

Bantengan Art and Ideology: The Independent Banteng Dance as a Spirit of Freedom

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<p>SEJARAH ARTIKEL Diterima: 17 September 2024 Direvisi: 1 Oktober 2024 Disetujui: 28 Oktober 2024 Diterbitkan: 31 Oktober 2024</p> <p>*Corresponding belindadewi@students.unnes.ac.id</p> <p> 10.22219/satwika.v8i2.37483</p> <p> jurnalsatwika@umm.ac.id</p> <p>How to Cite Regina, B. D., Suharto, S., & Wibawanto, W. (2024). Bantengan Art and Ideology: The Independent Banteng Dance as a Spirit of Freedom. <i>Satwika: Kajian Ilmu Budaya dan Perubahan Sosial</i>, 8 (2), 592-600. https://doi.org/10.22210/satwika.v8i2.37483</p>	<p>ABSTRAK</p> <p>Bantengan art, as part of East Javanese traditional culture, not only functions as entertainment, but also as a medium for social and ideological expression that is full of symbolic meaning. This research aims to analyze the relationship between Bantengan art and the ideology of freedom, with a focus on the Merdeka Banteng Dance as a representation of the spirit of freedom. The Merdeka Bantengan. Dance, one of the important elements in this art, is often associated with the spirit of resistance and freedom. This research uses a qualitative approach. Data was collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with artists and cultural figures, as well as studying related literature. The analysis was carried out using thematic analysis and semiology methods to understand the symbolism contained in dance movements, costumes and music. The research results show that the Merdeka Bantengan Dance reflects the ideology of freedom through the use of the Bantengan symbol as a representation of strength and resistance to oppression. Through cultural and ideological meaning, the Merdeka Banteng Dance becomes a means of communication and expression of the spirit of freedom that is rooted in Bantengan art. This research provides new insight into how traditional art can function as a mirror of ideology and become a means of social expression in society.</p> <p>Kata kunci: <i>free bantengan dance; freedom ideology; ethnography; symbolism</i></p> <p>ABSTRACT</p> <p><i>Kesenian Bantengan, sebagai bagian dari budaya tradisional Jawa Timur, tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga sebagai media ekspresi sosial dan ideologis yang sarat makna simbolis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara kesenian Bantengan dengan ideologi kebebasan, dengan fokus pada Tari Banteng Merdeka sebagai representasi spirit kebebasan. Tari Banteng Merdeka, salah satu elemen penting dalam kesenian ini, sering diasosiasikan dengan semangat perlawanan dan kebebasan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan para pelaku kesenian dan budayawan, serta studi literatur terkait. Analisis dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode analisis tematik dan semiologi untuk memahami simbolisme yang terkandung dalam gerakan tari, kostum, dan musik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Tari Banteng Merdeka merefleksikan ideologi kebebasan melalui penggunaan simbol banteng sebagai representasi kekuatan dan perlawanan terhadap penindasan. Melalui pemaknaan budaya dan ideologis, Tari Banteng Merdeka menjadi sarana komunikasi dan ekspresi dari semangat kebebasan yang mengakar dalam kesenian Bantengan. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan baru mengenai bagaimana seni tradisional dapat berfungsi sebagai cermin ideologi dan menjadi alat ekspresi sosial dalam masyarakat.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>kesenian bantengan; tari banteng merdeka; ideologi kebebasan; etnografi; simbolisme</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

In bantengan art in society this occurs due to differences in views, interests and involvement between the older generation (who still highly uphold the bantengan tradition) and the younger generation, who are often more interested in popular or modern culture.

The younger generation is generally less interested in traditional arts such as bantengan, especially because they are more exposed to popular culture, digital technology and modern lifestyles (Pinihanti, 2020). This makes bantengan less attractive and considered less relevant to their daily lives (Karmini, 2023). Many young people consider bantengan to be "outdated" compared to modern entertainment such as music, movies, or video games (Wahyudiyanto, 2023).

Many Bantengan communities still rely on an informal system of inheriting this art, from parents or village leaders to the next generation without structured training. As a result, there is no consistent system for teaching the values and skills of bantengan to the younger generation, so many of them do not understand the values or techniques of this art well (Oktaviani et al., 2024).

