Hadron Formation in Deep-Inelastic Positron Scattering in a Nuclear Environment

The HERMES Collaboration

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The influence of the nuclear medium on the production of charged hadrons in semi-inclusive deep-inelastic scattering has been studied by the HERMES experiment at DESY using a 27.5 GeV positron beam. The differential multiplicity of charged hadrons and identified charged pions from nitrogen relative to that from deuterium has been measured as a function of the virtual photon energy $\nu$ and the fraction $z$ of this energy transferred to the hadron. There are observed substantial reductions of the multiplicity ratio $R_{hM}$ at low $\nu$ and at high $z$, both of which are well described by a gluon-bremsstrahlung model of hadronization. A significant difference of the $\nu$-dependence of $R_{hM}$ is found between positive and negative hadrons. This is interpreted in terms of a difference between the formation times of protons and pions, using a phenomenological model to describe the $\nu$- and $z$-dependence of $R_{hM}$.

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In deep-inelastic scattering (DIS) an incident lepton interacts with a target via the exchange of a gauge boson between the lepton and a parton (a quark or an antiquark). The struck parton is subjected to a sequence of hard parton- and soft hadron-production processes, resulting in the formation of hadrons. By carrying out DIS experiments on nuclear targets, it is possible to study the hadronization process during the time period immediately after the quark has been struck by the virtual photon [1]. In the simplest scenario the nucleus, which has the size of a few fm, acts as an ensemble of targets with which the struck quark or the produced hadron may interact. If an interaction occurs, the number of leading hadrons produced per DIS event and per nucleon is reduced compared to that for a free nucleon. The reduction of hadron multiplicity depends on the distance traversed by the struck quark before the hadron is formed, the (unknown) quark-nucleon cross section and the (known) hadron-nucleon cross section. Hence, measurements of the multiplicity of hadrons produced on nuclei can provide information on the space-time structure of the hadronization process.

In this paper we present the results of deep-inelastic positron scattering measurements on $^{14}$N and $^{2}$H targets carried out by the HERMES Collaboration at DESY. The reduction of the hadron multiplicity on $^{14}$N relative to that on $^{2}$H has been determined from the data. Deuterium was used as a reference target instead of hydrogen to account for the difference in scattering from neutrons or protons.

In the past, semi-inclusive lepton production of hadrons from nuclei was studied at SLAC with electrons [2] and at CERN and FNAL with high-energy muons by EMC [3] and E665 [4]. In these experiments the effect of the nucleus on the early stages of hadronization appeared in the dependence of the multiplicity ratios on the energy $\nu$ of the virtual photon (as defined in the target rest frame). The effect is most prominent if $\nu$ ranges from a few GeV to a few tens of GeV. The $\nu$-range covered by the present experiment ($7 - 23$ GeV was used in the present analysis) is low enough to be optimal for studying the influence of the nuclear medium on the hadronization process, while it is still high enough to be in the scaling regime, i.e. for the DIS-framework to apply.

The theoretical description of hadronization is difficult, as it is impossible to treat the problem in a perturbative QCD-framework. Although the nuclear environment can be used to study certain aspects of the hadron formation process, the same difficulties apply to the description of nuclear effects on hadronization. Therefore, one has to resort to model calculations. The HERMES data on hadron production from nuclei are compared to the gluon-bremsstrahlung-model calculations of Ref. [5], and the phenomenological intranuclear reinteraction model of Refs. [6,7].

In the gluon-bremsstrahlung model, the struck quark is assumed to lose energy via the emission of gluons until, in the case of meson formation, a $q\bar{q}$ configuration is formed consisting of the struck quark and an antiquark originating from the last emitted gluon [8,9]. If this last step occurs inside the nucleus, the nuclear environment affects the hadron multiplicity because the meson interacts with the nuclear medium with a sizable cross section. Moreover, the interaction of the initial quark with the nuclear medium causes the emission of additional soft gluons. On the other hand, the initial — possibly small — $q\bar{q}$ configuration represents a color dipole which may have a reduced probability of interaction with its environment (Color Transparency [10,11]). An estimate of the combined effect of the soft gluon radiation and Color Transparency on the multiplicity ratio in the framework of the gluon-bremsstrahlung model [6] yields 2–3% for the kinematics of the present experiment.

