

# Research in Brief



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## The Changing Time-Use Patterns of Dual-Earner Households in the Childrearing Stage 2019-2024

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In this study, I classified dual-earner couple households into three cluster groups—the work-oriented (WO), role-distinct (RD), and work-childcare coordinating (WCC) groups—based on the composition of time they spent on paid work, housework, and childcare.

Between 2019 and 2024, the percentage of the WO group declined slightly, while the proportion of the WCC group increased, indicating a gradual shift in time allocation among dual-earner households. However, WO couple households continued to account for the largest share.

Each of these three groups demonstrated a gradual shift of its own in time allocation to paid work, housework, and childcare, while still maintaining its dual-earner structure. For some groups, though not all, increases were observed in men's time spent on childcare. Similarly, women in certain groups showed increases in hours devoted to paid work and childcare and reduced time spent on housework. From 2019 to 2024, time allocation among these couple households tended toward a greater balance between men and women and between work and family, a trend likely facilitated by a combination of increased labor market participation among women, the cumulative effect of government work-family balance policies, and changing public perception of gender equality.

A notable finding is that among those with high childcare needs—defined here as having two or more children of ages requiring close care—couples showed a stronger tendency to adjust their time allocation around paid work and childcare. However, as the WO group remained the majority among couples with children of ages requiring close care, their adjustments in time allocation may place a greater burden on women than on men. This points to the need to allow dual-earner couples to adjust their working hours and to broaden the scope of work-family balance policies.

## Introduction: the need for typological analysis of dual-earner couple households

Dual-earner families as a share of couple households increased by 2.7 percentage points from 45.5 percent in 2019 to 48.2 percent in 2024 (National Data Portal, 2025). The increase in the share of households with both partners working suggests that these couples have less need for within-household specialization and a greater need to share both earning and childrearing responsibilities between partners. Couple households with young children, in particular, must set aside time just for childcare. Because paid work, childcare, and housework must all fit within a fixed 24-hour day, these couples make strategic decisions about how to allocate their time (Becker, 1965). In this connection, to fully appreciate what the time-use structure of work-family balance should be like, it is necessary to examine how dual-earner couples allocate and adjust their time.

Time allocation among dual-earner couple households is likely to be affected by circumstantial factors such as labor market conditions and the state of childcare services. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, various work modes, such as flexible hours and telecommuting, have proliferated. In parallel, services aimed at reducing care gaps for dual-earner households—such as hourly childcare and integrated afterschool care programs—have increasingly been implemented.

Even under the same changing external conditions, couple households may differ in how they allocate their time across paid work, housework, and childcare, depending on their characteristics. Thus, this study analyzes changes in patterns of time allocation among dual-earner couples. In this analysis, households were classified into types based on the hours spent in paid work, housework, and childcare. To examine changes in time allocation among dual-earner couple households, I conducted a latent class analysis (LCA)<sup>1)</sup> using raw data from the Time Use Survey<sup>2)</sup>. Based on the identified time allocation clusters, this study derives policy implications for the design and implementation of work-family balance systems.

## Changes in time allocation among dual-earner couples in the childrearing stage

Time-use patterns among dual-earner couples remained largely gender-specific in 2024, echoing 2019 trends: men worked longer hours while women handled more housework and childcare. However, gradual changes appeared. Men's work hours decreased while women's increased. Meanwhile, time spent on childcare rose for both, with a more pronounced increase among men (from 40.3 minutes in 2019 to 57.1 minutes).

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1) To examine time allocation in dual-earner households, weekday data (Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday) from the 2019 and 2024 Time Use Survey time-use datasets were used. The analysis focuses on dual-earner couples who live in the same household and care for children under the age of 10 (excluding those on leave).

2) The Time Use Survey is conducted every five years to statistically examine how people spend their daily 24 hours, with the aim of understanding lifestyles and social changes. The data gained in this time-series survey are results by year that show patterns and trends. Because it does not explain causal relationships, care must be taken when interpreting the results.

