

Nichiren Shu News

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'NICHIREN SHONIN & LOTUS SUTRA CULTURE' EXHIBIT



Left: Shinji Ebinuma, Assistant Curator of the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum.
Above: A 'Goshuin book' from the Edo period that belonged to a follower on Sado Island.

Rev. Kanjo Bassett

The "Nichiren Shonin and Lotus Sutra Culture" exhibit running from October 2 until November 23 at the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum is one of the last events in connection with the celebration of the 800th Anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's Birth. The exhibit is co-hosted by the Niigata Prefecture Museum of History in Nagaoka City and was on display there during July and August.

Shinji Ebinuma, Assistant Curator of the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum and a part-time lecturer at Minobusan University, helped create the exhibit and gave us a tour explaining the importance of the items on display. The exhibit also honors the 750th anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's Sado Exile, and there were many rare, and rarely seen, pieces including many in Nichiren Shonin's own distinctive handwriting. The most moving one for me was a well preserved humble pilgrim's 'Goshuin book' with the page open to the stamp of Keishiin Temple on Shichimensan.

Mr. Ebinuma explained, "It belonged to a Sado woman believer in the Edo

period. Items that illustrate the spiritual life of ordinary people are extremely rare." It's impossible to imagine a person now making the long journey from Sado Island to the top of Shichimensan and back, on foot. The most amazing thing is that those kinds of pilgrimages were extremely popular, enough to support some 180 *shukubo* in the Minobusan area alone, spread out far and wide compared to the few you see today clustered around Kuonji temple.

I asked Mr. Ebinuma how he would explain this exhibit to a visitor from abroad with no knowledge of Nichiren Shonin or the Lotus Sutra. "I would first show them the statues of Shakyamuni

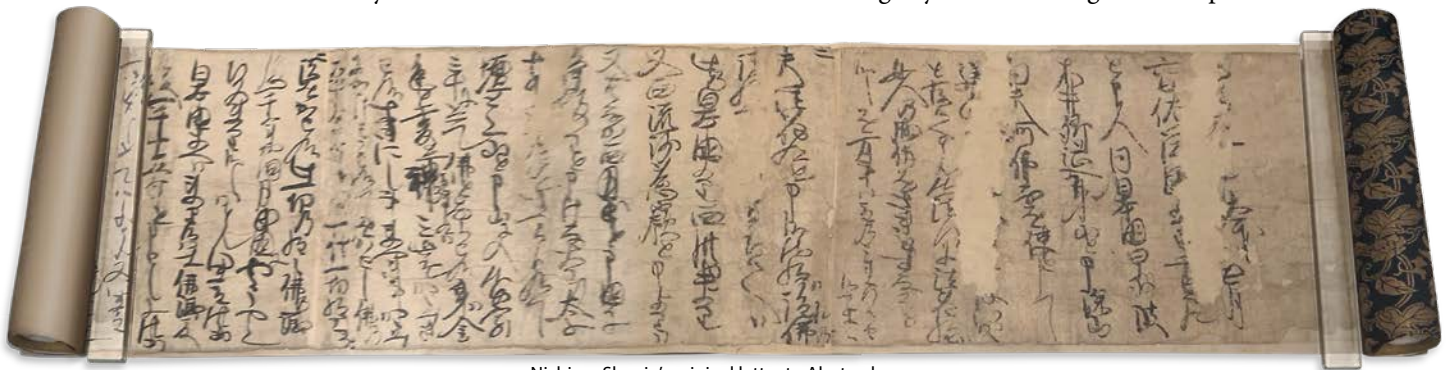
and Many Treasures Buddha and the Four Bodhisattvas from Underground and explain their background. Then I would show them Nichiren Shonin's Gohonzon Mandala and explain its importance and meaning."

He also detailed the preparations necessary for the exhibition. There are around 175 items that cannot all be displayed at once, either due to limited space or from items being on loan from temples for limited time. "We would go to each temple to assess handling and transportation issues. Sometimes, it took two onsite days to get the job done."

