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Introduction

A Lost Stele and a Multivocal River

In July 1931 a historic stele marking the Chinese–Korean border disappeared mysteriously. The last people to see it were a group of fifty-six tourists who were escorted by 100 patrol soldiers from the local Japanese-Korean garrison.[1] They passed the stele at around 9:30 a.m. on the 28th, shortly before the tourists and their escorts separated. The next day, when the tourists returned from their sightseeing at Heaven Lake (C. Tianchi; K. Ch'ŏnji), a splendid crater lake on the peak of Mount Changbai (K. Paektu), they were surprised to find that the stele was no longer there. A wooden marker reading "the trail up Mt. Paektu" had been installed beside the empty base. Apparently, it was a planned theft. No record shows the stele ever being seen again.

Made of normal limestone, the stele was approximately 3 *chi* high and 2 *chi* wide and weighed over 100 *jin* (see Figure 1). It was located approximately 5 kilometers southeast of the summit of Mount Changbai. Japanese and Korean sources call it a "demarcation stele" (J. *teikaihi*; Kr. *chŏnggyebi*), as it marked the origins of the two Sino-Korean boundary rivers: the Yalu (K. Amnok) flows westward and the Tumen (K. Tuman) flows east. It indicated the starting point of one of the oldest, and perhaps most stable, state boundaries in the world. Chinese sources, naming it after the Qing official who erected it in 1712, generally call it the "Mukedeng stele" (*Mukedengbei*).

The story of the stele goes back to 1710, the forty-ninth year in the reign of Qing emperor Kangxi and the thirty-sixth for the Chosŏn king Sukchong. In that year a criminal case was brought to the attention of both courts. Nine Koreans violated the Yalu River border in order to poach ginseng. Running into five Qing, they murdered them and took their belongings. In recent years trespassing incidents like this one had occurred repeatedly. Qing emperor Kangxi decided that the time had

[1] The event is recorded in Shinoda Jisaku, *Hakutōsan teikaihi* (Tokyo: Rakurō Shoin, 1938), "Preface," pp. 1–2.

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Figure 1 The Mukedeng stele
Source: *Atō Ingashū*, vol. 1, no. 5.

come for a comprehensive and conclusive clarification of the geographic division between his empire and the Chosŏn.

Obsessed with the new surveying and cartographic techniques, Emperor Kangxi was conducting a grand mapping of his entire empire, including not only Inner China, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Tibet but also Korea. In seventeenth-century Europe as well as China, cutting-edge cartography was a critical tool for imperial powers.[2] Introduced by Jesuits, the early modern technologies proved advantageous over indigenous technologies, especially in a military sense. This was well proven in an armed confrontation between Qing and Russia in the Amur River basin (1685–1689). Kangxi's mapping project served two practical purposes: allowing his regime to acquire updated geographical data on Manchuria that would assist in countering Russian expansionism, while also permitting the creation of a highly accurate imperial atlas that incorporated

[2] James R. Akerman, "Introduction," in James R. Akerman, ed., *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 1–10.

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Chinese as well as Inner Asian territories.[3] Prior to 1710 Kangxi had already sent several survey teams to Manchuria. Through these surveys, Kangxi promoted Mt. Changbai as the royal ancestral mountain, further strengthening the foundation myth of the monarch and the sacredness of Manchuria.[4] Naturally, the project included the border region between the Qing and Chosŏn. Although no one disputed the boundary formed by the Yalu and Tumen Rivers, a small section between the two rivers' respective headwaters had yet to be clearly defined. Surrounding the summit of Mt. Changbai, the area was characterized by an extremely harsh climate and a complicated drainage system. The 1710 homicide case provided Kangxi with a good excuse to demarcate this ambiguous section of the border once and for all.[5]

The emperor entrusted a local Manchu official named Mukedeng with this task. Mukedeng was the superintendent (C. *zong guan*) of Dasheng ("hunting") Ula, a local branch of the Imperial Household Department (*neiwufu*). A former imperial guardsman, his regular duty was to oversee the collection of local wild products and deliver them to Beijing. Perhaps for this reason, the emperor assumed Mukedeng was more familiar with the local terrain than anybody else. In 1711 Kangxi assigned him to supervise the homicide trial in a Korean border town and ordered him to investigate the Qing–Korean boundary after the trial.

