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dense subsets**

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Edge coloring multigraphs without small dense subsets

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Abstract

One consequence of a long-standing conjecture of Goldberg and Seymour about the chromatic index of multigraphs would be the following statement. Suppose G is a multigraph with maximum degree Δ , such that no vertex subset S of odd size at most Δ induces more than $(\Delta + 1)(|S| - 1)/2$ edges. Then G has an edge coloring with $\Delta + 1$ colors. Here we prove a weakened version of this statement.

1 Introduction

In this note we study edge colorings of (loopless) multigraphs. We use the standard notation $\chi'(G)$ to denote the chromatic index of the multigraph G , that is, the smallest number of matchings needed to partition the edge set of G . It is clear that the maximum degree $\Delta(G)$ is a lower bound for $\chi'(G)$ for every graph G . The classical upper bounds for $\chi'(G)$ are $\chi'(G) \leq 3\Delta(G)/2$ (Shannon's Theorem [15]) and $\chi'(G) \leq \Delta(G) + \mu(G)$ (Vizing's Theorem [18]), where $\mu(G)$ denotes the maximum edge multiplicity of G .

For a multigraph G , a subset $S \subseteq V(G)$, and a subgraph $H \subseteq G$, we denote by $G[S]$ the subgraph induced by S , by $\|H\|$ the number of edges in H , and by $|H|$ the number of vertices in H . We also set $G[H] = G[V(H)]$ and $\|S\| = \|G[S]\|$. Let $\rho(S)$ be the quantity $\frac{\|S\|}{\lfloor |S|/2 \rfloor}$. The parameter $\rho(G)$ is defined by

$$\rho(G) = \max\{\rho(S) : S \subseteq V(G)\}.$$

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Then $\lceil \rho(G) \rceil$ is a lower bound on $\chi'(G)$, since for a set S on which $\rho(G)$ is attained, each matching in $G[S]$ has size at most $\lfloor |S|/2 \rfloor$ and therefore at least $\lceil \frac{\|S\|}{\lfloor |S|/2 \rfloor} \rceil$ colors are needed to color the edges of $G[S]$. On the other hand, when $\rho(G) \geq \Delta(G)$ the chromatic index can also be bounded above in terms of $\lceil \rho(G) \rceil$. Kahn [7] gave the bound $\chi'(G) \leq (1 + o(1))\lceil \rho(G) \rceil$, which was recently improved by Plantholt [10] to

$$\chi'(G) \leq \left(1 + \frac{\log_{3/2} \lceil \rho(G) \rceil}{\lceil \rho(G) \rceil}\right) \lceil \rho(G) \rceil.$$

The focus of this paper is the long-standing conjecture due to Goldberg [3] (see also [4]) and independently Seymour [14] which states that the chromatic index of G should be essentially determined by either $\rho(G)$ or $\Delta(G)$.

Conjecture 1 *For every multigraph G*

$$\chi'(G) \leq \max\{\Delta(G) + 1, \lceil \rho(G) \rceil\}.$$

Goldberg [4] also proposed the following sharp version for multigraphs with $\rho(G) \leq \Delta(G) - 1$.

Conjecture 2 *For every multigraph G , if $\rho(G) \leq \Delta(G) - 1$ then $\chi'(G) = \Delta(G)$.*

Conjecture 1 implies that if $\chi'(G) > \Delta + k$, $k \geq 1$, then G must contain a set S of vertices for which $\rho(S) > \Delta + k$, certifying this inequality. Thus S induces a very dense subgraph in G . As $\|S\| \leq \Delta(G)|S|/2$, if $|S|$ is even then $\rho(S) \leq \Delta(G)$; so $|S|$ is odd and $\rho(S) \leq \Delta(G)|S|/(|S| - 1) = \Delta(G) + \Delta(G)/(|S| - 1)$. In particular S is *small* in the sense that its size depends only on Δ and not on the number of vertices of G . Conjecture 2 gives a similar statement for $k = 0$, but the corresponding set S need not be small.

We can therefore think of Conjecture 1 as providing structural information about multigraphs for which $\chi'(G) > \Delta + 1$, namely, that they must contain small sets S that are very dense. Our aim in this note is to prove a result of this form. Unfortunately we cannot make such a conclusion about all G with $\chi'(G) > \Delta + 1$, but we show that when k is bounded below by a logarithmic function of Δ then a structural result of this type for multigraphs G satisfying $\chi'(G) > \Delta + k$ is possible.

