Research Article

Women Initiatives and Its Impact on Agro-Ecotourism Development in Rural Areas

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Abstract.
In Indonesia, a new form of tourism called agro-ecotourism has emerged from rural agricultural activities. It holds great promise in conjunction with cultural and ecotourism. The participation of women in agro-ecotourism has had substantial impact on its development and socio-economic well-being. However, the societal expectations that limited women to the home have diminished their significance within it. This article analyzed the current status of agro-ecotourism in Sukowilangun village, Kalipare sub-district, Malang District, East Java. The focus was on identifying the factors that drove and hindered participation in tourism, with a particular emphasis on gender. This article also explored the role of local communities in the development of a gender-inclusive agro-ecotourism model. This study utilized a qualitative approach, incorporating in-depth interviews and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) techniques. It was evident from the findings that, despite progress in the tourism sector, the current level of female involvement in tourism destinations remains unsatisfactory. It was discovered that Sukowilangun village has great potential for developing Agro-ecotourism centered around processed cassava. This initiative, led by The Perempuan Singkong, a collective of migrant women’s families, shows great promise as a source of income and a way to generate more community interest in tourism. Lastly, the development of a top-notch tourism destination necessitates the focus on three crucial aspects: establishment of proper institutions, investment in skilled personnel, and fostering women’s involvement. Through the promotion of gender equality and the inclusion of women in decision-making processes, tourism destinations foster a more diverse and inclusive environment that brings benefits to all.

Keywords: Agro-ecotourism; Community-based; Institutionalization; Women-participation

1. Introduction

Agro-ecotourism is an emerging form of tourism that is currently being developed in diverse regions across the globe, including Indonesia. The preference for ecotourism as a sustainable tourism context can be observed within the context of tourism development, particularly in rural areas [1]. The tourism sector in Indonesia has experienced significant growth, particularly in rural areas that focus on agro-ecotourism. This development can be attributed to the implementation of policies by the Ministry of Tourism and
Creative Economy. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the local tourism industry, leading to a decline in its activities. However, there has been a gradual resurgence in the agroecotourism sector in Indonesia, characterized by notable growth. Tourism has been identified as a key driver of economic growth by the Government, with the aim of augmenting the state budget.

The growth of agro-ecotourism, particularly in rural regions, necessitates the establishment of sustainable tourism models in order to enhance its attractiveness and marketability to potential tourists [2,4]. Hence, the present study endeavors to enhance the prospects of ecotourism as a foundation for tourism, with a particular focus on the management strategies and models for developing community-based tourism. This approach aims to ensure that local inhabitants derive advantages from the conservation of their surrounding natural environment. When examining the context of ecotourism, it is crucial to consider the concept of environmental awareness. This concept highlights the significance of ensuring that the enhancement of welfare is directly linked to the optimization of environmental quality in the specific tourist area [5, 6, 7].

Malang Regency is a prominent tourism destination in Indonesia, primarily due to its favorable environmental conditions [8]. Malang Regency is a renowned tourist destination, characterized by its favorable natural conditions that facilitate the development of tourism. This region boasts a diverse landscape, encompassing both coastal areas, mountainous terrain, and low-lying plains. Consequently, this study entails an exploration of the theoretical frameworks and operational structures that have been formulated within the realm of ecological tourism, with a focus on its role in facilitating socio-economic change. The engagement and active participation of diverse stakeholders in the advancement of agroecotourism in Malang Regency, located in the East Java Province, can yield multiple effects on the progress of other tourism initiatives centered around the environment.

