Effective way of intention for our advantageous use (Part 1)

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Abstract

There seems to be a general principle in our way of intention for avoiding excess muscle tension. It is to intend to carry out the original objective of an action when we are in action, and think as if the muscles and joints that make the action happen worked automatically. This way of intention is named the original objective intention. This intention works because we are likely to have "the preconscious intention to use the muscles" unknowingly, which promotes excess muscle tension. We are also likely to have the similar intentions as trying to use the muscles when we consciously try to alter our movement pattern. So, the movement pattern will not be altered much by typical conscious practice. The original objective intention could thus be an effective alternative for avoiding excess muscle tension.

Taking this way of intention as a principle, we will know what we need to intend for the better use through re-acknowledging what we actually or originally do. Some of the tasks within them have been hidden because of our non-declarative way of learning, and thus we may have missed chances to improve our use. One of those tasks is to support the body while we move, so we had better keep in mind intending it.

There are 3 fundamental intention that we should have for practicing better use: 1) the intention for desired output or goal, 2) the intention for desired movement with leading edge, and 3) the intention to support the body advantageously. For practicing advantageous way of supporting the body, there are 3 key intentions: 1) give the body weight on the base of support, and think of its stop, 2) control the head position and angle, and release muscle tension in the neck, and 3) breath out in action, and release muscle tension in the neck. This procedure is named "Placing", and it could be a potential alternative of the Primary control in the Alexander technique because it makes up for some of the shortages in the Primary control.

1. Introduction

People may conduct actions with disadvantageous ways in terms of their use of the body, and these impose burdens or functional limitations on them. Most of these disadvantageous patterns of their movement involve excess muscular contraction. These patterns could be acquired both consciously and preconsciously in the beginning, but these actions will be carried out mostly preconsciously through their

repetition in daily activities. They become habits, and they are carried out by autopilot.

However, it is possible for us to alter disadvantageous habitual use to advantageous one. Our habitual physical actions are carried out by the skeletal muscles. The skeletal muscles are voluntary muscles, and this means in definition that we are able to consciously control the degree of muscle contraction. We thus need to be conscious of own use at least in order to change habitual use, and we also need to intend alternative advantageous use.

Our way of intention is thus involved in the improvement process of physical use, and here I describe how and what we should intend in order to make our use advantageous. Through my practice of teaching the Alexander Technique (AT) I have found effective ways of intention. There seems to be some principles and tips in our way of intention for practicing advantageous use.

I don't describe so much about advantageous posture and movement from the kinesiological point of view here. These were described in my prior report "An Advantageous Way of Using Our Body" (https://advantageousintention.com /2017/10/an-advantageous-way-of-using-our-body/.html). Please refer to it.

2. A principle in our way of intention for avoiding excess muscle tension

Intending an original objective

We have several ways to intend an action. We still can accomplish the task with most of them, but the results may be different from one another. I found a general principle in our way of intention for avoiding excess muscle tension. If we do an action with the following way of intention, we will have higher possibility to do the action with less muscle contraction.

A principle in our way of intention for avoiding excess muscle tension

"Intend to carry out the original objective of an action when in action, and think as if the muscles and joints which make the action happen worked automatically."

In other word, our conscious motor command had better be formulated in terms of its original objective such as desired position, movement, and action. Direct conscious control over muscles is not desirable. A person had better think as the muscles works involuntarily.

I mentioned that we have several ways to intend a physical action. In fact, there could be two major different types. One is to intend an objective or end, and the other is to intend its means, i.e., "use the muscle" or "move the joint" in this case. I would say that the way of intending an original objective will be at least better than another way of intention: "intend to use the muscles" (trying to use the agonist muscles that make a certain movement happen).

This could be a general rule, so we could apply this to all of our movements, from partial movements to whole body movements, from daily life activities to performances. Although it sounds to be a very simple and one of common sense, this will become a really helpful knowledge for people's improvement of their use. I will describe here why this would be helpful. This is still a hypothesis and has not been proved true yet. It works well so far through my teaching practice of posture and movement.

Experience by yourself

Let's try an action as an example to get experience. The action is to move the right arm up in the side of the body until the shoulder height. The right arm is kept straight without bending the elbow joint. Which of the following two ways do you feel easier (less muscular effort)? One way is to intend to use the muscles in the shoulder (Figure 1, A). The other way is to intend to lead the outside surface of the forearm upward (B). Try to do both at the same speed.