Conjecture 1 has inspired a significant body of work, with contributions from many researchers, see for example [16] or [6] for an overview. Here we mention just the results that directly relate to this note. The best known approximate version is as follows, due to Scheide [11] (independently proved by Chen, Yu and Zang [1], see also [12] and [2]), who proved that the conjecture is true when $\lceil \rho(G) \rceil \geq \Delta + \sqrt{\frac{\Delta-1}{2}}$.

Theorem 3 For every multigraph G

$$\chi'(G) \leq \max\{\Delta(G) + \sqrt{\frac{\Delta(G) - 1}{2}}, \lceil \rho(G) \rceil\}.$$

Since $\lceil \rho(S) \rceil > \Delta + \sqrt{\frac{\Delta-1}{2}}$ implies $|S| < \sqrt{\frac{2\Delta^2}{\Delta-1}} + 1$, the following corollary about multigraphs without small dense subsets is implied by Theorem 3.

Corollary 4 Let G be a multigraph with maximum degree Δ . If $\lceil \rho(S) \rceil \leq \Delta + \sqrt{\frac{\Delta-1}{2}}$ for every $S \subseteq V(G)$ with $|S| < \sqrt{\frac{2\Delta^2}{\Delta-1}} + 1$ then $\chi'(G) \leq \Delta + \sqrt{\frac{\Delta-1}{2}}$.

The main theorem of this note states that if the density of small vertex subsets S is restricted somewhat further then a substantially better upper bound can be given for $\chi'(G)$, in which the quantity $\sqrt{\frac{\Delta-1}{2}}$ in the conclusion of Corollary 4 is replaced by a logarithmic function of Δ . It can also be viewed as a weakened version of the statement of Conjecture 2.

Theorem 5 Let G be a multigraph with maximum degree Δ , and let ε be given where $0 < \varepsilon < 1$. Let $k = \lfloor \log_{1+\varepsilon} \Delta \rfloor$. If $\rho(S) \leq (1 - \varepsilon)(\Delta + k)$ for every $S \subseteq V(G)$ with $|S| < \Delta/k + 1$ then $\chi'(G) \leq \Delta + k$.

For example, this implies that $\chi'(G) < \Delta + 101 \log \Delta$ unless G contains a set S of vertices with $|S| < \frac{\Delta}{100 \log \Delta}$ with density parameter $\rho(S) > 0.99(\Delta + 100 \log \Delta)$.

Our proof uses the technique of Tashkinov trees, developed by Tashkinov in [17]. In the next section we give a brief introduction to this technique together with the main tools we use, including our main technical lemma, Lemma 8. The proof of Theorem 5 appears in Section 3.

2 Tools

The method of Tashkinov trees, due to Tashkinov [17], is a sophisticated generalization of the method of alternating paths. It is based on an earlier approach from [8]. See [16] for a comprehensive account of this technique.

Let G be a multigraph with $\chi'(G) \geq \Delta + 2$, and let ϕ be a partial edge coloring of G that uses at most $\chi' - 1$ colors. We say ϕ is a *t-coloring* if the codomain of ϕ is $\{1, \dots, t\}$. We normally assume ϕ is *maximal*, that is, the maximum possible number of edges of G are colored by ϕ . For a vertex v of G , color α is said to be *missing* at v if no edge incident to v is colored α by ϕ . Let $T = (p_0, e_0, p_1, \dots, e_n - 1, p_n)$ be a

sequence of distinct vertices p_i and edges e_i of G , such that the vertices of each e_i are p_{i+1} and p_r for some $r \in \{0, \dots, i\}$. Observe that the vertices and edges of T form a tree. We say that T is a *Tashkinov tree* with respect to ϕ if e_0 is uncolored, and for all $i > 0$, the color $\phi(e_i)$ is missing at p_j for some $j < i$. Thus T is a Tashkinov tree if its first edge is uncolored, and each subsequent edge is colored with a color that is missing at some previous vertex. The key property of Tashkinov trees is captured in the following theorem, due to Tashkinov [17].

