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**ANIME PILGRIMAGE AND
LOCAL TOURISM PROMOTION:
AN EXPERIENCE OF WASHIMIYA TOWN,
THE SACRED PLACE FOR ANIME "LUCKY STAR" FANS**

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Anime Pilgrimage and Local Tourism Promotion: An Experience of Washimiya Town, the Sacred Place for Anime “*Lucky Star*” Fans

Takayosi Yamamura¹

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the town of Washimiya has become a mecca for anime lovers ever since fans from all around the country rushed to visit after it was used as a setting for the TV animation series *Lucky Star*. As a result, the town has successfully hosted two anime-related events for these fans. As a result, it was found that the local Commerce and Industry Association played a central role in each process. It was also discovered that, with the town's Commerce and Industry Association at the core, a local shrine, local shops, fans and corporations from outside the region (copyright owners and a tourist agency) were able to build mutually beneficial relationships as a backdrop to the current success.

Key Words: Washimiya, Animation, *Lucky Star*, Anime Pilgrimage, Commerce and Industry Association

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the recent rapid development of media and communication technology, particularly with the advent of the Internet, individual communication capability has been noticeably enhanced, thereby transforming the various forms of communication. In response to this situation, the young generation is forming many segmented private communities, free from conventional local ties and business connections through social networking services (the services that provide social networks on the Internet, such as *mixi*, or the Japanese version of Myspace). These dramatic changes in communication activity and the establishment of a wide variety of communities based on the common use of the Internet, are remarkably transforming the tourism patterns of young people, who enjoy the new trends, and are also creating a huge effect on local tourism development. These changes, which vary immensely from conventional forms of tourism, can be termed the “tourism information revolution.”

This study seeks to examine the significance of the tourism information revolution in postwar Japan's tourism history, with a focus on the anime enthusiasts' participation in local tourism promotion and community development in the town of Washimiya, located in Saitama prefecture. Through this examination, the paper argues for the possibility of community revitalization based on tourism promotion in the age of the tourism information revolution.

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TOURISM INFORMATION REVOLUTION

Table 1 outlines postwar Japan’s tourism history with a focus on the most important factors affecting tourist behavior during three major segmented periods.

Table 1
Postwar Japan’s Tourism History with a Focus on Key Factors Affecting Tourist Behavior

	Three Segmented Periods and Their Characteristics		
	From the 1960s to the 1970s	From the 1980s to the 1990s	The 2000s
	Mass tourism (corporate-coordination-oriented)	New tourism (local-proposal-oriented)	Next-generation tourism (tourist-oriented)
Key factors	Public infrastructure <Tourism transport revolution>	Public facilities and regional resources <Bubble economy and its collapse>	Information infrastructure (Internet) <Tourism information revolution>
Focus of tourism promotion	Corporate-coordinated resources as products (Economic resources)	Corporate-coordinated resources as products (Critical for community development)	Information as part of leisure activities (Platform for individual leisure types and private web-based networks)
Tourism information provider	Companies (transportation companies (airline, railway and bus, etc.) and travel agencies)	Local communities (Tourism associations, administrators, NPOs and local residents)	Individuals (Blog, SNS and private web-based communities)
Informed content	Corporate-coordinated products	Local-proposed products	Individual preference
Communication forms	Company-customer One-way communication	Host-guest One-way communication	Peer-to-peer From interactive communication to networks
Key communities for tourism promotion	Corporate communities	Regional communities (Local connections)	Private web-based communities
Points of discussion	Corporate profit (Management strategy and short-term strategy for returns on investment)	Community revitalization through resort development (Myth of ever-higher land prices, speculation, spontaneity, local ties, exclusiveness, outsiders and volunteer theories)	Lifestyle (Preference, leisure, stylishness, <i>moe</i> (a key Japanese word expressing anime features) and private community-based factors)
Period background	Period of mass people	Period of new trend pursuit	Period of diverse options
Characteristics of media content	TV programs watched at home, national soap operas, popular national personalities and big-hit national songs	Enjoying TV programs and videos in private space, trendy dramas, ordinary-girl idols and music band boom (J-pop)	Internet movies, net dramas, net idols and <i>Hatsune Miku</i> (the character of a desk top music software)

