

The NSP elite study program as a foreign policy instrument of Taiwan's new southbound policy toward Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

In the context of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy toward Indonesia, this study examines the role of the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP) as a foreign policy instrument. As Taiwan faces structural diplomatic constraints, non-traditional approaches have become increasingly important in promoting international engagement. However, previous studies have largely focused on the policy framework and its economic dimensions, leaving limited understanding of how specific programs function as foreign policy instruments at the implementation level. Drawing on Christopher Hill's framework, which emphasizes the transformation of resources into capabilities and instruments, this study analyzes how NSPESP operates as a foreign policy instrument. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach and document analysis, utilizing official policy documents, program materials, and institutional communications. The findings reveal that Taiwan mobilizes its strategic resources—including technological expertise, sustainability initiatives, and cultural assets—through institutional coordination among government agencies, academic institutions, and overseas representative offices. These resources are systematically translated into programmatic themes and implemented through structured processes such as participant recruitment, academic engagement, and scheduled program activities. Beyond facilitating knowledge exchange, these activities also serve as mechanisms of cultural engagement. The study concludes that NSPESP functions as a non-coercive foreign policy instrument that enables Taiwan to navigate its diplomatic constraints while strengthening relations with partner countries, including Indonesia. Within the broader framework of Taiwan's foreign policy, the program demonstrates how structured engagement can effectively connect domestic capabilities with external foreign policy objectives.

Keywords:

NSPESP; Taiwan; Indonesia; foreign policy

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INTRODUCTION

As a country with limited diplomatic relations, the way Taiwan conducts its foreign policy is a critical consideration. As a sovereign entity not recognized due to the One-China Policy, Taiwan faces restrictions on the conventional diplomatic activities available to other countries (Kaban & Widiastutie, 2025). Taiwan pursues innovative cooperation frameworks rather than formal diplomatic relations, exemplified by its New Southbound Policy initiated in 2016, aimed at enhancing international cooperation with ten ASEAN and six South Asian countries, as well as Australia and New Zealand. The policy focuses on economic development, regional prosperity, and strengthening relations through shared resources and exchanges (Hsieh, 2019).

Compared to the New Southbound Policy's initial focus on economic activities, over time the policy has shifted toward programs centered on education (Jamil, 2024; Yang, 2018). As part of this shift in focus, Taiwan launched the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP) in 2022. This program represents a distinctive educational exchange initiative, offering a diverse curriculum that includes fields such as biomedicine, semiconductor engineering, and regional studies, alongside cultural immersion activities like Mandarin classes and heritage site visits in Taiwan (Taipei Economic and Trade Office Jakarta Indonesia, 2025). Although it resembles typical international education programs overseen by Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MOE), NSPESP is actually funded and managed by the Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (Tien, 2022). This distinction is quite significant because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) focuses on diplomacy and foreign relations, with the aim of strengthening Taiwan's sovereignty and international standing, whereas the Ministry of Education (MOE) prioritizes the field of education. This distinction highlights the unique position of the NSPESP within Taiwan's foreign policy framework, which focuses on student exchanges and cultural immersion under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Existing literature on Taiwan's New Southbound Policy can be broadly organized into three thematic clusters: studies that examine the NSP as an economic and trade instrument, its implications for soft power and national identity, and its relationship with Taiwan's bilateral relations and diplomatic strategies and foreign policy. The first cluster examines NSP is a strategic foreign policy to bolster Taiwan's economic resilience and lessen dependence on China. It also creates strategic chances for partner nations like Indonesia to take advantage of stronger economic connections through FDI (Chen, 2023; Eka, 2022; Setyono, 2025). The second cluster takes a soft power and national image-building approach to the NSP, contending that despite its lack of official diplomatic recognition, Taiwan uses its cultural, technological, and educational resources—including its shared Austronesian heritage and diasporic ties with Indonesia—to increase its influence abroad (Patriadi, 2022; Tamtai, 2024; Rasool & Ruggiero, 2022; Effendi, 2024; Mumtaz, 2025). The third cluster talks about Taiwan's unrecognized status significantly impacts its New Southbound Policy (NSP) by constraining diplomatic relations, particularly with Indonesia, under the One China Policy. While the NSP aims to integrate domestic and foreign policies through unofficial channels, its effectiveness is often limited by geopolitical factors. The shift from a "Go South" strategy to a focus on soft power is noted, but evaluations of NSP outcomes, such as scientific cooperation and digital outreach, reveal ambiguous results, indicating a disconnect between policy intentions and actual impacts (Adhipramana & Maksum, 2022; Waltz, 2023; Isnarti, 2023; Chen et al., 2025).

