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The Soviet State Government And The Transformation Of Women In Public Life: Causes And Corrections

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Abstract: This article explores the transformation of women's social status and public engagement in Uzbekistan during the 1920s and 1930s under Soviet rule. Based on archival materials, statistical data, and historical studies, the research analyzes the state policies aimed at women's emancipation, the establishment of women's departments, and the promotion of female participation in education, production, and cultural life. The study highlights multiple institutional mechanisms such as women's departments, red teahouses, literacy schools, pedagogical institutes, and Atinoyi schools that shaped women's cultural and political integration. It also examines the contradictions of Soviet gender policy, including administrative-command practices, ideological pressure, repression of traditional female educators, and the liquidation of women's departments. The article emphasizes that although the Soviet reforms increased women's access to education and public life, they simultaneously disrupted traditional social norms, generated new socio-psychological challenges, and often subordinated cultural reforms to ideological objectives. Through a critical analysis, the study demonstrates that the emancipation process produced both significant achievements and profound socio-cultural losses.

Keywords: Uzbek women; Soviet policy; emancipation; women's departments; red teahouses; literacy campaigns; Atinoyi schools; cultural construction; gender history; administrative-command system.

Introduction: Additional work related to the liberation of women began in 1912 with the establishment of the Women's Department of the Turkestan Regional Committee of the RCP(b). Later, in 1921, it was transformed into the Women's Department of the Turkestan Central Committee [1]. At the same time, special attention was given to organizing women's departments in the regions. Such departments appeared in Tashkent in 1919, in Samarkand in December 1919, in Fergana in 1919, and in Syrdarya in March 1920, as well as in Andijan, Kattakurgan, Kagan, and other locations. In total, by 1920, about 40 women's units were functioning [2].

In Uzbekistan, however, there were still shortcomings and mistakes in the practical implementation of women's freedom and in increasing their social activity. The main reason for these mistakes was the lack of historical traditions concerning women's public participation, as well as insufficient study of the spiritual and psychological state of the Uzbek population. The possibility of developing methods that could help change men's attitudes regarding women was not taken into account. As a result, men, whose worldview had been shaped over centuries, were not prepared for rapid change. Another factor hindering the advancement of the women's issue was the disregard for religious aspects. Instead of protecting and considering cultural norms, religion was targeted and rejected. The lack of sensitivity to these issues was further aggravated by the incitement of violence against women during the so-called "female paratrooper" campaign [3].

The second half of the 1920s was marked by significant developments in the struggle for women's liberation. Based on Moscow's February 1927 directive, a serious attack on the "old regime" began during this period. This signaled the beginning of a strong confrontation between religious groups, supporters of traditional life, and supporters of the women's movement [4]. Under such conditions, in order to strengthen women's rights and renew their social life, great attention was paid to involving women in judicial and investigative bodies and forming councils of people's advisers from among

them. If in 1926–27 there were 5,642 female people's advisers in Uzbekistan, by 1928 their number reached 10,450, an increase of 41 percent [5].

According to 1928 data, 1,680 women worked as advisers in the Fergana district. However, it should be noted that only one of these women had a higher education, while 911 were illiterate. Naturally, in such a situation, it was impossible to carry out effective social and legal work for women's protection. This condition was especially evident in the Khorezm district [6].

People's advisers in the Khiva, Gurlan, and Hazorasp districts existed only on paper, and women did not know where to turn with their concerns [7].

Thus, the 1920s and 1930s were crucial years in transforming women's lives and social activity in Uzbekistan. The process of emancipation, as a means of involving women in public life in the 1920s, was undoubtedly appropriate. Increasing women's literacy, knowledge, and participation in production, and raising the issue of political and ideological equality with men, can be regarded as positive developments of the period. However, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, the situation changed significantly. The establishment of the Stalinist administrative-command system, the one-sided approach to social issues, and ideological monopolization created serious difficulties in the women's question. This was intensified by the liquidation of women's departments and the transfer of their functions to party committees. In fact, the abolition of women's departments was a political maneuver. From today's perspective, it would have been necessary to further strengthen and expand the work of such departments, as they undoubtedly played an important role in the historical destiny of Uzbek women [8].

