

The Role of Faith and Piety in Empowering Muslim Minority Communities in Asahan District, Indonesia

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Article History: Received on 10 June 2025, Revised on 30 July 2025,
Published on 13 August 2025

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Faith and Piety (IMTAQ) in fostering minority Muslim communities in Asahan Regency, with a focus on program planning, implementation, and evaluation. The approach used is qualitative, with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies. Informants include IMTAQ managers, speakers, community members, and community leaders. Data is analyzed inductively to understand the dynamics of development within the context of minority communities. The research findings indicate that IMTAQ planning is strategic and inclusive, involving various stakeholders, including religious leaders and local government officials. The programs designed include spiritual strengthening through Quranic reading activities, regular religious study sessions, and economic empowerment initiatives such as sharia-based entrepreneurship training. Program implementation is structured, sustainable, and supported by active community participation. Evaluations indicate that IMTAQ has had a positive impact on improving the quality of faith, piety, and social and moral awareness of the Muslim minority community in the region. The uniqueness of this research lies in IMTAQ's holistic approach in integrating spiritual guidance with social and economic aspects within the minority Muslim community. These findings contribute to the development of a contextual and inclusive model of religious guidance and have practical implications for application in areas with similar conditions.

Keywords: Faith and Piety (IMTAQ) Program, Minority Muslim Communities, Religious Development

A. Introduction

There are many cases in Indonesia such as corruption, sexual harassment and murder. The increase in crime among students reflects the low morale of the nation. Education should teach students to have moral responsibility, not just general knowledge. Between 2020 and 2022, there were 2,338 children in conflict with the law. These cases were handled by BPHN through 619 accredited OBHN. (Luthfi, 2018). The increase in crime cases in Indonesia, such as corruption, sexual harassment, and violence among students, indicates an alarming moral crisis and

points to the weak role of education in shaping the character of students. Data from 2020 to 2022 shows that 2,338 children were involved in conflicts with the law, illustrating that education has not been optimal in instilling moral values and social responsibility. In this context, the IMTAQ program has been implemented as an approach to strengthen character education based on religious values. This program has been implemented in various regions, such as Palu City and Bima City, through the integration of religious activities into the formal education system and communities.

Previous research shows that the IMTAQ program contributes to shaping students' religious, moderate, and tolerant character, as well as increasing the spiritual awareness of the community. However, these studies generally focus on educational institutions in majority Muslim areas, while the implementation of IMTAQ in minority Muslim communities has not received much attention. In fact, minority communities face different challenges, such as limited access to religious education, social pressure, and limited institutional support. This gap highlights the need for a more in-depth study of the effectiveness of the IMTAQ program in the context of marginalized communities. Support from the government and community participation are expected to create a better and more sustainable education ecosystem (Ariandi, 2023). In this context, the IMTAQ program serves as an alternative character education program based on religious values. This program has been implemented in various regions, such as Palu City, Bima City, and Asahan Regency, through regular religious activities in schools and communities. However, many studies still focus on the implementation of IMTAQ in formal schools with a Muslim majority, while the role of IMTAQ in the development of minority Muslim communities has not been studied in depth. This gap is important to note because minority Muslim communities face different challenges, such as limited access to religious education, social pressure, and stigma from the majority group. Thus, a contextual study is needed to understand how IMTAQ functions effectively in marginalized and remote environments.

The Mayor emphasized the importance of sufficient time for religious education, considering that current education is considered less effective (Darna, 2023). With the expectation that between 10% and 50% of the material can be internalized, this program is expected to form a responsible and noble generation. The policy also includes a reduction in the Saturday lesson load, so that learners have time to relax and interact with their families. In line with this, the Bima City Government is implementing an IMTAQ strengthening program to strengthen religious life and improve the spiritual quality of the community. This activity was attended by the Regional Secretary of Bima City, Drs. H. Mukhtar Landa, MH, at the An-Nur Mosque on May 3, 2024. In the program, the Secretary emphasized the importance of faith and piety as a foundation in daily life. He also invited the community to actively participate in religious activities to strengthen friendship. The program includes religious lectures, scripture studies, and religious training. Hopefully, these

activities can increase the spiritual awareness of the community. In addition, this program is part of the Bima City Government's commitment to promote religious life. Thus, it is expected that the community can live in harmony and justice based on religious values (Noviantika, 2024). The implementation of Islamic moderation values in IMTAQ activities has also proven effective in the educational environment. Research at MAN 2 Lombok Timur found that structured IMTAQ activities are able to shape the character of students who are moderate, tolerant, and open to diversity. Through a qualitative approach, researchers found that the learning process of balanced Islamic values is carried out not only cognitively but also through habituation of religious attitudes and actions (Muhayan, 2022).

