



Transformation of the Yogyakarta *Panji* mask style and its relevance in gender identity reconstruction

Slamet Subiyantoro ^{a,1*}, , Yasin Surya Wijaya ^{b,2}, Mulyanto ^{a,3}

^a Pendidikan Seni Rupa, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jalan Ir. Sutami 36A, Surakarta 57126, Indonesia

^b Tata Kelola Seni, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Jl. Parangtritis Km. 6.5, Yogyakarta 55188, Indonesia

¹ s.buiyantoro@staff.uns.ac.id*; ² yasin.sw@isi.ac.id; ³ mulyanto@staff.uns.ac.id

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformation of the form, function, and meaning of the Yogyakarta *Panji* mask style and its relevance to gender identity reconstruction. The research employs a qualitative single-case study strategy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and content analysis of informants, settings, events, and archival documents. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and informant review, while analysis followed a flow model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that the *Panji* mask has undergone transformations in three concrete dimensions. Visually, it has shifted from classical *pakem* conventions to contemporary designs influenced by wood-batik and tourism aesthetics. Functionally, it has changed from a sacred ritual object into a commodity within the creative economy and cultural tourism. Symbolically, its meaning has expanded from traditional Javanese moral-philosophical values to more contextual interpretations linked to social identity and cultural promotion. These shifts contribute to gender identity reconstruction by enabling more inclusive representations of masculinity and femininity. The evolving visual forms, broader social roles, including the increasing involvement of women in mask making and renewed interpretations of *Panji* and *Sekartaji*, demonstrate how traditional arts can promote more egalitarian gender narratives today.



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1. Introduction

Gender equality remains a significant challenge within Indonesia's socio-cultural landscape. Although the discourse on emancipation has been widely promoted, the interpretation of male and female roles continues to be constrained by patriarchal social constructs [1]. The unequal division of domestic and public roles, the persistence of masculine and feminine stereotypes, and gender-based violence serve as clear indicators that issues surrounding gender identity have yet to be fully addressed equitably. There is a pressing need for initiatives and educational platforms that encourage society to understand and internalize the true meaning of gender equality, as misconceptions about gender roles continue to shape social behavior, limit participation in cultural practices, and reinforce unequal access to opportunities. This urgency is particularly evident in traditional arts communities, where inherited norms often constrain women's involvement in creative production and public cultural expression. In this context, cultural arts, particularly traditional arts, hold great potential as reflective and educational mediums. However, they are still rarely utilized to challenge stagnant gender narratives. This condition becomes especially relevant when revisiting the legacy of traditional performing arts such as the *Panji* mask, which is rich in symbolic value and life philosophy. Indonesia is rich in traditional arts, with each region possessing its unique cultural treasures [2]. Javanese traditional arts, particularly the *Panji* mask, serve as a meaningful medium imbued with symbolism, ethical values, and intergenerational cultural heritage.

The love story of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Dewi Sekartaji* is not merely a romantic narrative, but a portrayal of values such as loyalty, sacrifice, perseverance, and the quest for self-identity [3]. The form, function, and meaning of the *Panji* mask in the Yogyakarta style embody expressive power that reflects the harmonious relationship between men and women. Specifically, the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask has the potential to serve as a cultural mirror that inspires a redefinition of gender identity, as its visual symbolism, including the serene facial expression, balanced proportions, and the harmonious integration of masculine and feminine attributes, embodies the Javanese ideal of equilibrium (*keseimbangan*). These symbolic elements reflect values of equality and complementarity, suggesting that neither gender is positioned hierarchically but instead functions in mutual harmony. The *Panji* mask should not be viewed solely as an aesthetic artifact, but also as a vehicle for promoting gender equality through both visual and narrative approaches. The current state of *Panji* mask traditions in the modern era stands in stark contrast to their original philosophical and educational significance. The tides of modernization have increasingly marginalized the deeper meanings and didactic functions of the *Panji* mask. As a cultural heritage, traditional arts inherited from ancestors constitute a vital component of Indonesia's national identity and must be protected from extinction, as they embody essential life guidance [4]. The transformation of the *Panji* mask performance, both in form and function, has been primarily driven by entertainment and tourism interests, which have significant implications for its traditional values. As commercial demands grow, sacred meanings such as inner refinement, moral virtue, and the philosophical ideals of harmony embedded in *Panji* iconography risk being simplified or detached from their original narrative contexts. This shift potentially weakens the mask's role as a medium of ethical teaching and cultural reflection, reducing it to a visual commodity rather than a vessel of Javanese philosophical depth. Consequently, the profound meanings embedded in the *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Dewi Sekartaji* narrative, particularly regarding gender relations, are no longer explicitly conveyed. Contemporary interpretations of *Panji* art and other Yogyakarta-style traditions frequently reproduce hegemonic narratives that portray men as heroic and women as passive. This condition reflects not only a degradation of values but also a stagnation in the potential of traditional arts to serve as a space for gender dialectics.