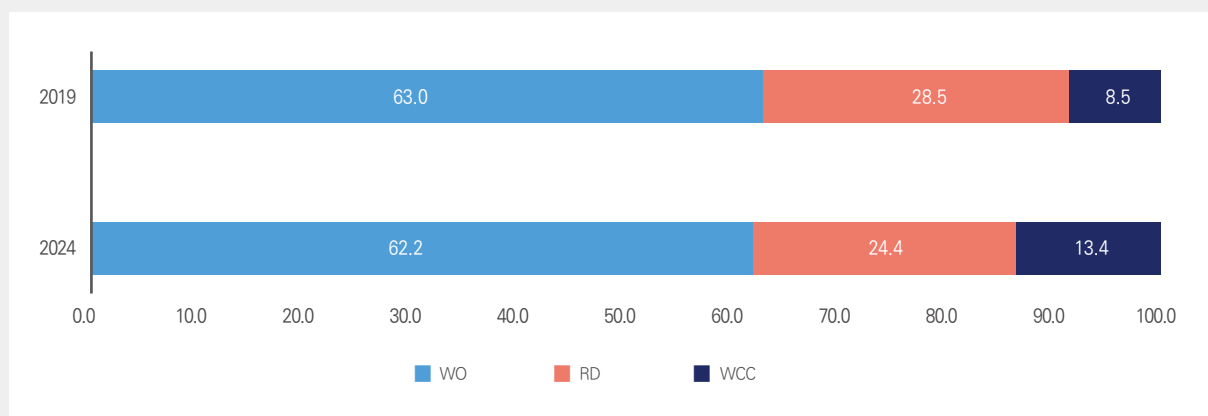
[Table 1] Changes in time allocation among dual-earner households 2019-2024 (in minutes)

	Men			Women		
	Paid work	Housework	Childcare	Paid work	Housework	Childcare
2019	574.2	27.3	40.3	423.5	123.8	125.5
2024	546.6	27.2	57.1	438.5	104.8	126.6

This study classifies dual-earner couple households into three types—work-oriented (WO), role-distinct (RD), and work-childcare coordinating (WCC). WO couples spend more hours in paid work than other types of couples. WO women allocate more hours than men to housework and childcare. RD couples are characterized by their adherence to a traditional, gender-based division of roles, whereby men spend more hours in paid work and women do more housework and childcare. Lastly, couples in the WCC group differ from those in other groups in that among them both partners divide their time relatively evenly among paid work, housework, and childcare.

The three-cluster structure of dual-earner couple households carried over from 2019 to 2024. There were changes in the composition of these types. While the WO group largely remained the same as a share of dual-earner couples, the RD group declined from 28.5 percent to 24.4 percent as the work-childcare coordinating type grew by 4.9 percentage points to 13.4 percent.

[Figure 1] Changes in the proportions of three clusters of dual-earner households 2019-2024 (in %)



Source: Ministry of Data and Statistics. 2019/2024 Time Use Survey. raw data (in minutes)

◆ *Work-oriented (WO) group*

Men and women in the WO group, a cluster characterized by relatively long working hours, spent 597.4 and 494.7 minutes per day on paid work, respectively, in 2019. WO men allocated 17.9 minutes to housework and 37.0 minutes to childcare, while women spent more time on these activities—94.6

minutes for housework and 100.0 minutes for childcare.

By 2024, time spent on paid work declined slightly for men but increased slightly for women, to 583.9 and 499.3 minutes, respectively. Time spent on housework and childcare increased over the period, to 21.7 and 37.3 minutes, respectively, for men, and to 82.8 and 103.5 minutes for women.

#### ◆ *Role-distinct (RD) group*

In 2019, RD men spent 551.8 minutes daily on paid work, a substantial difference compared with women's 241.1 minutes. Women spent 196.3 minutes on housework and 195.9 minutes on childcare, while men allocated just 14.7 and 33.5 minutes, respectively.

In 2024, men spent 515.1 minutes per day on paid work, a significant reduction from the figure in 2019; women's time spent on paid work changed little. Men allocated 26.0 and 41.0 minutes to housework and childcare, respectively. For women, time spent on housework and childcare declined, albeit slightly, to 183.3 and 197.2 minutes. The moderate increase in time spent among men for housework and childcare notwithstanding, the traditional, gender-based division of labor remained.