Theorem 6 *Let ϕ be a maximal partial edge coloring of G with at most $\chi'(G) - 1$ colors, and let T be a Tashkinov tree with respect to ϕ . Then no two vertices of T are missing the same color.*

For a color ω we denote by $\partial_\omega(T)$ the set of edges of color ω that have exactly one vertex in T . Every vertex $v \in V(T)$ is incident to an edge of $G[T]$ of color ω , or is incident to an edge of $\partial_\omega(T)$, or is incident to no edge of color ω . Let $m_\omega(T)$ be the number of vertices missing color ω in T and $q_\omega(T) = |\partial_\omega(T)| + m_\omega(T)$. (Thus $q_\omega(T)$ counts the number of vertices in T that are not incident with an edge of $G[T]$ of color ω .) By Theorem 6, $m_\omega(T)$ is at most 1; so we have the following corollary.

Corollary 7 *Let ϕ be a maximal partial edge coloring of G with at most $\chi'(G) - 1$ colors, and let T be a Tashkinov tree with respect to ϕ . If $|T|$ is odd then for every color ω , the quantity $|\partial_\omega(T)|$ is even if and only if ω is missing at some vertex of T .*

Let T be a Tashkinov tree with respect to some maximal coloring ϕ . If a color α is missing on $v \in V(T)$ and not used by ϕ on an edge of T we say that α is *free* for T . The number of colors missing at v that are free for T is denoted by $f_T(v)$, or simply $f(v)$ if there is no danger of confusion. Set $f^*(T) = \min\{f(v) : v \in T\}$. It was observed by e.g. [2] that if T is a Tashkinov tree with respect to ϕ such that $\rho(G)$ is not attained on $V(T)$, and if $f^*(T) > 0$, then by (possibly) replacing ϕ by another maximal coloring it is possible to construct a Tashkinov tree that is larger than T . This technical fact was used in several results using Tashkinov trees, for example [1, 5, 11]. Our main lemma, Lemma 8, is also based on this parameter. For technical reasons we will work with the slightly modified parameter $f^k(T) = \min\{f^*(T), k\}$.

Lemma 8 *Let G be a multigraph with maximum degree Δ and suppose $\chi'(G) \geq \Delta + 2$. Let ϕ be a maximal $(\Delta + k)$ -coloring of G , where $\Delta + 1 \leq \Delta + k \leq \chi'(G) - 1$, and let T be a Tashkinov tree with respect to ϕ such that $f^k(T) > 0$. Let $\omega \in \{1, \dots, \Delta + k\}$ be a color. Then there exists a maximal $(\Delta + k)$ -coloring ψ and a Tashkinov tree T' with respect to ψ such that*

- $T \subset T'$

- $f^k(T') \geq f^k(T) - 1$,
- $|T'| \geq |T| + q_\omega(T) - 1$.

Proof. To simplify notation we let $f(T) = f^k(T)$ throughout this proof.

If ω is missing on a vertex of T then we may simply add the edges in $\partial_\omega(T)$ to T , forming a Tashkinov tree T' with $|T'| = |T| + q_\omega(T) - 1$. Clearly $f_T(v) \geq f_{T'}(v)$ for every vertex v of T . The colors used on T' are missed on vertices of T . By Theorem 6, they are not missed on vertices of $T' - T$. As at least k colors are missed at each vertex in $V(T') \setminus V(T)$ and they are all free, we have $f(T') \geq \min\{f(T) - 1, k\}$ for all vertices in $V(T') \setminus V(T)$. Hence by definition of $f(T) = f^k(T)$ we find $f(T') \geq f(T) - 1$ and so $\psi = \phi$ satisfies the theorem.

We may therefore assume that ω is not missing on T . Set $q = q_\omega(T) = |\partial_\omega(T)|$. There are at least $k \geq 1$ colors missed on each vertex of T . By Theorem 6, these $\geq k|T|$ colors are distinct. As T has only $|T| - 2$ colored edges, there are at least k free colors missed on some vertex v ; let γ be one of these.

