New times, new needs. Town planning in the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia (1905-1950)

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Introduction

The emergence and professionalization of town planning in the Dutch East Indies did not occur overnight. Between the arrival of the Dutch at the end of the sixteenth century and their departure in the middle of the twentieth century, life in the archipelago changed in many ways. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that due to fundamental socio-economic changes, the conditions emerged that were fertile for the development of modern Dutch Indian town planning.

Modern town planning in the Dutch East Indies materialized after the central government in Batavia in 1903 delegated part of its authority to local administrative entities, soon referred to as municipalities. This decentralisation of power and the far-reaching socio-economic changes caused by burgeoning private enterprise and ongoing innovations in building, architecture and transportation, created a prolific setting for the development of town planning. At the same time, a growing feeling of discontent arose among a substantial number of the indigenous population about the colonial system.

The issues addressed by the municipalities focussed on various aspects related to the improvement and the extension of towns: sanitation, housing, water management, infrastructure but also aesthetics, methodology and legislation. Town plans designed during the first half of the twentieth century reflect the gradual professionalization of Dutch Indian town planning.

The rise of Dutch Indian town planning

After ousting the Portuguese and British from the Moluccas in the late sixteenth century the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* - VOC) embarked on the lucrative spice trade. It made the Netherlands the wealthiest European country in the seventeenth century. The majority of the early Dutch settlements, located in the Eastern part of the archipelago, were fortified trading posts and simple towns where function prevailed over aesthetics. The architecture and lay-out of these settlements resembled those in the Netherlands. By and large canals were dug, streets were laid in a rectangular pattern, and houses were built in rows. During the eighteenth century successful businessmen and administrators occasionally built luxurious country estates outside the walled towns: spacious grounds with imposing houses designed according to prevailing European architectural styles.

Due to changes that drastically altered the European political landscape towards the end of the eighteenth century and the subsequent changes in the administration of European colonies, the Dutch East Indies – initially with the exception of Java – came under British rule. It was not until 1814 that the Dutch, or rather the Kingdom of the Netherlands that had been established one year earlier, regained control over the archipelago. The new administration proved to be much harsher than its predecessors. Prompted by the disintegration of the Kingdom in 1830, the independence of the Kingdom of Belgium and the subsequent financial setback governors-general appointed by the Dutch parliament followed a much more exploiting course than their colleagues who were appointed by the VOC. One of the most extreme measure taken was the introduction of the Culture System (*Cultuurstelsel*) in 1831, a system that forced indigenous farmers to deliver a determined part of their cultivated crops (*cultures*) to the Dutch government in Batavia through the agency of indigenous local rulers. To control production and delivery Dutch civil servants were appointed on strategic i.e. commercially relevant locations. As the Dutch held the trade monopoly the farmers were entirely at their mercy.

As the Dutch increasingly conquered more territory and imposed harsher regulations on the indigenous population to augment the production of trading goods, the Dutch East Indies gradually developed into a true colony. At the top a small minority of Europeans controlled the administration and the trade. On an equal level from a social though not from an administrative point of view were the indigenous kings and noblemen. Socially and economically secondary in hierarchy was the substantial group of so-called 'strange Asians': a heterogeneous group of mainly Chinese but also British Indians, Arabs and other Asians. Their main source of income was distributive trade and small and medium-sized businesses. With the exception of kings and noblemen the indigenous inhabitants, by far the largest ethnic group in the archipelago, ranked lowest on the socio-economic ladder. They primarily worked as farmers, labourers or servants.

Prompted by pressure from social and liberal political movements the Culture System and the trade monopoly were abolished in 1870. After the introduction of the Agrarian Act (*Agrarische Wet*) in 1870 – the act that enabled private persons to hold land on a long lease – several fundamental changes took place. As the archipelago offered good opportunities for business, private entrepreneurship in the colony developed rapidly after the act had been introduced. As a result of this development it were no longer predominantly Dutch civil servants who set off to the Dutch East Indies. Other professionals and an increasing number of women settled in the colony. Gradually a Dutch Indian version of the European lifestyle emerged in the archipelago.

