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Culinary Potential of Traditional Lotek as Culinary Tourism Attraction in Karawang Regency (case study: Lotek Ci Apang)

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Abstract

Lotek Ci Apang is a restaurant with lotek as its main menu. Lotek itself is a traditional culinary dish originating from West Java, making it a familiar food in the West Java region. This study aims to explore the potential of lotek as a culinary tourism attraction in Karawang Regency, which will become one of the culinary tourism attractions in Karawang Regency. Therefore, the researcher wants to know more about the potential of culinary tourism attractions at Lotek Ci Apang. The purpose of this study is to determine the potential of culinary tourism attractions by using the 4A analysis method. This type of research uses a qualitative method with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. The analysis uses the theory of tourist attractions to determine the potential of traditional cuisine. This paper aims to analyze Lotek Ci Apang restaurant to determine the potential of traditional cuisine as a tourist attraction from the restaurant owner, which will later develop culinary tourism in Karawang Regency through lotek dishes.

Keywords: Culinary Tourism Potential, Culinary Tourism Attraction, Traditional Food, Lotek.

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, reflecting a strong recovery from the global downturn caused by the pandemic. According to the latest data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a comprehensive survey has revealed that international tourism has almost entirely rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, the number of international tourist arrivals reached an impressive 1.4 billion, marking an 11% increase compared to 2023. This upward trend underscores the resilience of the travel industry and the increasing enthusiasm of travelers worldwide to explore new destinations. Tourists travels to various destinations are motivated by more than just the scenic beauty of the locations they visit. Many seek to gain deeper cultural insights, learn about the history and traditions of a place, and immerse themselves in unique local experiences. Engaging with the local community is a significant aspect of modern travel, visitors often interact with residents, participate in traditional ceremonies, and explore local crafts and heritage.

Culinary tourism has also emerged as one of the key component of the travel experience. Many tourists take great pleasure in sampling regional delicacies and traditional dishes that reflect the rich gastronomic heritage of their chosen destinations. From street food markets to fine dining establishments, tourist explores an authentic flavors that add to their overall cultural experience. As international tourism continues to expand, destinations worldwide are focusing on enhancing visitor experiences by offering sustainable tourism initiatives, improving

infrastructure, and promoting responsible travel practices that benefit both tourists and local communities.

Karawang Regency is one of the regencies located in West Java, also known as the rice granary. Karawang also has a lot of natural tourism potential, including Curug Cigentis, Tanjung Pakis Beach, Cipule Lake, and Bukit Kembar Puncak Pinus. For artificial tourism, Karawang offers attractions such as the Rawa Gede Monument, Taruma Leisure Waterpark, Waterboom Kampung Wisata Curug Cigentis, Situ Kamojing, and Walahar Dam. Religious tourism sites include Jiwa Temple, Sian Djin Ku Poh Vihara, and the Grand Mosque of Karawang. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics published in 2020, Karawang ranked first in the number of tourist visits to attractions in 2019, with a total of 9,453,886 visitors, both domestic and international. Popular natural tourist attractions include Tanjung Pakis Beach, Tanjung Baru Beach, Samudera Baru Beach, Cibento Beach, and Grand Canyon. Meanwhile, popular artificial attractions include Maqom Syech Quro, Maqom Syech Gentong, the Grand Mosque of Karawang, Waterboom Cibonteng, and Walahar Dam. Karawang is also known for its culinary tourism, offering delicacies such as Serabi Kuntilanak, Pepes Walahar, Opak Ketan, Soto Gempol, Tahu Bumbu, Semprong Cake, and Lotek.