First, during postwar Japan’s high-speed economic growth period (from the 1960s to the 1970s), social infrastructure was a critical factor for tourism, and its development triggered new tourist behavior. Mass transportation and speedy travel time were key factors for the establishment of public transit systems, such as bullet trains and jumbo jets, and continuous technological progress was made toward the maximization of carrying a high volume of passengers at a given time with a minimization of transit time. Thus, an efficient travelling pattern in which a particular package of tourists visited limited areas where public transit systems had been developed became common. This is the way mass

tourism was established in our country. As an efficient method to handle such a form of tourism, package tours coordinated by travel agencies were developed. In this way, transportation companies (airline, railway and bus, etc.) and travel agencies played a central role in developing the tourist industry and the model of “corporate-coordination-oriented tourism” was created.

During the period that followed, around the bubble economy (from the 1980s to the 1990s), the value of public facilities and regional resources was a significant factor for tourism. During the years of the asset-inflated economy, resort development involving capital outside of local areas was actively conducted. Many local governments were also keen on strengthening tourism resource development through facility construction and hot spring excavations for tourism promotion based on regional revitalization projects (1988–89). In addition, after the collapse of the economic bubble, tourism promotion was regarded as a key strategy to revert devastated local economies. As part of this, public facilities and resources critical for local reinvigoration were redeveloped, but many local governments could not afford to drive tourism development, which inevitably necessitated tourism promotion to fall back on the initiative of local residents. This is how regional initiatives to create new forms of community-inhabitant-driven tourism that could be replaced with conventional mass tourism came alive in the 1990s. Based on this background and the resultant trends, current tourism in Japan exists as a “local-proposal-oriented tourism” led by community people.

However, the author considers that these trends have begun to dramatically change since 2000. In recent years, the Internet has transformed the way people behave and has replaced public transit infrastructure, public facilities and regional resources as the most significant factor for tourism. A typical example shows that the growing use of the Internet has enabled people to directly buy plane tickets without the intermediary service of travel agencies and to likewise, reserve a hotel room. The Internet has had an enormous impact on the behavior of individual tourists. Amidst this situation, the model of corporate-coordination-oriented tourism through the collaboration between transportation companies and travel agencies is undergoing a fundamental test of its significance and value.

In addition, another notable point is that individuals have gained influential communication tools through the advent of the Internet. That is, private companies usually provided tourism information in the system of corporate-coordination-oriented tourism, and local tourism associations played a central role in information provision within the framework of local-proposal-oriented tourism. But today, individual young-generation tourists, who have quickly become familiar with the Internet, have already posted information about destinations on their own personal blogs and websites, so that they can share that information with other Internet users. Furthermore, Internet users have organized a wide variety of web-based communities about travel, free from conventional local ties and business connections through SNS and other relevant media. For example, some people provide and share information about sub-culture, such as animation, or other subjects which travel agencies and local communities have not yet realized have become the focus of tourists. That is, individual tourists are no longer just customers, but have finally obtained the position of providing tourism information. They have now become tourism producers.

As Table 1 shows, this situation is clearly different from conventional forms of tourism in the aspects of: critical factors for tourism, information provider, the specific content of information and tourism promotion communities. It represents the tourism information revolution.

ANIME PILGRIMAGE: NEW FORM OF TOURISM

The remarkable development of media technologies, such as VCD, DVD and the Internet, has enabled us to enjoy comics and animation beyond the wall of national borders and also to share those experiences in a contemporary framework. In particular, paid video sites and video-sharing sites, which were first created around 2000, have drastically transformed the way people enjoy animation.

(In discussing the relationship between animation and video-sharing sites, it is currently necessary to bear in mind the fact that those websites involve many problems concerning copyrights. As the examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this study, the author would like to address them on a separate occasion.) The conventional models of terrestrial broadcasting and satellite broadcasting involve broadcasting time restrictions, but now we can enjoy any program or movie anytime, anywhere we like.