Most people tend to feel easy and less muscular effort in the latter way (leading the outside surface of the forearm). They tend to feel more muscular tension in the former



Figure 1 Two different ways of raising the arm

way (trying to use the muscles in the shoulder). This means that people tend to give more muscle contraction in the former way.

Excess co-contraction and intention of "trying to use the muscles"

What happens is that people tend to give excess co-contraction of the muscles in the shoulder in the former way. Let me explain this further. The muscle contraction generates pulling force. If the agonist muscle contracts and its antagonist muscles contracts moderately enough to let the bone moves, the movement is going to happen toward the agonist muscle. If the antagonist muscle contracts evenly against the pull of the agonist muscle, any movement won't happen. The condition that both the agonist muscle and its antagonist muscle contracts together is called co-contraction. If someone gives more co-contraction, it means that he/she holds the joint tighter.

In most of our movement, there is a certain degree of co-contraction. This is for getting required stability of the joint to perform an action. We could give further degree of co-contraction than required in order to perform an action, but in this case the contraction degree of both the agonist and antagonist muscles will be considered to be excess, i.e., the joint will be tightened too firmly. Taking this into account, we know that there are two factors generated from the muscle contraction. One is making a movement (i.e., acceleration), and the other is stabilizing the joint by co-contraction.

Now going back to the example of the arm movement above, even though the resulting movement (the acceleration of the movement) is the same in the both way, there tend to be more muscle contraction in the case of the former way (trying to use the muscles in the shoulder). From this tendency, we could presume that the muscle contraction in the former way is used more for co-contraction than in the latter way (leading outside surface of the forearm). Since we could have bring the arm with less muscle contraction through the latter way, we could presume that the degree of co-contraction should be excess in the former way.

Minimizing co-contraction degree by intending original objective

In the latter way (leading the outside surface of the forearm) the person who does this action pays more attention to the arm as an object and its path of movement, which can be said that the person pays attention to the resulting picture, goal, or simple objective for this action. This intention could be said as an original intention that a person has had in the first time of their practice, i.e., beginner's intention. This way of intention is thus like the one that small children may have ("try to move the forearm up"). I call this particular way of intention "original objective intention". On the other hand, in the former way the person pays more attention to the muscles or muscle contraction (or tension) that makes the movement happen. This is the way that the person pays attention not to its objective but rather to its means for the action.

The resulting movement is the same in both ways. The difference is the degree of the muscle contraction, and this comes from their way of intention. There will be possibility to make more efficient recruitment of the muscle contraction through

avoiding unnecessary degree of co-contraction when we intend the simple objective of movement. It seems that our way of intention tends to affect the degree of muscle contraction recruited.

The original objective intention is also called "leading edge"

This intention targeting original objective may also be called "leading edge". The idea of the leading edge is that a person decides a part of the body as the edge and intends to lead the edge in the intended path. Leading a part of the body in an intended path is very simple objective, and so it is just the same as the original objective intention. Some AT teachers I know have already used the idea of the leading edge because they empirically know this works well. I myself have kept testing this way in my lessons with clients, and I have had good results.

The reason why intending original objective is better

Now, it could be a matter of course that we intend the objective of an action while we do the action. Why is it useful to intend such a matter of course? Most of us usually don't think of how to make own movement, especially each partial movement. In other word, we aren't conscious of own movement so much. We may intend the objective or result of an activity for example "wash hands", but we don't intend each partial movement, we are likely to have the "preconscious intention to use the muscles (or the muscle contraction)" unknowingly to make each partial movement. Furthermore, we are likely to have the similar intentions as the intention to use the muscles even when we are conscious of the movement in order to change its pattern. Then, the movement pattern will not be altered much by typical conscious practice. The original objective intention could thus be an effective alternative. This is why just having this original objective intention will help to alter to the better one.

Tendency to have preconscious intention of "trying to use muscles"

Why do we get such preconscious intention "trying to use the muscles" unknowingly? There is another way to describe about the intention to use the muscles. It is the intention "trying to sense the muscle contraction". The pattern generated by intending to use the muscles is just the same as the pattern generated by another intention "trying to sense the muscle contraction".