When asked what his personal favorite item was Mr. Ebinuma looked slightly

apologetic saying, "Nichiren Shonin's books impress me the most. His output was tremendous." In addition to producing hundreds of books, Nichiren Shonin also moved Kuonji temple from its old location, now the Gobyosho, to the current temple that we use today by cutting down trees and clearing the mountain. His efforts were amazing, especially when you consider that he did this in the Sengoku period when Japan was in a state of constant civil war.

From the famous mandalas of great priests to Goshuin books from ordinary followers, the Nichiren Shonin and Lotus Sutra Culture exhibit is indeed a special and unforgettable experience.



Nichiren Shonin's original letter to Abutsu-bo.

ONLINE MEETING TO TALK ABOUT NICHIREN SHU'S OVERSEAS MISSIONARY WORK

By Rev. Tsuoh Yokoi

A lecture meeting on overseas missions was held online on October 6, 2021. Kokusai Fukyoshi, Overseas Ministers, talked about the questions they received in temples in foreign countries and about how to reply based on each culture and the religious background so that participants in Japan may understand



Rev. Kangyo Noda.

the actual situation of overseas missions and apply what they have learned to spreading Nichiren Buddhism domestically and internationally. Altogether, 26 priests (ages 29-67) participated.

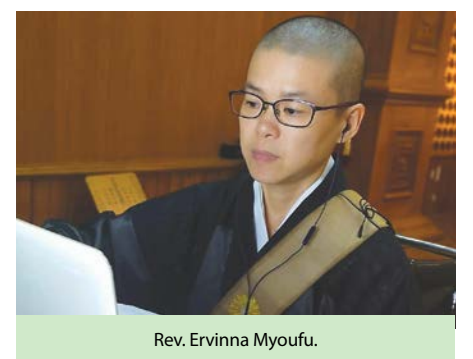
Rev. Kangyo Noda, Honkoji Temple of Wakayama Prefecture, and Rev. Ervinna Myoufu, chief priest of Rengeji Temple of Jakarta, Indonesia, were invited as guest speakers. Rev. Noda, who was involved in missionary work in Southeast Asian countries from 2007 to 2016, talked about the geological, historic and religious features, the history of Nichiren Shu propagation, and the current situation in Southeast Asia, including participation in Wesak Day parades since 2009.

Rev. Ervinna Myoufu talked about Rengeji Temple of Indonesia, her native country, and Busshinji Temple in Sri Lanka, including the activities under the current coronavirus crisis, such as food

bank, free distribution of lunch boxes, a study class and chanting gathering, and 24-hour Odaimoku chanting relays held on days with a full moon.

Rev. Noda introduced the questions he has often received: "Which is the better pronunciation, 'Nan' or 'Namu'?" "How many times is enough for chanting the Odaimoku?" "Sariputra was the wisest disciple and the first one who was assured of his future Buddhahood in the Lotus Sutra. Then, why did he doubt women's attainment of Buddhahood?" "Tell me the reason why there is no name of World-Voice-Perceiver Bodhisattva in the Mandala, the Most Venerable One?" "What kind of precept should Nichiren Shu keep?" and so on.

The participants commented after the online meeting, "I have a deep respect to the Kokusai Fukyoshi because they try hard to spread the Lotus Sutra and



Rev. Ervinna Myoufu.

Odaimoku through every possible way. Followers in Southeast Asia have a deep faith in Nichiren Shu Buddhism. A special bond and unity is found to develop between a priest and followers." Another comment was, "I was interested in their mission work. I am so happy to hear their activities today. I will try to become a Kokusai Fukyoshi in the near future."



Whenever you get angry, it is clearly written in your face. Please remember that at no time do gods or deities protect those who are short-tempered. It is true that you are going to become a Buddha, but isn't it regrettable for you to get hurt, pleasing your enemy and causing us grief?

