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# The Costumes of Topeng Panji Dance at Surakarta Palace, Indonesia: Symbolic Meanings and Functions

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## ABSTRACT

*Traditional dance costumes in Indonesia, including those used in Topeng Panji dance at Surakarta Palace, carry symbolic meanings and functions that reflect educational characters. However, these meanings and functions are only known within a limited circle, primarily within the palace, making them unfamiliar to the public. This study aims to describe the symbolic meanings and functions of Topeng Panji dance costumes at Surakarta Palace in Indonesia. This qualitative research involved participants from the Surakarta Palace family, cultural experts, and the creators and main dancers of the Topeng Panji dance. Data were collected through observations and supported by information from informants as well as documentation in the form of photographs, videos, and books related to the dance. The data were analysed qualitatively using content analysis. The results of the study revealed: (1) the symbolic meanings of the costumes include representing power and status within the kingdom, distinguishing between protagonist and antagonist characters, symbolising readiness for war, and functioning as a weapon of war; and (2) the functions of the costumes include character depiction, character enhancement, and serving as a medium to facilitate movement. Audiences respond to the costumes' appearance through their five senses, engaging imagination and emotion. The symbolic meanings of the Topeng Panji dance costumes hold educational value and should be studied further as a learning material for the wider community.*

**Keywords:** *symbolic meaning, Topeng Panji dance costume, Surakarta, semiotics*

## INTRODUCTION

The era of globalisation has influenced the millennial generation's interest in developing local culture. Studies indicate that modern visualisation has significant potential as an effective tool for introducing foreign cultures to younger generations, thereby posing a challenge to the preservation and transmission of local cultural heritage in globalisation (Sabila et al. 2025; Yoga 2024). In this context, Pradana and Saraswati (2020) found that interest among the younger generation in traditional arts is declining. Similar findings were reported by Ulfiah et al. (2023),

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as well as by Dharma et al. (2021) and Ongko et al. (2022), who observed that local cultural values are gradually eroding due to Generation Z's preference for foreign cultures perceived as more modern and trendy.

One impact of the influx of foreign cultures can be seen in the findings of Wibowo and Mahardika (2020), who studied the existence of the Topeng Panji (Panji Mask) dance in the postmodern era as an effort to preserve a cultural tradition that is starting to decline. Topeng Panji dance, a product of past human creativity, emotion, and will, once played a significant role in society, particularly in rural communities (Akanfani et al. 2022). Moreover, cultural arts, as a form of community resilience, can help reduce psychological stress and thus serve as a form of mental therapy (Hanif and Maruti 2024). For this reason, cultural arts will continue to thrive only if their sustainability is maintained by the communities that own and practice them. This includes Topeng Panji and its distinctive dancers' costumes, which carry symbolic meanings and functions that set them apart from other traditional dance costumes (Putra et al. 2025).

Topeng Panji dance is one of the classical art forms in Indonesia. There are several regional styles of Topeng Panji, including the Cirebon style (from district areas), the Yogyakarta style, and the Malang style. However, the oldest form of Topeng Panji is preserved at Surakarta Palace in Central Java. Each regional style features distinct costumes (Indah 2021). This supports the view of Dewi and Cahyono (2018) that each region has unique dance performances, functions, and choreography, including variations in masks and costumes. This variation reflects the fact that, in traditional culture, masks and costumes serve as important symbols of cultural identity (Martsidaun 2024).

Topeng Panji dance costumes inherently embody strong elements of local culture, which are closely tied to aesthetic values (Marlianti et al. 2017). This is supported by Budi Prasetyo (2005), who states that dance costumes are designed through creative processes that take into account the visual elements shaping a dance performance. As a result, the costumes appear vibrant and colourful, capturing the audience's attention. Consequently, communities establish specific norms to preserve these visual elements, ensuring the continuity of the dance's original values and symbolic meanings (Hartati et al. 2020).

A study has concluded that one reason the younger generation lacks understanding of the values and symbolic meanings embedded in traditional dance costumes is that such knowledge is accessible only to a limited group. In contrast, access to foreign culture is widely open (Amalia et al. 2025). Other research suggests that the noble values within local culture are often unfamiliar to younger generations because they are primarily preserved through oral traditions (Alfarisy et al. 2021). Therefore, it is essential to explore, document, and disseminate local cultural values, including the symbolic meanings and functions of Topeng Panji dance. This effort serves as an educational strategy to promote cultural preservation (Tafonao and Zega 2022). Such education should not be limited to formal settings but can also be implemented through deeper engagement with local performing arts in regional contexts.

Several studies have examined the costumes used in traditional mask dances. First, Martino and Jazuli (2019) investigated the symbolic meanings in *Topeng Klana Cirebon* dance, focusing on the elements of dancers, movement, costumes, and acting. The study found that the costumes worn convey connotative meanings that reflect various aspects of human activity. Second, Sujana (2015) explored the symbolic meaning and function of *Topeng Tumenggung* dance costumes, revealing that the attire contains dual coding, aligning with the nature of signs within a postmodern scientific framework. Third, Hapsari (2013) researched the symbolic meanings and functions of *Topeng Ireng* dance costumes, concluding that the costume not only holds symbolic value but also serves as a medium for educating the public about local culture.