In the context of Taiwan's foreign policy, there is a significant research gap, particularly within the third research cluster focused on New Southbound Policy (NSP). There are no specific programmatic instruments utilized by the NSP in practice, including the NSPESP program, which has been administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) since 2022

and involves participants from Indonesia. Using Christopher Hill's pyramid framework regarding resources, capabilities, and instruments, this study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the NSPESP at the instrument level, thereby enhancing understanding of Taiwan's foreign policy mechanisms—particularly the New Southbound Policy—through targeted programmatic related to Indonesia. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How does Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs implement the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP) toward Indonesia at National Chung Hsing University?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine whether the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program can be categorized as one of Taiwan's foreign policy instruments. Qualitative research enables an in-depth understanding of social and policy phenomena through data collected in their natural settings (Creswell, 2009). Using a descriptive approach, this research analyzes the program within the broader framework of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy.

The unit of analysis is Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), as the study focuses on how the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program is implemented as a foreign policy instrument. Following Alden et al. (2016), the unit of analysis was selected based on its relevance to the research question and its clearly defined boundaries. The analysis evaluates the program according to Christopher Hill's conceptualization of foreign policy instruments.

Data were collected through document analysis, utilizing official statements, speeches, policy publications from MOFA, and documents from the Office of International Affairs (OIA) of National Chung Hsing University (NCHU), complemented by other relevant institutional reports. To ensure validity and reliability, this study employs source triangulation by comparing information from government documents, news reports, and official university sources. The study also adopts the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) framework as its analytical perspective.

Among the major FPA scholars, including Valerie M. Hudson, William D. Coplin, and Christopher Hill, this study adopts Hill's approach because it explicitly addresses foreign policy instruments. Hill conceptualizes these instruments as the means through which states implement foreign policy objectives, ranging from hard instruments such as military force to soft instruments such as culture and education (Hill, 2016).

According to Hill, foreign policy instruments emerge through a three-tiered process consisting of resources, capabilities, and instruments. Resources include material and non-material assets such as economic strength, military capacity, geography, population, and culture. These resources become effective only when transformed into capabilities through institutional effectiveness, governance, leadership, and bureaucratic performance. Foreign policy instruments constitute the final stage of this process, representing the practical means by which states exercise international influence through diplomacy, development assistance, sanctions, military action, and soft power initiatives.

Hill further classifies foreign policy instruments along a hard-to-soft power continuum. Military instruments are primarily used for defense, deterrence, and coercion, while economic instruments include aid, trade incentives, sanctions, and economic diplomacy. Diplomatic instruments encompass negotiations, representation, and official communications. Cultural instruments, including education, media, cultural exchanges, and public diplomacy, represent the softest form of foreign policy implementation. Although non-coercive, cultural instruments can significantly influence foreign policy outcomes by shaping public perceptions, values, and attitudes. This framework provides the basis for assessing

whether the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program functions as a foreign policy instrument within Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (Hill, 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP)

The New South Policy Elite Program (NSPESP) is an education-based program offering a one-semester study program at several prestigious universities in Taiwan (Taipei Economic and Trade Office Jakarta Indonesia, 2025). NSPESP was established in 2022 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan in collaboration with several universities in Taiwan as one of the programs to support the New Southbound Policy initiatives launched by President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016. At its inception, the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborated with three universities: Taipei Medical University, National Taipei University of Technology, and National Quemoy University. In its initial phase, the program attracted more than 250 applicants from New Southbound Policy partner countries, including India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam (Tien, 2022). In early January 2023, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs plans to increase the number of partner universities for this program in line with the objectives of the New Southbound Policy (Taiwan Today, 2023).

