

Dialogic Communication Society in Mining Conflicts in Bengkulu Tengah Regency

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Abstract. The Long-lasting conflict occurs in the absence of common ground which oversees the dynamics of the conflict. Conflicts are representative of the interests of each group involved in taking the form of, one of which, opinion friction lead to anarchy. Such premises, specifically, occur in the conflict between Merigi Sakti people and PT.CBS pertaining mining system which, then, give its impact on other issues. The conflict requires dialogue as an instrument for transforming these interests in order to reconcile the conflicting groups to find an agreement. Based on that background, this article will elucidate how dialogue takes roles in conflict reconciliation process. This study uses case study method—not only to show the friction occurs, but also the dialogic efforts which are important parts of the communication in the conflict. Based on the data obtained, it can be seen that the dialogue moves from bottom to top in the sense that Merigi Sakti people can manage their communities to unite against the mining system and deliver it structurally to the parties concerned.

Keywords: Communication, dialogue, conflict, society, companies

Introduction

Conflict is always marked by contradictions and tensions in a relationship (especially for social relationship). Although the relationships formed in a community is not as intimate as relationships in the family, it can be one because of the proximity of long-standing relations in the community. In the purpose to study conflicts, Baxter and Montgomery (2012) analyze any tensions and contradictions exist in the relationship that can be used to examine conflict occurred in a community, as social relationships are formed dynamically as well as the interaction among the contradictions which contains tendencies. Studies pertaining conflicts become important as contradictions and conflicts, i.e., broken social order, can change the prevailing practice—one of which is social relationship that has been running for a long time.

In accordance with, environmental conflict is one of major conflicts often occurs in Indonesia. Limited availability of natural resources which is not proportional to the needs of people often brings up various potential conflicts of utilization of Natural

Resources (SDA). The limitation of high economic value rising the desire of some groups to control the resource continuously. In addition, the condition also trigger environmental degradation and the erosion of society which, then, becomes difficult to resolve because of an escalation, even crisis, loaded with power and interests that are not equitably distributed (Usboko, 2016). It then, impact the life of local communities who have long hung their life on the nature, i.e. the loss of land, livelihoods, and even a place to stay. Furthermore, conflict of utilization of natural resources in general can also be triggered by the legal status of the land occupation, natural resources, inequality in the distribution, government policies perceived as part of investor protection, nature's destruction and/or environmental contamination (Muhdar & Nasir, 2012). In other words, conflicts occur along with the discrepancy among local people where the natural resource situated, companies, and the government as a policymaker.

As happened in Merigi Sakti, conflict between local people and PT. Citra Buana

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Seraya (CBS) arises when people reject an underground system mining method, which is imposed by PT. CBS without approval from and dissemination first to the public. The conflict continuously grows and touch other contradictions, i.e. suspicion on each party interest in mining activities, land compensation issues, and others. Addressing the existing contradiction, local people uses various methods to convey their aspirations to several parties considered helpful for the settlement of the conflict.

In such condition, the role of communication (one that is dialectical) is very important due to its potential to manage similarities and differences. Dialectical, according to Baxter, et al. (2012) is a tension between opposing forces in a system. Baxter put dialogue as voices united in a conversation as well as differences in the opposing sounds. Hence, in any conflict situation, the role of dialogue is very important—not only to see the contradictions arise but also the process of unification of conflicting voices. In addition, problem-solving method through dialogue is very important as it can be a melting place for conflicting parties to meet and express their disagreement toward each other.

Bakhtin (in Griffin, 2012) stated that the core idea of a dialogue is utterance, a unit of exchange (spoken or written) between two people. Dialogue, then, is interpreted as a network of complex inter-relationships with other people. A dialog presents contextual, continuous and grow in issues which contributes to the continuous redefinition by the participants in the dialogue.

So far, the pace of dialogue that has been done to resolve related problems in Indonesia is tied to niceties and formality. The decision is made when the dialogue is not entirely finished. Moreover, there are interests of each party, which are not enclosed resulting ego from each party. Based on that, the dialogue is also placed in a dilemmatic position. With the existence of such view, comes the premise “do not believe in dialogue to resolve disputes or conflicts in Indonesia”.