An important parameter characterizing the hadronization process is the formation time (in the target rest frame) $t_f^h$, which is defined as the mean time elapsed between the moment the quark is struck and the creation of the leading hadron $h$. In the gluon-bremsstrahlung model [6], the probability distribution of $t_f^h$ may be evaluated for given values of $z$ and $\nu$, where $z$ represents the fraction of the energy $\nu$ transferred to the hadron. The mean value of $t_f^h$ exhibits an approximate $(1 - z)\nu$-dependence. In the phenomenological models [3,4], on the other hand, the formation time is assumed to be equal to the product of a
time constant $\tau_h$ intrinsic to the kind of hadron produced, and a time-dilation factor $\nu/m$ where $m$ represents a mass. In the past, several functional forms for $t_f^h$ have been considered — for instance $t_f^h = \tau_h z \nu/m_h$ or $t_f^h = \tau_h \nu/m_q$, where $m_h$ ($m_q$) represents the mass of the hadron (constituent quark). Alternatively, one may take for $m$ the kinematic expression derived by Berger [14] for the mass of the offshell struck (current) quark. Under the assumption that the mass of the initial quark and that of the produced hadron can be neglected, one finds $t_f^h = \tau_h \sqrt{z (1 - z)/p_T^2 \nu}$, where $p_T$ represents the component of the hadron momentum transverse to the direction of the virtual-photon momentum.

The experimental results are presented in terms of the multiplicity ratio $R^h_M$, which represents the ratio of the number of hadrons of type $h$ produced per DIS event for a nuclear target of mass $A$ to that from a deuterium target (D):

$$R^h_M(z, \nu) = \frac{N_h^A(z, \nu)}{N_h^D(z, \nu)} \left/ \frac{N_e^A(\nu)}{N_e^D(\nu)} \right.$$ (1)

with $N_h(z, \nu)$ the number of semi-inclusive hadrons in a given $(z, \nu)$-bin, and $N_e(\nu)$ the number of inclusive DIS positrons in the same $\nu$-bin. For the purpose of the present analysis, the multiplicity ratio was determined as a function of $\nu$ and $z$, while integrating over all other kinematic variables. The data for $R^h_M$ are only weakly dependent on either $Q^2$ or $p_T^2$.

The HERMES experiment at DESY makes use of the 27.5 GeV positron storage ring of HERA. The $^{14}$N and $^2$H target gases are injected into a tubular open-ended storage cell through which the beam passes. The cell provides a 40 cm long target with areal densities of up to $6 \times 10^{15}$ nucleons/cm$^2$ for $^{14}$N. The dead time of the data acquisition system was observed to be less than 5% even at the highest luminosities of about $10^{33}$ cm$^{-2}$s$^{-1}$.

In the HERMES spectrometer both the scattered positrons and the produced hadrons are detected and identified within an angular acceptance of $\pm 170$ mrad horizontally, and $\pm (40 - 140)$ mrad vertically. The trigger for scattered positrons was formed from a coincidence between several scintillator hodoscope planes and a lead-glass calorimeter. The trigger required an energy of more than 3.5 GeV deposited locally in the calorimeter. Positron identification was accomplished using the calorimeter, the second hodoscope, which functioned as a preshower counter, a transition-radiation detector, and a threshold gas Čerenkov counter filled with a mixture of $N_2$ and $C_4F_{10}$ at atmospheric pressure. This system provided positron identification with an average efficiency of 99% and a hadron contamination of less than 1%. Hadrons with an energy $E_h \geq 1.4$ GeV could be distinguished from leptons. Furthermore, in the momentum range between 4 and 13.5 GeV, pions were identified with the help of the Čerenkov counter.

Events were selected by imposing constraints on the four-momentum squared $-Q^2$ of the virtual photon, the invariant mass of the photon-nucleon system $W$, the Bjorken scaling variable $x = Q^2 / 2m_p \nu$ (with $m_p$ the proton mass), and the energy fraction of the virtual photon $y = \nu/E_{beam}$. For each event it was required that $x > 0.06, Q^2 > 1$ GeV$^2$.

