ABSTRACT

Chinese problem experienced by Chinese Indonesian has begun to rise in media nowadays, especially in comedy stage. The new category of comedy genre in Indonesia, Stand Up Comedy, has successfully brought these problem into public. Through one of Stand Up Comedians from Chinese Indonesian, Ernest Prakasa, who usually delivers his jokes about his life as Chinese and its cultures, this thesis aims to find out how the discourses of Chinese Indonesian are represented and (re)constructed through Ernest Prakasa’s show in Stand Up Comedy Indonesia through Ernest’s show ‘Ernest Prakasa and The Oriental Bandits’. For the method and theory, the researcher uses the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis-Historical Approach by Ruth Wodak which focuses not only on linguistics aspect of Ernest’s show but also relating it to discourse and historical aspect of Chinese Indonesian. This analysis will be divided into four parts. In the first part, Ernest’s show will be analyzed using five discursive strategies. In the second, third and fourth part, the analysis examines the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between text (Ernest’s show transcript), genre and discourse. I also relate the text with sociopolitical and historical context of Ernest and Chinese-Indonesian discourse. I found that through Ernest’s jokes, there is strategy of ‘positive-self and negative-other presentation’ which used by Ernest as counter discourse to change the existing dichotomy into Chinese as ‘the self’ and indigene as ‘the other’.

Keywords: CDA; Chinese-Indonesian; Discourse; Jokes; Racism; Stand Up Comedy

1. Introduction

Chinese is included as one of ethnic groups which are inherent with Indonesian people. Their status of citizenship is clearly mentioned as Indonesian, but they have dilemmatic problems with indigene. This dilemma makes Chinese Indonesian always become an ‘Other’ in their own nation, even though they had lived together with indigene since hundreds years ago (Budiawan 2013).

Since Soeharto took over the dominance in 1966, New Order forced the reappearance of the “Chinese Problem” through several constructions and stigmas into Chinese Indonesian as exclusive, asocial, rich, and China or Communist oriented (Hoon 2008, p. 38). Moreover, Coppel (1994) also convinces that any kind of marginalize actions in social, politic; education and culture into Chinese Indonesian were allowed by government because it is considered as “problem” solving.

After anti-Chinese riot happened in May 1998, Habibie as the president released President Instruction (Inpres) which allowed Mandarin (Chinese) language teaching in school. Furthermore, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) declared Presidential Decree No. 6 year 2000 which abolished Presidential Decree in 1967, liberated Chinese ethnic to do their culture, and belief. In January 2001, as the continuation of February 2002, Megawati as the president also announced Chinese New Year as the national holiday starting in 2003.

Suryadinata formulate that assimilation policy which was applied in New Order had been changed into multiculturalism as new policy in reformation era (Dahana 2001, in Suhardinata 2009; Hoon 2008; Suryadinata 2010). It means that changing policy is related with how discourse of Chinese is reproduced in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the changing of Chinese Indonesian discourse can be seen in media and literature. As noted in JB Kristanto’s Katalog Film Indonesia (2005) that since the first film production in Indonesia until 1965, there are only 21 films which used Chinese Indonesian theme or materials. While in New Order (1966-1998), this number decreased more and more until there are only 9 films about Chinese Indonesian.

One of phenomenal film about Chinese Indonesians was “Soe Hok Gie” (2005). This film was based on true story about Gie, who is an active student of Universitas Indonesian (UI) and a Chinese Indonesian portrayed as Indonesian citizen who cares about political confusion in his nation. In this film, the character of Gie was not portrayed explicitly as Chinese ethnic, but implicitly as young Indonesian who carried idealism in his political view (Rumahfilm.org 2007).
However, the representation of discourse of Chinese Indonesian is not only in film media but also in television. Metro TV as one of television channel in Indonesia broadcasted Chinese Indonesian through its special program of Imlek celebration every year. Another television like KOMPAS TV also broadcasted issue about Chinese Indonesian discourse, even though not in special program, but through competition of comedy performance which known by Stand Up Comedy Indonesia.