Sukowilangun Village is a constituent village within the Malang District that actively contributes to the outflow of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), thereby fostering a significant presence of former PMI individuals who possess the capacity to generate capital and establish new employment opportunities. The community exhibits a notable work ethic, particularly among women, with no instances of adult unemployment observed in the agricultural, trading, and other sectors. A significant number of women engage in migrant labor overseas, primarily in sectors such as agriculture, trade, and services. Sukowilangun Village exhibits a notable prevalence of women in leadership positions, exemplified by the female Village Secretary. Additionally, the village is characterized by the active involvement of women activists who effectively mobilize women to participate...
in various organizations and entrepreneurial endeavors, particularly among individuals with a history of migrant work. The business division responsible for the production of instant tiwul, gatot, chips, and cake is managed by a predominantly female workforce. The aforementioned women’s group has also undergone training in the production of mokaf flour, thereby pioneering the establishment of culinary lodges. Nevertheless, the marketing process remains limited, predominantly confined to the local scope of Sukowilangun Village.

The aim of this study is to develop a conceptual framework for community empowerment in the management of agro-ecotourism in Malang Regency. The research aims to achieve specific objectives in a comprehensive manner:

1. Examining the state of gender-based agro-ecotourism in Sukowilangun
2. Identifying factors that exert influence on women’s engagement in agro-ecotourism
3. Analyzing the role of local communities in the development of gender and community-based tourism
4. Formulating a comprehensive framework/model for the development of agro-ecotourism in Sukowilangun Village

2. Research Method

The present research used a case study design. This involved the initial implementation of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) techniques to facilitate the mapping of the agroecosystem within the designated research region [21]. Subsequently, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to gather comprehensive data. The research steps could be delineated into the following steps:

1. Rappid Assessment in Sukowilangun Village, Kalipare Sub-district
2. Secondary data study sourced from Sukowilangun Village Office
3. Focused discussions and in-depth interviews with women’s groups
4. Survey on women’s responses to agroecotourism development
5. Data analysis
6. Formulation of the agroecotourism development model in Sukowilangun Village
7. Journal Writing
8. Policy formulation (policy brief)
9. Activity impact analysis

The selection of the research setting was purposefully made in Sukowilangun Village, located in the Kalipare Sub-district of Malang Regency. This decision was based on the
presence of an active women’s community within the village, which is actively involved in the development of tourism. The majority of women who engage in productive activities are employed as dryland farmers and migrant workers abroad. These individuals consistently remit funds to their families and possess the potential to serve as valuable business capital. The service sector’s growth within the context of migrant labor has enabled Kalipare to effectively navigate and overcome its surrounding conditions.

The research informants were women in Oro-oro Ombo and Sukowilangun Villages, namely a group of twenty women who were willing to participate in tourism development and four male leaders of tourism developers. Key informants were community leaders, both women and men, village officials and agro-tourism traders/shops/entrepreneurs, homestays, and community groups, especially women.

The main research variables in the study are (1) regional potential, (2) agroecosystem conditions, (3) community perceptions, (4) tourism marketing, and (5) initial conditions of informants.

3. Result

3.1. Gender-based agro-ecotourism status map in the Sukowilangun Village

The study was conducted in the Sukowilangun Village, located in the Kalipare Subdistrict of Malang District, East Java, Indonesia. The Kalipare Sub-district is classified as one of the 33 sub-districts within the administrative division of the Malang Regency. Kalipare Sub-district is situated in the southern region of the Sutami Dam, Karangkates. It is characterized by a topography dominated by forested areas and hilly terrain. The Sutami Dam serves multiple purposes, encompassing hydroelectric power generation, flood control measures, irrigation for rice fields, freshwater fish farming, and tourism attractions. The Kalipare region is characterized by the prevalence of teak forests, which are actively utilized by the local community for agricultural purposes. Consequently, a significant portion of the population in Kalipare is engaged in the agricultural sector.

The Sukowilangun Village is comprised of four distinct hamlets: Sukorejo, Kampungbaru, Tawang, and Kopral. It exhibits promising water resource potential due to its proximity to the Karangkates reservoir. Consequently, the primary economic activities in this region revolve around the cultivation of various crops such as tubers, sugar cane, rice, corn, peanuts, and coconuts. Additionally, the local community engages in fisheries, specifically the cultivation of tilapia, tombro, and catfish using floating screens.
The physical condition of Sukowilangun Village exhibits promising potential for the development of tourism.