The situation described above presents a significant risk if no preventive efforts are made to preserve traditional *Panji* mask art, particularly in the Yogyakarta style. Without such efforts, the *Panji* tradition will continue to lose its critical edge and its function as a mirror of social reality. Traditional arts risk becoming mere spectacles, devoid of meaningful contribution to public awareness regarding the importance of gender equality and justice. One of the most concerning consequences is that younger generations may lose access to a contextual, symbolic, and locally-rooted source of learning as an alternative foundation for culturally based character education. Moreover, they may become increasingly detached from their cultural identity, making it challenging to maintain national identity amid the overwhelming influence of foreign cultures [5]. In the long term, such conditions could lead to a persistent misinterpretation of gender roles in traditional arts, with distorted narratives of male and female identities being reproduced and inherited across generations. One of the necessary responses to the issues outlined above is to conduct in-depth research on the *Panji* mask tradition, particularly the Yogyakarta style, focusing at a minimum on its central characters, *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Dewi Sekartaji*. Such research should aim to thoroughly explore how the transformation in the form, function, and meaning of the *Panji* mask can reflect and support a more equitable transformation of gender roles. This approach goes beyond examining visual and performative aspects; it also involves investigating the narrative and symbolism as socio-cultural representations within the context of gender equality. Research on the *Panji* mask tradition can also contribute to broader public recognition and appreciation, thereby supporting its continued existence and preservation. Enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the *Panji* mask tradition may foster a deeper appreciation and affection for local cultural heritage among the broader community. Based on the issues, the research problem addressed in this study is: how has the *Panji* mask in the Yogyakarta style transformed, and what is its relevance in the reconstruction of gender identity? The objective of this research is to explore in depth the transformation of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask and its relevance to the reconstruction of gender identity.

This study aims to offer a renewed interpretation of traditional art, specifically the *Panji* mask, as a pedagogical tool for transmitting values and fostering gender equality perspectives grounded in local wisdom. This implies that educational and epistemological resources on gender need not be limited to modern knowledge systems but can also be drawn from localized knowledge crystallized in traditional cultural arts. This research is significant because there has been limited scholarly attention specifically linking the transformation of form and meaning in *Panji* masks to the reconstruction of gender identity, particularly within the context of the Yogyakarta style. Previous studies have primarily focused on the historical, aesthetic, or ritual functions of *Panji* traditions, without addressing their socio-cultural relevance to contemporary issues, such as gender equality. Yuhanda, for instance, examined the messages conveyed in the *Panji* mask dance of Cirebon [6]. Nawardi explored the physiognomy of *Panji* masks in the manuping ritual dance in Banyiur Luar, Banjarmasin [7]. Yanuartuti investigated the cultural values of *Panji* in the *wayang topeng* tradition of Jombang and their relevance to character education [8]. Hapsari focused on the patterns of inheritance of the *Panji* mask dance in Slarang Lor Village, Dukuhwaru Subdistrict, Tegal Regency [9]. Meanwhile, Wulandari examined the reconstruction of children's character values in the play Lahire *Panji Laras* as performed in the *wayang topeng* tradition of Malang [10].