But Mukedeng's survey attempt in 1711 failed, because of the lack of cooperation from the weather and Korean officials alike. Aware of the situation, Kangxi, for a second attempt in 1712, asked the Board of Rites to issue a decree to the Korean court, assuring the latter that the purpose of the mission was only to "survey our borderland and will not involve your country." Just in case there were difficulties and dangers along the road, he asked the Chosŏn regime "to lend a bit of assistance."[6]

The Chosŏn received Kangxi's requests with great reluctance and caution. Having suffered two invasions by the Manchu "barbarians" and been forced to submit to the Qing, the Korean kings and literati were hostile towards the Qing regime. Through its intelligence network in China, the Chosŏn court assumed that the Manchu could not successfully

[3] Peter Perdue, "Boundaries, Maps, and Movement: Chinese, Russian, and Mongolian Empires in Early Modern Central Eurasia," *International History Review*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1998), pp. 263–286; Laura Hostetler, "Contending Cartographic Claims: The Qing Empire in Manchu, Chinese, and European Maps," in Akerman, *The Imperial Map*, pp. 93–132.

[4] Mark Elliott, "The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3 (2000), pp. 603–646.

[5] *Qingshilu*, vol. 246, Kangxi 50-05.

[6] *Chosŏnwangjo sillok*, Sukchong 38-2-24.

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control China for an extended period and that it would only be a matter of time before they were expelled. Thus, when Kangxi launched his grand geographic survey in Manchuria and fostered imperial worship of Mt. Changbai, the Koreans speculated that the Qing was just preparing a route to retreat and worried that this would harm Korea once again.[7] Chosŏn's initial response was to cite the difficult terrain or the harsh weather to avoid assisting the survey missions. This strategy worked in 1711. But, when Kangxi urged for a second time, the Koreans felt they had to cooperate, although with the intention of securing more territory to the south of Mt. Changbai.[8]

In May 1712 the Qing and Chosŏn teams met in Huju, a Korean border town on the Yalu River.[9] They traced the river upstream all the way to Mt. Changbai. A Korean interpreter, Kim Chi-nam, informed Mukedeng that both the Yalu and Tumen Rivers originated from the Heaven Lake. Therefore, instead of tracing the other border river, the Tumen, upstream to determine its correct source, Mukedeng decided to search for what he believed to be the shared source of both border rivers at the summit. His team and some of the Korean escorts reached the top on June 14 and started to look for the source. At a site southeast of the summit, they found a ridge that was quite close to the headwater of the Yalu River. Mukedeng decided that this ridge should be regarded as the "drainage divide" (C. *fenshuiling*; K. *punsuryŏng*) of both the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. So the only job that remained was to find the source of the Tumen connecting to this drainage divide. However, this task proved much harder than they had expected: the intricate nature of the river system and the intermittent water flows in this mountain forest made it extremely difficult to define a true source. After four days of arduous exploration and debate, they finally agreed to choose one of the small streams that gushed out dozens of *ri* east of the drainage divide as the true source of the Tumen. Explaining that this stream had emerged after "flowing underground" from the divide, Mukedeng ordered that a stele be erected on the drainage divide as the mark. He also asked the Korean staff to build a row of earthen and wooden barriers in the future to connect the stele with the Tumen headstream.[10]

[7] See, for example, *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, Sukchong 26-2-26.
[8] *Chosŏnwangjo sillok*, Sukchong 38-2-27, 38-3-8.
[9] For detailed accounts of the 1712 demarcation, see Kim Chi-nam, "Pukjŏngnok"; Pak Kwan, "Pukjŏng ilgi"; and Hong Se-dae, "Paektusangi," all collected in *Paeksan Hakpo*, no. 16 (1974), pp. 195–262, and no. 17 (1974), pp. 225–229. For an account in English, see Andre Schmid, "Tributary Relations and the Qing–Choson Frontier on Mount Paektu," in Diana Lary, ed., *The Chinese State at the Borders* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), pp. 126–150.
[10] *Chosŏnwangjo sillok*, Sukchong 38-5, 6.

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On June 18 the stele was engraved and installed. Written in Chinese, the inscription read:

> The Great Qing Superintendent of [Dasheng] Ula, Mukedeng, arrived here when surveying the border on Imperial Order.
>
> Observing that the Yalu River is in the west and the Tumen is in the east, [the surveyors] engrave this stele on the drainage divide as the mark.
>
> The fifteenth day of the fifth month, the fifty-first year of Kangxi.

Far from being the end of the problem, this was just the beginning. When the Koreans later returned to build the barriers, they discovered that the stream Mukedeng had chosen was wrong: it somehow turned north and eventually joined the Songhua (Sungari) River, a tributary of the Amur River in the far north. However, after intensive internal debate, the Chosŏn court decided not to bother the Qing with such a "trivial" mistake. Instead, the Korean official who supervised the project arbitrarily built a barrier to connect another stream in the south. As a consequence, in Beijing, the Qing government never became aware of the error. Since border security had been relatively stable, no Qing official after Mukedeng ever surveyed the border again. As the earthen and wooden barriers gradually eroded, so did the memory of the demarcation itself. What was worse, even the Qing documents related to this mission were lost, possibly in a fire.

