Educational Social Movement of Indonesian Women from Pre-Independence to Reform Era

Afifah Nabila Afdhalia
University of Briwijaya, Malang
Email: afifa.jmb781@gmail.com

Siti Raudhatul Jannah
UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin, Jambi
Email: sitiraudhatuljannah@uinjambi.ac.id

Abstract: This article attempts to examine the gradation of the social movement of Indonesian women’s education from time to time, starting from the pre-independence era to the Reformation period. A long movement that does not exist in a vacuum arises from recognising women’s status to men who have always held an imperial position. This article itself is conducted in a descriptive qualitative technique with a historical thinking approach. The authors found that the imperial position of women is caused by many factors, both religious views that place women lower than men and a gradation in the social movement of education throughout the history of the life of the Indonesian nation, from the pre-independence era to the reformation era. Even the thought of upholding women’s rights as equal to men has existed since the pre-independence era, as can be seen from the fantastic Indonesian female figures, not only because of their thoughts and actions that predate their era but also because of their enormous concern. On efforts to emancipate women, such as those carried out by Dewi Sartika or RA. Kartini. This spirit has continued to develop from time to time to produce a social education movement driven by the two most prominent Islamic organisations in Indonesia, namely Muhammadiyah through its female organisation Aisyiyah and NU through the NU Muslimat movement produced many breakthroughs in the social education sector.

Keywords: Women’s Movement, Social Education, Islam, Indonesia

Abstrak: Artikel ini diupayakan menelisik gradasi gerakan sosial pendidikan wanita Indonesia dari masa ke masa, mulai dari masa pra kemerdekaan hingga masa Reformasi. Sebuah gerakan panjang yang tidak hadir di ruang hampa namun muncul dari sebuah kesadraan tentang posisi wanita vis a vis dengan pria yang selama ini senantia ada di posisi yang imperior. Artikel ini sendiri dilakukan dalam teknik kulitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan pemikiran historis. Hasilnya penulis menemukan bahwa posisi imperior wanita diakibatkan oleh banyak faktor termasuk di dalamnya pandangan keagamaan yang menempatkan wanita lebih rendah dibandingkan pria. Selanjutnya penulis juga menemukan adanya gradasi pergerakan sosial pendidikan di sepanjang sejarah kehidupan bangsa Indonesia, mulai dari masa pra kemerdekaan hingga reformasi. Bahkan pemikiran untuk menegakkan hak-hak wanita sederajat dengan pria telah ada sejak masa pra kemerdekaan, sebagaimana dapat dilollow dari figur-furig wanita Indonesia yang amat mengagumkan, tidak saja karena pikiran dan tindakan mereka yang mendahului zamannya, namun juga karena konsern mereka yang amat besar pada upaya emansipasi wanita, seperti yang dilakukan oleh Dewi Sartika ataupun RA. Kartini. Semangat inilah yang terus berkembang dari masa ke masa hingga menghasilkan gerakan sosial pendidikan yang dimotori oleh dua ormas Islam terbesar di Indonesia, yaitu Muhammadiyah melalui ormas kewenitannya Aisyiyah dan juga NU melalui pergerakan Muslimat NU yang dewasa ini telah menghasilkan banyak gebrakan di bidang sosial pendidikan.

Kata-kata kunci: Gerakan Wanita, Sosial Pendidikan, Islam, Indonesia.
I. Introduction

Woman as gender is described as a personification of meekness, motherhood, and in some cases synonymous with helplessness when confronted with men and their interests in various social or personal lives. Such a picture of women is seen in the solid patriarchal culture in Indonesia. However, discriminatory practices against women have been attempted to be justified by religious legitimacy, as many 'Kitab Kuning' have revealed. It is difficult for women to associate themselves with men because of the constraints imposed by culture, tradition, and religion.

