

# *Brothel*

A **brothel**, **bordello**, **ranch**,<sup>[2]</sup> or **whorehouse** is a place where people engage in sexual activity with prostitutes.<sup>[3]</sup> However, for legal or cultural reasons, establishments often describe themselves as massage parlors, bars, strip clubs, body rub parlours, studios, or by some other description. Sex work in a brothel is considered safer than street prostitution.<sup>[4]</sup>



*Joachim Beuckelaer, Brothel, 1562*



*The Pascha brothel in Cologne, Germany is the largest brothel in Europe.<sup>[1]</sup> During the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the poster had the Saudi Arabian flag and Iranian flag blacked out after protests and threats.*

# Legal status

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On 2 December 1949, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.<sup>[5]</sup> The Convention came into effect on 25 July 1951 and by December 2013 had been ratified by 82 states.<sup>[6]</sup> The Convention seeks to combat prostitution, which it regards as "incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person." Parties to the Convention agreed to abolish regulation of individual prostitutes, and to ban brothels and procuring. Some

countries not parties to the convention also ban prostitution or the operation of brothels. Various United Nations commissions, however, have differing positions on the issue. For example, in 2012, a Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) convened by Ban Ki-moon and backed by United Nations Development Programme and UNAIDS, recommended decriminalization of brothels and procuring.<sup>[7][8][9]</sup>

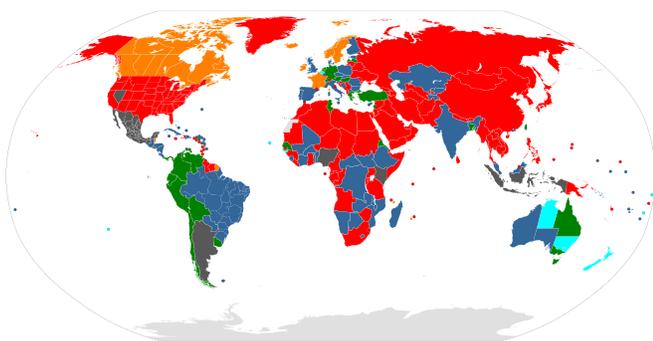


*De Wallen, Amsterdam's red-light district, offers activities such as legal prostitution and a number of coffee shops that sell marijuana. It is one of the main tourist attractions.*

In the European Union, there is no uniform policy and no consensus on the issue; and laws vary widely from country to country. Netherlands and Germany have the most liberal policies; in Sweden (and in Norway and Iceland outside the EU) the buying, but not selling, of sex, is illegal; in most former Communist countries the laws target the prostitutes; while in countries such as the UK (except Northern Ireland), Italy, and Spain the act of prostitution is not itself illegal, but soliciting, pimping and brothels are, making it difficult to engage in prostitution without breaking any law. The

European Women's Lobby condemns prostitution as "an intolerable form of male violence" and supports the "Swedish model".<sup>[10]</sup>

In February 2014, the members of the European Parliament voted in a non-binding resolution, (adopted by 343 votes to 139; with 105 abstentions), in favor of the "Swedish Model" of criminalizing the buying, but not the selling, of sex.<sup>[11]</sup>



Brothels are legal only in countries and areas shown in green or light blue



Brothel Hafenmelodie Trier (Germany)

Prostitution and the operation of brothels is illegal in many countries, though known illegal brothels may be tolerated or laws not strictly enforced. Such situations exist in many parts of the world, but the region most often associated with these policies is Asia. When brothels are illegal they may nevertheless operate in the guise of a

legitimate business, such as massage parlors, saunas or spas.

In a few countries, prostitution and operating a brothel is legal and regulated. The degree of regulation varies widely by country. Most of these countries allow brothels, at least in theory, as they are considered to be less problematic than street prostitution. In parts of Australia, brothels are legal and regulated.

Regulation includes planning controls and licensing and registration requirements, and there may be other restrictions.

