

## KRONIK FILMEDIA'S RECEPTION TOWARDS FLORIAN GALLENBERGER'S *COLONIA*

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes the audience's reception of *Colonia*, a 2016 film by Florian Gallenberger. As a popular work, *Colonia* is a docudrama film that presents historical events happened in Chile during the coup of General Augusto Pinochet in 1973. The problems analyzed in this article are the reception process of respondents and the quality of *Colonia* as popular films. The film is chosen for the study as it received five nominations from German Film Awards 2016 and won Bavarian Film Awards 2016 for Best Production category, but it only has a rating of 26% from 47 reviews by Rotten Tomatoes. The respondents involved in this study are members of Kronik Filmedia of Diponegoro University. Kronik Filmedia is the university film club that focuses on producing short films and appreciating films by conducting film discussions. The purpose of the study is to describe the reception processes of respondents who are affected by their horizon of expectations and to prove that not all of popular works are low literature. The theory used in this paper is the Aesthetic of Reception theory by Hans Robert Jauss. The main concept of this theory is horizon of expectations. Horizon of expectations is a reader's preferences from the previous experiences or readings. For the methodology, this paper uses qualitative research and focus group discussion as the data collecting method. Focus group discussion is a gathering data method by means of interviewing respondents in a forum consisted of five to eight people. Focus group discussion is an effective method to observe a social phenomenon or a case study. The data obtained is then analyzed as texts to draw a conclusion. The research involves eight members of Kronik Filmedia as respondents. The results of the research show the reception of Kronik Filmedia as *Colonia* can satisfy and even surpass seven out of eight respondents' horizon of expectations as the film goes to be more 'interesting' and 'thrilling'. All respondents also view that *Colonia* is worth to be studied and discussed as those of high literature.

**Keywords:** Reception; Film; Docudrama; Audiences

### Introduction

Along with the development of technology, film has become one of the most popular works among the society. Almost every city in the world has theaters or cinemas. Film has become more popular because they are produced in large quantities and distributed globally. This makes the film as one part of popular literary works. Dr.

Totawad Nagnath Ramrao (Ramrao, 2016) mentioned in his journal that "film is considered as a branch of literature" (p. 151). Film shares many similar elements with drama.

Film as a literary work is interesting for literary experts and academics to make it an object of research. Almost every time a new film is released, academics and literary experts will make it as the object of

their researches. Even so, there are many people who view films as popular literary works think that film is less serious as an object of a study. Many people belittle popular literary works and underestimate the function of popular literary works because they think that popular literature is not aesthetic.

Those who belittle popular works ignore that popular works are part of popular culture. Guerin (Guerin, 2019) explains this view as "the cinema is often considered the bastard child of other arts and visual media" (p. 107). Popular works like films may influence the audience and directly or indirectly give birth to new habits in popular culture. These works can create new or shift the existing patterns in a society. In relation with this, Civelek (Civelek, 2012) in his thesis *Food in Film: A Study on Audience Reception* explains his findings:

"Nevertheless, though they [participants] refer to different films, different film scenes, whilst narrating the meanings they assigned and poached within these scenes, in their particular stories a shared aspect and emphasis come into prominence, which is – self-formation and stylization of life" (p. 81).

In other words, popular works are not just works which functions as entertainment and do not contain values other than pleasure.

Although considered as low literature, more or less popular works have their own beauty and have value that they convey to the audience. Since many studies of popular works only focus on the work itself, there is not much research that emphasizes on the readers. The relationship between the work and the

audience is an important factor to decide whether a work can be accepted or not by the audience. Of course, works that can meet the horizon of expectations of the reader or the audience can be accepted by the society (Jauss, 1982).

Every reader or audience of a work cannot be separated from their horizon of expectations. Work that approaches the horizon of expectations of the reader or audience will certainly be well received. This relates to the history or knowledge of the reader or audience with the work they have just received (Jauss, 1982). There is one formula that is quite popular among readers or audience which is docudrama films or films that are based on true stories. For example, *Habibie Ainun* (2012), *Rudy Habibie* (2016), and *Soe Hok Gie* (2005) are very popular in Indonesia.