In line with the above, another study highlighting internal dynamics in minority Muslim communities was also conducted in Manado. His research focused on the relationship between Sunni and Shi'a groups living side by side in one area. It was found that differences in theological understanding and worship practices created tensions, but also created space for reconciliation and dialogue between groups. Social factors Local politics also influence this relationship, showing the importance of a contextual and inclusive da'wah approach (Mokodongan & Kasim, 2025).

Islamic faith development in minority Muslim communities can be seen in the area of Dukuh Purbo, Pekalongan. Local community leaders use informal methods such as village recitation, *tahlilan*, and TPQ teaching as a means of internalizing the values of faith. This strategy is considered effective because it is participatory and in accordance with the pattern of life of a socially homogeneous community but a minority on a regional scale (Prasetya, 2022).

An analysis of contemporary Muslim minorities shows that they face challenges of extremism, discrimination and Islamophobia. In scholarly works that discuss the history and socio-political dynamics of Muslims in non-Muslim countries, it is found that these communities often have to adapt to the local context while maintaining Islamic values. This study provides a useful conceptual framework in understanding how Muslim minorities in Indonesia such as in Asahan also face similar dynamics. (Anwar, 2023).

Islamic education in minority communities faces various complex challenges, especially in the social context and diversity of local cultures (Jamal et al., 2024). A study conducted by Hasugian, et.al in Sirandorung sub-district, Central Tapanuli district, showed that although the Muslim community in Central Tapanuli district is a minority, the community still tries to carry out Islamic education through informal approaches such as local recitation and collaboration with Muslim leaders from outside the area. The main obstacles faced are limited access to formal educational institutions, low local government support, and stereotypes from the majority community. However, efforts to preserve Islamic values are still being made through

community development and strengthening religious identity among the younger generation (Hasugian et al., 2023).

Aqidah development for converts, who face not only religious, but also social and economic issues. Juwairiani and Budiyanthi's research at the *Muallaf* Center Foundation in Subulussalam highlights how *aqidah* development programs are implemented to strengthen the Islamic understanding of converts. The foundation provides services such as religious classes, logistical assistance, and psychological assistance. However, the surrounding community faces challenges such as lack of motivation from some converts, limited competent human resources, and social pressure from non-Muslim families. This shows that fostering IMTAQ (faith and piety) in vulnerable groups such as Muslim converts requires a holistic and sustainable approach, including social, economic and spiritual aspects (Juwairiani et al., 2024). In this case, the success of Islamic education in fostering character and faith can also be seen from the Qur'an memorization system implemented in boarding school institutions. Siregar et.al (2023) in their study of boarding school Robitotul Istiqomah Huristak in Padang Lawas Regency showed how the *tahfiz*-based education system not only emphasizes the aspect of memorization, but also forms the religious personality of students through habituation of worship and moral values. This boarding school is a concrete example of an Islamic educational institution that has successfully implemented IMTAQ values in a structured manner, although it still faces obstacles such as limited facilities and the number of teaching staff. The model of implementing IMTAQ values can be used as an inspiration to be applied in minority Muslim communities and converts, with adjustments to local needs (Arnandi et al., 2022).