The mystical or trance element in bantengan, which is seen as sacred by the older generation, is often considered less relevant or even frightening by the younger generation (Syakuro et al., 2023). Many young people feel uncomfortable or skeptical about the spiritual and mystical elements in bantengan, so they are reluctant to get involved in this art (Firmansyah et al., 2023). This creates a gap between the views of the older generation who value mystical elements and the younger generation who are more pragmatic (Bauto, 2016).

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Bantengan art rarely gets enough coverage from mainstream media, which tends to focus more on

popular culture. As a result, the younger generation does not know or understand this art, except for those who grew up in an environment that maintains it. The lack of media exposure also means that bantengans are not attractive enough for the younger generation, who are more exposed to modern entertainment via the internet and social media. In some communities, getting involved in the art of bantengan requires a lot of money or time.

The younger generation may be more focused on education or career, and see traditional arts such as bantengans as something that does not provide financial benefits. This gap makes the younger generation tend to prefer activities that are considered more "productive" rather than participating in traditional activities such as bantengans.

For the older generation, bantengan is not only art, but also a means of strengthening social ties, preserving ancestral values, and carrying out cultural obligations (Astuti et al., 2022). On the other hand, the younger generation living in the modern era views this art more from an entertainment perspective (Nurhasanah et al., 2021). This gap in views means that the younger generation tends not to be emotionally and socially attached to bantengans, so they feel less compelled to preserve or be involved in it.

Traditional arts often play an important role in expressing the social, cultural and ideological values of a society. In East Java, Bantengan art is a form of performing art that is thick with symbolism and meaning (Irianto, 2017). In this art, the Merdeka Bantengan Dance is a striking element and attracts attention because it is considered to represent the spirit of freedom, strength, and resistance to various forms of oppression (Faturrahman et al., 2023). The Independent Bantengan Dance, as part of the Bantengan art, contains the symbol of a Bantengan (Gafur et al., 1970). Which in many cultures is seen as a symbol of strength, courage and the spirit of independence (Deni, 2024).

The Bantengan art phenomenon is developing in society as a cultural form that is not only entertainment, but also a medium for conveying ideological messages (Ni Wayan Masyuni Sujayanthi & Ni Putu Hartini, 2023). In this case, the ideology of freedom is one of the central themes that can be found in various elements of this art, especially in the

Merdeka Bantengan Dance ([Afifah & Irawan, 2021](#)). In colonial and postcolonial times, this art was often associated with the struggle of ordinary people who tried to free themselves from oppression ([Sudirana, 2019](#)).

Therefore, the Merdeka Bantengan Dance is not just a spectacle, but also a manifestation of the spirit of resistance and freedom ([Indraningsih Jeno et al., 2023](#)). In this case, although several studies have discussed Bantengan art in the context of culture and spirituality the ideological aspect, especially freedom, has not been explored in depth. Many studies highlight aspects of ritual or symbolism in Bantengan, but they are not sufficient to explain how this art can represent the ideology of freedom or resistance. Among them 1) J.L.A. Brandes - As an ethnographer, Brandes conducted research on various Indonesian cultural traditions, including bantengan performances. He linked bantengan to aspects of Javanese belief and the symbolism contained in its rituals. 2) Herman L. Pospisil - An anthropologist who also conducted studies on aspects of ritual and symbolism in Javanese cultural traditions, including bantengan. His research often highlights the role of these performances in the social structure and beliefs of society.

Relevant previous research namely 1) ([Prasetyo & Kumalasari, 2021](#)). "Structural Functionalism as a Transmission Process of Bantengan Art in Batu City" This study focuses on the structural-functionalist perspective of Bantengan art in Batu, East Java, specifically examining the transmission of cultural practices. Findings reveal that Bantengan functions as a means of cultural transmission and social function within society, helping to preserve local traditions and values. This is different from the author's research which focuses more on cultural transmission rather than the ideological essence of performances in the context of freedom. 2) ([Nur Sekreningsih & Mia Juliana, 2021](#)). "The Symbolic Meaning of the Putra Jaya Association of Bantengan Art in Trawas District, Mojokerto Regency" Fitrotin's research explores the symbolic meaning of the Bantengan performance in Mojokerto.

