

## **Relationship Between Islamic Sufism Practices and Religious Personality Among Muslim Students in Malaysia**

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*Many researchers agree that the level of religious personality influences an individual attitude. In Islam, nurturing a good religious personality can be done through Islamic Sufism practices. Therefore, this study has identified the relationship between Islamic Sufism practices and the religious personality among Muslim students in the university. It used a survey design that covered three scales of religious personality. A total of 296 questionnaires were collected in four universities in Malaysia. It was found that Islamic Sufism practices have a significant positive correlation with student's religious personalities. These results provide new insight into Sufism practices and religious personality among university students.*

*Keywords : Islamic Sufism, religious personality, Muslim students, relationship*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study focuses on the at-takhalli and al-tahalli practices as one of the Islamic Sufism approaches especially in forming religious personalities among university students in Malaysia. The objective is to identify the relationship between at-takhalli and al-tahalli practices and the religious personality among Muslim students in the university. Four scales of Muslim's religious personality have been used. There is the relationship with Allah SWT, the relationship with humans and nature, and the relationship with oneself. Al-takhalli means to fight or remove from the personal and spiritual abominable things, while al-tahalli means to adorn the personal and spiritual with good things (Ismail et.al, 2021). The practice of these two concepts is very much loved by Allah SWT and Prophet Muhammad SAW as mentioned in a hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW which means: "Indeed Allah SWT loves things (morals) that are high and noble and Allah SWT hates things (morals) that are vile" (Reported by at-Thabarani). This shows that the concept of at-takhalli and al-tahalli is important to be practiced to produce individuals with noble personalities and subsequently produce a universal ummah that excels in this world and the hereafter.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

According to Sufism practices by al-Ghazali (1988), the religious personality of a Muslim can be formed through tazkiyyah al-nafs (purification of the heart) which needs to be implemented through practices of al-takhalli and al-tahalli. The practice of al-takhalli and al-tahalli will develop a Muslim community with noble morals. This coincides with the study of Akhir & Sabjan (2014) who said that the formation of noble morals is inseparable from the religious aspect where religion is the most stable form of values, attitudes, and behaviors. Many studies have been conducted to identify the level of students' morals from school level to university (Jusoh, Sharif & Sulong, 2018; Bakar & Majid, 2016). Even so, studies related to the practice of Islamic Sufism in the development of students' religious personalities are still lacking. The practice of Islamic Sufism is seen can develop religious personality among Muslim students and simultaneously produce excellent human capital.

The involvement of university students in many social problems is related to the lack of appreciation of religion (Muhammad & Omar, 2017; Yahya & Nasrun, 2016, Tan & Abiddin, 2016; Noor et al., 2016). This is also indirectly related to the level of appreciation of Islamic morality (Marzuki et al., 2019) and also the level of religious personality among students (Ghani & Musa, 2018). Thus, many scholars suggested studies about factors that encourage improving the appreciation of religious life and religious personality are implemented especially in university. The findings can help the university to plan and improve student development programs (Marzuki et al., 2019; Ismail et al., 2019). Therefore, this study focuses on the Islamic Sufism practices and their relationship with the Muslim religious personality in university. So that the findings can be a new initiative and approach in student development programs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Islamic Sufism Practices**

Islamic Sufism has been known since the early 19th century. It is one belief and practice in which Muslims strive to be close to Allah SWT spiritually and through direct personal experience (Usman, Stapa & Abdullah, 2020). It drives Muslims to practice more than what is obligatory, stay away from the prohibitions of Allah SWT even a little, and follow the morals of the Prophet SAW from the smallest to the largest deeds. A Sufi who practices Islamic Sufism always tries hard to purify the heart not only from the nature of mazmumah or reprehensible, but even any bad trajectory in the soul. If the heart neglects to remember Allah SWT even for a moment, a Sufi will feel very sinful and remorseful until he redeems it by doubling his deeds, and even punishing himself. Furthermore, according to Rachid (2018), a Sufi is a spiritual person and considers love and peace as a fundamental part of human life. This is one reason, that motivates millions of Muslims to embrace Sufism today. The greatness of Sufi's soul makes their followers

always adore them even after death (Iqbal & Farid, 2017; Saglam, 2017). Even so, there are Muslim scholars who oppose the worship of Sufis in such an extreme way that it can lead to the polytheism of Allah SWT.