To deal with the socio-economic and demographic changes generated by this development and to govern the vast colony suitably, the government decided to decentralise its administration. The consequently decreed Decentralisation Act (*Decentralisatiewet*) in 1903 and the Local Council Ordinance (*Locale Radenordonnantie*) in 1905 provided the necessary legal framework for this. The delegation of part of the responsibilities to the departments of Public Works (*Burgerlijke Openbare Werken*) and Home Affairs (*Binnenlands Bestuur*) to local officials *caused* fundamental administrative and political changes. The new system was not without flaws though. As the government had neglected many of its duties for years, maintenance of public works was often heavily overdue. Moreover work was seriously hindered by a constant shortage of material, knowledge and funding, inadequate organisation and infrastructure, insufficient work force, and a very unforthcoming attitude of the central government towards requests for support from the local authorities. Last but not least, the natural and social disposition of the archipelago regularly complicated work: its vastness, tropical climate, multi-ethnic population, and colonial system.

Convinced that joint attempts to overcome these obstacles would be more effective than individual attempts, the local councils established the Association for Local Interests (*Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen - VLB*) in 1912. The VLB, its journal *Local Interests* (*Locale Belangen*), and particularly the Decentralisation Congress it organised annually offered professionals the necessary platforms to exchange expertise and knowledge. Engineers and architects already associated in the nineteenth century. In 1850 a Dutch Indian section of the Royal Institute for Engineers (*Koninklijk Instituut voor Ingenieurs - KIVI*) was established, in 1898 the Association of Architects in the Dutch East Indies (*Vereeniging van Bouwkundigen in Nederlandsch-Indië*). Each association published its own journal. The engineers' journal was successively published under the following names: *The Journal of KIVI, section Dutch East Indies* (*Het Tijdschrift van het KIVI, afdeling Nederlands-Indië), The Engineer* (*De Ingenieur*) and *The Engineer in the Dutch East Indies* (*De Ingenieur in Nederlandsch-Indië*). The periodical for architects was called: *Dutch Indian Architecture Journal* (*Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift*).

One, if not the most urgent issue for municipalities to address, was the need to provide qualitative and quantitative sufficient housing. Following the development in the Netherlands, the first inclination to address this issue was to introduce a Housing Act. The draft of this act, presented in 1916, was never promulgated because the then sitting advisor for the Decentralisation in favoured adjusting existing building regulations and a consistent town planning practice rather than implementing a Housing Act to solve the housing problem.

An aspect of the housing issue that needed special attention as the situation in the

kampungs. Generally situated on poor locations, these densely populated, unplanned semi-permanent settlements were breeding grounds for ill-health, epidemics but also, as the government gradually realised, for political unrest. Therefore from the start, and inspired by strong pleas from medical specialist, notably W.T. de Vogel and H.F. Tillema from Semarang, municipalities intended/tried to improve the hygienic and housing condition in kampungs. Unfortunately though, due to administrative and financial obstacles, the municipalities were by and large unable to undertake consistent and grand-scale kampong projects until the end of the 1920s. It was only then that the government in Batavia, thanks to the unremitting pressure of administrators, architects and town planners, decided to subsidise kampong improvement projects and provide municipalities with guidelines for kampong improvement. Although the institutionalisation and standardisation of kampong improvement was thus taken care of relatively late, it was the housing situation in kampungs and other neighbourhoods that initially stimulated administrators architects and town planners to pay attention to town planning.

After some town plans were designed and (partly) realised, town planning as an autonomous discipline gradually emerged and professionalized in the 1920s thanks to the efforts of mainly two architects: ir Henri Maclaine Pont and ir Herman Thomas Karsten. Both Maclaine Pont and Karsten graduated as architects at Delft’s Polytechnic. They independently moved to the Dutch East Indies in the early 1910s to pursue a career in architecture. In 1920, Maclaine Pont and Karsten wrote separate papers on town planning. Despite the fact that ill health forced Maclaine Pont to abandon his architectural vocation after only a couple of years, both he and Karsten contributed significantly by creating awareness among colleagues and administrators about the importance of town planning. Not only by emphasizing that many aspects were correlated and had to be dealt with accordingly, but also by underlining the need for a clear vision and a methodology, and the importance of research and aesthetics.