It depicts a symbolic struggle between good (represented by the bantengan) and evil (represented by the tiger), which may align with the themes of freedom and resistance explored in the author's study. However, Fitrotin's focus is on symbolic representation, not on the post-colonial or political readings of freedom and independence found in the author's research. 3) ([Pianto et al., 2023](#)). "Bantengan Performance by the 'Banteng Wareng' Group in Madyopuro Village, Malang City". This thesis examines

the Bantengan performance in Malang by paying attention to its social and cultural dimensions. Radhia discusses the preservation of local Javanese traditions and the role of magical practices, offering a sociocultural view of Bantengan. This contrasts with the author's research which analyzes the practice in the context of ritual and magic rather than focusing on the political and ideological underpinnings of freedom and autonomy. 4) ([Pratikno & Hartatik, 2023](#)). "The Meaning and Transmission of the Summoning Mantra, the Javanese Art of Bantengan, Mburing Malang Region, East Java". This study explores the spiritual and ritualistic aspects of the Bantengan performance, with an emphasis on the summoning of ancestral spirits in the performance. Although this book provides insight into the spiritual ideologies associated with Bantengan, it does not directly address the contemporary ideological readings (e.g., freedom and resistance) that the author's research seeks to explore. 5) ([Herמיawan, 2013](#)). "Efforts to Preserve Bantengan Art in the Prigen Area, Pasuruan Regency" This research focuses on efforts to preserve Bantengan as a form of art in Prigen using Max Weber's theory of social action. This research closely examines the role of society in maintaining traditions, but differs from the author's research in that it does not discuss the specific ideological aspects of Bantengan as a symbol of freedom and resistance, which is the main focus of the author's research. This research aims to examine in depth the relationship between Bantengan art and the ideology of freedom which is reflected through the Merdeka Banteng Dance ([Darwis, 2018](#)).

This research explore how the Merdeka Bantengan Dance functions as a medium for ideological expression that reflects social struggle and the spirit of freedom (Ana Irhandayaningsih, 2018). In this context, Bantengan traditional art is understood as a reflection of the social dynamics of society and how the values of freedom are articulated through dance symbolism ([Manik Suryani et al., 2023](#)).

Apart from that, this research also aims to analyze dance elements, such as movement, costumes and music, which support the narrative of freedom and resistance ([Wirasanti, 2023](#)). Thus, it is hoped that this research can contribute to the understanding of traditional arts as a medium for ideological expression, as well as how the Merdeka Banteng Dance represents the spirit of freedom in the local cultural context ([Faradilla & Ahmad, 2023](#)).

The novelty of this research is that it shows that 1) Association with the Ideology of Freedom: Many studies on bantengan focus on cultural or ritual aspects,

but this research focuses on how the bantengan dance can be understood as a form of expression of the ideology of freedom. It provides a new perspective on how art can reflect or even champion social and political values. 2) Transformation and Political Meaning: By highlighting the Merdeka Bantengan Dance, this title may be trying to express how the bantengan, which originally functioned as entertainment or ritual, has been transformed into a symbol of struggle and freedom. This opens up space to explore how traditional art can be adapted to convey contemporary messages relating to independence and national identity.

This provides a new perspective on Bantengan, namely that this art can be seen as a form of expression or representation of the idea of freedom (Chairul, 2019). Related research from this research is concerning Symbolic Meanings in Bantengan Art: Cultural Anthropological Study of the Bantengan Community in Malang (Budiwirman et al., 2023). The difference with researchers lies in ideology. Meanwhile, the similarities are related to the art of bantengan (Agus Subandi, 2011).

By viewing the Merdeka Bantengan Dance as a symbol of freedom, this research will explore how traditional arts can play an important role in reflecting and shaping society's ideological awareness, especially related to the spirit of freedom (Qur'aniyah et al., 2023).

The contribution of this research is that it can deepen understanding of the role of Bantengan art as more than just a form of entertainment or cultural expression; but rather as an ideological medium that voices the spirit of freedom (Anggrani & Karsiwan, 2024). Through this research, we can understand how people use traditional symbols to express ideologies of resistance, courage and independence in the local cultural context.

