AN ISLAMIC OVERVIEW ON THE CONCEPTS OF INTELLECT, SIGHT AND FEEL IN VISUAL ART

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Abstract

Creative activities in the education sector have changed based on industrial development and revolution; changes from various angles including the concept of intellect, sight and feeling in visual art. So that, this writing aim to discuss on the Islamic overview in several concepts of intellect, sight and feel explicated in the context of visual art. In this study, by using the method of research critiques of the concepts of intellect, sight and feel in the context of visual art based on literature review and the researcher’s observation. Based on the thorough discussion between the concept and the Islamic perspective, all three concepts of intellect, sight and feel will be explained and related to the process of art creation so that it is more easily understood and appreciated. It is hoped that this discussion will sharpen the mind and perception of artists and designers besides developing noble character and deepens faith in Allah The Creator who precedes all creations in the world. For future research, recommendation is given by using the qualitative approach for conducting further researches in this field of study.

Keywords: Islamic art, Visual art, Concepts of Intellect, Sight and Feel.

1 INTRODUCTION

Generally, intellect is a faculty to interpret something. Intellect lies in the mind or spiritual form meaning that it cannot be touched physically. Intellect can also be considered as a balancing scale that human uses to understand, differentiate, identify and make justifications. Next, we study the power of visualisation through the eyes. The eye helps man to receive images through the retina with the aid of light. Besides light, the reception of images through the retina also depends on the position, time and the health level of the eyesight. Things happening at the back cannot be seen by the eyes in front. Similarly, the eyesight too is compromised in darkness and night time. Some people experience difficulty in seeing when their eyes are in poor condition. Meanwhile, feel refers to the forms of real experiences in life such as the feeling of heat from...
fire as a real experience in the past. However, children who have never been exposed to fire will not fear it or be aware of handling it. In fact, they will boldly approach it. Feel also relates to happiness, sadness, fear and courage. Humans are gifted with many kinds of feeling on the skin and tongue. The tongue can taste sweetness, sourness, saltiness and bitterness. On the other hand, the skin can feel softness, coarseness, hairiness, smoothness and stickiness as well as heat and coldness.

The three matters above have been explained by various perspectives and manifested in many forms or theorem models. Psychologists and the field of education have expounded the ability to think intellectually such as described in the Taxonomy Theory (1956), creative thinking by Guilford and Taylor (1955 and 1979, respectively), critical and generative thinking and others as such. These approaches were mainly applied in human life such as assessing cognitive achievement level or the intelligence of students in learning outcomes. Aion and Abdullah (1994) applied various techniques of thinking including creative, positive, negative, analytical, critical, logical, informative, intuitive and also mathematical in forming the thinking in creation. The way man sees or his perception has been studied by scholars who forwarded various approaches such as Gibson Theory (1966), Gregory (1970) and Gestalt (1920’s) that deliberated on theories of perception. Delving into the methods of how human see is imperative for designers, especially in the process of developing an idea. This will make them more focused in their design strategies because the interpretation and acceptance of the client is top priority. So that, this writing aim to discusses on the Islamic overview in several concepts of intellect, sight and feel explicated in the context of art and design.

In this study, the concepts of intellect, sight and feel in the context of art and design will be discussed based on literature review (thematic discussion based on the concept of intellect, sight and feel) from the researcher's observation. The explanation of these concepts began with the interpretation of its meaning followed by demonstration of examples.

2 BACKGROUND

Artisans have used the ability of the mind or intellect in order to gain inspiration, imagination and ideas to be presented in the forms of aesthetical artistic creations. Muslim artists too have utilised artistic products as a medium or visual communication material to interpret certain messages. According to Zakaria Ali (2013), Islamic art includes script art or calligraphy, architecture, ornamentation or decorative art, arabesque (motifs of flora and/or geometrics that are repeated indefinitely), manuscript or miniature drawing, and also western-centric art by Muslim artists. Islamic art is said to begin from the Holy Book, Al-Quran that was granted to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the year 611AD (Kleiner et. al, 2001 and Zakaria Ali, 2013).