Many studies have found that the approach of Sufism can be an antidote in solving various psychological and personality problems among the Muslim community. Subandi, Chizanah & Subhan (2021) found that the zikr as one of the Sufism practices can improve mental health. It shows the importance of a soul purification process in Sufism which consists of at-takhalli (purifying the soul from reprehensible attributes), at-tahalli (adorning the soul with noble and praiseworthy attributes), and at-tajalli (attaining a pure soul). This is supported by a study conducted by Hamsyah & Subandi (2017) who found that the practice of zikr can increase happiness and reduce stress. Sufism practices are seen as necessary not on the development of spiritual aspects only but also religious growth such as increased religious appreciation as well as good behavior (Mitha, 2019).

### **A-Takhalli and at-Tahalli Practices**

According to al-Ghazali (1988), personality is encompassing the whole of the individual physically (external) and spiritually (internal). These two aspects influence each other where the internal of a person consisting of emotions, attitudes, motivations, etc. can influence external behavior and external behavior can also affect the spiritual aspects of an individual (Sham et al., 2013). Even so, according to al-Ghazali (1988), the spiritual aspect is more influential to the behavior and embodiment of a person's personality because it is related to the role of the heart (qalb).

Therefore, in ensuring that the personality of a Muslim individual is formed from a heart (qalb) that is submissive and obedient to the commands of Allah SWT and Rasulullah SAW, then the process of purification of the soul (tazkiyyah al-nafs) must be done. According to Islamic Sufism by al-Ghazali (1988), the process of tazkiyyah al-nafs needs Sufism practices such as al-takhalli (mujahadah al-nafs) and al-tahalli (riyadhah al-nafs). According to Ismail (2021), al-takhalli and at-tahalli are among the most important practices in Sufism to develop Muslim spirituality and attitude. Al-takhalli means trying hard against lust until the elimination of the attributes of mazmumah (abomination) such as jealousy, love of the world (hub al-dunya), arrogance, and so on. Al-tahalli is a training of the soul where the soul is trained with goodness gradually so that something that is considered difficult can finally be implemented easily and lightly (Sham et al., 2013). These two processes complement each other in the construction of the Muslim personality where al-takhalli removes the attributes and practices of mazmumah (vile) and al-tahalli builds the attributes and practices of mahmudah (praiseworthy) in a person.

The practice of Islamic Sufism based on al-takhalli and al-tahalli is very important in developing the Muslim religious personality. These two practices mutually complement each other. According to Salleh (2004), the practices of at-takhalli and at-tahalli produce positive effects on the psyche and personality of Muslims. Many studies explain that both practices have successfully built the personality of Muslims (Supriyadi & Jannah, 2020; Abdullah et al., 2017). Moreover, according to Mahpol et.al (2020), it can also produce a physically and spiritually balanced Muslim. The study also found that the practice of at-takhalli and at-tahalli can build physical, spiritual, and mental strength during stress (Sugianto, 2018). Similarly, the study by Wahidah (2018) found that this practice can build spiritual and emotional strength to face various difficulties live. All these studies prove that by practicing al-tahalli and at-takhalli, a Muslim's personality will improve mentally and physically.

### **Religious Personality**

Personality refers to the Arabic word 'sahsiah' or 'akhlak' (Ab Ghani et al., 2013). Thus, an individual with a good personality refers to an individual with admirable morals. On the other hand, individuals with bad personalities refer to individuals with vile morals (Syamsuddin & Mamat, 2014). Syamsuddin & Mamat (2014) summarized the meaning of morality into four main relationships, namely the moral relationship with God, oneself, humans, and nature. This coincides with the Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI) personality model by Steven Eric Krauss (Abdul Lateef Abdullah) et al. (2011), where there are three dimensions in the construction of religious personality, namely the relationship with Allah SWT, the relationship with oneself and the relationship with humans and nature. While the Ummatic Personality

Inventory (UPI) (Othman, 2011) has three main constructs namely worship, trust, and knowledge. All three constructs are adapted to the main scale of the study by focusing on the construct of worship to the relationship with Allah SWT, the construct of trust to the relationship between human beings and nature, and the construct of knowledge to the relationship with oneself.