We consider the (γ, ω) -alternating path P beginning at v . The other end z of P is not a vertex of T , since ω is not missing in T and by Theorem 6 no $x \in V(T)$ different from v can be missing γ . Let y be the last vertex of P in T and denote by Q the (y, z) -segment of P . Then $E(Q) \cap E(T) = \emptyset$. Since $f(T) > 0$ there exists a color α missing on y that is not used on T . In the case $v = y$ we choose $\alpha = \gamma$, otherwise $\alpha \neq \gamma$ by Theorem 6. See Figure 1 for a general picture of P .

For $i \geq 0$ we now define a sequence of Tashkinov trees T_i with respect to ϕ , together with colors α_i , vertices z_i and segments Q_i of Q satisfying the following properties.

1. $T_0 \subset \dots \subset T_i$,
2. α_i is missing on z_i and not used on T_i ,
3. $f(T_i) \geq f(T) - 1$ for each $i \geq 1$,
4. for $i \geq 1$, every edge of $E(T_i) \setminus E(T_{i-1})$ is of color γ or α_{i-1} ,
5. Q_i is the (z_i, z) -segment of Q , and the length of Q_i is positive but less than the length of Q_{i-1} .

We begin the construction by setting $T_0 = T$, $\alpha_0 = \alpha$, $z_0 = y$, and $Q_0 = Q$. Then (1)-(5) hold for $i = 0$.

Suppose $i \geq 0$ and that we have completed the construction up to i . We now consider two cases according to whether any (α_i, γ) -component intersects both T_i and $E(Q_i)$. If there is such a component then we show that either ϕ itself satisfies

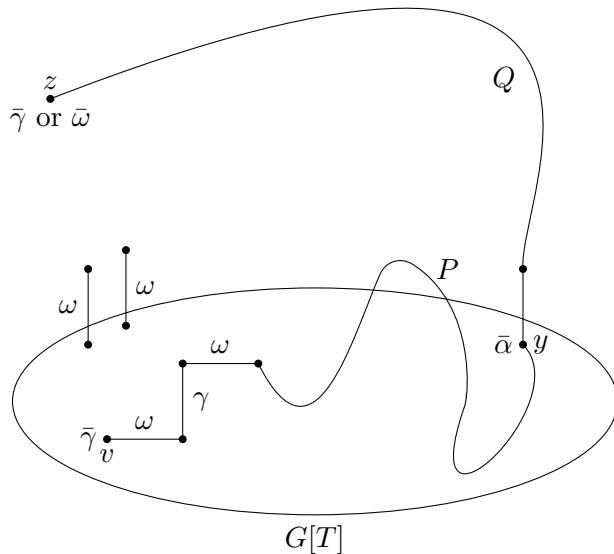


Figure 1: The path P in the proof of Lemma 8. Here \bar{c} means color c is missing at the vertex indicated.

the theorem, or that we can extend our sequence. If no such component exists then we will terminate the sequence and find a recoloring ψ that satisfies the theorem.

Case 1: Some (α_i, γ) -component R contains an edge of Q_i and a vertex of T_i .

Note that Case 1 occurs if the edge e of Q incident to y has color γ because e is in Q and has a vertex y in T . Also, Case 1 does not occur if $v = y$ since then an (α_0, γ) -component is an edge colored γ , which cannot be incident to v .

In Case 1 we define T_{i+1} to be the Tashkinov tree obtained by extending T_i to a spanning tree of $T_i \cup R$. This is a valid Tashkinov tree for ϕ because α_i and γ are both missing on T_i . Then (1) and (4) are satisfied for $i + 1$. We let z_{i+1} be the vertex of T_{i+1} that is closest to z on Q_i , and note that the (z_{i+1}, z) -segment Q_{i+1} is shorter than Q_i because R contained an edge of Q_i , verifying the second condition in (5) for $i + 1$. Let α_{i+1} be any color missing on z_{i+1} ; then (2) is satisfied for $i + 1$.

To verify Condition (3) for $i + 1$, first note that every vertex of $V(T_{i+1}) \setminus V(T)$ has at least k missing colors that are not used on T . Observe that by (4), every edge of $E(T_{i+1}) \setminus E(T)$ has one of the colors γ or α_j for some $0 \leq j \leq i$. By (2), the colors α_j for $j \geq 1$ are missing on the vertices z_j , and since the z_j are all distinct (by the second part of (5)), no other color missing on z_j is used on T_{i+1} . So $f_{T_{i+1}}(z_j) \geq k - 1$.