Given this situation, when animation movies become popular, young fans can watch them through on-line video-sharing sites beyond national borders and exchange information on the Internet. Such contemporary information-sharing among these fans creates cross-border travel in the form of an anime “pilgrimage.” Anime enthusiasts find locations where animations were shot and other places related to their creators, cherish them as “holy places” and enjoy visiting those special spots. As noted above, in these cases, the conventional resources of tourism are neither exploited nor prepared in the form of corporate-coordination-oriented tourism and local-proposal-oriented tourism, yet individual tourists themselves find enjoyment at their special spots on their own initiative. (This is clearly different from conventional tourism models.) In addition, there are some scattered cases in which this new type of tourist actually participates in community development during their repetitive visits to the spots and creates a new culture in collaboration with local residents.

A common factor detected in these community development cases based on “anime pilgrimage” is that local communities did not initially expect anime fans to visit their areas and did not have any intention of promoting tourism featuring anime-related spots; as enthusiastic anime fans repeatedly visited those local areas, they gradually formed a special emotional attachment to the places and became ardent supporters. The author considers that this new type of tourism involves hidden important elements to fundamentally change the ideas behind community development based on tourism.

In the following section, the author focuses on an animation called “*Rakisuta*” (*Lucky Star*), which was launched in 2007, and offers Washimiya Town, Saitama Prefecture, as a typical example of the new style of tourism involving community development.

AN EXPERIENCE OF WASHIMIYA TOWN

Table 2 shows a chronological explanation of the anime “*Lucky Star*” and community development activities in Washimiya. (Information gained from interviews conducted with the Washimiya Town Commerce and Industry Association, local community and visitors anytime between April 2008 and January 2009.) It was in April, 2007 when the anime “*Lucky Star*” started to be aired on TV, that anime enthusiasts began to visit the town. In the opening scene of the anime, the gateway at the entrance to the Washimiya Shrine and the *Otori-chaya* Teahouse in front of the gate (managed by the Washimiya Town Commerce and Industry Association; see Photo 1) were drawn, along with main characters. Though the scene was run for just a few seconds, some pioneering fans spotted those locations and gradually began to visit the shrine. Subsequently, active coverage through anime magazines and the Internet depicted the town as the “sacred place” for “*Lucky Star*” fans and visitors to the town dramatically increased. The Commerce and Industry Association paid much attention to the behavior of those enthusiastic fans. They considered what to do about the situation, listened to the visitors and got in contact with the copyright holder of the anime, Kadokawa Group Publishing Co., Ltd. Consequently, a special event involving the anime’s voice actors and 3,500 participants was held on December 2, 2007, in the Washimiya Shrine and the *Otori-chaya* Teahouse, with Kadokawa’s great consideration given to local promotion. On this occasion, some fans worked as volunteer security guards for the event. Following this first event, each time other relevant events were held, voluntary groups of fans were organized to work as security guards.

Based on the above-mentioned special opportunity, the local Commerce and Industry Association fulfilled the desires of delighted fans that had come all the way to the town by improving the mid and long-term management of their stores. They produced original goods for sale and also planned and conducted sales campaigns for anime fans. In particular, they keenly listened to the fans and accordingly produced original goods which would meet their expectations, and developed the products in collaboration with voluntary sympathizers. Amidst this growing popularity of the town among fans, 130,000 New Years celebrants gathered at the shrine in 2007; their number increased to 300,000 in 2008 and even hit a record of 420,000 in 2009. In addition, on April 1, 2008, the town designated the six Hiiragi family members of the animation as special residents and held a special ceremony to grant certificates of residence with the participation of three voice actors (Hiiragi sisters and Minoru Shiraishi) on April 6.

Table 2
A Chronology of the Anime “*Lucky Star*” and Community Development Activities
in Washimiya Town: 2004-2007