However, In the case of Merigi Sakti people, they came to the legislative, local government, company authority, even the provincial governments to find similarities in the differences that lead to conflict. The dialogue is very important, because after a clash occurs, then the concrete step taken through the Governor’s instruction to close temporarily the activities of the company. The

decision comes after the dialogue took place more than six times among the community, the government, and the company authority. Dialogical process created by the community can find those who defend them, and the government can also find individuals who play an important role in the rising of the clash.

Methods

The study was conducted in Merigi Sakti, Bengkulu Tengah Regency, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. It was represented by three villages: Komerling, Durian Lebar, and Susup. The three villages were chosen as the villagers (of the three villages) had a significance influence for triggering mass action of other villages and other districts.

The authors used qualitative research approach, as well as case studies design which is descriptive. Descriptive study is a study seeking for the existing problem-solving based on the data, as well as presents, analyzes, and interpret the data obtained (Narbuko and Achmadi: 1999). Many people using a case study as a strategy, methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy. However, Creswell (2007) chooses to consider it as a methodology, a *design* in qualitative research, or an object of study, or equal to the efforts of investigation.

Objects and targeted subjects of the research are relatively few in number and range, they are few people from Meringgi Sakti involved in the mass action and conflict. Based on the sources, the data are divided into two categories; primary data (from primary source) and secondary data (from secondary source). Primary data are the result of interviews with informants from both key informants and additional informants. The data source (primary) was the people who were directly involved in the dialogical process pertaining environmental conflicts in Meringgi Sakti (precisely in the three representative villages), Central Bengkulu Regency, Bengkulu Province. Moreover, the author also came to the government, journalists, politicians, and NGOs.

Secondary Data are the supporting data collected by the author from other sources of information in order to complete the primary data, i.e., the data of PT. CBS’s environmental assessment, from environmental agency of Bengkulu Province, and photos, videos, as well as the form of meeting attendance from villages official and local people. Furthermore,

the author also received several field notes made by relevant NGOs related chronology of the conflict, related online news, youtube video documentary showing the conflict, television news and other media. The data (both primary and secondary) were collected by observation, in-depth interview, and documentation. In addition, to discover the truth of the data, the authors also seek to meet several trusted informants and then compare the information obtained.

Role of Dialogue in Conflict: An Overview

Various conflicts spread across some areas in Indonesia which show how susceptible a conflict between the public and the parties opposed in viewing the differences. One of the most vulnerable conflict happening in Indonesia is environmental conflicts involving local communities and companies. WALHI indicated that, at least, until December 2012, there are 613 conflicts motivated by natural resource management-related issues happened in 29 provinces in Indonesia. WALHI also received complaints and advocated 149 cases consisting of oil palm plantations cases (51), mining-related cases (31), forestry-related cases (33), agrarian cases (14), and pollution-related cases (15). Moreover, the National Commission of Human Rights stated that, at the end of 2012 there were 1,064 complaints relating to the issue of land rights disputes and other natural resources-related cases (DPD Expert Team, 2014: 29 in Sulastriono, 2014).

The role of communication as a mean to locate trouble spots and to address the right settlement process is very important, provided that there are still many conflicts latently occurred in the middle of Indonesian societies. With the role of communication, the public will be able to express what they feel when spaces for exchanging messages become more open. Communication also plays a role in almost all areas of human life, from the smallest to largest, in any activity that transformed in daily social activities.

Aside from being a process of delivering a message and meaning, communication also plays a role in determining what kind of relationship will continue. As written by Baxter (2004) in Griffin (2012), communication creates and sustains a relationship. Without communication it will be difficult to detect the presence of a problem resulted from existing

contradictions.

Although Baxter uses his theory to examine intimate relationship within the family, this theory can also see a wider relationship that has long been constructed in a community which steadily bring up closeness among the members. For example, in the proximity of intimacy constructed among people because of the kinship system and the inherent social system. Thus, the connection here is seen more broadly in the relationship among individuals in society.

Differences in managing natural resources (in this case is coal) between Merigi Sakti people and PT. CBS regarding mining system raises other problems rooted to the bottom of society. This conflict is increasingly enlarged when the company was not cooperative enough to explain honestly about the mining system. There is no interactive and conducive dialogue between communities and companies. It is then captured by the public as a deliberate factor to "deceive and fool" them as they claim the full rights over the land tilled by the company. In addition, safety-related considerations for the future of the villagers also be the reason of their refusal. These differences lead to acts that inflict casualties both from the local society and the police as the pacifier.