![FIG. 1. Scatter plot of the hadron (or pion) energy $E_h$ ($E_\pi$) and the energy transfer $\nu$. Lines representing constant values of $z$ are shown as well.](image-url)
$W > 2 \text{ GeV}$, and $y < 0.85$. The requirements on $W$ and $y$ are applied to exclude nucleon resonances and to limit the magnitude of the radiative corrections, respectively. The constraints on $(x, Q^2)$ are applied to exclude the kinematic region where an anomalous ratio of the longitudinal to transverse cross sections for inclusive deep-inelastic scattering from $^{14}\text{N}$ has been observed [18]. The anomaly can be interpreted as being due to the absorption of the virtual photon by a correlated quark pair [19] or by a nuclear meson [20]. Either interpretation breaches the assumption of incoherent lepton-quark scattering, inherent in deep-inelastic scattering.

The instrumental threshold on $E_h$ is larger for pions than for hadrons. This implies, as is illustrated in Fig. 1, that e.g. the pion $z$-acceptance is restricted to rather large values as $\nu$ decreases. Hence, to ensure that the $\nu$-dependence of the multiplicity ratio does not correspond to a strong variation of the mean $z$-value, the presented data are confined to $z > 0.2$ and $\nu > 7 \text{ GeV}$ for hadrons and $z > 0.5$ and $\nu > 8 \text{ GeV}$ for pions.

Under the kinematic constraints described above, the number of selected DIS events is $0.88 (1.05) \times 10^6$ for $^{14}\text{N}$ ($^2\text{H}$) if $\nu > 7 \text{ GeV}$. For $\nu > 8 \text{ GeV}$ these numbers decrease to $0.76 \times 10^6$ for $^{14}\text{N}$ and $0.91 \times 10^6$ for $^2\text{H}$. The number of hadrons with $z > 0.2$ equals $227 (288) \times 10^3$, and the number of pions with $z > 0.5$ is $36 (48) \times 10^3$ for $^{14}\text{N}$ ($^2\text{H}$).

The HERMES data have been corrected for radiative processes using the codes of Refs. [21,22]. As is commonly done [3], the contributions from nuclear elastic scattering, quasi-elastic scattering and DIS were treated independently. Coherence-length effects [23] are not included in this approach. The code of Ref. [22] was modified to include the measured semi-inclusive DIS cross sections for $^{14}\text{N}$. The size of the radiative correction was found to be negligible in most of the kinematic range, with a maximum of 3% at the highest value of $\nu$. The correction is so small because most of the contributions to the radiative corrections cancel in the multiplicity ratio.

The systematic uncertainty of the present data is 3% or less. The uncertainty is small due to the fact that double ratios of semi-inclusive and inclusive yields are measured. The main contributions to the systematic uncertainty arise from radiative corrections (< 2%), overall efficiency (< 1.5%), and diffractive $\rho^0$-meson production (<1.5%) [25]. It has been verified that the acceptance for semi-inclusive hadron production is the same for both targets, by plotting the multiplicity ratio versus hadron angle and $p_T^2$. These ratios are constant to within the expected statistical precision except for the data beyond $p_T^2 = 1 \text{ GeV}^2$, where an enhancement similar to that reported by Ref. [3] is observed. Because of the steep decline of semi-inclusive hadron production with $p_T^2$, this enhancement does not contribute to the present data. The nuclear attenuation of pions resulting from the decay of $\rho^0$-mesons formed in the frag-
mentation process (which constitute about 20% of the semi-inclusive pion yield) was found to have a \( \nu \)-dependence similar to that of the direct-fragmentation pions. No correction for this process was therefore applied.

The results for the multiplicity ratio for all charged hadrons with \( z > 0.2 \) are presented as a function of \( \nu \) in Fig. 2 together with data of previous experiments. In the top panel, existing data on copper \([3]\) are shown together with the original phenomenological calculations that were used to interpret the data. In the lower panel of Fig. 2 the present data on \( ^{14}\text{N} \) are displayed together with data of previous experiments at CERN \([4]\) and SLAC \([5]\) on \( ^{12}\text{C} \). The SLAC data point is lower than the present data by five standard deviations. For the SLAC data no systematic uncertainty is available from the original publication. Moreover, no corrections were made for the target-mass dependence of the inclusive DIS cross section, an effect that was not known at the time of the analysis. Such a correction is needed because a semi-inclusive cross-section ratio was measured in a 4% increase of \( R_{M}^{h} \), which reduces the discrepancy by a factor of two.