It was particularly Karsten who made a name for himself as a town planning theorist, designer and consultant. His comprehensive yet concise 1920 publication ‘Dutch Indian Town Planning’ (‘*Indiese Stedebouw*’), his involvement in the realisation of the Town Planning Ordinance in the 1930s but also his town plans for Semarang (1917, revised in 1919), Buitenzorg (now Bogor, 1917) and Malang (1933, revised 1935) established this reputation. Besides Karsten and Maclaine Pont many other professionals contributed to the professionalization of Dutch Indian town planning as well. Among them were directors of municipal departments of public works (ir H. Heetjans in Bandung, ir J.J.G.E. Rückert in Semarang), mayors (ir D. de Iongh in Semarang, F.H. van de Wetering in Menado and Palembang), and occasionally central government officials (mr A.B. Cohen Stuart).

The institutionalisation of town planning and the simultaneous emergence of regional planning developed from the end of the 1920s onwards. The first step in this direction was a central regulation proclaimed in 1926. Based on this regulation a municipality could apply for priority rights on a particular plot of land over third parties if it could demonstrate this land was indispensable to accommodate the future development of the town. To substantiate this claim a town plan approved by the local and the central government needed to be handed over. The second step was taken in 1929, when the government agreed to subsidize kampong improvement projects up to fifty percent of the total cost. Again, a request needed to be supported by an approved plan. The third and ultimate step that led to the institutionalisation of town planning was the appointment, in 1934, of a committee to study the problem of town planning. It was this committee, briefly referred to as the Town Planning Committee (*Stadvormingscommissie*), that, in 1938, presented a draft and an extensive explanation of a Town Planning Ordinance (*Stadsvormingsordonnantie*) for municipalities on Java. It was this ordinance that provided architects and administrators with the tool they had pleaded for since the introduction of the decentralisation: a generic regulation for town planning that described the aims and procedures of town planning, and supplied the necessary legal framework.

The Town Planning Ordinance was the first Dutch Indian – and thus in a sense the first Dutch – act that acknowledged town planning as an autonomous discipline. Despite its

merits the ordinance had two shortcomings. The first one was that it only referred to Java. A restriction the authors put down to their own ignorance regarding administrative, economic and cultural circumstances in the Outer Regions. They also emphasized however, that it would not be too complicated for a knowledgeable staff at the department of Home Affairs to adjust the ordinance and thus make it applicable to the Outer Regions as well. The second restraint was that despite increasing attention for and debates on regional planning the ordinance did not refer to this development at all.

Unfortunately, the presentation of the Town Planning Ordinance was rather inopportune. Due to the outbreak of World War II in 1939 and the Japanese occupation of the archipelago in 1942 it could not immediately be assed after its presentation. It was not until 1948, three years after the Japanese surrendered and the Dutch regained control over part of the archipelago, that the Town Planning Ordinance was eventually decreed.

After the war, between 1945 and 1951, planning in the archipelago i.e. the parts where the Dutch regained control, was coordinated by the (Central) Planning Bureau ((C)PB) in Batavia. Established immediately after the war, the bureau brought together the few remaining professionals who survived the war and had not left the country. Despite its name the bureau's sphere of activity did not cover the entire archipelago. As a result of the proclamation of the independent Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 1945 it could only operate in areas that were under control of the Dutch Indian government in Batavia. On Java this meant a narrow strip from Batavia to Bandung. In the Outer Regions the government only controlled Medan, Padang, Palembang and a large area surrounding Palembang on Sumatra, plus the islands of Borneo, Celebes, the Moluccas and New Guinea. The areas administered by the government of the Republic of Indonesia that resided in Djocjakarta were beyond PB control.