During the rule of the Abbassid Caliphate (Abbasiyah), Islamic art and culture rapidly develop and spread. The earliest form of Islamic art then tended towards religious spirituality. Later on, Islamic spirituality changed to an enchanting form of art due to the influences of Persia and India as well as imprudence in conducting daily life. Art that was started in the confines of the mosque was moved outside and renamed secular art. This happened during the Muawiyyah Rule when artists from Persia, India and China appeared in Baghdad (Abdul Rahman, 1981). Abdul Rahman (1981) added that Persians who practiced the religion of Manu illustrated their holy book with beautiful scripts and pictures. They also produced epics filled with figures of kings and warriors such as the ones made by Firdausi (935-1020). This showed that the assimilation of cultures has influenced the production of Islamic art that encompassed the aspects of understanding, perception evaluation of art.

According to Dzul Haimi (2007), Islamic art appeared in the Malay Archipelago with the arrival of Arabian traders. In the 7th century, these traders sought spices and frankincense via land and sea routes. They brought along forms and elements of Islamic art such as the ones found on the gravestone of Maulana Abdullah, Al-Quran manuscripts that were beautifully decorated and illuminated, and the construction of mosques decorated with Islamic art. Then, Malay art adopted the Islamic elements and flourishes indicating the heritage of Arabic Islamic art with the main feature of manifesting the syahadah (believe in Allah SWT).

In the 1930’s, western modern art entered the Malay Land due to British colonisation (Mulyiady, 2011). Besides that, the immigration of foreigners and the exposure brought by education are also contributing factors towards the changes in Malay art. Local artists began to produce a multitude of modern art forms in line with the development of modern art movements at the international levels. Locally, the development started with water colour art to expressionism, abstract expressionism, traditional art, electronic art, digital, multimedia and until the post-modern era. The understanding of art that occupies the thoughts, perception and spirit of artists should be clear and effectively shared with the audience through their manifestation of art products.

According to Zakaria Ali (2013) in his book, “Kuliah Estetik”, Islamic aesthetics put the highest import on content. Thus, the roles of intellect, sight and feel should be given utmost attention by artists so that they do
not veer from the role of “khilifah”. This role as a “khilifah” should been understood through the effort of Islamification of aesthetic knowledge especially in the context of higher education sector (Shokrollah et.al. 2008). Zakaria Ali (2013) added that the deluge of knowledge on modern and post-modern art today is very complex and characterised by multi-disciplines and hybrids.

3 THE CONCEPT OF INTELLECT

According to Mokhtar Jamil and Rahman Shaari (n.d.), generally, intellect means ‘internal power’ while intellectual is the implementation of that power. Meanwhile, thought is a function of the intellect (Mokhtar Jamil & Faisal Othman, 2005). Both meanings are descriptions that intellect is not a physical object and it can be considered as a mechanism that controls the actions of man. Meanwhile, Hamka (2002) explained intellect using two perspectives; 1) linkage; and 2) knowledge on things that are essential.

‘Linkage’ is an illustration of the meaning regarding the rope or bond that controls men’s actions. In addition, the intellect is the knowledge that comes from the senses and from the body of the person. For example, the eyes can see animals and plants. In regards to the second perspective, ‘knowledge on things that are essential’ is the forms of opinion such as the opinion on good and bad. Using the intellect humans can identify behaviours such as respecting the elder is a good character. Hamka (2002) added that besides thought (al wijdan), the intellect is also a combination of desire and emotion (al likr and al iradah). Desire is considered as the desire to explore and emotion is the response to information received by the senses such as like and dislike.

Briefly, intellect is the extraordinary ability of human that can govern himself. It is like a program that is very complex that exceeds the ability of any computer programs. This is because not only that it works together with all the senses that are sources of data entry but it can also generate its own data to come out with its own decision. Thus, if the bonds that govern human actions became loose or broken, unrestrained desires will take control. Artisans or designers that use intellect will study, understand, analyse and experiment with the aid of the senses to arrive to a logical evaluation. Subsequently, they will be able to produce art creations that are good and useful.

Humans are sometimes said as lazy in using their intellect and thoughts. Harun Yahaya (2000) said that humans hardly use their brain to think due to several reasons that include stubbornness, mental laziness, the belief that it is not good to think too much, avoidance of responsibility brought about by thinking, too busy to think, seeing the world as normal requiring no changes and the feeling that it is not required to think.

