

Tran Tuyen

Vietnam—Russia Relations in the New Era: A Case of Expanded South—South Cooperation in a Changing World

Abstract. In the context of a reshaping world order, this study analyzes and proposes a strategic cooperation model between Vietnam and Russia within the framework of Expanded South—South Cooperation, aligned with Vietnam’s new era development agenda and contemporary trends in international collaboration. Employing a historical — policy analysis combined with a case study approach, the research draws on official documents, scholarly literature, and international reports to assess Vietnam—Russia relations across historical stages, key cooperation pillars, and opportunities for expansion into emerging sectors. Findings indicate that the relationship is underpinned by high strategic trust, stable mechanisms, and significant potential in renewable energy, high technology, digital economy, and cultural diplomacy. The proposed model outlines five guiding principles, a multi-tier cooperation structure, priority sectors, and actionable policy recommendations, thereby expanding the concept of South—South Cooperation by integrating global strategic partners such as Russia.

Keywords: South—South cooperation, Vietnam—Russia relations, strategic partnership, global order, international cooperation.

Author: Tran Tuyen, Ph.D (Tourism), Researcher at the Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities Research, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. ORCID: 0000-0002-7960-5234.
E-mail: tuyentran@hcmussh.edu.vn

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Чан Тuyen

Вьетнамско-российские отношения в новую эпоху: пример расширения сотрудничества формата Юг—Юг в меняющемся мире

Аннотация. В контексте меняющегося мирового порядка в данной статье анализируется и формулируется модель стратегического партнерства между Вьетнамом и Россией в рамках расширенного сотрудничества Юг—Юг, соответствующая повестке дня развития Вьетнама в новую эпоху и современным тенденциям международного сотрудничества. На основе историко-политологического анализа в сочетании с методом *case study* и обширной библиографии дается оценка вьетнамско-российских отношений на разных этапах истории, ключевых направлений сотрудничества и возможностей его расширения. Исследование показывает, что в основе этих отношений лежат высокий уровень стратегического доверия, стабильные механизмы и значительный потенциал в области возобновляемой энергетики, высоких технологий, цифровой экономики и культурной дипломатии. В авторской модели выделены пять руководящих принципов, раз-

ные уровни сотрудничества, приоритетные сектора и практические задачи дальнейшего сближения Вьетнама с Россией как части работы с глобальными стратегическими партнерами на пути расширения сотрудничества Юг—Юг.

Ключевые слова: сотрудничество Юг—Юг, отношения Вьетнама и России, стратегическое партнерство, мировой порядок, международное сотрудничество.

Автор: Чан Туен, к. тур. н., исследователь, Институт общественных наук и гуманитарных исследований, Университет общественных и гуманитарных наук, Вьетнамский национальный университет, г. Хошимин.

ORCID: 0000-0002-7960-5234. E-mail: tuyentran@hcmussh.edu.vn

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1. Introduction

In the context of the world order undergoing profound changes, South—South Cooperation (SSC) has emerged as an important complementary mechanism for multilateral cooperation, aiming at promoting autonomous, equal, and mutually beneficial development among developing countries [Quadir 2013: 331—333]. However, recent geopolitical and economic changes have changed the structure and scope of the SSC, creating conditions for the formation of an expanded concept (Expanded South—South Cooperation) that includes not only developing countries as traditionally defined, but also strategic partners with economic, scientific, and technological potential and global political influence. As an industrialized economy and one of the world's power centers, Russia increasingly demonstrates its role through bilateral and regional cooperation with countries in the Global South [Vuving 2025].

Vietnam has entered a new era with clear strategic orientations on sustainable development, green economy, digital transformation, and deep international integration [Tô Lâm 2024]. The combination of internal reform forces and external cooperation forces opens up opportunities to enhance the country's position while strengthening the connection channels with key partners. In this context, Russia is not only a traditional partner with loyal friendship and high political trust but also plays a role as a source of technology, energy, security, and knowledge, essential factors for Vietnam to realize its goals in the new development stage [Hà Mỹ Hương, Đoàn Anh Tuấn 2025; Vuving 2025].