To date, NSPESP has five partner universities, each with a distinct academic focus. These include National Chung Hsing University, which focuses on sustainability; National Quemoy University, which focuses on geopolitics; National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, which focuses on agriculture; National Taipei University of Technology, which focuses on semiconductors; and Taipei Medical University, which focuses on public health (Taipei Economic and Trade Office Jakarta Indonesia, 2025). Among these universities, National Chung Hsing University (NCHU) serves as one of the host universities involved in implementing the NSPESP. Although each university has a distinct focus within its field, the program does not merely offer learning activities limited to the specified fields. The program provides mandatory Mandarin language classes for participating students and conducts activities that enhance their experience and knowledge of Taiwanese culture.

As part of the evolving New Southbound Policy initiative, which promotes new approaches to talent development through community interaction, NSPESP aims to showcase Taiwan's increasingly attractive higher education system to international students from NSP partner countries, including Indonesia (Tien, 2022). This is further reinforced by the program's offerings, which balance academic activities with other initiatives that broaden participants' understanding of life and the educational landscape in Taiwan. This demonstrates that NSPESP is not merely an education- or academically-focused program, but also a platform for expanding educational interactions—whether between individuals or communities—between Taiwan and its partner countries. Overall, NSPEP is a program designed to provide a balanced combination of on-campus academic learning and other activities that enrich participants' experiences throughout the program. This balanced combination offers a more comprehensive experience for student participants. Consequently, student participants not only develop knowledge in their fields but also have the opportunity to interact directly with Taiwanese culture, which is introduced through this program.

New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP) as Foreign Policy Instrument

Using Christopher Hill's pyramid framework—which includes resources, capabilities, and instruments—this section examines the NSPESP as a foreign policy instrument within the context of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy toward Indonesia. From Taiwan's raw national assets at the base of the pyramid to their operationalization into state-managed capabilities to their purposeful projection as a foreign policy instrument directed outward,

this analysis is carried out step-by-step through each stage of Hill's pyramid, assessing the degree to which the NSPESP satisfies the requirements of each level. Furthermore, this section also analyzes the NSPESP as a foreign policy instrument in the cultural sphere by examining how the program is implemented

Resource

The NSPESP's theme architecture closely reflects Taiwan's unique collection of strategic resources. Taiwan's leadership in semiconductor technology is the first and possibly most well-known. Taiwan, which is home to industry titans like TSMC, UMC, MediaTek, and Silicon Motion, controls 63.8% of the global foundry market, 58.6% of the packaging and testing sector, and produces about 70% of chips smaller than seven nanometers. This position has been established over four decades of intentional industrial policy, government-sponsored R&D through the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), and the creation of extensive semiconductor industry clusters (Tung, 2023).

The other resources is Taiwan's accumulated expertise in sustainability governance and green energy. Taiwan has created a strong framework for climate action since the Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Management Act went into force in 2015, pledging to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and creating the Net-Zero Pathway Task Force under the Executive Yuan. Due to decades of investment in clean energy infrastructure and environmental governance, Taiwan's renewable energy installations grew by more than 100% between 2016 and 2020, with solar power capacity rising 370% (Gao et al., 2026). Despite that, Taiwan also has its agricultural know-how, which is distinguished by a highly productive and technologically sophisticated farming system despite the country's small amount of arable land. Taiwan's agricultural industry produces a wide variety of goods, from rice and aquaculture to vegetables and tropical fruits. It has also incorporated smart farming technology, such as IoT sensors, AI-based vision systems, and precision livestock management. Taiwan's organic market exceeded NT\$20 billion in 2022, demonstrating a persistent dedication to sustainable agricultural growth (Liu, 2026; Taiwan Smart Agriweek, 2025).