Culinary tourism is a type of tourism that not only satisfies hunger by eating a variety of traditional dishes from the tourist destination but also provides an interesting experience through eating and cooking various local specialty foods (Permatan and Syarif, 2024). According to Ketaren (2017), lotek is a dish made from cooked vegetables served with peanut sauce. It is a traditional salad originating from Indonesia and is particularly known as a specialty of West Java. One of the well-known restaurant that specializes in serving lotek is Lotek Ci Apang. Initially, there was only one Lotek Ci Apang restaurant, but it has since expanded into two locations: Lotek Ci Apang Karawang, located at Jl. Mochammad Kosim No.3, Nagasari, Kec. Karawang Bar., Karawang, West Java 41312, and another branch in Kp. Babakan Cianjur. These locations are close to each other, and before the expansion, Lotek Ci Apang was a favorite among Karawang residents. Even Indonesia's 6th President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, once visit this place to taste the dish. Lotek Ci Apang offers a variety of dishes, including lotek, karedok, and different types of fruit salads (rujak). The lotek itself consists of vegetables such as long beans, cabbage, water spinach, bean sprouts, and young jackfruit. Tourists visiting Karawang can enjoy this traditional dish, which contributes to the region's culinary appeal. The potential of traditional food like lotek as a culinary tourism attraction can also have a positive impact on the local economy. Developing this potential requires strategic planning and promotion. This study aims to identify the potential of lotek as a culinary tourism attraction in Karawang Regency. The urgency of this research is to understand the extent to which traditional cuisine, particularly lotek, plays a role in boosting culinary tourism in Karawang.

2. Method

This research is a descriptive study that uses a qualitative approach with the application of triangulation in the marketing mix.

The purpose of this study is to explain the culinary tourism potential through lotek cuisine in Karawang Regency, using field notes, photographs, and interview transcripts. Thus, the study is supported by a direct field-based approach. The research aims to understand the role of culinary tourism potential as an attraction at the Lotek Ci Apang restaurant.

Data and Data Collection Techniques

This research will employ qualitative techniques, involving data analysis methods using information in both oral and written forms. The steps for data analysis in this research are as follows:

Data Collection

The data in this study includes both primary and secondary data. The primary data consists of the researcher's observations and the results of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), while the secondary data includes magazines, reports, previous research findings, and information available from Karawang Regency.

Table 1.
Source of Informants

No	sources of information	Reasons and Considerations
1	Owner of Ci Apang Restaurant	A restaurant owner who sells traditional food and creates a culinary tourism attraction
2	Visiting tourists	To determine satisfaction in terms of taste and the uniqueness of the lotek.

Data Reduction

Obtaining the desired data does not necessarily mean that the researcher understands the phenomenon being studied. Since qualitative research aims to deeply explore what happens in an event from the participants' perspective, interview recordings and transcripts are akin to a researcher's 'treasure' that needs to be understood and closely connected with the qualitative data obtained. There is no more effective way to truly connect with the data than by reading and rereading the interview transcripts, and even listening to the interview recordings again or rewatching the video recordings made during the data collection process. The interview recordings can become an important source in the data analysis process, as the researcher can gain valuable information or insights from the conversations conducted with the participants. Therefore, the researcher should take the time to listen to the recordings at least once. The primary goal in this initial stage is for the researcher to start understanding the content of the data obtained and begin to identify elements in the data that relate to the research question. To achieve this, it is quite common for the researcher to read the interview transcript at least once, twice, or even three times until they truly feel they understand and are 'close' to the data.

Data Presentation

After data reduction, the next step is data presentation, which can be done in the form of brief descriptions, tables, relationships between categories, and so on. In qualitative research, the presented data is usually in a narrative text form.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusion drawing and verification is the final stage, which is the result of the previous steps. This stage involves finding or understanding meanings, regularities, patterns, explanations, cause-and-effect flows, or comparisons.

Tabel 2.
Sources of Informants, Reason and Consideration

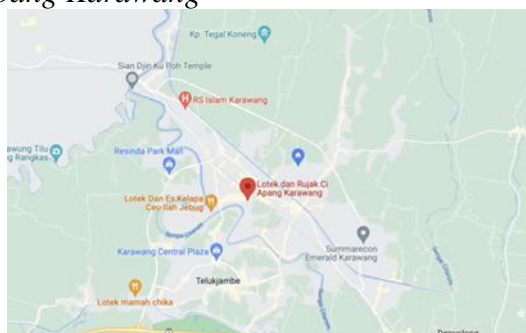
No	Information Source	Reason and Consideration
1	Owner of Rumah Makan Ci Apang	The owner of restaurant that sells traditional food and having culinary tourism attraction

In Table 2, the informants who will be selected and serve as sources for interviews to complete the data sought in the study are presented. The confirmed informant is the owner of Lotek Ciapang restaurant, as they are a valid source of information, along with supporting input from consumers who visit and experience the taste of the lotek.