However, the existence of licensed brothels does not stop illegal brothels

from operating. According to a report in the Australian *Daily Telegraph*, illegal brothels in Sydney in 2009 outnumbered licensed operations by four to one;<sup>[12][13]</sup> while in Queensland only 10% of prostitution happens in licensed brothels, with the rest being either independent sex workers (which is legal) or illegal operations.<sup>[14]</sup>

The introduction of legal brothels in Queensland was to help improve the safety of sex workers, punters (customers of prostitution), and the community at large and reduce crime. This may have been successful in many ways in

Queensland, with The Viper Room being one of the most well known, clean, safe and most highly regarded brothels in Brisbane and Queensland.<sup>[15]</sup> The Netherlands has one of the most liberal prostitution policies in the world, and attracts sex tourists from many other countries.<sup>[16]</sup> Amsterdam is well known for its red-light district and is a destination for sex tourism. Germany also has very liberal prostitution laws.<sup>[17]</sup> The largest brothel in Europe is the Pascha in Cologne. Although the Dumas Hotel in Butte, Montana operated legally from 1890 until 1982, brothels are currently illegal throughout the United States, except in rural Nevada;

prostitution outside these licensed brothels is illegal throughout the state. All forms of prostitution are illegal in Clark County, which contains the Las Vegas–Paradise metropolitan area.

## History

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*Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Salon at the Rue des Moulins, 1894*

The earliest recorded mention of prostitution as an occupation appears in Sumerian records from ca. 2400 BCE and

describes a temple-bordello operated by Sumerian priests in the city of Uruk. The 'kakum' or temple was dedicated to the goddess Ishtar and housed three grades of women. The first group performed only in the temple sex-rites; the second group had the run of the grounds and catered to its visitors as well, and the third and lowest class lived on the temple grounds but were free to seek out customers in the streets. In later years, sacred prostitution and similar classifications of females were known to have existed in Greece, Rome, India, China, and Japan.<sup>[18]</sup>

# Europe

State brothels/bordellos with regulated prices existed in ancient Athens, created by the legendary lawmaker Solon. These brothels catered for a predominantly male clientele, with women of all ages and young men providing sexual services (see Prostitution in ancient Greece). In ancient Rome female slaves provided sexual services for soldiers, with brothels being located close to barracks and city walls. Brothels existed everywhere. The custom was to display lit candles to signal that they were open.

Before the appearance of effective contraception, infanticide was common in brothels. Unlike usual infanticide—where historically girls were more likely to be killed at birth— a brothel site at Ashkelon in Israel revealed that nearly all of the babies were boys.<sup>[19]</sup>



Brothel scene; *Brunswick Monogrammist*, 1537; *Gemäldegalerie, Berlin*

Cities first began setting up municipal brothels between 1350 and 1450 CE.<sup>[20]</sup> Municipalities often owned, operated, and

regulated the legal brothels. Governments would set aside certain streets where a keeper could open a brothel.<sup>[21]</sup> These separate sections of town were the precursors to the so-called "red light districts". Not only did the towns restrict where a keeper could open a brothel, but they also put constraints on when the brothel could be open. For example, most brothels were forbidden to be open for business on Sundays and religious holidays. The reason for this is not completely clear. Some scholars believe these restrictions were enforced to make the prostitutes go to church but others argue that it was to keep parishioners in

church and out of the brothels. Either way, it was a day of no revenue for the keeper.

Although brothels were set up as a sexual outlet for men, not all men were allowed to enter them. Clerics, married men, and Jews were prohibited.<sup>[22]</sup> Often, foreigners such as sailors and traders were the main source of revenue. Local men who frequented the brothels mainly consisted of single men; laws restricting the patrons were not always enforced. Government officials or police would periodically do searches of the brothels to cut down on the number of unpermitted customers. However, since the government was so

closely related to the church, common punishments were minor. These restrictions were put in place to protect the wives of married men from any sort of infection.



*The Brothel Scene from A Rake's Progress by William Hogarth, 1735*

Multiple restrictions were placed on the residents of brothels. One limitation prohibited prostitutes from borrowing money from their brothel keeper.