Studies on *Panji* masks, particularly in the Yogyakarta style, have also been conducted by several previous researchers. Wijaya examined character values embedded within the symbolic structure of Yogyakarta-style *Panji* masks [11]. Subiyantoro explored the *Panji* mask, focusing on the warrior, giant, and goddess profiles as a source for reconstructing character education, using visual semiotics as the primary analytical framework [12]. The *Panji* masks examined in their study originated from the Yogyakarta style, specifically from the village of Bobung, Putat, Patuk Subdistrict, Gunung Kidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. Suwasono also researched the visual form of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask, with a particular focus on the *Panji* mask collection held at the Sonobudoyo Museum [13]. Existing studies on *Panji* masks have primarily focused on various regional styles, highlighting their philosophical values, aesthetic structures, ritual meanings, and cultural functions. Although several scholars have examined the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask, their analyses have remained centered on historical development, visual aesthetics, and character education, without exploring how its symbolic elements contribute to the construction of gender identity. This research therefore offers a concrete scientific contribution by introducing a gender-oriented interpretive framework that has not been applied in previous *Panji* mask studies. The novelty of this study lies in three aspects: (1) theoretically, it integrates visual symbolic of traditional masks with contemporary gender theory to reinterpret symbolic forms of masculinity and femininity; (2) methodologically, it employs a single-case study focused specifically on the Yogyakarta-style mask tradition in Bobung to examine gender meanings embedded in its transformation; and (3) analytically, it establishes a model for reading the transformation of form, function, and meaning of *Panji* masks as indicators for reconstructing gender identity in Javanese society. Through these contributions, the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask is positioned not merely as traditional art, but as a cultural medium capable of offering new insights for understanding and reconstructing gender identity in the modern era.

2. Method

This research was conducted at the Bobung Wood Batik Craft Center, located in Putat Village, Patuk Subdistrict, Gunungkidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. The site was selected using a single-case study strategy, which is theoretically justified because Bobung functions as a critical and representative locus of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask tradition. A single case may be chosen when it embodies a uniquely informative context. Bobung meets this criterion as it simultaneously preserves classical mask-making practices, produces contemporary variations in the creative economy, and involves intergenerational participation, including women and younger artisans. These characteristics position Bobung as a microcosm of the broader transformation of *Panji* mask traditions in Java, thereby enabling an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing purposive sampling to select research participants. Primary informants included *dalang topeng*, senior artisans, *empu* mask carvers, and cultural preservationists who possess in-depth

knowledge of both traditional and contemporary *Panji* mask practices. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observation of production processes and performances, and the examination of socio-cultural interactions among the artisan community. Secondary data were collected from documents, archives, and previous studies relevant to *Panji* mask traditions. The credibility of the data was ensured through source triangulation, which involved cross-checking information from multiple sources, including informants, settings, events, and documentary sources, as well as through informant review, wherein preliminary interpretations were returned to key informants for validation.

To avoid purely descriptive results and enhance analytical depth, this study was guided by an integrated conceptual framework that combines the symbolic of visual culture, performance theory, and cultural transformation theory. The symbolic perspective was employed to interpret the symbolic elements within the mask's form. Culture is a relationship between symbols that can be examined as a text [14]. Performance theory provided the basis for analyzing the shifting ritual, artistic, and economic functions, while cultural transformation theory enabled an understanding of how traditional meanings are renegotiated within contemporary socio-cultural dynamics. This framework aligned the analysis with the study's objectives, particularly in examining how transformations in form, function, and meaning intersect with the reconstruction of gender identity. Data analysis employed the flow model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In this study, data reduction was carried out by organizing field findings into major categories related to the transformation of form, function, and meaning. Data display involved arranging these findings into visual matrices, thematic summaries, and comparative descriptions that clarified the relationship between classical and contemporary practices. Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted by identifying emerging patterns, comparing them with theoretical propositions, and returning interpretive summaries to informants for further confirmation and validation. Through this process, the analytical model facilitated a systematic and iterative interpretation that remained closely tied to empirical fieldwork. Researcher reflexivity was also an integral part of this study. The researchers acknowledge that their backgrounds in visual arts, cultural studies, and traditional Javanese arts influence their interpretive lens. To address this positionality, reflexive field notes were maintained throughout the research process, and interpretations were critically discussed among the research team as well as with artisans and cultural stakeholders. This reflexive stance strengthened the trustworthiness of the analysis and aligns with contemporary qualitative cultural research, which recognizes the researcher's subjectivity as a meaningful interpretive instrument rather than a methodological limitation.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion in this study are focused on two main aspects: the transformation of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask and its relevance to the reconstruction of gender identity. The debate on the transformation of the *Panji* mask in the Yogyakarta style centers on aspects of form, function, and meaning, from the past to the present. The exploration of its relevance focuses on examining whether the values embedded in the tradition can be meaningfully applied to the contemporary reconstruction of gender identity.