Location and Time of Research

The research location is the Lotek Ciapang Jl. Moh Kosim Babakan Cianjur, RT 01 / RW 30 Block C no. 3, Tuparev Karawang.

Figure 1
Location of the Lotek Ciapang Karawang



In the figure, location 1 represents the position as seen from a map, indicating that Lotek Ciapang is in a highly strategic location in the center of Karawang city.

3. Results and Discussion

Karawang Regency, located between 107°02'–107°40' East Longitude and 5°56'–6°34' South Latitude, is a region in West Java with a diverse geographical landscape. The total area of Karawang Regency spans 1,911.00 km², representing 5.72% of the total area of West Java Province, which covers 37,116.54 km². As reported by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2023, Karawang ranks as the 9th largest regency or city in West Java and consists of 10 districts. This large area is not only rich in agricultural resources but has also become a rapidly developing industrial hub. Historically, Karawang was known as the "rice granary city" due to its vast rice paddies that made it one of the main suppliers of rice in Indonesia. However, over time, Karawang has undergone a transformation and emerged as a thriving industrial city. The presence of extensive industrial zones has propelled Karawang into the position of being the largest industrial area in Southeast Asia, with numerous factories and manufacturing plants driving the local economy. The city's rapid industrialization has attracted workers from various regions, contributing to its growing urban landscape. Despite its industrial growth, Karawang has managed to preserve its rich cultural heritage, with a variety of tourism attractions that appeal to both local and international visitors. These attractions include natural sites such as beaches, waterfalls, and lakes, as well as artificial landmarks, religious sites, and culinary experiences. Among the region's most notable culinary offerings is pepes Walahar, a traditional

dish known for its unique preparation and flavor. However, another highly popular and beloved dish in Karawang is lotek, a traditional dish with deep cultural roots that holds a special place in the hearts of locals. Lotek is made from a mix of cooked vegetables combined with peanut sauce, offering a simple yet flavorful experience. Ketaren (2017) describes lotek as a dish made from vegetables, specifically long beans, cabbage, water spinach, bean sprouts, and unripe jackfruit, all mixed with a savory and slightly spicy peanut sauce. This combination creates a dish that is not only nutritious but also packed with flavor. According to Chef Wira, lotek can be considered a close counterpart to another popular Indonesian dish, gado-gado. During the Hindu-Buddhist era, the term "lotek" is believed to have originated from the word "latek," which means mud. This is likely because the peanut sauce, which is a key component of the dish, has a rich and smooth texture that resembles the consistency of mud. It is estimated that lotek has existed since the Hindu-Buddhist period, and it has since evolved into an iconic part of Indonesian cuisine, especially in West Java. The dish not only satisfies the palate but also carries a deeper philosophical meaning. The various vegetables in the dish represent the diversity of ingredients, and when combined with the peanut sauce, they form a harmonious and balanced whole. This philosophy of unity in diversity is symbolic of the Indonesian cultural landscape, where different elements come together to create something greater than the sum of their parts. As part of Karawang's culinary tradition, lotek continues to be a significant dish, offering a taste of the region's history, culture, and community values. Its longstanding presence in the local food scene and its ability to adapt to modern times while maintaining traditional methods make it a unique and treasured dish in Karawang.

The geography of West Java is blessed with abundant natural resources, including vegetables and animal products. The lotek served at Ci Apang's stall is still made traditionally using a mortar and pestle without the aid of modern equipment. The ingredients used in making lotek include cabbage, young jackfruit, bean sprouts, long beans, and water spinach, all of which are boiled first (Ketaren, 2017). This is consistent with the practice at Lotek Ci Apang, where cabbage, young jackfruit, bean sprouts, long beans, and water spinach are first boiled and then mixed with peanut sauce, said Reno, the manager of Lotek Ci Apang.