Here is a possible reason. Whenever we move or do something, we use the muscles and receive the sense of the muscle contraction. When we do a certain action for the first time or in the beginning, we probably think how we do that action or what to move for making that action happens. At the same time we also receive the sense of the muscle contraction involved in the action. So, in the beginning we pay more attention to "how we do it" or "what to move" rather than to the sense of muscle contraction. However, after experiencing certain repetition of the action, we tend to think of something else such as: checking other surrounding things or something unrelated to the action like "what to do next". For example, we could concentrate on TV progamme while do something else like washing dishes. This is possible because we have the auto-pilot system in our brain. Once the auto-pilot programme has been established, we don't have to think of "how to do it" or "what to move" to complete the action. Even in this state we receive the sense of the muscle contraction, and we easily fall ourselves into just trying to sense the muscle contraction to do the action. Our mind in this state could be almost like "just do it" and filled by the sense of the muscle contraction. Thus, we end up having preconscious intention "trying to sense the muscle contraction", i.e. the intention "trying to use the muscles". This is as if the auto-pilot system in our brain incorporated the intention pattern of trying to use the muscles into its program.

Difficulty to change even in conscious practice

Now, how do we voluntarily intend in general when we try to change our movement pattern? Typical intentions we have will be something like "use the muscles" or "move (bend) at a certain joint". People who study anatomy and try to apply the knowledge in anatomy to their movement tend to have this intention. They will know which muscles for what movement or which joints for what movement, and they will tend to try to apply their knowledge into their actual movement as a movement intention. In other cases, people who feel stiffness or chronic pain in particular area of the body also tend to have this intention. These stiffness and pain mostly are felt at the muscles and joints, and these people's attention easily goes to those muscles and joints where they feel stiffness and pain. People who do muscular workout also tend to have the intention to use the muscles. Same as the people with pain, these people will often have "pump up feeling" at the muscles after their training. They thus easily give attention to those muscles where they feel pump up when in movement, and they end up trying to use them.

Example 1. Throw a ball farther

Let's see some examples. A person who plays baseball attempts to throw a ball farther. The person may try to use the shoulder (or the shoulder muscles) in order to throw a ball farther (Figure 2 A). If the person has enough times of throwing experience, the person may tend to have this preconscious intention unknowingly. Or, some people may have this intention consciously. The person will be actually able to throw a ball farther with this way. However, the person may tend to promote the muscle contraction for co-contraction of the muscles in the shoulder and tighten up the shoulder joint excessively. In this case, the agonist muscles for the arm movement in the shoulder get to the contraction limit earlier than possible so that the person will not be able to throw a ball up to his/her potential farthest distance. The person with this intention tends to use the muscle contraction inefficiently by excess promoting muscle contraction.

On the other hand, if the person throw a ball by intending the simple objective "move a ball faster" with paying more attention to making a ball in the hand move (making a ball as an edge to lead, Figure 2 B) and with thinking the muscles and joints will be used automatically, the person will have more chance to avoid excess co-contraction



Figure 2 Two ways of throwing a ball farther

and be able to use muscle contraction more efficiently for accelerating the arm movement so that the person throws a ball up to his/her potential farthest distance.

Example 2. Fix posture

For another example, a person who realizes his/her posture is collapsed attempts to fix it to the better. The person may try to make the spine straight like "straightening back" (Figure 3 A). The person can fix their posture better with this intention, but the person probably give more muscle contraction in the torso than required to keep the better position. So, the person will end up supporting their torso too firmly with excess co-contraction. This is because the person pays attention to the back where the agonist muscles for this fixation are located. Since the spine is located in the back, the intention "try to make the spine straight" is easily translated into the intention "try to use the back muscles" or "try to sense the muscle contraction in the back".

On the other hand, if the person fixes their posture by intending to move the head higher and place it at the highest position (Figure 3 B), the person can fix their posture better with less muscle contraction in the torso and the neck. Placing the head at the highest position is the action which all small children will do, and it is one of our original objectives to achieve for advantageous condition. The head will be the edge to lead in this case. The back muscles and the spinal joints are means for achieving this original objective, and they are not adequate to be intended. It is better for us to think as if the back muscles and the spine worked automatically while intending to



Figure 3 Two ways of fixing posture

move the head higher like "the head up against the bottom of the feet". There are some other things to be controlled for advantageous condition such as the total weight balance and the angle of pelvis besides the head placement. Although the detail controls of the whole body are left out here, all controls should also be achieved with their original objective intention.