The novelty of this research, compared to previous studies, lies in its focus on the symbolic meanings and functions of Topeng Panji dance costumes in Surakarta Palace style. Unlike the first study, which centred on the symbolic meaning of Topeng Panji dance costumes in Cirebon style, this research explores a different regional tradition. In contrast to the second and third studies, which examined the costumes and functions of various mask dances beyond Topeng Panji, this study is specifically concerned with the costumes in the Surakarta Palace context. Based on this gap, the objectives of this study are to: (1) describe the symbolic meanings and (2) describe the functions of Topeng Panji dance costumes at the Surakarta Palace, Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Semiotics of Dance Costumes

From a semiotic perspective, fragments and visual elements of cultural objects are structured to reveal how signs are constructed and interpreted within society (Hakim 2023). Accordingly, everything used in a performance, including costumes, is regarded as a sign that carries specific meanings. This study adopts Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyse symbols and meanings, as the theory encompasses both denotative and connotative levels of meaning, making it highly relevant to the study of dance costumes. The use of symbols is significant, as they convey information through objects, actions, language, relationships, gestures, and spatial arrangements that reflect core values within a society (Mathar 2022). Barthes' semiotic framework emphasises five code systems for textual and visual analysis: the hermeneutic code, connotative code, symbolic code, proairetic code, and cultural code (Kanzunnudin 2022). Denotative meaning refers to the literal or physically observable aspects of an object, while connotation operates at a second level of significance, involving associations, emotions, cultural values, and ideological interpretations (Rahmawati et al. 2024).

Every symbolic meaning is socially constructed, transmitted, taught, and embedded within various cultures (Budiarti et al. 2022). This concept also applies to the symbolic meanings found in mask dances, which are among the most prominent traditional dance forms in Indonesia. In Topeng Panji performances, each group of dancers wears costume elements that correspond to their respective characters. The use of costumes in every mask dance follows specific rules (Safitri 2023). These costume elements enhance the visual impact of the performance, contributing to a complete and cohesive appearance. Moreover, the use of costumes enhances the dancers' appearance by adding unique and visually appealing elements to the performance (Kristiantoro et al. 2020).

The costumes of Topeng Panji dance consist of several key elements that reflect cultural values conveyed through symbolic features. These elements include the costumes' shape, motifs, and colours (Anam and Ismurdiyahwati 2024). Each component plays a role in communicating deeper meanings rooted in tradition. A related study on *Boran* Dance costume from Lamongan Regency found that its design embodies cultural meaning through a composition of balanced elements, resulting in a visually appealing and aesthetically harmonious whole. This unity is achieved through a thoughtful combination of patterns, colour contrasts, and textures. Similarly, research conducted by Yanuartuti and Winarko (2021) found that the supporting elements of *Topeng Mban Mban* dance are reflected in its costume, which features a yellow-brown colour scheme in the form of a kebaya and cloth with *bledag* motif, characterised by white colour and bird wing patterns. This indicates that dance costumes consistently incorporate elements such as colour, shape, and pattern, which are typically adapted to the type of dance being performed. These elements often carry symbolic meanings that help convey the underlying intentions and purposes of the performance.

## Functions of Topeng Panji Dance Costumes

Dance costumes are somatic, designed not only to support the dancer's physical performance but also to foster empathy and connection with the audience (Smith 2020). According to Amelia et al. (2024) and Rosala and Adikarya (1999), dance costumes play a vital role in enhancing the overall quality of a performance. Their functions include: (1) serving as a form of identity for the performing arts group, (2) distinguishing between different types of dances, (3) creating visual appeal for the audience, and (4) contributing to the vibrancy and aesthetic beauty of the performance. These functions are closely related to both the physical and psychological aspects of human typology (Amelia et al. 2024).

Topeng Panji dance costumes serve not only to enhance the dancers' appearance but also to support the thematic content of the performance. This aligns with Jazuli's (2016) view, which states that the function of dance costumes is to reinforce the theme or narrative of the dance and to clarify the roles of the performers. Costumes also serve a practical function, such as providing protection from the sun and covering private parts of the body. The use of complete costumes has become a cultural tradition and social norm within the community (Precillia and Julisa 2022). In addition to these roles, costumes in dance play a significant part in shaping the overall atmosphere and visual impact of the performance (Longteng Cui et al. 2023). Thus, dance costumes are not merely functional objects; they are also cultural symbols that communicate identity, social status, and occupation through their style and appearance.

