

Design Thinking Process for Co-creating the Conservation and  
Inheritance Guidelines of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony in Chedi  
Nerng Community, Sanpatong District, Chaing Mai Province

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## Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to gain insights into the Wisdom Reed Ceremony at Wat Rong Kum and create its conservation and inheritance guidelines in Chedi Nerng Community, Amphoe Sanpatong, Chaing Mai. Fifteen participants in Chedi Nerng Community voluntarily participated in this research, including the village chief, abbot, monks, key persons involving in temple rituals, and the locals. The data were gathered by field observation, semi-structured interviews, and group discussion in three phases of Design Thinking: Empathizing, Defining, and Ideation.

In the “Empathizing” phase, the field observation and semi-structured interview data revealed the Chedi Nerng community’s attempted to maintain the Wisdom Reed Ceremony at Wat Rong Khum. However, due to the post-pandemic condition in 2023, the number of participants was fewer, and the ceremony’s procedure was modified. Only the abbot and a few elderlies in the community could lead the ceremony. In the “Defining” phase, their concerns about this tradition’s sustainability led to the need to raise younger generations’ awareness of the significance and process of this sacred ceremony. Thus, in the “Ideation” phase, key guidelines for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony co-created by Chedi Nerng Community included 1) Promoting Wat Rong Khum along Sunpatong’s cultural tourism routes; 2) Developing storytelling of Wat Rong Khum’s Wisdom Reed Ceremony; and 3) Establishing learning community of the

Wisdom Reed Ceremony.

**Keywords:** Design Thinking, Cocreation, Conservation, and Inheritance, Wisdom Reed Ceremony

## Introduction

Thailand possesses unique and precious culture and heritage. It is well-known for valuable tangible and intangible cultural assets. The former includes monuments, ancient ruins, and historic sites, whereas the latter involves Thai ways of life, traditions, and wisdom. Many historical sites were on the UNESCO World Heritage list, namely Ban Chiang Archaeological Site (1992), the Historic City of Ayutthaya (1991), and the Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns (1991). Also, Thai ways of life, Thai food, and handicraft has been well-recognized worldwide. According to the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2560-2564 B.E.), the emphasis was on cultivating positive social and cultural values, including preservation, conservation, and reviving Thai arts and culture (e.g., local identity, local wisdom, Thai and local language, tradition, history, and festival).

With abundant cultural capital, much research highlighted cultural conservation and the inheritance of local-specific cultures. For instance, those in Thailand's northeast region included local performance art in Chiang Khan, Loei Province (Phoungmanee et al., 2021), and Tee-Klee-Fire culture in Chaiyaphum Province (Hanphichai, 2018). Likewise, attempts to conserve local culture in the northern region were evidenced in Matonboon's (2018) study of

Tai-Lu's weaving wisdom in Chiang Khong, Chiang Rai Province, and Ngamprapasom's (2018) research into the Mpi ethnic group's cuisine in Prae Province. Nevertheless, several local-specific cultures remain under-researched.

The Wisdom Reed Ceremony is commonly held in northern Thailand, aiming to provide moral support and confidence in ability. According to Chumchit (n.d.), Wisdom Reed Ceremony can be classified into four types: Eating Or Phayah (Eating Reed for Gaining Wisdom), Eating Or Mahasaneh (Eating Reed for Powerful Attraction), Eating Or Jum (Eating Reed for Good Memory), and Eating Or Pood (Eating Reed for Art of Conversation). Eating Or Phayah or eating Reed for Gaining Wisdom is particularly the most common ceremony throughout northern areas. Inherited from Lanna's ancestor, locals believe that Eating Reed Ceremony would empower learning, enhance awareness, and strengthen teacher-student relationships. The ceremony often takes part on Teacher's Appreciation Day in academic institutions, while many others hold the ceremony in the temple. More importantly, the abbots always chair the ritual process.