Example 3. Singing a song

For the next example, a singer sings a song. Some singers may vocalize with trying to use the abdominal muscles. They may think that the tension in the abdominal muscles will support their voice. These singers tend to promote more contraction in the abdominal muscles to vocalize. They are able to sing a song with this way, but they may have problems such as 1) difficulty to sing long passage, 2) deteriorating the sound or difficulty to vocalize higher pitch through having functional limitation in their larynx.

Regarding the problem 1), the key factors for singing long passage are both the initial condition and efficient use of the abdominal muscles. If a singer starts to sing with the possible relaxed state of the abdominal muscles, the singer will be able to get more contraction possibility (units to contract) so that the singer can sing longer passage. Furthermore, if the singer has efficient use of the abdominal muscles, i.e., sings a passage with minimum contraction of the abdominal muscles, the singer will also be able to get more contraction possibility so that the singer can sing even longer passage. Contrarily, if the singer promotes the contraction in the abdominal muscles



Fig. 4 Simplified contraction scale of the abdominal muscles

for excess co-contraction before singing, the singer will lose the contraction possibility of the abdominal muscles for vocalizing so that the singer may not vocalize the desired length of the passage (See Figure 4 B). This means that the singer will get to the limit of the contraction of the abdominal muscles sooner.

Now, it will be easy for the singer to promote excess contraction in the abdominal muscles if the singer tries to use the abdominal muscle when singing. Because of the intention of "trying to use the abdominal muscles", the singer tends to promote excess contraction in the abdominal muscles already before starting to sing. The singer may not release this excess muscle contraction because of his/her intention to support voice by the muscles. This contraction in the abdominal muscles will be coincided with the contraction in the back muscles, and its pulling force of the abdominal muscles (which is not used for generating air pressure) will be offset. This condition will become excess co-contraction. In addition to this, the singer may tend to promote excess contraction than required for generating a certain unit of air pressure to vocalize because of his/her intention to use the muscle for voice. This means that the singer in this case uses the abdominal muscles inefficiently for vocalizing. Through this process the singer will lose the contraction period of the abdominal muscles for generating air pressure and thus have difficulty to sing long passage.

Regarding the problem 2) of deteriorating the sound or difficulty to vocalize higher pitch, the main cause of this problem is excess contraction of the muscles in the larynx. Once the thyroid cartilage is pulled excessively by the contraction of the muscles in the larynx (like the sternothyroid, see Figure 5), it will tend to affect the function of the vocal cords. We will then have functional limitation in the use of the vocal cords. When the singer tries to use the abdominal muscles to vocalize, the singer tends to make the thyroid cartilage be pulled excessively and thus cannot use the vocal cords in advantageous condition. This will deteriorate the quality of the voice and also add difficulty to vocalize higher pitch.



Figure 5 The muscles in the larynx

Let me explain this in detail. The abdominal muscles contract to generate air pressure when we vocalize. We need to know characteristics about the contraction in the abdominal muscles and the antagonistic action for it. What the abdominal muscles are also doing is pulling the ribcage down, i.e. making the spine flexed. Now when the abdominal muscles contract, the muscles in the front side of the neck tend to contract as well, especially with the sternocleidomastoids. This is for a part of the antagonistic action by pulling up the ribcage against downward pull of the contraction in the abdominal muscles. However, this antagonistic action will not be yet completed. The sternocleidomastoids are attached to the head (the skull, it attaches to the relatively rear part of the skull), so its contraction also pulls the head forward. When the person who have attitude to support the head against this pull by using muscles such as the back muscles and the longus capitis, the antagonistic action against the pull of the abdominal muscles will then be completed. This is actually a favorable condition for the vocal cords and thus for vocalizing.

Most people do not consider about the head support when they contract the abdominal muscles, so the antagonistic action will not be the desired way as described above. They often end up using the sternocleidomastoids excessively to compete with the abdominal muscles' pull. The head may be supported by the pull of the back muscles and the longus capitis, but their contraction degree will be excess. This will be excess co-contraction in the neck. In this case there will be excess contraction in the front side of the neck including the muscles in the larynx, and they will end up pulling the vocal cords excessively. Some people may move their head forward by the pull of the sternocleidomastoids and the abdominal muscles. In this case their spine will be flexed, and the head will be rotated backward. The more their spine are flexed and their head are moved forward, the more the contraction in the larynx will be promoted and vocal function will be restricted. These conditions may be easily happened if the singer sings with trying to use the abdominal muscles.