The most well-known lotek from Karawang is Lotek Ci Apang, which has been operating since 1954. This lotek business has now spanned three generations. Lotek Ci Apang is currently available in two locations, both opened by the children of the founder and now continued by the grandchildren. Lotek is proven to be a traditional dish because it meets four criteria as outlined by Sastroamidjojo, S. (1995): (1) it has been commonly consumed for several generations, (2) it has a taste that suits the local people's preferences, (3) it does not conflict with the religion or beliefs of the surrounding community, and (4) the ingredients used come from the surrounding environment and are fully utilized.

Figure 2
Pictures of Lotek



The image above is a description of the appearance of the dish to be served, which includes rice cake (ketupat), water spinach, bean sprouts, young jackfruit, and more.

When analyzing the potential of Lotek Ci Apang as a tourism attraction in Karawang, a SWOT analysis should be conducted to provide an overview of the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and threats faced. The formulation based on the SWOT analysis is derived from the results of literature studies and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) that were held with the sources

Table 3.
Sources of Informants, Reason and Consideration

No	Information Source	Name
1	Owner of Rumah Makan Ci Apang (3 rd generation)	Reno Harsono
2	Visiting Tourist	Ramhdan Raka

Reno Harsono is the third-generation owner of Rumah Makan Ci Apang, a renowned restaurant that has been passed down through his family. He continues to uphold the legacy and traditions of the restaurant, ensuring its success and relevance in modern times.

Ramhdan Raka is a tourist visiting the location, possibly interested in experiencing the cultural and culinary offerings of the area, such as the famous Rumah Makan Ci Apang.

Culinary Tourism Potential of Lotek Ci Apang

On this occasion, the culinary tourism potential of Ci Apang not only involves the food products offered but also the traditional food culture. Therefore, food and beverages through culinary tourism are often used as part of the promotion of the culture and social background of a region or city.

Based on research conducted by Ketaren et al., 2024, when engaging in culinary tourism, tourists are not only looking for food to eat and satisfy their hunger but also want to see the process of making and serving it.

Based on interviews and observations from people living outside of Karawang, lotek has become a dish that is frequently ordered, with rujak being the second most popular. While lotek is not the only culinary specialty in Karawang, there are several other dishes that are also considered icons of the region, lotek Ci Apang stands out as the most sought after by consumers, with taste being the primary reason. Based on the observations and interviews conducted, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- ◆ *Attraction*, According to the research by Antonia & Facrureza (2024), an attraction plays an important role in a place. This is also supported by research from Nurdiansyah et al., 2023, which states that food is recognized as one of the factors that can attract tourists to visit cities.

In this case, the lotek culinary experience at Lotek Ci Apang becomes a unique attraction because of its traditional preparation method, the use of traditional tools such as a stone mortar (cobek), and the process of making the dish right in front of the consumers.

Figure 3.
Making Process of Lotek



The image explains the process of making lotek, as well as handling ordering and payment transactions.

- ◆ *Accessibility*, Access to Lotek Ci Apang is quite easy because it is located in the city center and is accessible by public transportation, such as angkot (public minivans), which stop in front of Karawang Theater. From there, visitors can enter a narrow alley (Babakan Cianjur) and walk towards the back. However, with the availability of online transportation services, visiting has become even more convenient. This is also supported by research conducted by Susanto and Sasmita (2023), which states that the restaurant is located in Karawang Regency, right in the city center. Its location is quite strategic because it is easily accessible, especially by public transport, and there are also three-wheeled vehicles like pedicabs available. The location is also close to shopping centers, such as malls in Karawang, and Lotek Ci Apang is not far from traditional markets, ensuring that the ingredients used remain fresh and of good quality.
- ◆ *Amenities*, In terms of facilities, Lotek Ci Apang is well-equipped, with sufficient seating, adequate toilets, and handwashing areas with soap. However, the parking space is not sufficient as there is no designated parking area available.