There are several studies related to religious personality among students and the Muslim community in general. A study by Ghani & Musa (2018), found that the level of the religious personality of mosque toilet users is at a moderate level. Thus, the study suggests a more comprehensive religious practice to generate a first-class mind society, high-level thinking, and rational in dealing with life's challenges. Ahmad & Kasim (2018), found that the religious personality of Islamic Education teachers has a significant relationship with the formation of student morals. This is supported by the study of Hamid & Kila (2018) who said that individual personality affects the efficiency of a job done. Thus, the religious personality of Islamic education teachers is very influential in the success of the education delivered. Similarly, a study by Othman (2009), which looked at the importance of academic balance as well as the religious personality of students to produce excellent human capital. Findings from these studies clearly show that individuals with good religious personalities will be able to form an excellent Muslim society. Similarly, the practice of the teachings of Islam comprehensively is very important and has a significant relationship in improving the religious personality of the Muslim community.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. Is there a relationship between at-tahalli practices with the scale of religious personality 1 namely the relationship with Allah SWT (HDA)?*
- ii. Is there a relationship between at-tahalli practices with the scale of religious personality 2 namely the relationship with man and nature (HMA)?*
- iii. Is there a relationship between at-tahalli practices with the scale of religious personality 3 namely the relationship with oneself (HDS)?*
- iv. Is there a relationship between at-takhalli practices with the scale of religious personality 1 namely the relationship with Allah SWT (HDA)?*
- v. Is there a relationship between at-takhalli practices with the scale of religious personality 2 namely the relationship with man and nature (HMA)?*
- vi. Is there a relationship between at-takhalli practices with the scale of religious personality 3 namely the relationship with oneself (HDS)?*

## HYPOTHESIS

*H<sup>a</sup>1: There is a significant relationship between at-tahalli practices with the scale of religious personality 1 that is the relationship with Allah SWT (HDA)*

*H<sup>a</sup>2: There is a significant relationship between at-tahalli practices with the scale of religious personality 2 that is the relationship with man and nature (HMA)*

*H<sup>a</sup>3: There is a significant relationship between at-tahalli practices with the scale of religious personality 3 which is the relationship with oneself (HDS)*

*H<sup>a</sup>4: There is a significant relationship between at-takhalli practices with the scale of religious personality 1 that is the relationship with Allah SWT (HDA)*

*H<sup>a</sup>5: There is a significant relationship between at-takhalli practices with the scale of religious personality 2 that is the relationship with man and nature (HMA)*

**H<sup>a</sup>6:** *There is a significant relationship between at-takhalli practices with the scale of religious personality 3 which is the relationship with oneself (HDS)*

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey design that involves descriptive and inferential data analysis. A set of questionnaires was used which covered three scales of religious personality, namely relationship with Allah SWT, relationship with oneself, and relationship with humans and nature. The instrument was adapted from the Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI) (2005) and Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI) (2011). A total of 296 questionnaires were collected from students in four universities.

Data input and data cleaning were made using SPSS software. Before starting the analysis, the preliminary analysis was conducted to test the normality and common method variances. The result from the preliminary analysis shows this dataset is qualified to be analyzed using SamrtPLS with bootstrapping procedure.

### Overview of Data Analysis

This section starts with the profiles of the respondents in Table 1. Four demographic factors had been collected, namely gender, religion, age, and university. A majority of the respondents were female (n=240, percentage = 81.1). 67.5% of the respondents were above 21 years of age and all respondents are Muslim. In terms of university, most of the respondents were from university 1 (n=110, percentage=37.2) and second from University 4 (n=93, percentage=31.4).