Religious education for adolescents in Aceh Singkil shows that the community has a very important role in the process of religious learning. Not only as recipients, but the community in Aceh Singkil also actively contributes directly through religious activities such as routine recitation and dhikr together, as well as providing examples in everyday life. The involvement of religious education and society at the community level can be a strong foundation in shaping the character and morals of adolescents. This is important in the context of IMTAQ development, which aims to form faith and piety in the younger generation so that they not only master science, but also have a strong spiritual foundation (Budianti, 2023). On the other hand, (Lubis et al., 2022) emphasize that to maintain children's interest in learning, a deeper approach to the psychological aspects of Islamic education is needed. By incorporating the principles of Islamic psychology, such as compassion, role modeling and reinforcement of religious values, education can become more effective in fostering children's love and interest in learning. Therefore, strategies that combine the spiritual values present in society, as found in (Budianti, 2023) study, with the principles of Islamic educational psychology can create a learning environment that not only educates intellectually, but also strengthens the spiritual

and moral aspects, which are very important in fostering IMTAQ for the younger generation (Lubis et al., 2022).

In fostering the morals of students at Dayah Modern Maqamam Mahmuda Takengon emphasized the importance of Islamic educational institutions in shaping the character of students through good moral development. This coaching is carried out with various methods, ranging from religious to social-based approaches, which aim to build a generation that is not only intelligent but also virtuous. In line with the formation of IMTAQ in Islamic educational institutions, which functions to integrate intellectual and moral aspects in students. Through good moral development, students are expected to reflect Islamic values which are the basis of their character (Maulida et al., 2022).

In addition, the importance of tolerance education reflected in Surah Az-Zumar verse 18, Tolerance is the basis for people to respect differences, of course, part of the broader IMTAQ value. In this context, tolerance education supports the development of noble morals, as explained by Maulida et al., (2022). By understanding and applying the value of tolerance, the younger generation educated in Islamic educational institutions can be better prepared to face social diversity and build harmonious relationships between people (Farabi et al., 2020). Meanwhile Nahar et al., (2022), discussed the value of peace and love contained in Surah Al-Hujurat verses 9-10, which are very relevant to character building through Islamic education. The values of peace and love are in line with the objectives of moral development in *santri* (Maulida et al., 2022), teaching the importance of maintaining peace and creating loving relationships between fellow human beings. The application of these values of peace and love also strengthens the aspects of tolerance discussed by Farabi et al., (2020). In making a major contribution to the creation of a harmonious and respectful society. Thus, IMTAQ education which includes morals, tolerance, and peace is an important foundation in forming individuals who are able to contribute positively to a plural and peaceful society (Nahar et al., 2022).

The research conducted by (Siregar et al., 2023) shows that the criteria for scientific truth from a Western and Islamic perspective are scientific truth based on ratio and empirical verification, which emphasizes evidence that can be tested through scientific methods. In contrast, in the Islamic perspective, scientific truth is seen as something that is in harmony with God's revelation and human ratios. This approach invites to see science not only as the result of human rationality efforts, but also as a form of harmony with the spiritual principles revealed by God (Siregar et al., 2023). Ginting et al., (2023) raised the topic of science and technology in the Qur'an with a philosophical approach to Islamic education exploring how the Qur'an provides a deep view of the importance of science and technology, but with an emphasis that both must be in line with moral and spiritual values. Science and technology, not only for material progress, but also to deepen Muslims'

understanding of God and the surrounding world, so that the knowledge gained can bring them closer to God and promote the welfare of the people (Ginting et al., 2023).

Innovations in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning applied by teachers in Madrasah Tsanawiyah. It revealed that PAI teachers use various innovative approaches, certainly influential in improving the quality of learning, such as the utilization of technology and contextual approaches. This innovation aims to make learning more interesting and relevant for students, as well as to improve their understanding of PAI materials. The results of his research show that the use of innovative methods in PAI learning can increase students' interest, as well as strengthen their understanding of Islamic values in everyday life (Syarbaini et al., 2023). This study aims to answer the following question: How is the IMTAQ program implemented in fostering the Muslim minority community in Asahan Regency? Specifically, this study analyzes the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of the IMTAQ program, as well as its contribution to religious character building, social strengthening, and minority community empowerment.

B. Methods

Methodologically, this research is a descriptive study that seeks to uncover and explore information about the implementation of the IMTAQ in the development of Muslim minority communities in Asahan Regency. This research approach falls under the qualitative research category, which is aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals or groups (Hariati, 2024). According to (Lexy, 2008), qualitative research uses qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, or document analysis. Qualitative methods are used for several reasons. First, qualitative methods are easier to adapt when dealing with complex realities. Second, this method directly presents the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the respondents. Third, this method is more sensitive and better able to adapt to the various influences that shape the patterns of values being studied (Lexy, 2008). Therefore, as in research method studies, particularly in the field of education, a qualitative approach was used in this study to analyze, describe, explore, and describe the implementation of the IMTAQ in the development of Muslim minority communities in Asahan Regency. To describe these issues, observations were made of what was conveyed by the informants in this study.