—Nichiren Shonin, Emperor Sushun Letter (ST 262)

In the “Emperor Sushun Letter” (ST 262), Nichiren advises his dear follower Shijo Kingo on how to navigate a difficult situation with his feudal Lord, Ema. Nichiren also speaks to us today on how we should make the best of difficulties we have with our employers, neighbors and even families. We know that we, and all beings, will become Buddhas, even when we are at times tired, frustrated and impatient. Other people also have difficulties. We help them best when we remember to respect both them and their capacities, and keep our own anger from bringing out theirs.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

Memorial Service for Dolls in Hongakuji Temple, Kamakura

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

On a Sunday afternoon, October 3rd, Hongakuji Temple in Kamakura held a memorial service for dolls. This was a ceremony to bid farewell to the old dolls which people have treated with affection. Ministers chanted the Lotus Sutra and offered *kito* prayers before over 2,000 dolls. Following that, the fire burning ceremony was conducted outside in front of a doll tomb. All the incinerated ash will be consigned into the doll tomb. In Buddhism, a soul is believed to dwell in non-sentient beings as well. Spiritual entities are inherent within long-lived articles such as



Rev. Shoyo Tamura praying for the dolls.

dolls. Therefore, ‘eye-closing’ rites are necessary to remove their souls.

Rev. Shoyo Tamura, who serves at Hongakuji Temple, explains the significance of the ceremony: “Dolls always stay by your side as a child. When you grow up, their roles come to an end. As you derived comfort and encouragement from them, you cannot discard the dolls without due respect. When you bring your beloved dolls to the temple for a farewell, do not forget to have a sense of gratitude. You will pray with your palms together by offering your appreciation to the dolls.”

He added with passion, “In another case, some people lost a member of their precious family, especially their beloved child. Distraught with grief, there was no way to dispose of the dolls treasured by the deceased. So, they have kept the dolls for a memory. Their deep grief may be consoled for some time. But one day they realize it is no good to look away from reality. It is time to change the focus in a positive way. They come to the temple to consign the dolls filled with memories so that they may accept the world as it is and take a new step forward.”

A memorial service for dolls is held at Hongakuji Temple on the first Sunday of October every year. You will take the best opportunity to express a sincere gratitude to your dear dolls and to commit yourself to making a fresh start.

Unknown Histories of Nichiren Shu Temples in Sado (4) – Zuisenji Temple

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

The Sado Gold Mine began operations at the start of the 17th century. The gold extracted from this mine helped build up the finances of the Edo Shogunate. As production increased by a remarkable amount, more workers in the excavated pit were brought in, including miners who dug into the earth, putters who hauled ore out from the mine, timberers who built supports and other framework, and blacksmiths who forged metal tools. Water drainage was the hardest labor with low pay and long hours. It required physical strength to remove the water collected in mines. The deeper a tunnel went into a gold vein, the more water was there. Workers were forced to haul up nine liters of water, weighing 9 kilograms or about 20 pounds, with a wooden bucket every 15 seconds. No one wanted to take on the hard work.

Beginning around 1772, repeated natural disasters caused a plague and a famine throughout Japan. Many homeless people came to the city of Edo from various local areas, where there was no food or work. To improve public safety and to keep an important source of revenue, the shogunate government decided in 1777 to send homeless people to the Sado Gold Mine to work as drainage laborers. The laborers were exploited, without sufficient rest or wages, to the extent that they rarely

survived more than three years working in the mine.

Those who could not stand the terrible working conditions tried to escape, but most of them were captured and thrown into jail with harsh physical punishments or sentenced to death. A total of 1,874 homeless people were sent to the Sado Gold Mine. Most died on Sado Island.

Their ashes were buried in the graveyard of Kakushoji Temple. The temple is now abandoned, but their tombs still stand in the same place. The drainage laborers were only permitted to go out once a year. On this free day, they would visit the grave of their deceased fellow workers to offer flowers and go to the beach to wash off the dirt from their

work. Social restrictions were relaxed a bit for the Obon dance. Everyone, from the high officials to low laborers danced together wearing the distinctive Sado straw hats that hid everyone's faces.

At the foot of the gold mine is Zuisenji Temple, where a memorial service is held for the repose of the deceased drainage laborers on the third Sunday of April each year. Ministers and supporters walk in procession while chanting the *Odaimoku*, *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*, around the site of the mine, the gate to a tunnel, and the grave of the drainage laborers. Finally, they come to Zuisenji Temple to chant sutras and offer prayers for their souls. Rev. Renjo Aoki, resident minister of Zuisenji Temple, tells us,



Procession marching and chanting around the Sado Gold Mine.