In Korea, by contrast, the Mukedeng mission of 1712 was extensively recorded and widely remembered. From the mid-eighteenth century, geographers and mapmakers have viewed the Mukedeng stele as a marker of Korean territory rather than an indicator of the source of the Tumen River. However, the Korean knowledge of the boundary was rather incoherent. While the Qing documents referred to the river as 土門 (pronounced "Tumen" in Chinese), the Chosŏn documents used the name 豆滿 (pronounced "Tuman" in Korean) predominantly. Both names, arguably, are transliterated from the Manchu *tumen sekiyen*, which means "the origin of ten thousand rivers."[11] Decades after the 1712 demarcation, some Koreans inherited the traditional view that the Tumen/Tuman, being different names of the same river, was indeed the border. Some other literates, however, generated a new theory that the Tumen and Tuman were two rivers separated from each other. According to this theory, the border river was not the "Tuman" but another river that originated in Mt. Paektu/Changbai and flowed further north. Yet their theory about this "real" border river was even more confusing: some named it the "T'omun" River (土門江) while others called it "the Division River"

[11] Yu Fengchun, "Tumen, Tumen yu Douman, Douman zhi ciyuan yu yiyin kao," *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2009), pp. 118–126.

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(分界江; K. Pungyegang). Some indicated that this river was actually the Hontong River (混同江, Songhua/Sungari River), whereas still others insisted that it was located between the Sungari and the Tuman.[12] This caused great inconsistency regarding the exact location of the boundary during the late Chosŏn period.

The ambiguity eventually turned into an official territorial claim more than 170 years after the installation of the stele, when thousands of poor Korean peasants crossed the Tumen River and cultivated wildlands in southeast Manchuria. Was the Tumen the boundary? Which river was actually the Tumen? Which stream was its headwater? Upon these controversial questions rested a recurring Qing–Chosŏn territorial dispute. The contradictions surrounding a contested and multivalent boundary river developed into a Sino-Japanese political conflict in the early twentieth century when Japan, after gaining control of Korea, proceeded to colonize Manchuria. Closely associated with this problem was the question of which country had the right to rule the Koreans immigrants – thousands in the 1880s, increasing to nearly 300,000 by the end of the 1910s – in the area north of the Tumen, a place called "Kando" in Korea and "Yanbian" in China. The dispute involved not only the three East Asian countries but also Russia, whose colonial expansion triggered and accelerated the long-term demarcations of the land and people. With East Asia being drawn into a global capitalist and imperialist system, the resource-filled Tumen River area, a remote frontier that had been maintained wild and undisturbed for centuries, suddenly became a geopolitical hotspot for a multilateral regional, even global, competition.

Historical Spaces in East Asia

This book tells the story of the disputes and demarcations over this boundary river from 1881 to 1919. Rather than engaging in the debate about "territorial sovereignty," I examine how basic elements of state – land, people, border, and historical memory – presented and evolved in a concrete time and space. Using demarcation as method, I display the transformation of nineteenth-/twentieth-century East Asia in the imperialist, colonialist, and nationalist contexts. At the center of my narrative are the exploration of the borderland, the formation of the immigrant society, and various efforts of state and nonstate forces to competitively penetrate the frontier society. I pay special attention to how indigenous

[12] Nianshen Song, "Imagined Territory: Paektusan in Late Chosŏn Maps and Writings," *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2017), pp. 157–173.

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and European perceptions of people and land were entangled and implemented in this outlying region through various local practices. Knowledge and practices employed in the demarcations (e.g., geographical perception, cartographic techniques, and legal codes), I argue, shaped the modern formation of East Asian nations and states on a local level. As negotiations both stalled and progressed over the years, the conventional ways of understanding and regulating land, people, border, state, and historical memory changed dramatically. The simultaneous contests over both the border and the Korean diaspora promoted China's frontier-building endeavors, motivated Korea's nationalist imagination, and stimulated Japan's colonialist enterprise. It foreshadowed the rise of nationalism and imperialism in twentieth-century East Asia. In other words, through the lens of boundary making this book examines the unfolding of "modern" in the East Asian context.