There is advantageous way of intention instead of trying to use the abdominal muscles. There are two intentions that are helpful for this activity, and both are the original objective intentions.

One is for supporting the body. If the singer sings by intending to give the weight of the body on the feet and place the head at its highest position with face facing forward, the singer will have more chance to avoid both excess contraction in the abdominal muscles and excess contraction of the muscles in the larynx (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Advantageous postural control in singing

Singers may not think of supporting the body when they sing. The body, our skeletal structure, is pulled not just by the gravity but also by own muscle activities. Singing requires effortful muscle activity especially at the abdominal muscles, and to support the body in normal condition like usual talking may not be enough. To support the body enough is a required activity and thus an original activity for singing. So, to support the body advantageously will be original objective for singing activity.

Another intention is for singing. The original objective intention for singing is to sing desired sound and passage. Or simply intending to create the sound you want. At the same time the singer also had better think as if the abdominal muscles (and other muscles) worked automatically. By just having these intentions, the abdominal muscles and other muscles will be recruited adequately and generate the required force.

Having these two original objective intentions in singing, the singer will be able to use full contraction possibility for air pressure, and the singer will have more chance to sing the desired passage and pitch with better voice quality.

Vocalize at the vocal cord vs. vocalize at the lip

There is another helpful intention. Some singers unknowingly try to vocalize at the vocal cords (Figure 7, A). They probably get this preconscious intention through their repetition of receiving the sense of tension and vibration in the vocal cords while they vocalize. Since there are many muscles around the vocal cords, the intention "vocalize at the vocal cords" is easily translated into the intention to use the muscles in the



Figure 7 Two ways of vocalizing

larynx. This preconscious intention may tend to lead excess contraction of the muscles in the larynx and the vocal cords, and thus the voice sound can be easily deteriorated. It will also be excess burden to the vocal cords.

It is better for these singers to have intention "vocalize at the lip (or in front of the mouth)" (Figure 7, B). If the singer vocalizes with this intention, the singer will have more chances to avoid excess contraction in the larynx and vocal cords so that the sound won't be deteriorated. This simple intention is targeting an original objective for vocalizing. Sounds are generated at the vocal cords, and the pitch is controlled at the vocal cords as well. However, pronunciation (pronouncing language) is actually formed through the cavity of mouth, not just at the vocal cords. What singers do is to vocalize language with the particular pitch. So, our pronunciation (language with pitch) is actually formed right after the cavity of the mouth. Vocalizing at the lip (in front of the mouth) is actually the original objective.

As seeing in these examples, the typical voluntary intentions tend to be the intention to use the muscles, and they are similar to the preconscious intention that people tend to have. People thus tend to fail to alter their excessive movement pattern with their typical conscious intentions. The original objective intention on the other hand will be an effective alternative for us to intend for altering our movement pattern enough.

Other examples of the original objective intention

Other examples of the original objective intentions for some activities are shown in the table below. The edge to lead doesn't have to be the part of the body. It could be the part of a tool or gear held in the hand. It could also be air (move air from a certain place to another place) or sound (creating sound wave).

Activity	Example of the original objective intention (the leading edge)
Writing	Move the tip of a pen
Bending the body at the hip joint	Move the front surface of the upper body (the torso and head) forward while the feet are on the floor. *This way is better than usual intention "bend the body at the hip joint".
Walking	Move the front surface of the body forward (or move the head, torso, and knees forward)
Breathing	Breath out air from the mouth, and breath in air from the nose. (In this case, air becomes the edge to lead.)

Swinging in Golf	Move (or swing) the head of a golf-club in a desired path
Standing up from a chair	Push the floor through the feet, and move the head and torso upward

Table 1 Other examples of the original objective intention

"Try to use the joint" tend to be the same as "try to use the muscles"

As I mentioned at "bending the body at the hip joint" in the table above $(2^{nd} row)$, the intentions such as "try to bend at the joints" and "try to use the joint" are not desirable. It is because our attention goes to the joint where we get the sense of the muscle tension, so these intentions targeting the joint will be easily translated into "try to use the muscles". The intention "try to use the joint" will promote excess muscle contraction the same as the intention "try to use the muscle".