Depiction of drainage workers in the old mine.

“Drawing water is the most important work in a gold mine. We owe so much of the prosperity of Sado Island to those drainage laborers. We must appreciate the service of their labor. We must not forget their suffering.”

In 1989, the operations of the Sado Gold Mine were discontinued, since so little gold could still be found.



Graveyard of the drainage workers.



Zuisenji Temple.

HIDDEN HISTORIES ON SADO ISLAND

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

The air in Sado is full of fading history, a history that is never far away for the people born and raised there. Their history is like an acquaintance, a somewhat distant cousin or neighbor, and the interconnectedness is everywhere: the proprietress of the inn where we happened to stay is a relative of the wife of the Konponji Resident Priest, and so on.

They take great pride in their history, always eager to tell it. Not in a boring book way but in a living way as stories are passed down through generations. “Did you know that Mitsui got its real start as a Zaibatsu because of Sado?” they will tell you casually. They don’t mince words and have a down-to-earth directness that is often found in people who live by the sea. When I told my travel partner and guide, a Sado native, that I wanted to visit Zuisenji in the Aikawa Temple District on the way to the Sado Gold Mine, he asked a question that was echoed by every Sado native we met along the way, “Why on earth would you want to go there?”

He phoned his mother who said, “Don’t go if you don’t have to, and only go in the morning. Don’t be caught there late in the day.” The elderly Okamisan of the inn where I stayed had a sharp mind full of current information about

the entire island, “All the resident priests fled the temples around there long ago for better places, and now they only show up when they need to.”

Aikawa was a castle town built by the Tokugawa Shogun to operate the Sado Gold Mine. One interesting fact you can learn by going there was that the Aikawa population in the Edo era was more than 50,000. To understand the significance, it helps to know that the entire population of Sado in 1970 was about 90,000. Today, it is just below 60,000. If you go there, it is mind-boggling to imagine the current population of Sado crammed into such



a small mountainous area. That’s how important the gold mine was and why so many temples were built there.

I have driven on many narrow and dangerous mountain roads in Japan, but nothing prepared me for the road to Zuisenji Temple. A crooked little sideroad away from the main temple area wound its way through a steep tiny

valley. It was like going into another world. The road was so narrow that the only place for residents to hang out laundry was along the road, just inches away from passing cars.

I parked my rental car in an abandoned field near a turnoff for Zuisenji Temple and walked the last steep climb. The air was unpleasant and full of flies. We passed a Jodo Shinshu temple. Directly across the road from the temple front gate was a small alcove carved into the earthen mountain wall containing what appeared to be Jizo. I almost took a picture but stopped. There were moldy, half-rotten Japanese dolls crammed into it along with the Jizo.

We reached Zuisenji Temple, but nobody was there, just a dusty old car with flat tires in the parking space. I started taking pictures and noticed that my travel partner was looking sick and sweaty. “Why don’t you go wait in the car,” I suggested as I handed him the keys. I took some pictures in the unpleasant gloomy air that was filled with buzzing flies and surrounded by a strangely dark forest. Then I walked down to the car passing the rotten dolls.

“Are you okay?”
“I was upset by the voices of those old ladies talking in the temple where those dolls were.”

“What do you mean? It was empty.”
“I know.”

We drove on to the gold mine, and he went to wash out his mouth and nose.

Later on, he explained “That area is too narrow for proper sewers. Did you see all the bits of broken pottery in the earthen walls along the temple road?” I had. “They mixed human feces with dirt and pottery shards as a way of getting rid of it. That’s the smell.” A relic of an



older and poorer part of Sado history that has no place in these times, a sign that somebody doesn’t want to spend money on proper upkeep.

The next day, he took me to Myosenji and Sesonji Temples. It was sad to see them looking so neglected. The temples felt like museums without a life of their own. “Sesonji Temple’s head priest used to teach calligraphy to all the school-children. It was such a lively place back when I was growing up.”

His sentiment was echoed by the sharp old proprietress of Minamikan Inn who laughed and said, “We always love to have Nichiren Shu followers come and visit, but they leave Sado feeling let down after visiting Myosenji and Myoshoji Temples. Nobody’s really living there to greet them and show them around. So most visitors never come back. Nichiren Shu should spend some money on refurbishing these historic temples rather than on those big statues and anniversary ceremonies.”