Baxter developed a dialogical process claimed as a second generation of dialogical dialectic communication. In explaining this theory, Baxter assisted by Bakhtin's opinion which confirms that the dialogue here is different from monologue (*finalization*). He described life in constant and can not be completed because it is always there at every moment of life. In simple terms, the process is familiar with the term *feedback* as a reciprocal effort messages and meanings from one person to another.

The importance of the dialogue efforts in the reconciliation/resolution process of the conflict between the company and the government is indeed real. Beside as a part of the communication process, the dialogue is also used as a tool to confront and resolve conflicts constructively. According to Bakhtin (in Littlejohn, 2011), a dialogue is all about how to interact in a specific interaction, and utterance—which is a unit of exchange.

Dialogue is delivered through some processes, from preparation within the group to the process that bypassed the mediation group and opposing groups. Thus, the general

response to the conflict, which has escalated towards violence is a demand from many quarters for immediate dialogue (Sudira, 2016). Parties are already supposed to meet to discuss the problems of the opinions that are contrary to the path of peace. Because the prolonged conflict often occurs in the absence of common ground and of answers to the interests which oversees the dynamics of the conflict.

Most scientists and practitioners as outlined by Ropers (2003) would agree that a prolonged conflict could only be effectively transformed through the efforts addressed on structural causes and political power aspects of the conflict. This includes the interests of the opposing groups as involved in the conflict between Merigi Sakti people and PT.CB in which the conflict occurred because of the desire to represent their respective interests in the conflict. As the whole conflict is a representative of the interests of each group manifesting in various forms, one of which is friction opinion lead to anarchy.

A dialog, in a conflict, is used as an instrument for transforming these interests in order to find concrete problems that become the background. Groups with interests, such as local society, companies and governments will not be directly subject to one meetings and talks. It took some time and message exchange process until an agreement being reached. Although not all of the dialog successfully seated interests in conflict, at least, it can bring up the subject as well as the materials causing the conflict. For example, in many previous conflicts, dialogue can show the parties benefited or harmed, or other factors having been the impact of conflict. With the emergence of differences which are discussed, an effort to be opened is indirectly implemented.

Perhaps the dialogue is a middle way among the contentions. In the dialogue process, it is important to consider the appropriate mechanisms, such as who will express or listen, or both are appropriately positioned to enable the wedge to reach a resolution. Galtung (in Sudira, 2016) stated that the most important thing about dialogue is its ability to neutralize a major source of conflict, and to create an atmosphere where the parties involved can meet each other.

Dialogue is done internally in Merigi Sakti society, indicating that they have to understand how a problem can find a solution in a proper way. The existence of

the form of organized group make it easier to carry out intercommunity meetings in order to discuss the issues going on. Although dominance within the group occurred because of differences in education and structural position in the village, but in reality, the community of Merigi sakti can come together in rejecting the mining system imposed by the company.

Role of Party Affairs in Dialogue Process Between Society and Company

Merigi Sakti society has embarked the path of dialogue to break down problems that occurred as a result of conflict between the society and the company. Society repeatedly stated that they had tried to convey their aspirations through demonstrations at various agencies who understand and are responsible for these problems. They hope to meet those parties in person to discuss their oppositions in the problem although, in fact, they did not get answers to their liking.

Referring to the dialogue approach in inter-group conflict put forward by Rothman (1998) in the Ropers (2003), the efforts of dialogue that occurs in this conflict is in the category of problem-solving dialogue in which people involved in the conflict (society) arrange their communication so they can work systematically. Supposed the conflict started to be escalated, the dialogue of this kind generally requires the presence of a third party as *co-actor*- or as an initiator.

Co-actor has a variety of roles, ranging from assistant to the community, policy maker, supervisors, as well as a final settler. The interesting thing about this case is that people adjust delivery strategy independently—in the sense that Merigi Sakti people act in delivering messages based on their own interest instead of delivering messages concerned with *co-actor* influence (read: NGOs, academia, etc.) as what happened all this time in a society involved in conflict.