Costumes in a performance encompass all forms of clothing, including shoes, shirts, trousers, and other attire. The function of costumes is not only to clothe the performer but also to guide the audience's perception of the character and their relationships with different characters. An effective dance costume enhances the visual dynamics of the performance space and contributes to the overall aesthetic experience. The design of a dance costume is often aligned with the artistic goals intended by the costume designer. Therefore, costumes are considered a vital element in dance performances and are recognised as expressions of local identity. A well-designed costume should support the theme or content of the performance and help clarify the roles of the performers (Hartono 2017, 80–81). The Topeng Panji dance at Surakarta Palace, for instance, has preserved its authentic costume tradition since the era of Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwana I, the ruler of the Surakarta Sunanate from 1704 to 1719.

## METHODS

This research focuses on the symbolic meanings and functions of the costumes in the Topeng Panji dance, one of the traditional dance collections preserved at Surakarta Palace in Central Java. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis as the theoretical framework. Topeng Panji dance features two main character types: *alusan* (refined/soft) and *gagahan* (firm/strong), each represented through distinct costume elements. The primary data source for this study is the Topeng Panji dance costumes, as performed at Surakarta Palace. This site was selected based on the following considerations: (1) the authenticity of the dance has been well preserved; (2) the costume displays unique characteristics that distinguish it from other regional versions, such as the Yogyakarta style; and (3) the costume accessories remain unchanged and unmodified. The analysis focuses on the costume components, which are categorised into three main parts: upper, middle, and lower costume elements.

The samples in this study were determined using a purposive sampling technique, in which subjects are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In addition, the study involved several key informants, including members of the palace family, cultural

experts, and Topeng Panji dancers at the Surakarta Palace. Details of the informants are presented in Table 1. The palace family members involved in this research included a prince (a direct descendant of the King of Kasunanan Surakarta/Surakarta Sunannate), a Javanese language expert residing in the palace, and the main dancers of Topeng Panji. The study also engaged two cultural experts with in-depth knowledge of Topeng Panji dance's characteristics and underlying philosophy. Furthermore, two active Topeng Panji dancers were included as informants. These informants were selected through a snowball sampling technique, where each participant recommended other potential informants with relevant expertise or experience.

**Table 1** Data and sources of information using the snowball sampling technique

| Data Source | Sources of Information | Total |
|---|---|---|
| Informants | Cultural experts in Surakarta Palace | 2 |
| | Lecturers at Institut Seni Indonesia | 2 |
| | Topeng Panji dancers | 2 |
| | Fashion stylist | 1 |
| | Cultural expert at Central Java Cultural Park | 1 |
| | Costume maker in Central Java Cultural Park | 1 |
| Location (city/people who make and wear the costumes) | Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia | 9 |
| Location (Topeng Panji costumes) | Surakarta Palace | 1 |

To collect data on the completeness of Topeng Panji dance costumes, three methods were used: (1) careful observation of cultural objects during Topeng Panji dance performance, (2) document analysis of manuscripts containing information about the costumes, and (3) in-depth interviews with relevant informants. To ensure data accuracy, validity tests were conducted using source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved verifying information obtained from one informant by cross-checking it with data from other informants; for instance, costume details provided by cultural experts were confirmed through interviews with members of the royal family. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing data gathered through different methods, such as documentation and interviews, to validate findings regarding the function and components of the costume.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages: (1) data collection through observation and interviews, including the process of searching, recording, and gathering relevant information; (2) data reduction by organising, combining, and selecting significant data; (3) data presentation in a systematic and structured manner; and (4) conclusion drawing and verification, supported by relevant data (Miles et al. 2014).

## FINDINGS

The public widely recognises the Topeng Panji dance and has made it a cultural symbol of Surakarta City. This dance embodies significant cultural values, particularly evident in its costume elements. The form and function of the costumes align with the cultural designs of Surakarta Palace. This section presents the study's findings.

### The Symbolic Meanings of Topeng Panji Dance Costumes at Surakarta Palace

The symbolic meanings of Topeng Panji dance costumes are reflected in the forms and designs of the objects. The costumes serve as physical accessories to cover the dancer's body, with each type of costume representing a different character and function.

The costume is a cultural artefact whose authenticity has been carefully preserved. This is evident in its continued use during sacred events held at Surakarta Palace. Cultural communities and educators also utilise these traditional costumes in performances during cultural activities. According to a cultural expert from the Surakarta Palace, these costumes remain widely recognised for their originality.

> Costume as a cultural object has not changed over time. This costume already has a distinctive pattern which has a great philosophical meaning, so it will not change in pattern or shape. (Male, 60 years old)

This statement reflects the enduring nature of Topeng Panji dance costume as a cultural legacy passed down from previous generations. The distinctive patterns and forms of the costume are preserved due to their deep philosophical significance. The internal members of the palace actively promote these cultural objects to ensure their continued development and sustainability. Various strategies are implemented to preserve and transmit this cultural heritage, including public events organised by the palace (open palace agenda), training programmes held in cultural studios, and broader cultural performances accessible to the general public.