METHOD

This type of research is qualitative, this allows researchers to explore people's perceptions, values and interpretations regarding Bantengan art.

This research was located in Malang, East Java, precisely in RW 08, Oro-oro Dowo Village, Malang City. Below is a location map Malang, East Java, precisely in RW 08, Oro-oro Dowo Village, Malang City.

This data source uses primary and secondary data. Primary data here uses in-depth interviews: Collect data from artists (dancers, musicians, trainers, choreographers) involved in the Merdeka Banteng

Dance, as well as observers or the public who are familiar with the performance. Interviews can help explore the ideological meaning they feel and understand regarding freedom in this dance. Direct Observation: Directly observe the Banteng Merdeka Dance performance to capture the symbolism, expression, and visual or bodily interpretation of the dance that reflects the spirit of freedom. Performance Recording: Using video or documentation of dance performances to analyze more deeply the ritual and symbolic elements present, such as costumes, body movements, and interactions between dancers and audience.

This secondary data uses. The first secondary data reviews about Historical and Cultural Literature: Historical books, articles, or journals that discuss bantengan, the history of the struggle for independence, or freedom in a socio-political context. This will provide context on how the traditional art of bantengan can be connected to the ideology of freedom. Academic Articles and Publications: Previous research that examines aspects of freedom in traditional art, bantengan, or other cultural symbolism. Cultural Documents: Recorded oral stories or documents that explain how the Merdeka Bantengan Dance developed and the meaning contained in its movements.

Data collection techniques using In-depth Interview: Interview techniques are used to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Merdeka Banteng Dance for artists and society. Researchers can explore their views and experiences regarding how this dance reflects freedom, social change, or ideology of struggle. Participant Observation: Researchers can be directly involved in the rehearsal or performance process to observe how elements such as music, body movements, and costumes work to convey an ideological message. This observation can be done either actively (joining in the performance) or passively (watching the performance). Visual Documentation: Using video recordings of the Banteng Merdeka Dance performance to observe and analyze the movements, symbolism and changes in this dance form related to freedom and struggle. Documentation and Literature Study: Collect data from books, articles, reports and other sources that explain the historical, cultural and ideological background related to bantengan, as well as the relevance of this art in a socio-political context.

Data analysis techniques using Semiotic Analysis: Using semiotic theory to analyze symbolism in dance, costume, and music. Semiotics will help reveal how

the visual and auditory elements in the Merdeka Bantengan Dance communicate the ideology of freedom and resistance to oppression or colonialism. Narrative Analysis: If there is a story or lyrics conveyed in a dance or performance, narrative analysis can be used to understand how the story reflects struggle, freedom, and certain ideologies. This may include analysis of the story structure, characters, and messages conveyed. Historical Contextual Analysis: Using a historical approach to see the development of the bantengan dance in relation to political and social history, such as the Indonesian independence struggle or certain local struggles. This approach will assess how the Banteng Merdeka dance emerged as a form of expression of the ideology of freedom that is relevant in a historical context. Visual and Audio Analysis: Analyze video or audio recordings of performances to assess body movements, use of costumes, and music selected. Researchers will look at how these elements convey the message of the ideology of freedom.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Bantengan Dance is a traditional dance originating from East Javanese culture, especially in the Malang area and its surroundings. This art is usually played by two people. The roles of the two people are divided into front legs and back legs. The role of the front legs is to hold the bantengan's head and control the bantengan's dance. While the hind legs act as the bantengan's tail. These two people are usually played by two men.

The costume usually used for the bantengan dance is made of black cloth and a mask in the shape of a bantengan's head made of wood. Apart from that, the bantengan's head also features real buffalo or bantengan horns. The movements in the Bantengan dance are the two bantengan tail steps, the lombo gedong, junjungan, and sliding movements. These movements have a dashing character and are played by men with a large volume of hand, body and foot movements. This bantengan is always accompanied by a group of people who play typical bantengan music with musical instruments in the form of gongs, drums, etc. Below we explain how to understand the symbolism contained in dance movements, costumes and music.