Prostitutes paid high prices to the brothel keeper for the basic necessities of life: room and board, clothes, and toiletries. Room and board was often a price set by the local government but the price for everything else could add up to a common woman's entire earnings. Prostitutes were sometimes prohibited from having a special lover. Some regulations put on prostitutes were made to protect their clients. A woman was kicked out if she was found to have a sexually transmitted disease. Also, the prostitutes were not allowed to pull men into the brothel by their clothing, harass them in the street, or detain them over unpaid debts.<sup>[23]</sup> Clothing

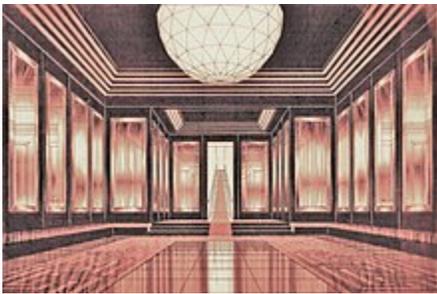
worn by prostitutes was regulated as well and had to be distinguishable from that of respectable women. In some places, a prostitute had to have a yellow stripe on her clothing while in others red was the differentiating color. Other towns required harlots to don special headdresses or restricted the wardrobe of proper women. All restrictions placed on prostitutes were put in place not only to protect them but nearby citizens as well.

Because of a syphilis epidemic throughout Europe, many brothels were shut down during the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>[24]</sup> This epidemic had been brought on by Spanish

and French military pillages after the return of Christopher Columbus from the newly discovered Americas. The church and citizens alike feared that men who frequented brothels would bring the disease home and infect morally upright people.

From the 12th century, brothels in London were located in a district known as the Liberty of the Clink. This area was traditionally under the authority of the Bishop of Winchester, not the civil authorities. From 1161, the bishop was granted the power to license prostitutes and brothels in the district. This gave rise

to the slang term *Winchester Goose* for a prostitute. Women who worked in these brothels were denied Christian burial and buried in the unconsecrated graveyard known as Cross Bones.



Interior of a luxurious brothel: "Waiting room in the house of M.me B.", project by Italian architect Araldo dell'Ira, Rome, 1939.



By the 16th century, the area was also home to many theatres, (including the Globe Theatre, associated with William Shakespeare), but brothels continued to thrive. A famous London brothel of the time was *Holland's Leaguer*. Patrons supposedly included James I of England and his favourite, George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham. It was located in a street that still bears its name<sup>[25]</sup> and also inspired the 1631 play, *Holland's Leaguer*. Charles I of England licensed a number of brothels including the Silver Cross Tavern

in London, which retains its license to the modern day because it was never revoked.

The authorities of Medieval Paris followed the same path as those in London and attempted to confine prostitution to a particular district. Louis IX (1226–1270) designated nine streets in the Beaubourg Quartier where it would be permitted. In the early part of the 19th century, state-controlled legal brothels (then known as "*maisons de tolérance*" or "*maisons closes*") started to appear in several French cities. By law, they had to be run by a woman (typically a former prostitute) and their external appearance had to be

discreet. The *maisons* were required to light a red lantern when they were open (from which is derived the term red-light district) and the prostitutes were only permitted to leave the *maisons* on certain days and only if accompanied by its head. By 1810, Paris alone had 180 officially approved brothels.

During the first half of the 20th century, some Paris brothels, such as le Chabonais and le Sphinx, were internationally known for the luxury they provided. The French government sometimes included a visit to the *Chabonais* as part of the program for foreign guests of state, disguising it as a

*visit with the President of the Senate* in the official program.<sup>[26]</sup> The *Hotel Marigny*, established in 1917 in the 2nd arrondissement of Paris, was one of several that were well known for catering to gay male clients.<sup>[27]</sup> Premises suspected of being gay brothels, including the Hotel Marigny were, however, subject to frequent police raids,<sup>[28]</sup> perhaps indicating less tolerance for them from the authorities.