The present data for \( R_{M}^{h} \) are observed to increase with increasing \( \nu \) and approach unity for high \( \nu \), which is consistent with the EMC data. This behaviour suggests that for large values of \( \nu \), hadron formation takes place mainly outside the target.

![Fig. 3. The multiplicity ratio as a function of \( z \) for all charged pions (open circles) and all charged hadrons including pions (closed squares). The full curve represents a gluon-bremsstrahlung model calculation for pions. The dotted, dashed and dot-dashed curves represent phenomenological formation-time calculations.](image)

TABLE I. Parameters used in the phenomenological one and two time-scale model calculations shown in Figs. 2 and 3. In the left two columns the line type used in the figures and the expression used for the formation time are listed, while the three columns on the right give the values of the three cross sections (in mb) used in the calculations.

| line type | \( t_{f}^{h} \) (fm/c) | \( \sigma_{q} \) | \( \sigma_{s} \) | \( \sigma_{h} \) |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| \( c_{h} \times z\nu \) | 0 | 20 |
| \( (1 - \ln(z))z\nu/(\kappa c) \) | 0.75 | 20 | 20 |
| \( (1 - \ln(z))z\nu/(\kappa c) \) | 0 | 20 | 20 |
| \( (1 - \ln(z))z\nu/(\kappa c) \) | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| \( c_{h} \times (1 - z)\nu \) | 0 | 0 | 25 |

For the interpretation of the data it is useful to provide some details on the calculations from Ref. \([5]\) shown in the upper panel of Fig. 2. Similar calculations are also used when discussing the \( z \)-dependence of the \( ^{14}\text{N} \) data below. The long-dash dotted curve represents a calculation in the framework of the one time-scale model \([4]\), in which it is assumed that the influence of the nuclear medium on the hadron multiplicity is due to quark-nucleon scattering for \( t < t_{f}^{h} \) and hadron-nucleon scattering for \( t > t_{f}^{h} \), with cross sections \( \sigma_{q} \) and \( \sigma_{h} \) respectively. In the calculation shown \( t_{f}^{h} = c_{h}z\nu \) with \( c_{h} = 1 \text{fm/(GeVc)} \) \([1]\) has been assumed, and the parameters listed in table I have been used. The other curves in fig. 2 are three examples of two time-scale model calculations, in which the formation time is assumed to be given by \( t_{f}^{h} = (1 - \ln(z))z\nu/(\kappa c) \) with \( c \) the speed of light and \( \kappa \approx 1 \text{GeV/fm} \) the string tension \([1,2,3]\). In these models an additional parameter \( \sigma_{s} \) is introduced that represents the interaction between the open string and the medium occurring after a time interval \( \tau_{c} = t_{f}^{h} - z\nu/(\kappa c) \). The expressions for \( t_{f}^{h} \) and \( \tau_{c} \) have been derived from the color-string model \([2,3]\). The parameters used for the three calculations shown are also listed in table I.
The long-dashed curves give a fairly good description of both the Cu and the present $^{14}$N data. However, it should be noted that a two time-scale model calculation with $\sigma_q = \sigma_h$ is equivalent to a one time-scale model calculation except with a different expression for $t_f$. For this reason we will use only the one time-scale model when presenting the final parameterization of the data near the end of this paper.

In order to further investigate the various possible descriptions of the hadron formation process, the $z$-dependence of $R_M^h$ was extracted from the present measurements for both hadrons and identified pions. The multiplicity ratio for hadrons (pions) with $\nu > 7$ GeV (8 GeV) is presented as a function of $z$ in Fig. 4.

No significant difference between data for hadrons and pions is observed here. The decrease of $R_M^h$ with $z$, as observed at large $z$ for the first time by the present experiment, is at variance with the phenomenological-model calculations, which predict an increase of $R_M^h$ with $z$. This is demonstrated by the long-dash-dotted (one time-scale) and long-dashed (two time-scale) calculations shown in Fig. 2. The curves have been obtained in the same way as the corresponding curves in Fig. 2 only using the $^{14}$N matter density instead of the one for Cu. It is concluded that the $(z, \nu)$-dependence of the formation time is not given by the simple expressions \[ \sigma_q = c_h(1 - z)\nu, \] mentioned above. It is significant that the expression for $t_f$ implied by the kinematic $z$-dependence of the invariant mass of the current quark \[ \sigma_q = 0 \text{ mb and } \sigma_h = 25 \text{ mb} \] also fails to reproduce the observed dependence of $R_M^h$ on either $z$ or $p_T^h$.