In the 1920s, women's shops (cooperative stores for women) were considered one of the most popular forms of cultural and educational institutions for women. Both the sellers and buyers in these shops were women, and men were prohibited from entering. Such shops first appeared in Tashkent. Women who wished to join the cooperative could register and benefit from its services. Within the first months, 400 women joined the cooperative, and a shop committee was elected. "Mothers and Children" and women's corners also began to be organized.

The women's corner set the following tasks:

1.Combating the veil and ignorance through persistent promotion;

2.Raising the political level of working women by organizing special circles and conducting cultural-educational work, with special attention to women elected to work in cooperatives, trade unions, and social organizations;

3. Providing international and political education for women activists and assisting them in engaging in public work and various branches of trade union and cooperative activity [9].

Another important form of cultural and educational institutions for women were the red teahouses. Women were invited to these teahouses, where political and ideological events were strongly encouraged. The first red teahouse in Uzbekistan was opened by Khamza Khakimzoda Niyoziy in the early 1920s in Shakhimardan. Discussions on women's freedom and the struggle against religion took place in these teahouses. However, from the very beginning, women's cultural institutions became instruments for promoting communist ideology. For example, according to a report by an instructor of the Commissariat of Education after visiting the Tashkent region, women preferred cultural events. When he delivered a 30-minute political lecture before a concert, the women complained, asking: "Is this a concert or a rally?" [10].

From this example, it can be concluded that women visited red teahouses not to listen to political lectures but to improve their cultural level. The low quality of political and ideological work among women in the red teahouses prompted demands for stronger Bolshevik policies. On November 15, 1921, the Turkestan Commissariat of Education issued a resolution criticizing the activities of women's red teahouses, stating that they were not fulfilling their assigned tasks and requiring the formation of commissions to investigate their activities [11].

On November 25, 1923, a special resolution of the Central Committee of the TASSR established a local fund to revive cultural and educational work among the women of the local population. It was emphasized that the main purpose of these funds was to increase the effectiveness of political and ideological work among women and involve them more actively in the construction of Soviets [12].

By the mid-1920s, red teahouses and red corners had become the most widespread forms of cultural and educational work among women. According to 1926 data, there were 159 red teahouses in Central Asia; in 1927 their number reached 252, with 134–140 daily visitors each year. For red corners, the number of institutions ranged from 356 to 588, with 31-36 daily visitors. In 1927, 3,094 people were engaged in cultural and educational work across Uzbekistan; in 1928 their number increased to 4,454. However, the number of

women among them remained extremely small (371 in 1927 and 457 in 1928)-only 12% of male cultural workers. This situation created challenges in involving women in cultural activities, largely due to the psychological condition of Uzbek women and their limited social openness.

As a result of organizational efforts, significant changes began to occur in public education in Uzbekistan. These efforts primarily led to an increase in the number of schools. By mid-1920, 31 unified schools with 18,800 students, 130 boarding schools, and many 1st- and 2nd-stage secondary schools were operating in the Turkestan ASSR. During the 1919–20 academic year, 801 1st-stage and 4 2nd-stage schools were opened [13].

Despite the existing difficulties, serious progress began in the field of women's education. For instance, in 1925 alone, more than 4,000 girls in Uzbekistan received education in socialist schools. The number of schools for literate women increased to 21, where 200 Uzbek women studied [14].

In the 1924-1925 academic year, 96 women's schools were opened across Uzbekistan. A total of 23,308 students were educated in special women's and mixed schools. According to statistical data, 442,673 girls attended school in 1926, indicating that the earlier figure of 9% represented significant progress achieved in a short period.

During this period, special attention was also given to organizing boarding schools for girls. If 163 girls studied in such institutions in the 1924-1925 academic year, their number reached 458 by 1926-1927. These boarding schools mainly admitted orphans, girls expelled from their homes, and those considered "difficult," which made their educational work particularly challenging.

Alongside girls' education, great emphasis was placed on eliminating female illiteracy. In the 1923-24 academic year, 23 special schools accommodating 500 women were operating under political and educational institutions. In the 1924-25 and 1925-26 academic years, the number of such schools increased to 51 and 82, serving 1,023 and 2,700 women, respectively. In total, 2,700 women improved their literacy during these years [15].