In most European countries, brothels were made illegal after World War II. France outlawed brothels in 1946, after a campaign by Marthe Richard. The

backlash against them was in part due to their wartime collaboration with the Germans during the occupation of France. Twenty-two Paris brothels had been commandeered by the Germans for their exclusive use; some had made a great deal of money by catering for German officers and soldiers.<sup>[29]</sup> One brothel in the Monmartre District of the French capital was part of an escape network for POWs and downed airmen.<sup>[30]</sup>

Italy made brothels illegal in 1959. The 2010s decade has seen the introduction of sex dolls and sexbots on the premises of some brothels.<sup>[31]</sup>

## East Asia

Brothels have been used formally in China for prostitution and entertainment since ancient China in its feudal period. For much of China's ancient and imperial history, brothels were owned by wealthy merchants, typically stereotyped as "madams", and engaged in business in urban areas such as the capital city. Prostitutes, or "courtesans" as they were known, were well-dressed and groomed to the proper table and drinking manners(禮). A Chinese prostitute may have been artistic and skilled at practices such as dancing, playing musical instruments,

singing, and conversing in verse.

Prostitution was not outlawed in ancient and imperial China (although prostitutes were not considered fit for marriage to men of respectable social ranking) and instead, prostitutes hosted in street brothels were popularly placed in the same social class as females artisans and regarded as elegant, albeit tainted, beings, most notably courtesans who used similar means to entertain members of nobility.<sup>[32]</sup>

Both young women and men worked as prostitutes in these elaborate brothel settings, though historical records and works of literature have widely

romanticized the free-flowing, artistic nature of female prostitutes.

The practice of hosting prostitutes in these elaborate brothels spread to surrounding regions of Chinese cultural influence, notably in Japan after the sixth century AD, where prostitutes and courtesans evolved to develop the Oiran and Geisha entertainment professions.

Again, the *geisha* of Japan emphasized good table manners, artistic skills, elegant styling, and sophisticated, tactical conversational skills. The practice also spread to Korea, where prostitutes evolved into the Korean kisaeng.

# India

The governments of many Indian princely states had regulated prostitution in India prior to the 1860s. The British Raj enacted the Cantonment Act of 1864 to regulate prostitution in colonial India as a matter of accepting a necessary evil so that the British soldiers could seek sexual gratification when away from their homes.<sup>[33]</sup> The Cantonment Acts regulated and structured prostitution in the British military bases which provided for about twelve to fifteen Indian women kept in brothels called *chaklas* for each regiment of thousand British soldiers.<sup>[34]</sup> They were

licensed by military officials and were allowed to consort with soldiers only.<sup>[35]</sup>

Brothels in India came into life in the early 1920s,<sup>[36]</sup> when certain dance styles in states like Maharashtra, such as *Lavani*, and dance-drama performance artists, called *Tamasha* artists, starting working as prostitutes.<sup>[37][38]</sup> Notably, such professions were strongly connected to caste and income levels.<sup>[37][38]</sup>

# United States



*Last example of a brothel from the wide-open time of Galveston*

From 1911 to 1913, the United States Department of Justice undertook the task of collecting information on the numbers of prostitutes in brothels in order to use this information against the much-feared "White Slave Traffic".<sup>[39]</sup> This effort collected information from 318 cities of 26 Eastern states. It estimated about 100,000

women to be working in brothels at the time, yet some estimated the total number of prostitutes to be as high as 500,000.<sup>[40]</sup>

During the late nineteenth century, brothels in the United States were no secret.

George Kneeland articulated his growing concern about the organized sex business in America well, saying that prostitution had grown into a "highly commercialized and profitable business that penetrated the deepest recesses of the political, cultural and economic life of the city."<sup>[41]</sup>

Brothels were commonly referred to as "disorderly houses", and their residents were called by many names, some

euphemistic—e.g., *abandoned woman*, *bawd good-time daisy*, *fallen angel*, *fille de joie*, *jeweled bird*, *lady of the evening*, *shady lady*, *soiled dove*, *wanton woman*, and *woman of the town*—and some less kind—e.g., *hooker*, *slut*, and *whore*.<sup>[42]</sup> As the 19th century went on, prostitution as a profession became more common, rather than just occasionally necessitated soliciting. As a result of these changes, the way prostitution was practiced changed.<sup>[43]</sup> Many prostitutes still practiced their trade independently, but the new class of professional prostitutes created a demand for a location to do their

regular business, and the brothel served this purpose.<sup>[44]</sup>

Visitors could easily find disorderly houses by merely opening up the local or statewide directories, such as the 1895 *Travelers' Guide of Colorado*.<sup>[45]</sup> This 66-page manual helped the interested client decide which brothel was right for him. These manuals did not attract by using euphemistic language, and though bold by standards of the time, were not crude. Some examples read: "Twenty young ladies engaged nightly to entertain guest", and "Strangers cordially welcome". In some areas, brothels simply could not be

ignored. A nineteenth-century authority describes the city of New Orleans as such: "The extent of licentiousness and prostitution here is truly appalling and doubtless without a parallel in the whole civilized world. The indulgence and practice are so general and common that men seldom seek to cover up their acts or go in disguise."<sup>[46]</sup>