Biomedical and public health capabilities are the others Taiwan's resource. Since its founding in 2012, Taiwan Biobank (TWB) has gathered information from more than 150,000 people, making it one of the biggest biobanks in East Asia. Taiwan is positioned as a global leader in integrated health data infrastructure and biomedical research capability thanks to its National Health Insurance (NHI) system, which has covered over 99.9% of the population since 1995 and is backed by the National Health Insurance Research Database (NHIRD), which contains over 25 years of national medical records (Feng et al., 2022). Despite that, Taiwan's rich cultural legacy is the other opportunities of Taiwan to utilize its culture's resource. In addition to the heritage of Hakka, Taigi-speaking communities, and 16 officially recognized Indigenous peoples, Taiwan maintains living traditions rooted in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, preserving many aspects of traditional Chinese arts, crafts, and customs more thoroughly than other regions of East Asia. Beyond its traditional roots, Taiwan has developed a thriving modern cultural scene with thriving creative industries, performing arts institutions, and a reviving cinema and television sector. It is known as the world capital of Mandopop. Importantly, Taiwan actively promotes these cultural assets abroad through initiatives backed by the cultural divisions of its representative offices abroad, indicating that culture serves as a purposefully mobilized national asset rather than just a home legacy (Kuo, 2022).

Most significantly, the NSPESP does not contain these five resource domains by accident. According to program information distributed by the Taiwan Economic and Trade Office (TETO) in Jakarta, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) purposefully identified and

arranged these national strengths into a programmatic structure by giving each participating university a thematic focus directly aligned with one of Taiwan's strategic resource domains. The crucial first phase in Hill's pyramid is the top-down, state-driven organizing of Taiwan's resource domains into this organized program framework, which is when untapped national potential starts to become useful instruments for foreign policy

Capability

The second stage of Christopher Hill's pyramid framework, which builds on the resource endowments described in the preceding section, moves the emphasis from what Taiwan has to how these resources are mobilized and operationalized in the context of foreign policy. In this context, capacities encompass not only the existence of national strengths but also the state's capacity to use institutional and policy procedures to organize, coordinate, and utilize those assets. Taiwan's institutional coordination capacity is the most notable aspect of its capabilities in the execution of the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP). In order to organize NSPESP as an integrated policy platform that unites many actors under a single strategic framework, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Taiwan is a key player. The state deliberately arranges national resources into thematic themes rather than treating them as discrete topics. These themes are subsequently translated into educational initiatives aimed at partner nations like Indonesia.

Taiwan's capability to enlist universities as implementing actors is a crucial aspect of this competence. Universities like National Chung Hsing University serve as operational extensions of governmental policy in addition to being academic establishments. These universities are in charge of converting policy instructions into specific program elements, such as curriculum development, theme specialization, and participant management, through institutional structures such as Offices of International Affairs (Chan & Yang, 2017). This illustrates how the state has systematically delegated the execution of policies to institutional actors with some degree of autonomy. Furthermore, Taiwan exhibits its capabilities by extending policy implementation beyond its official diplomatic boundaries through the employment of abroad representative mechanisms. Taiwan is able to sustain functional engagement in the absence of official diplomatic relations because organizations like the Taipei Economic and Trade Office Jakarta enable outreach, coordination, and information regarding participant recruitment in target countries (Taipei Economic and Trade Office Jakarta Indonesia, 2025). This suggests that implementation channels have been strategically adjusted in response to structural limitations.

Taiwan's capabilities are also demonstrated by its ability to integrate policies, especially when it comes to coordinating education with more general goals of human resource development and external involvement. NSPESP serves as an example of how many resource domains are carefully packaged, provided, and consolidated under a unified programming framework, making them relevant and accessible to participants from around the world. When considered collectively, these dynamics show that Taiwan's strengths in the context of NSPESP are found in its capacity to go beyond the simple possession of resources to their efficient organization, institutionalization, and external projection. National potential is converted into actionable capability at this point in Hill's pyramid, laying the groundwork for its later use as an instrument of foreign policy.