> Topeng Panji dance has existed since the era of the kingdom at Surakarta to the present. The dance costume accessories are divided into two types, namely the Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan. Each of them acts according to the play. (Male, 58 years old)

> Topeng Panji dance is performed as a solo act; therefore, there are two types of *Panji* which have opposite characters. They cannot unite, but can collaborate in staging Panji story. (Male, 34 years old)

The form, meaning, and function of each part of Topeng Panji dance costume convey contrasting expressions. This is due to the differing symbolic meanings embodied by the Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan costume elements. These differences are reflected in their shapes, patterns, and colours. Figure 1 illustrates the Topeng Panji dance costumes, representing two characters: Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan.

As detailed in Figure 1, the costumes have two characters: Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan. These characters are central to a romantic narrative centred around a rivalry for a beloved one. The most well-known figures in this performance are Panji Asmarabangun and Klana Sewandono, who vie for the affection of Dewi Sekartaji, the daughter of the King of Jenggala. While the costumes for both characters generally include the same types of accessories, they differ in colour schemes and are worn by dancers of different genders. The costumes are composed of the following elements:



**Figure 1** Topeng Panji dance costumes. Blue: Panji Alusan, Red: Panji Gagahan

*Source*: Author's collection

## *Panji Hat (Irah-Irahan): A Symbol of Power, Majesty, and Struggle*

The Panji hat, also known as *irah-irahan*, is the most prominent and sacred element of the costume. It takes the form of a *malangan*-type headpiece. The term *malangan* refers to the philosophical concept of wind directions, where the north and south are called *mujar*,

and the east and west are referred to as *malangan*. Both male and female dancers, whether portraying *alusan* (refined/smooth) or *gagahan* (firm/strong) characters, wear this type of hat, as determined by the Surakarta Palace. The hat features *untu walangan* patterns, characterised by rows of curved sequins symbolising unity in repelling enemies, typically used for the *alusan* character. It also includes *rujen* patterns, marked by sharp zigzag-shaped serrations that represent bravery in facing challenges, commonly associated with the *gagahan* character. These decorative motifs are adapted from elements of everyday life in the world.

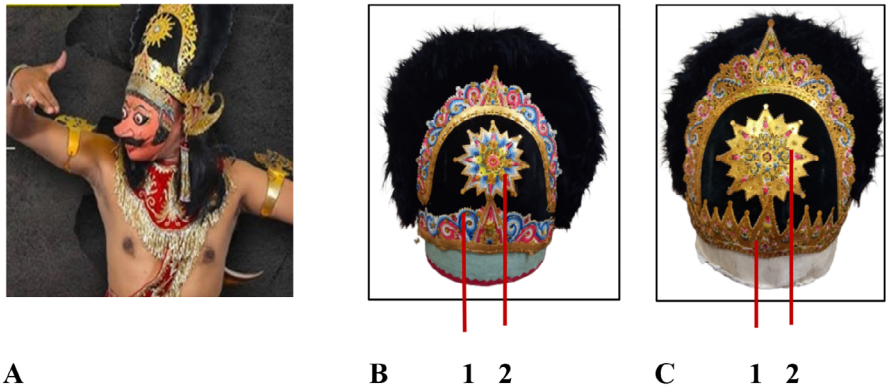



**Figure 2** *Irah-irahan* hat for Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan. A) Dancer is wearing a Panji hat; B1) *Untu walangan* or animal teeth'; B2) Star of life; C1) *Rujen* or pointed sequin pattern; C2) Star of life

The hat symbolises a crown, social status, and human caste. Cultural experts from the Surakarta Palace explained the meaning of the hat as follows:

> The hat holds noble and sacred meanings because it is adorned with star symbols and patterns of flora and fauna for decoration. These elements were chosen as life symbols during the kingdom era, which was influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions. (Male, 60 years old)
>
> Many of the symbols on the pennant hat, if you look at it at first glance, have the same shape, because the main motif element is the star. The presence of a star symbolises glory. (Male, 58 years old)

The star motif is associated with royal (king) attire, symbolising light and guidance in life. Meanwhile, the flora and fauna decorations reflect the dynamic aspects of life during the Kediri Kingdom, particularly related to its economic and social development.

Based on the earlier statements, the symbolic meaning of Panji hat is multifaceted, depending on the context and cultural elements being examined. Overall, the hat serves as a symbol of power, indicating that it is reserved for prominent or noble figures in society. The star motif represents majesty, signifying that the glory and dignity of its owner must be honoured. Meanwhile, the element of struggle reflects the relentless effort required to live meaningfully in society and to achieve goals.

## *The Colour of Topeng Panji: A Symbol of Antagonist and Protagonist Characters*

Among the various accessories of the Topeng Panji dance costumes, the mask stands out as a significant element, particularly in cultural circles. The masks are categorised into two types: Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan, each distinguished by their facial expressions, which are cheerful and fierce, respectively. These masks are characterised by distinct features such as the eyebrows, eyes, nose, mouth, and skin tone. Panji Alusan masks typically appear in softer

colours, such as white, yellow, and brown, symbolising gentle or protagonist figures. In contrast, Panji Gagahan masks feature bolder hues, such as dark red and pink, which represent more aggressive or antagonistic characters.