Based on the above statement, the research approach used is a qualitative approach. This choice is based on the fact that qualitative research has a natural flow as a source of data, while the researcher functions as a key instrument. The research is descriptive in nature, with the researcher focusing more on the process than the results. Qualitative research tends to analyze data inductively, and meaning is a primary concern in the qualitative approach.

C. Results and Discussion

The planning of the IMTAQ Program in Asahan Regency has clear and strategic objectives, namely to improve the quality of faith and piety among the community, particularly among Muslim minority groups. In this context, IMTAQ plays a crucial role in fostering harmonious and empowered social life. Through a comprehensive approach, the IMTAQ institution strives not only to enhance the spiritual aspects of society but also to strengthen interfaith social relations. Through spiritual and moral guidance, IMTAQ seeks to support the creation of a religious and tolerant society that upholds religious values while maintaining harmony among people of different faiths. This objective forms the foundation for designing comprehensive programs that address both religious and social aspects.

The Chairman of IMTAQ emphasized that "the existence of IMTAQ is part of the local government's efforts to support the vision and mission of Asahan Regency, particularly in the religious aspect under the auspices of the Public Welfare Division (Kesra). IMTAQ serves as a complement to the religious-based character development program targeting vulnerable groups, including the Muslim minority community. In an interview, Marpaung stated, "We hope that with the presence of IMTAQ, the Muslim minority community in Asahan Regency can enhance their spiritual quality and gain a better understanding of the Islamic religion." (Interview, Ahmad Qosim Marpaung, 2025). This statement reflects IMTAQ's commitment to giving special attention to groups that are often marginalized in social and religious contexts. However, the main challenge in developing Muslim minority communities is establishing effective communication that is accepted by all levels of society. Several preachers have stated that IMTAQ uses a dialogical and participatory approach in its activities. This approach allows the community to feel more involved and not forced, making it more successful in improving the quality of worship and religious understanding, especially for those living in areas with Muslim minority communities. In this way, IMTAQ strives to create a conducive atmosphere for discussion and exchange of ideas, which in turn can strengthen social bonds among community members.

The Village Head of Gajah, Meranti District, added that the primary objective of IMTAQ is to strengthen religious beliefs and a proper understanding of Islam. This training is particularly important in areas where the Muslim population is a minority. The Village Head of Gajah stated, "We want their faith to remain strong and not easily influenced by deviant interpretations." (Interview with Maja Hamdani, 2025). This statement reflects an awareness of the importance of preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings amid the challenges faced by Muslim minority communities. With the implementation of IMTAQ, it is hoped that their faith will remain strong and not easily influenced by deviant interpretations. In addition, IMTAQ also strives to increase public awareness and concern for Islam. In line with this statement, the Head of Rawang Baru Village, Rawang Panca Arga

Subdistrict, stated that “IMTAQ uses an educational and empowering approach. We focus on improving the capacity of the community through continuous training and the delivery of Islamic teachings that are easy to understand” (Interview, Amran, 2025). This approach aims to provide relevant and practical knowledge to the community, enabling them to apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives. In this way, minority communities are expected to feel valued and have an equal place in religious life.

The programs designed by IMTAQ cover various aspects, ranging from religious training, seminars, to social activities that directly involve the community. For example, IMTAQ conducts training for preachers and religious leaders to improve their ability to convey Islamic teachings in a more interesting and easy-to-understand manner. Additionally, IMTAQ organizes seminars on current issues relevant to community life, such as religious tolerance, human rights, and the importance of maintaining harmony among people of different faiths. In this context, IMTAQ focuses not only on spiritual aspects, but also on social empowerment. By involving the community in every stage of program planning and implementation, IMTAQ strives to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members. This is crucial to ensure that the programs implemented truly align with the needs and expectations of the community. As a result, IMTAQ aims to build trust and collaboration between institutions and the community, which will ultimately strengthen the position of the Muslim minority community in Asahan Regency.