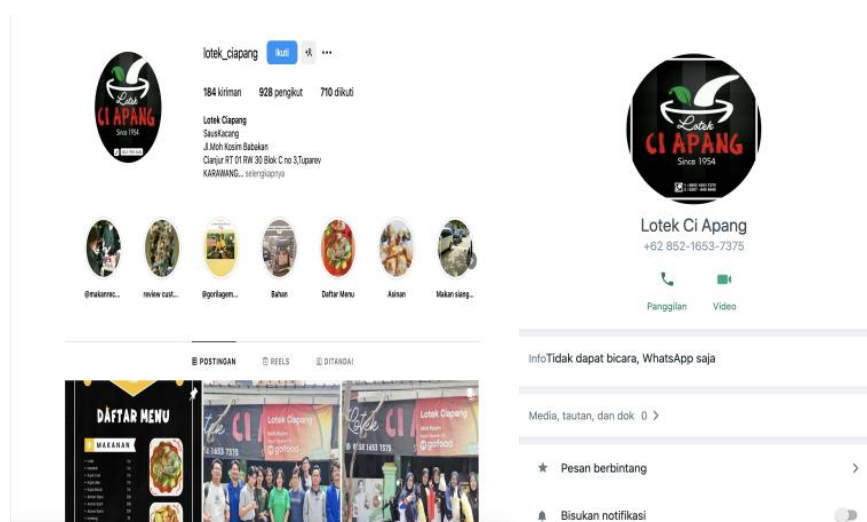
Figure 4
Dining area of Lotek Ci Apang



The Figure4, depicts the dining area atmosphere when customers eat on-site.

- ◆ *Ancillary service*, In terms of facilities, Lotek Ci Apang is well-equipped, with sufficient seating, adequate toilets, and handwashing areas with soap. However, the parking space is not sufficient as there is no designated parking area available.

Figure 5.
Social Media of Lotek ci Apang



The translation of the image above is the social media owned by Lotek Ci Apang, Instagram and WhatsApp.

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method that utilizes various approaches. By considering several factors and conducting precise analyses, it can align marketing strategies with the company's objectives (Finsa and Putra, 2023).

SWOT analysis is a method used to evaluate both internal and external factors that influence performance. This analysis consists of four key components: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Ngurah et al., 2018).

The researcher also conducted a SWOT analysis based on observations and interviews:

- ◆ **Strengths**

1. **Cultural Heritage and Historical Value**

The Lotek dish has been a part of Karawang's culinary identity since 1954. This long-standing tradition enhances its authenticity and positions the dish as a cultural icon. Such heritage fosters trust and loyalty among long-time customers and makes the dish more appealing to those seeking authentic Indonesian cuisine.

2. **Consistency Across Generations**

The taste of the Lotek has remained consistent for three generations. This demonstrates a strong commitment to quality and tradition, which can be a major selling point. Consistency in taste also helps to maintain customer satisfaction and build a reliable brand identity.

3. **Philosophical Value of the Dish**

The unique philosophy embedded in the preparation or presentation of the dish adds emotional and cultural depth. It can be used to enrich storytelling in marketing campaigns, further strengthening the brand's identity and appeal.

4. **Online Sales Availability**

The availability of the Lotek dish through online platforms expands the customer base

beyond walk-in traffic. This flexibility supports business continuity, especially during periods when physical visitation is low, such as during rainy seasons or public holidays.

5. **Strong Social Media Presence**

Active and informative use of Instagram allows the brand to communicate effectively with current and potential customers. It provides a platform for sharing updates, promoting deals, showcasing the traditional preparation process, and interacting directly with customers to build community and loyalty.

◆ **Weaknesses**

1. **Limited Shelf Life**

The dish's primary component—peanut sauce—causes it to spoil quickly, limiting its viability for long-distance delivery or long storage periods. This affects the scalability of the business and reduces its ability to participate in wider food distribution networks.

2. **Inadequate Parking Facilities**

Limited or inconvenient parking can deter potential customers, especially those coming from outside the area or traveling by car. This could limit foot traffic, particularly during busy times or tourist seasons.

3. **Dependency on Traditional Methods**

While traditional methods are a strength in terms of authenticity, they may also limit the volume of production and speed of service, potentially causing longer wait times or difficulty meeting high demand.

◆ **Opportunities**

1. **Appeal to Culinary Tourism**

The traditional preparation of Lotek using heritage techniques and ingredients can be leveraged as a tourist attraction. Many modern travelers seek unique and authentic food experiences, and the Lotek dish fits perfectly into this growing market trend.

2. **Differentiation Through Authenticity**

Unlike modern variations served in restaurants or hotels, this Lotek dish offers a truly traditional experience, creating a niche that can be marketed as a rare find. This can justify premium pricing and create a loyal customer base.