The average house held five to twenty working girls; some higher-end brothels also employed staff servants, musicians, and a bouncer. The typical brothel contained several bedrooms, all furnished. Some upscale brothels were much larger;

such is the case with that owned by Mary Ann Hall of Arlington, Virginia.<sup>[47]</sup> It is described as "a rather grand house with twenty-five rooms and was enclosed by a brick wall. The interior was elegantly furnished. The principal rooms on the first floor contained large oil paintings, Brussels carpets, red plush 'parlor furniture', étagères (a shelf for small ornaments), and numerous items of silver plate."<sup>[48]</sup> An archeological dig of the area outside of Mary Ann Hall's estate revealed refuse of a quality superior to that in surrounding working-class areas. This included many champagne bottles and corks, wire cages from such bottles,

perfume bottles, high-quality porcelain with gilt edging, along with remnants of exotic foods—coconut shells and berry seeds, bones from beef, fish, and pork indicating that elegant meals were being eaten at this high-class brothel.<sup>[49]</sup> These "five and ten-dollar parlor houses" attracted wealthy men, who used the facilities much as a gentlemen's social club,<sup>[50]</sup> where they made business and political connections, met with associates and had exquisite dinners with wine, champagne, and women. Brothels were not only for the wealthy. "One-dollar houses" were visited by those of the working class. A 1910 Kansas vice report

compares the two: "A few brothels were equipped with expensive furniture and furnishings including the finest of upholstered chairs, well-done paintings, and costly rugs, while others were hovels of repulsive squalor."<sup>[51]</sup>

Women joined brothels from all walks of life. The average prostitute was approximately 21,<sup>[52]</sup> but many were as young as 13 or as old as 50. Typically thought of as an escape for young, poor, troubled women, brothels sometimes attracted those less expected. Trained musicians and singers sometimes were lured into it by their interest in easy money

and fun times.<sup>[53]</sup> Some others turned to brothels to get out of their boring, abusive, or otherwise unfulfilling marriages.

Although they might be of various classes, ethnicities, and ages, most women who began or joined brothels had a shared goal: quick money.<sup>[52]</sup> Many found themselves always indebted to their mistresses. Her lack of credit made a prostitute unable to buy items necessary for her trade (powder, cosmetics, perfumes, and evening wear), and she was forced to buy them through her madam.<sup>[54]</sup>

Some madams, often former prostitutes themselves, rose to become independently

wealthy. One was Mary Ann Hall of Arlington, Virginia. Clearly attractive and a good businesswoman, Mary Ann purchased a lot and built a brick house. That would be the location of an upscale brothel for another 40 years, sitting right at the foot of Capitol Hill. Her brothel was very lucrative, and Mary Ann was able to buy multiple slaves and a summer home. She was responsible for the behavior of her prostitutes, which could prove challenging since drug abuse was common. A large focus for madams was keeping their business transactions discreet and staying on the good side of the law, which they did by contributing

money to charitable organizations, schools, and churches.

Despite those efforts, much of the profit still went to legal fines and fees, since prostitution was largely illegal. Timely payment of these fines could guarantee a madam that her business could continue without fear of being shut down, usually. Brothels were expected to pay significantly higher rent than other tenants.<sup>[55]</sup> Another upscale bordello was the Big Brick in Charleston, South Carolina, built and operated by Grace Peixotto, the daughter of the Rev. Solomon Cohen Peixotto, and

the madam of the most infamous brothel in the history of the city.<sup>[56]</sup>

