



Binary Gender in Yogyakarta Panji Masks: A Visual Semiotic Study

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the aesthetic values of binary gender (femininity and masculinity) within the visual structure of Yogyakarta Panji masks through the lens of semiotics. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study. The object of the study is the Yogyakarta Panji mask, whose visual structure is analysed to uncover symbols that indicate femininity and masculinity values. Data sources include informants, places, events, and documents/archives collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and content analysis. The validity of the data is tested using data source triangulation and informant review techniques. Data analysis is conducted using the flow model of analysis, which involves data reduction, data display, and verification. The results indicate that the visual structure of Yogyakarta Panji masks, when examined through a semiotic framework, contains signs/symbols and values of femininity and masculinity. These values of masculinity and femininity are also embedded in and have been transformed into various cultural artifacts within the context of Javanese culture. The findings highlight that Panji masks not only reflect aesthetic expressions but also serve as cultural signifiers that preserve, communicate, and reinforce traditional Javanese perspectives on gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Panji tradition is a cultural heritage of the Indonesian ancestors, which in the past held significant power and vitality, manifesting itself in the ideological, social, cultural, and societal structures of its time. The development and influence of Panji art have played a major role in the creation of cultural arts in Java, Indonesia, and even Southeast Asia [1]. This widespread dissemination was rooted in the historical glory of the Majapahit Kingdom, notably through the efforts of Prime Minister Gajah Mada in uniting the islands of the Nusantara [2]. The conquest and unification of these regions were not solely based on warfare but were also facilitated by cultural elements, including Panji-inspired art forms, which spread organically across the archipelago.

Panji's influence extended beyond narrative traditions encapsulated in texts or inscriptions. It transformed into cultural arts, embodying the uniqueness, customs, ideologies, and needs of local communities. The Panji romances have transformed into various forms of performing

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arts and visual arts, rich in meaning and values. These diverse cultural artifacts emerged from the transformation of Panji stories into media for expression and representation within society, particularly in the form of mask art [3]. Masks (*topeng*) became an artistic medium that served as societal expressions, with their creation reflecting the typology of specific character traits [4]. The role of the mask dancer is crucial, as their performance involves more than just wearing a mask. The dancer's movements, gestures, and characterization are tailored to the mask they wear. The dancer immerses themselves in the choreography and the persona of the Panji mask character, to the extent that their body and soul no longer belong to them but instead to the character or figure represented by the mask.

Yogyakarta is known as a center of struggle, culture, and education, while also being renowned for its beautiful natural scenery as well as its traditional arts and culture that have been preserved to this day [5]. Bobung, located in Putat Village, Patuk Subdistrict, Gunung Kidul Regency, is a region within the Special Region of Yogyakarta where the influence of Panji remains alive and vibrant. This influence manifests in the form of Panji mask dance performances (*sendratari topeng panji*), which continue to be well-preserved by the local community. These performances are typically showcased during commemorative ceremonies or sacred events, serving as a medium for cultural expression. However, a pressing issue today is the declining frequency and popularity of Yogyakarta Panji mask dance performances compared to their vibrant presence in the past. The audience for this traditional art form is predominantly older generations, while younger generations show little interest in it. In line with this issue, the makers, artists, craftsmen, and performers of Panji masks are also primarily from the older generation. The younger generation is generally reluctant to learn mask-making and mask dancing due to the changing times and the shifting cultural preferences of today's youth [6].

The existence of Yogyakarta Panji mask art has experienced a decline since the influx of foreign cultural influences through technological advancement and the development of the global order [7]. Its current state starkly contrasts with the golden era of Majapahit, primarily due to the lack of appreciation and sense of ownership among the younger generation. Putra et al. [8] support this view, asserting that today's youth are largely unaware of the existence of Panji mask performances, both visually and in terms of their deeper essence, despite the rich values and profound philosophies embedded within them. One of these values includes the representation of gender dynamics, encompassing both femininity and masculinity. The performances of Panji masks are not merely entertainment but serve as a medium for imparting moral guidance, which can be applied to the daily lives of men and women by practicing the values they embody.

The potential extinction of Panji mask art is also a consequence of the younger generation's reluctance to cherish and preserve this cultural heritage. Panji masks are essentially an expression of ancestral societal values, crystallized in the form of mask art; however, the younger generation fails to recognize this uniqueness. The Panji mask tradition risks being forgotten due to limited access to information regarding its history, forms, functions, and meanings [9]. Performance-related issues also pose a challenge, as Panji mask art is rarely staged in contemporary community settings. Nurwanti [10] underscores this by noting that Panji mask performances are now extremely rare, occurring only once or twice a year on average. This situation presents an irony, as Panji mask art, once revered and admired by all social groups, is now seemingly forgotten, sinking into oblivion. These challenges must not be ignored, and effective solutions are necessary to revive and preserve Panji mask art in Bobung, Yogyakarta. One potential academic and research-oriented approach involves conducting in-depth studies on Panji masks and disseminating the findings through scientific publications. The aim is to provide the public with enriched information about this art form. Such comprehensive information could foster a renewed sense of appreciation and respect

for Panji mask art, highlighting its significance as a repository of noble cultural heritage values.