Instrument

The deployment of Taiwan's resources and capabilities as tangible foreign policy instrument is the last phase in Christopher Hill's pyramid paradigm. At this point, the emphasis switches to how the state converts its organizational capabilities into particular policy instruments intended to accomplish external goals. The New Southbound Policy Elite

Study Program (NSPESP), which operates through organized academic engagement, can be viewed in this sense as a non-material and non-coercive foreign policy instrument. Taiwan uses this initiative as a strategic instrument to promote international involvement, especially with partner nations in Southeast Asia like Indonesia, instead of depending on conventional instruments like economic penalties or military action. From a policy standpoint, NSPESP serves as an instruments to help Taiwan achieve its larger New Southbound Policy goals, which include developing human capital, fortifying regional ties, and increasing Taiwan's educational influence in the Indo-Pacific area. The program helps create long-term connections that go beyond official diplomatic channels by focusing on participants from nations like Indonesia.

Taiwan's structural limitations have affected the creation of NSPESP as a policy instrument. Since many NSP target nations, like as Indonesia, lack formal diplomatic ties, the program offers Taiwan a low-risk, adaptable, and accessible avenue for international engagement. By collaborating with universities like National Chung Hsing University, the state can indirectly accomplish policy goals by integrating its national strengths into organized academic programs that are both politically insensitive and technically pertinent. Additionally, NSPESP functions as a policy instrument through a multi-actor implementation framework that involves collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, and foreign representative offices like Taipei Economic and Trade Office Jakarta. Taiwan can project its policies outward while retaining flexibility in execution because to its multi-layered framework, especially in situations where formal state-to-state interaction is scarce.

NSPESP functions as a policy instrument, but it also falls under Christopher Hill's concept of cultural instruments. Through organized participation, the program supports the projection of values, knowledge systems, and societal behaviors rather than depending only on technical delivery. Through this program, Taiwan teaches participants to its institutional procedures, governance strategies, and innovation-driven development model in addition to engaging them at the skill and expertise level. This suggests that NSPESP serves as a platform for cultural interaction in which the dissemination of more general sociopolitical and institutional experiences is intimately linked to the exchange of information. In terms of policy output, NSPESP takes the form of an organized program that provides exposure, training, and expertise in important areas that are in line with Taiwan's strategic resources. Beyond its immediate results, though, the program also fulfills a more general role as an engagement instrument, allowing Taiwan and Indonesian participants to participate in long-term communication. NSPESP serves as an example of how this kind of programmatic involvement can connect domestic capabilities with external goals. When considered collectively, the analysis shows that NSPESP is a strategically employed policy instrument that enables Taiwan to advance its regional participation under the New Southbound Policy framework while navigating its diplomatic limitations, rather than just a technical or academic endeavor.

Implementation of NSPESP Toward Indonesia

Taiwan's attempt to operationalize its foreign policy instrument at the national level is shown in the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP) targeting Indonesia. Indonesia has a critical role in Taiwan's regional engagement as one of the main target nations under the New Southbound Policy, especially when it comes to institutional cooperation and human resource development (Melkis et al., 2025). Operationally, NSPESP's implementation is carried out through a structured mechanism involving multiple actors. Higher education institutions like National Chung Hsing University are in charge of carrying out the program at the institutional level, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Taiwan is

crucial in developing and managing the program at the policy level. These universities translate policy goals into tangible programmatic activity by creating and delivering program components that represent Taiwan's critical sectors (Lin & Huang, 2022). Additionally, foreign representative offices, such as the Taipei Economic and Trade Office in Indonesia such as Jakarta and Surabaya, play a key role in the implementation process in Indonesia. Their responsibilities include communicating with local stakeholders, such as partner universities, spreading information about the program via official websites, and assisting with the visa application process. Taiwan has demonstrated the value of alternative institutional channels in policy implementation by using this mechanism to expand the reach of its policies to Indonesia in spite of the lack of official diplomatic ties.