The Wisdom Reed Ceremony in Chedi Nerng Community, Sanpatong, Chaing Mai, was once regarded as one of the most sacred rituals, chaired by the legendary abbot Kru Ba Boon Pun. Throughout the year, many of his students and followers visited, paid worship, and made merit at Wat Rong Kum, especially during the Songkran festival in mid-April. Since he passed away, many reputable and sacred ceremonies have gradually declined from

their old fame. The Chedi Nerng community was highly concerned with such cultural extinction, so they set up some practical directions to maintain and sustain the Wisdom Reed Ceremony.

## Objectives

1. To study the Wisdom Reed Ceremony in Chedi Nerng Community, Amphoe Sanpatong, Chaing Mai
2. To co-create conservation and inheritance guidelines of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony with Chedi Nerng Community, Amphoe Sanpatong, Chaing Mai

## Literature Review

### 1. Cultural conservation and inheritance

Previously, cultural heritage was defined differently by linking to history, arts, rituals, traditions, or clothes. Then, it was suggested that value and identity were crucial to analyze and understand each culture (Niglio, 2014). In terms of cultural conservation, Evans (2014) views cultural conservation into four parts, including 1) a philosophy that highlights the importance of conserving important things in society, 2) a mindset that is understanding of the difference between something (e.g., change and progress), 3) a movement that inspires people to preserve our cultures and transfer such heritage to the new generation, and 4) an organization that provides a guideline for preserving cultures (Evans, 2014). Also, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2009) defines the conservation of cultural heritage as the strategies

to lengthen the life of cultural assets while ensuring that important heritage themes and values are transmitted. Additionally, conservation aims to preserve an object's physical and cultural features so that its worth does not deteriorate and it outlasts our finite lifespan. Cultural inheritance is a type of inheritance in which information is stored and transmitted through conversation, imitation, teaching, and learning (Peedicayil, 2021). It also refers to the transference of socially learned knowledge across generations, which is unrelated to the genetics of living things (Sheppard et al., 2018). Therefore, cultural conservation and inheritance are relevant to the strategies to preserve cultural value and identity from generation to generation.

Interestingly, in Siregar's (2018) study, comprehending Indonesia's cultural legacy required combining a global perspective with a local perspective. Firstly, the global perspective is concerned with the formal conception of heritage. This viewpoint allows for a systematic approach to documenting and confirming cultural significance and continuing the process with broad promotion. Secondly, the local perspective is commonly held by locals and is more concerned with recognizing cultural history via the lens of place, which is typically connected with traditional philosophy. The local perspective can produce a good society by incorporating local philosophy into people's daily lives.

Thailand has a diverse cultural landscape according to its history and geography. Thus, studies of cultural conservation and inheritance were based on different perspectives. For example,

Kawkamsue's (2019) study focused on varied methods to develop modernized wicker handcrafts, including presentations on handicraft and wickerwork conservation; the future of handmade art; display of products that use artisan knowledge into new products; and demonstration of items based on the concept and redesign. Also, Phoungmanee et al., (2021) conducted a qualitative study to develop guidelines for maintaining and expanding Ban Nam Phon's art and culture. These included a workshop; a conservation or tourism management organization located in the community; a field study or community model of conservation and broadening the arts of culture; training on product development; arts and culture exhibitions in the festivals; a range of media for cultural and artistic dissemination; and a youth club practicing communication and presentation skills to welcome visitors. In addition, according to Hanphichai's (2018) qualitative research, techniques to conserve and expand the Tee-Klee-Fire culture in Chaiyaphum were based mainly on the cooperation between villagers, temples, and schools. These comprised 1) preserving the Tee-Klee-Fire culture at Nong Kleung community hall, 2) passing down this culture through building the Tee-Klee-Fire culture of Kut Tum sub-district at the end of Buddhist lent day, 3) encouraging students in Kut Tum sub-district schools to learn about Tee-Klee-Fire culture by having village scholars teach the history of the culture as well as how to play the game, and 4) combining Tee-Klee-Fire culture for operational activities and to continuously conserve the Tee-Klee-Fire culture.