The confinement of women, in particular, is legitimized by the 'Kitab Kuning' in the value of Mansour Fakih as a bitter consequence of historical realities that lasted centuries ago. According to Fakih, this happened because patriarchal traditions very much controlled the 'Kitab Kuning', which was a product of 'moslem classical scholars' in the mid-century, so it is not surprising that the 'Kitab Kuning' which male thinkers usually write raises a panoramic view of gender biases as an effort to maintain male supremacy over women.1

In the last few decades, women's awareness of the above situation appears to have begun to appear on the western horizon of the enlightenment in line with the increasing quality and quantity of women's education. Today’s Indonesian women are starting to realize their rights and strive to demand their rights to be treated equally with men.

The emergence of this joyful awareness is not a short struggle that can be achieved in two or three years; at least, women have gone through a long struggle to establish an equal existence with men. The long struggle of women in aligning themselves is what the author tries to highlight by presenting their social, educational movement in self-awareness efforts in their relationship with men.

Traditions and religious views that position women under men still bind Indonesian women in the pre-independence era of the nation. Discriminatory actions in the name of tradition and faith castrate women's rights. The primary cause of the denial of women's rights was the patriarchal culture that is strongly adhered to in Indonesian culture and religious teachings. Women, for example, are not permitted to leave the house unless accompanied by a 'muhrim'. Similarly, they are barred from receiving a proper education because women are only allowed to work in the kitchen. Pre-independence Indonesian women were marginalized under the power and control of men who were thought to be women leaders, whether in their personal, family or social lives, due to these difficult circumstances. Women have no rights before men in this case, and they are simply positioned as the second gender after men.

Women's rights in Islam have been distorted as a result of living in a private religious tradition. Patriarchal practices against women have instead tried to be legitimized by steering religious teachings, which are progressively verified and

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1Mansour Fakih (et. al.), Membincang Feminisme: Diskursus Gender Perspektif Islam, (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 1996), p. 245.
passed on by scholars from generation to generation. The Prophet was a man, and 
the 'Al-Qur'an' says in the form of a man shown in the masculinity of the verses is 
often used as justification by classical scholars to place men over everything'. This 
view has colored the course of Islamic history for centuries, which has also been 
embodied in the Islamic scientific tradition, especially 'Fiqh' and 'Tafsir', in its  
‘Kitab Kuning’.

The negative implications that the ‘Kitab Kuning’ had on women were 
indeed compelling, which Masdar F. Mas'udi described as a means of perpetuating 
males' superiority over women, arguing that most - if not all - the teachings in the 
‘Kitab Kuning’ took sides. In the interests of men and in its way has cornered 
women on marginal lines in religion. In terms of household affairs alone, Mas'udi 
found several teachings that castrate women's rights, among others: First, the right 
to apply only to men, while women are only the object of application; Second, 
because women are placed as the object of a marriage application, in the process of 
applying certain body parts of women are allowed to be seen by men, like 
merchandise that is still in the process of 'Khiar'; Third, the right to divorce is the 
domination of the husband, with the wife's right to divorce almost 
non-existent; Fourth, the wife obeys the husband as a leader in the family, even the wife 
must always fulfil the husband's request and obey his orders. Furthermore, the law 
of ‘Fiqh’ even allows a wife to leave ‘Sunnah Rasul’ (the Propet's order) if her 
husband wishes, such as ‘Puasa Sunnah’. A wife must always serve her husband 
whenever he desires in a biological relationship; according to the 'hadith,' a 
thousand angels will curse a wife who declines until dawn. Fifth, in urgent social 
needs such as visiting sick parents or worship purposes such as congregational 
prayer, wives are not permitted to leave the house without their husbands' 
permission2.

Nowadays, some views consider the trivialization of Islamic teachings, 
which becomes a terrifying spectre for Muslim women, especially in Indonesia. 
Women are expected to decline due to Islamic teachings, and they lack their space 
to progress on an equal footing with their peers. Unfortunately, women in parts of 
the Islamic world tend to accept this discriminatory treatment. They accept to be 
treated as a gentle gender and must be protected by men.

The above assessment is entirely inaccurate. In religious and traditional 
views that place women at the lowest point of marginality, it turns out that there 
are a handful of Indonesian women who have the awareness to move forward 
through various means in the limitations of their space and movement. The struggle of these women is very closely related to the socio-educational movement,

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*Kenamaan menunjukkan bahwa teks al-Qur’an selalu memakai dhamir pria untuk 
menyebut kata ganti Tuhan, demikian pula dengan kitab yang lainnya. Dengan demikian ada asumsi 
yang kemudian meyakini bahwa Tuhan adalah pria, karena itu pia memang mesti ditempatkan 
lebih tinggi dari wanita.