3.1. Transformation of Form, Function, and Meaning of the Yogyakarta *Panji* Mask Style

The *Panji* mask is a form of cultural art expressed through dance-drama, originating from the transformation of *Panji* narratives. Roman or *Panji* Stories is a classic literary work that is quite well known by Javanese, Indonesian, and even Southeast Asian people [15]. Yogyakarta is one of several regions in the Indonesian archipelago that has been influenced by *Panji* culture. Over time, the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask has transformed in terms of form, function, and meaning. The form, function, and meaning of the *Panji* mask in the past differ significantly from those of the present day. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the transformation of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask from earlier times to the present.

Table 1. Transformation of Form, Function, and Meaning of the Yogyakarta *Panji* Mask

Transformation	Traditional <i>Panji</i> Mask	Contemporary <i>Panji</i> Mask
Form	Classical Mask Conventions (<i>Pakem</i>)	Batik-Inspired Creative Masks
Function	Spiritual Dimension	Economic and Tourism Commodity
Meaning	Javanese Life Philosophy	Socio-Economic, Political, and Other Contemporary Contexts

Traditional Yogyakarta-style *Panji* masks historically represented visual entities bound by normative and hereditary aesthetic structures, [Fig. 1](#). The masks used in dance performances and ritual ceremonies were crafted according to established conventions (*pakem*) that were passed down through generations within the community. Traditional *Panji* masks were composed of structured elements, including the *jamang* (crown), eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, mustache, beard, facial color, and various traditional ornaments. These visual structures were further differentiated into a range of character types or profiles, such as the refined (*alusam*) and the vigorous (*gagahan*) [\[16\]](#). Male and female figures, warriors (*satria*), giants (*raksasa*), and others were depicted through specific symbolic features. These *pakem* not only governed the physical proportions of the masks but also functioned as a semiotic system laden with deep metaphorical meaning [\[17\]](#). In essence, the form of the *Panji* mask is a cultural construct shaped by aesthetic norms and ethical values rooted in traditional society.



Fig. 1. Transformation of the Yogyakarta *Panji* Mask Form

The visual form of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask has transformed in response to social developments and shifts in cultural paradigms. The *Panji* mask has evolved toward forms that are more adaptive to contemporary contexts and aligned with the creativity and needs of modern society. This transformation is reflected in the emergence of tradition-based craft products, such as wood-batik *Panji* masks and souvenirs, as well as the development of cultural tourism villages centered on *Panji* mask arts. The *Panji* mask is no longer confined solely to traditional ritual functions; it has transformed into an economically valuable product [\[18\]](#). This formal innovation reflects a shift from symbolic representation toward more functional expression and commodification within the creative economy. In Yogyakarta, *Panji* masks are often combined with other artistic traditions, such as batik motifs, resulting in a fusion of traditional art forms [\[19\]](#). This phenomenon can be interpreted as a response to contemporary visual demands and the growth of the cultural tourism market. As such, the form of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask is no longer rigidly constructed within traditional *pakem* (aesthetic canons), but is instead undergoing a process of visual re-semanticization, opening new spaces for creative interpretation without entirely abandoning its cultural origins. The transformation of form is a visible and tangible aspect of change, whereas the transformation of function can be more subtle, sometimes observable, yet often implicit, [Fig. 2](#). Strong spiritual, ritualistic, and pedagogical dimensions characterized the original function of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask within Javanese culture. *Panji* mask art was regarded as a form of devotion to divine manifestations, rooted in a cosmocentric worldview [\[20\]](#). The *Panji* mask was used in traditional ceremonies, sacred dance performances, and religious rituals as a medium for connecting humans with transcendent forces. The Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask tradition played a vital role