The northern region of Thailand, in particular, is enriched with valuable cultural capital. Attempts for conserving and inheriting the cultures were evidenced in many studies. For example, Matonboon (2018) studied the conservation of Tai-Lu's weaving wisdom in the Chiang Khong community, Chiang Rai. The conservation included knowledge transfer from generation to generation and encouraging locals to wear Tai-Lu's woven clothes at community events and schools. Also, Ngamprapasom (2018) carried out Participatory Action Research to conserve the Mpi ethnic group's cuisine in Prae. The community agreed to conduct the local cuisine workshop for the new generations, and they were highly satisfied with the activities. In addition, Chantima et al. (2022) developed guidelines for the sustainable cultural tourist image in Northern Thailand. These guidelines included teaching local cultures to the young generations, creating the media for public relations, supporting and developing pathways to be a world heritage city, preserving tourist architecture, and stimulating the community's participation in developing cultural tourism. Moreover, Sunkanaporn (2016) developed local product design guidelines based on the cultural capital of Sanpatong district, Chiang Mai. Integrated with creative economy concepts, three local products were designed: Mulberry paper fabric bags, herbal cosmetics and drinks in lacquerware, and natural tie-dyed fabric bags for stationery.

## **2. Design Thinking**

Design thinking is a methodical procedure for solving



challenges and creating social innovation in collaboration with a specific community (Design with users). Three main components of design thinking led to coping with difficulties successfully. Firstly, design thinking's foundation is human-centered, promoting comprehension of human needs, community and stakeholder participation in problem-solving, and social innovation creation. Secondly, the design thinking method emphasizes interdisciplinary teams working together to achieve problem-solving and community development (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Cocreation is also a group method that emphasizes user participation in invention development and focuses on collaboration among experts and stakeholders from many disciplines. Thirdly, design thinking is an ongoing problem-solving and development cycle. The best outcomes should be those that satisfy the demands of the community.

The d.school at Stanford University in the United States introduced the design thinking framework, comprising five steps: Empathizing (demonstrating empathy to understand users), Defining (interpreting user problems and needs), Ideation (generating guidelines through brainstorming), Prototype (turning ideas to conceptual modeling), and Test (implementing and testing for continuous development and improvement).

Currently, design thinking is widely implemented for social development, product and service design, education, and the hospitality tourism industry. For example, Kwunsakul (2020) adopted design thinking to create unique public relations media for the Koeng

Subdistrict community, Maha Sarakham Province. The procedure comprised five stages: Problem analysis (Empathizing and Defining); Idea generation (Ideation); Innovation prototypes (Prototype); and quality testing of innovations (Test). The result was the short film Hug Meng Keng which promoted tourism in Maha Sarakham. Similarly, Sarasuk (2018) implement design thinking for the Tai Lue fabric scraps bag design. The process included in-depth interviews with the Tai Lue people (Empathizing), defining the community's requirements (Defining), and brainstorming to establish criteria for making products that suit the demands (Ideation). Then, bags were designed according to the criteria: Displaying the community's identity, using local resources and a simple process for the community (Prototype), and finally examined by a specialist (Test).

## Methodology

### 1. Research design

This study was underpinned by design thinking's qualitative approach. Design thinking comprises five non-linear and ongoing processes: Empathizing, Defining, Ideation, Prototype, and Test. This study focused on the first three phases. Observation and interviews were carried out in the Empathizing phase to gain insights into the Wisdom Reed Ceremony in Chedi Nerng Community and understand community needs for the conservation and inheritance of the ceremony. Such needs were defined in the "Defining" phase. Following this, based on the group discussion, researchers working

together with the representatives of the community brainstormed ideas for developing a learning community, and some best ideas were selected and presented to reach a mutual agreement. According to Withell and Haigh (2013), the “Empathizing” phase focuses on the human-centric approach and helps gain insights into the context, problems, and needs of the community that were then defined in the “Defining” phase. Based on the defined problem and need, ideas are created, discussed, and selected in the “Ideation” phase. Working together among researchers, community representatives, and stakeholders would bring different perspectives to co-create ways to promote the conservation and inheritance of the ceremony.