Kopral Hamlet, situated to the east of the village, shares a boundary with the Karangkates reservoir. This reservoir serves as a fishing destination, attracting both local residents and visitors from outside the community. However, it is worth noting that the facilities and amenities available at this location remain modest in nature. To the western side, there exists a border with the teak forest managed by PERHUTANI, presenting a promising opportunity for the development of teak forest tourism.

The female population in Sukowilangun comprises 3,510 individuals, accounting for 50.4% of the total population 6,961 individuals. In contrast, the male population stands at 3,451 individuals, representing 49.6% of the total population. In Sukowilangun Village, there was a notable inclination among the female population to engage in international migration as a means to swiftly enhance their respective households’ economic conditions. Conversely, the male population tended to concentrate their efforts on employment opportunities within the region of Kalimantan. The inclination of women to engage in migrant labor was substantiated by the prerequisites for aspiring migrant workers, namely attaining a minimum age of 18 years and possessing a junior high school education. Furthermore, the perceived lack of economic benefits from agriculture, livestock, and fisheries in Sukowilangun Village has resulted in an increased inclination among female residents to seek employment opportunities overseas as migrant workers, while male residents were more inclined to seek employment in plantations or mines in Kalimantan.
The table below presents the distribution of occupations among the population residing in Sukowilangun Village.

**Table 1: Number of residents by type of occupation.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Livelihood Sector</th>
<th>Number (People)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Not yet employed</td>
<td>1176</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Farmer/plantation workers</td>
<td>1213</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Private employees and migrant workers</td>
<td>1560</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Householder</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1566</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6961</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Sukowilangun Village Monographic Data, 2022*

The greatest segment of employment, with 1,560 individuals or 22.4% of the total, pertains to private employees, including migrant workers both domestically and overseas, with a specific focus on the region of Kalimantan. The engagement of men in Kalimantan mostly revolved around employment in oil palm plantations and mining enterprises, whilst women predominantly participated as migrant workers. This division of labour yielded higher remittances compared to those earned via working as farm labourers or small traders in Sukowilangun. Furthermore, these economic activities undertaken by men and women served as a catalyst for entrepreneurial endeavours within the Sukowilangun community.

The women residing in Sukowilangun, particularly those who were migrant workers and their families, were organised within the Perempuan Singkong community. This community engaged in various activities centred around the processing of cassava into mokaf flour, instant gatot and tiwul, cassava chips, and other cassava-based processed foods. These endeavours possessed the potential to be further developed and utilised within the realm of culinary tourism.

**The roles of local community in gender-based tourism development**

The finding derived from the focused group discussion indicated some implications in the development of tourism.

“... The residents of Sukowilangun village have a progressive mindset and a positive attitude towards the advancement of tourism in their community. This is predicated upon the inherent potential inside the community that possesses the capacity to facilitate the advancement of tourism. The residents around the village express a strong sense
of optimism regarding the potential of tourism to stimulate the local economy. They believe that tourism can facilitate community engagement in tourism management and serve as a platform for promoting the processed products made by women who are members of the Perempuan Singkong community. This, in turn, can enable independent marketing opportunities for these products. The Sukowilangun Village exhibits promising tourism prospects in the water domain due to its proximity to the Karangkates reservoir. Additionally, the village’s location in close proximity to the forestry forest offers opportunities for agricultural activities in the peripheral areas surrounding the forestry plants. The community has established many forms of privately-owned water tourism, including Kopral fishing, camping grounds, and Suko Park, which features food booths, swimming pools, and Sasana Krida Budaya."

The community base in Sukowilangun village comprised six individual farmer groups and one collective farmer group. In Sukowilangun Village, the local farmers commonly cultivated agricultural commodities such as corn, rice, and sugar cane. Certain commodities have been employed as processed goods that can contribute to the advancement of tourism in the village; yet, their effectiveness remained suboptimal.