The bureau's main task was to survey the damage caused by war activities and to design reconstruction plans. As the damages were most severe in places that were attacked for strategic reasons, priority was given to the reconstruction of economically vital parts on Borneo, Celebes and the Moluccas. Many towns on these islands, particularly where oil was extracted, were heavily damaged. Since in many cases almost all infrastructure and housing were destroyed, PB decided to take advantage of this situation. Thus, rather than just reconstructing pre-war circumstances, it decided to design plans that would not just reconstruct but simultaneously improve the old situation. To find out what would be the best solution town plans were considered in a wider, regional context. The result was the design of the first regional plan in the archipelago. To back up the PB's work legally, by far the most efficient thing to do would be to decree the draft of the pre-war Town Planning Ordinance. After it was adjusted in such a way that it could also be applied to towns outside Java and without municipal status, the Town Planning Ordinance was finally decreed in 1948. The first town it was applied to, in January 1949, was Bandjermasin on Borneo. Later that year it was also applied to several towns on Java and Sumatra.

On December 27, 1949 the Netherlands transferred sovereignty over the archipelago to the independent Republic of Indonesia. Just over a year prior to this crucial event the Dutch Indian government appointed a committee to prepare an act on regional planning in non-urban areas. Nearly three years later the committee presented a draft of the Spatial Planning Act (*Wetsontwerp op de Ruimtelijke Ordening*) to the minister of the Department of Public Works and Energy (*Departemen Pekerjaan Umum dan Tenaga*) Unlike the Town Planning Ordinance the Spatial Planning Act never gained legal force. Although an official reason was never given, the cause might very well have been related to the shortage of professionals in Indonesia in the early 1950s. Given this lack of qualitative and quantitative adequate personnel it would have been very difficult to comply with the act. The easiest way to sidestep this problem was to refrain from assessing the act – and thus the obligation to implement and observe it.

The decision not to decree the Spatial Planning Act was unsatisfactory from both a methodological and a historical point of view. By not decreeing the act the government obstructed the legal and methodological expansion of town planning into the vaster realm of spatial planning. It also discontinued the future professionalization and adaptation of town

planning as an autonomous discipline – a development that began in 1905 and had only been interrupted between 1942 and 1945. As a result of this decision not to assess the Spatial Planning Act the Town Planning Act was to remain the only legal instrument for Indonesian planners for the next four decades.

Although the developments after 1950 fall outside the boundaries of my study, I will describe them very briefly. One of the most radical consequences of the transfer of sovereignty was the Indonesianization of administrative and other institutions: the replacement of Dutch professionals in leading positions by Indonesians. Remarkably though, this alteration did not cause a Dutch exodus. Far from it, as Indonesia offered plenty of career opportunities many Dutch professionals resumed and even began their career in the new republic. Life in the archipelago from 1950 onwards seemingly continued more or less as before. It was not until 1957, when negotiations between Indonesia and the Netherlands about the administrative status of New Guinea reached a deadlock that the actual consequences of the revised political relation between Indonesia and the Netherlands manifested themselves. As a result of the diplomatic rupture the 50.000 Dutch citizens who had lived and worked in Indonesia were forced to leave the country overnight. More than the transfer of sovereignty it was this departure that slowly but surely changed Indonesia – and its aspirations.

The positions left behind by Dutch architects and town planners were taken over by colleagues from Austria and Germany but mainly from the United States of America. As architects from Harvard and Kentucky took up advisory and teaching positions in Indonesia and American scholarships increasingly enabled Indonesian students to study in the United States, the American approach of planning and architecture eventually changed town planning and architecture in the archipelago fundamentally. In accordance with the American lifestyle town plans were increasingly designed to accommodate a society where transportation by car, high-rise buildings and air-conditioning were the norm. A trend that profoundly changed the rather European outlook that featured in many towns and by and large defines the outlook on the Indonesian town until the present.

Analysis

Initially plans barely addressed more than one issue or area. They were isolated events that did not have any relation to other plans, nor took the general interest of the development of a town into account. Their design was pretty straightforward: a layout of streets bordered by plots of land destined for housing. The impact of a plan on other developments nor aesthetic aspects were hardly considered. The plan for Tjandi in Semarang, for Menteng-Nieuw Gondangdia and the kampong Taman Sari in Batavia are examples of this approach.

It did not take long before administrators, engineers and architects acknowledged the need for coherent, social and aesthetic town plans. As architects gradually got more of a say in the process, town plans became more visionary and comprehensive: they addressed interrelated developments. Increasing attention was paid to aesthetics: the position and design of prominent buildings, public spaces and vistas. Maclaine Pont's plan for Darmo in Sourabaya (1914), Karsten's extension plans for Semarang (1916, revised 1919) and the design of the General Engineers and Architectural Bureau's (Algemeen Ingenieurs- en Architectenbureau - AIA) design for Bandung (1919) are good examples of these plans.