The Vietnam-Russia relationship, with a foundation of 75 years of continuous cooperation, not only reflects the sustainability of bilateral relations in the face of historical changes but also demonstrates the ability to adapt and restructure in periods of major changes in the international environment. This creates a basis for the two countries to jointly shape a hybrid cooperation model between traditional SSC and North-South cooperation, in which Vietnam plays the role of a bridge between developing countries and a global strategic partner such as Russia. To advance this argument, it is necessary to clarify why Russia can be conceptualized as part of the Expanded South—South Cooperation. Such a justification not only situates the

Vietnam—Russia partnership within the broader academic discourse on South—South cooperation but also explains the hybrid nature of their bilateral relations.

This study aims to analyze the historical-political foundations and current dynamics of Vietnam-Russia relations, clarify the opportunities and challenges in the context of Vietnam's new era, and propose an expanded South-South cooperation model suitable for the changing world order. Thereby, the article contributes to expanding the theoretical framework of SSC, suggesting a more flexible approach to bilateral relations with specific characteristics and the potential for reconfiguring global cooperation networks.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Literature review

Domestic and foreign works on Vietnam-Russia relations have formed a diverse discussion stream, reflecting historical, political, and economic-strategic perspectives.

On the Russian side, Mazyrin (2021) analyzed the state of the Vietnam-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, emphasizing the role of bilateral mechanisms and stability in high-level political relations [Mazyrin 2021: 148—149]. Following that, Mazyrin and Burova (2022) focused on the scientific debate on the current state of Vietnamese-Russian relations, arguing that, despite many economic challenges, the strategic trust foundation is still a sustainable pillar [Mazyrin, Burova 2022: 72—73].

Another research stream focuses on the regional environment and strategic competition. Tran and Vieira (2013) analyzed Vietnam's hedging strategy vis-à-vis China, in which relations with Russia were seen as a component that helped Vietnam balance its foreign relations [Tran, Vieira, Ferreira-Pereira 2013: 169]. Similarly, Baev and Tonnesson (2015) questioned whether Russia could maintain a special relationship with Vietnam in the context of the pivot to Asia, thereby showing the intertwining of bilateral cooperation and regional security architecture [Baev, Tonnesson 2015: 313].

At the thematic level, Ponka, Yuniushkina, and Dubrovsky (2021) emphasized the humanitarian aspect of the Vietnam-Russia strategic partnership, considering cultural and educational exchanges as the most sustainable factor when economic and trade cooperation is still limited [Ponka, Yuniushkina, Dubrovsky 2021]. Recently, Ly and Hoang (2025) analyzed Vietnam's dilemma between two great powers and argued that Russia still holds a special role, although the US-China competition creates many new pressures [Ly, Hoang 2025].

In the Vietnamese academic community, Ha My Huong and Doan Anh Tuan (2025) provide a comprehensive historical-political overview, emphasizing the tradition of friendship and mutual trust as prominent features of Vietnam-Russia relations [Hà Mỹ Hương, Đoàn Anh Tuấn 2025]. This work adds a domestic perspective while affirming the need to reshape the relationship in the new context.

Overall, domestic and foreign studies agree that Vietnam-Russia relations are unique, formed from a historical-ideological foundation, maintain high strategic trust, and are seeking a development direction in the context of complex geopolitical

competition. However, there are still differences in emphasis: Russian academics focus more on historical and political factors, while international and Vietnamese scholars expand their analysis to the impact of the regional environment and global trends. It is this diversity that creates a vibrant academic discourse, which is the basis for the current research to propose a new analytical framework for expanded South-South cooperation.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Expanded South—South Cooperation and hybrid cooperation

South-South cooperation (SSC) is defined by the United Nations and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as a cooperation mechanism between developing countries to exchange resources, technology, knowledge, and experience with the aim of enhancing self-reliance and promoting sustainable development [Pereira, Medeiros 2015]. The core principles include respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and non-imposition of political conditions. In practice, SSC is operated through three main channels: (i) technical-technological cooperation; (ii) trade, investment, and infrastructure connectivity; and (iii) political-diplomatic and institutional cooperation [Pereira, Medeiros 2015: 113—114; Regnier 2009: 122—125].