The second half of the 1920s was also marked by progress in literacy courses in Uzbekistan. In particular, the composition of female students in such courses can be seen in the following table [16].

COMPOSITION OF STUDENTS IN COURSES IN THE 1925-26 ACADEMIC YEAR

GENDER	NATIONALITY					SOCIAL BACKGROUND			
	Uzbek	Tadjik	Tatar	Russian	Others	Farmers	Workers	Servants	Others
Men	1305	89	165	-	57	1334	106	75	101
Women	139	-	109	22	9	148	17	68	46
Total	1444	89	274	22	66	1482	123	143	147

The number of educational institutions where representatives of the local ethnic population studied was also very small among the existing women's schools in Uzbekistan. In particular, if in 1927 there were 138 schools in Uzbekistan that enrolled 7,848 women and girls, only 58 of these were Uzbek schools, and a total of only 1,623 students studied there. The situation in mixed schools for boys and girls in Uzbekistan was even worse. For example, the average number of girls in each mixed school did not exceed two, while in special girls' schools an average of 56 students were enrolled [17].

In particular, in the late 1920s, only 2.1 percent of the budget of the People's Commissariat of Education was spent on women's education [18].

The history of involving women in cultural processes in Uzbekistan is directly connected with the Atinoy schools that prevailed in the 1920s and 1930s. In the past, educated women in our country were honored as "Atins." They were primarily responsible for the strength, purity, and harmony of the family. At the same time, Atins opened schools for women, taught literacy classes, and paid great attention to issues of education and upbringing.

In almost every neighborhood of the large old cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Shakhrisabz, Kokand, Namangan, and Margilan, there were Atinoyilars who organized schools in their homes and taught girls to

read and write. The names of Mubarakkhan, Basharatkhan, Khanposhsha, Inoyatkhan, and their daughters Kholpash, Sharofatbibi, and Sadiqa Atin were especially famous in Tashkent, and they were among the most progressive people of their time. The contributions of Sadiqa Atin, from the Oqchi mahalla of Tashkent, deserve particular praise. Her school was established in 1925, and many of today's well-known intellectuals studied in this school, which was run exclusively by women teachers. In particular, the famous poetess Zulfiya received her first lessons in literacy and enlightenment from Sadiqa Atin. According to the old traditions of the Shakh school, Sadiqa Atin first taught girls literacy using "Khavtiyak," and then had them memorize the divan of Sufi Ollayor and the tales of the Four Dervishes.

Regarding the Atinoyi schools of the 1920s–1930s, it can be said that the women who taught there were exemplary for the entire society because of their Oriental culture, feminine elegance, and pure morality. Many of the intellectual women who later worked in the field of education and contributed to raising the cultural level of women in the 1920s–1930s received their initial education from the Atinoyis. The Atinoyi schools played a major role in the development of women's education, raising many young "swallow" educators and teachers who received their first lessons in these schools.

One of these active Uzbek women was Robiyakhanim Kosirova. The people of the neighborhood respectfully called her "Otin kinoyi," because she would read aloud and retell articles and stories published in the press for her neighbors and relatives. When R. Nosirova later graduated with excellent marks from the Zebiniso Women's Educational Institution, she was appointed director of the Uzbek educational institution by the Commissariat of Education. She opened a department for women's affairs at the institution, focusing on raising the cultural and political level of Uzbek women and training educated personnel among them. As a result of such efforts, many graduates of this institution went on to work in various fields of science. Among them were prominent stars of the Uzbek theater-Halima Nosirova, Sora Eshonturaeva, People's Artists of Uzbekistan Shohida Makhsumova and Zamira Hidoyatova-and medical professionals such as Professor Hasana Yunusova and Associate Professor Lazokat Orifkhanova. Teachers Tojihon Rustambekova, Sobira Holderova, Manzura Sobirova, Sharifa Tojieva, and poetesses Khosiyat Tillakhanova and Salomat Rakhimova also graduated from this institution. Certainly, Robiyakhanim and other devoted women played a great role in educating such gifted individuals.

However, the administrative-command system that began to take shape in the second half of the 1920s had a very negative impact on the work of these schools. Many Atins were subjected to political repression in the 1930s. Later, in the second half of the 1930s, such schools began to disappear under accusations of "nationalism" and "religiosity."