In this case, there are other parties that participated in the effort to solve the problems occurred in Merigi Sakti society. In field note, the author encountered some other actors that play a role in this conflict, i.e. NGO such as Genesis and WALHI, political figures such as Muspani and Ita Jamil (informants), and governmental party (Parliament, BLH, official authority of the District, Regency and provincial government) which all have the irrespective roles.

Accompanying the community

In some environmental conflicts occurred in Indonesia, NGOs are often at the center of the community to assist to the conflict that can be avoided. In the conflict between Merigi Sakti society and PT. CBS, NGO's namely Genesis and WALHI position themselves to assist people when they need legal assistance or a way to deliver the public rejection in order to be received by the company or the government. As stated by the local correspondent of Bengkulu, WALHI is one of NGO's giving its assistance in mining-related issues, including in Bengkulu Tengah Regency (9/02/2017).

In term of the case studied, WALHI spokesman said that the position of their institution is only in case of emergency as a response to the shooting of 9 residents and one person who got hit by officers and one officer who was injured during the conflict. In an interview, WALHI also said that there are some differences in ideology that cannot be imposed in the case of Merigi Sakti, thus the role of WALHI was unable to give its full significance. The difference in perspectives, then, become a reason for NGOs such as WALHI and Genesis can not assist Merigi Sakti people throughly. Thus, in this conflict, the role of NGOs cannot be that significant in influencing the decisions of the society, companies, and governments.

As a supervisor during the conflict

An addition to the previous role, Local Parliament of Central Bengkulu, in this conflict is positioned as a supervisor. Parliament oversight functions could be improved from a mining-related permits to the system alternation put in place by the company. As written by Usboko (2016), the DPR (Local Parliament) should conduct supervision since the government started implementing a policy on manganese mining and oversee the implementation process of the mining policy, and conduct investigations when people complain about the mining issue.

Correcting community demands

Merigi Sakti Mayor, in this case positions himself as part of the government including one of the people responsible for the conflicts in society, stated that efforts to stem the public action before the clash occurred was already done. However, he could not do much because the people themselves trust their internal

group more—Forum Masyarakat Rejang Gunung Bungkok (FMRGB)—for resolving this conflict until final decision. Technically, the Mayor of Merigi Sakti did not approve the action that ended in clashes between communities and companies. However, in a different side, as apart of the community in Merigi Sakti, he positions himself as the one who corrects the reconciliation process between the communities in Merigi Sakti and company authority in order to avoid further conflict.

As the Environmental Document Correction

In addition, the Environment Agency (BLH) of Bengkulu province is one of the parties that several times invited and done some dialogues with the public to explain the underground system. Technically, BLH Bengkulu province was the one who assess the feasibility of the underground system to be done in these two districts, Merigi Sakti and Merigi Kelindang. They also gave a justification regarding the assessor position. Environmental document (the draft) in the form of endorsement has been issued by the Environment Agency of Bengkulu province which means that from the environmental standpoint, PT. CBS has complied with the procedures. Thus, the company is consider feasible to perform the process of underground mining methods.

As final decision maker

Providing that, after the conflict broke out—clashes between the people and the security forces—the Governor of Bengkulu, which was chaired by Mr. Ridwan Mukhti, took the measurement to stop the conflict. Accordingly, the Governor issued an instruction that the company should stop its activities temporarily to create the peace process between the community and the company—with a note that there should be a review of the company's permission and any activities having been carried out. In this case, the governor did not intervene on any decision between the community and the company. However, sided tendency was seen in the government conduct, as in several times a discussion about mining system was not involving competent experts.

As outsiders

There are some other names appeared

when the dialogue efforts made by the community. These figures include the important people who have influence politically and socially. In fact, some outside assistance is not readily accepted by the public for granted. In addition to the factor of self-reliance, confidence factor is one reason why people of Merigi Sakti did not want any outsiders to help in the process of settlement of the conflict.