2 Masdar F. Mas'udi, Perempuan di antara Lembaran Kitab Kuning, dalam Lies M. Marcoes-Natsir 
and Johan Hendrick Meuleman (Ed.), Wanita Islam Indonesia dalam Kajian Tekstual dan 
Kontekstual, (Jakarta: INIS, 1993), p. 158.
which seeks to make their people aware of the situation they are facing. The following will describe the chronology of women's movements in chronological history in Indonesia.

II. The Social Movements for Women’s Education in Indonesia in the Pre-Independence and Old Order Period

Since the pre-independence era, there have been impressive figures of Indonesian women, not only because of their thoughts and actions that predate their era but also because of their exceedingly great concern for emancipation efforts. Woman among the few Indonesian female figures, Dewi Sartika and RA. Kartini. In this classification, female champion figures such as Djut Nyak Dien or Cut Mutia are not included in the classification because their struggle focuses more on the revolutionary physical struggle against the colonialists. However, it does not mean that their struggle does not contribute to the struggle for women in emancipation.

Dewi Sartika (born 1884) is an Indonesian female figure who established a special self-help school for Indonesian women. The school is even called the first school for women in Indonesia. Sartika founded his school in 1904 with the initial name "School for the Wife", which was subsequently called the "School for the Mainstream of Wives." Until 1912, the school had nine branches, widely spread in Bandung district. Sartika's dedication to the education of her people is shown by her great concern for women's education, even though almost all of her life is dedicated to the advancement of women's education. This is done out of a strong desire to free women from the wilderness of ignorance and create better, enlightened horizons filled with the liberating light of knowledge3.

As for RA. Kartini is a female figure who is very thick with the struggle for emancipation hidden, primarily through her masterpiece, which is recognized by the world "Out of Darkness, Light Comes". Kartini's masterpiece is a picture of Kartini's anxiety and struggles in facing her very confining situation, which originated from her Kartini to her friends Estelle H. Zeehandelaar or Estella, Mrs. Ovink-Soer, Prof. Dr. G.K. Anton and wife, Dr. N. Andriani, Ny. HG. De Booy-Boisevain, Ir HH. Van Kol, Mrs. N. van Kol, Mrs. RM. Abendanon, Ec. Abendanon. The letters were then compiled and subsequently published under the title 'Door Duisternis tot Licht' by the Dutch official JH. Abendanon, who was very familiar with Kartini, in 1911.

Kartini's figures and struggles were indeed different from Sartika. Kartini did not have room for the actual realization of her ideals, in the sense that she did not have a school like Sartika, even though she had given education to the women informally. Kartini schools only appeared in 1910, right after six years of her death.

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3 Marianne Katoppo, Mutiara Maluku dan Permata Pasundan, Suplemen Kompas menuju Milenium III, Saturday, January 2000, p. 50.
Kartini school was also not started on her initiative but the initiative of JH. Abendanon, one of his best friends⁴.

In addition to the individual movements carried out by the two female figures above, the social education movement was also carried out by female mass organizations, such as Aisyiyah, which is under Muhammadiyah. In women's education, Aisyiyah has established educational institutions at various levels for women. Aisyiyah is also active in various social activities for women, including helping to support the "Indonesian Women's Congress", which began to congress in 1928, 1935, and 1941. Especially at the second congress (1935), a woman figure appeared who dared to criticize fiqh. Islam, in a critical paper entitled "The Position of Women in Islamic Law". The figure of the woman is Ratna Sari.

Aisyiyah herself represents the aspirations of lower-middle-class women born in the Kauman community of Yogyakarta. Theologically this movement appears to question why the position of women is differentiated in religion? Even though in his idealization, Allah does not differentiate between humans? In addition, practically speaking, Aisyiyah could be said to be a reaction to female mass organizations led by Western-educated women, most of whom are 'nigrats', aristocrats or the economic class and above, whose emancipatory vision tends to be different.