Year	Main events
January 2004	The four-panel cartoon “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ” was first published in a Kadokawa monthly game magazine called <i>Comptiq</i> as a serial story.
March 2005	An old house beside the Washimiya Shrine was renovated and rebuilt as the <i>Otori-chaya</i> Teahouse.
April 2007	The anime “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ” started to air on TV (ending in September). In its opening scene, the gateway of the shrine and the teahouse was drawn. Anime fans began to visit the shrine in a small number.
May	On May 4, a special coterie magazine called “Groupie! Sailor Suit” announcing the televising of “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ” was published and shooting locations around the town were introduced.
July	Supplementary material entitled “A Bookmark of Visits to Locations Related to “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ” (a double-sided poster) was added to the August issue of the <i>Monthly New Type</i> (Kadokawa) and it reported that the animation was set around the Washimiya Shrine. Many anime fans began to visit the shrine. They often put up votive wooden tablets with anime characters drawn on them and took souvenir pictures there. A resident of neighboring Kuki city wrote in his website that he was concerned that many anime nerds gathering in the shrine would disturb the order of the area. <i>Sankei Shimbun</i> reporters looked at the post and interviewed the Washimiya Town Commerce and Industry Association. Their news was published on the Internet. In response to this situation, the local Commerce and Industry Association started to interview visitors to the shrine and met a person who became the future leader of volunteer staff.
August	People other than anime enthusiasts also began to visit the town to see the reported votive tablet and the shrine. The Commerce and Industry Association staff asked for ideas about souvenirs from Washimiya in the 2ch website of “Shrine OFF.”
September	The anime “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ” stopped being broadcasted on TV.
September	The Commerce and Industry Association conducted research of the animation and contacted Kadokawa Publisher. They drew up a blueprint for their plan and submitted it to the publishing house.
October	Two members of the Commerce and Industry Association and its vice chairman had a meeting with Kadokawa’s staff at its head office. The publisher proposed that the town have a special event featuring the animation.
December	On December 2, the town hosted a special event called “ <i>Lucky Star</i> Brunch & Official Homage-Paying in Washimiya.” About 3,500 people participated in the event.
December	On December 3, a special product called “Paulownia-Made Votive Tablet-Style Mobile Phone Strap” was first put up for sale. Seventeen stores in the local community released a total of 1,000 copies for sale and they were sold out just 30 minutes after the stores had opened. On a scratch card of “Washimiya Year-End Sales Campaign in 2007” were drawn the characters of “ <i>Lucky Star</i> .” On December 20, the special mobile phone strap was put up for its second sale. Forty three stores in the community prepared a total of 3,000 copies and they were sold out one hour after the stores had opened. A special coterie magazine called “Groupie! Sailor Suit in 2007,” commemorating the end of the Televising of “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ,” was published, introducing many shooting locations in detail. Around this time, various media, including newspapers, began to give the town of Washimiya big coverage.

Table 3
A Chronology of the Anime “*Lucky Star*” and Community Development Activities
in Washimiya Town: 2008-