Over the past two decades, global power shifts, supply chain crises, and strategic competition among major blocs have prompted many scholars and international organizations to propose an expansion of the Global South concept [Appiah, Grimm 2025; Cerny 1997]. The Expanded South—South Cooperation includes not only developing countries but also partners with high economic and technological capabilities, playing the role of knowledge, security, and technology providers but still maintaining an orientation of cooperation based on equality, without imposition [Heeks et. al. 2024].

The classification of Russia within the Expanded South—South Cooperation is justified by several interrelated factors. Despite being a former superpower, Russia's current international position increasingly reflects characteristics associated with Global South countries, such as its emphasis on sovereignty, resistance to Western-centric norms, and pursuit of multipolarity in global governance [Vuksanovic 2025: 134—135]. Economically, Russia maintains strong linkages with emerging markets and has actively redirected trade, investment, and energy cooperation toward Asia, Africa, and Latin America, aligning with the diversification strategies of Global South actors [Korolev 2019; Mesbahi 2024]. Politically, Russia positions itself as a champion of anti-hegemonic discourse, advocating for more inclusive international institutions and supporting developing countries in global forums.

These traits, combined with its historical partnership with Vietnam and other postcolonial states, make Russia not a typical “North” actor but rather a hybrid partner whose role in South—South networks is both pragmatic and symbolic. Therefore, considering Russia as part of the Expanded South—South Cooperation allows for a more nuanced understanding of its cooperation with Vietnam, highlighting how their partnership simultaneously draws on historical solidarity and adapts to contemporary global transformations.

2.2.2. Analytical framework

Inheriting previous studies, this article approaches the Vietnam-Russia relationship within the framework of Expanded South—South Cooperation. As pointed out, Russian scholars mainly emphasize the historical-ideological specificity and the level of strategic trust [Mazyrin 2021: 149], while international scholars focus on the balancing strategy and the context of regional competition [Baev, Tonnesson 2015: 313; Tran, Vieira, Ferreira-Pereira 2013: 173]. However, no work has systematized the Vietnam-Russia relationship as a typical case of South-South cooperation in the new global context.

To fill this gap, the study proposes an analytical framework consisting of three components.

First, the historical-political basis is considered the foundation for maintaining the stability of the relationship, demonstrated through its early formation, continuity, and absence of bilateral conflicts.

Second, the traditional pillars of cooperation, such as defense, energy, science and technology, education, and culture, both reflect complementary advantages and serve as channels for maintaining mutual trust.

Third, Vietnam's new era orientation with the goal of sustainable development, digital economy, and deep integration puts Vietnam-Russia relations in a new logic: both inheriting traditions and adapting to the needs of globalization and power shifts.

This analytical framework allows us to view Vietnam-Russia relations not only as a bilateral partnership but also as a typical case illustrating how a developing country (Vietnam) can exploit the advantages of a global strategic partner (Russia) to increase its autonomy, thereby expanding the scope and content of South-South cooperation. This is the basis for the next part of the study to assess achievements, opportunities, and challenges and propose a new strategic cooperation model.

3. Method

3.1 Research approach

The article uses a historical — policy analysis approach combined with a case study approach. This approach allows for an assessment of the process of formation and development of Vietnam—Russia relations over the past 75 years, thereby identifying the factors that constitute the sustainability and adaptability of the relationship in the new context. At the same time, the case study method helps clarify how this bilateral cooperation can become a model for relations within the framework of the Expanded South—South Cooperation.

3.2. Data sources

The research data include: (i) official archives and statistics of Vietnam and Russia; (ii) bilateral documents and joint statements; (iii) reports and publications of international organizations related to SSC and development cooperation; (iv) academic research on Vietnam-Russia relations and the Global South. In addition, the article exploits secondary data from policy analysis, specialized news and scholar interviews to supplement multidimensional perspectives.

3.3. Analytical process

The analytical process is implemented in three steps: (i) synthesizing historical and current data to identify the main stages and characteristics of Vietnam-Russia relations; (ii) classifying the factors promoting and hindering bilateral cooperation in the context of the new era; (iii) building a conceptual framework for expanded South-South cooperation, in which Vietnam-Russia is analyzed as a typical model.