Since its establishment in 1917, Aisyiyah has indeed been in the shadow of Muhammadiyah. However, in 1923 it began to establish itself as an autonomous organization independent from Muhammadiyah. Since then, they have begun to focus the movement on the socio-education sector, such as educating and supporting orphans in the institutions they manage, established a mosque for women, and established an educational institution specifically for women, namely 'Busthanul Atfal'. Aisyiyah's achievements are pretty phenomenal. Until 1985, Aisyiyah had 2,751 Busthanul Atfal spread throughout Indonesia.

In Indonesia, Aisyiyah is the first Islamic women's social movement organization and the most extensive organization in scope. Not only that, but Aisyiyah is also the inspiration for various other Muslimat organizations, such as 'Nasyiatul Aisyiyah' (1931), an organization specifically for Muslim teenagers, which was autonomous in 1963.

Apart from Aisyiyah, a feminine organisation has had a significant influence in Indonesia since the pre-Independence of Indonesia period, namely Nahdhatul Ulama 'Muslimat. It was established under NU in 1938, but in 1946 when NU became a political party, NU Muslimat became autonomous, carrying the new name Muslimat NU. Just as Aisyiyah have Nasyiatu Aisyiyah, NU's Women also have Fatayat NU (established in 1950)⁵.

In addition to the figures of women and organisations Muslim above, other figures have access to and contributed significantly to women's education, including Abdullah Ahmad and Zainuddin Labai. Abdullah Ahmad is the founder of

⁴ Ibid., p. 50.
⁵ Taufiq Abdullah, Kilasan Sejarah Pergerakan Wanita Islam di Indonesia, on Natsir dan Meuleman (Ed.), Wanita Islam Indonesia, pp.71-79.
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the particular religious school 'Adabiyah School'. It was founded in 1907. In its later development (1909), the school focused in Padang and then (1915) was changed to 'Hollandash Inlandash School Adabiyah (HIS)'. These changes have implications for changing the curriculum, which initially only contained religious knowledge, which was also oriented towards general knowledge in Dutch. The school eventually absorbed the Dutch educational system and methods.

As for Zainuddin Labai was better known as a direct educational reformer applying his reform ideas to the school he founded 'Diniyah School', Padang Panjang. The school, founded in 1915, combines two educational systems: the Religious Education System and the Dutch West Education. The religious education system thickens in school buildings and teaching places that still use the 'Surau' or mosque system, while the Western education system can be seen in the educational methods used, which are equipped with blackboards and other Western educational attributes. The school itself is divided into two levels: the 'Ibtidaiyah' level and the 'Tsanawiyah' level.

Diniyah School's significant contribution to women's education is evident in accepting female students in the education system. They are even placed on an equal footing with male students, even though their classes are differentiated, namely male students on the right porch of the mosque and female students on the left porch of the mosque. Not only that, there are indications that female students tend to be privileged in the education system. The proof is that Zainuddin Labni himself directly handles those female students.

The girls' schools above are not in vain. One of the first graduates of 'Diniyah School', 'Rahmah el-Yunusiah', subsequently succeeded in continuing her predecessor's ideals by establishing a new school for women, namely "Diniyah School Puteri" in 1926. In contrast to the previous school, the girls' school was more focused on women's education concretely. Through the Diniyah School Puteri Rahmah el-Yunusiah' strives to achieve one big goal, namely increasing the knowledge and skills of Muslim women in Minangkabau, through the Islamic education system that uses Western educational methods and facilities.