The third phase of town planning was characterized by a rationalisation of the design process. A trend that emanated from increased and improved statistics and a better understanding of the socio-cultural context of the Dutch Indian society. The rationalisation enabled architects to design town plans that complied much better with the market and, even more important, to abandon the primarily intuitive style of designing in favour of a more methodical approach. It was this gradual rationalisation that eventually led to the introduction of regional planning. The 1920 plan for a couple of indigenous neighbourhoods (kampungs) designed by the municipality of Medan, and the 1948 plan for the satellite town Kebayoran Baru near Batavia are good examples of this kind of planning. Early examples of regional

planning are Karsten's designs for Buitenzorg (1917) and Malang (1933, 1935), and the plans designed by the (Central) Planning Bureau for north Celebes and the region southeast of Buitenzorg (both 1948).

What characterizes planning in the archipelago after 1950 is not so much a shift in methodology as a shift in focus. Instead of the relatively intimate neighbourhoods and towns designed by Dutch architects the approach of architects who stepped in their place – many of them from America – was much more focussed on infrastructure and the projection of long and wide traffic routes linking business and living areas. Consequently roads for motorised traffic became the backbone for Indonesian town plans. Though not entirely based on this principle, the 1962 plan of Pulo Mas near Djakarta illustrates the hybrid character of the early Indonesian town plans that originated from this approach. The plan is a careful attempt to blend American and local Indonesian planning objectives.

As in other colonies, the Dutch Indian society was ethnically diverse and very class-conscious: European, Indo-European, indigenous and other Asian people by and large lived in different ethnic neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood had its own distinctive features. In general neighbourhoods for Europeans, Indo-Europeans, well-to-do Chinese and indigenous dignitaries were vast and moderately to sparsely populated. The parcels were relatively large, the houses luxurious and the gardens lush. The overall atmosphere in these neighbourhoods was European. On average, Asians and socially and economically less successful Europeans and Indo-Europeans lived in considerably denser populated areas where the streets were narrower, often unpaved and many facilities such as running water, baths, and toilets were public. The atmosphere in these less affluent and denser populated neighbourhoods was predominantly indigenous, Chinese, British-Indian or Arab.

Given the fact that this ethnic distinction was based of the notion that Europeans were superior to other ethnic groups and town plans more or less adhered to the principle of ethnic division, the question is justified whether town plans and town planners supported a division based on ethnicity. To answer this question it is necessary to understand that the ethnic distinction that characterized Dutch Indian society was not solely based on ethnic criteria but also on socio-economic criteria. Thus, despite the fact that nearly all early twentieth century town plans distinguished different neighbourhoods for European, Indo-European, indigenous and other Asian citizens, well-off indigenous, Chinese, Indian and Arab people lived in the so-called European neighbourhoods while less well-off Europeans lived in indigenous neighbourhoods. A division that, from a modern town planning point of view, was quite convenient as it 'naturally' divided towns in socio-economic zones – and thus created the rationale that corresponded to the principle of zoning that characterised town planning in Europe. The assertion, therefore, that colonial architects and town planners were convinced colonialists who through their designs supported a colonial policy, is untenable: the majority of the architects, town planners, and engineers who worked in the Dutch East Indies where committed professionals with bold and sometimes visionary ideas who very early onwards identified town planning as an important and autonomous discipline, and recognised the need to expand the geographical and ethnic scope of town planning and to underpin the profession with a sound methodology. Though applied consistently, the division of town plans into ethnic neighbourhoods was not very strict because, as the Advisor for the Decentralisation explained during an international congress on the occasion of the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* in Paris in 1931: 'il faudra laisser le chemin libre pour l'interpénétration des races dans les villes partout où les besoins de la vie exigent que les individus se mêlent'.[1]