In addition, IMTAQ also strives to establish cooperation with various parties, including local governments, civil society organizations, and educational institutions. This cooperation aims to expand the reach of the program and increase the effectiveness of its implementation. By involving various parties, IMTAQ hopes to create positive synergy in its efforts to nurture the Muslim minority community. This also reflects IMTAQ’s commitment to contributing to broader social development in Asahan Regency. In facing existing challenges, IMTAQ continues to innovate and adapt to the times. For example, by utilizing information technology, IMTAQ can reach a wider audience through digital platforms. Development activities can be conducted online, so that people who are unable to attend in person can still participate in the programs. This is a strategic step to ensure that religious development can still be carried out even in difficult situations, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Asahan District Government’s Social Welfare Agency emphasized that “IMTAQ is designed as a policy instrument capable of maintaining social harmony based on religious values. We see that guidance for minority communities, especially in the religious sphere, is very important for maintaining social stability and local cultural integrity.” This shows that the IMTAQ program strives to remain synergistic with regional development and does not stray from the context of local wisdom. With the

implementation of IMTAQ, it is hoped that the Muslim minority community can enhance their awareness and concern for the Islamic faith and gain better opportunities in various fields (Interview with Masnur Pangaribuan, 2025).

According to the Meranti Subdistrict Social Welfare Office, the main objective of IMTAQ in guiding the Muslim minority community in Meranti Subdistrict is to create harmony and strengthen faith in the social life of the community (Interview with Irwan Rahmadi, 2025). This is in line with the explanation from the Social Affairs Office of Rawang Panca Arga Subdistrict, which states that the objective of IMTAQ is to instill values of faith and piety so that the community can perform their religious duties and live-in accordance with Islamic teachings in a harmonious manner (Interview with Hariadi, 2025).

The planning of the IMTAQ in the development of the Muslim minority community in Asahan Regency is to achieve equitable access to religious guidance, spiritual empowerment, and the strengthening of Islamic identity in a pluralistic environment. Through various programs such as the Festival of Pious Children, Quran Recitation Gatherings, and support for the establishment of the Quran Recitation Development Institution (LPTQ), IMTAQ strives to provide equal opportunities for participation for the Muslim minority community. As a result, an inclusive religious atmosphere free from discrimination is created. The presence of IMTAQ is seen as having opened up previously limited access to religious education, enabling minority communities to enhance their understanding of Islamic teachings and strengthen their confidence in performing religious practices within a diverse society. Beyond spiritual aspects, IMTAQ also aims to strengthen social cohesion and foster interfaith harmony through fair and equitable approaches. This is expected to strengthen social bonds both within the Muslim community and with other communities. The community's hope that IMTAQ continues and expands its programs reflects their trust in the institution's role as an agent of empowerment and guardian of religious values capable of supporting social integration and improving the quality of life for the Muslim minority community in Asahan District.

The community of Gajah Village, Meranti District, stated that they have benefited from the programs run by IMTAQ. Activities such as religious study sessions and skill-building training have helped them feel more confident in practicing Islamic teachings within a diverse environment. "We hope that with the presence of IMTAQ, the Muslim minority community can improve their quality of life and gain better opportunities in various fields," they stated (Community Interview, 2025). Meanwhile, the community of Rawang Baru Village in Rawang Panca Arga Subdistrict emphasized the importance of effective communication in guidance. They appreciated the dialogical approach used by IMTAQ, which made them feel more involved and not forced. "This approach is considered more successful in improving the quality of worship and religious understanding," they said (Community Interview, 2025).

Based on direct observations of the activities of the IMTAQ in Asahan Regency, the planning of community development programs for Muslim minorities is carried out systematically with the involvement of local religious leaders, community representatives, and local government officials, particularly the Public Welfare Division. Observations indicate that planning is carried out through participatory deliberations at the village level, resulting in programs based on the actual needs of the community, such as regular religious study sessions, Quran reading training, practical worship guidance, and sharia-based entrepreneurship training. Additionally, the approach used is dialogic and open, enabling the minority community to feel valued and actively involved. In some villages, the observation team noted that IMTAQ identified areas with low access to religious guidance and prioritized those areas in program implementation. Activities were also designed to align with local wisdom values to maintain interfaith harmony. Based on the observations, it can be concluded that IMTAQ's planning not only focuses on spiritual aspects but also considers the social and economic dimensions of the community, thereby impacting the enhancement of self-confidence, Islamic knowledge, and the overall quality of life for the Muslim minority community (Field Observation, 2025).