Artists and designers must cast away all the things that prevent them from thinking. This is because they are the creative group that play a different roles from other people. Their creative thoughts are needed so that their creative products will inject fresh breath in the context of human creations. Ainon and Abdullah (1994) stressed that the creative idea must not only be original but also useful, practical and can be implemented. These matters are interconnected because Allah bestowed the ability to think only onto man. The ability to utilise the mind is given so that man can benefit and be faithful to Him. Allah said; Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], "Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire (Qur’an, 3: 191).

Malays who live a life as farmers are more exposed to the nature surrounding them. In the sky, they watch the clouds that move, cluster and form various shapes. The shape and movement of the clouds showed signs of wind direction, the weather and season. The appearance of the clouds inspired the production of motifs that are called “awan larat” that resembled the cloud clusters. These motifs are made into decorations in daily life such as in wood carvings, songket and batik. The “awan larat” is also understood as a pattern style with its specific rules in the art of Malay carvings. According to Mohd Sabrizaa (2008), the specific rules of “awan larat” in carving are flower, leaves, stems motifs plus others that must be carved beautifully and finely so that it is impossible to compare it with its original forms in the real world.

Artisans shared their appreciation of the nature by designing wood carvings on the window frames of Malay traditional houses. The question on how deep the appreciation felt by the observer is obviously did not entirely depend on the beautiful forms alone. The ingenuity of the mind in interpreting the aesthetical forms requires apparent sources of knowledge. Harun Yahya (2006), in his writings said that the mass of a cloud can reach 300 000 tonnes. Even at that weight, it can still float stably in the sky until Allah wills it to fall down as rain. In reference to the wonderful creation of the clouds, he cited a saying from the Al-Quran that means; And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy until, when they have carried heavy rainclouds, We drive them to a dead land and We send down rain therein and bring forth thereby [some] of all the fruits. Thus will We bring forth the dead; perhaps you may be reminded (Qur’an, 7: 57).
Figure 1: Ruzaika Omar Basaree, 1981, ‘Siri Dungun’, Mixed media, 170.8 x 76cm. (Source: Muliyadi, 2007, p.59)

The beauty of woodcarving using “awan larat” is considered as traditional art and this has been adopted as reference for local modern art by Ruzaika Omar Basaree in her artwork titled “Siri Dungun” (Figure 1) produced in 1981. This artwork, according to Muliyadi (2011), is a manifest of Islamic aesthetic values that is the awareness of the “Tauhid” using the methods of dematerialisation and denaturalisation. The explanation of Allah’s Tauhid can be further understood by referring to the saying above that described the greatness of Allah in creating the clouds and as a reminder to people on His power.

Artists and designers use the intellect in referring and analysing in the research of a creation. A French builder named Gustave (1832-1923) referred to the research by Herman von Meyer, an anatomist who studied human femur bones. He found the structure of the bone has bigger ends that contain many fine bones inside that are called trabeculae. The structure of these fine bones is inter-connected so that it is able to support the stress experienced on the feet due to movement. This inspired Gustave in designing the Eifel Tower that is 1063 feet tall. The tower is built using a structure that is wide at the bottom and supported by small pillars built until the very top. Its construction was regarded as creative because the usage of materials is reduced whilst at the same time making the framework sturdier and flexible, besides creating its own ventilating system.