The film that will be the object of study in this research is *Colonia* (2015). This film is one of many films that use the docudrama formula. The film is based on a true story and set on a coup attempt in Chile against General Augusto Pinochet in 1973. However, the film is underrated as it only has a rating of 26% from 47 reviews by Rotten Tomatoes. In the other hand, the film won Bavarian Film Awards 2016 as Best Production film and received five nominations from German Film Awards 2016. In this study, *Colonia* will not be studied using an objective approach but pragmatic approach. This research will use Hans Robert Jauss's literary reception theory which is the aesthetics of reception to study the audience reception of the film.

Respondents involved in this study are members of Kronik Filmedia of Diponegoro University. Kronik Filmedia is the university film club for students. Kronik Filmedia also the oldest film club registered in Semarang, Indonesia. They focus their activity on producing short film or appreciating film. The members of

Kronik Filmedia are active in attending a film discussion or even conducting one. Some members even have experience in making a documentary film or conducting a documentary seminar. Viewing their experiences in film activities, Kronik Filmedia members prove as competent candidates to participate in the study.

While there are not many studies on docudrama film, previous study on documentary film had been conducted by Nur Inayah Yushar (Yushar, 2016) in her thesis entitled *Resepsi Mahasiswa UIN Alaudin Makassa Terhadap Film Dokumenter Sicko*. Yushar uses Stuart Hall's reception theory, namely encoding and decoding, and the focus group discussion method as a data collection method in her thesis. Data variation occurs according to Yushar because it is influenced by one's interpretative ability as she stated in her thesis:

“Dua informan yang memiliki perhatian pada satu adegan yang sama menginterpretasi film secara berbeda. Hal ini dipengaruhi oleh daya interpretasi ... Informan dengan latar belakang keilmuan yang berbeda secara otomatis memiliki daya interpretatif yang berbeda pula” (p. 87).

On the other hand, the horizon of expectations or can be called the preferences of previous experiences becomes the main variable in this study to determine the position of the audience in perceiving a work. Few differences can be found in Fathurizki and Malau's study which shows that socio-cultural backgrounds become the main variable of their study. Fathurizki and Malau (Fathurizki & Malau, 2018) stated that the difference in the position of the audience

was caused by “*latar belakang sosial-budaya informan yang berbeda-beda*” (p. 34) or the differences in socio-cultural background of the informants. Different theories will produce different data. In contrast to Yushar's research, to determine the position of the audience, Fathurizki and Malau uses Stuart Hall's theory of three reading positions instead of encoding and decoding.

The problem that will be studied in this research is how the horizon of expectations of an audience affects the reception experience in watching or enjoying a work. The next problem is how the audience interprets a popular work that is often seen as low literature. Based on the problems above, the purpose of this research is to describe the audiences' reception experience of *Colonia*. Furthermore, this research is also intended to prove that not all popular works are easy and meaningless.

Theoretically, this research can give new insights in the application of literary reception theory. This research is expected to help other researchers who try to apply reception theory in their research. As for the practical benefits, this research attempts to answer the accusation that popular works are works that can be enjoyed without deeper thoughts.

This study uses Hans Robert Jauss's reception aesthetic theory so that the research conducted becomes more focused and specific. While the method to be used is a qualitative research method based on John W. Creswell's research design in his book, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Creswell, 2014). As for the data collection method, this study will use focus group discussions.

Literary works require the role of the society in its development. A good

society is a society that respects and loves art. Works such as novels and poetry depend on sales. Works such as drama and film depend on the audience to survive. The social structure's role is to affirm the aesthetic aspects of works so they can be appreciated.

It is very clear that the society must be involved in the development of literary works. When literary works are presented to the society and well appreciated, surely the literary works can develop and survive. It is different when a literary work is offered to people who do not have appreciation and love for literary works, then the work will not develop and gradually lose its existence.

From the descriptions above, the reception theory is a theory that can be used in this research. Reception theory emphasizes the attention on the reception of the reader or audience. Jauss (Jauss, 1982) in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* reveals:

"The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. Variation and correction determine the scope, whereas alteration and reproduction determine the borders of a genre-structure. The interpretative reception of a text always presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception: the question of the subjectivity of the interpretation and of the taste of different readers or levels of readers can be asked meaningfully only when one has first clarified which transsubjective horizon of understanding conditions the influence of the text" (p. 23).