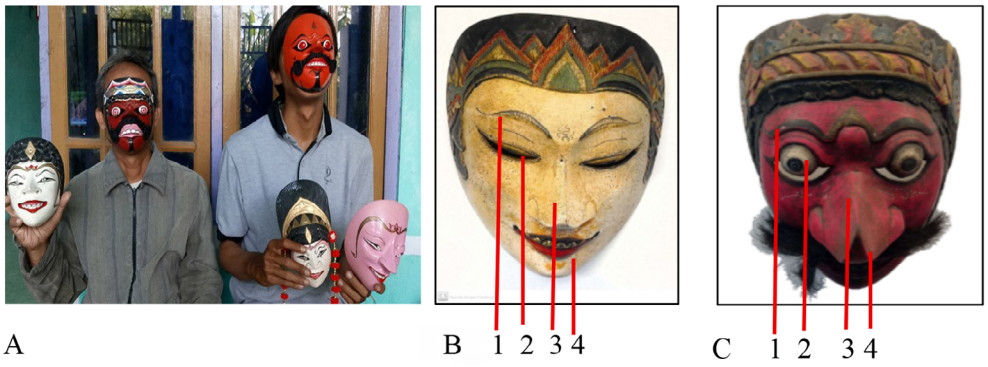



**Figure 3** A) Two people are wearing Panji masks: a white mask and a red mask; B) White mask: (1) *nanggal sepisan* (date-one) eyebrow, (2) *leyepan* (closed eyes), (3) *walimiring* nose, (4) *prengesan* (closed lips); C) Red mask: (1) *nanggal sepisan* (date-one) eyebrow, (2) *thelengan* (glared) eyes, (3) Pinocchio nose, (4) *gusen* (open) mouth

One of the distinctive accessories of dances performed at Surakarta Palace is the mask, which embodies the philosophy of living beings. According to Javanese cultural experts, Topeng Panji dance masks carry symbolic meanings related to the universal stages of human life.

> Some masks for Topeng Panji dance symbolise universal events, namely the stages of human development from babies, teenagers, and adults to old age. The shapes and colours are also adjusted, and even the characters portrayed are based on Panji's phases of growth. (Male, 57 years old)
>
> Panji mask accessories are divided into two, namely Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan. They all contradict each other visually and in meaning. Each of them has an expression that is related to the play performed. (Male, 34 years old)

As explained before, Topeng Panji dance features two types of masks: Panji Alusan and Panji Gagahan. Panji Alusan mask represents a character with a noble, warrior-like spirit, someone who is dependable and wise in resolving conflicts. This character is depicted with *nanggal sepisan* eyebrows, *leyepan* eyes, a *walimiring* nose, and a *prengesen* mouth. The *nanggal sepisan* eyebrows resemble a crescent moon in its early phase, symbolising gentleness and an elegant, goddess-like impression. The *leyepan* eyes, thin and half-closed as if drowsy, carry the symbolic meaning of honesty and the absence of deceit. The *walimiring* nose is small and short, resembling a sap-tapping knife, and also symbolises honesty. The *prengesen* mouth, shaped in an open smile with visible teeth, represents wisdom in speech.

In contrast, the Panji Gagahan mask represents a character with negative traits. It features *menjangan ranggah* eyebrows, *thelengan* eyes, a *pangotan* nose, and a *gusen* mouth. The *menjangan ranggah* eyebrows are thin, curved lines that convey a positive yet non-rigid impression. The *thelengan* eyes are round and bulging, symbolising fearfulness, ferocity, and heightened alertness. The *pangotan* nose, shaped like a forward-curving *pangot* knife, carries symbolic meanings of roughness, eeriness, and aggressiveness. This nose shape is also referred to as the Pinocchio nose, based on the belief that liars have long noses (Muhammad and Triyadi 2021). The *gusen* mouth, derived from the *prengesan gagahan* mouth style, features a thick moustache, white teeth, and red gums, symbolising a deceptive mouth that may appear wise on the surface but hides malicious intent. It is also associated with excessive speech and laughter (Subiyantoro et al. 2020).

## *Kelat Bahu (Armbands): A Symbol of Readiness and Reliable Strength*

*Kelat bahu*, or armbands, are typically crafted from animal skin and come in a variety of shapes, including representations of creatures, such as peacocks, eagles, giants, and dragons. Cultural experts from the Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Surakarta shared the following insight regarding the symbolism of armbands.

> Armbands worn by Surakarta-style Topeng Panji dancers are shaped like a giant's head. When you look at them closely, they look like they are opening their mouths. This shape is chosen because it is believed to be a safety talisman. (Male, 58 years old)
>
> A distinctive feature of the shoulder and arm straps in the Topeng Panji dance costume is the depiction of blind figures. This has a significant meaning in implementing a spirit of authority in leadership. (Male, 60 years old)

*Kelat bahu*, featuring a dragon's head motif, may be worn by dancers portraying any character, except for female roles. These are typically golden yellow with a hint of red, symbolising strength and nobility, and adorned with decorative beads.