There was nothing to say, all I could do was reflect on the fact that ‘saying’ that you honor Nichiren Shonin and actually ‘doing something’ to honor to Nichiren Shonin are completely different ideas. The people in Sado have a saying: Sado is a miniature of Tokyo and Japan. What’s happening to the temples in Sado will happen in Tokyo. The honest words of Sado bite deep.



Ichinenji Food Bank

By Alex Ang

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the economy in Malaysia. Many people have lost their jobs and are struggling to make ends meet. With the situation not improving since March 2020, Penang Ichinenji Temple decided to start a Food

Bank within the premises of our temple in December 2020. The aim is to help people in the community who need food for their families and to reach out to people without housing.

The Food Bank is intended to be a community project. Anyone who is in need can come for basic food supplies.

Anyone who is able is encouraged to donate food. Today, we keep the food stocks inside the temple, and our temple member Brother Albert Kiong helps to refill the Food Bank every day.



In addition to the Food Bank, Penang Ichinenji Temple is partnering regularly with a local volunteer chef, Brother Koh from My Kitchen, to provide food to those who are without housing or who are otherwise in need.

We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank everyone who has continuously supported these two community projects. It has helped and is helping many people in need. Once again, thank you very much.





Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Rev. Shokai Kanai

Three-Day Retreat

The Nichiren Mission of Hawaii held a three-day retreat for its members from October 22-24. The attendees participated in two morning services, an afternoon World Peace Prayer, a *Shodaigyo* meditation, learning how to assist the resident minister and participated in the Oeshiki Service on October 24.

Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrett of the Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Texas and Rev. Shoda Kanai of the Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Nevada gave lectures on Nichiren Shu Doctrines, *shomyo* (Buddhist hymns), and how the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

The attendees were also taught how to handle musical instruments, do altar arrangements and prepare special vegetarian meals.

The Retreat also included a *Shodai Angya* (marching and chanting the Odaimoku) from the Nichiren Mission to the Honolulu Myohoji Temple on the last day.

A fee of \$50.00 per person covered all materials, five meals, drinks and snacks.

Jizo Bosatsu Statue Donated

A Jizo Bosatsu statue was generously donated to the Mission by Mr. Shigeru Takayama and was dedicated in an eye-opening ceremony in front of the small pond. It will protect you as you walk to our main hall.

Jizo Bosatsu is believed to be a divine guardian of travelers. In Japan, these statues stand along countryside roads where people used to travel on foot.

It is also a divine guardian for pregnant women and children. It is common in Japan for women who have had miscarriages and families who have lost a young child, to offer prayers to a statue of Jizo Bosatsu.

Since the statue is outdoors, anyone can come and pray at any time, regardless of their faith. You will be comforted just by looking at Jizo's compassionate face.



Honolulu Myohoji Temple

Rev. Josho Yamamura

Community Hall Renovation

The flooring in the Community Hall has undergone renovation. We are now able to welcome more activities like before. Part of our mission at Honolulu Myohoji is to serve our community by having more people use newly renovated space.

The Hawaii Japanese School also known as "Rainbow School" will be using this space to teach Japanese to the local *keiki* (children). There have been no in-person classroom activities due to the pandemic. But now that restrictions have been lifted in many areas, we are happy to have our facility being utilized for in-person Japanese classes for the children.

Kannon Temple of Nevada

By Rev. Shoda Kanai

Gardening in Las Vegas

When my father, Rev. Shokai Kanai, was in Las Vegas, he would always be in the garden trying to grow lotus from seeds, growing various vegetables and fruit. He was always proud of his garden and offered the fruit and vegetables that were harvested at the altar before eating them. It is amazing what kind of vegetables can be grown in this heat!

When I moved to my new place, the previous owner had a large fig tree which yielded two harvests a year. I had so many figs that I had to give them away to friends. I thought of growing vegetables, but it didn't work. The poor soil and lack of shade made things difficult.