By the choice of γ , which is missing on v , we know $f_{T_{i+1}}(v) \geq k - 1 \geq f(T) - 1$ since no other colors missing on v were used. Therefore the only new color used that may affect $f(T_{i+1})$ is $\alpha_0 = \alpha$, and hence $f(T_{i+1}) \geq f(T) - 1$.

Finally we turn to the first condition in (5). If this condition holds, in other words $z_{i+1} \neq z$, then we extend our sequence using the above definitions. If $z_{i+1} = z$, then we claim that ϕ satisfies the lemma in this case. Note that if γ is missing at z then we have a contradiction to Theorem 6, because γ is also missing at $v \neq z$. Therefore ω is missing at z . Then we may construct T' by adding all remaining edges of $\partial_\omega(T)$ that join a vertex of T_{i+1} to a vertex outside T_{i+1} . By the existence of R this in fact gives us $|T'| \geq |T| + q$. By (3) for $i + 1$ we have $f(T_{i+1}) \geq f(T) - 1$, and the only new color used in the construction of T' from T_{i+1} is ω , which is missing on z_{i+1} . But no other color missing on z_{i+1} appears on an edge of T' , so $f_{T_{i+1}}(z_{i+1}) \geq k - 1 \geq f(T) - 1$. Thus $f(T') \geq f(T) - 1$.

Case 2: No (α_i, γ) -component contains an edge of Q_i and a vertex of T_i .

In this case we modify ϕ . Note that (as observed in Case 1) if $i = 0$ then the edge e of Q incident to y has color ω . First we interchange α_i and γ on every (α_i, γ) -component containing an edge of Q_i . Since we are in Case 2, this change does not affect the color of any edge induced by $V(T_i)$. Therefore T_i is a Tashkinov tree with respect to the new coloring. The path Q_i becomes an (α_i, ω) -path from z_i to z , which (as before) is disjoint from all of $\partial_\omega(T)$ except possibly for e , if it has color ω . (Note that if $i = 0$ and $v = y$ then none of these steps caused any change.) We complete the construction of ψ by interchanging ω and α_i on Q_i . Then ω is missing on z_i . We construct T' by adding to T_i all the edges of $\partial_\omega(T) \setminus \{e\}$ that join $V(T_i)$ to its complement. Then $|T'| \geq |T| + q - 1$ (and if $i \geq 1$ then $|T'| \geq |T| + q$). The only new color used that was not used on T_i is ω , which is missing on z_i . If $i = 0$ then trivially $f(T') \geq f(T) - 1$. If $i \geq 1$ then by (3) and the fact that no other color on z_i is used on T' we have $f(T') \geq f(T) - 1$. This completes the proof. \square

3 Proof of Theorem 5

The proof of Theorem 5 follows by a sequence of applications of Lemma 8. Since k is fixed, we may again set $f(T) = f^k(T)$ for simplicity of notation.

Proof. The theorem is trivially true for $\Delta = 1$ so we may assume $\Delta \geq 2$, and hence $k \geq 1$. If $\chi'(G) \leq \Delta + k$ then the conclusion of the theorem holds so we may assume on the contrary that $\Delta + k \leq \chi'(G) - 1$. Let ϕ be a maximal $(\Delta + k)$ -coloring of G . Since $\chi'(G) > \Delta + k$, there is an uncolored edge e_0 with vertices p_0 and p_1 .

For the proof of Theorem 5 we provide a construction consisting of a series of steps. We begin with the partial coloring $\psi_1 = \phi$. At each step $i \geq 2$ an application of Lemma 8 is used to construct a new maximal $(\Delta + k)$ -coloring ψ_i with e_0 uncolored and a new Tashkinov tree T_i with $|T_i| \geq 1 + (1 + \varepsilon)^i$, where $|T_i|$ is odd.

Step 1. Set $\psi_1 = \phi$ and let p_2 be a vertex joined to p_1 by an edge whose color α is missing at p_0 . Then $\{p_0, p_1, p_2\}$ forms a Tashkinov tree T_1 with respect to ψ_1 , and $f(T_1) \geq k$ because there were at most $\Delta - 1$ colored edges incident to p_0 . Note that $|T_1| = 3 \geq 1 + (1 + \varepsilon)$, since $\varepsilon < 1$.