Nature created by Allah SWT is a depiction of His Might. It represents a communication medium that needs to be translated. Thus, the role of intellect is to absorb the information, filter and make choices based on reasons and logic. A rambutan fruit will begin as a bud and grow in the colour of dark green. The colour soon lightens and changes to reddish-orange as the fruit ripens. The changes in colour of the skin are an information code to the taste of the inner flesh. However, the colour of the inner flesh remains white since budding to the ripening stage. Thus, even though its taste did not depend on the skin itself, the colour changes of the skin justify the changing taste of the inner pulp. So, the observer can gauge the taste of the fruit by its colour. Thus, knowledge on colour as a visual language is very important. Although water is colourless, artists will place clear colours with added values of the surroundings. For example, in the painting of impressionist George Seurat titled “Water Lilies” (1916), from the collection of the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, water is coloured using blue pigments of various tones showing the effects of light beam and reflections of clouds and the sky (Figure 2). Green effects are reflections of grasses and plants alongside the water’s edge, besides grasses that grew among the water lilies leaves. The red colour of the lilies also spreads on the leaves’ and water surfaces in order to evoke the effects of natural objects.
Allah SWT created a multitude variety of flora and fauna for the benefit of human life in the world. When the process of photosynthesis ceased, green leaves will turn from yellow to red to brown, which finally dry up and subsequently fall to the ground. In some trees, all the leaves fall leaving only bare twigs, branches and trunk. In region that experience seasonal changes, this occurrence saves the tree from being broken due to the weight of snow that soon follows in winter. The tree did not in fact die it will flourish again with new leaves and flowers in spring. This change in seasons is thus, marked with the changing of colours and the trees condition. Again, colours play a vital role in informing the changing of the seasons. Similarly, designers too select and apply colours in the process of creation. Fashion and textile designers search for information, process and analysed it to produce creative products. Hence, a pattern is created that resembles colours and visual integration with effects of leaves and grass on a military camouflage uniform. It functions to conceal the wearer from the view of enemies in the forest or jungle.

Briefly, the intellect in the context of art and design refers to the ability of the artist or designer to translate and interpret the surroundings and life experience through their senses. The effect of the mind’s ability can be seen through various manifestations of art forms that can also be shared with the senses of other observers. The artists and designers will then be in accord with the faith in Allah SWT.

4 THE CONCEPT OF SIGHT

Intellect and the power of sight are interrelated because the mind process what is perceived through sight. In reference to the concept of intellect, the eye is an important sense that contributes visual information to human. The Kamus Dewan Bahasa (2005) defines sight in various perspectives. Firstly, is to see when looking, and not blind. Secondly, is to see (look, watch, etc) using the eyes. Thirdly, is to foresee or predict. Fourthly, is to make conclusion by using the senses, to acknowledge or explore. Briefly, sight is an action that involves the whole function of the eyes including the nerve network that reach the brain, which possesses the ability to think, the intellect.

In the context of art and design, the definition of sight also refers to seeing that is extended to observing and perception. This is because as creative people, their sight is individualistic and extraordinary. Every artist or designer sees the world differently. According to Zakaria Ali (2013), perception makes the artisan to look for answers to the things that permeates their senses. As such, sight is not just receiving all images into the eyes. Its process also involves the intellect to interpret the things that entered the senses.

The combination of sight and intellect make mankind as a very special creature. By seeing, man is able to read. Man sees texts that are comprised of alphabets, numbers and signs. Man is also able to read symbols such as that found in logos. Alphabets, numbers and symbols contain special meanings. For example, the number 2 can represent an amount and can also be used to show a particular level or stage on logo design. Various sources of literature contribute different information and values. Literature such as text books has different information to general reading such as newspaper and magazines. To read the Al-Quran is considered an ibadah (worship of Allah) and is rewarded with great returns as explicated in the book, Ilmu diungkap Al-Quran dan Al Hadis: The best form of worship is by reading the Al-Quran (Jabatan Pendidikan
Kedah Darul Aman, 1999).

In the context of art and design, the calligrapher who produced artistic calligraphy also gave the opportunity for other people to see the words of Al-Quran, to appreciate and to receive “pahala” (merit) when reading it.

Besides reciting the Al-Quran, watching the Kaabah, the faces of ones' parents and the panoramic view of the world as appreciations also qualifies as merits given by Allah SWT, who has given the gift of sight to mankind. However, not many sees it with gratitude. Allah SWT said; And it is He who produced for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful (Qur'an 23: 78).

Using sight, man is able to sense the beautiful forms that Allah SWT has created. Although man cannot touch light, he however can see the beauty of the rainbow. Thus, artists and designers can be inspired by watching nature and all that is contained in the surroundings. The movement of birds in flight has inspired man to produce airplanes. Man also discovered the theory of gravity when he observed an object falling from above to the ground. It is also worth noting that the eyes that view all things in this world will also bear witness to every human's action in life at the Hereafter. Hence, artists and designers too need to give attention to this matter and avoid from looking on sinful matters and even more, avoid from producing such materials for others to see.