The reception of the reader or audience is greatly influenced by the horizon of expectations. The horizon of expectations is a collection of readers or audiences' experiences of the previous works they have encountered. The society's acceptance of a work is influenced by things that have been revealed by Jauss above. This is important because each reader has a different horizon of expectations.

From the explanation presented above, the approach that will be used in this research is the sociology of literature approach. The sociology of the reader is the most ideal concept in sociology of literature to be applied in this research. Using this approach, the reception of the reader will be assessed from his or her social background. Grundström (Grundström, 2018) stated that "empirical analysis of cinema originates from sociology" (p. 8). The sociology of the reader focuses on the relationship between the work and its reader. The scope of this approach covers the impact of a literary work and its acceptance based on a social conditions.

The results of this research are expected to be able to explain how the horizon of expectations of the reader or audience that influences the experience of perceiving a work. The negotiations between the audience and the work happen in the horizon of expectations which is an accumulation of previous experiences and social knowledge. Negotiations can result in reception of a work or rejection of a work by the audience. In addition, the results of this research can show that popular works are worthy to be discussed in educational forums and not just lower-class literature.

## Research Method

The research method used in this research is a qualitative research method using focus group discussions as data collection method. Qualitative research is considered more suitable for this research. Creswell (Creswell, 2014) in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* explained that “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 2). Qualitative research is more appropriate to be used in a research that seeks to understand or examine the understanding of an individual or a group of social phenomena.

The data examined in this study was the process of audience reception in interpreting *Colonia* (2015). To obtain this data, a focus group discussion was conducted. The film was screened to students who are members of the Kronik Filmedia of Diponegoro University. The Kronik Filmedia is a film club for students who are interested in both the production of short films and film appreciation at Diponegoro University. After the respondents' watched *Colonia*, an interview was conducted in the focus group discussion format. The discussion involved eight students of Filmedia Kronik members and took place at the Kronik Filmedia's secretariat on December 15, 2019.

One of the advantages of focus group discussion is the data obtained are not too personal. Second, the questions asked are open-ended questions and do not limit the opinions of the respondents. Using focus group discussion, the data gained are expected to be able to represent each respondent and be

consensual, so that it can be considered to represent the group's opinions. In qualitative research methods, the data is considered as text so that it can be analyzed for meaning and conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### *Synopsis of Florian Gallenberger's Colonia*

Daniel (Daniel Bruhl) was an international journalist who supported the revolution in Chile and Lena (Emma Watson) was a flight attendant. They are lovers. The conflict began with the arrest of supporters of the revolution made by Augusto Pinochet's army. Daniel and Lena were involved in the riots, but Daniel was caught while he was secretly trying to take pictures of Pinochet's atrocities. Daniel was then taken to Colonia Dignidad, a camp of extreme religious sects led by Paul Schafer (Michael Nyqvist).

Lena followed Daniel to Colonia Dignidad and pretended to join for religious reasons. Lena then found that Paul Schafer's doctrines were heresies. The followers were forbidden to marry. Men and women were separated. Paul Schafer himself turned out to be a pedophile and homosexual. Children in Colonia had to serve the lust of Paul Schafer. Women had to work in the fields with unreasonable working hours, while men only prayed and did easy works.

With her intelligence, Lena managed to find Daniel, who pretended to be an idiot after being tortured by Pinochet's army. The two then made a plan to escape from Colonia before Daniel was targeted as a biological weapons experiment. After the two escaped, Daniel and Lena asked for protection from the

German embassy, which was their nationality, in Chile. Unfortunately the embassy was also the accomplice of Pinochet and Paul Schafer. Lena then called her partner who is a pilot to help Daniel and Lena getting out of Chile (Gallenberger, 2015).

### **Kronik Filmedia Diponegoro University Reception of *Colonia***

*Colonia* is a film by Florian Gallenberger which is a romance-thriller genre with a historical background of the coup attempt against Augusto Pinochet in 1973. Roman-thriller genre is a genre that is rarely used in popular literary works. The formula used in this film is docudrama, a formula that documents historical events then presents them as drama.