However, the roles of third parties were very needed to facilitate and speed up the peace process and the agreement. In addition, their presence is also expected as anticipatory measures so that a similar conflict does not happen in the same region and also in the rest territories of Indonesia. For example, the presence of NGO's was a form of democratization in Indonesia, although the attitude of NGOs are sometimes confronted with the government. Form of partnerships (with the community) chosen by NGO's was critical engagement, meanwhile some others chose constructive engagement (Yusdiyanto, 2012). It is a step forward for NGOs to be able to become a government and society's representation during the conflict.

in the concept level, those three presented in the conflict can be the initiator of peace when it does not create an agreement towards peace. But what happened to the Merigi Sakti society is, they try to put their group as an independent group with no desire to be interfered by other parties, especially the emphasis on the parties interested. The sensitivity of the issues in the conflict between Merigi Sakti society and company, also behind the prudence of society in action. Another fact happened is the alleged interests of individual communities, making the movement as a stepping stone for them to move. Such findings are commonly seen in the conflict, as mentioned earlier, that the nuances of political economy surrounded the conflicts are part of the dynamics which arise various conflict allegations among groups in conflict.

The role of third parties in the conflict between Merigi Sakti society and the company is as a mediator, even though they can not intervene further to the motion raised by the society. The fact happened in this neighborhood is a community conflict of Merigi Sakti who looking forward to viewing angle and movement. Some people from the community have already understand how people express their opinions to the opposing party and the public feel disadvantaged. Besides demonstrations, an attempt to

reject public is a form of society in order to anticipate environmental damage caused by underground system for the next 10 to 20 years in order not to be happened. It can be seen from how people gather to set strategic steps in order to be heard and executed their aspirations.

Dialogic Communication's Role in Environmental Conflict

Naturally, humans and the environment are two things that have a pattern of mutual relations. Between one and the other will be interdependent. The living environment in general consists of many elements. The influence of an element will propagate the others, and their affect to people often cannot be immediately seen and felt (Soemarwoto, 1991: 52).

In the ideal concept, humans will face conflict since there is a limitation of availability in nature while humans need a lot from nature for their development. The development often associated with the development of economy, growth or physical (building). The views of neo-classic does not take into consideration other relevant aspects related to the economy and economic development, such as natural resources and the environment. Whereas, economic growth requires natural resources to be exploited in order to produce material goods (Presilla, 2014).

Development is often echoed in the form of sustainable development which in fact only benefit one part at the expense of others. Sustainable development is often described by the improved quality of life adapted to the environmental carrying capacity (Fauzi & Oxtavianus: 2014). Unfortunately, in fact, the state of development in Indonesia is more oriented towards the economic development of capital owners to gain as much as possible. Management of nature which also ridden by economic interests led to the gap between nature and man. Through the company, the Indonesian government then manage nature with standardization which they have agreed for.

It then raises the issue of when the forcible eviction of the rights owned by the local community with companies that enter their region on the basis of documents, and others to manage the natural resources that exist. The problem is often led to conflicts in many areas of Indonesia. Imbalances cause people to perform actions that are deemed against the existing structure (Tahyudin,

2014). Such horizontal conflict often failed to reach agreement on the peace process.

Dialogic communication is very important in these considerations. Dialogue can define a relationship, which is able to put each position according to what the conversation occurs repeatedly (Baxter, 2012). The public, governments, and companies can put their own positions which created through a process of dialogue. As stated earlier, each party need to know their role to be able to put and deliver the messages. For example, a conflict that took place between the community and the company will not work well if there is no role of mediator (co-actor) to provide a view from a different perspective. In this conflict, several dialogue process that has been carried out giving rise to a concept of dialogue itself. Dialogical process undertaken following society of Merigi Sakti with government and company.

Dialogue to bring together the community's aspirations

A relationship can wake up and change. Differences and similarities of people will be equally important depending on how they action have meanings. Equation mindset and background of the mining process will show a form of intimacy in the relationship. Merigi Sakti society will feel more powerful when they have one voice or one equation in defending their rights and land.

Merigi Sakti society do some of the dialogue to form a Forum Masyarakat Gunung Bungkok(FMGB). The forum consisted of a chairman to the treasurer to invite other community in rejecting underground system undertaken by the company. Through that forum, people can speak easily to the regent and the governor. In addition, through the forum society decided not to involve too many outsiders to face the problems of society and the company, which means people can be independent in solving the problem.