4. Vietnam—Russia relations: foundation and specificity

4.1. Historical and political basis

Vietnam—Russia relations are rooted in a distinctive historical context, marked by shared struggles and enduring trust [Hà Mỹ Hương, Đoàn Anh Tuấn 2025; Huyen, Quyet Van 2022: 1495—1496]. Diplomatic ties, established on January 30, 1950, during Vietnam's anti-colonial resistance and Cold War polarization, soon evolved into a strategic partnership through Soviet aid, infrastructure development, human resource training, and crucial defense support from 1950 to 1991. These efforts enabled Vietnam to consolidate independence, reunify the country, and rebuild after war. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, relations were revitalized in the mid-1990s with a new legal foundation. In 2001, Russia became the first country with which Vietnam signed a Strategic Partnership, upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2012, signaling long-term commitment across multiple fields. From the perspective of international relations, this partnership is distinctive among Global South cases: it was established through an early ideological alliance, free of major bilateral disputes, and reinforced by strategic trust and friendship. These factors underpin its sustainability and illustrate why Vietnam—Russia ties can be framed as a model within expanded South—South cooperation.

4.2. Cooperation achievements

Building on this foundation, Vietnam and Russia have achieved progress across multiple domains. Economically, two-way trade rose from USD 363 million in 2000 to over 4.5 billion in 2018, stabilizing above 3.5 billion annually despite COVID-19 and geopolitical turbulence. The trade structure is complementary: Vietnam exports agricultural and light industrial goods while importing Russian energy, machinery, and fertilizers. Vietnamese investment in Russia has grown rapidly, notably TH True Milk's USD 2.7 billion dairy project, whereas Russian investment in Vietnam remains concentrated in oil, gas, and energy [Vuving 2025].

Defense and security remain a historic pillar. From Soviet-era military support to the reaffirmed priority in the 2001 Strategic Partnership and 2012 upgrade, cooperation has been oriented toward peace and compliance with international law. Russia continues to supply technology and resources often inaccessible to developing states, strengthening Vietnam's defense capabilities and strategic autonomy.

Science, technology, and education represent in-depth cooperation. The Vietnam—Russia Tropical Center exemplifies effective joint research in ecology, medicine, and environmental technology. The 2024 agreement to establish a Nuclear Science and

Technology Center marks a new phase of high-tech collaboration, enhancing Vietnam's innovation capacity. Educational ties remain robust, with Russia annually providing around 1,000 scholarships for Vietnamese students, thereby cultivating human capital for strategic sectors.

Culture and people-to-people exchange sustain the traditional friendship. Festivals, cultural weeks, and strong Vietnamese and Russian communities abroad foster mutual understanding and create a social foundation for cooperation. Tourism has also expanded, with Russia consistently ranking among Vietnam's top ten visitor markets.

Taken together, these achievements demonstrate that the Vietnam—Russia partnership extends well beyond politics, encompassing economic, defense, scientific, and socio-cultural dimensions. Within the framework of expanded South—South cooperation, these results highlight both the complementarity of interests and the potential to position Vietnam as a dynamic bridge connecting developing countries with a global strategic partner like Russia.

5. Proposal for a Vietnam-Russia strategic cooperation model in Expanded South—South Cooperation

5.1. Guiding principles

The construction of a Vietnam-Russia strategic cooperation model within the framework of the Expanded South—South Cooperation needs to be based on a set of clear guiding principles, both ensuring the sustainability of bilateral relations and being consistent with changes in the power structure and global economic-political order. These principles must also reflect the historical characteristics, current capacities, and strategic goals of both countries.

First, respecting the sovereignty, independence, and core interests of each side. This is a consistent principle throughout the entire Vietnam-Russia cooperation process over the past 75 years, acting as a political buffer zone to ensure the stability of relations despite international fluctuations. Within the framework of the Expanded South—South Cooperation, this principle helps maintain strategic autonomy, avoiding dependence or being dominated by pressure from other power blocs.

The second principle is equality and mutual benefit. Bilateral cooperation must create added value for both sides through a fair benefit allocation mechanism and project design that complements strengths. Vietnam can take advantage of Russia's technological, security, and energy capabilities, while Russia can exploit Vietnam's strategic position in Southeast Asia and its extensive network of relations in ASEAN and the Global South.