Year	Main events
January 2008	The number of visitors to the Washimiya Shrine during the first three days of the new year increased by 170,000 from the previous year to 300,000 according to a survey by the Saitama Prefectural Police Regional Department. The local Commerce and Industry Association prepared new year’s special goods for <i>Lucky Star</i> fans. Local stores ran their operations on new year’s eve and during the new year period for those fans.
February	On February 10, the special mobile phone strap was put up for its third sale. Sixty stores in the community prepared a total of 8,500 copies.
March	From March 30 to April 6, the Washimiya Commerce and Industry Association collaborated with the city of Saitama Commerce and Industry Association (in Saitama City) to coordinate a big sales campaign called “ <i>Lucky Sale</i> ” for anime fans.
April	On April 1, Washimiya town designated the six Hiiragi family members of “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ” (including Hiiragi Kagami and Tsukasa sisters) as special residents. On April 6, the town hosted the <i>Lucky Star</i> -featured third anniversary festival for the <i>Otori-chaya</i> Teahouse. In cooperation with local administrators, the Commerce and Industry Association invited the two voice actors for the Hiiragi sisters and had a special ceremony to grant certificates of residence. Following this event, the town also distributed those special certificates for the Hiiragi family to anime fans. On the same day, the town also hosted a fan-participation-oriented event in the precincts of the Washimiya Shrine. A total of 4,000 people participated in the event. On that day, the town coordinated the “Event Access Tour” in collaboration with Kinki Nippon Tourist Co., Ltd. On April 7, the town distributed the special certificates for the Hiiragi family to the public at a unit price of 300 yen. The town issued 10,000 copies for a limited sale. From April 6, the Commerce and Industry Association began to host a major event called “ <i>Lucky Star</i> ” Restaurant Stamp Rally” with the participation of 12 stores in the community. They used <i>Lucky Star</i> characters for the stamp mount and premium goods for the fans that successfully ate all of their food.
June	Around this time, the chairman of the <i>Haji</i> Festival Execution Committee proposed to the Commerce and Industry Association that they permit <i>Lucky Star</i> fans to participate in the traditional festival in autumn.
August	On August 9, all the 10,000 copies of the special certificates for the Hiiragi family were sold out. In early August, the <i>Haji</i> Festival Execution Committee decided to feature the “ <i>Lucky Star Palanquin</i> ” in the event in September. The town invited public participation for 100 portable shrine carriers through the official website of the Commerce and Industry Association and a notice put up at the teahouse. During the application period, they received a total of 114 applications in three days.
September	In early September, the town installed 40 lights in the street along the shrine, which cost a total of 3 million yen, through the sale of the special certificates for the Hiiragi family. On September 7, more than 120 carriers participated in the <i>Haji</i> Festival and marched through the street carrying the special portable shrine. On September 9, the “ <i>Lucky Star Palanquin</i> ” was displayed at the Washimiya Municipal Museum. The portable shrine was exhibited as of October 1. On September 7, a special coterie magazine called the <i>Lucky Star Walker</i> featuring its shooting locations and community development projects in Washimiya was published. On September 24, the “ <i>Lucky Star</i> Restaurant Stamp Rally” (starting on April 6) ended. On September 26, the “ <i>Lucky Star</i> OVA” was put up for sale.
December	From December 20 to 28, the town hosted a big year-end sales campaign called “ <i>Lucky Sale</i> .” From 9:00 p.m. on December 31, the town hosted the “New-Year Votive Tablet Fair in Washimiya.” Local stores prepared 12 types of <i>Lucky Star</i> -featured votive table-style mobile phone straps.
January 2008	The number of visitors to the Washimiya Shrine during the first three days of the new year hit a record of 420,000.

In response to this situation, the Commerce and Industry Association hosted a major event called “*Lucky Star* Restaurant Stamp Rally” beginning on April 6, 2008, (ending on September 24). This event, coordinated by the local organization, was intended to encourage local stores to emphasize their original core value without depending on anime character goods. Twelve local restaurants prepared a special menu featuring different anime characters and made a plan to give premium goods to customers who ate all these foods. Many fans enjoyed visiting the twelve stores scattered around the

town. Through this special event, the Commerce and Industry Association succeeded in enticing anime fans to stroll through the entire shopping district and the entire town, as well as visit the shrine and the teahouse. In addition, each store highlighted its own menu as well as its goods, and this strategy worked well. Individual store owners and individual fans communicated with one another more actively than before, and some fans took a liking to particular stores. These store owners and local residents got the impression that many of those fans were good-mannered, young people.



Photo 1
the Washimiya Shrine (left) and the *Otori-chaya* Teahouse (right)
(Source: Photograph courtesy of the author, April 2008)



Photo 2
The “*Lucky Star Palanquin*” (left) and the traditional *Mikoshi*, portable shrine (right), at *Haji Festival*
(Source: Photograph courtesy of Takeshi Okamoto, September 2008)

In this way, local communities and anime fans developed the solid foundations for good relationships. In June 2008, the *Haji Festival* Execution Committee proposed that those anime fans participate in the traditional local event, “*Haji Festival*”. This suggestion was epoch-making. The festival, with its long history, had come to a cessation once, but revived in 1983 and was thereafter

held every year in September. The committee suggested that the fans carry the “*Lucky Star Palanquin*” featuring anime characters in the festival. In response to this proposal, the Commerce and Industry Association invited public participation for portable shrine carriers and some fans also joined in the production of the palanquin. On the festival day of September 7, more than 120 carriers paraded through the street (see Photo 2).

In the beginning, many fans spotted and visited locations for the animation. Subsequently, they participated in related events along with the stamp rally and also became familiar with community people. This was how they collaborated on community development.

CONCLUSION

The development of the town of Washimiya community revitalization project featuring the anime “*Lucky Star*” is characterized by the following four main factors:

(1) Web-based word-of-mouth communication among anime fans enticed them to visit the town. (Conventionally, sightseeing guidebooks and pamphlets were main media used to attract visitors, but online communication tools, such as blogs and SNS, became new media used to attract tourists.)