The study and research of Yogyakarta Panji mask art represent an effort to revive its existence. Panji masks can be explored in-depth to uncover the values embedded in the cultural symbols they carry, which are often shrouded in mystery. The younger generation must understand that Panji masks are not merely facial coverings for dancers. Instead, they embody values closely related to human life, particularly those concerning masculinity and femininity. These values can be unearthed through an analysis of the most apparent artifact structures, specifically the symbolic or visual elements of the masks. The symbolic features of Panji masks, such as colors, crowns, eyes, eyebrows, noses, mustaches, mouths, and beard shapes, can be analyzed using semiotics to extract the values of femininity and masculinity.

Based on this background, the research question addressed in this study is: What are the aesthetic values of masculinity and femininity embedded in the visual structure of Yogyakarta Panji masks?. This question aligns with the objective of the research, which is to explore the aesthetic values of binary gender (masculinity and femininity) embedded in the visual structure of Yogyakarta Panji masks. The benefits of this study include addressing fundamental issues related to the declining existence of Panji masks in Bobung, Yogyakarta. The findings are expected to provide new information and knowledge that the community has long overlooked. This information is anticipated to inspire future generations to appreciate and recognize the importance of preserving Panji mask art in Bobung, Yogyakarta. The uniqueness of Panji mask art, rich in values, necessitates efforts by the younger generation to introduce it to wider audiences, both locally, nationally, and internationally.

Semiotics serves as the analytical tool employed to explore the values of femininity and masculinity within the visual structure of Yogyakarta Panji masks. The visual structure can be equated with language, enabling each system of signs (visual symbols) to be understood as comprising two components: the signifier and the signified [11]. The signifier refers to all observable, audible, and perceptible aspects, which, in the context of Panji masks, represent the visual symbols of the mask itself. Meanwhile, the signified pertains to the concept or meaning behind these visual symbols. The signifier and signified are inseparable; the presence of one implies the existence of the other, often metaphorically described as two sides of the same coin [12]. However, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is also arbitrary, meaning it is subject to freedom, coincidence, or social agreement. This arbitrariness suggests a lack of inherent or scientific connection between the signifier and the signified.

Previous studies on traditional mask art relevant to this research topic have been conducted by several scholars. [13] examined the function of *topeng ireng* in Kelurahan, Magelang Regency. [14] investigated the existence of *topeng ireng* dance as a fulfillment of the aesthetic needs of the Pandesari community in Parakan, Temanggung. [15] studied the *barongan* mask art in Kendayakan, Tegal, from the perspective of the symbolic expressions of coastal communities. [16] explored the visual structure of classical Balinese masks. [4] analyzed ethnic Nusantara masks in the context of global cultural development. [17] examined the *topeng ireng* dance of Bandongrejo, Ngablak, Magelang. [18] analyzed traditional mask performances in Surakarta and Yogyakarta. [19] reflected on the concept of *mancapat* as represented in the characterization of *wayang topeng* in Malang. [20] studied the semiotics of Malang masks, focusing on a case study in Kedungmonggo Hamlet, Pakisaji Subdistrict, Malang Regency. Concerning Panji, [21] analyzed the narrative structure of Panji stories in the *wayang topeng* Malang dance-drama, focusing on the Panji Reni repertoire.

The study of Panji masks in Bobung, Yogyakarta, is not unprecedented, as previous researchers have attempted to explore and investigate the mask art in this region. [22] examined Panji masks depicting warrior, giant, and princess profiles as a source of character education. In the same year, [23] also explored the role of women behind the existence of classical and globally creative Panji masks. Later, [24] delved deeper into the study of Panji masks in Bobung, Yogyakarta, focusing on aspects of commodification and authenticity. Another researcher, [25], analyzed the Panji masks of Bobung, Yogyakarta, in relation to character values within the symbolic structure of the masks. [26] refined this analysis by focusing on the paradoxical aesthetics in the visual structure of Panji masks, particularly the contrasting profiles of *alusan* (refined) and *gagahan* (strong).

Based on these prior studies, it becomes evident that no research has specifically examined the traditional art of Yogyakarta Panji masks, focusing on the aesthetic aspects of binary gender (masculinity and femininity) within their visual structures. Earlier research on both Yogyakarta Panji masks and masks from other regions has largely concentrated on performing arts, while this proposed study will emphasize visual art aspects. While some studies on Panji masks have explored visual art, they have not yet examined the intersection of gender and aesthetics. Additionally, most existing mask studies originate from other regions, which have distinct historical, philosophical, and ideological contexts compared to Yogyakarta Panji mask art. This study therefore, contributes by positioning the Yogyakarta-style Panji mask as a critical site for interrogating how gendered aesthetics are visually encoded and symbolically represented in traditional art. By applying a semiotic analysis, this research not only fills a gap in mask studies but also advances broader discussions in visual arts, cultural studies, and semiotics. The implications of this study are twofold. First, it offers new insights into how visual art embodies gendered values within Javanese cultural traditions, and second, it provides a foundation for broader discussions on the role of traditional art in shaping, preserving, and transmitting cultural understandings of gender in contemporary contexts.

