern documented here suggests that adding more support initiatives without coordinating what they collectively say about teaching's value may add to the incoherence that participants described, since incoherence drives faculty back onto identity alone as their guide.

Limitations

The limitations previewed in the Method section bear repeating as they qualify every claim above. The perceived organizational support and perceived artistic disciplinary characteristics scales carry marginal reliabilities ($\alpha = .596$ and $\alpha = .592$), so the quantitative

estimates are indicative rather than precise; the study's evidentiary weight rests deliberately on the qualitative strand. Moreover, the characteristics scale measures perceived features of the discipline, not personal identity as such, so the identity-filter interpretation is developed primarily from the qualitative materials, with the quantitative pattern serving as consistent background rather than direct validation. The educational leadership practice scale shows acceptable reliability (11 items, $\alpha = .681$). The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference: the regression pattern is consistent with a filtering mechanism but does not demonstrate one, and longitudinal work is needed to trace how identity configurations and support experiences co-evolve. The Harman's single-factor check reported in the Method section is a post-hoc diagnostic and cannot fully rule out method effects; multi-source data would provide a stronger safeguard. The single-case design permits analytic generalization to theory but no statistical generalization to Chinese art faculty at large, let alone to other disciplines or systems. Finally, the author's insider position, though managed through reflexive journaling, member checks, and external peer discussion, inevitably colors interpretation; an outsider replication would be a valuable check.

Conclusion

Organizational support for teaching was present in this case—in policies, grants, awards, and workshops—yet it repeatedly failed to become SoTL competence. The missing link, this study argues, is disciplinary identity: the interpretive filter that conditions whether support signals can be converted into the systematic, evidential, public practices of SoTL. When identity affirmed institutional signals, support was amplified (Case A); when identity read those signals as alien or threatening, support was discounted or deflected (Case B); and when identity was re-authored, dormant support was re-activated (Case C). The statistical pattern consistent with this account—the conditional associations of support and leadership fading as each subsequent predictor entered the model—converges with the lived trajectories, even as the cross-sectional

design forbids causal claims. These claims are interpretive and bounded by the single-case, cross-sectional design; they are offered as a theory-refining account rather than as causal estimates.

If identity is taken seriously as the filter, the faculty development agenda shifts. The question is no longer only "how much support does the institution provide?" but "does this support arrive in a form that the teacher's disciplinary self can recognize as its own?" For art faculty in China's local universities, support that affirms the artist-teacher identity is more likely to travel; support that ignores or threatens it is more likely to be quietly set aside, however generously it is funded. Designing support that passes through the filter, rather than breaking against it, is the practical frontier this study points toward.

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Figure legend

Fig. 1 Disciplinary identity as the filter between organizational support and SoTL competence. Arrows depict the interpretive framework proposed from the case study, not empirically verified causal paths

Data availability

The de-identified item-level survey data and processed analysis data, survey instruments, bilingual codebook and transformation documentation, SPSS syntax, Python reproduction script, statistical output files, semi-structured interview guide, and qualitative coding framework are provided in the Supplementary Information and the accompanying Data and Analysis Package. Full interview transcripts, non-participant observation records, and institutional documents are not shared because they contain information that could identify participants or the case institution; the ethics approval requires that identifiable participant information, full interview transcripts, and original platform technical information not be disclosed.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the faculty members who participated in this study. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethics declaration

The research ethics committee of the author's institution recorded an Approved decision for this study (the committee name, decision date, and reference number are provided in the cover letter and accompanying ethics approval document to preserve double-anonymous review). As stated in the approval form, data collection had been completed when the application was submitted;

the review covered the existing study materials, their ethics compliance, and the confidentiality arrangements for publication and peer review. All research was performed in accordance with the Committee's approved confidentiality and consent arrangements, the Measures for Ethical Review of Science and Technology (Trial) (2023), and applicable national laws and regulations. Informed consent was obtained from all participants: survey participants received study information before responding and were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could decline to answer; interview participants signed informed-consent forms before the interviews. Names, staff numbers, contact details, IP addresses, and submission times were removed from analysis files.

Author contributions

The author conceived and designed the study, developed the survey and interview instruments, collected and analysed the data, and wrote the manuscript.

Supplementary information

Supplementary information accompanies this paper and includes the survey questionnaire, the interview guide, the codebook, the de-identified dataset, the coding framework, and the analysis syntax.

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

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