Some organizational changes were made in the women's education system in the 1930s. For example, according to the resolution of the Uzbek government dated September 15, 1930, children and adolescents were to be transferred to compulsory primary education. Under this resolution, compulsory education for eight-year-old children was introduced in the 1930-31 academic year. The mass collectivization of agriculture led to the transition to general compulsory education for children aged 8–9 in districts, and for those aged 8-10 in cities and working-class settlements. The issue of opening one-, two-, and three-year schools for illiterate children aged 11-15 was also raised.

The introduction of universal primary compulsory education in the 1930s, followed by the introduction of seven-year compulsory education in 1934-35, played a significant role in increasing girls' school attendance.

As a result, the participation of representatives of local ethnic groups in general-education schools increased, as did their active participation in literacy programs. For example, according to 1930 data, female literacy in cities reached 19.4%, while in rural areas it was only 0.9%. Overall, female literacy lagged more than twice behind male literacy (11.8%).

At the same time, the literacy level of Uzbek women remained very low. In particular, in 1930 this rate was only 1%, and in rural areas it did not exceed 0.3% [19]. Thus, the plan set in the 1920s-to achieve 100% literacy among all women employed in production and 50% literacy among working women by 1930-was not fulfilled [20].

For example, in the 1935–36 academic year, 253,100 girls, or 40.2% of all students, were enrolled in schools in Uzbekistan. This figure was 46.0% in cities and 38.2% in rural areas [21]. By 1939, 620,000 children studied in Uzbekistan's schools, nearly half of whom were girls [22]. This is further illustrated by the following table.

RESULTS OF THE ELIMINATION OF FEMALE ILLITERACY.

Years	**All students in schools to end illiteracy**	**Including women**

1923/24	5.100	500
1924/25	19.700	1.023
1925/26	26.300	2.700
1926/27	36.930	4.605
1927/28	40.492	7.092
1928/29	67.900	10.695
1930/31	175.600	52.143
1933/34	221.600	99.620
1935/36	459.421	204.377
1936/37	602.447	273.637

In addition, the main goal of the ruling party's ideology in promoting women's education was to turn them into reliable partners in the construction of the Soviet government. In the context of Uzbekistan, where traditional national psychology was deeply rooted, it was more convenient for the ruling political force to win the support of women rather than men. Furthermore, through schooling and literacy campaigns, the Soviet government sought to attract women more rapidly into production, particularly into industry and agriculture. As a result, after completing school, a mass process of women entering the production sector took place. This led to significant social consequences for Uzbek families and society.

In 1919, when the campaign to eliminate illiteracy had just begun, the first educational institution and the Higher Pedagogical Institute for Women were opened in Tashkent. In the first year, classes were limited to literacy and basic arithmetic. In 1922, this institution was renamed the "House of Education." In 1923, several new subjects began to be taught-social studies, Russian, drawing, and club activities. That year, 72 women graduated. These were the first female teachers, including Manzura Sobir-Korieva, Hamida Tojieva, Robia Khojaeva, Khosiyat Ziyomuhamedova, and others [23].

During the period under study, great attention was paid to training teachers for literacy courses and schools that aimed to eliminate illiteracy among local women. The main reason for this was the lack of qualified local female teaching staff. For this purpose, by decision of the board of the Turkestan People's Commissariat of Education, a Turkic Women's Pedagogical School was opened on October 25, 1919 [24].

The courses for training teachers of schools for the eradication of illiteracy acquired considerable social significance in Uzbekistan. They trained literate women aged 18 to 30 and provided them with dormitories and three hot meals a day. For practical training, literacy schools operated under the courses. In some cases, lessons and classes were conducted according to shortened and accelerated programs and curricula. Applicants for these courses were mainly women who had recently graduated from schools for the eradication of illiteracy [25].