2. METHODS

The research was conducted in Bobung, Putat Village, Patuk Subdistrict, Gunung Kidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta Province. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to capture the depth of meaning, symbolism, and cultural context embedded within the visual symbols of the masks. The study adopted a single-case study design, focusing exclusively on Yogyakarta Panji masks as tangible visual art artifacts, without a comparative analysis of other mask traditions. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of gendered aesthetics within the specific cultural context of Yogyakarta Panji masks. The subjects of the research included preservationists, craftsmen, dancers, and cultural experts related to Panji masks in Bobung, Yogyakarta. The selection of subjects was determined using purposive sampling based on specific considerations such as expertise, skills, and relevance to the research domain. The data sources comprised two types: primary and secondary. Primary data were collected from informants as well as from places and events through in-depth interviews and active participant observation. Secondary data, which served to reinforce the validity of the primary data, were derived from documents and archives relevant to Yogyakarta Panji masks. These secondary data were gathered using content analysis techniques. Data collection was further supported by tools such as video recorders, audio recorders, cameras, and notebooks. The validity of the collected data was tested using two methods: data source triangulation and informant reviews. Data were analysed using the flow model of analysis, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The flow model of analysis was selected due to the single-case strategy employed in this study. Within this framework, semiotics was practically applied by identifying visual signs and symbols on Panji masks, categorizing them according to markers of femininity and masculinity, and interpreting their meanings

in relation to Javanese cultural codes. This semiotic reading connected visual elements with broader cultural narratives, allowing the study to uncover how gendered values are embedded, represented, and transmitted through the aesthetic structure of Panji masks.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Javanese culture is one of the major cultural traditions in Indonesia, originating from the Javanese as the largest ethnic group in the archipelago. It is characterized by a wealth of ideas, practices, and artifacts imbued with symbolic and philosophical meanings, and is therefore often described as a symbolic culture. Symbols in Javanese culture manifest in various forms—rituals, oral literature, performing arts, and visual arts—functioning as media to convey spiritual, social, and ethical values transmitted across generations. The Yogyakarta Panji mask stands as one such cultural artifact, serving not only as a medium of performance but also as a visual representation of symbolic values inherent in Javanese aesthetics.

Semiotics, as formulated by Charles Sanders Peirce, classifies signs into icons, indices, and symbols. Among these, the symbol is most closely associated with culture, as its meaning is constructed through social convention and transmitted within the context of tradition. Symbolic semiotic analysis thus provides an essential methodological foundation for this study, as every visual detail of the Yogyakarta Panji mask—its crown, eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, mustache, chin, and colors—functions not merely as aesthetic elements but also as symbols carrying philosophical and cultural messages. Through the lens of symbolic semiotics, the Panji mask can be read as a cultural text rich with meaning, revealing how Javanese society constructs, negotiates, and reproduces gender values through visual artifacts.

The application of symbolic semiotics in this study is directed toward examining the symbolic meanings embedded in the visual structures of Yogyakarta Panji masks, particularly in their masculine and feminine profiles. The binary opposition between masculinity and femininity in mask art does not simply represent biological differences but rather expresses Javanese cosmological and social worldviews concerning balance and harmony. Masculinity in the masks is positioned as a representation of strength, firmness, and protection, whereas femininity is interpreted as a symbol of gentleness, beauty, and fertility. Collectively, these symbols form a narrative of life balance that constitutes a fundamental foundation of Javanese philosophy.

This discussion seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the Yogyakarta Panji mask functions not merely as a visual art artifact but also as a symbolic medium articulating gender values while simultaneously teaching the philosophy of balance in life. The study also engages with gender symbolism as expressed in other Javanese cultural artifacts to situate the Panji mask within a broader cultural framework. Artistic and cultural expressions such as *wayang beber*, temples, *wayang purwa*, *Loro Blonyo* statues, the *joglo* house, Javanese rice pounders, and traditional cooking utensils similarly embody symbolic representations of masculinity and femininity. The purpose of this comparative engagement is to demonstrate that Javanese culture is deeply saturated with symbolic meanings, including gender symbolism, which is not confined to a single artifact but is instead embedded across nearly all dimensions of cultural expression.