Documentation of the activities of the IMTAQ in Asahan Regency shows that all programs for the development of the Muslim minority community are carried out face-to-face in the field. Photographic documentation includes planning meetings between IMTAQ officials, religious leaders, and community representatives, as well as coordination meetings with local government officials and the Social Welfare Department (Kesra), which were held directly at village offices or community halls. Additionally, various development activities such as regular religious study sessions, Quran reading training, practical worship guidance, and religious events like the Quran Recitation Festival and the Pious Children Festival were conducted with the physical presence of participants and supervisors. Social activities, such as sharia-based entrepreneurship training, interfaith discussions, and cross-community cooperation, were also documented through photos and meeting minutes, emphasizing the participatory approach implemented directly. This face-to-face approach enables more effective interaction and strengthens the emotional bond between IMTAQ and the community. Additional documentation includes activity proposals, direct interviews with community leaders and religious affairs officials, field observation reports on program implementation, and community participation data demonstrating the direct effectiveness of the activities. This comprehensive documentation underscores that IMTAQ emphasizes a direct and dialogic approach at every stage of development, without involving online methods, to ensure full engagement and the success of the program among the Muslim minority community in Asahan District.

Received a visit from the Chairman of Imtaq Kab. Asahan to hold a hearing in his office on Wednesday (06/19/19). Present at the hearing were the Acting Regent of

Asahan, Assistant II for Economic Development, Head of the Asahan Regency Communication and Information Agency, Head of the Asahan Regency Secretariat's Social Welfare Division, and the Chairman of Imtaq Kab. Asahan along with his board members.

Based on the above discussion, the researcher can conclude that the planning of the IMTAQ Program in the development of the Muslim minority community in Asahan Regency shows that IMTAQ plays a strategic role in improving the quality of faith and piety among the community through a comprehensive, participatory approach that is oriented toward social and spiritual empowerment. The programs implemented, such as religious training, seminars, and social activities, not only strengthen understanding of Islamic teachings but also foster social cohesion within a diverse community. Support from the local government, particularly through the Public Welfare Department (Kesra), is a key factor in the success of these programs. Amidst the challenges of cross-group communication, the dialogical approach adopted by IMTAQ has been able to increase community involvement and the quality of religious life. Overall, IMTAQ is expected to become a driving force in realizing a religious, harmonious, and inclusive society, while maintaining social stability and strengthening local cultural identity.

D. Conclusion

This study examines the implementation of the IMTAQ in the development of Muslim minority communities in Asahan Regency, focusing on planning, implementation, and evaluation. Based on the findings, the following conclusions can be drawn: the planning of the IMTAQ institution in the development of the Muslim minority community in Asahan Regency demonstrates a strategic and inclusive approach. IMTAQ strives to address the needs of the Muslim minority community, which is often marginalized. This is achieved through mapping local needs and involving various factors, including religious leaders and local government. IMTAQ designs programs that not only focus on spiritual aspects but also on social and economic empowerment. Programs such as regular religious study sessions, Quran reading training, and sharia-based entrepreneurship training are designed to enhance the quality of faith and piety among the community, as well as strengthen Islamic identity in a pluralistic environment.

Based on these findings and conclusions, several suggestions can be made, including:

1. Local governments should continue to improve regulatory support, funding, and facilities for IMTAQ so that the guidance program can run optimally and sustainably;
2. The importance of increasing human resource capacity, especially competent da'i and mentors who are sensitive to the needs of minority communities;

3. The development of digital technology-based development materials should be prioritized in order to reach younger generations who are more familiar with digital media and to expand access to development programs in remote areas; and
4. Adaptive and community-based development approaches need to be continuously strengthened so that programs can be tailored to the diverse.

E. Acknowledgement

Thanks to all friends who helped us in this article.

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