There were also political reasons behind the increased attention to training female teachers in Uzbekistan. The primary aim was to quickly expand the number of supporters of the Soviets and eliminate the shortage of promoters of communist-Bolshevik ideology among the local population. For this purpose, in the 1924–25 academic year, 139 women were sent to higher educational institutions in Moscow, Leningrad, and Baku, 115 of whom were representatives of the local ethnic group. At the same time, the Uzbek Women's Educational Institute was operating in Moscow, and ten local women were sent to study there. By the mid-1920s, the first Uzbek women teachers appeared among the staff of women's pedagogical institutions in Uzbekistan. Among them were Z. Yokubova, M. Sulaimanova, and F. Yokubova at the Samarkand Women's Pedagogical College; K. Shodmarova, Z. Sadriddinova, and G. Akhmadzhanova at the Tashkent Pedagogical College; P. Abdullaeva and H. Susina at the Kashkadarya Pedagogical College; Z. Faizulina at the Khorezm Pedagogical College; and P. Masudova, O. Kamariddinova, among others.

During the period under study, the ruling political leadership also began to focus on expanding production and filling vacancies in new enterprises, institutions, and agricultural sectors. However, this was not urgently necessary because, in the 1920s and early 1930s, Uzbekistan experienced severe unemployment, and there was no immediate need to attract women to the workforce. In fact, unemployment was increasing.

For example, on April 1, 1925, there were 18,000 unemployed people in Uzbekistan; by the end of the year, this number had reached 20,044 [26], and in 1926 it reached 30,000. Compared to 1927, unemployment increased by 123.6%, and in 1928 the number reached 36,930 [27]. In 1929, it rose to 60,000 [28].

On the one hand, the number of new jobs in industrial production and agriculture was growing. On the other hand, the number of unemployed people was also rising. This was explained by government-set migration plans and the unregulated movement of citizens from various cities of the former Soviet Union. For example, in 1929, there were 60,000 unemployed people in Uzbekistan [29], of whom only 11,601 were representatives of the local ethnic population [30].

The difficulties in attracting women to production and improving their qualifications required expanding women's industrial education. For this purpose, attention was also given to organizing various training circles. For example, in 1927, 37 circles were opened throughout Uzbekistan, with 50 women (304 participants in total) receiving training; in 1928, this number increased to 54-75 circles (558 participants). However, the requirement for participants to pay for some training circles led to a sharp decline in the number of women attending these institutions [31].

In the 1920s and 1930s, significant attention was also paid to organizing women's education in higher educational institutions. In particular, the training of teaching staff became a priority. The national composition and social origin of students in women's pedagogical schools in 1926-1929 can be seen in the following table.

CENTRAL ASIAN STATE UNIVERSITY.

Faculties	All students	Men	Women
Economy	304	78.3	21.7 %-65 person
Pedagogy	250	77.2	22.8 %-57 person
Medicine	223	49.2	50.4%-113 person
Chemistry	115	73.4	26.7%-31 person
Working fac.	225	73	27%-52 person

Sending young people to study abroad, primarily to Germany and Turkey, began in the first half of the 1920s. One of the first individuals from Uzbekistan to be sent to study in Germany was Maryam Sultanmurodova from Khorezm. She arrived in Tashkent in 1919 and studied at the Tatar Teacher Training Institute. In 1922, upon the recommendation of the Autonomous Representative of the Khorezm People's Republic under the Central Executive Committee of Turkestan, she was sent to Moscow. From there, M. Sultanmurodova and several young people from Turkestan and Bukhara were sent to study in Germany. She studied in Berlin until 1923, mastering the German language. In 1928, she returned to Tashkent, first serving as the head of the educational department of the evening Communist University in the old city of Tashkent, and from 1935 she continued her work at the magazine Guliston. In the magazine, M. Sultanmurodova published numerous scientific and popular articles on the cultural heritage of the Uzbek people, emphasizing its richness and antiquity.

The ideological and political leadership of the Soviet regime, dissatisfied with her activities, arrested Maryam Sultanmurodova together with T. Shodieva and S. Kholdorova on September 13, 1937, accusing them of belonging to a nationalist organization. She was imprisoned in Kazan and Suzdal until 1939, and later sent to the "Dalvstroy" NKVD camp, from which she was released on September 13, 1947. She received her official certificate of rehabilitation only on September 23, 1957.

Another Uzbek woman who studied in Germany alongside M. Sultanmurodova was Khayriniso Majidkhanova from Tashkent. She was accused from the outset of being a member of the Turkestan counter-revolutionary nationalist organization and of working as a spy under German instruction. As a result, she was sentenced to death on October 9, 1938.