in transmitting cultural and spiritual values rich in symbolism, a process that occurred through multiple channels: ritual performances that embodied moral teachings, oral inheritance from elders and empu mask makers who explained the philosophical meanings behind each visual element, and ceremonial practices such as prayers, offerings, and purification rites that framed the mask as a sacred object. Through these intertwined performative, narrative, and ritual mechanisms, the values embedded in the *Panji* tradition were internalized and passed down across generations. The sacred context of the mask is also evident in the restricted access to its creation and performance: not just anyone was permitted to craft or wear the *Panji* mask in *sendratari* (dance drama) performances [21]. These performances were typically preceded by prayer or ritual acts that could only be conducted by designated individuals. The performative function of the mask, therefore, extended beyond aesthetic expression to encompass epistemological significance, serving as a medium for internalizing social norms and cultural values. The *Panji* mask functioned as a sacred instrument of social communication, imbued with philosophical and cultural meaning far more than a vehicle for entertainment.

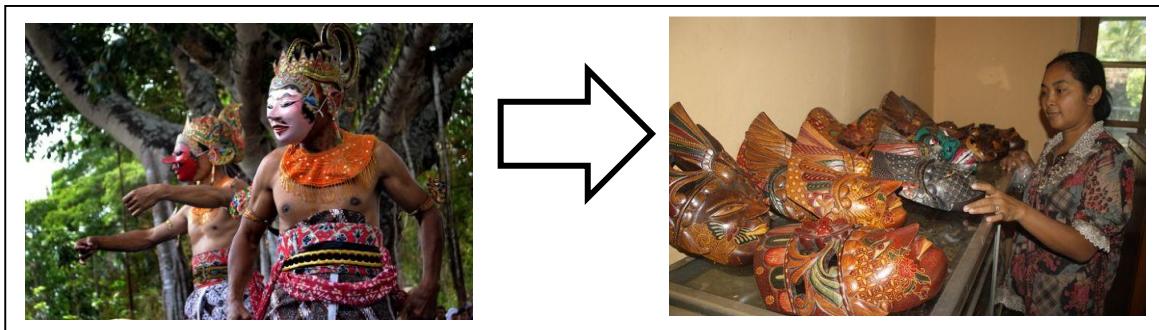


Fig. 2. Transformation of the Yogyakarta *Panji* Mask Function

In the modern context, the function of the *Panji* mask has undergone a reorientation, reflecting the desacralization of cultural forms and the commodification of traditional artifacts. Contemporary cultural artworks are often created to meet practical needs, primarily driven by economic considerations [22]. Today, *Panji* masks are widely utilized as creative economic products that support tourism activities, promote cultural tourism villages, and contribute to the craft industry. This functional shift reflects an adaptation to the economic demands of local communities, wherein the mask has transitioned from a spiritual medium to an object of economic value. Originally, *Panji* mask performances were presented in both individual and communal ritual ceremonies. Still, due to economic necessities, the mask evolved into a more practical and economically driven form of presentation [23]. The masks are now produced on a mass scale for market consumption and serve pragmatic functions as souvenirs, decorative items, or educational tools within cultural tourism programs. However, this shift toward mass production often reduces the aesthetic refinement and symbolic depth traditionally embedded in *Panji* masks, as simplified forms, standardized motifs, and faster production techniques tend to replace the meticulous craftsmanship and philosophical intentionality characteristic of classical masks. Consequently, the cultural authenticity of the *Panji* mask may become diluted, with its ritual and symbolic meanings weakened or detached from their original narrative and spiritual contexts. While mass production increases accessibility and economic value, it simultaneously risks transforming the mask into a commodified object rather than a vessel of Javanese cultural identity. This transformation does not negate the artistic value of the masks, but rather indicates a shift in social logic from sacredness to utility within the framework of economic and tourism development. Nonetheless, in places such as Bobung, Yogyakarta, original and sacred forms of the *Panji* mask tradition continue to be preserved and sustained by the local community.