The meaning of symbols contained in dance movements

Symbols have the meaning of throwing, throwing or uniting a visible object or idea, so that the object represents that idea. Symbols can lead a person to ideas

about the future or the past. Discussion of how the symbols for bull dance movements are explained by (- et al., 2015).

That a symbol is an image that usually symbolizes a certain message. For example, if you see the ° symbol, it means the symbol represents degrees. Indira also explained that a dance movement is full of symbols which have an important role in knowing the meaning. This is also in line with what researchers have researched, namely that dance movements have symbolic meanings whose meanings can be known.



Figure 1. The meaning of dance movement symbols banteng
(Source:@Ikonesia HD Youtube channel)

In the [figure 1](#) above shows that In this dance, there are various movements and symbols that have deep meaning, both spiritual, social and cultural. The following are some of the symbolic meanings of the movements in the Bantengan Dance: 1) Movements that imitate the behavior of a bantengan, such as stomping, jumping, or ducking before attacking, symbolize courage, firmness, and strength. Bantengans are considered strong animals and do not give up easily, so their movements reflect the spirit of struggle. 2) Some movements depict bantengans as protectors of communities from harm or threats. This stems from the local belief that the bantengan is a symbol of guardian or protector of community harmony. 3) Bantengan dance is often associated with spiritual elements. Certain movements performed by dancers are considered a way to communicate with ancestral spirits or supernatural forces. This can be seen in movements that show respect, such as bowing or circling something. 4) The dance movements that resemble a bantengan also symbolize the relationship between humans and nature. Bantengans as wild creatures remind humans to respect and maintain environmental balance. 5) Symbol of The Bantengan Dance is usually played in groups, which shows cooperation and togetherness. The harmonious movements between

dancers symbolize the importance of harmony in social life.

Every movement in the Bantengan Dance has a strong symbolic meaning, and this makes this dance not just entertainment, but also a means of preserving the cultural and spiritual values of the local community.

The meaning of the symbols contained in dance costumes

Dance clothing or costumes are clothing specifically designed to cover a dancer's body during a dance performance. Its function is to add beauty to the appearance, clarify the character of the character, differentiate each role and provide facilities to help with movement. The discussion regarding dance costumes was stated by ([Dana, 2022](#)) that all clothing and equipment are worn by dancers when on stage. This clothing model consists of basic clothing, leg clothing, body clothing, head clothing and various other accessories. Dana also explained that costumes contain symbols that are full of rituals in a dance. This is also in line with researchers' thoughts that in a dance performance, costumes play a very important role in the dance performance and dance costumes also have symbolic meanings that are conditional on religious values.



Figure 2. The meaning of dance costume symbols bantengan

(Source: @lklanesia HD Youtube channel)

In the [figure 2](#) above shows that the costumes in the Bantengan Dance have deep symbolic meaning, reflecting various cultural, spiritual and philosophical aspects of East Javanese society. The following is the meaning of the elements of the Bantengan Dance costume: 1) Mask or Bantengan Head. Symbol of Strength and Courage: The bantengans head symbolizes strength, steadfastness and courage. Bantengans are considered strong, tough and ready to protect animals. Symbol of Ancestral Spirits: In a spiritual context, the bantengan's head is also considered a medium for presenting ancestral spirits or supernatural powers which are believed to provide protection and blessings.

2) Bantengan Body Costume. Symbol of Unity: The bantengan body costume is usually performed by two dancers who work together to move the "bantengan". This reflects the importance of cooperation and unity in social life. Representation of Natural Power: The bantengan's large and sturdy body shape symbolizes natural power that humans must respect and protect. 3) Costume Color. Black: The dominant color in a bantengan's costume is often black, symbolizing strength, steadfastness and mystery. This color also reflects the connection with spiritual elements. Red: Often used as an accent, symbolizes courage, passion and energy. White: Sometimes found in costume details, symbolizes purity, harmony, and respect for ancestors. 4) Costume Accessories. Gold or Silver Ornaments: Symbolizes glory and honor. These accessories also show that the bantengan dance is not just an ordinary performance, but has high value in local culture. Bells or Anklet: Bells attached to the costume symbolize the spirit of life and provide a distinctive rhythm to the dance, adding a magical element to the performance. 5) Mask Symbols and Other Player Makeup. In addition to the bantengan costume, other players who act as companions usually wear costumes or makeup that symbolize certain elements: Tiger Mask: Symbolizes courage and ingenuity. Other Dancers' Attire: Supporting dancers often wear traditional clothing or brightly colored costumes to balance the energy of the dance.