3.1. The Symbolic Structure & Meaning of Masculine and Feminine Panji Masks

Panji is a romance and folk tale whose presence and dissemination have spread widely across the Nusantara, particularly in the former Majapahit Kingdom. The Panji romance followed the trajectory of Patih Gajah Mada's expansion in unifying the archipelago. It is

unsurprising that Panji culture, to this day, continues to exist, albeit in varying degrees, in different regions both locally and internationally (neighboring countries). According to Sumaryono [3], the Panji tale is not only widespread in various parts of the Nusantara, such as Bali, Java, Sunda, Kalimantan, Lombok, and Sumatra, but it has also reached parts of Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Thailand, and Cambodia. The Panji romance underwent acculturation with local cultures, resulting in a wide variety of Panji-inspired artistic forms.

Yogyakarta is one region strongly influenced by Panji culture, as evidenced by cultural arts rooted in the Panji romance. In Yogyakarta, Panji tales transformed into the art of *sendratari* (dance-drama) Panji masks, which are still preserved by the community of Bobung, Putat Village, Patuk Subdistrict, Gunung Kidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, to this day. Since 2005, this area has been recognized as a *topeng* (mask) tourism village actively involved in the preservation and revitalization of Panji mask art [24]. Mask dancers and artisans in this village remain actively engaged in both performing and crafting Panji masks. However, the artisans and dancers of Panji masks in this region are predominantly from the older generation. The younger generation receives limited education on Panji mask art, as their focus is largely absorbed by pursuing formal education. This has resulted not only in the discontinuity of Panji mask preservation but also in the inability of the younger generation to understand the cultural values embedded in the masks.

The Panji masks in the Yogyakarta style embody numerous noble values inherited and preserved by our ancestors since the era of the kingdoms. One of the key values embedded in the Panji masks is the reality that humanity and the entire universe are fundamentally divided into the sexes of male and female. The metanarrative of "sex" here goes beyond mere gender relations; it delves deeply into the unification of two opposing yet complementary universal elements: masculinity and femininity [27]. Our ancestors understood that humanity comprises only men (masculine) and women (feminine), and from these two genders comes the continuation of generations to uphold cultural values and traditions. Men and women symbolize balance; they are distinct yet not meant to stand alone. Women, with their gentle and delicate nature, require men for strength, and vice versa—no matter how strong, men still need women. Animals, plants, and other creations of God are also divided into male and female to maintain their ecosystems and sustain life. It can be said that it is almost impossible for anything in the vast universe to exist outside of being male or female, except for God and those creatures of His will that are neither male nor female (such as angels).

The Panji masks in the Yogyakarta style are divided into two binaries: masculine masks and feminine masks. The binary structure of these masks, both in symbolism and meaning, is oppositional and paradoxical. This paradoxical form represents, in general, the paradox of masculine and feminine values, which can be examined in greater detail in the following table.



Figure 1. Panji Asmarabangun & Dewi Sekartaji Mask.
[Source: Wijaya Documentation, 2020]

Table 1. Symbol Structure & Meaning of Masculine & Feminine Panji Masks.
[Source: Document Analysis, 2024]

Structure	Masculine Mask		Feminine Mask	
	Symbol	Meaning	Symbol	Meaning
Central Character Kingdom	Panji Asmarabangun	Gallantry & Masculinity	Dewi Sekartaji	Softness & Femininity
	Jenggala	Northern Direction & Worldly	Daha	Southern Direction & Heavenly
Crown	<i>Rujen & Rujen Buto</i>	Honor & Strength	<i>Rujen & Relung</i>	Honor & Gentleness
Eyebrows	<i>Manjangan Ranggah</i>	Stiff & Strong	<i>Nanggal Sepisan</i>	Stiff & Strong
Eye	<i>Plolot</i>	Intense Gaze	<i>Leyepan</i>	Downcast Gaze
Nose	<i>Pangotan</i>	Firm & Deceptive	<i>Walimiring</i>	Sweet & Honest
Mouth	<i>Prengesan & Gusen</i>	Talkative & Gluttonous	<i>Mingkem</i>	Reserved & Modest in Eating
Mustache	Thin & Thick Mustache	Male Virility	No Mustache	Femininity
Chin	Bearded	Strength & Handsomeness	No Beard	Gentleness & Beauty
Color	White, Red, & Blue	Purity, Aggressiveness, & Coolness	White & Yellow	Purity & Cheerfulness

The Panji masks in the Yogyakarta style are rich in symbols that embody both masculinity and femininity. As illustrated in the table above, the Panji masks in this style are generally structured around symbols and meanings of maleness and femaleness. The main characters in the Panji romance are the couple Panji Asmarabangun and Dewi Sekartaji. Their story revolves around the love affair between Asmarabangun and Sekartaji, filled with trials and tribulations, but ultimately, they are reunited. The cultural acculturation across various regions in the archipelago has resulted in different versions of the Panji tale, though their essence remains the same. [3] emphasizes that the chronology of the love story between Asmarabangun and Sekartaji in the Panji narrative has spread widely and diversified, with the names of the main characters sometimes differing. In one version, Dewi Sekartaji disagrees with an arranged marriage to a man she does not love, leading her to leave the palace. In another version, Dewi Sekartaji is kidnapped and taken to the forest, prompting Panji Asmarabangun to embark on a journey to find his beloved.