The Perempuan Singkong community, led by Mrs. SNL, comprised women who have previously worked as migrant labourers and their families. The total number of members was 40, with 30 of them being actively engaged. The management of Mrs. SNL demonstrated a high level of engagement both inside and beyond the village, actively participating in exhibitions showcasing the processed products of Perempuan Singkong community.

The Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDES) placed its emphasis on market management, but Karangtaruna (youth group) exhibited limited activity due to a significant portion of the youth population being employed as mine labourers in Kalimantan, with a considerable number of young women seeking employment opportunities overseas. The institutions involved in the promotion of tourism encompass the village administration, the village forest society (LMDH), and Jasa Tirta (Indonesia water company), a corporation responsible for the management of the Karangkates reservoir region which shares a border with Sukowilangun village.

The findings from the focus group discussion yielded the subsequent pattern on the progress of Kopral fishing, camping ground, and Suko Park. The administration of Suko Park successfully acquired an informal authorization from the LMDH to construct various recreational facilities, including a park, swimming pool, gazebo, and photo spot. A monthly bazaar was organised by a group of women who engage in the production of food, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as handicrafts. In
addition to the marketplace, there was also a traditional folk-art presentation. The art performances found within this community encompassed a variety of forms, including Reyog, Bantengan, Serduk/Sakerah, Jaranan (a traditional horse dance), dance studio, and karaoke. The aforementioned trend was also observed within the fishing industry, when the manager is granted authorization to establish a fishing zone, engage in karambah commercial activities (container for fishing farming), operate food booths, and offer karaoke services. The aforementioned principle also held true for the camping site. During periods of low tide, numerous individuals chose to engage in camping activities inside this particular region. The food and beverage stalls experienced a high level of demand. The Perempuan Singkong community was prepared to supply snack, food, and beverage goods in all three domains, provided that the area has undergone development naturally, subject to the authorization of the manager.

Various traditional cultural practises that continue to thrive and are upheld by women included Slametan (ceremonial meal), clean village, Barikan, Bedah Krawang Sukowilangun, Suroan (events associated with Suroan), Mauludan (celebration in Islam that marks the birth of the Islamic prophet Muhammad), and Punden site management (Mbah Plenti, Mbah Suko, Gunung Burit, Selo Lapak). Birth, marriage, and funeral rituals continued to be observed at the domestic level.

Several factors hindered the progress of tourism in Sukowilangun Village, namely inadequate waste management practises, as well as prevailing cultural conflicts and divergent perspectives among community members. The presence of limited financial resources, as well as variations in cultural norms among different hamlets, was perceived as a potential catalyst for community discord.

In the initial phases of tourist development, men tended to assume prominent roles in the planning and management of tourism initiatives, whilst women typically engaged in various tourism-related activities. Gender relations played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of work within the tourism industry. Specifically, men tended to assume managerial positions and were responsible for tasks such as overseeing fishing activities throughout the afternoon and evening, as well as maintaining parking facilities and ensuring security measures are in place. At Suko Park, women were responsible for the operation and management of various stalls, including those selling food and beverages, as well as participating in bazaars. Artistic performances are executed by individuals of both genders. Gender relations mostly manifest as a mutually supportive collaboration between females and males.

Gender and community-based agrotourism development model in Sukowilangun Village
From the results of in-depth studies and FGDs, a gender and community-based agro-ecotourism development model in Sukowilangun Village was formulated, through a logic model framework, as follows.

![Figure 2: Women empowerment model based on gender and community.](image)

The focus of women’s empowerment lies in the pursuit of facilitating women’s access to tourism resources and their capacity to exercise decision-making authority. By leveraging community-based approaches or engaging in women’s collectives, there is a potential to enhance the well-being of families. In order to foster a dynamic community, it is imperative to mobilize community members, with a particular emphasis on the leadership of individuals, including women leaders. The optimal approach for community engagement involves a bottom-up, proactive strategy that encourages the generation and implementation of ideas originating from the grassroots level.