The solid curve, on the other hand, gives a good account of the data. It represents the result of a calculation for $R_M^h$ within the gluon-bremsstrahlung model \[ \sigma_h = 25 \text{ mb} \] \[ \text{dotted curve in Fig. 4} \]. It is concluded that in the context of the phenomenological models, the interaction of to rescattering is largest, explaining the decrease of $R_M^h$ at high $z$.

In order to be able to study phenomenological concepts such as the quark-nucleon cross section $\sigma_q$ and the formation time $t_f$, the $z$-dependence of $R_M^h$ has been parameterized in the framework of the one time-scale model. Using the expression \[ t_f = c_h(1 - z)\nu, \] as suggested by the gluon-bremsstrahlung model \[ \text{dotted curve in Fig. 4} \], it has been obtained. It represents the result of a fit with the factor $c_h$ a free parameter, and $\sigma_q$ and $\sigma_h$ set to the values listed in table 2. It is concluded that no significant difference between data for charged pions with $\nu > 0.5$ is shown in Fig. 4.

The $\nu$-dependence of the multiplicity ratio for charged pions with $z > 0.5$ is shown in Fig. 4. The calculation with the gluon-bremsstrahlung model \[ \sigma_h = 25 \text{ mb} \] \[ \text{dotted curve in Fig. 4} \] is in fair agreement with the data. A similar description of the data is obtained using the one time-scale model with \[ t_f = c_q(1 - z)\nu, \] assuming $\sigma_q = 0 \text{ mb and } \sigma_h = 25 \text{ mb} \] (dotted curve in Fig. 4). In a two-parameter fit with $c_q$ and $\sigma_q$ treated as free parameters, the resulting value for $\sigma_q$ is consistent with zero with an uncertainty of only $\pm 0.4 \text{ mb (or } \pm 0.2 \text{ mb if the hadrons are considered). It is concluded that in the context of the phenomenological models, the interaction of...
the struck quark with the nuclear medium is indeed very small, which is in accordance with the results of Refs. [5,15]. Hereafter, we extract further information about the hadron formation time within the context of the one time-scale model with \( \sigma_q \approx 0 \).

The results presented thusfar concern the sum of positive and negative hadrons. For both pions and hadrons the charge states can be studied separately. In the upper (lower) panel of Fig. 5, the multiplicity ratios for positive and negative hadrons (pions) are displayed as a function of \( \nu \).

The same requirements on the variable \( \nu \) as before have been imposed: \( \nu > 7 \) GeV for the hadron data and \( \nu > 8 \) GeV for the pion data. However, for the purpose of this comparison and in order to increase the pion statistics, the requirement \( z > 0.2 \) has been imposed in both cases.

The data show that the multiplicity ratio \( R_{M}^{\pi}_+ \) is the same for positive and negative pions. This observation — together with the fact that the \( \pi^\pm - N \) interaction cross sections are about equal — is consistent with the likely assumption that the formation times for the two charge states are the same.

In contrast, a significant difference is observed between \( R_{M}^{h}_+ \) of positive and negative hadrons. Since the multiplicity ratios of positive and negative pions are measured to be equal, this difference must be caused by other hadrons, such as protons, antiprotons and kaons. A Monte Carlo study with the LUND model [26] has been performed in order to estimate the relative yield of various hadrons in the acceptance of the spectrometer. The study shows that the contribution of antiprotons (protons) to the negative (positive) hadron sample, averaged in the \( \nu \)-range of 3–23 GeV, equals 6\% (24\%). In the same kinematic range, the negative and positive kaon contributions are 10 and 13\%, respectively. Since the effects of the interaction between the struck quark and the nuclear medium are found to be small, only two effects may account for the observed difference between \( R_{M}^{h^+_\pi} \) and \( R_{M}^{h^-\pi} \): the difference in the cross sections [27] for rescattering of antiprotons (\( \approx 60 \) mb), protons (\( \approx 40 \) mb), negative kaons (\( \approx 23 \) mb) and positive kaons (\( \approx 17 \) mb), or possible differences between