#### ◆ *Work-childcare coordinating (WCC) group*

In 2019, couples in the WCC group spent less time working—468.5 minutes for men and 479.4 minutes for women—than did their work-oriented counterparts. Men in this group spent 142.4 minutes on housework and 89.1 minutes on childcare, while women spent 107.6 minutes on housework and 88.8 minutes on childcare, indicating a relatively well-balanced time allocation.

In 2024, men in this group spent 417.0 minutes at work, slightly less than in 2019, and 57.5 minutes on housework, substantially less than in 2019, while the time they spent on childcare increased by a large margin to 185.5 minutes. Women in this group spent 490.8 minutes at work, more than in 2019, 76.8 minutes on housework, a decline from 2019, and 115.0 minutes on childcare, an increase from 2019. Dual-earner couples in the WCC group tended toward a marked increase in time spent on childcare, presumably in an effort to better balance paid work and childcare.

Time spent on paid work generally decreased for men in 2024 compared to 2019, across all three groups, though they still spent most of the day at work. Time spent on childcare increased among men in the RD group, and to a greater extent in the WCC group.

In 2024, women in the WO and WCC groups devoted more time to paid work and childcare than in 2019, while spending less time on housework. The time-use patterns of dual-earner households increasingly focused on balancing paid work and childcare.

Inasmuch as dual-earner couples, out of the need to strike a balance across paid work, housework, and childcare, tend to adjust their time-use patterns in ways particular to their typological categories, changes in time allocation differ between men and women even in the same category.

**[Table 2] Changes in time allocation among dual-earner households 2019-2024 by cluster (in minutes)**

		Men			Women		
		Paid work	Housework	Childcare	Paid work	Housework	Childcare
WO	2019	597.4	17.9	37.0	494.7	94.6	100.0
	2024	583.9	21.7	37.3	499.3	82.2	103.5
RD	2019	551.8	14.7	33.5	241.3	196.3	195.9
	2024	515.1	26.0	41.0	240.6	183.3	197.2
WCC	2019	468.5	142.4	89.1	479.4	107.6	88.8
	2024	417.0	57.5	185.5	490.8	76.8	115.0

Source: Ministry of Data and Statistics. 2019/2024 Time Use Survey. raw data (in minutes).

## Changes in the characteristics of dual-earner households in the childrearing stage

### ◆ Household income

In 2019, a large share—47.1 percent—of households in the WCC group were in the top income tercile. WO households were fairly evenly distributed across all three income terciles. The income distribution of couples in the RD group was more concentrated in the bottom third than in the other two terciles.

By 2024, the distribution of WCC households by income class had shifted, with the proportion of those in the top tercile declining to 22.5 percent and the proportions in the middle and bottom terciles growing. The share of households in the WO and RD groups whose incomes were in the top and middle terciles increased.

Compared with 2019, WCC households in 2024 were less concentrated in a single income tercile and more evenly distributed across all three. The time-use patterns characteristic of the WCC group spread across the income distribution, rather than remaining concentrated in the top third as in 2019. In other words, the time allocation patterns typical of the WCC group became increasingly adopted by dual-earner couples of all income levels.