The present study aims to explore the development of agro-ecotourism, considering the influence of geographical conditions and the utilization of women’s potential in various aspects such as culinary tourism, processed food, processed agricultural products, and other creative products. The tourism market, positioned at the forefront of the industry, necessitates a comprehensive promotional strategy encompassing both online and offline channels. In order to address this issue, it is imperative to have actors or market players who possess the necessary skills and capabilities.
4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Women empowerment

The term empowerment can be traced back to its etymological root, the word “daya,” which denotes strength or capability. In its conceptualization, empowerment is understood as a transformative process through which individuals who possess power transfer their power, strength, and abilities to those who possess less or lack empowerment altogether [9]. Empowerment refers to the deliberate act of granting power to a community, thereby enabling individuals to possess the capacity to exercise agency in their decision-making processes. The objectives of empowerment initiatives can be directed towards individuals, groups, or communities that have been marginalized or disadvantaged.

Empowerment necessitates the simultaneous implementation of three essential components, specifically: (a) preferential treatment, (b) adequate readiness, and (c) safeguarding measures. Women are identified as a demographic that requires empowerment in order to enhance their ability to access and exercise control over resources [10,11]. There is a growing recognition of the significance of women’s role, as evidenced by the evolving approach of development programs targeting women. This shift is motivated by the imperative for women to attain independence and their integral contribution to the process of development [12], and the women’s empowerment could be made in many aspects, including in tourism.

The phenomenon of women empowerment is often attributed to the persistent challenges posed by high levels of poverty. Efforts aimed at empowering women are grounded in the context of poverty, which can be classified into two main categories: structural poverty and cultural poverty [13]. The concept of structural poverty pertains to individuals or collectives who experience or fall into poverty due to the unequal societal structure that disadvantages vulnerable populations. Individuals who find themselves in a state of poverty or experience a decline in their socioeconomic status do not necessarily lack the desire to enhance their circumstances. Rather, their endeavors are often impeded by the existing societal system or structure. On the other hand, cultural poverty refers to a form of poverty that arises as a result of the cultural characteristics and practices within a given community. In the Sukowilangun region, the manifestation of poverty becomes apparent through the observation that the average household possesses a mere 0.5 hectares of land. The development of economies may encounter
challenges when they rely solely on the agricultural sector. Women have the potential to contribute to the development of culinary-based tourism.

4.2. Agro-ecotourism

Indonesia is renowned for its exceptional natural landscapes and rich biodiversity. The Indonesian Government has unequivocally prioritized the development of tourist destinations as a national strategic initiative aimed at augmenting Indonesia’s economic revenue and enhancing its global recognition. The government actively extends substantial support to tourism advocates in various regions as a means of fostering community development and significance [2, 20]. Community-based or ecotourism is a burgeoning form of tourism that is anticipated to flourish and exert a substantial influence on the community. This particular type of tourism is gaining popularity among both domestic and international visitors. The phenomenon of community-based tourism is becoming increasingly prevalent in diverse regions. Its primary aim extends beyond enhancing community welfare to include fostering ecological awareness among both tourists and managers [4,7]. The Sukowilangun ecosystem encompasses a comprehensive array of physical elements, including water bodies, forests, and gastronomic attractions, which provide significant potential for women-led development initiatives. Sukowilangun, located in the Malang district, emerges as a village with promising prospects for the establishment of agro-ecotourism initiatives, which are primarily propelled by the active participation of both male and female members within the community.

One of the key strategies for the development of the tourism ecosystem is the preservation of the environment coupled with the provision of ecological and cultural education to the community, particularly the younger generation [7,14,15]. This approach is expected to have a comprehensive impact on the sustainability and longevity of tourism in Indonesia. By actively involving the community in the tourism development process and promoting environmental conservation, significant benefits can be realized for both the community and the region. Fennell supports this notion by emphasizing that the development of ecotourism-based sites should not solely focus on exploiting the environmental aspects for profit, but rather should prioritize the cultivation of environmental sustainability values within the community and younger generation of the region [6,7].