Docudrama according to Hoffer and Nelson (Hoffer & Nelson, 1978) in their article "Docudrama on American Televisions" is:

"While the documentary per se is in many ways subjective, it still depicts individuals and events as they actually occurred in real, non-mediated time and space. The docudrama, on the other hand, may provide realism, but the events portrayed are recreated and restructured" (p. 21).

Docudrama film is slightly different from the documentary film because what it is shown has been restructured or arranged in such a way as a drama film by adding or removing certain parts of the original story to make it more interesting to watch.

As a romance-thriller genre, *Colonia* combines two different genres that are very contradictory. This is common in the film industry. Barry Keith

Grant (Grant, 2007) stated that "nearly all Hollywood films were hybrids insofar as they were tended to combine one type of generic plot - a romance - with others" (p. 23). Romance is the most often genre combined with other genres. On the other hand, the thriller is a sub-genre that often colors the main genres.

*Colonia* took up religious theme or rather heretical or extreme religious sect. The issues presented are also very diverse. Some of the issues presented in this film include pedophilia, homosexual, patriarchal system, women exploitation, politic, and heresy.

There are some important points from focus group discussions related to the reception of *Colonia*. First, the expectations of most respondents are low at the beginning of the film. This is because the sequence or plot using in *Colonia* is considered too long from the introduction to the conflict. In film, this terms better known as a slow pace or tempo. One respondent, AF, thought that *Colonia* was "*film sejarah yang membosankan, tapi akhirnya menjadi menarik dan menegangkan*" (AF, 2019). As said by AF, the film feels too slow at the beginning but then becoming more interesting and intense. Films with slow tempo like *Colonia* do tend to feel boring at the beginning of the film.

*Colonia* has a unique tempo, which feels slow at the beginning but then it gets faster as it goes to resolution. The experience of watching *Colonia* is like riding a roller coaster, going slowly at the start and slowly climbing to the peak then glide quickly toward resolution. This is such a tempo that found generally on thriller films. James Mangold's *Identity* (2003), for example, is a thriller that also has a slow tempo in the beginning and a fast pace in the end like *Colonia*. The problem is, not all audiences like the slow tempo at the

beginning of films like some respondents of *Colonia*. Some audiences will feel bored because the information presented is limited at the beginning. Yet what is presented at the end of the film is very interesting.

Most of the respondents begin to be interested when the film began to enter the conflict phase. Films that use tempo like *Colonia* have the risk of not being well received in the community. All respondents agreed that the tempo of *Colonia* takes too much time from introduction to arrive at the conflict with too little information. NA for example, said that "*awalnya tidak minat sama sekali, mau saya tinggal, terus ada adegan yang kompleks yang membuat saya lanjut nonton*" (NA, 2019). As well as NA, AF also said that an interesting part of this film was when it began to enter into conflict (AF, 2019).

Some other reasons that led respondents to not expect much in the film were the setting or background of the film which was taken in the 1970s. To adjust the actual background of the event, the color composition displayed on the film must give a classic impression. NA, one of the respondents said "*saya kira akan membosankan, saya tidak tertarik dengan film perang dengan look jadul*" (NA, 2019). NA said that he thought the film will be boring to watch because of its classic look. The background of a film is an important element, especially for docudrama films or historical films. Social background and historical conditions must be appropriate and consistent in a film. All scenes and interactions in the film must logically follow the background of the film. As stated above by the respondent, there are indeed some people who do not like films with historical background.

Another reason is the title itself. Most respondents even think that *Colonia* is a film about colonial era or colonialism based on the title. AQ for example, one of the respondents who thought this film was "*film tentang kolonial Belanda ... film Indonesia jaman dulu. Ternyata film baru dan masih oke*" (AQ, 2019). This is caused by the respondent's understanding of English. In English, Colony means a country or area under a full or partial political control of another country. On the other hand, the colony meant by the title of the film is a location or rather a community in Chile named Colonia Dignidad.

Interestingly, the low expectations of respondents changed as *Colonia* progressed. This is where the reception process takes place where a dialogue happens between the horizon of expectations of the respondents and what is offered by the film. In the end, the respondents can accept *Colonia* with better meaning. LF for example, one respondent who was not into a historical or war films said that the film was "*akhirnya bagus, makin menarik dan menarik*" (LF, 2019). Whereas AD, another respondent who is in the same page with LF, said that he had thought that this film "*roman-nya lebih banyak, ternyata thrillernya yang banyak dan saya suka*" (AD, 2019). The interests of the respondents grow more and more as the film goes.