Stand Up Comedy which is originated from USA through theatre called The Minstrel Show, has been popular in Indonesia for the last two years, since KOMPAS TV held a Stand-Up Comedy Indonesia competition in September 2011 and brought this comedy show successfully into public (Papana 2012). As we know that Stand Up Comedy as a new form of comedy genre in Indonesia appeared as serious comedy raising sensitive issues like ethnic, politic, gender, and religion. Stand-up comedy has other functions besides entertaining audience which are dealing with and bringing forth, be it explicitly or implicitly, current issues and topics with which many people in society are concerned. That is the comedy is for, when it is brought quite well, without making others offended, some taboo topics can easier to discuss within society (Falk 2010)

In the interview with Ernest Prakasa, he mentioned that Stand Up Comedy is unique comedy because all comic always prepared their performance and joke materials or the script by their own selves. This is why every comic has different kind of jokes depending on their characteristic. Ernest Prakasa is one of comic who has special characteristic in his comedy because he always tells jokes about “Chineseness” as his own ethnic. He is known as a finalist of the competition of Stand-up comedy in KOMPAS TV season 1. He is the first comic who held his own tour #MeremMelekTour around 8 cities in Indonesia on April to May 2012. Then, he continued by releasing the book and DVD of his tours on October 2012. (Prakasa 2012).

In this study, the writer chose the issue about ethnic, focusing only on Chinese Indonesian ethnic, which often delivered by Ernest Prakasa in his jokes. This study will emerge a different context with other studies about Chinese Indonesian. Many scholars and historians like Charles Coppel, Leo Suryadinata, Mely G. Tan, Onghokham and Wibowo had done study about Chinese Indonesian which pointed to the history and identity problems in real life.

This study will analyze the problem about Chinese identity or Chinese problem in the context of comedy, which is never done by any scholars or historians. Furthermore, this study also tries to analyze how Chineseness discourse is (re)constructed and represented through Ernest Prakasa’s jokes in Stand Up Comedy.

Considering the context of the text, this study used two theories in analysis. The first is about theory of humor, laugh and joke. Humor, laugh and joke are known since language has been found by human. Humor is also part of people’s life as it also comes with people’s feelings, such as happiness and fun. The clear definition about humor itself is difficult to be clarified since every person has their own funny experiences which make them laugh (Rahmanadji 2007). Humor and joke as language tools can function to deliver serious and taboo messages become more relaxed and less serious.

Furthermore, humor and laughter are delivered with certainly different purposes and functions which depend on its context. It is because the major functions of humor and joke are for entertaining and relaxing people’s mind from hectic activity. Another function of humor which is also mostly used is as message. James Danandjaya (in Suhadi 1989) says that the mostly used function of humor is for canalizing our depressed feeling, which is caused by social and political unfair, or the suspense between ethnic and religion. Recently, young adults also use humor and joke as social or political critics. This function is considered as the intellectual and modern way to criticize government policy or social phenomena instead of doing useless demonstration (Suhadi 1989).

Meanwhile, Jatiman (in Suhadi 1989) also claims another function of joke except social critics is as tools of self-actualization when some people are being powerless for telling direct critics and hence creating humor for their concern. Furthermore, Kartono Muhammad (ibid) states that good humor is about laughing at our own self or our own group; which is called as auto critic.

The second theory used is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Historical approach by Ruth Wodak. The main focus of CDA is on language or text but even so, it is also not only concerned to the language aspect. CDA is always related to the context of how discourse is produced. Moreover, historical context
is also an important aspect for this approach because social structure always changes dynamically ovetimes so it will belong to historical context. One of the approaches of CDA is Historical-approach by Ruth Wodak.

As pointed out by Wodak (2006), CDA-Historical Approach is also oriented to socio-philosophical of critical theory. In her interview with Kendall (2007), Wodak clarified the most important characteristic in her Historical Approach among other CDA approaches, except interdisciplinary. In formulating her concept, she has been influenced by many historians and sociologists’ teamwork. It makes her concept becomes combined with theoretical research strongly along with empirical research, the analysis of large data corpora and ethnography (Wodak 2001, p. 46).