## **2. Research participants**

The participants included 15 representatives from Chedi Neng Community, Amphoe Sanpatong, Chaing Mai. They were the village chief, monks, key persons involving in temple rituals, and the locals voluntarily involving in the in-depth interview and group discussion. According to Local Development Plan 2561-2565 of Baan Mae Subdistrict Municipality, this community had 124 households and 365 villagers. Their ways of life were based on Buddhism, and the temple (Wat Rung Kum) was the center of the community.

## **3. Data collection methods**

### **3.1 Field observation framework**

The POEMS framework was adopted for the field observation. According to Lee (2017), the framework includes People (P), Object (O), Environment (E), Message and Media (M), and

Services (S). Following the POEMS framework helps include key information about the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. Firstly, P involves observing people involved in the Wisdom Reed Ceremony, their roles, duty, and relationship. Secondly, O deals with observing objects used in the ceremony, their importance, and uses. Thirdly, E is concerned with observing environments, locations, and atmospheres. Fourthly, M includes observing messages and media found in the ceremony as well as their roles and significance. Lastly, S consists of observing services and support systems in the ceremony.

### 3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand better the community's needs for the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. Guided questions were divided into three groups. The first group was those related to personal information, habits, and lifestyles. The second group included personal motivation, beliefs, aspirations, inspiration, and problems. The last group focused on the ceremony's history, process, and significance, as well as participants' feelings, thoughts, motivation, and pain points for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. After gaining permission and consent, the individual interview took place in the temple compounds for 30-40 minutes based on the willingness and availability of each participant.

### 3.3 Group discussion

The group discussion was undertaken to brainstorm ideas and select the best ideas to meet the community's

needs for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. The participants and researchers worked together to brainstorm as many ideas as possible for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. Then, similar ideas were grouped, and some were voted as participants' best ideas. Following this, the design selection matrix was conducted by: 1) discussion to mutually agree on two design criteria mostly related to the community needs: High impact and sustainability; and 2) selection of some voted ideas that meet the criteria.

#### **4. Data collection and analysis**

After gaining approval from Ethics in Human Research, informed consent was processed. Research objectives, participants' roles, and rights were acknowledged, and permission for taking photos and voice recording was also gained before data collection. In the "Empathizing" phase, the data were collected from the field observation and categorized into five themes: People, Objects, Environment, Messages and Media, and Service to understand the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. Then, these data were compared with the Wisdom Reed Ceremony undertaken in the past to address ceremony changes. These data were supported by the data from in-depth interviews that were reviewed, categorized, and coded in many themes, including the history, significance, belief, and ritual of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony, villagers' ways of life, and ways of thinking, feeling, inspiration, aspiration, motivation, and pain point for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. In the "Defining"

phase, the data from the previous phase were synthesized and discussed to design a “Persona” to represent the villagers, explaining their common personal data, lifestyle, motivation, aspiration, pain points, and needs for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. In the “Ideation” phase, ideas from brainstorming were grouped into themes, voted on, and selected as the best ideas.

## Results

### 1. Context, process, and changes of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony

The data from the observation and interview brought about understanding of the context, process, and changes of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony at Rong Khum temple. As outlined in Table 1, the POEMS observation revealed the people, objects, environment, messages, and service in the Wisdom Reed Ceremony.

**Table 1** *The POEMS Observation of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony*

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| People      | Ritual Ceremony: Abbot and elderlies<br>Participants: Villagers and their family |
| Objects     | Jasmine rice, honey, a pot, Reed, and the sharp knives                           |
| Environment | Sacred, warm, calm atmosphere in Vihara  |
| Messages    | Blessing from the abbot, participants’ wishes                                    |
| Service     | Group ritual of courage and wisdom enhancement                                   |

The Wisdom Reed Ceremony has long been held in Rong Khum temple, Chedi Nerng Community, Sanpatong, Chiang Mai Province. The ceremony aims to encourage participants, particularly

students, to focus on and succeed in their studies. It took place during the Songkran festival in mid-April. In the past, the villagers prepared all necessary supplies (Jasmine rice, honey, a pot, Reed, and sharp knives). Figure 2 shows the procedures of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony.