Of course in an open discussion like this, not all respondents have the same opinions. This is because each respondent has differences in their watching experience. One respondent, TM, has a different opinion from other respondents. According to him, *Colonia* failed to live up to his expectations because there were historical restrictions. Despite that, TM knew that the docudrama film is supposed to be within historical boundaries. Another

point is the lack of the thriller element shown in *Colonia* (TM, 2019). Whereas LF added that *Colonia* was less able to fulfill his expectations, because the ending of this film made him feel as this film had not been completed due to the lack of depiction of what happened after the two main characters managed to escape (LF, 2019).

Based on the results of the discussion, the respondents were able to recognize the issues raised in this film well. All respondents agreed that the main issue in this film was about heretical religious sect. As stated by NA (2019), "*isu yang paling menonjol adalah isu tentang agama, sekte keagamaan*". According to him, throughout the film was played, the issue was continuously highlighted. For example, the followers in *Colonia* considered Pius to be a messenger of God. Then they worshipped him like he was perfect and always right. Gender issues are also strongly embedded in this film. Women were pushed to work with unreasonable working hours. If there were women who had affair with men, then the woman was considered like a prostitute and the way to cleanse the woman's sin was by torturing her. It is clear how men were considered superior to women in this film. Women representation on film explained by Kunsey (Kunsey, 2019) as "increased numbers of women in the film industry may facilitate coalition, but sheer numbers do not guarantee equal on-screen representation, as women are not guaranteed to represent other women in gender issues" (p. 30).

The issue of sexual harassment and abuse is also an issue highlighted in *Colonia*, which shows how Pius harassed several boys in turn. Some other issues are political issues related to biological weapon experiments, war crimes, and collusion between several parties who support

*Colonia* and Augusto Pinochet. Coppola (Coppola, 2019) stated in his article that "films are often considered political when they narrativize social struggle, allegorize the inner workings of government, or explicitly take public policy as their subjects" (p. 105). For a film with romance thriller genre, the issues raised are more complex than usual thriller films. So for some respondents, the thriller element of *Colonia* is less prominent.

TM, one of the respondents mentioned that "*pemain antagonisnya kurang diekspos, sehingga tidak simpati atau peduli dengan tokoh utama ... kalau untuk drama oke, tapi thrillernya kurang*" (TM, 2019). A thriller is always represented by antagonist that intimidates the audience. This occurs because of the lack of motivation pinned on the character of Pius. Orson Scott Card (Card, 1988) in his book *Characters and Viewpoint*, said that "a character is what he does, yes - but even more, a character is what he means to do" (p. 6). Pius' figure is considered as failure in playing his role as an antagonist due to the lack of understanding of the audience of the motivation behind Pius' actions.

Although the lack of thriller elements felt by some respondents, it does not mean that the respondents cannot be emotionally involved. Some respondents felt emotionally involved and worried about the fate of the two main protagonists in this film. For example, NA who said that he was emotionally involved (NA, 2019) or AF that was carried a little emotionally (AF, 2019). This indicates that with the lack of thriller elements, *Colonia* is still able to attract the sympathy of some viewers to get involved in the story. With a little extra thriller element, maybe this film can be appreciated even better.

What is interesting about *Colonia* is the ability to attract the emotions of the



audience to be involved with the fate of the protagonists. According to Orson Scott Card (Card, 1988), the element of suspense plays an important role in attracting the emotions of the audience. Card stated that “we may be drawn into the story, curious to learn more, yet we will also feel a tingle of suspense, that tension that comes from the earliest stages of fear, the uncertainty of not knowing what this person will do, not knowing if we're in danger or not” (p. 8). Curiosity and the uncertainty of the protagonist's fate made the audience emotionally involved after being confronted with the tensions displayed earlier. Respondents' emotions towards the film can also be raised by issues presented in the film. Perdana (Perdana, 2020) in his study stated that the audiences' emotions can be ignited if “the film is directly related to political views, ideology, culture, and interests of audience” (p. 87).