A boundary, as Martin Heidegger famously said, "is not that at which something stops but…is that from which something *begins its presencing*."[13] This perspective applies to a frontier as well. A frontier is not merely a periphery but is a place of interactions. Locating the Tumen River region – a multilateral frontier – at the center, my narrative invites states to a joint borderland and emphasizes complex intercommunications between all neighboring polities in this peripheral place. I regard this region as a loosely "fixed" sociogeographic unit, whereas nations and states were more or less fluid. It was only through the projects of demarcation (of both land and people) that states and nations took their current shapes. In addition, the space of a nation and that of a state do not overlap precisely. Migration and historical memory may extend a national space beyond state boundaries. The Korean community in China's Yanbian region, for example, extends the Korean "national space" into Chinese territory. Similarly, because ethnic Koreans in Yanbian were integrated into a new notion of a "Chinese nation," the Chinese and Korean national spaces overlap there.

What is written in this book is a multilateral and multilayered local history. Concerning the spatiality of history writing, my narrative departs from most previous scholarship on the Tumen boundary dispute, which argued predominately for exclusive sovereignty and nationality. Instead, my work echoes other emerging trends in East Asian studies and engages in a broader conversation on the nature of East Asian transitions in late imperial and modern periods.

[13] Heidegger, Martin, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 141–160, 154, emphasis in original.

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A number of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean scholars have extensively studied the trilateral dispute on the Tumen River boundary, aiming to argue for the national "sovereignty" of the Tumen north bank.[14] The nationalist paradigm reflects the ideology of the nation state system, which, many believe, is a product of the Peace of Westphalia constructed by European states in the late seventeenth century. I use "Westphalian time-space" to refer to the view that sees nations as separate and equal polities regulated by international law, each with its own distinguishable territory and exclusive past. Introduced to East Asia through Euro-American colonization, this temporal-spatial perception was adopted and adapted locally to counter Western (and later Japanese) intrusions. The tension between colonialism and anticolonialism stimulated new scholarships on Manchurian history and geography. Under the Westphalian time-space ideology, East Asian scholars in the early twentieth century created parallel traditions of Manchurian studies. In Japan the school of "Manchurian-Korean history" (*mansenshi*) was a crucial part of Japanese Oriental historiography (*Tōyō shigaku*). Seeing Manchuria as an independent, non-Chinese historical space, the *mansenshi* school made great scholarly achievements with the vigorous support of the South Manchuria Railway Company, a national colonial agency of the Japanese empire.[15] In response, Chinese historians, notably Fu Sinian, Jiang Tingfu, and Jin Yufu, initiated the historical studies of northeast China (*dongbeishi*), vigorously arguing for Chinese sovereignty over Manchuria.[16] Under similar colonial pressure, the Korean nationalist historians, such as Sin Ch'ae-ho, also turned their eyes from the peninsula to the continent, seeking to revive Korean national spirit in Manchuria.[17] All of them justified an exclusive sovereign claim of a territorial space by rewriting history.

[14] Representative works include but are not limited to Shinoda Jisaku, *Hakutōsan teikaihi*; Sin Ki-sŏk, *Kando yŏngyukwŏn e kwanhan yŏn'gu* (Seoul: T'amgudang, 1979); Yang T'ae-jin, *Han'guk ŭi kukkyŏng yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Tonghwa Ch'ulp'an Kongsa, 1981); Zhang Cunwu, *Qingdai zhonghan guanxi lunweji* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1987); Yang Zhaoquan and Sun Yumei, *Zhongchao bianjie shi* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1993).

[15] The magnum opus of this school includes the sixteen-volume *Mansen chiri rekishi kenkyū hōkoku* and the two-volume *Manshū rekishi chiri*, both financed by the South Manchuria Railway Company. The authors include Shiratori Kurakichi, Yanai Watari, Inaba Iwakichi, Matsui Hitoshi, and Wata Sei.

[16] See Fu Sinian, ed., *Donbei shigang* (Beiping: Guoli zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1932); Jiang Tingfu, *Zuijin sanbainian dongbei waihuanshi* (Taipei: Zhongyang ribaoshe, 1953); Jin Yufu, *Dongbei tongshi: Shangbian* (Chongqing: Wushi niandai chubanshe, 1943).

[17] See Sin Ch'ae-ho, "Toksa sillon," "Chosŏn Sanggosa," "Chosŏnsa yŏn'guch'o," etc., in *Tanjae Sin Ch'ae-ho chŏnjip* (Seoul: Tanjae Sin Ch'ae-ho Sŏnsaeng Kinyŏm Saŏphoe, 1982).

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Within their contexts, the nationalist arguments deserve to be understood with sympathy. Yet today they have become part of the problem, as they deny the possibility of a transnational dialogue regarding the historical inclusiveness of the region.