Before the Wisdom Reed Ceremony began, a participant came to see the senior locals to have his middle finger measured using a Reed trunk. The seniors cleaned and sliced the Reed trunk to the same length as his middle finger before adding the honey. At this point, each participant was required to place his trunk on a pot that contained Jasmine rice and wait for others to follow suit until the pot was filled with the trunks. Recently, the seniors used only honey, the Reed trunk, and sharp knives. A person no longer put the Reed trunk on the pot full of Jasmine rice. Next, an abbot would cast a spell for the participant, wishing him luck and success. Then, he had to eat all the honey in the Reed trunk, make a wish in front of an ancient pagoda inside the temple, and throw the trunk over his head. Finally, he had to get the Reed trunk to the closest river for discharge. The locals thought that doing this would ward off bad luck. Mostly, the parents were likely to bring their children to attend this ceremony because they thought it would help their kids become smarter than they were in the past and more successful in the future.

### The Wisdom Reed Ceremony



Reed trunk



The elderly prepared all of the necessary supplies before the ceremony



The elderly cleaned and sliced reed trunks for each participant.



A participant threw the reed trunk over his head after making a wish in front of an ancient pagoda.

Figure 1 The Wisdom Reed Ceremony at Wat Rong Khum



## 2. Needs for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony

The data from the interview, supported by those from the observation, were clustered, interpreted, and synthesized to gain insights into the community's needs for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. These data were presented through the persona of the community representative, Lung Mee, a 70-year-old onion farmer. He was active on the temple committee, working with the current abbot and other members to organize Buddhist rituals and worship practices. He considered the Wisdom Reed Ceremony one of the most important and sacred. When he was young, he experienced a magical story. While the former abbot held the Wisdom Reed Ceremony, the wild bees appeared from nowhere, reflecting its sacredness and holiness. With the reputation, many people around Thailand kept visiting and worshipping the well-known and highly respected abbot, Kruba Boonpun, for many decades. The former abbot passed away in 2545 B.E., and the current abbot hosted all rituals after since. However, like other members, Lung Mee was anxious that the ceremony would no longer exist as many elderlies who actively participated in the ceremony passed away. The young generation kept busy at school, so temple rituals were not their priority. The number of visitors also decreased during the pre-and post-pandemic conditions. Also, due to changes in the procedure, they needed to pass on the sacred and blessed ceremony to young generations, raising their awareness of the significance and original process of this sacred ceremony and expanding such sacred wisdom to other communities.

### 3. Guidelines on conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony

The data from the group discussion in the Ideation phase included a list of ideas clustered into themes, voted as best ideas, combined as design concepts, and selected through the Matrix method, according to the criteria: High impact and sustainability. As a result, three design concepts were selected as guidelines for conserving and inheriting the Wisdom Reed Ceremony.

The first idea was a storytelling method that would help young generations to learn about the Wisdom Reed Ceremony easily and effectively. There were eight ways to describe a storytelling approach (a profile, explanatory piece, issues and trend stories, investigative, narrative, descriptive/day in the life, voices or perspective story, and visual story (American Press Institute, 2023). Storytelling serves several functions in the community. Firstly, it could represent injustice or other social problems in the community. Secondly, it can be a source of power to change the community to be a better place. Thirdly, it can be applied to inspire people and have an obligation to the community. Finally, it can enhance the community's involvement (Bradley, 2018). Due to the continuous decline of the senior residents of Rong Khum Village who had previously known or held this ritual, the villagers needed to apply this technique in order to preserve and transmit their sacred and historic Wisdom Reed ceremony to the next generation. The youths were also less likely to understand the ceremony's actual significance.

Additionally, institutions or groups have yet to gather data concerning the ceremony consistently. They may increase awareness of and importance for the villagers from the past to the present if they implement this initial concept. They can also sustainably preserve their traditions. The stories could be shared on social media, workshops, or events where young people could learn about and participate as much as possible in the village's Wisdom Reed Ceremony from the elders.