Third, harmoniously combine bilateral and multilateral interests. The cooperation model not only serves Vietnam-Russia relations but also contributes to regional and global initiatives, especially in the fields of energy security, climate change response, and infrastructure connectivity. This creates a spillover effect, enhancing the international position of both countries.

Fourth, be flexible and adaptable to fluctuations. In the context of rapidly changing geopolitics, the cooperation model needs to be designed in an open structure, allowing

for adjustments in priorities, implementation methods, and relevant partners. This step is especially important when some areas of cooperation may be affected by international sanctions or changes in global trade and investment policies.

Fifth, it's crucial to blend both hard and soft power. In addition to cooperation in security, energy, and technology, it is necessary to focus on cultural diplomacy, education, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. This combination not only strengthens the socio-political foundation of bilateral relations but also creates sustainable attraction for the expanded South-South cooperation model that Vietnam and Russia pursue.

With this set of principles, the Vietnam-Russia cooperation model in the Expanded South—South Cooperation will be fundamental, complementary, and highly flexible, ensuring that it both maintains the unique identity of the relationship and adapts to the new requirements of Vietnam's new era and the changing global context.

5.2. Multi-layered cooperation structure

In order for the Vietnam-Russia strategic cooperation model in the Expanded South—South Cooperation to operate effectively and sustainably, it is necessary to design a multi-layered cooperation structure, ensuring the connection between strategic and implementation levels, while creating space for the participation of many subjects. This structure should be envisioned as an ecosystem, in which each layer plays a separate but complementary role, to maximize benefits and adaptability.

First layer: State-level cooperation and policy institutions.

This is the strategic orientation layer, playing the role of establishing the legal framework, cooperation priorities, and coordination mechanisms between the two sides. Bilateral mechanisms such as the Intergovernmental Committee, the High-level Strategic Dialogue, and framework agreements in key areas (energy, defense, science-technology, and education) are the foundation to ensure stability and continuity. Within the framework of the Expanded South—South Cooperation, this layer should expand its scope to emerging areas such as the digital economy, cybersecurity, renewable energy, and climate change response, while ensuring compatibility with international law and each country's multilateral commitments.

Second layer: Cooperation between enterprises and the private sector.

Enterprises are the direct implementers of cooperation projects, transforming political agreements into concrete socio-economic results. In Vietnam-Russia relations, this layer includes large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises operating in trade, services, processing, and tourism. To improve efficiency, it is necessary to build priority economic corridors, creating favorable conditions for tariffs, logistics, and payment mechanisms. In addition, the formation of joint ventures and cooperation projects in the fields of high technology, clean energy, and processing industry should be encouraged in order to meet Vietnam's sustainable development requirements and Russia's diversification strategy.

Third layer: Academic cooperation, civil society, and people-to-people exchanges.

This is the foundation layer, playing the role of strengthening mutual understanding, nurturing social capital, and maintaining the continuity of relations. Universities, research institutes, non-governmental organizations, professional

associations, and overseas Vietnamese communities are key actors in this layer. Academic cooperation and joint research not only train high-quality human resources but also create new knowledge for policymaking and technological innovation. Cultural, sports, tourism, and people-to-people exchange programs contribute to creating a favorable social foundation for implementing agreements at higher levels.

Interlayer linkage mechanism.

A core point of the multi-layer structure is to ensure smooth connection between the three layers of cooperation. This requires an interdisciplinary coordination mechanism, possibly the Vietnam–Russia Strategic Cooperation Council with the participation of representatives of the State, businesses, academia, and civil society. This council acts as a coordinating brain, helping to adjust policies in a timely manner, resolve problems, and ensure interaction between strategic orientations and practical needs. With such a multi-layered cooperation structure, the Vietnam–Russia model not only maintains strategic stability but also enhances adaptability, expands cooperation to new areas, and increases influence in the Expanded South—South Cooperation space. This is a prerequisite for transforming cooperation potential into concrete results while strengthening Vietnam’s position in the new era as a strategic bridge between developing countries and powerful global partners.