A madam stayed involved in her business. Running a house with so many in it required skill. A brothel required the purchase of regular food and food preparation. A madam had to monitor the cleanliness of the brothel, including the sheets, which had to be changed several times in an evening, and a stock of wines and liquors for clientele. She was the boss of the brothel and so a madam fired and hired servants, maids, and prostitutes. New faces in the brothel were desired by patrons and so madams had to find new

women to recruit. Sometimes, that meant taking in a less-than-desired woman but one with youth and good looks. The "new" prostitute received training, cosmetics, and clothes from the madam. A prostitute from Kansas City is recorded as saying that she is no match for the "proper" behavior and dress required for the famous Ice Palace in Chicago.<sup>[57]</sup>

Disorderly houses or any other dwelling used for purposes of selling sex or other lewd acts in the early 20th century were illegal with a few exceptions: the states of Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, and South Carolina. Penalties

could range from \$1,000 and time in jail to much smaller fines.<sup>[44]</sup>

## **Military brothels**

Until recently, in several armies around the world, mobile brothels were attached to the army as auxiliary units, especially attached to combat units on long-term deployments abroad. Because it is a controversial subject, military brothels and the women who provided sex services in them were often designated with creative euphemisms. Examples of such jargon are *la boîte à bonbons* ("the sweet box"), replacing the term "*bordel militaire de*

campagne". France used mobile brothels during the First World War, the Second World War and the First Indochina War to supply sex services to French soldiers who were facing combat in areas where brothels were unusual, such as at the front line or in isolated garrisons.<sup>[58][59]</sup> Brothels were outlawed in France in 1946; but the French Foreign Legion continued to use mobile brothels until the late 1990s.

During the Second World War, women drawn from throughout the Far East were forced into sexual slavery by the occupation armies of Imperial Japan in brothels known as lanjo.<sup>[60]</sup> These women

were referred to as "comfort women" (kanji=慰安婦; hiragana=いあんふ). During the Second World War in Europe, Nazi Germany created military brothels where an estimated 34,140 enslaved women from Nazi-occupied Europe, particularly Poland, were forced to work as prostitutes in brothels.<sup>[61]</sup>

After the Japanese surrender following the Second World War, the Japanese government formed the Recreation and Amusement Association and recruited 55,000 of its "patriotic women" to "sacrifice themselves" to the G.I. occupation, to

protect the chastity of pure Japanese womenfolk.<sup>[62]</sup>

In South Korea, women who worked as prostitutes for UN forces were called Western princesses. Between the 1950s and 1960s, 60% of South Korean prostitutes worked near the US military bases.<sup>[63]</sup> Korean leader Park Chung-hee encouraged the sex trade, particularly with the U.S. military, in order to generate revenue.<sup>[64]</sup> Since the mid-1990s, Filipina women have worked as prostitutes for U.S. servicemen in South Korea.<sup>[65][66][67]</sup> In 2010, the Philippine government stopped approving contracts that promoters use to

bring Filipinas to South Korea to work near  
U.S. military bases.<sup>[68]</sup>



A Bordel militaire de campagne in Morocco in the 1920s.



German soldiers entering a *Soldatenbordell* in Brest, France (1940). The building is a former synagogue.



A young Chinese woman from one of the Imperial Japanese Army's "comfort battalions" is interviewed by a British Royal Air Force officer in Rangoon after being liberated in August 1945.



U.S. servicemen entering Recreation and Amusement Association during Occupation of Japan.



The registration of Western princesses in South Korea on September 13, 1961.

# Sex doll brothel

A number of brothels offering only sex dolls exist in Japan. There is also one in Barcelona, and one named Bordoll opened in Germany.<sup>[69]</sup> Another was set to open on 8 September 2018 in Toronto, Canada

though it was deemed to be contrary to a by-law in the city, forcing its shutdown.<sup>[70]</sup>

Australia has recently seen its first sex doll available for use in a brothel as well.<sup>[71]</sup> In February 2018, another opened in Aarhus, Denmark.<sup>[72]</sup>

## See also

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***Prostitution portal***

- Artemis
- Barbary Coast, San Francisco
- Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others

- Gay bathhouse
- Lupanar (Pompeii).
- Maxim Wien
- Pimp
- Prostitution
- Sex on Premises Venue
- Sex worker
- Soapland
- Spintria

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