(2) Local Community communicated with anime fans on the Internet. (Conventionally, marketing companies and consulting firms investigated the tourism market, but the local Commerce and Industry Association communicated directly with anime fans on the Internet.)

(3) Visitors played a central role in community promotion. (Anime fans replaced event-planning companies and local tourism promotion firms as a main player in community promotion and development.)

(4) Web-based communities and local inhabitants got closely connected with each other and the border between them became indistinct. (Through community development projects, web-based communities and local people constructed tight cooperative relationships well beyond their walls.)

These characteristics show that tourism promotion is gaining original production and improvement systems similar to the “open source” structure (in which source codes that comprise a design for software are published for free so that everyone can improve and redistribute the software).

Then, why was such open source system constructed in Washimiya? The author speculates that the potential power of the animation enabled the system to be built. More specifically, the anime “*Lucy Star*” worked as the connector between online communities and local residents and also as a common factor for interactive communication. Anime enthusiasts and local community people could communicate with each other in various ways, free from reality restrictions beyond their walls, simply because the animation was something imaginary, because it was not exclusively owned by either the local people or the fans. In addition, the Commerce and Industry Association, the teahouse and individual store managers acted as the platform (networking point) for such communication.

Today, individuals can widely send out various messages through information infrastructures, such as the Internet, and people sharing such information form online communities. But such web-based communication differs from real-world communication in both mode and code. Web-based communities and real regional communities rarely have interactive exchanges. As a matter of fact, most of today’s criticism of the Internet is based on the gap between “virtual relations” and “real relations.”

However, many “*Lucky Star*” fans visited Washimiya and communicated with local people. In

this respect, as the stamp rally signifies, it was quite significant that the local Commerce and Industry Association and individual store managers focused on their own core businesses, while featuring the anime “*Lucky Star*” so that they would entertain fans. In addition, the initial purpose of community development was not to attract tourists and promote local tourism but to satisfy anime fans who came all the way to the town. It made a great difference that individual store managers, running a wide variety of businesses, not travel agencies, played a pivotal role in entertaining fans. What would disappoint fans most was if their favorite animation was deliberately used just as a means of local community promotion. The way those fans behaved was also wonderful. They had a great love for the animation and adored the town as a “sacred spot.” Naturally, they behaved with self-restraint and modesty. They were good-mannered enough to collect their trash and work as volunteer staff for events. Their behavior was even better than that of visitors to other famous tourist spots in Japan.

The anime “*Lucky Star*” worked properly as the common language between community people and fans and also as a catalyst for better communication and mutual understanding. Many fans told the author that they were glad that the town had readily accepted them and that they had felt delighted and relaxed to be there.

This special case suggests that we can seek a new style of community development appropriate for the tourism information revolution era beyond the conventional model of “host and guest.” This case shows that people sharing affection for the same animation get together to create a new form of culture, well beyond the framework of host or guest, insider or outsider. The case also provides important implications for tourism as a mechanism for peacemaking and cultural exchanges.

Of course, this correlation between an animation and community development is currently is one among a few successful cases. In fact, there are some cases in which anime pilgrims and local residents had trouble. This study does not blindly admire web-based communities and the young-generation culture.

However, the current youth will play a central role in promoting next-generation tourism. It is very important to focus on the new nascent tourism of these young people and actively evaluate its positive aspects. At least the author thinks that the Washimiya case suggests that young people’s senses and hearty attitudes will change next-generation tourism and community development into more humane enterprises. Now that the period of a steady economic growth is over, young generations are enormously concerned about their future. The author considers that in this situation, young people have begun to shift their mindset from tourism as a form of consumption to tourism as a lifestyle.

It is a significant challenge of future research to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of *ACT, Anime Content-based Tourism* (tourism induced by anime content or tourism focusing on anime content as its primary resources), without neglecting the above-noted phenomena merely as a form of sub-culture, and to consider and evaluate the nascent young tourism culture from the perspective of major social trends.

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the Sacred Place for Anime “*Lucky Star*” Fans

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