Rahmah's great aspirations were motivated by a harsh reality that afflicted women at the time: women were still denied access to education due to restrictions on their rights. That is why Rahmah established 'Diniyah School Puteri' to provide the best opportunity for women to obtain an education and break free from the chains of ignorance. The theological argument used by Rahmah is that Islam does not restrict women from studying because studying in Islam is compulsory for both men and women; Islam instead places humans regardless of gender or nationality in the same degree as seen in QS. Al-Hujurat (49), verse 13:

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6 Burhanuddin Daya, Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam: Kasus Sumatera Thawalib, (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1990), p.83.
7 Ibid., p. 84.
8 Edwar (Ed.), Riwayat Hidup dan Perjuangan 20 Ulama Besar Sumatera Barat, (Padang: Islamic Center Sumatera Barat, 1981), p. 206.
9 Ibid., p. 13.
Based on the prior understanding, 'Diniyah School Puteri' aims to emancipate women who are focused on their gender nature as women, explicitly producing women with Islamic souls who can depict themselves as capable educators, active citizens of the nation and state based on devotion to God\textsuperscript{11}.

In order to achieve the aspiring Muslim female figure, 'Diniyah School Puteri' not only focuses on cognitive but also affective and psychomotor aspects, considering it essential to equip women with practical skills. These skills mean to be very useful in a household or social activities such as cooking, weaving, home industry, physical education, first aid, and other practical skills that are considered necessary for womanhood in her life as mothers, educators, and members of society\textsuperscript{12}.

Because the form of education is under the ideals of Islam and the demands of its era, the emancipatory efforts developed by Rahmah through the 'Diniyah School Puteri' can be accepted and get a warm welcome from Indonesian women. It is not surprising that Diniyah School Putri has overgrown across the island of Sumatra, to the island of Java\textsuperscript{13}.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that Diniyah School Princess has a huge role in the advancement of Indonesian women, and all of this is thanks to Rahmah el-Yunusiah. Because of that, the figure of Rahmah on this occasion seems entirely appropriate to be aligned with other Indonesian female figures such as Dewi Sartika and RA. Kartini. Rahmah el-Yunusiah herself was a member of Permi Puteri, which was chaired by Rasuna Said, who made many efforts to uphold women's rights through various conferences or women's congresses. In a congress that the name Rahmah el-Yunusiah became known for, to be precise at the 1935 Indonesian women's congress, Rahmah el-Yunusiah and her partner, Permi Ratna Sari, succeeded in formulating several excellent proposals to increase the dignity of Indonesian women, namely: 1) The oath that men and women have the same...

\textsuperscript{10} Tim YPPA, \textit{al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya}, (Jakarta: DEPAG RI, 1971), p. 847.
\textsuperscript{11} Mahmud Yunus, \textit{Sejarah Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia}, (Jakarta: Mutiara, 1979), pp. 68-69. Also compare with Deliar Noer, \textit{Gerakan Modern Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942}, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982), Ed. Ke-2, pp. 62-65.
\textsuperscript{12} Samsul Nizar, \textit{Filosafat Pendidikan Islam: Pendekatan Historis, Teoritis dan Praktis}, (Jakarta: Ciputat Pers, 2002), pp. 155.
\textsuperscript{13} Departemen Agama RI., \textit{Ensiklopedia Islam di Indonesia}, (Jakarta: Proyek Departemen Agama RI, 1992/1993), p. 804.
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rights; 2) Striving for a federation of women’s associations throughout Indonesia in the form of a women’s main congress; 3) Establishing illiteracy eradication agencies throughout Indonesia under one central leadership; 4) Fighting for the position of women according to Islamic law carefully; 5) Strive for a central association for Indonesian female workers because of their substantial quantity in Indonesia; 6) Providing a unique magazine for women; 7) Establish a particular health care agency for women; 8) Due to the deficient condition of women, efforts should be made to establish companies that suit their needs and provide opportunities for women to work.

In principle, the movements carried out by the female figures above were carried out since the pre-independence era, but the struggle continued until the independence era. The central figures of Indonesian women may have passed away. However, their movements in the social education sector have continued to exist, several educational institutions that have continued to exist until the time of Indonesian independence, the Old Order era, even today, including Aisyiyah, the NU Muslimat educational institution and 'Diniyah Puteri'.

III. The Indonesian Women’s Education Social Movement in the New Order and Reformation Period

Entering the beginning of the New Order period, the stability of the country was relatively stable compared to the old order era, which was full of conflicts and national discord. The relationship between the state and other religion can be quite closely and harmonised because it (apart from the shortcomings of today's unconscious) development efforts can be carried out smoothly, so she can develop her feminine movement ideology quite well.