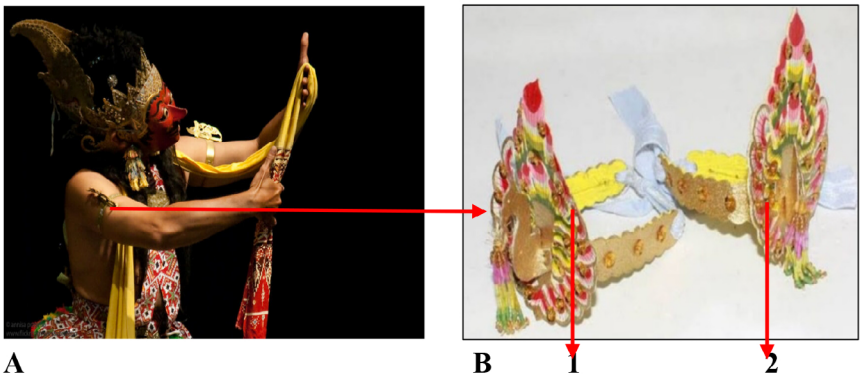



**Figure 4** A) A dancer is wearing *kelat bahu*; B) *Kelat bahu*: (1) left *kelat bahu*, (2) right *kelat bahu*

The term *kelat* means attached, while *bahu* refers to arms. Thus, *kelat bahu* symbolises a source of strength, representing the idea that humans are born to face and endure life's challenges. As such, individuals must be prepared to confront future obstacles. Both male and female dancers may wear *kelat bahu*. These armbands feature various motifs, including: (1) the eagle, which symbolises gallantry and serves as a national emblem; and (2) the giant's head, which represents *ngungkurne keraksaan*, meaning the act of leaving behind or overcoming negative forces.

## *Uncal (Binding Strap): A Symbolic Weapon of War*

*Uncal*, or binding strap, is typically attached to an *epek timang* (a decorative waistband element) to help cover the dancer's lower abdomen or genital area. Both male and female dancers can wear this strap. It is commonly painted gold and designed to resemble a *bandil* (a traditional cannonball pouch). However, it may also appear in other colours such as purple, red, yellow, or green, similar to the colours found in *sumping* (decorative ear ornaments).

*Uncal* is crescent-shaped and often adorned with additional motifs, such as flowers and vines. The choice of motifs depends on the artisan or the character portrayed in the dance. A hole is added to the top of the *uncal* to allow it to be fastened securely at the waist.

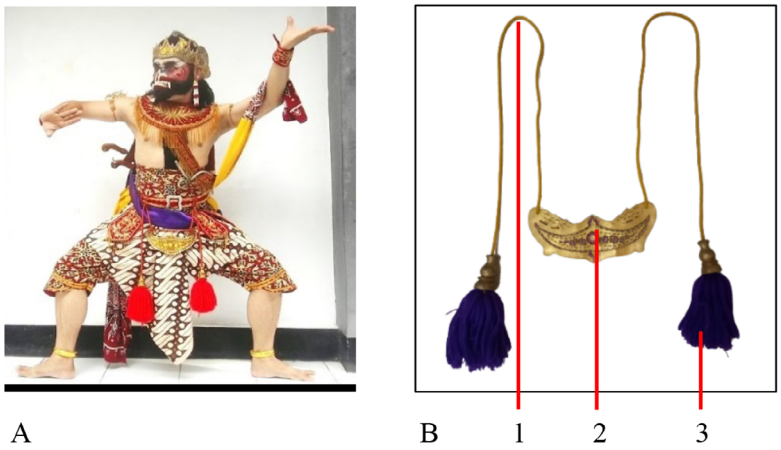



**Figure 5** A) A dancer is wearing *uncal* (binding straps); B) *Uncal*: (1) *Kur* (rope), (2) *Patwa* motifs (combination of motifs), (3) *Gombyok* (tasse)

The *uncal* accessory in Topeng Panji dance is often referred to as a *badhong*, a short waistband that hangs down as a complementary element of the dancer's costume. Its shape resembles a weapon, and symbolically, it represents a tool that can be used to strike the enemy during battle. The following are expert insights from cultural specialists at ISI Surakarta regarding the symbolic meaning of *uncal*.

> *Uncal*, or *badhong*, is always the highlight in a dance performance. There is a combination of *uncal* assemblies, including *patwa* motifs designed using gold and iron. So, when worn, it can cover the reproductive organs. (Male, 58 years old)
>
> This *uncal* part is often referred to as the cover of the genitals, meaning that the part that cannot be seen must be covered using a supporting costume. This costume is considered very vital. (Male, 34 years old)

*Uncal* features *patwa* motifs, and all elements of its costume design must not be arranged vertically. Typically made from rope and metal, *uncal* is gold in colour, symbolising luxury, and is adorned with *gombyok* (dangling ornaments) in red, yellow, and purple, mirroring the hues found in *sumping* (ear ornaments) and *kelat bahu* (armbands).