5.3. Priority areas of cooperation

In order for the Vietnam–Russia strategic cooperation model in the Expanded South—South Cooperation to be truly effective, it is necessary to identify a number of priority areas, both taking advantage of each side’s comparative advantages and meeting Vietnam’s development goals in the new era. These areas do not exist in isolation but need to be implemented according to interdisciplinary and integrated thinking in order to create a resonance effect between the pillars of cooperation.

First, energy security and sustainable energy infrastructure development.

Energy is the most traditional and effective area of cooperation between Vietnam and Russia, with typical projects such as Vietsovpetro, Rusvietpetro, and Vietgazprom. In the new period, cooperation needs to be expanded to renewable energy (wind power, solar power), liquefied natural gas (LNG), and energy storage technology. At the same time, the development of energy transmission and distribution infrastructure needs to be placed within the framework of green transition, ensuring that Vietnam meets its emission reduction commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Second, science, technology, and innovation.

Russia has many strengths in core technology sectors, from nuclear energy and aerospace to new materials, artificial intelligence, and biomedicine. Vietnam can take advantage of research cooperation programs, technology transfer, and human resource training to improve national innovation capacity. The Nuclear Science and Technology Center project in Vietnam is a typical example that needs to be replicated in other areas, such as environmental technology, biotechnology, and cybersecurity.

Third, trade and investment with complementary value chains.

Vietnam has strengths in agricultural products, seafood, and consumer goods, while Russia is strong in energy, industrial raw materials, and technical equipment. Designing complementary value chains, from production and processing to distribution, will help

increase bilateral trade value. In addition, it is necessary to promote two-way investment, especially joint ventures in food processing, light industry, logistics, and high technology.

Fourth, education, training and strategic human resource development.

Educational cooperation should be enhanced through joint training programs, joint degree programs, and interdisciplinary research projects. Maintaining and expanding the number of Russian scholarships for Vietnamese students, while increasing the exchange of scholars and experts, will contribute to forming strategic human resources for key sectors such as energy, information technology, medicine, and public administration.

Fifth, culture, tourism and people-to-people diplomacy.

Cultural exchange and tourism cooperation are both channels for enhancing mutual understanding and directly contributing to economic development and soft power. Russia is one of Vietnam's major international tourist markets, and Vietnam has the potential to attract Russian tourists with its leisure, cultural, and medical tourism products. Cultural diplomacy, art events, and media cooperation will create a favorable social foundation for implementing other cooperation projects.

By focusing resources on these priority areas, the Vietnam-Russia cooperation model in the Expanded South—South Cooperation will ensure both quick benefits from economic and trade projects and long-term benefits from knowledge, technology, and cultural cooperation, thereby strengthening the strategic position of both countries in the changing world order.

6. Conclusion

Vietnam-Russia relations, with a foundation of 75 years of continuous cooperation and high strategic trust, have demonstrated their adaptability and sustainability in the face of profound changes in the international environment. In the context of Vietnam's new era, a period focusing on sustainable development, green economy, digital transformation, and deep integration, this bilateral relationship is not only meaningful in maintaining traditions but also opens up new prospects if restructured in a direction consistent with the Expanded South—South Cooperation.

The article has analyzed the historical-political foundation, the current state of cooperation in key areas, as well as existing opportunities and challenges. On that basis, the study proposes a model of Vietnam-Russia strategic cooperation built on five guiding principles, operating in a multi-layered structure, focusing on priority areas, and supported by feasible policy implications. This model combines hard and soft power, ensuring bilateral benefits while creating spillover effects in regional and global cooperation mechanisms.

Theoretically, the study contributes to expanding the conceptual framework of South-South cooperation, integrating elements of hybrid cooperation between developing countries and global strategic partners. In practice, the proposed model provides a clear framework for action for Vietnam and Russia to not only strengthen

bilateral relations but also enhance their positions in the Expanded South—South Cooperation network and in the reshaping world order.

In the long term, realizing this model requires strong political commitment, flexible coordination mechanisms, and synchronous participation of actors at all three levels: the state, businesses, and civil society. If successfully implemented, the Vietnam-Russia relationship can become a new model of strategic cooperation, both inheriting historical values and meeting the development requirements of the times.

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