In the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (KEMEN-PAREKRAF) is actively engaged in promoting branding initiatives, with a particular focus on tourist areas that prioritize the ecological concept as their primary destination [2].
The aforementioned reinforcement, as elucidated by KEMENPAREKRAF, aligns with Fennell’s assertion that sustainable tourism ought to be directed towards the realms of business, socio-economic factors, cultural sustainability, and the preservation of environmental aspects. Hence, when choosing tourist destinations that receive governmental assistance in their management, it is imperative to consider clear management strategies encompassing social, economic, cultural, and ecological aspects. Batu City and Malang Regency are recognized as prominent national and international tourism destinations, offering a diverse range of ecology-based tourism options. Examining the process and dynamics of tourism development undertaken by the two tourism entities is crucial in their journey towards establishing themselves as a national ecological tourism center.

4.3. The development of community-based tourism and ecological tourism

In the realm of ecotourism management, the reliance on external entities such as government bodies or industry stakeholders is not the sole determinant. Furthermore, a crucial aspect lies in the collaboration among various stakeholders within the tourist destination itself [16]. The involvement of the community is essential for the achievement of sustainable tourism development, as it serves as the primary driving force in the overall sustainability process. The phenomenon of community empowerment plays a pivotal role in the sustained progress of regional development. Hence, a crucial consideration pertains to the means by which a community can sustain its empowerment without necessitating external institutional support. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a viable alternative within the tourism industry, characterized by a development approach that originates from within the community and follows an equitable and bottom-up process [17,18].

Like sustainable development, the concept brought by CBT is actually also related to what is developed in the concept of ecotourism and KEMENPAREKRAF where collaboration and participation in management by agents are important. Development is not only meant to be physical, but more than that, it needs to be optimized, especially related to the social, economic and cultural contexts that go hand in hand with ecological aspects [16].

Hence, the achievement of intricate sustainable tourism development necessitates the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach [19]. These two ecologically-oriented tourist
attractions aim to offer a comprehensive perspective and insight to the broader community at large, as well as to sustainable tourism advocates specifically, with the intention of enhancing their capacity for positive development. This research aims to demonstrate the model constructed by the two tourism objects and potentially inspire other tourism entities to enhance the framework of sustainable tourism development, ensuring its continuity while minimizing harm to the natural environment.

The focus of women's empowerment lies in the pursuit of facilitating women's access to tourism resources and their capacity to exercise decision-making authority. By leveraging community-based approaches or engaging in women's collectives, there is a potential to enhance the well-being of families. In order to foster a dynamic community, it is imperative to mobilize community members, with a particular emphasis on the leadership of individuals, including women leaders. The optimal approach for community engagement involves a bottom-up, proactive strategy that encourages the generation and implementation of ideas originating from the grassroots level.

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5. Conclusion

The primary objective of this study is to formulate an agro-ecotourism framework within the Malang region, with a particular emphasis on integrating gender and community-oriented elements. The utilization of the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methodology in this study has yielded a number of noteworthy findings. The present state of Agroecotourism in Sukowilangun is characterized by its geographical attributes, primarily situated in a mountainous region where perennial crops are cultivated. Additionally, the presence of Karangkates reservoir further contributes to the unique landscape. Notably, the land surrounding the reservoir becomes accessible during low tide, presenting an opportunity for camping activities. Furthermore, the gender dynamics within the realm of agritourism are evident through the prevailing presence of men in managerial positions. This is accompanied by a clear division of labor, whereby men primarily engage in
managerial tasks while women predominantly undertake activities traditionally associated with femininity, such as culinary pursuits, agricultural product cultivation, and food preparation.

In the realm of gender-based and environmental tourism, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant role that local communities play in fostering development. Specifically, by focusing on the actors involved in agroecotourism, who operate within business groups and engage in cooperative and complementary endeavors. These communities can unlock their full potential for growth and progress. The effectiveness of the agroecotourism development model in Sukowilangun village hinges upon its careful consideration of the interrelated aspects of input, process, output, outcome, and impact within the system.

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Declaration of Conflict Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Biography

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