Dialogue to find some opposition

Baxter wrote in his theory that the entire social life is the product of a union controlled by the contradictions and full of tension. A dialogue is not always directly led to the settlement. These differences cannot be combined in a single moment of meeting or even directly led to the policy. More than seven attempts of dialogue has been done by

community with various parties, but in the end clashes between communities and the police occurred. The process of maintaining and developing the relationship between the public and the government becomes a difficult thing to predict, especially when society have no certainty on the compensation they would receive as mining system change.

The government, in this case represented by BLH who is also the environmental assessment team, expressed their efforts to engage in dialogue to the public. Differences of opinion and attitude is also seen to show the tensions that appears. Village Head and the District for example, on the one hand they are part of society, and on the other hand, they also continue in carrying out their duties as part of the government in the society. When there is no communication between them, the tension will emerge from the bottom of society and the village officials.

Dialogue then showed their opposition. Start from the contention between communities, conflicts between communities and companies, between communities and the government, even conflicts between all of them. However, not all such conflict ended in bigger conflict. Only some indicate that the conflict emerged took the path of dialogue to resolve existing conflicts.

Dialog to each other face to face

Matters submitted by the public to their demands regarding environmental management rules of the company. Those phrases describe the various expressive people who come out in words. If only it is understood that what was done by the community is actually a collection of expressions and actions to change the decision that has been issued in consideration of their survival. The expressions show that the general belief in the community cannot be underestimated. The public will be more accepting and do the process of a peaceful settlement if there is an effort of a good dialogue from the company.

Dialog to express opinions

Position of dialogue in the conflict stating that opinions are open to each other in public dialogue. Also visible communication between village structures with house is always open for people to complain and convey their concerns for the village in many ways. This form is considered as a process of natural

dialogue and occurs in rural communities. Hence, when there is a conflict, they can reduce misunderstanding of village officials although initially, there is a misunderstanding of opinions. The dialogue process is a step for each expression in conflicting groups. Those opinions eventually will focus on the decision, whether it is a decision between groups and within the group itself.

Dialogue as a peace efforts

Reciprocal process between the public, the government, and the company for ongoing dialogue describing the moment formed to complement the overall tension and ends with a common understanding. Although the dynamics are skipped quite long, but this dialogue can gather experiences of various opinions submitted by the public in various demonstrations. Starting from that, various peace processes also runs between companies and society. Several times people went through meetings with various stakeholders to discuss points and agreement to get a peace with the company. Dialogue has demonstrated how peace can take place through lengthy processes and stages. Though the dialogue is not the only attempt to find peace in the conflict, but through dialogue various conflicts can be looked up to find common ground for peace.

Conclusions

The long journey of the conflict in Indonesia shows how still far the dialogue process takes place either *top-down* or *bottom up*. Conflicts in Bengkulu Tengah Regency involved three major interests of people, companies, and governments. Friction interests that lead to conflict and anarchy of a society and the security forces, in the end can be minimized through the sustainable dialogue process.

In this case, the dialog has several roles to become a reference in the solution of other contradictions. Dialog as a means for people of Merigi Sakti to unite their voices and reject the underground system for their method of coal mining region. More than that, people can move independently, so that the aspirations articulated at basic requirement in managing the natural resources to be available daily.

Dialogue is also used to convey the aspirations of the groups concerned in this horizontal conflict. These aspirations can be

either in the form of rejection or acceptance. The differences that arise can be delivered to find a point of agreement. Although neither side is separated from the interests, but through dialogue it can be at least showed which groups disadvantaged and which groups benefited both before and after conflict. Through dialogue forum, conflicting parties can meet and express their objections.

Conflicts between Merigi Sakti society and PT. CBS is a form of opposition viewpoints and opinions that ended in clashes which caused victims. The dialogue process is a middle path, when the regional leaders (The Governor) went down immediately and give instruction to suspend mining activities. The road to peace mediated with resolution between society and companies to find an agreement between two parties. One of the contents of the agreement is that people continue to reject system *underground* to be implemented by the company for any given reason.

With the concept of ideal dialogue in resolving conflicts, as well as the need for research that is almost similar to the author, it is not impossible if one day the concept of dialogue could serve as a reference for resolution conflict efforts. Because the elements of communication interpretation that go through the path of dialogue is not only about the process of exchange of messages, but also as an effort to understand each other and find the differences to determine the point of agreement. Due to the nature of dialogue, the dynamic could change the way to be in accordance with the needs and current conditions.

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