## *Sumping Jewellery: A Symbol of a Resilient Spirit against the Enemy*

In Surakarta-style Topeng Panji dance costumes, *sumping* jewellery takes the form of an eagle, known as *grudo mungkur*. It is worn behind the dancer's ear and is adorned with various ornamental motifs, including floral, plant, root, and animal patterns. This design shares symbolic similarities with costume elements found in Surakarta's *Wayang Wong* performances. The eagle's shape closely resembles a pair of wings, reinforcing its symbolic connection to strength and resilience. Typically, two *sumping* pieces are worn, one on each side, to maintain visual balance. Each *sumping* is decorated with *gandul-gandul*, or dangling ornaments, often shaped like ten *kembang suruh* (betel flowers). In Javanese cultural philosophy, the wing-like form of the *sumping*, or *grudo mungkur*, represents the idea of *dhuwur uluke*, a noble or elevated way of life. The details of the *sumping* are presented in Figure 6.




**Figure 6** A) Two dancers are wearing *sumping* jewellery; B) *Sumping* jewellery: (1) *grudo mungkur* (open-mouth *garuda* bird), (2) *pawal patwa* (curved line), (3) *kembang suruh* (betel flower)

For both male and female dancers, *sumping* carries the same form and symbolic meaning. Statements from cultural experts at ISI Surakarta and Surakarta Palace affirm this:

> Both male and female dancers wear the same *sumping*. *Sumping* means as the commander of the kingdom. *Sumping* is considered to have high honours. By wearing *sumping*, it is expected that the commander's hearing is sharp when receiving stimuli in war. (Male, 58 years old)

> The presence of *sumping* that resembles wings symbolises that humans live and fly as high as possible. (Male, 55 years old)

These statements indicate that a soldier, as portrayed by Topeng Panji dancer, must possess a resilient and perceptive spirit when facing the enemy. Additionally, the symbolism reflects the idea that every individual must have goals and the determination to pursue them.

## Functions of Topeng Panji Dance Costume Accessories at Surakarta Palace

The community traditionally performs Topeng Panji dance as part of various ceremonial activities at Surakarta Palace. The performance features several characters, each with a distinct role according to the storyline acted out. Thus, the dancers wear slightly different costumes that reflect their characters. These costumes have been passed down through generations, preserving their authenticity and historical significance. As a result, Topeng Panji dance costumes serve not only as traditional attire but also carry a sacred function. It is used in a range of royal ceremonies, including the coronation of the king, the welcoming of royal guests, and palace weddings. The functions of Topeng Panji dance costumes are outlined as follows.

### *Representing Dancer's Characters*

The dance costume serves as a vital component of the dancer's appearance, physically attached to the body and symbolically representing the character being portrayed. One of the primary functions of Topeng Panji dance costumes is to convey the identity and traits of a specific character visually. The following statements from Javanese language experts highlight this function.

> The costumes must be able to represent and depict the character. When the costume is worn, viewers will see the real Panji character. (Male, 60 years old)

> When watching dancers, our eyes will be drawn to the costumes used; viewers will immediately be able to guess the character of the dancer. (Male, 34 years old)

These statements emphasise that costumes play a key role in helping the audience recognise the character being portrayed. For instance, costumes with soft and contrasting colours may indicate a gentle and refined character. Differences in character portrayal can be reflected through variations in costume models, shapes, colours, motifs, and lines. To further enhance the representation of each character, various supporting accessories are also used.

## *Strengthening Dancers' Character*

In Topeng Panji dance performances, costumes serve not only as visual identifiers of character but also as tools to reinforce and emphasise the dancer's portrayal. Through specific motifs, colours, and accessories, the costumes help accentuate the traits of each character. For instance, Panji Gagahan characters typically wear costumes with bold, complex patterns and striking accessories, while Panji Alusan characters are portrayed through simpler, softer designs. Cultural experts from ISI Surakarta elaborate on these:

> The costumes worn by Panji Gagahan and Panji Alusan characters have different motifs and colours. Overall, all the costumes are almost the same, but there is a motif that stands out on one part of the costume. (Male, 58 years old)

> The costume of *alusan* character looks wise, while that of *gagahan* looks powerful and scary. These two costumes are used by dancers to convince the audience of the characters they portray. (Male, 34 years old)

Therefore, Topeng Panji costumes feature two primary motif types: *untu walangan* for Panji Alusan and *rujen* for Panji Gagahan. Both motifs derive from plant imagery, symbolising fertility and prosperity. This reflects the deep cultural connection of the Surakarta community to nature and their continued commitment to preserving the authenticity of traditional attire.