Although this interpretation does not exclude the fact that there might have been town planners who full heartedly supported the colonial system, primary publications and reports of debates between town planners, administrators and politicians bear witness of a primarily professional approach towards town planning. Regardless whether it accommodated the European, indigenous or other Asian population, the town planners' main concern was to design functional and aesthetic town plans. Indications that projects were designed to

[1] Cohen Stuart and Hébard, 1932, 276

consolidate the Dutch dominance over the archipelago are non-existent. The late 1920s plans to improve kampungs were no different from earlier plans even though by the late 1920s they were not only generated by hygienic concerns but also by the need to deprive nationalists of arguments to persuade the indigenous population to turn against the Dutch government. The one plan that might be considered a candid demonstration of colonial aspirations was the extension plan for the northern part of Bandung. Born out of the ambition of governor-general count J.P. van Limburg Stirum to turn Bandung into the colony's new representative administrative capital, the development of the plan illustrates the ambivalent position of both the Dutch Indian government and town planners. Caught between visionary considerations on the one hand and pragmatic ones on the other, the plan was abandoned after a couple of years after its conception and only partially executed. Up until this day Bandung has the dubious honour of being the embodiment of the great aspirations and inadequate resources that so often characterised the Dutch Indian town planning practice.

What also supports the thesis that Dutch Indian town planning was an autonomous discipline rather than a discipline supporting the colonial regime is the fact that after the Dutch transferred their sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia town planning continued along the same lines. Had the Dutch Indian approach to town planning not been autonomous but colonial, surely post-colonial town planners would, if not immediately at least after some time, have abandoned it. As this did not happen, its seems fair to assert that Dutch Indian town planning was not a tool of the colonial politics of the Dutch Indian government but an autonomous discipline.

Another aspect of life in the Dutch East Indies is the gradual emancipation of the non-European inhabitants and professionals. Slowly but surely the number of non-European architects, town planners and administrators actively involved in architecture, town planning and the administration increased. Though their number never equalled the number of Europeans, the rise of indigenous and other Asians participating in planning and politics were in accordance with determined efforts of the liberal governor-generals to rule the archipelago in accordance with the principles of Ethical Politics. Hence people like Abdoelrachman, R. Abikoesno, R. Slamet, mr R.Ng. Soebroto, Moh. Soesilo, ir Soetoto and Moh. Hoesni Thamrin gradually came to the fore. The 1957 Outline Plan Plan for Djakarta by Indonesian engineers Lucius O'Brien and R.S. Danunagoro as well as the 1962 plan for Pulo Mas by Indonesian architects ir Herbowo, ir Kandar Tisnawinata and Radinal Moochtar and Canadian architect O.C. Simonsen, could be considered the grand finale of this development and the beginning of a new one.

Justification of this study

Although this study does not exclusively focus on the island of Java, the larger part does relate to developments, projects and people on this island. The reason for the imbalance is caused by the availability of sources. By and large, information of developments on Java exceeds information concerning developments on other islands. As this imbalance mirrors the hierarchy among the islands in the archipelago and the continually dominant position of Java, I felt no need to rectify this as it is part of the story. Avoiding this problem by limiting my study to Java or a single town was not an option as this would have made it impossible to include sources that were relevant for the comprehensive reconstruction of the development of Dutch Indian town planning. I have therefore decided to be inclusive and study any development in the archipelago that was relevant to town planning in the period between 1905 and 1951.

The basic material for this study is very diverse. It ranges from contemporary journals, literature and novels to minutes of meetings, from newspapers and private notes to interviews with architects and their relatives. Photographs, films, maps and of course the town plans themselves provide important information as well. To collect this material various institutes were visited: the National Archive and National Library in The Hague and Jakarta, the Royal Tropical Institute (*Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen - KIT*) in Amsterdam, the Royal

Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (*Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde - KITLV*) in Leiden, the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAi) in Rotterdam, the Netherlands Institute for Military History (*Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie - NIMH*) in The Hague, the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (*Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie - NIOD*) in Amsterdam, the National Service for Archaeology, Cultural Heritage Agency (*Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed - RCE*) in Amersfoort, the former Dutch Land Registry Office (*Topografische Dienst*) in Emmen, the University of Amsterdam, Delft University of Technology and Bandung University of Technology.

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