The costumes in the Bantengan Dance are not only an aesthetic element, but have rich symbolism of cultural, spiritual and social values. Each element of this costume reflects a philosophy of life, connection with nature, as well as respect for ancestors and supernatural powers.

The meaning of the symbols contained in dance music

The definition of Musical Art comes from two words, namely "art" and "music". The word Art can be interpreted as a beautiful and extraordinary work resulting from human creativity, feeling and intention, while in the definition of Music it is the result of processing tones or sounds, harmony, melody, rhythm, tempo and vocals. These two things were combined to give rise to the term Musical Art which can be interpreted as a work formed from tonal sounds with beautiful harmony ([Windiyarti, 2017](#)). According to Windiyarti, music has symbols in it, whether they have religious, social meaning, etc. This is also in line with

researchers' thoughts that music has symbolic meanings in it that are full of religion.



Figure 3. The meaning of dance music symbols bantengan
(Source: @Iklanesia HD Youtube channel)

In the [figure 3](#) above shows that music in the Bantengan Dance has a very important role, both as an accompaniment to the dance movements and as an element that strengthens the spiritual, emotional and cultural meaning of the dance. The following is the symbolic meaning of the music in the Bantengan Dance:

1) Symbol of Spirituality and Transcendence. The music used in the Bantengan Dance often has magical and spiritual elements. The rhythm of the music is believed to "invite" or "connect" ancestral spirits or supernatural powers that are believed to protect the community. Instruments such as gongs or drums are played to create a solemn atmosphere, symbolizing respect for the spiritual world. 2) Symbol of Energy and Power. The dynamic and varied tempo of the music reflects the bantengan's strength and energy. The fast beat depicts the spirit, courage and strength of the bantengan in action. Percussion instruments, such as drums and kenong, are often used to imitate the sound of a bantengan's stomp or movement, giving the impression of dominance and power. 3) Symbol of Life and Harmony. The music played during the dance symbolizes harmony between humans, nature, and supernatural beings. The combination of various traditional instruments creates a rhythm that unites these elements. Melodies from musical instruments such as the flute or gamelan symbolize beauty and balance in life, although colored by the strengths and challenges depicted by dance. 4) Warning or Precaution Symbol. Certain tones, especially loud and sudden ones, are often interpreted as warnings or signs of alertness for danger. This music reminds people to always be careful and respect the forces of nature. 5) Symbol of Culture and Identity. The traditional music in the Bantengan Dance reflects the rich culture of East Java, especially the heritage of the people of Malang and

its surroundings. The musical instruments used, such as gongs, drums and angklung, reflect local identity and are a symbol of preserving tradition.

The music in the Bantengan Dance is not just accompaniment, but has a symbolic meaning that includes spiritual aspects, strength, harmony and cultural identity. The rhythms and instruments used reflect the philosophy of the local community and maintain a balance between the real world and the supernatural world.

CONCLUSION

The research "Bantengan Art and Ideology: Free Banteng Dance as a Spirit of Freedom" shows that the Free Banteng Dance functions as a medium for cultural expression as well as a channel for communicating the ideology of freedom. This dance displays the symbol of a banteng which represents strength, steadfastness and courage as a form of resistance to injustice. Through dynamic movements, evocative music, and distinctive costumes, this dance depicts a deep and inspiring spirit of freedom. As a traditional art form, the Merdeka Banteng Dance also plays an important role in maintaining local cultural identity. This dance not only strengthens people's sense of pride in their cultural heritage, but also serves as a tool to instill and strengthen the values of courage and freedom. Thus, the Merdeka Banteng Dance is not just part of the Bantengan art, but also a symbol of resistance and freedom that is relevant in the social life of society. Through an aesthetic perspective and cultural symbolism, this art proves that traditional art has the capacity to communicate significant ideological messages, as well as being an inspiration for society in facing and fighting forms of oppression in everyday life.

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