One day, after visiting a member's house, I discovered plants being grown in large pots that could be moved out of the sun as needed. I tried planting seeds in various pots, but mostly it didn't work out. However, green onions were easy, and they grew quite large!

My greatest success though is growing basil. For some reason, from seed to plant, it has provided me with an abundance of leaves. It has endured the hot summer heat, and now I have plenty of homemade pesto sauce!

This year's growing season is over, but I will continue to plan and research. I will continue to try to get a vegetable garden growing. Stay tuned to hear about my successes and failures!

Renkoji Temple, Italy

By Rev. Shoryo Tarabini

The Importance of Being Open

In recent weeks, many temple believers and followers have shown their affection for this temple, their strong desire to be close to it and to protect the only Nichiren Shu temple in Italy. Above all, they have shown their large hearts of sincere faith. All of this has deeply touched me during this difficult time for our temple. People have come from nearby as well as from Milan, Veneto, Florence and Abruzzo. In many cases, they had to overcome a lot of difficulties (including economic problems) just to be able to sit in front of the altar and recite the Odaimoku inside Renkoji Temple. All of them expressed to me how important this temple is to them and what a great treasure it is for them and, above all, the joy they feel after finally visiting or returning to the temple. This is what it means to really have faith.

One Woman's Long Journey to Reach Renkoji Temple

I would particularly like to share with all of you the story of one person who came to the temple this week. Her name is Cornelia Landes, and she comes from a town along the North Sea town in Northern Germany, just below Denmark and Norway. She is not young, she is 61 years old, she does not speak any Italian and just a little English. She got in her car, together with her German-language copy of the Lotus Sutra and her liturgy book, and traveled over 1,300 kilometers, pausing along the way and sleeping in her car to complete the long journey. It took two full days of driving, all by herself. She finally arrived in Casale Monferrato (a city near Cereseto where our temple is located), but then her car suddenly broke down. She could no longer go on. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to recite in front of Renkoji's Gohonzon, she left her car and took a taxi, which cost her 60 euros for the remaining 15 minutes of the trip. She had a lot of trouble coming to the temple. When I finally saw her, she was so happy to be here despite the fact



that she was physically exhausted from her long journey. I thanked her for her incredible efforts and for having overcome so many obstacles and problems to get to the temple. She just humbly replied, "These are not the real problems in life. Having a serious disease is a problem. Moreover, the problems that Nichiren Shonin had to overcome in order to transmit and share Buddhism with all of us today, these were the true problems. Mine are nothing."

This very special woman has taught me what it means to have faith and to be a true believer of Nichiren Shu and Renkoji Temple. A heartfelt thanks to you, Cornelia. Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.

Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Greater New England

Shami Yu Iizuka

Re-opening Our Sangha

After more than a year of online services and an empty hondo, the Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Greater New England reopened to the public just in time for the Obon season.



There were 20 sangha members in hybrid attendance, as many continue to attend services virtually. Since then, Kosen-ji Temple, Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Greater New England, has continued to welcome new and old members to the temple while staying safe in compliance with the local COVID-19 protocols.

On November 13, Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer administered *tokudo*, the ceremony in which priest candidates take their first vows and become Shami (novice ministers), to Sean McNamara of Wilder, Vermont and Yu Iizuka (Brandon) of Boston, Massachusetts. Nona Bishop Myokei Caine-Barrett was in attendance to assist with the ceremony. The new Shami are all looking forward to help spread the wonderful dharma.

Our sangha will celebrate Bodhi Day/Jodo-e on December 4. We will hold a New Year's Eve Service on December 31 and a New Year's Blessings/First Service of the Year on January 1.

We wish you all a Happy New Year and will be praying for health and prosperity for all in 2022!

Calendar for December 2021 – January 2022

DEC 8 Jodo-e (Enlightenment Day) commemorating the day when the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

DEC 31 New Year's Eve Service; Bell Ringing Ceremony held throughout Japan.

JAN 1 Memorial Service for Nichiji Shonin, one of the six main disciples of Nichiren Shonin.

JAN 13 Minobusan Opening Ceremony for the New Year at Kuonji Temple

JAN 21 Memorial Service for Nichiro Shonin, one of the six main disciples of Nichiren Shonin

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