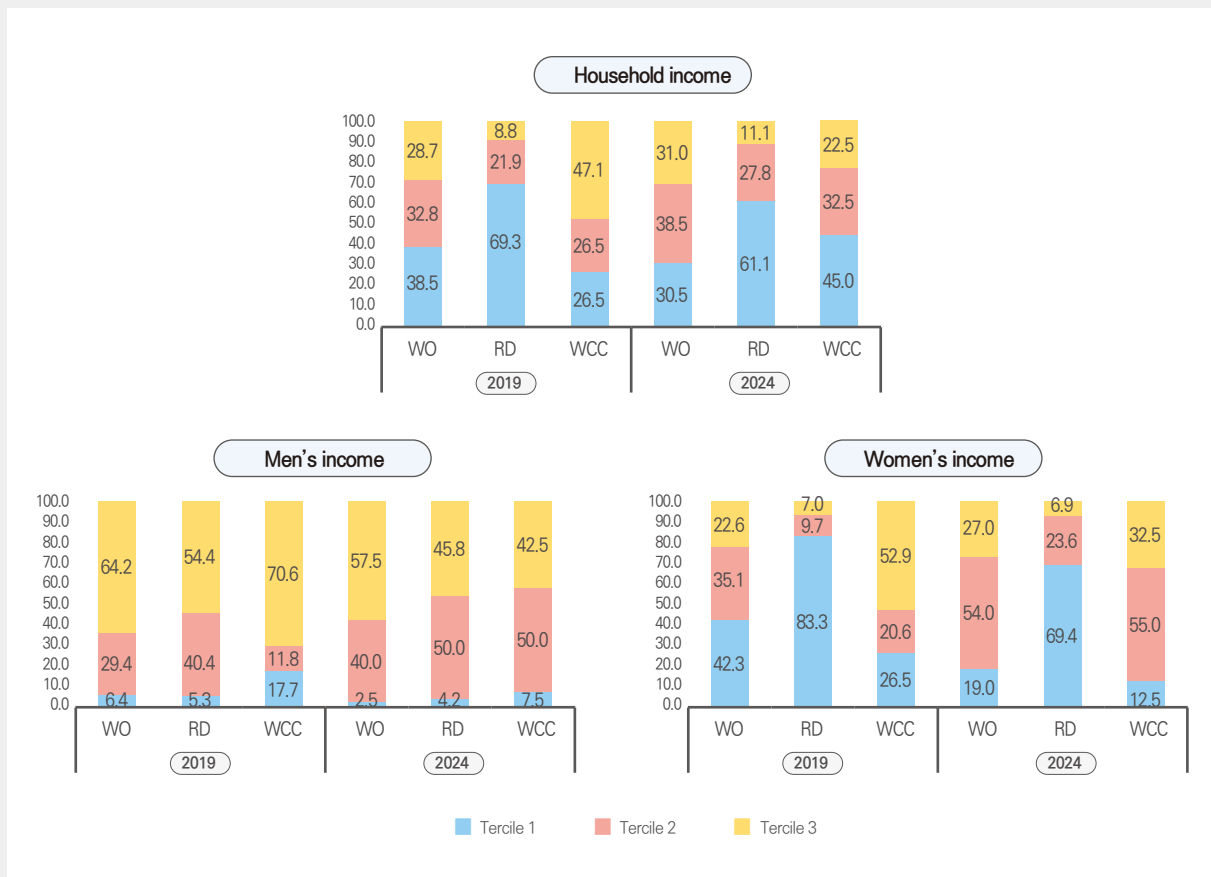
### ◆ Individual income

Even at the individual level, the WO group was more strongly represented in the top income tercile in 2019 than either the RD or WCC group. Dual-earner couple households in the WO group, with 70.6 percent of men and 52.9 percent of women in the top third, indicated greater income security and more scope for responsibility sharing between partners. By comparison, the RD was less represented in the top tercile for both men and women. Among women in this group, 83.3 percent were in the bottom third, indicating their high vulnerability to income insecurity.

WO men were the most likely to have higher incomes, with 57.5 percent placed in the top third in 2024. For women, the WCC group in 2024, as in 2019, had the largest share in the top income tercile, although this trend was accompanied by expansion into the middle third.

The proportion in the bottom third declined over the period for both men and women across all three types, with women showing a sharper decline. Overall, women were more vulnerable in terms of income, but the gap with men narrowed between 2019 and 2024 as more women moved into higher income terciles.

[Figure 2] Changes in the distribution of dual-earner couple households, by income 2019-2024 (in %)



Source: Ministry of Data and Statistics. 2019/2024 Time Use Survey. raw data (in minutes).

These shifts notwithstanding, a large percentage of women in the RD type remained in the bottom income tercile, suggesting that while gender-based role division in this group remained largely unabated, only a small fraction of households could afford to make intra-household changes in time use and earnings.