The meaning of the *Panji* mask in the past was deeply rooted in Javanese life philosophy, which emphasizes cosmic harmony, inner balance, and moral exemplarity. The *Panji* mask embodies philosophical values and life teachings intended to guide individuals toward virtue, benefiting both society and the natural environment [24]. The character of *Panji Asmarabangun*, known for his gentleness, wisdom, and pursuit of truth, symbolizes the spiritual journey of

human beings in their quest for moral perfection. Meanwhile, *Dewi Sekartaji* is positioned as a symbol of purity, loyalty, and feminine strength within a patriarchal cultural system that still honors the noble role of women. These two central characters in the *Panji* mask tradition represent a paradoxical yet complementary balance between male and female elements. In Javanese cultural tradition, the symbolic duality of male and female is often interpreted as a representation of happiness and fertility [25]. This fertility symbolism is also present in other Javanese cultural artifacts, such as the *Loro Blonyo* statues, *Lingga-Yoni* sculptures, and traditional Javanese houses. Thus, the *Panji* mask is not merely a visual medium but a symbolic artifact that encapsulates noble values and serves as a moral compass for traditional Javanese society.

The cultural meaning of *Panji* has undergone a significant shift in the modern context, wherein the mask is positioned as part of the creative industries and a medium for popular cultural expression. The *Panji* mask is no longer interpreted solely through a spiritual or ethical lens, but has expanded to encompass social, political, and economic dimensions. It has evolved into a symbol of local identity that is leveraged in various initiatives, including financial empowerment programs, cultural diplomacy, and tools for political and cultural expression. Many traditional visual art legacies, including the *Panji* mask, have become regional symbols, sources of pride, and cultural icons [22]. Martono further notes that artistic products today often emerge in the form of replicas with new aesthetic interpretations to meet the economic needs of their supporting communities [22]. This suggests that the meaning of the mask has evolved into a multifunctional entity that is contextual, adaptive, and reflective of the times' dynamics. Today, the *Panji* mask does not merely articulate ideal values; it also represents economic struggle, cultural promotion, and the symbolic integration of tradition and modernity. The Yogyakarta *Panji* mask style has undergone significant transformations in terms of form, function, and meaning. Initially regarded as a sacred artifact, spiritual symbol, and medium for transmitting traditional cultural values, the *Panji* mask has evolved into a creative economic product that is adaptive to contemporary demands and societal developments. The visual form of the *Panji* mask has been modified in response to the aesthetic needs of cultural tourism markets; nevertheless, its core philosophical and symbolic values, such as harmony, balance, and moral exemplarity, remain embedded in its representation. In Bobung, Yogyakarta, the local community not only continues to innovate with creative mask-making practices but also remains committed to preserving the classical *Panji* mask tradition. Both classical and contemporary expressions coexist, transcending space and time. This shift in the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask exemplifies the process of re-semanticization, whereby the mask is repositioned as a multifunctional cultural entity transitioning from a ritual medium to an educational tool, a marker of local identity, and an economic commodity. This transformation reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity.

3.2. The Relevance of Yogyakarta *Panji* Masks in Gender Identity Reconstruction

The *Panji* mask, particularly in the Yogyakarta style, historically represented a visual and symbolic structure rich in gendered meaning within the context of Javanese culture. The characters of *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Dewi Sekartaji*, as central figures in *Panji* mask performances, do not merely illustrate interpersonal relationships; they also serve as cultural reflections of societal views on gender roles and identities. *Panji Asmarabangun* is portrayed as the ideal man, humble, loyal, modest, yet dignified, while *Dewi Sekartaji* is depicted as a beautiful woman of noble character and moral virtue [26]. These representations reflect traditional Javanese gender norms that emphasize harmony, balance, and mutual complementarity between men and women. Masculinity and femininity are viewed as binary oppositions that, while contrasting, are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Together, they form a unified duality (*dwi tunggal*) along a single axis of opposing yet complementary forces [27]. The *Panji* legend recounts a love story between *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Dewi Sekartaji*, marked by trials and separation across space and time, yet ultimately culminating in reunion and unity. Each visual element in the construction of the *Panji* mask, such as the shape of the crown (*jamang*), eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, facial color, and other accessories, plays a role in reinforcing gender narratives. The *Panji* mask is generally structured according to two main character profiles: *alusan* (refined) and *gagahan* (bold), each possessing distinct and paradoxical symbolic