Step i. Suppose that the Tashkinov tree T_{i-1} and coloring ψ_{i-1} have been defined for some $2 \leq i \leq k + 1$, such that $f(T_{i-1}) \geq k - i + 2$, $|T_{i-1}| \geq 1 + (1 + \varepsilon)^{i-1}$, and $|T_{i-1}|$ is odd. Choose a color ω such that $q = q_\omega(T_{i-1})$ is largest. Since $|T_{i-1}|$ is odd, we know by Corollary 7 that q is odd. Consider two cases:

Case 1: $q = q_\omega(T_{i-1}) \leq \varepsilon|T_{i-1}| + 1 - \varepsilon$.

Then each color occurs on at least $(|T_{i-1}| - q)/2 \geq (1 - \varepsilon)(|T_{i-1}| - 1)/2$ edges of T_{i-1} . As $e_0 \in T_{i-1}$ is uncolored,

$$\|T_{i-1}\| \geq (\Delta + k)(1 - \varepsilon)(|T_{i-1}| - 1)/2 + 1.$$

Therefore $S = V(T_{i-1})$ is such that

$$\rho(S) > (1 - \varepsilon)(\Delta + k).$$

Moreover $|S| < \Delta/k + 1$ by Theorem 6, because at least $k|S| + 2$ colors are missing on the vertices of S . This contradicts the assumptions of Theorem 5.

Case 2: $q = q(T_{i-1}) > \varepsilon|T_{i-1}| + 1 - \varepsilon$.

As $|T_{i-1}| \geq 3$ and q is an odd integer, $q \geq 3$. Let ψ_i be the maximal coloring and T' be the Tashkinov tree given by Lemma 8. Then by that lemma $f(T') \geq k - i + 1$, and

$$|T'| \geq |T_{i-1}| + q - 1 > 1 + (|T_{i-1}| - 1)(1 + \varepsilon) \geq 1 + (1 + \varepsilon)^i.$$

If $|T'|$ is odd (e.g. if $|T'| = |T_i| + q - 1$) then we set $T_i = T'$. If $|T'|$ is even then choose an arbitrary color β that is used by ψ_i on an edge of T' . Then Theorem 6 implies that some edge e colored β has exactly one vertex in T' . We define T_i to be the Tashkinov tree formed by adding e to T' , so that $|T_i|$ is odd and $f(T_i) = f(T') \geq k - i + 1$.

It suffices to show that eventually Case 1 occurs. Otherwise, we construct a maximal coloring ψ_{k+1} and a Tashkinov tree T_{k+1} with $|T_{k+1}| \geq 1 + (1 + \varepsilon)^{k+1}$. By Theorem 6 this implies that the number of colors that are missing on the vertices of T_k is at least $k(1 + (1 + \varepsilon)^{k+1}) + 2$. Then using the definition of k we derive the contradiction

$$\Delta + k > k(1 + (1 + \varepsilon)^{k+1}) > k + k\Delta.$$

□

For each $0 < \varepsilon < 1$ and $k = \lfloor \log_{1+\varepsilon} \Delta \rfloor$, the proof of Theorem 5 shows the existence of either an edge coloring of G with $\Delta + k$ colors or a small, dense set

S with $|S| \leq \Delta/k + 1$ and $\rho(S) > (1 - \epsilon)(\Delta + k)$. In fact this yields a procedure for constructing one of these structures in time polynomial in $|E(G)|$. We start by greedily coloring the edges of G with colors $\{1, \dots, \Delta + k\}$. If we get stuck before finishing then as in the proof of Theorem 5 we attempt to construct a large Tashkinov tree T . If we halt in Case 1 then we have constructed a small, dense set $S = V(T)$. Otherwise at some point in Case 2, some color is missed at distinct vertices of T . In this case, the proof of Theorem 6 (which gives a polynomial time algorithm [17], see e.g. [9] or [13]) allows us to recolor G so that there is an additional colored edge. Then we start over using this new coloring. After fewer than $|E(G)|$ restarts our procedure halts with a small, dense subset or a proper edge coloring with $\Delta + k$ colors.

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