**TABLE 1**  
**PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS**

Demographic	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	18.9
	Female	240	81.1
	<i>Total</i>	<i>296</i>	<i>100</i>
Religion	Islam	296	100
	Others	0	0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>296</i>	<i>100</i>
Age	19-20	96	32.5
	21-22	127	42.9
	Above 23	73	24.6
	<i>Total</i>	<i>296</i>	<i>100</i>
University	University 1	110	37.2
	University 2	68	23.0
	University 3	25	8.4
	University 4	93	31.4
	<i>Total</i>	<i>296</i>	<i>100</i>

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.3.2. Before using the software, data need to go through the preliminary analysis to ensure it fulfilled the characteristic needed to use SmartPLS. A preliminary analysis consists of normality tests as proposed by Cain and Zhang (2016) and common method variance remedy, full collinearity estimates as suggested by Kock and Lynn (2012). Later, we conduct the assessment of the measurement results based on reporting suggested by Hair, Hollingsworth, Randolph, and Chong (2017) as

well as Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle (2019). For discriminant validity, we reported the HTMT indicators as suggested by Hair et al. (2018). Once the model achieved its reliability and validity, we tested the hypothesis for this study using a bootstrapping procedure.

### Preliminary Analysis

Before conducting the analysis, the preliminary assessments were conducted to ensure that (1) normality test and (2) this set of data is free from common method bias. For the normality test, we test this data using skewness and kurtosis calculator by Webpower (<https://webpower.psychstat.org/>) as suggested by Cain and Zhang, (2016). The result for skewness:  $\beta = 6.665$ , or for kurtosis:  $\beta = 61.910$  indicating that the data is not normal. Therefore, this set of data can be analyzed using SmartPLS through the employment of bootstrapping procedure. To ensure that this set of data is free from common method variance, we use the full collinearity estimates approach as suggested by (Kock, 2015). The result (Table 2) exhibits confirm with the threshold values for VIF (below 5) hence free from the common method variance issue. The preliminary analysis result for normality and common method bias indicates that this set of data can proceed for further data analysis using SmartPLS.

**TABLE 2**  
**FULL COLLINEARITY ESTIMATES FOR THE STUDY**

Constructs	HDS	HMA	HDA	At-Tahalli	At-Takhalli
VIF	2.368	2.737	2.501	3.583	1.945

Note: HDS - Relationship with self; HMA- Relationship with human and nature; HAD - Relationship with Allah SWT

### Assessment of Measurement Model

Table 3 exhibits the reliability using composite reliability (CR) and convergence validity using average variance extracted (AVE) outlined by Hair et al. (2014). One item was deleted due to low loading namely – At-Tahalli (C1) Loading for all items are above 0.50, Moreover, the CR for all constructs – At-Takhalli (0.953), At-Tahalli (0.938), Relationship to Allah (HDA) (0.929), Relationship to Human and Nature (HMA) (0.935), and Relationship to Oneself (HDS) (0.916) are above 0.80. Also, the value for AVE - At-Takhalli (0.505), At-Tahalli (0.504), HDA (0.566), HMA (0.507), and HDS (0.500) are above 0.50. Hence, this set of data achieves its reliability and convergence validity, therefore is valid to be tested for discriminant validity.

**TABLE 3**  
**ASSESSMENT OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL**

Construct	Items	Loading	CR	AVE
At-Takhalli	B5	0.627	0.953	0.505
	B6	0.690		
	B7	0.597		
	B10	0.663		
	B11	0.635		
	B12	0.711		
	B13	0.813		
	B14	0.782		
	B15	0.798		
	B16	0.683		
	B17	0.730		

Construct	Items	Loading	CR	AVE
Al-Tahalli	B18	0.704	0.938	0.504
	B20	0.686		
	B21	0.721		
	B22	0.764		
	C2	0.608		
	C3	0.671		
	C5	0.600		
	C6	0.531		
	C9	0.623		
	C10	0.770		
	C11	0.761		
	C12	0.752		
	C13	0.751		
	C14	0.764		
	C15	0.802		
	C16	0.784		
	C17	0.820		
	C18	0.747		
	C19	0.745		
	C20	0.662		
	C21	0.700		
	C22	0.726		
	C23	0.691		
	C24	0.631		
HDA	D1	0.675	0.929	0.566
	D2	0.771		
	D3	0.752		
	D4	0.751		
	D5	0.722		
	D6	0.757		
	D7	0.736		
	D8	0.793		
	D9	0.779		
	D10	0.779		
HMA	E1	0.674	0.935	0.507
	E3	0.746		
	E4	0.696		
	E5	0.723		
	E6	0.764		
	E7	0.754		
	E8	0.768		
	E9	0.758		
	E10	0.765		
	E11	0.620		
	E12	0.682		