forms [17]. *Gagahan* masks typically display rigid and assertive visual features, while *alusam* masks are characterized by softer, more flexible forms. The *gagahan* mask representing *Panji Asmarabangun* conveys strength, decisiveness, and wisdom, embodying noble masculinity, whereas the mask of *Dewi Sekartaji* expresses gentleness, beauty, and purity, representing idealized femininity. These values align with Javanese philosophical thought, which situates men and women in distinct yet harmonious roles. Men and women are seen as mutually supportive, both contributing equally to the public sphere [28]. The *pakem* system, an inherited canon of traditional aesthetic rules, ensures that prevailing cultural norms preserve gender identities represented in *Panji* masks.

The visualization of Yogyakarta-style *Panji* masks has transformed over time, influencing how gender identities are represented. Adaptations in form, color, and usage beyond sacred contexts have opened new spaces for interpreting gender concepts. Contemporary mask creations such as *topeng batik merak* (peacock batik masks) and floral-shaped masks emerge from the fusion of traditional mask-making and batik artistry. These hybrid forms, positioned as products of the creative economy, enable more flexible and inclusive representations of gender. The traditional associations of *Panji Asmarabangun* as a male symbol and *Dewi Sekartaji* as a female symbol have shifted in line with the broader transformation in the form, function, and meaning of the mask [20]. The intersection of traditional visual art and contemporary community expression generates visual narratives that are no longer strictly bound by patriarchal gender norms of the past. For example, whereas historically mask-making was the exclusive domain of *empu* (male master craftsmen), today women also have opportunities to engage in the creation of masks.

The functional transformation of the *Panji* mask from a spiritual and ritual medium to a product of the creative economy has simultaneously triggered a re-semanticization of gender meanings. As masks are increasingly produced as souvenirs or decorative objects, the symbolic aspects of gender embedded in their forms and ornamentation can be reinterpreted to align with the tastes and perceptions of modern audiences [29]. In Bobung, Yogyakarta, the *Panji* mask has been creatively developed into new forms, such as the *topeng batik merak* (peacock batik mask) and floral-themed masks. These innovations suggest that the *Panji* mask can continue to evolve in response to contemporary and future societal contexts. The development of the *Panji* mask into a modern art form opens possibilities for more egalitarian representations of gender, allowing characters such as *Panji Asmarabangun* and *Dewi Sekartaji* to be portrayed in styles that challenge traditional gender stereotypes. In this way, the *Panji* mask holds potential to contribute to both the deconstruction and reconstruction of gender identities within the realm of popular culture. Within the context of education and cultural tourism, the *Panji* mask can serve as a reflective medium for engaging more critically with gender concepts. This can be achieved through workshops, performances, or exhibitions that invite communities to explore how gender constructions within traditional arts are formed, maintained, or transformed. The characters of *Panji Asmarabangun*, depicted as *gagahan* (strong), and *Dewi Sekartaji*, depicted as *alusam* (gentle), may serve as starting points for discussing the importance of gender role balance in contemporary society [30]. Men may be strong yet are expected to cultivate gentleness, while women, though gentle, are also expected to embody inner strength. This presents an opportunity for traditional *Panji* mask art to function as a contextual and locally grounded medium for gender education. The *Panji* mask becomes not only a symbol of cultural aesthetics but also a tool for social transformation that fosters critical awareness of gender equality. Through the symbolic narratives embedded in the masks, communities can be encouraged to reflect more openly and inclusively on gender roles in everyday life.

The inclusive development of *Panji* mask products has created greater opportunities for women to participate in the traditionally male-dominated sphere of mask art. Women now participate not only as dancers or performers but also as mask makers, designers, and managers within *Panji* mask-based creative industries. In Bobung, Yogyakarta, women play roles equal to those of men in the creation and performance of *Panji* masks [31]. This shift reinforces the role of women in both the transmission and innovation of traditional arts, while also supporting the reconstruction of a more equitable gender identity within the context of Javanese cultural arts.