Panji Asmarabangun hails from the Kingdom of Jenggala, located in the northern region, while Dewi Sekartaji comes from the Kingdom of Daha in the south. Jenggala and Daha were once a single great kingdom, the Kingdom of Kediri, ruled by King Airlangga [28]. Asmarabangun and Sekartaji symbolize the paradoxical existence of humanity—man and woman—each possessing opposing values and traits. Men, with their masculinity, and women, with their femininity, are inherently a balance that cannot exist without the other. Men and women are, in fact, two separate beings, much like the Kingdoms of Jenggala and Daha; however, they are one unity, akin to the Kingdom of Kediri (the combined realms of

Jenggala and Daha). This aesthetic value of binary gender is also crystallized in the forms and symbols found in the Panji masks, especially in the Yogyakarta style.

The binary gender values of masculinity and femininity in the Yogyakarta Panji masks are reflected in the symbols of the mask, including the crown shape, eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, mustache, chin, and color. The masculine mask features a crown shaped like *rujen* and *rujen buto*, while the feminine mask features a *jamang* with forms such as *rujen jamang* and *relung jamang*, which have a more feminine structural appearance. The *rujen jamang relung* consists of zig-zag tooth-like structures on both sides of the crown [22]. The crowns or *jamang* on both the masculine and feminine masks carry the meaning of honor, with the masculine honor representing strength and the feminine honor symbolizing gentleness. The honor of men lies in their strength, enabling them to provide protection, guardianship, and security for women, who are generally perceived as weak and gentle. The honor of women, on the other hand, lies in their softness, grace, and compassion. Women who display characteristics similar to men, and vice versa, men who resemble women, are viewed negatively by the local community.

The eyebrows of the Yogyakarta Panji mask are structured with paradoxical symbols and shapes between the masculine and feminine masks. The masculine mask features the *manjangan ranggah* shape, while the feminine mask has the *nanggal sepisan* shape. The *manjangan ranggah* eyebrows convey strength, with a branching form resembling deer antlers, whereas the *nanggal sepisan* eyebrows appear softer, with a thin, curved form resembling a crescent moon [29]. The *manjangan ranggah* eyebrows are thick, curved, and branched, giving an impression of rigidity and strength. The most dominant trait of masculinity is rigidity and strength. A man who is soft, indecisive, or weak is considered not to be a "true" man. In contrast, the *nanggal sepisan* eyebrows have a thin, curved, and unbranched form, symbolizing softness and gentleness. The dominant trait of femininity is softness and gentleness, as shown in both the physical and emotional characteristics of women. Women are perceived as only able to bear lighter burdens compared to men, who are stronger. This is considered a natural law, although there are certain cases where women are stronger than men.

The symbols of masculinity and femininity in the Yogyakarta Panji masks can also be found in the shape of the eyes. The masculine mask tends to feature wide, glaring eyes (*plolot*), while the feminine mask displays narrower, slanted eyes (*leyepan*). The *plolot* eyes are round and wide, symbolizing a sharp and decisive gaze. Men, by nature, possess traits of decisiveness, firmness, and authority in their gaze and decision-making [30]. As leaders of their families, men must embody these firm characteristics to lead their households. On the other hand, the *leyepan* eyes in the feminine mask are thin and almond-shaped, resembling rice grains, and convey a soft, gentle gaze. A woman's eyes are seen as beautiful and gentle, signifying that women possess a delicate and shy character. Wahyudi [31] emphasizes that women are inherently soft beings, gifted with the natural roles of pregnancy, menstruation, childbirth, and breastfeeding. These roles, though challenging, require gentleness and are infused with love and care.

In line with the shape of the eyes, the noses of the masculine Panji mask characters also contrast. *Pangotan* is the term used for the nose shape found in masculine Panji masks, which is prominent, long, and large, symbolizing decisiveness and deceit. The fictional character Pinocchio, for example, becomes a symbol of this idea, where every lie causes his nose to grow longer [32]. Men are often associated with decisiveness, but in today's societal hegemony, they are also considered more prone to lying than women. The feminine mask, however, features a smaller, more pointed nose, known as *walimiring* or *mbangir*. This nose shape is associated with sweetness and honesty. Women are stereotypically seen as having sweet faces and maintaining honesty, even if it is not always entirely accurate.

The binary contrast in the shapes of the eyes and noses serves as a clear symbol that the characters in the Yogyakarta Panji masks are divided into those embodying masculine and feminine traits.