Figure 1. Fnal project presentation for “On the path to net zero transition” class

The implementation of NSPESP is reflected in various academic activities designed to support knowledge transfer and participant engagement. One of the main academic components involved sustainability-related learning activities conducted at National Chung Hsing University. Participants were required to present their final projects related to environmental transition and sustainability issues as part of the course assessment process. This activity demonstrates how Taiwan promotes its expertise in sustainability and climate-related governance through academic interaction.



Figure 2. Final exam for “Mandarin” Class

In addition to thematic academic courses, the program also included Mandarin language instruction aimed at facilitating participants' communication and cultural adaptation during their stay in Taiwan. The language component served not only as a learning activity but also as a medium for strengthening interaction between participants and Taiwanese society. The final examination session illustrates participants' engagement throughout the language-learning process.

Beyond classroom-based activities, NSPESP also incorporated cultural engagement programs intended to introduce participants to Taiwanese cultural heritage and social life. Through cultural visits and direct interaction with local traditions, participants were able to gain firsthand experience of Taiwan's cultural environment. These activities strengthened

the experiential dimension of the program and supported Taiwan's broader cultural diplomacy efforts.



Figure 3. Cultural visitation to dragon and tiger pagodas, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

This initiative was further reinforced by an official statement issued by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the "Indonesian Night" forum organized by the Indonesian Economic and Trade Office in 2023. On one such occasion, Dr. Roy Chun Lee, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, highlighted that the program has benefited a total of 70 students from ASEAN countries, including 29 participants from Indonesia, with a focus on fields such as public health, technology, medicine, regional security, and international relations. More importantly, the program is described as an "important bridge between Taiwan and Indonesia," indicating that NSPESP is not only implemented at the technical level but is also actively communicated as part of Taiwan's broader engagement strategy (Lee, 2023). This indicates that the program functions simultaneously as an implementation mechanism and as an instrument for signaling policy, reinforcing its role in fostering sustained bilateral interaction through informal channels.

Overall, the execution of NSPESP toward Indonesia shows a multi-level, coordinated approach that integrates overseas facilitation, institutional execution, and policy design into a coherent framework. Taiwan can successfully project its foreign policy goals through unconventional channels because to this system, which also gives it flexibility in negotiating its diplomatic limitations. Therefore, within the larger context of the New Southbound Policy, NSPESP provides a tangible illustration of how foreign policy instrument are operationalized at the national level.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the New Southbound Policy Elite Study Program (NSPESP) functions as a foreign policy instrument under Taiwan's New Southbound Policy toward Indonesia. Using Christopher Hill's framework, the analysis shows that NSPESP is an example of how Taiwan's national resources are transformed into capabilities that may be used as a non-coercive policy instrument. Taiwan is finally able to accomplish its foreign goals in spite of diplomatic limitations thanks to the program's structured engagement, which combines institutional coordination, programming activity, and cross-border interaction. In this way, NSPESP represents a kind of foreign policy that prioritizes adaptability, indirect involvement, and the tactical application of non-material instrument. This study also highlights that NSPESP operates not just on a technical level but also in the area of cultural engagement, where institutional practices and societal values are transmitted together with information exchange. As a result, the program helps to promote ongoing communication between Taiwan and Indonesia by establishing itself as a link between internal resources and external engagement in a useful and flexible way. Based on these findings, this study suggests that future studies investigate the long-term effects of such initiatives, especially when evaluating how well they shape long-term bilateral relations or

policy outcomes. Furthermore, it is recommended that policymakers improve the integration between program design and strategic objectives, guaranteeing that such efforts continue to be responsive to partner nations' needs while remaining in line with more general foreign policy objectives. From a theoretical standpoint, additional research could broaden the application of Christopher Hill's framework to other unconventional instrument to enhance comprehension of current foreign policy procedures.

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