Women are no longer seen as passive inheritors with limited roles; instead, their active involvement positions them as key agents in the preservation and evolution of traditional mask culture. The inclusion of women fosters more diverse and representative artistic perspectives within the conventional arts landscape. Ultimately, cultural preservation depends not only on continuity but also on adaptability and the ability to create inclusive spaces for cross-gender participation. The transformation of gender values within the *Panji* mask tradition must also be understood within the broader context of socio-cultural dynamics, including shifts in family structures, education, and social roles in contemporary Javanese society. Today's younger generation is increasingly influenced by globalization and the rapid flow of digital information, making traditional narratives such as the *Panji* story valuable tools for instilling contextualized local values. These values are crystallized in the visual symbols of the *Panji* mask and should therefore be explored and developed as effective educational media [32]. The *Panji* narrative and its visual representations can be expanded into interactive educational resources in schools, not only within cultural arts curricula, but also in subjects related to civics, ethics, and character education. An interdisciplinary approach can be implemented to position the *Panji* mask as an instrument for strengthening a progressive cultural identity, enabling the concept of gender to move beyond traditional norms and evolve in accordance with contemporary values of equity and justice.

Strengthening the *Panji* mask as a medium for cultural dialogue also holds the potential to foster cross-community awareness locally, nationally, and globally. Within the contexts of cultural tourism and cultural diplomacy, the *Panji* mask can be presented as a narrative that highlights how Javanese culture creatively adapts to contemporary social issues such as gender equality. Gender differences become problematic when they lead to unequal treatment in society and injustice in terms of rights and opportunities [33]. International performances of *Panji* mask theatre, accompanied by cultural discussions, curatorial exhibitions, or gender forums, can open up avenues for global audiences to recognize that Indonesian local traditions are not only aesthetically valuable but also embedded with transformative social values, particularly those concerning gender equity. Such initiatives can strengthen the position of the *Panji* mask not merely as a relic of the past, but as a living, reflective artistic practice that serves as a medium for driving social change toward a more just and equal society. The relevance of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask in the reconstruction of gender identity lies in its capacity to serve as a bridge between traditional values and contemporary perspectives. Although rooted in a patriarchal system of aesthetics and ethics, the *Panji* mask today is open to reinterpretation under the inclusive and egalitarian spirit of the times. The transformation of its form, function, and meaning not only helps preserve cultural heritage but also contributes to a critical reflection and renewal of gender identities within modern Javanese society. As a traditional art form, the *Panji* mask is more than a relic of the past; it embodies life-guiding values that can be meaningfully reinterpreted in light of current social developments. The values of harmony and balance, which the ancestors emphasized through traditional performing arts, particularly the *Panji* mask tradition, remain central teachings that resonate with the ethical imperatives of today's society.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the transformation of the Yogyakarta-style *Panji* mask demonstrates that traditional arts are dynamic cultural practices shaped by social, economic, and aesthetic changes. Once sacred and bound by strict pakem, the *Panji* mask has evolved into an artistic and creative-economy product while still retaining traces of its philosophical values. In relation to gender identity reconstruction, the *Panji* mask offers symbolic representations of masculinity and femininity that emphasize harmony, complementarity, and moral balance. These meanings, when reinterpreted in contemporary contexts, open new spaces for inclusive and equitable understandings of gender roles in Javanese society. The findings of this study, therefore, suggest that revitalizing *Panji* mask traditions can serve not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a strategic medium for fostering gender-sensitive cultural education and enhancing community awareness of egalitarian values. Future research should move beyond broad descriptive accounts and focus on more operational and methodologically grounded inquiries. One promising direction is the

use of visual ethnography to analyze symbolic expressions, iconographic variations, and embodied meanings of *Panji* masks as they evolve in contemporary artistic practices. Another direction is the development of local wisdom-based arts education frameworks, which can integrate *Panji* narratives and mask symbolism into structured learning models for character education, gender awareness, and cultural literacy in both formal and informal educational contexts. Additionally, creative economy studies are necessary to investigate the economic value, sustainability strategies, and cultural authenticity of *Panji* mask production in tourism villages, such as Bobung, particularly in relation to the livelihoods of artisans and the preservation of traditional craftsmanship. These specific and interdisciplinary research pathways will strengthen the scientific contribution of *Panji* mask studies and support the revitalization of traditional arts within the dynamics of modern cultural development.

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