Wodak convinces that the analysis of discourse by using CDA needs to integrate a large quantity of the social and political field in which discursive events are embedded. She realizes that historical aspect in a wider concept will embrace those social theories, thus this approach can be used interdisciplinary and eclectically. Wodak divides divides the context of discourse into four levels named triangulation concept: (1) the immediate, language or text internal co-text; (2) the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterance, text, genre and discourse; (3) the extralinguistic social/sociological variables and institutional frames and specific ‘context of situation’ (middle range theories); (4) the broader sociopolitical and historical context, which discursive practices are embedded in and related to (grand theories) (Wodak 2006, p. 67).

2. Research Method

This study used qualitative approach since the main data source is the video performance. Qualitative approach is compatible for research which relies on the interpretive and critical approach to social science, in which the reports often contain rich description and detail explanation. Qualitative is an appropriate approach for analyzing cultural phenomena such as the issue of Chineseness in Indonesia and its discourse is also agreeable for qualitative approach.

The main data source of this study is the video of Ernest Prakasa’s performance of Stand Up Comedy, which is one video from his latest special show “Ernest Prakasa and The Oriental Bandits” on February 2013. The writer chose this show because it was held one day before Imlek celebration. There are also secondary data which were taken to complete this study. The writer had done a brief direct interview with Ernest Prakasa and transcribed the dialogue. The writer also had conducted library as well as online research to find reliable information through books, journals, newspaper articles, thesis, dictionaries, Ernest’s and StandupIndo’s official blog, and many more related to the topic and theory as much as possible.

For keeping this analysis ‘in-line’, the writer had limited the object material and the issue, so that the study will be focused on specific into discourse of Chinese-Indonesian in humor context; which is Stand Up Comedy. More specific, this study only focused on Ernest Prakasa’s comedy performance in his latest big show which represents Chineseness discourse in Indonesia.

Considering that the object chosen for this study is a video, there are several steps required for collecting data. In the DVD of “Ernest Prakasa and The Oriental Bandits”, the writer only used the last season which contains Ernest’s sixty minutes part. This sixty minutes performance of Ernest were transcribed and organized according to the classification of topic. Secondary data is the transcript of interview with Ernest on February 11th 2013.

Using the concept of CDA-Historical Approach by Ruth Wodak, there are 5 discursive strategies as the categories of analysis. First, there are referential strategies or nomination strategies by which one constructs and represent social actors, this step are required to categorize the membership depending on tropes, biological, naturalizing, and depersonalizing metaphors and metonymies. Second, there are predicational strategies which provided as stereotypical, evaluative attribution of negative and positive traits in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates. Third, there are argumentation strategies and a fund of topoi through which positive and negative attributions are justified. Fourth, the analyst may focus on perspectivisation, framing or discourse representation in which speaker express their involvement in discourse, and position their point of view in the reporting, description, narration or quotation of discriminatory events or utterances. The last, there are intensifying strategies on the one hand and mitigation strategies on the other. Both of them help to qualify and modify the epistemic status of a
proposition by intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force or racist, anti-semitic, nationalist or ethnicist utterances.

3. Discussion

3.1 Discursive Strategies of Ernest Prakasa through ‘Ernest Prakasa and The Oriental Bandits’ Show

In the first level, the researcher applied a concept of discursive strategies which are divided into five types of strategies: referential strategies or nomination strategies; predicational strategies; argumentation strategies; perspectivation, framing or discourse representation; intensifying-mitigation strategies; those strategies used to analyze the text of Ernest Prakasa’s Stand Up Comedy show entitled “Ernest Prakasa and the Oriental Bandits”. This is the opening of his show:

“Cuman gua mau bilang satu hal buat loe yang bukan Cina malem hari ini, loe tau gak sih kenapa dikatain “Cina” itu gak enak? Kenapa kalo dibilang “Cina” (with mockery tone) itu gak enak. Gue kasih tau kenapa, dipanggil “Cina” itu gak enak bukan karena kita merasa hina jadi orang Cina, bukan, dipanggil ‘Cina’ itu gak enak, karena pada saat kata itu didenger, itu memunculkan trauma, itu kayak time capsule, itu kayak membongkar kembali ingatan-ingatan yang mau loe pendam, tapi begitu kata itu muncul, jadi teringat lagi.