the formation times of baryons and mesons. Noting that the effective hadron-nucleon cross sections, obtained as the weighted sum of individual hadron cross sections, are practically the same for the positive and negative hadron samples, the observed difference of \( R_{M}^{h^+_\pi} \) and \( R_{M}^{h^-\pi} \) is most likely due to differences in the formation times of pions, kaons and/or (anti)protons. Since the proton fraction in the positive hadron sample is four times larger than the antiproton fraction in the negative hadron sample, it is concluded that protons have a significantly larger formation time than pions. In order to substantiate this conclusion, additional data with good pion, kaon and proton identification are needed.

In the absence of a theoretical model predicting the observed difference between \( R_{M}^{h^+_\pi} \) and \( R_{M}^{h^-\pi} \), the data of Fig. 5 have been parameterized using the one time-scale model [8]. In these calcula-

![FIG. 5. Multiplicity ratios for hadrons including pions (top panel) and identified pions (bottom panel) as a function of \( \nu \). The open (closed) squares represent the positive (negative) hadrons. Identified pions are represented by open (positive) and closed (negative) circles. The curves are parameterizations of the data using the one time-scale model assuming \( t_f^h = c_h(1 - z)\nu \).](image-url)
tions, the formation time is assumed to be given by \( t_f^h = c_h(1 - z)\nu \) to ensure a proper description of the \( z \)-dependence of \( R_M^h \), and an effective hadron-nucleon cross section of 25 mb is used for all hadrons. Initially both \( \sigma_q \) and \( c_h \) were used as free parameters. In all four cases (\( h^+, h^-, \pi^+, \pi^- \)) the fits gave a good account of the data, while the fitted value of \( \sigma_q \) was found to be consistent with zero within uncertainties ranging from 0.3 mb for \( \pi^+ \) to 1.2 mb for \( h^- \). This implies that the dominant effect of the nucleus on \( R_M^h \) is due to hadron-nucleon interactions. Setting \( \sigma_q \) equal to zero, the fits were repeated yielding once more a good description of the data (see Fig. 5) and the following set of fit parameters:

- \( c_{\pi^-} = 1.38 \pm 0.21 \text{ fm/(GeVc)} \),
- \( c_{\pi^+} = 1.37 \pm 0.18 \text{ fm/(GeVc)} \),
- \( c_{h^-} = 1.32 \pm 0.16 \text{ fm/(GeVc)} \),
- \( c_{h^+} = 3.49 \pm 0.51 \text{ fm/(GeVc)} \).

The quoted uncertainties equal the quadratic sum of the statistical errors of the fit parameters and the variations of these parameters when the hadron-nucleon cross section is varied by \( \pm 2 \text{ mb} \). The fitted values of \( c_h \) quantitatively confirm our earlier conclusions concerning the equality of the formation times of positive and negative pions, and the large difference between the formation times of positive and negative hadrons.

In summary, high accuracy data on the attenuation of charged hadrons and identified pions in deep-inelastic scattering on \(^{14}\text{N}\) relative to \(^2\text{H}\) have been obtained by the HERMES experiment. The \( \nu \)-dependence of the multiplicity ratio of hadrons (\( h^+ \) and \( h^- \)) has a similar behaviour as the CERN muon [3] data. In the previously unexplored high \( z \)-region covered by the present experiment, a decrease of \( R_M^h \) with \( z \) is observed. This observation is in agreement with the prediction of the gluon bremsstrahlung model [3], but it is at variance with the prescription often used in phenomenological models that the hadron formation time is proportional to \( z \), and with the \( z \)-dependence implied by Ref. [3]. In contrast to what is observed for positive and negative pions, a difference is found in the \( \nu \)-dependence of \( R_M^h \) for positive and negative hadrons. This difference is interpreted to indicate that a proton has a larger formation time than a pion.

Additional measurements of hadronization in various heavy nuclei with pion, kaon and proton identification are needed to clarify the issues raised by the present data concerning formation-time differences of different kinds of hadrons. Such measurements are underway at HERMES.

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