Various women's organisations that initially (pre-independence) were directed at affirming women's position to men during the New Order era, it was directed at the more practical needs of women in various fields of life. During the New Order era, for example, Aisyiyah, which was founded to emphasise women's role in the world of men, began to focus on defending women's rights, particularly in the areas of family and development. This fact was evident in the '17th Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council Conference’ in 1972, in Wiradesa, Pekalongan. Thanks to the persistent efforts of Aisyiyah, the congress when she helped formulate an agreement that was quite significant for women, that women were recognised for their rights in development, which meant open access for women to participate in the development and sit in the chair of leadership.

Furthermore, the necessity of forming a 'sakinah family' was emphasised at the Muhammadiyah Congress in Surakarta in 1982 in order to avoid the loss of 'sakinah family' values in Indonesia, as has happened in the Western world. In the concept of the 'sakinah family', the central leadership of Aisyiyah at that time also emphasised the importance of the role of women in forming a 'sakinah family', especially in Islamic education of children. Subsequently, in 1990, Aisyiyah had also succeeded in developing various programs aimed at village development by promoting home industries and livestock and village education.

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Recent developments show that Aisyiyah’s various social programs have made her move towards an LSM-style movement after the collapse of the New Order. Aisyiyah, at this stage, has been able to provide awareness for women to be independent and free to move outward\(^{14}\).

An encouraging development has also occurred in the Muslimat NU movement, especially seen from the many educational institutions established either by NU women or Muslimat NU in particular. In addition, it is also evident that Muslimat NU has been able to position its cadres to be equal with men in various fields of life today.

Despite the many successes of the women’s movement today, the problems of women in Indonesia are quite numerous and not all of them can be resolved properly. It is still inadequate and the prevalence of women’s education in Indonesia has encouraged some women to become TKW without adequate skills, which in turn provokes quite complicated humanitarian problems. This actually should get the attention of women’s organizations, but it is seen today that the existing women’s organizations tend to show less resonance in overcoming these problems. The current movement of women also tends to be less able to overcome the current tendency that makes women only as commodities in the industrial and tourism sectors, because they are less educated.

Furthermore, it is also seen that there is still very little effort by the women’s movement to provide awareness for Indonesian women today to be able to escape from the traps of the Western global culture which makes women consumptive, degrades their femininity or humanity, or even acts un-Islamic. In fact, in anticipating the global situation, the role of the Muslim woman movement is very much needed to develop countervailing forces or even barriers for women, which can provide control and limits from the expansion of the dominant forces that dominate the lives of modern women today. This means that it is time for the Muslim women’s movement to rise up to balance the situation for women, which is increasingly uncertain today\(^{15}\).

As a result of this fact, Muslim women’s movements throughout the reform era tend to stagnate or even regress because they lack a clear direction, where educational efforts are still contextualized in traditional ideas and have not touched the context of education in a broad sense, especially education, which can assist women face the chaos of a strong global environment that attracts women to be dragged out of their feminine nature.

\(^{14}\) Kuntowijoyo, Arah Pengembangan Organisasi Wanita Islam Indonesia: Kemungkinan-Kemungkinannya, on Natsir and Meuleman, Wanita Islam Indonesia, pp. 132-134.

\(^{15}\) Wardah Hafidz, Organisasi Wanita Islam dan Arah Pengembangannya, on Natsir dan Meuleman, Wanita Islam Indonesia, pp. 136-137.
IV. CLOSING

It can be said that the social movement for Muslim women’s education in Indonesia has contributed significantly to efforts to emancipate and also elevate the dignity of Indonesian women amidst the patriarchal religious traditions and views that are very dominant in Indonesia.

The social education movement carried out by Indonesian Muslim women is not the result of a short and baseless struggle but has roots from previous Indonesian female figures who had the persistence to uplift the dignity of women, which are considered only achievable through education. These results show that Indonesian women are never quiet from fighting for their rights. Furthermore, the struggle to uphold women’s rights has never ended because various discriminatory acts against women still occur today. Indonesian women still have to fight until their rights are genuinely recognized and placed on an equal footing with men.

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