The mouth is an important symbol in the Yogyakarta Panji masks, as the shape of the mouth reflects the character of the mask's figure. Masks with masculine characteristics typically have a wide, broad smile, revealing the teeth and gums. This mouth shape signifies that the masculine character is talkative and consumes both good and bad things. In contrast, the feminine mask has a different mouth shape, symbolizing the opposite qualities. The feminine mask features a closed mouth with a subtle smile, reflecting the gentle, shy, sweet nature of a woman who speaks little and consumes less.

One of the most prominent characteristics distinguishing a masculine and feminine mask is the presence of facial hair, specifically mustaches and beards. Masks with mustaches and beards clearly represent masculine figures. While some men may not have facial hair, it is naturally common for adult men to have mustaches and beards. Women, on the other hand, do not naturally grow facial hair on their mustache or chin, which enhances their feminine characteristics, such as beauty, sweetness, and gentleness. Though some women may have mustaches or beards, this is often due to hormonal imbalances, leading to excessive hair growth in specific areas, such as the mustache and chin.

The color of the masks is one of the most important symbols in understanding the meaning and character of the figures in the Yogyakarta Panji masks. Masculine masks tend to feature face colors of white, red, and blue, while feminine masks typically have white and yellow face colors. Color psychology indicates that white represents purity or holiness, red signifies aggression, blue symbolizes calmness, and yellow signifies cheerfulness [33]. In the context of cultural relativism, the meanings and interpretations of colors may vary depending on the culture in which they are interpreted. The interpretation of colors in the context of the Yogyakarta Panji masks can be understood as explained above; however, in other cultural contexts, these colors may hold different meanings.

3.2. The Meaning of Masculinity and Femininity in the Symbols of Javanese Cultural Context

The Yogyakarta Panji mask is a cultural artifact of Javanese culture that contains symbols and meanings. Javanese culture, originating from the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, the Javanese people, is characterized by a wealth of ideas, activities, and artifacts that are distinguished by their symbolic aesthetic uniqueness. Javanese culture is rich in symbols, which is why it is often regarded as a symbolic culture [34]. The meanings embedded in the Panji mask crystallize into values, namely masculinity and femininity. These values are essentially the ideological values of Javanese society, which adheres to the concepts of balance and fertility. The value of fertility, represented by the binary opposition of male and female, is manifested in various cultural artifacts within Javanese culture. The Panji mask, *wayang beber*, temples, *wayang purwa*, *loro blonyo*, *joglo* houses, traditional Javanese rice pounders, and traditional Javanese cooking utensils all contain the essence of masculine and feminine values. Table 2 below presents data on cultural artifacts from various Javanese traditions that embody binary gender values, namely masculine (male) and feminine (female). These cultural artifacts are linked to gender, whether viewed through the lens of mythology, symbolism, or the social roles within Javanese society.

Table 2. Masculine & Feminine Meanings in Symbols in the Javanese Cultural Context.
[Source: Document Analysis, 2024]

Cultural Artifacts	Masculine (Male)	Feminine (Female)
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Panji Mask	<i>Panji Asmarabangun</i>	<i>Dewi Sekartaji</i>
<i>Wayang Beber</i>	<i>Inu Kertapati</i>	<i>Candra Kirana</i>
<i>Sukuh Temple</i>	<i>Lingga</i>	<i>Yoni</i>
<i>Wayang Purwa</i>	<i>Rama</i>	<i>Shinta</i>
<i>Loro Blonyo</i>	<i>Raden Sadana</i>	<i>Dewi Sri</i>
<i>Joglo House</i>	<i>Pendopo</i>	<i>Omah Dalem</i>
Javanese Traditional Clothing	<i>Beskap & Blangkon</i>	<i>Kebaya & Sanggul</i>
Rice Pounder in Java	<i>Alu</i>	<i>Lesung</i>
Traditional Javanese Utensils	<i>Munthu</i>	<i>Lemper</i>

The Panji mask, particularly the Yogyakarta style, is structured with symbols that embody both masculine and feminine values. These values are clearly reflected in the two main characters of the mask: Panji Asmarabangun, represented as masculine, and Dewi Sekartaji, represented as feminine. These two characters frequently appear in traditional Javanese stories, where Panji Asmarabangun is usually depicted as a hero, while Dewi Sekartaji is portrayed as a figure of grace and beauty. The Panji story is not confined to Java; its existence has spread to the Malay Peninsula. The widespread dissemination of the Panji tale is believed to align with the political expansion of Patih Gajah Mada in unifying the Nusantara region, extending even to Southeast Asia and the Malay Peninsula [2]. This broad distribution has led to the emergence of various versions of the Panji tale, with even the main characters differing in some versions. However, these differences are essentially the same, with the structure remaining unchanged. Masculine and feminine values are consistently present in Panji culture, across all versions of the tale and various cultural adaptations.