Construct	Items	Loading	CR	AVE
HDS	E14	0.652	0.916	0.500
	E16	0.648		
	E17	0.695		
	F1	0.616		
	F4	0.752		
	F5	0.763		
	F6	0.755		
	F7	0.671		
	F8	0.609		
	F10	0.796		
	F11	0.818		
	F12	0.692		
	F14	0.594		
	F16	0.667		

Note: Deleted items – al-Takhalli (B1, B2, B3, B4, B8, B9, B19); al-Tahalli (C1, C4, C7, C8); HMA (E2, E13, E15); HDS (F2, F3, F9, F13) due to low loadings

We test the discriminant validity using Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Table 4 presents the discriminant validity value. All values presented are below the  $HTMT_{0.85}$  ratio. Therefore, this set of data achieves its discriminant validity and is valid for further analysis.

**TABLE 4**  
**DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY USING HETEROTRAIT-MONOTRAIT RATIO (HTMT)**

	1	2	3	4	5
1. HDS					
2. HMA	0.704				
3. HDA	0.636	0.733			
4. At-Tahalli	0.773	0.690	0.711		
5. At-Takhalli	0.542	0.604	0.693	0.670	

### Assessment of Structural Model

Assessment of structural model was used to analyze the hypotheses of this study. There were six hypotheses tested in this study. The result indicates that At-Tahalli shows a positive significant relationship with HDA among students ( $\beta = 0.675$ ,  $t$ -value = 10.301,  $p < 0.001$ ). Also, At-Tahalli has a positive relationship with HDS among students ( $\beta = 0.481$ ,  $t$ -value = 8.798,  $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, At-Tahalli also exhibit a positive significant relationship with HMA among students ( $\beta = 0.438$ ,  $t$ -value = 7.545,  $p < 0.001$ ). For At-Takhalli, At-Takhalli also has a positive significant relationship HDS among student ( $\beta = 0.256$ ,  $t$ -value = 4.686,  $p < 0.001$ ). Also, At-Takhalli has a positive significant relationship HMA among student ( $\beta = 0.368$ ,  $t$ -value = 6.422,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, this study does not provide sufficient evidence to support Hypothesis 4. The tested variables included in this study explain 53.1% of the variance in the HDA, 45.4% of the variance in HMA, and 53.3% of the variance in HDS. Moreover, all  $Q^2$  value for intent is greater than zero for a particular endogenous latent construct, suggesting that the conceptual model can predict the endogenous latent construct.

Figure 1 shows the assessment of the structural model using SmartPLS.