In *Colonia*, there are some impressive scenes according to the respondents. As mentioned by AR, according to him one of the impressive scenes was when Ursel dies. When the two main characters in *Colonia* tried to escape from Colonia camp, they asked Ursel to come along. When they made it out of the electric fence around the camp, Ursel accidentally stepped on a mine and was killed. Before she was killed, she thanks the protagonists for being able to take her out of Colonia. At least she died as a free woman, AR said “*Yang berkesan adalah paling tidak dia mati dalam keadaan merdeka, tidak mati di dalam koloni tersebut*” (AR, 2019). Another opinion was expressed by NA. According to him, the most impressive scene is when the protagonists escaped, as he said “*adegan yang paling berkesan itu ketika mereka lolos*” (NA, 2019). The scene when the two

main characters and Ursel tried to get out of the camp, along with a heart-beating music made the respondents also furious. In this climax of the film, the three of them are brought into obstacles that continue to emerge. This was also expressed by AF, “*adegan yang paling berkesan ketika melewati terowongan air kemudian Ursel tersangkut*” (AF, 2019). For AF, the most impressive scene is when Ursel get stuck at the gate of the flooded underground tunnel. These dramatic scenes become memorable for the audience as Benedikt Till (Till et al., 2011) stated that “emotion in media processes and effects that certainly deserve more attention is the impact film dramas can have on their viewers” (p. 149).

Different to the previous respondents, for LF the most memorable scenes in *Colonia* are the scenes that show the power of Pius. Pius who held absolute power in the colony was able to do anything to the members of the colony. As an example, when he beat Gisela who was the guardian of the women in the colony. He also has the right to punish members that he thought have done wrong. These scenes made the respondent want to feel having the same power as Pius. LF said “*Seandainya saya sebagai Pius saya akan melakukan hal yang sama*” (LF, 2019). Other respondents argued that *Colonia* could not present memorable scenes. The multiple genres taken in the film actually made the scenes feel less deep. This was expressed by TM, ZE, and AD (2019).

The results of the discussion showed that seven of the eight respondents involved with this discussion agreed that *Colonia* was worth to watch and to recommend to others, while one respondent felt that this film was not worth to recommend to others. This

difference in acceptance occurred because the film was unable to negotiate the horizon of the expectations of one respondent who did have a lot of experience in watching films with the thriller sub-genre.

Overall this film has several strengths according to respondents. Two main characters who perform the role well become one of the strength of this film. The story filled with puzzles and unpredictable events is also able to make respondents curious and get involved emotionally. The romance of the film is also the strength to attract audiences who like romance film. Although there are still some weaknesses, such as the lack of thriller elements and the information presented, but this film can still be well received and recommended to others.

## Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that the reception of *Colonia* itself depends on the reception of its audiences. The audiences' reception is strongly influenced by their horizon of expectations. Seven out of eight respondents involved in the focus group discussion were able to receive *Colonia* well despite of the weaknesses of the film. On the other hand, one respondent was less able to accept this film well. The differences in horizon of expectations between one respondent and another respondent play an important role in the differences in reception of each respondent. In this horizon of expectations, negotiations take place between the audience and the work being watched based on previous experiences.

This research also shows that popular literary works are not always easy literary works. Issues raised in popular literature can be issues that are worthy to

discuss in educational forums. Films that use the docudrama formula try to present historical events in a structured frame, so docudrama films have the potential as literary works that are worth to watch. *Colonia* as part of a popular literary work with the docudrama formula and roman-thriller genre raises many issues and historical data that need to be discussed and interpreted further. *Colonia* can be an example that a popular literary work is worth to discuss since the issues presented are taken from true stories.

In this study there are several problems encountered due to the limited time and also the lack of author's experience in field research. This study only involved eight respondents where the number is too little for the author. It is recommended that similar research is able to attract more respondents in a longer time span. The next problem is the lack of similar research. This happens because most studies only examine the work as the research object. The next suggestion is that it would be better if there are more similar studies involving audiences or readers. These studies have the potential to provide references for authors or filmmakers in creating a work since a work without a reader is just a cultural artifact. In addition, it will also increase the references for researchers and academics.

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