It should also be noted that some of those sent to study abroad never returned to their homeland. The main reason was the increasingly authoritarian political climate in the country beginning in the second half of the 1920s, which many Uzbek intellectuals living abroad closely observed. Saida, the daughter of

Shermukhammad from Tashkent, was one of them. She studied and lived in Germany for 15 years, and in 1937 moved to Turkey, where she married Uktoybek, who had also come from Tashkent.

In general, historical accounts indicate that in the early 1920s, Uzbek women studied not only in Western countries but also in the East, particularly in Japan. According to available data, more than 500 Uzbek intellectuals studied abroad during the 1920s, and a significant number of them were women [33].

Particular attention was also given to the social support of Uzbek women studying abroad. In 1924, the Turkestan Jadids established the "Kumak Youth Society." Its main purpose was to provide material and moral support to Uzbek students studying abroad. A magazine called Kumak was also published in Berlin [34].

Thus, during the 1920s and 1930s, many women from Uzbekistan were sent to study in foreign countries. However, the fate of the majority of them was the same: persecution, imprisonment, and even execution. Labels such as "nationalist" and "counter-revolutionary" destroyed the careers and lives of young Uzbek intellectuals who had studied and gained experience abroad.

Based on the study and scientific analysis of the efforts carried out in the 1920s–1930s to involve Uzbek women in the education system and raise their cultural level, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1.Significant work was done to involve women in secondary schools, eliminate illiteracy, expand access to higher and secondary specialized education, and improve women's spiritual and cultural life. As a result, numerous educational institutions, schools, and cultural centers were established, contributing to measurable progress in reducing female illiteracy.

2.At the same time, these developments show that the improvement of Uzbek women's culture was not impartial. Rather, all changes within the cultural sphere were driven by the political objectives of the administrative-command system, which sought obedient and "loyal" allies for Soviet construction.

3.Another dimension of the state's goals in promoting women's participation in cultural spheres was tied to solving its own economic problems. As a result, negative changes emerged in the social and spiritual lives of Uzbek women. Traditional qualities such as delicacy, modesty, tenderness, and kindness were replaced by non-traditional traits—administrative harshness and rudeness—imposed by political demands.

4.Although quantitative progress was achieved in involving women in the cultural and spiritual spheres, qualitative shortcomings became increasingly evident. Some Uzbek women became "champions" of the "socialist way of life," rejecting national cultural identity and supporting an artificial internationalism based on Russian culture.

All of this demonstrates that, overall, there were more shortcomings and dangers than achievements in involving Uzbek women in cultural processes.

Thus, in the 1920s and 1930s, Uzbek culture experienced severe political upheaval, and the ruling communist-Bolshevik ideology attempted to turn culture into a tool for its own purposes. During this period, the complex tasks of developing women's spirituality and strengthening their socio-cultural status were carried out strictly within the framework of Bolshevik cultural policy.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the 1920s-1930s shows that the Soviet state initiated extensive reforms to transform the social and cultural position of Uzbek women, yet these reforms were deeply intertwined with ideological and political objectives. The creation of women's departments, literacy schools, red teahouses, pedagogical institutes, and Atinoyi schools contributed to expanding women's participation in education, public life, and cultural activities. Female literacy rose significantly, school attendance increased, and the first generation of Uzbek female teachers and intellectuals emerged.

However, these achievements were accompanied by systemic shortcomings. The administrative-command system that intensified at the end of the 1920s subordinated women's emancipation to political goals, dissolving independent women's organizations and replacing them with strictly controlled party structures. Traditional cultural institutions—such as Atinoyi schools—faced repression, and many educated women who studied abroad became victims of political persecution. Rapid Sovietization also disrupted the spiritual foundations, psychological stability, and socio-cultural identity of local women, replacing traditional feminine virtues with rigid ideological expectations.

The analysis reveals that while quantitative improvements were achieved in women's education and participation, qualitative aspects remained problematic. Women were often viewed as instruments of ideological mobilization rather than autonomous social actors. Consequently, the Soviet transformation of women's lives produced not only progress but also profound cultural losses, social tensions, and long-term repercussions for Uzbek society. Ultimately, the women's emancipation

campaign of the 1920s–1930s represents a complex historical phenomenon marked by both genuine advancements and deep contradictions.

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