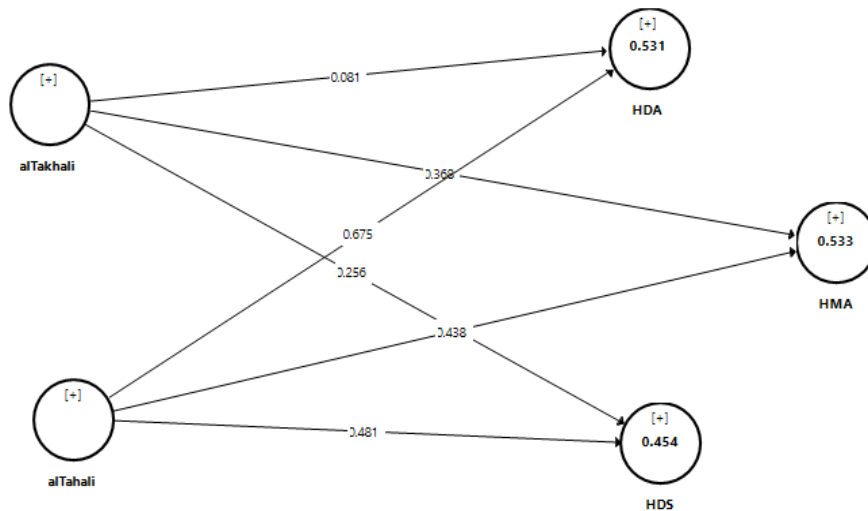


**TABLE 5**  
**HYPOTHESES TESTING FOR THIS STUDY**

Hypo	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Dev	t-value	p-value	BC LL 5%	BC UL 95%	R <sup>2</sup> /Q <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>
	HdA							0.531/ 0.292	
	HMA							0.454/ 0.219	
	HDS							0.533/ 0.261	
H1	Al-Tahalli -> HDA	0.675	0.065	10.301	0.000	0.528	0.754		0.576
H2	Al-Tahalli -> HDS	0.481	0.055	8.798	0.000	0.384	0.562		0.252
H3	Al-Tahalli -> HMA	0.438	0.058	7.545	0.000	0.349	0.532		0.244
H4	Al-Takhalli -> HDA	0.081	0.064	1.264	0.103	-0.007	0.203		0.008
H5	Al-Takhalli -> HDS	0.256	0.055	4.686	0.000	0.163	0.340		0.071
H6	Al-Takhalli -> HMA	0.368	0.057	6.422	0.000	0.272	0.458		0.172

Note: ATT – Attitude; SN – Subjective Norm; PBC – Perceived Behavioural Control; KNW – Knowledge; MN – Moral Norm; Intent – Intent to Use

**FIGURE 1**  
**ASSESSMENTS OF STRUCTURAL MODEL**



**Summary of Hypothesis Testing**

There were six hypotheses tested in this study. The result reveals that five hypotheses are supported (H1, H2, H3, H5, and H6). However, this study does not have enough evidence to support H4. The summary of the results is presented in Table 6:

**TABLE 6**  
**SUMMARY OF THE HYPOTHESES RESULTS FOR THIS STUDY**

Hypotheses	Description	Results
H1	Al-Tahalli -> HDA	Supported
H2	Al-Tahalli -> HDS	Supported
H3	Al-Tahalli -> HMA	Supported
H4	Al-Takhalli -> HDA	Not Supported
H5	Al-Takhalli -> HDS	Supported
H6	Al-Takhalli -> HMA	Supported

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Findings from the study indicate that the practice of at-Tahalli has a significant positive correlation with all scales of religious personality. This shows that the practice of at-Tahalli influences and impacts the religious personality of a Muslim in all three scales of religious personality: the relationship with Allah SWT, the relationship with human and nature, and the relationship with oneself. It shows that in forming a religious personality and being a very good Muslim, each Muslim has to fill in the soul with all the goodness and adorn the personal and spiritual with all the good things. Therefore, something that is considered difficult can finally be implemented easily and lightly. The findings also show that the practice of al-Takhalli has a significant positive correlation with two scales of religious personality. There is a relationship between humans and nature and the relationship with oneself. It shows that university students are very concerned about these two relationships in their daily life and influenced by at-Takhalli practices. These findings coincide with a study by Supriyadi & Jannah (2020); Abdullah et al. (2017); Mahpol et al. (2020), Sugianto (2018), and Wahidah (2018).

Even so, based on studies, the relationship between at-Takhalli and religious personality does not have enough evidence to support it. This may be because the relationship with Allah SWT is more influenced by other elements and factors. This may also be influenced by the age factor of the students who are still young and less concerned with the divine element than the relationship between human beings and nature. This group needs to be nurtured in their relationship with Allah SWT not just in the form of the practice of at-Takhalli but also needs to be given external motivation from the institutions, family, and society.

This finding is also in line with al-Ghazali's religious personality model (Sham et al., 2013) which emphasizes the practice of al-takhalli and at-tahalli in the development of a Muslim's religious personality. This study also proves that Sufism practices in forming religious personality can be adapted to form a good and quality Muslim society.

Therefore, the university can use the at-takhalli dan at-tahalli practices in planning and improving student development programs, especially in the construction of morals and practices of religious life. This can also help the country in producing a holistic and balanced human capital as targeted in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (Higher Education) 2015-2025.

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