The basic level of the painting process requires good skills in seeing. Not only in terms of looking at the subject matter, the artist is required to observe and make estimations on distances, the effect of objects layering, the basic structure of the object and study the details towards decorations colours and integration.

The way each person looks at an object is different to each other. In order to plan for an efficient graphic design, the designer applies several theorems that are suitable and accurate so that the created message can be conveyed interestingly and effectively. Artists usually apply approaches such as Gestalt (1920's) to look at object in a wholesome manner, the Law of Pragnanz to look at objects in parts or certain sections, the Law of Closure to look at objects continuously, and also various other methods of ambiguity.

Observing and appreciating Islamic art refers to the course of producing the art work itself through all the processes (D'zul Haimi, 2007). The first process is imitating nature while appreciating the beauty of God's creation. Secondly, is the activity of dematerialising the object. Thirdly, is the styling for the purpose of aesthetical concept. The fourth and last process is abstraction whereby it contains implicit messages. This is how the Muslim artisans goes through the complicated and detailed processes in order to produce their artworks.

By using sight man becomes a believer. If we attempt to explain colours to the blind, it is very difficult for them to understand much less believe because they have never seen it. So, the believe in colours between the normal man and the blind is different. Generally, the colour blue is categorised as cold and often associated with water and clouds. However, the blind may not have the same concepts. This demonstrates that human have different views based on his sight or the lack of it. Allah SWT said; and not equal are the blind and the seeing, nor are those who believe and do righteous deeds and the evildoer. Little do you remember (Qur'an, 40: 58).

The sight of man is not limited only to the eyes. It is also complemented by the other senses such as touch, smell and taste. For example, the growth of a plant can be seen from the start on its seed that grows shoots and leaves. These develop into a trunk, branches, flowers and fruits. Altogether, the experiences of touch, smell and taste further enrich the experience of sight.
shaking the legs and laughing loudly, all illustrate the joys in the children’s world. Here, some observers may just accord a passing interest while some can be absorbed watching the children play. Thus, looking with just a passing interest is different from observing and develops a perception. The artist and designer see not only with the eyes but also with his/her heart and emotion. Hence their artworks are planned so that the audience can be drawn together into the artwork through the artist’s perception. As an example, the nation’s political conflict is illustrated in a well-mannered way and by using the images of birds as the symbol of peace by Hashim Hassan (1987) in his artwork titled, ‘Intruder’ (Figure 3). This approach is very distinct from the western approach like the Dadaism style in interpreting the image of protest. To see, understand and appreciate an artwork by differentiating the characteristics of the art piece is an important experience for art historians. This is what has been expounded by D’zul Haimi (2007) in regards to the pleasure of seeing an artwork or in other words, the aesthetic experience.

In summarising, the sight in the context of art and design is an activity using the eyes to record visual images to transform into data that will be processed, filtered and evaluated by the intellect and experienced by the emotions. Sight is vital in the visual world whereby artists and designers use it as the first step in the process of producing or designing their work. They use sight to search for knowledge, making research, record images, form and control how their art products should be viewed.

5 THE CONCEPT OF FEEL

The experience of sight produces an impact on the ability to feel. For example, seeing a glass full of water and ice, with condensed droplets on the outside surface will induce the feeling of thirst and coolness to the observer even though not a drop of water has touched his lips. The Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (2005) defines feel as a matter that is experienced by the tongue or other body parts, the characteristics of something that gives rise to a feeling such as the sweetness of sugar, and fell is related to the matters of the heart or the spiritual (Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2005).

Simply put, feel can be defined as one form of the senses that produces a reaction of the body such as sweetness, coarseness and coldness that is felt by the tongue, fingers dan skin. Feel also exists in the unseen or internal part of the body and evokes an effect that is the emotion. In short, emotion is something that emerged from the body and although it cannot be specifically located, we can be assured that it exist in one’s body.