The second idea was to include the Yang Nerng community in the cultural tourism route. The temple compound comprised the statue of the most respected abbot, Kru Ba Boon Pun; the temple's history; and the Wisdom Reed Ceremony during Songkran festival. Also, the community itself reflected local ways of life (e.g., rice fields, overflow weir, longan orchard, onion farms, local morning market, and evening street vegetable stalls). In addition, the surroundings included an ancient pagoda, well-known among locals' prayers for wishes. These attractions reflect the community's potential for managing cultural tourism (Intagoon & Tungcharoenchai, 2020). Moreover, it is located in Sanpatong, the south of Chiang Mai, rich in distinctive culture. According to Sunkanaporn (2016), cultural capitals in Sunpatong comprised religion (e.g., ancient temples, famous immemorial monks, and tales of Buddha); arts and culture (e.g., Tai ethnic groups and their ways of life); and crafts (e.g., blacksmith skill, lacquer making, and herbal products). Including the Chedi Nerng community in the cultural tourism route could enhance the

young generation's engagement in their community by welcoming tourists, leading tours, and describing cultural aspects.

The third idea was to create learning communities by developing learning resources, learning centers, and activities for the young generations in the community, the nearby communities, and other communities. This guideline could be implemented at the global level by cooperating with policyholders (e.g., Subdistrict Administrative Organization), Sanpatong's cultural committee, formal and informal education, and even international education in Chiang Mai, who are interested in local Thai. The network of learning communities would help support locals' attempts to conserve the ceremony and strengthen their relationship (Phuechphanphisan & Saengthongdee, 2018).

## Conclusions

This study was underpinned by design thinking to promote the Chedi Nerng community's Co-creation of conservation and inheritance guidelines of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony. The in-depth understanding of local contexts from the "Empathizing" and "Defining" phases revealed evitable changes in the ceremony and locals' attempts to raise young generations' awareness of the significance and procedures of the ceremony. The "Ideation" phase was conducted through group discussions. Ideas were brainstormed, finalized, and proposed. The three guidelines were creating storytelling of the sacred ceremony, including Chedi Nerng areas in

cultural tourism, and establishing learning communities within and across the communities. Such co-creation of the guideline reflected the combination of local and global perspectives to conserve the culture.

## Discussion

The co-creation of guidelines reflected the combination of local and global perspectives for cultural conservation in the Chedi Nerng Community. Siregar (2018) noted that, conserving culture requires local and global attempts. Based on local perspectives, the awareness of the significance and procedures of the ceremony can be raised by locals themselves. An abbot and elderlies could be the key people to share stories (e.g., history, tales, and folklore). At the same time, young generations should be encouraged to publish such stories online as media developers, local cultural tour guides, and village representatives to connect with other communities. Regarding global perspectives, public and private sectors (e.g., educational institutes, Cultural committee, SAO, and Tourism Authority of Thailand) could provide support for organizing workshops, exhibitions, and activities for sharing knowledge, designing cultural route tours around Sanpatong, and establishing learning community of the Wisdom Reed Ceremony within and across Northern part of Thailand.

These guidelines are consistent with the study by Phoungmanee et al. (2021), who included tourism management, media design, and the youth clubs in strategies to conserve Ban Nam Phon's art and culture.

Also, prioritizing locals' roles in cultural conservation was supported by Hanphichai (2018), who suggested conserving the Tee-Klee-Fire culture by cooperation with villagers, schools, and temples (e.g., having village scholars and encouraging local schools and students to learn about this culture).

### Recommendation

This study was carried out in three of five phases of design thinking: Empathizing, Defining, and Ideation, resulting in three guidelines for conserving and inheriting the ceremony. These findings have significant implications for understanding how to apply design thinking to solve the communities' problems and conserve and inherit previous cultural heritage. It would be beneficial for the governmental officers to make a policy and integrate the Wisdom Reed process into the main rituals or traditions, for instance, the Teacher's Appreciation Day or the Songkran Festival. They could also provide the fundamental information for scholars to employ design thinking to solve problems in other contexts. Further work may involve exploring whether these three proposed guidelines (creating storytelling of the sacred ceremony, developing Chedi Nerng areas in cultural tourism, and establishing learning communities within and across the communities) could help the villagers to maintain their ancient ceremony effectively and creatively, for example, creating the design thinking workshop and inviting the stakeholders to evaluate the proposed guidelines.

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