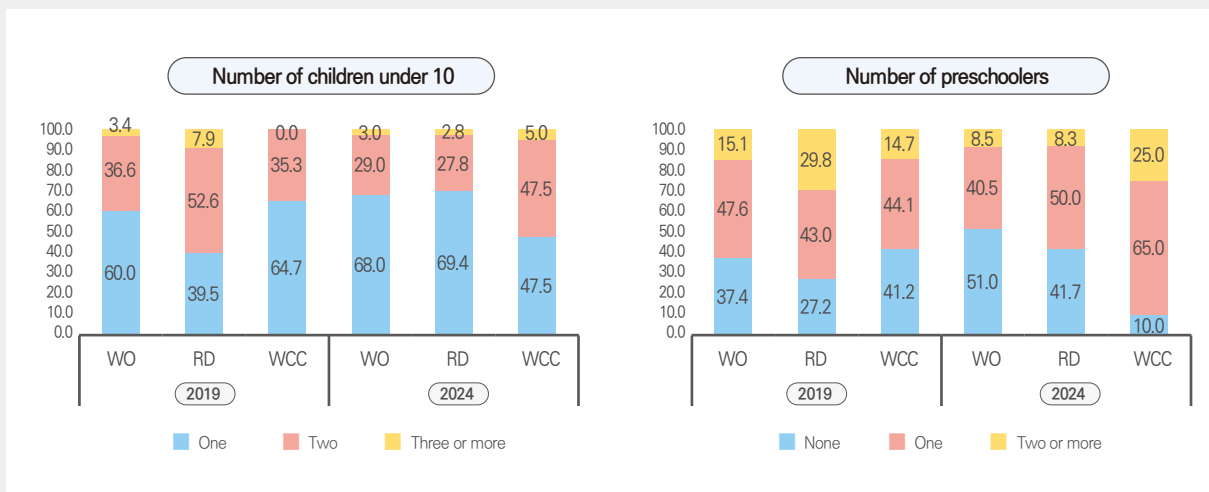
## Distribution of households with children of ages requiring close care, by group

In 2019, the RD group had a higher proportion of households with multiple children under age 10 than the other two clusters. Households with three or more such children accounted for 7.9 percent of the RD group, while those with two or more such children accounted for 52.6 percent. The RD group was also the cluster with the highest percentage of households with preschoolers. The proportion of households with two or more preschoolers in the RD cluster was 29.8 percent, higher than in either of the two clusters by more than 15 percentage points.

In 2024, the WCC cluster had the highest proportion of households with children young enough to require close care. Households with three or more children under age 10 accounted for 5.0 percent, while those with two or more such children accounted for 47.5 percent. The proportion of households with at least one preschooler in the WCC group was high at 90 percent, 30-40 percentage points higher than in either the RD or WO group.

In 2019, the RD group had higher proportions of households with multiple children of ages requiring close care, with women likely securing more time for childcare by reducing their hours spent on paid work, while in 2024 higher proportions of households with such children were found in the WCC group, where adjustments to time use on paid work, housework, and childcare are likely to be made through coordination between partners.

[Figure 3] Changes in the distribution of dual-earner couple households, by number of children 2019-2024 (in %)



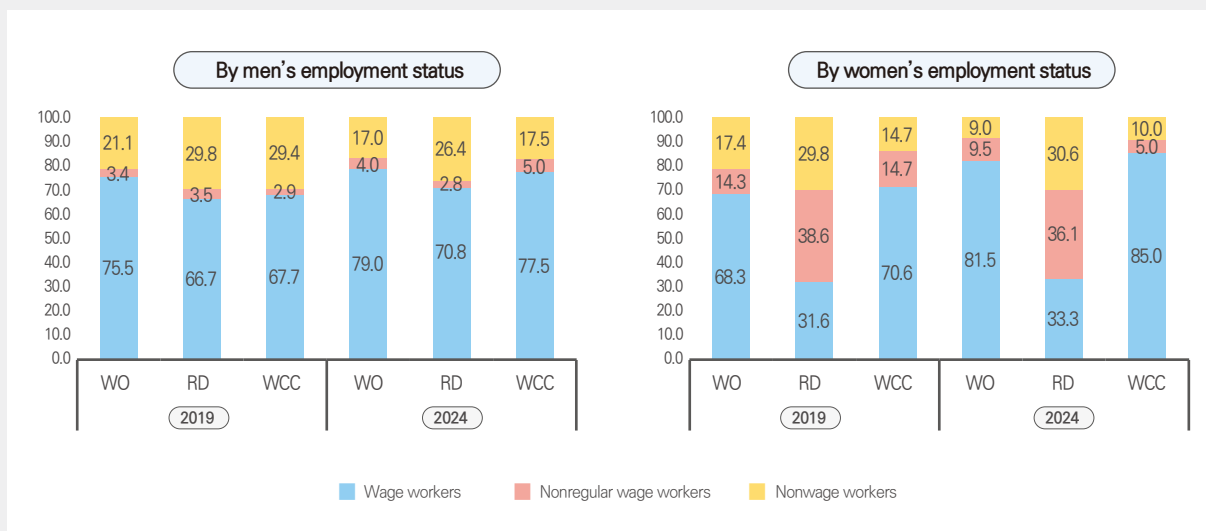
Source: Ministry of Data and Statistics. 2019/2024 Time Use Survey. raw data (in minutes)