People who learn the Alexander technique may have the intention to move (or rotate) the head at the atlanto-occipital joint (or simply "top joint"). This intention may have risk within according to the rule I described here. People may fall into paying more attention to the atlanto-occipital joint rather than to the head movement. This attention tends to lead us to direct command to the muscles in the neck, and it promotes excess muscle contraction. Having knowledge about anatomical detail is nothing disadvantageous, but having such intention is disadvantageous.

In the case of the head turning (to left and right), we had better think of the head (the part above the cheek bone) and intend to move the head in the left rotation and right rotation. We had better avoid too much attention to the joints including the atlanto-occipital joint or the muscles in the neck by "consciously ignoring them", and we thus think as if the muscles and joints work automatically.

Instead of it, we had better have another intention to keep the torso facing forward. What we actually do in the head movement is to move the head while keeping the torso and legs not-moving. We usually do not realize that we actually make muscular activity for stopping some parts of the body while moving other parts of the body¹. Stopping some parts of the body (or keeping the position) is our original activity, and such intention will be also the original objective intention that avoids excess muscle contraction. If we intend to move the head in this way, the head actually moves at the adequate joints by recruiting the proper muscles minimum.

¹ Keeping some parts of the body stopped is required activity especially for our postural control, and consciously deciding where to stop is also desirable for efficient force transmitting through reducing the moment of force by shortening the moment arm.

People may feel like intending it for the first time

People often feel like never intending the original objective intention of an action before and intending it for the first time, even though it is a kind of original intention so that they should have experience to do the action with such intention in the beginning. This happens because people usually learn to do an action in nondeclarative (implicit) way, so they usually feel difficult to express what they do in sentences, i.e. consciously. Having the original objective intention could be the first attempt for them to verbalize their intention. This kind of motor learning is called declarative (explicit) learning in contrast to non-declarative (implicit) learning.

No need to intend to use muscles

We don't have to have the intention "try to use muscles" for any of our movement. Small children can move, and they may not know about the muscles so much. People who live in very primitive living condition like some native tribes probably don't know much about the muscles as well. Many of us sometimes appreciate that both small children and people in primitive living condition move with even better quality than the adults in the civilized living. I assume that these people are able to stick more to the original objective intention preconsciously because of their simple life.

Muscles have been acquired in the process of evolution for lives to move. There are background and reasons for muscles to exist. Isn't it reasonable idea to think like: if we just try to carry out original objectives, the muscles will adequately work accordingly? Lions, for example, won't try to use their muscles. They are just trying to move their body forward. Their muscles are recruited and used adequately by following their simple intention.

What I am explaining here is just the same as this example. It will be a pitfall that the people in the civilized living condition like most of us preconsciously have the intention to use the muscles, and it will be a blind spot that those people need to re-think and intend its original objective when they want to change their movement pattern.

Better way of intention

In conclusion for this chapter, many of us tend to deteriorate our use. In order to alter our use we need to be conscious of our use. However, if a person tries to alter his/her use by intending to use the muscles, he/she tends to have difficulty of releasing excess muscle contraction and will not be able to change it to the better one. We had better intend its original objective in order to release excess muscle contraction. We have more chances to change our use to better use with the original objective intention.

There could be multiple objectives

I like to add a note here. There could be multiple objectives for a single activity. We usually move some different parts of the body for a single activity. For example, when we do dish washing, we move one arm and keep the other arm holding a plate while we use the fingers to grab a sponge and a plate. Every these partial actions or

movements in a single activity of dish washing can have original objective (such as 'move the right arm in this way', 'hold a dish at particular position'), and thus there are multiple objectives for a single activity of dish washing. Most of our activities consist of multiple knocked-down actions like this example of dish washing. Each knocked-down action has at least a single objective, so we have multiple objectives in most of our activities.

We don't need to manage all of the knocked-down actions or movements, but we had better manage some of them. Since most of our disadvantageous use happens at this detail level of actions, managing some of them improve our total use. There will be further explanation for management of attending multiple objectives, and they will be described in the report of part 2.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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