Buat gua ingatannya gak terlalu parah, biasa aja. Mungkin gua akan teringat masa-masa gua di’bully’ waktu kecil, waktu sekolah. Tapi buat orang lain bisa jadi lebih parah, buat Dwika Putra yang baru, dipanggil ‘Cina’ mungkin akan mengingatkan dia akan sebuah hari di bulan Mei tahun 1998, saat dia dikejar-kejar orang pakai kapak, serius, kapak beneran, bukan minyak angin cap kapak ya... ini kapak beneran. Bukan minyak angin cap kapak (he portrayed the person who bring minyak angin cap kapak to frighten others). Kapak beneran, coba tanya Dwika kalo gak percaya”

Opening this subchapter, I examined about the boundaries which are used to identify between ‘self’ (we) and ‘other’ (them). This subchapter explores more about ‘self-other representation’ which Ernest declared, whether it is explicitly or implicitly, during his show. In this way, I positioned Chinese-Indonesian as ‘self’ and indigene as ‘other’.

3.2 Referential and predicational strategies

In the opening of his show, Ernest began explaining the important reason why called ‘Cina’ / Chinese is uncomfortable. He then said that called as ‘Cina’ made people remember the worst memories for all Chinese Indonesian people. This bad memory refers to what he said next. He reminded the audiences about the tragic incident on May 1998 when Chinese Indonesian were being victims of anti-Chines riot.

Otherwise, the dichotomy between ‘positive self-presentation’ and ‘negative other-presentation’ is clearly stated by Ernest. This dichotomy is used for the boundaries between ‘we/self’ (Chinese-Indonesian) and ‘them/other’ (indigene/native Indonesian).

Furthermore, for applying the first strategy referential/nomination strategies, the researcher formulated the social actors mentioned by Ernest in the transcript of his show which are: elo/lo (Jakartarian/Betawi, slang language for ‘you’), loe yang bukan Cina (the others who are not Chinese-Indonesian or referring to indigene), gue (Jakartarian/Betawi, slang language for ‘I/me/my’ referring to Ernest), orang Cina/Cina (Chinese-Indonesian), orang lain (the other Chinese-Indonesian), Dwika Putra (another Chinese-Indonesian or one of comic opener at that night), orang pakai kapak (person who brought axe or referring to indigene), and kita (Indonesian language for ‘we’).

Ernest used general informal Indonesian language in his opening but identified himself by using Betawi or Jakarta accent which is indicating informal situation in his speech and where he belongs to. He also used the word “gue” to emphasize his identification as a metropolitan civil or Chinese-Jakarta which is the special term of Betawi language referring to “I”. In addition to strengthen his identity, he also used the opposite pronoun of ‘gue’, which is ‘I’. The term ‘loe’ is used as Jakarta/Betawi language refers to ‘you’. In this case, addressing ‘self’ and ‘other’ by using local pronouns ‘gue-loe’ also indicates the boundary between ‘gue’ (Chinese-Indonesian) and ‘loe’ (indigene/native Indonesia).

Moreover, the most significant social actors mentioned many times by Ernest is ‘orang Cina’ or ‘Cina’. This social actor is included as collective subject or collectivisation – the reference of social actor
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is as group entity but without quantifying them (Wodak 2001, p. 53) – which is categorized as particularizing synecdoche (pars pro toto / a part standing for the whole) or ‘collective singular’.

When he said “loe tau gak sih kenapa dikatain “Cina” ‘itu gak enak? Kenapa kalo dibilang “Cina” (dengan nada mengejek) itu gak enak” (do you know why being called as ‘Cina’ is uncomfortable? Why being mocked as ‘Cina’ – with mockery tone – is unpleasant?), Ernest deliberately stressed his tone in the term “Cina”, in order to make the audiences realized more how crucial and meaningful this word is. This crucial meaning is further emphasized when Ernest repeated his sentence using different verbs; “dikatain” and “dibilang”, which have meanings not only for calling but also for mockery. These both verbs are followed by the word “Cina” and then the word “gak enak” (uncomfortable/unpleasant/unpalatable) which depicts the unpleasant feeling resulted from the use of that word.

However, the employment of the term ‘Cina’ in this sentence refers to the context in which this term was used in New Order regime for humiliating and remembering their Chinese status as foreigner and stranger, not as part of Indonesian. According to Hoon (2008), this term has sensitive effect to Chinese-Indonesian, especially the old generation, because it reminds them of traumatic period in 1965-1966 when Soeharto and his New Order regime oppressed almost all manifestations of Chinese culture and officially legitimized the term ‘Cina’ as humiliation for Chinese-Indonesian.