3. **Social Media and User-Generated Content (UGC)**

Based on the research by Levyda et al. (2021), many tourists photograph and post culinary experiences online before consuming them. Encouraging customers to tag the business in their posts can amplify reach organically and serve as free, credible advertising.

4. **Collaboration with Local Tourism Initiatives**

The business could partner with local tourism boards, cultural festivals, or culinary tours to gain more exposure. Being featured in travel itineraries or promoted as a “must-try” local dish can significantly boost visibility and sales.

5. **Product Development and Packaging Innovation**

By exploring new packaging techniques that preserve the freshness of the peanut sauce, the dish could be adapted for takeaway or delivery without compromising quality. This innovation could open doors for expansion into new markets or catering services.

◆ **Threats**

1. **Increased Competition**

The growing number of modern vendors selling Lotek—especially those using commercial-grade equipment in restaurants and hotels—poses a threat. These

competitors may be able to serve larger volumes more efficiently, and might attract customers who prioritize convenience over tradition.

2. **Rising Costs of Raw Materials**

Inflation and supply chain disruptions have led to increased prices of raw ingredients, including vegetables and peanuts. This directly impacts profit margins and may necessitate price adjustments, which could deter price-sensitive customers.

3. **Changing Consumer Preferences**

As dietary trends shift toward health-conscious or fast-food preferences, traditional dishes with rich sauces like Lotek might be seen as less appealing by certain consumer segments. Without adaptation or marketing repositioning, the dish risks becoming niche or outdated in perception.

4. **Technology Lag**

While social media use is strong, a lack of investment in broader digital infrastructure (e.g., a dedicated website, online payment systems, or delivery partnerships) could place the business at a disadvantage compared to more tech-savvy competitors.

Based on the research conducted at Lotek Ci Apang, in terms of culinary potential, the distinctive taste of the lotek is influenced by the tools used. This is supported by the statement from the owner of Lotek Ci Apang, who mentioned that grinding the spices manually in a mortar (as opposed to using a blender) results in a different texture. In research conducted by Juliana (2019), culinary tourism, as one of the advantages in the tourism sector, has great potential for development and utilization. If managed professionally and systematically, it can even become a unique attraction that enhances tourists' interest.

Based on the research conducted at Lotek Ci Apang, in terms of culinary potential, the distinctive taste of the lotek is influenced by the tools used. This is supported by the statement from the owner of Lotek Ci Apang, who mentioned that grinding the spices in a mortar (as opposed to using a blender) results in a different texture. Lotek Ci Apang has significant potential as a traditional culinary tourism attraction in Karawang. With its unique traditional preparation process and authentic taste that has been preserved since 1954, Lotek Ci Apang offers a distinct and authentic culinary experience. Its easily accessible location, as well as its adaptation to modern technology through promotion on social media, particularly Instagram, and online ordering services like through online ride-hailing apps and WhatsApp, further increase its appeal. However, some weaknesses, such as the lack of parking space and the limited shelf life of the dish, need to be addressed to support the business's growth. Competition from modern lotek vendors and rising raw material costs are challenges that must be faced. By strengthening its uniqueness and traditional value, as well as supporting promotions and improving facilities, Lotek Ci Apang can become a more widely recognized culinary tourism icon in Karawang.

4. **Conclusion**

Lotek Ci Apang is a unique attraction because it still preserves the traditional preparation process. Its location is highly strategic, located in the center of Karawang, easily accessible by both public transportation and online ride-hailing services. Based on the SWOT analysis, the strengths of Lotek Ci Apang include its distinctive taste, which has been preserved since 1954, making it an authentic dish of Karawang, and the availability of online ordering. However, there are weaknesses, such as the fact that the lotek, due to its peanut sauce, does not have a long shelf life, and the lack of adequate parking space. The opportunities available include the fact that the lotek has become legendary in the area, which can be leveraged as a traditional culinary

value and a potential culinary tourism attraction. The threats mostly come from competitors who use modern equipment. With its unique qualities, along with promotional support and facility improvements, Lotek Ci Apang has the potential to become a widely recognized culinary tourism icon in Karawang.

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