## *Helping Dancers to Move Freely*

The dance costumes also serve to support the dancer's ability to move freely and flexibly. They enable dancers to fully embody their roles and follow the rhythm and flow of the performance. Additionally, the costumes provide comfort and space for expression. Topeng Panji dancers from Surakarta Palace stated:

> Wearing a costume gives me the confidence to dance. Even though the costume is not complete, the most important thing is that the private parts can be covered. I feel free to express myself. (Male, 30 years old)

> Dance costumes, as support, have vital value for me as a beginner dancer. Dancing without a complete costume will reduce the beauty of a dance performance. Likewise, the characters played are influenced by the visuals of the costumes. (Male, 27 years old)

A dancer requires a costume to enhance movement during the performance. The fit and appropriateness of the costume can influence the overall quality of the dance. For instance, wearing trousers that are the right size enables the dancer's gestures to synchronise with the musical accompaniment. Besides covering the body, the costume plays a role in distinguishing characters and serves as a functional tool for movement.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that: (1) the symbolic meaning of Topeng Panji dance costume reflects the figure of a soldier and represents life during the era of the kingdom, marked by the need for constant alertness; and (2) the function of the costume is to represent the dancer's character, emphasise the qualities of the character portrayed, and support the dancer's ability to move freely and flexibly. This study is closely tied to the context of dance performances in Surakarta Palace. The findings offer deeper insight into the symbolic meanings and practical functions embedded in Topeng Panji dance costume.

Based on the research results, this discussion elaborates on the meaning of the findings presented in the previous section. The first finding reveals that Topeng Panji dance costumes comprise various detailed components. This aligns with the studies by Kumalasari and Juwariyah (2022) and Ningtyas et al. (2016), which suggest that the costume symbolises the qualities of figures who held positions in the royal court. These costume details reflect cultural values such as chivalry, wisdom, perseverance, and reliability. The second finding regarding the function of the costumes supports the view of Prahesty (2006), who emphasised that costumes serve purposes aligned with the cultural values they embody. Therefore, specific rules govern their use, which are deeply rooted in community traditions. Dancers must carefully select their costumes following established norms to ensure alignment with the character they portray. Furthermore, Nathania (2020) found that dance costumes also serve as indicators of social identity in the modern era. Her research revealed that the offering dance costume holds significant cultural importance in Malay society, where authenticity is still highly valued by the community wearing it.

The findings also indicate that Topeng Panji dance costumes have distinct meanings and functions compared to those of other traditional mask dances. These distinctions are rooted in the life philosophy of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom era. Budiyanto and Arifah (2024) noted that the symbolic meanings of motifs and colours in costumes conveyed the hopes and prayers of kings, aiming to provide strength and guidance for both rulers and their people. However, this symbolic meaning differs from that of Topeng Panji costumes, which emphasise the character of the Panji figure rather than royal aspirations. This contrast demonstrates that not all cultural artefacts share the same symbolic interpretation. Nonetheless, the underlying objective of such traditional expressions remains consistent, which is to preserve and honour ancestral cultural heritage.

Other research highlights the function of dance costumes as a visual attraction for audiences in the modern era. Costumes play a crucial role in visually representing the character portrayed in a dance performance. The shift in function is not connotative but rather denotative. Dance costumes are deliberately designed with specific shapes and colours to enhance their visual appeal. Over time, they are expected to appear more vibrant and luxurious (Kurniyawan and Utina 2019). Therefore, it is essential to preserve the authenticity of Topeng Panji dance costumes as cultural artefacts, ensuring they remain unaffected by trends in fashion modernisation.

On the other hand, several cultural figures continue to preserve the traditional function of costumes as supporting elements in *persembahan* (offerings) dance during the *Pujawali Saba* ceremony in Pedawa Village, where the costumes are considered sacred (Arifiana 2011; Utami and Malini 2019). The form and use of these costumes must be preserved to ensure their passing down to future generations. Hence, the influence of modern developments remains limited. Moreover, the costumes serve as a medium of indirect communication, emphasising their role as cultural intermediaries.

The data in this study offer a clearer understanding of the inheritance, symbolic meaning, and function of Topeng Panji costumes within the Surakarta Palace environment. While previous studies have tended to focus on specific costume details, the findings of this research reveal that, as a whole, the costumes embody character values that serve as role models for daily life within the society.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, several conclusions can be drawn. First, Topeng Panji dance costumes are categorised into two types: *alusan* (refined/smooth) and *gagahan* (firm/strong). The symbolic meanings of the costumes include: (1) representing authority and status within the royal court, (2) distinguishing between protagonist and antagonist characters, (3) symbolising readiness for battle, and (4) serving as a metaphorical weapon in warfare. The *alusan* costume symbolises leadership qualities such as wisdom, authority, and chivalry. In contrast, the *gagahan* costume conveys a more forceful persona, such as mighty, assertive, fierce, and even intimidating in expression. Second, the costumes hold a deeper function beyond aesthetics. They not only reflect and sharpen the character portrayed but also serve as a crucial medium for supporting the dancer's movement and expression during the performance.

The results of this study are expected to be beneficial for the younger generation, serving as a valuable resource for cultural learning and personal development. Furthermore, these findings contribute to the preservation and appreciation of Topeng Panji dance costumes as an important cultural heritage.

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