Younger generations try to break away from the uninational narrative and seek instead to apply a multinational perspective.[18] Their studies emphasize the interactions of Japan, China, and Korea (and to a lesser extent Russia) in the formation of a national space, employing the frameworks of international relations, international law, or nation state construction. But most of them still see nation states – homogeneous, simple, and rigid – as the only actors. Positing the conflict in an inter*national* system, their efforts reveal the indiscriminate approval of Westphalian time-space.

In Western academia, Westphalian time-space has been gradually dissolved along with the criticism of the modernization theory. Scholars in East Asian studies denaturalize the nation state system, exposing the colonialist nature of international law, modern diplomatic protocols, and the international system.[19] At the same time, they thoroughly reject nationalist historiography under the overall rethinking of the Enlightenment and social Darwinism.[20] Echoing this historiographical shift, Andre Schmid, one of the few Western scholars who writes explicitly about the making of the Korean northern boundaries, sees the Tumen demarcation as part of the nation-making process in Korea. Not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, his work demonstrates, did a newly imagined "Korean nation" emerge and nationalist thinkers start to use romantic nostalgia for the past to support their political appeals in the present.[21]

With this acknowledgment, I propose to use the "local" as an alternative spatial unit to examine the border makings in the Tumen River

[18] Yi Sŏng-hwan, *Kindai Higashi Ajia no seiji rikigaku: Kantō o meguru Nichi-Chū-Chō kankei no shiteki tenkai* (Tokyo: Kinseisha, 1991); Jiang Longfan, *Jindai zhongchaori sanguo dui jiandao chaoxianren de zhengce yanjiu* (Mudanjiang: Heilongjiang chaoxianminzu chubanshe, 2000); Bai Rongxun, *Higashi Ajia seiji gaikōshi kenkyū: "Kantō kyōyaku" to saiban kankatsuken* (Ōsaka: Ōsaka Keizai Hōka Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2005); Yu Fengchun, *Zhongguo guominguojia gouzhu yu guomintonghe zhi licheng: yi 20 shiji shangbanye dongbei bianjiang minzu guomin jiaoyu weizhu* (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006).

[19] Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), just to list a few.

[20] Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[21] Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

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region. My concept of "local" contains at least three geographical layers: "multilateral local," "regional local," and "global local." Although different, these layers are dynamically interconnected with one another.

Multilateral Local

The Tumen River region is a borderland encompassed by Chinese Manchuria, Korean Hamgyŏng, the Russian Far East, and the Sea of Japan. As an integrated socioecological unit, it is a multilateral local as opposed to a domestic local. It accepts influences from and responds to all state players in Northeast Asia. As early as the 1910s and 1920s Japanese scholars in Oriental historiography, notably Naitō Konan, Shiratori Kurakichi, Yanai Watari, and Wata Sei, already emphasized the relative independence of this historical realm, albeit with obvious colonialist connotations. Contemporary Japanese economic historians, notably Tsurushima Setsurei and Nishi Shigenobu, also underline the unique geographic and economic status of the Tumen River region in Northeast Asia, seeing it as a "Natural Economic Territory."[22]

The sociogeographic focus of this book, the northern bank of the Tumen River, is located in the southeastern part of Jilin Province in northeast China. Unlike other borderlands, this one was not only a model of conventional statecraft on frontier ruling but also an example of competitive yet symbiotic sociopolitical transitions in China, Korea, and Japan. In the hundreds of years before the 1880s, the region remained unexploited because of the Manchu Empire's strict ban on agricultural exploitation. When the Qing finally opened it for development, it was immediately integrated into national, regional, and global competitions. Nation- and state-building projects of the three East Asian countries, bolstered by nationalist, colonialist, capitalist, and imperialist agendas, overlapped and interlaced here. For China, this place was (and is) an ethnic frontier – first a Manchu frontier, then an ethnic Korean frontier. The "interiorization" of frontiers constituted a consistent theme throughout China's nation and state formation. For Korea, the place is a key to a progressive narrative of past and present. Mt. Paektu in particular was regarded as the cradle of both the ancient Korean civilization and the modern Korean state. To Japan, the place connected two of the most important colonies, Korea and Manchuria, and was a testing ground of the Japanese dream for building a pan-Asianist empire. With multiple players competing for

[22] Tsurushima Setsurei, *Tomankō chiiki kaihatsu* (Suita: Kansai Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2000); Nishi Shigenobu, "Tomankō (Tomonkō) chiiki kaihatsu niokeru 'NET (Natural Economic Territory)' ron no igi," *Kan Nihonkai kenkyū*, no. 7 (2001), pp. 14–23.

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