In 2019, the proportion of nonwage workers was at its highest in the RD group. About 30 percent of men in the RD group were nonwage workers. Furthermore, women in this group had the highest percentage of nonwage and nonregular workers, which attests to a structure of gender-specific role division combined with precarious employment. As mentioned earlier, the proportion of households with multiple children of ages requiring close care was higher in the RD group than in either of the other two groups, with women taking on childcare responsibilities as they often remained in nonwage or nonregular jobs.

The changes observed in the distribution of households by employment status varied across the cluster groups. In 2024, the proportion of nonwage workers among men was highest in the RD group, as in 2019, whereas the WCC group showed a decline in the percentage of nonwage workers combined with an increase in the percentage of wage workers. The proportions of nonwage workers and nonregular employees among women were highest in the RD group, indicating the continued precariousness of women's employment.

In both the WCC and WO groups, the proportion of wage workers was higher for both men and women in 2024 than in 2019. In the WCC group in particular, a cluster marked by a relatively higher percentage of wage workers, the shift may have involved couples adjusting their time spent on paid work in a context where employment security is higher. Meanwhile, the increased time spent on childcare by women in the RD may have resulted from adjustments made within a more precarious employment setting.

**[Figure 4] Changes in the distribution of dual-earner couples in different clusters, by employment status 2019-2024 (in %)**



Source: Ministry of Data and Statistics. 2019/2024 Time Use Survey. raw data (in minutes)



## Concluding remarks

This study examined patterns of time use among dual-earner couple households classified into three clusters—work-oriented (WO), role-distinct (RD), and work-childcare coordinating (WCC). Between 2019 and 2024, the proportion of the RD group declined, while that of the WCC group increased slightly, indicating a shift over this period in time-use patterns among dual-earner couple households. All along, however, the WO group continued to account for the largest share.

This shift amounts not so much to a substantial change in the division of roles between men and women as to adjustments of time allocation between partners in each group. Although men across all three groups spent less time on paid work in 2024 than in 2019, they still spent the better part of the day at work. Increases in time spent on childcare among men were observed in the RD and WCC groups. Women in the WO and WCC groups diverted less time to housework and more time to—and thus shifted toward balancing—paid work and childcare in 2024 than in 2019.

The time-use patterns of dual-earner couple households gradually shifted over the period 2019-2024 toward greater balance between men and women and between paid work and family, likely as a result of several factors at play—increased participation among women in the labor market, the cumulative effects of work-family balance policies, and the changing public perception of gender equality, among other things. Despite these changes, disparities in time allocation and adjustment patterns remain across the cluster groups. The WO group—characterized by long working hours for both partners—accounted for more than 60 percent of dual-earner couple households in both 2019 and 2024, a high percentage, given that the sample population consists by definition of households with children at ages that require close care. In these circumstances, additional childcare needs, absent other alternatives, may mean that women reduce their time spent on paid work or exit the labor market. The fact that the proportion of the RD group remained little changed over time may reflect the lack of mechanisms that enable women in this group to adjust their work hours during periods of concentrated childcare responsibilities.

The proportion of households with multiple children of ages requiring close care was at its highest in the RD group in 2019. In 2024, the proportion of such households was highest in the WCC group. This suggests that childcare responsibilities that arose during these years were increasingly addressed by both partners adjusting their time use patterns, rather than resorting to gender-oriented adjustment by either partner. Men in the WCC group allocated more time to childcare compared to men in other groups. This highlights that the key prerequisite is the availability of policies that actually enable dual-earner couples to adjust their working hours, rather than simply their willingness to do so. Part of the remedy, it can be suggested, lies in promoting a culture of gender equality and extending policies to households that have previously been excluded.

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