Wayang beber is one example of a cultural artifact that is essentially still related to the Panji story or legend. *Wayang beber* is unique in that it presents its narrative in a pictorial format, with the story told by unfolding a scroll of images, making it similar to illustrated storytelling [35]. The main characters in *wayang beber* are Raden Inu Kertapati (another name for Panji) and Dewi Candra Kirana (another name for Sekartaji). Inu Kertapati is depicted as a symbol of masculinity, while Candra Kirana represents femininity. Inu Kertapati is a strong heroic figure who always protects Candra Kirana, a graceful and gentle woman. These two characters often symbolize the dualism of gender roles in Javanese tradition.

Another Javanese artifact that embodies the meaning of masculinity and femininity is the *Sukuh Temple*. The gender symbolism at *Sukuh Temple* is expressed through the representation of the *Lingga* and *Yoni* symbols. The *Lingga* at *Sukuh Temple* is depicted in the form of a male genitalia symbol, while the *Yoni* represents femininity, symbolized visually as a representation of the womb. In Hinduism, the *Lingga* symbolizes the god Shiva, while the *Yoni* represents his consort, Goddess Parvati [36]. The presence of the *Lingga* is typically accompanied by the *Yoni*, with the *Lingga* positioned above the *Yoni*, symbolizing the union of Shiva and Parvati. This union represents the marriage between man and woman. These two symbols clearly illustrate the unity of the male and female in creation and the balance of the universe.



Figure 2. *Lingga Yoni*.
[Source: [38]]



Figure 3. *Wayang Beber*.
[Source: [37]]

The symbolism of male and female can also be seen in another Javanese artifact, the *Wayang Purwa*. Rama and Shinta are the main characters representing the binary gender symbolism. The love story of Rama and Shinta revolves around the trial of Goddess Shinta's loyalty to her lover Rama when she is abducted by the villainous character, Rahwana, a giant who deeply loves Shinta [39]. Rama is depicted as a masculine figure, characterized as brave and strong, while Shinta is portrayed as a feminine figure, symbolizing fidelity and devotion. The relationship between Rama and Sinta is often used as an ideal example of a husband-and-wife partnership in Javanese tradition.

The husband and wife pair in Javanese culture is also symbolized in another form of artifact, the *Loro Blonyo*. The *Loro Blonyo* statue is a pair of statues, usually made of wood, consisting of a female and a male figure dressed in traditional Javanese wedding attire [40]. This artifact is commonly found in traditional Javanese houses that are still original and authentic, typically placed in the *senhong tengah* (central room) to the left and right of the *krobongan* (wedding chamber) (Guntur in Permana [40]). The visual form of the *Loro Blonyo* statue depicts a bride and groom sitting side by side. The *Loro Blonyo* reflects the division of gender roles between men and women in Javanese culture. This means that men and women in Javanese culture are not just symbols of gender but representations of balance. The *Loro Blonyo* statue embodies Raden Sadana, symbolizing masculinity, and Dewi Sri, representing femininity. Raden Sadana's masculinity signifies strength and prosperity, while Dewi Sri is a symbol of fertility and blessings within a household.



Figure 4. *Loro Blonyo* Statue.
[Source: [41]]

The traditional Javanese house, known as the *Joglo*, also contains representations of binary gender in its architectural form. A *Joglo* house structurally consists of two main parts: the *Pendopo* and the *Omah Dalem*. The *Pendopo* is the front section of the house and is an open space, while the *Omah Dalem* is the opposite, located at the rear and designed to be enclosed. The *Pendopo* is represented as a masculine symbol, as it is commonly used as a public space for receiving guests and social activities. The structure of the *Pendopo* is typically open, meaning this part of the house serves as a public space that reflects



Figure 5. *Joglo* House.
[Source: [40]]

masculine traits [42]. The man, as the head of the household, must possess an open nature, as he is the one who receives guests at the front of the house. The *Omah Dalem*, on the other hand, is a symbol of femininity because it serves as a private space that represents comfort and protection for the family. The *Omah Dalem* is structured as a closed space, indicating that it is a private area meant only for close family members or trusted visitors and is also a space used for women's activities [42]. Not everyone is allowed to enter the *Omah Dalem*, unlike the *Pendopo*, where all guests are welcome.

Clothing is one of the most common symbols of binary gender for men and women, as it is frequently observed in everyday life practices. The clothing system has established guidelines and norms for men and women. This means that men are strictly prohibited from wearing women's clothing, and vice versa, women are forbidden from wearing clothing resembling men's attire. The *beskap* and *kebaya* are traditional Javanese garments worn by men (*beskap*) and women (*kebaya*). The male attire, *beskap*, consists of a high-necked jacket, long sleeves, *bebet* (a traditional cloth sash), a belt, *keris* (a traditional dagger), a lower garment, and footwear, typically made from batik, *lurik* fabric, or plain cloth, and is worn with a hat called *blangkon*. Women's traditional attire consists of the *kebaya*, a long skirt or cloth, a hair bun (*sanggul*), and footwear [43]. The *beskap*, as a male garment, is always worn with a *blangkon*, while the *kebaya*, worn by women, is always paired with a *sanggul*. These traditional Javanese garments clearly symbolize masculinity and femininity.