The meaning of this term is different for young generation. They do not feel insulted with the term ‘Cina’. After more than three decades, the term ‘Cina’ is fruitfully internalized in the public use as well as for young generation. Unconsciously, they accepted this term and always use it, whether it brings worst memorial or meaning, as long as it is not used as scorn or depending on how others pronounced and gestured this term.

3.3 Mitigating strategies

According to Wodak (2001), minimization, as a part of mitigating strategies, often appears in the form of euphemism – that is to say, for pleasant replacement of unpleasant words with a negative denotative or connotative meaning. In this case, Ernest used time phrase ‘sebuah hari di bulan Mei tahun 1998’ (in one day on May 1998), instead of ‘anti-Chinese riot’ or ‘kerusuhan’. Even though he did not explicitly explain about what happened in the tragic incident of May 1998, but he illustrated through the other social actor ‘Dwika Putra’ who is ‘dikejar-kejar orang pakai kapak’ (chased by people using axe), instead of saying ‘destruction of Chinese store’ or ‘ravishment of Chinese women’.

These euphemism phrases are aimed for reducing sentimental side about the tragedy. It can be seen in the following sentence, “serius, kapak beneran, bukan minyak angin cap kapak ya… ini kapak beneran. Bukan minyak angin cap kapak”. Ernest intentionally put his punch line (the funny part) in this sentence, in order to reduce the tragic meaning from ‘dikejar-kejar orang pakai kapak’ (chased by people using axe). In addition, the identification of which part of his sentence included as set-up or punch line is by paying attention to the audience’s laugh. In this way, Ernest compared the genuine axe with minyak angin cap kapak, Malaysian brand of traditional medicine oil literally translated “Oil for Wind Axe Brand” which is commonly used in Chinese family to reduce nausea, cold, headache and stomachache. This comparison is completed with Ernest’s gesture which portrayed the person bring minyak cap kapak to frighten others. These comparison and gesture indicate that Ernest did not seriously consider about the incident of May 1998.

3.4 Argumentative strategies

Wodak (2001) mentions that predicational and referential strategies can be so close with argumentative strategies and also can be part of it. Thus, this part is the continuity and neatly associated with the previous part. According to the text or Ernest’s bit, there is the topos of danger or topos of threat is identified and related to the situation below.

The topos of danger or topos of threat based on the following conditional: if a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform or do it. On the other hand, this topos can be formulated differently: if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them (Wodak 2001, p. 77).

If we look back to Ernest’s bit above, this topos can be identified when he said about the incident of May 1998. The illustration about Dwika Putra who was chased by person with axe as mentioned by Ernest
can give threatening feeling to Chinese-Indonesian about the tragedy of May 1998. They will feel danger that anti-Chinese riot can reoccur anytime and anywhere. On the other hand, in Pribumi’s perspective, that riot is the action resulted from their threatened feeling of their powerless position in the economy sector controlled by Chinese-Indonesian.

3.5 Perspectivation and framing

The fourth strategies: perpectivation, framing, and discourse representation focuses on the speakers’ expression of their involvement in discourse and the position of their point of view in the discursive flux (Wodak 2001, p. 81). Considering Goffmanian concept of ‘participant framework’ – the set of relationship among individuals present within the perceptual range of specific utterance and utterance themselves – there are four forms of relationship or ‘participant status’: ‘animator’ (the person who produces, voices, an utterance, or fragment of talk), ‘author’ (the person who originates, conceives, or creates the utterance or talk), ‘figure’ (the person who portrayed through the utterance or talk), and ‘principal’ (the person who is responsible for the utterance or talk and committed to what is said) (Goffman 1974, in Wodak 2001).

However, these all four statuses can be referred to Ernest himself. As the following criteria: first, Ernest is the one who performs as ‘animator’ or speaker and produces or voices his own set of jokes; second, Ernest is the ‘author’ who wrote originally his text or joke materials and organized its performance; third, he is also the ‘principle’, the one who is responsible for and committed about everything on his jokes. Furthermore, the principal also belongs to Ernest because he is also the host of his own show.