In the context of art and design, the sense of feel is imperative. It influences the effect and quality of a surface that is called integration whether it is real or illusion. The values of feel in beauty, fineness and dignity are the emotions felt by man. According to Zakaria Ali (2013) who cited Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), beauty and grace are feelings at the lower level while dignity is a feeling at a higher level. To place the evaluation of those feelings, it must be preceded by the process of thinking that involves the aspects of space and time. He added that the process of looking at a painting and absorbing the information into the mind where it will be further processed is called the aesthetic experience or the experience by a rational intellect.

Seeing a red chilli can depict the feeling of spiciness. Seeing the long and thick fur of a cat will evoke the feelings of lushness and softness. The sweetness of a durian fruit cannot be extracted physically but the tongue can surely feel it without any doubts. Man is also convinced on the feelings that are born from the heart and emotion. Still, the position of love and affection cannot be located to a specific place. Nevertheless, the emotions can be manifested through actions and speech.

The feelings of conviction and faith in Allah are spiritual in characteristic. When man reached the level of full faith in God, they will experience the greatest bliss. The Jabatan Kemajuan Islam (2006) explains that faith is the greatest bliss from Allah by quoting from the Al-Quran; And I have followed the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And it was not for us to associate anything with Allah. That is from the favor of Allah upon us and upon the people, but most of the people are not grateful (Qur’an, 12: 38).

The marvellous thing is that artists and designers with their sensitive souls are able to feel that Allah exists. The methodology of appreciation at various levels such as depicting, analysing, interpreting and evaluating a work of art is still, at the level of understanding form and meaning that is wished to be conveyed through visualisation. However, understanding the creations of God will invoke the feelings of taqwa (conscious of Allah) towards the Creator. Man cannot see Allah SWT, but by looking the world in its entirety man will feel His power.

Would not it be wonderful if through his appreciation the artist can manifest the faith and consciousness (taqwa) in Allah by producing works of art that leave a deep impression on the souls of his audience. Typeface art or typography and calligraphy using various styles do not only carry literal meanings, but they
also contain deep messages in the form of visuals. The words “Happy Birthday and Best Wishes” that are
decorated in greeting cards are not merely normal speech by the giver but also contain his prayers and
affections for the receiver. Nowadays, the forms of the script and wishes have been developed from
conventional greeting cards to digital ones complete with animation, sound effect, illustrations and interesting
images.

Briefly, feel is a sense that appear from the reactions of the physical and spiritual of the body. In the context
of the production of artwork and design, the feel of beauty should be an essential focus. Based on the
processes of producing Islamic art, the objective and role of the artist and designer are more towards the
manifestation of faith in Allah SWT.

6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS OF INTELLECT, SIGHT AND FEEL

The concepts of intellect, sight and feel are actually linked together. The intellect interprets matters that are
seen and continue to produce the feel of effect. The arrival of feelings at the end of the thinking process
together with sight is crucial as this will give rise to meaning and powerful effects. The artists and designers
who produce a multitude of art forms and designs are also able to simultaneously learn of The Creator
through their creative processes. This is achievable if they fully utilise their intellect and senses by following
the rules and regulation according to the Islamic Shariah basis (Ramli et al, 2018). The chain of functions of
the intellect, sight and feel becomes the important element towards the development of the art and design
field.

According to Hamka (2002), man will widen his thinking field and construct philosophies through the earth,
sky and himself. He cited a saying from the Al-Quran as follows; And on the earth are signs for the certain [in
faith], And in yourselves. Then will you not see? And in the heaven is your provision and whatever you are
promised (Qur’an, 51: 20 – 22).

7 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the three matters namely the intellect, sight and feel are interrelated and important in the
process of human life. All three contribute towards man’s quest to be faithful to Allah SWT. Artists and
designers, as individuals involved in the field of art and design, are capable of playing the role of the caliph in
this world by fully utilising their abilities of intellect, sight and feel. These gifts bestowed by Allah influence
the forms of artworks produced and also influence the processes of appreciation, the critic and aficionados of
art. Besides delving into modern concepts and theories, the thinking, seeing and feeling patterns of artists
and designers need to be sown with Islamic religiosity and values because these matters traverse all
knowledge explored by mankind. This is because man is also a creature created by Allah. For future
research, recommendation is given by using the qualitative approach for conducting further researches in
this field of study.

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