Figure 6. *Beskap & Kebaya*.
[Source: pinterest.com]

Javanese cultural artifacts that contain the *values* of masculinity and femininity can also be found in the agricultural sector, particularly in traditional rice pounding tools known as *Alu* and *Lesung*. The *Alu* is a long, large mallet used to pound rice in the *lesung*. The *lesung* itself is a long, hollowed-out trough where rice is placed for pounding. The structure of the *Alu* resembles a male organ, symbolizing masculinity, while the *lesung*, with its long and hollow shape (resembling the form of a womb), represents femininity. Together, they work in tandem to produce rice, the staple food, symbolizing the essential cooperation between men and women in daily life.



Figure 7. *Alu & Lesung*.
[Source: goodnewsfromindonesia.id]

Similar to the *Alu* and *Lesung*, traditional Javanese spice grinders, such as *Munthu* and *Lemper*, also share a comparable form and meaning in terms of their structure. The *Munthu* is a pestle whose shape resembles the male genitalia, making it a symbol of masculinity. The *Lemper* is the container where spices are pounded, and its shape resembles that of the womb, a symbol of femininity. The overall meaning of these tools is consistent with that of the rice pounding tools; these instruments represent the cooperation between men and women in food preparation. The food prepared will eventually be consumed, providing energy for daily activities. Both the *Alu* and *Lesung*, as well as the *Lemper* and *Munthu*, symbolize the balance between men and women, where both must synergize with one another for the goals to be achieved effectively.

The data presented in Table 2 overall illustrates how Javanese culture differentiates and values gender roles in various aspects of life, from mythology to daily activities. Javanese cultural artifacts serve as a heritage that enables us to understand the importance of the balance between masculinity and femininity in Javanese culture, as well as how these values are passed down from generation to generation. Masculinity and femininity are not merely about biological sex; these values transcend that concept, and we need to study, practice, respect, and understand one another.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions presented, it can be concluded that the Panji mask style of Yogyakarta is structured with visual symbols that carry meanings and values of binary gender (masculinity and femininity). This concept of binary gender has also been transformed into other Javanese cultural artifacts. Structurally, this binary gender divides the Yogyakarta mask style into two categories: masculine masks and feminine masks. The visual symbol structure of the masculine mask includes features such as a large headpiece (*jamang rujen & rujen buto*), arched eyebrows (*manjangan ranggah*), sharp eyes (*plolot*), a prominent nose (*pangotan*), a large and wide mouth (*prengesan & gusen*), mustache, beard, and colors of white, red, and blue. Collectively, these symbols convey that the character represented by the mask is masculine, with traits such as rigidity, strength, assertiveness, talkativeness, voracious appetite, attractiveness, and aggressiveness. The visual symbol structure of the feminine mask includes features such as a smaller headpiece (*jamang rujen relung*), thin eyebrows (*nanggal sepihan*), gentle eyes (*leyepan*), a narrow or upturned nose (*walimiring or mbangir*), a closed mouth (*mingkem*), no mustache or beard, and colors of white and yellow. These symbols represent femininity, signifying softness, honor, sweetness, gentleness, grace, beauty, purity, and cheerfulness. The main characters in the Yogyakarta Panji mask style that represent the idealization of masculinity and femininity are Panji Asmarabangun and Dewi Sekartaji. The values of masculinity and femininity are also contained and transformed within other Javanese cultural artifacts, such as the Panji masks (*Asmarabangun & Sekartaji*), *wayang beber* (Inu Kertapati & Candra Kirana), *wayang purwa* (Rama & Sinta), Candi Sukuh (*Lingga & Yoni*), the *Loro Blonyo* statues (Raden Sadana & Dewi Sri), the *Joglo* house (*Pendopo & Omah Dalem*), traditional Javanese clothing (*Beskap & Kebaya*), Javanese agricultural tools (*Alu & Lesung*), and traditional household items (*Lemper & Munthu*).

This study on binary gender still focuses on the art of Yogyakarta's Panji masks, and in the future, similar studies should expand to cover Panji masks across the entire Indonesian archipelago. This study also focuses on exploring the symbols and meanings associated with the philosophy of life. Other contexts should be explored to broaden the scope of research on masks with a focus on binary gender, offering new and more expansive insights. Future research should explore the evolving nature of gender representation in traditional art forms as they adapt to modernity, with a focus on how younger generations perceive Panji masks in contemporary contexts. Future research should also adopt paradigms beyond semiotics, incorporating approaches from various academic disciplines. The results will undoubtedly contribute to broader studies on Yogyakarta's mask art from multiple perspectives. Interdisciplinary discussions will enrich the discourse, even though the subject of discussion remains focused on Panji mask art. The impact for readers and society will be to expand their understanding, so that they will view Panji masks not just as cultural art but in other crucial aspects as well.

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