3.6 Sociopolitical and historical context of Ernest and Chinese Indonesian

In the concept of CDA, text cannot be separated from its context, especially its producer or speaker. Since I use CDA, interdisciplinary concept requires another method of data collection and the analysis of different genres depending on the topic in research (Wodak 2001, p.40)

For mapping the context of historical background of Ernest, it can begin from his age and then categorize him into division of generation formulated by Hoon. According to the collected facts from Ernest’s blog at neonspark.wordpress.com, he posted article entitled ‘Bye 2011, Hi 2012’ in 6 January 2012. He said that he attains the age of 29 years old in 2011; thus, he was born in 1982 and had been on teen-age, or approximately in 16 years when anti-Chinese riot happened in 1998.

In other words, he is included as young generation, who is about thirtieth until fiftieth years old in this year (2013), which was mostly being student senior high school, or university, when the riot of anti-Chinese and student movements happened on May 1998 (Hoon 2008). It can be understood that Ernest had experienced politic assimilation and several policies which occurred in Orde Baru regime. His childhood until teenager was under politic assimilation by Soeharto that makes it possible that dichotomy of ‘self-other presentation’ between indigene and Chinese-Indonesian is deeply internalized in his unconsciousness.

However, the difference is during his childhood, several policies and dichotomy defined that Chinese-Indonesian as ‘the other’, while indigene is ‘the self’. It can be seen in Soeharto policies of assimilation which forced the citizens to leave their identity and assimilate with national culture. According to Danandjaya (2001, in Suhandinata 2009, p. 295-299), assimilation policy, which is very inhuman, prohibited all of Chinese culture like tradition, belief, and religion ritual celebrated in front of public. This assimilation principle prosecuted Chinese-Indonesian to be completely melted into Indonesian culture by changing their Chinese names into Indonesian names in their residence identification card (KTP). However, from several policies applied during New Order period, Chinese-Indonesian as ‘the other’ is compelled to wipe out their identity to become Indonesian as ‘the self’ if they want to be admitted as Indonesian citizen.

Hoon also states that marginalizing Chinese-Indonesian in all areas in Indonesia, especially in education, social, religious and politic, is legaled by New Order government, because this is one way to settle what is called as ‘problem’. This is also triggered several discrimination action by indigene to Chinese-Indonesian in social or political sectors because they considered that Chinese-Indonesian as their national ‘problem’.
The postulation of ‘Chinese Problem’ and its justification is appropriate with the concept of racism. As Suhandinata (2001, p. 288) states that racism is the opinion which divides human into race in which the one is ‘superior’ while the other one is ‘inferior’. The people, considering themselves as ‘superior’ because of their culture or decent, believe that the power of social and politic is on their hand. The confession of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ is taken for granted toward discriminative action, segregation, or even massively genocide.

4. Conclusion

From analysis above using discursive strategies, it can be concluded that Ernest represented not only his ethnic, Chinese-Indonesian, but also his young generation who is successfully internalized with dichotomy between Chinese-Indonesian and indigene (pribumi) which is so popular in Soeharto and New Order regime. Throughout his jokes in his show, Ernest more and more provided ‘self-other representation’ to identify his Chinese identity and to differentiate him with indigene. In his ‘negative-other representation’ about indigene, he represented same popular stereotypes about indigene, instead of reconstructed with another presentation. In this way, he want to assert that even Chinese-Indonesian is ethnic minority, but they can hold ‘superior’ position and marginalized the indigene as inferior, criminal, poor, lower-class society, uncivilized and uneducated.

Furthermore, the finding in the first level is interpreted and examined using its relation with historical context about discourse of ‘Chineseness’ in New Order period and how Chinese-Indonesian considered as ‘the other’ and indigene (pribumi) as ‘the self’ above, it can be understood that these discourses are influenced how Ernest creates his own discourse through his show ‘Ernest Prakasa and The Oriental Bandits’. Ernest indeed represented general stereotypes about Chinese-Indonesian as well as indigene, but he edged the existed and previous discourses up to his counter discourse that Chinese-Indonesian is ‘the self’ while indigene as ‘the other’.

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