

The Symbolism of Duality in the Visual Form of the Barong Ket Mask: An Aesthetic and Religious Study of Balinese Hindu Ritual Traditions

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ABSTRACT

The Barong Ket mask in Balinese Hindu ritual tradition embodies a synthesis of lion, bear, and boma forms. Beyond its aesthetic, it represents divine power and cosmic protection. This study focuses on the mask's visual aspects—shape and color—from Gianyar Regency, Bali, emphasizing the artist's style in shaping its distinct character and symbolic meaning. Using a qualitative case study, it examines how the mask's visual expression reflects the principle of *Rwa Bhineda*, symbolizing harmony between opposing forces. The findings reveal six symbolic dimensions of duality spanning unseen metaphysical and visible aesthetic values, illustrating how Balinese people perceive and interact with the cosmos through sacred beauty, faith, and cultural expression.

INTRODUCTION

In Balinese tradition, the Barong Ket mask is both a visual artifact and a symbolic artistic object that reflects the spiritual values and cosmology of Balinese Hinduism. The Barong Ket appears in ritual practices across various aspects of social life, emphasizing its role as a visual medium that connects humans with the sacred.

The philosophical principle underlying the existence of the Barong Ket is *Rwa Bhineda*, meaning "two opposing things." This concept represents the universal duality in Balinese Hinduism: the belief that balance in life can only be achieved through the harmony of opposing forces such as good and evil, light and darkness, and masculine and feminine. Consequently, every spiritual and artistic expression in Balinese culture is inseparable from the framework of *Rwa Bhineda*.

According to Bandem (2014) and Yoga Segara (2000), the mythological roots of Barong Ket can be found in the palm-leaf manuscripts *Barong Swari* and *Siwa Tattwa*. The *Barong Swari* text recounts how the gods Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma descended to earth as *Topeng Bang*, *Topeng Telek*, and *Barong*, respectively, to neutralize the chaos caused by Durga, the incarnation of the goddess Uma. Meanwhile, the *Siwa Tattwa* describes the transformation of Sang Hyang Shiva into Bhuta Egeg, a Barong-like figure with a frightening appearance yet imbued with the power of truth. These two narratives emphasize that the Barong Ket is a manifestation of cosmic power that safeguards balance in accordance with the principle of *Rwa Bhineda*.

Visually, the form and color of the Barong Ket have evolved over generations through the work of Balinese artists. Although regional variations exist in carving details, color schemes, and ornamentation, these transformations consistently reflect spiritual values rooted in mythology. Visual elements – such as the use of red, white, and black, or forms that combine both frightening and beautiful aspects – are tangible expressions of duality. Thus, the visual evolution of the Barong Ket not only demonstrates artistic creativity but also preserves the principle of cosmic balance.

However, research on the Barong Ket has thus far focused primarily on its mythological aspects and ritual functions, while the visual dimension – particularly how form and color embody the duality of *Rwa Bhineda* – has received relatively little in-depth discussion (N. L. N. , S. W. Bandem, 2014; Yoga Segara, 2000). Yet in Balinese art, the visual dimension is not merely aesthetic; it is an integral part of religious practice and the embodiment of faith. This constitutes the research gap that the present study seeks to address.

Based on this background, the study aims to (1) Identify and analyze the duality embodied in the form and color of the Barong Ket mask. (2) Explore how this visual expression represents the principle of *Rwa Bhineda* within the context of Balinese Hindu rituals.

Through a qualitative approach and case studies, this research is expected to enrich understanding of the relationship between visual symbolism and belief systems in Balinese society, and to highlight the role of visibility as a medium for preserving cultural identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sacred Symbolism and Visual Aesthetics of the Barong Ket Mask

In Balinese Hindu tradition, the Barong Ket mask is not merely an aesthetic object or performance prop, but a sacred entity (*sesuhunan*) believed to embody spiritual power and cosmic protection. Previous studies emphasize its mythological and spiritual roles, portraying the mask as a manifestation of supernatural strength that transcends theatrical form (I. W. Dibia, 2018; Titib, 2003; Triguna et al., 1993). The name Barong derives from the Sanskrit *barwang* or *bahrwang* meaning “bear,” symbolizing power, while *binaron* refers to a frightening figure that reinforces Barong’s role as a protective force (N. L. N., S. W. Bandem, 2014).



Figure 1. Barong Ket as a whole (personal doc.)

From a cultural standpoint, Barong Ket operates within the value system of *desa, kala, patra*—the spatio-temporal principle governing Balinese social and ritual life—where art, sacred space, and cosmology are deeply interlinked (Mantra, 1996; Raka, 2019). Its visual form, depicting a four-legged creature resembling a lion or other mythical beast, varies across regions with local names such as Barong Ketket, Barong Rentet, and Barong Kekek (N. L. N., S. W. Bandem, 2014; Setem, 2021). The myth of Cokorda Api, who drew sacred forms that became masks passed down through generations, underscores that its aesthetics stem from religious experience rather than arbitrary design (Titib, 2003). Ritually, Barong Ket occupies a vital position in Dewa Yadnya and Bhuta Yadnya ceremonies as a medium linking humans and divine entities. In secular settings, it has evolved into a dance drama depicting the eternal struggle between good (Barong) and evil (Rangda), a theme solidified through the Calon Arang narrative since 1936 (Dana, 1990; I. W. Dibia, 2018; Mudra, 2021).

Although the Barong Ket’s mythological and ritual functions have been widely discussed, its visual aspects—form and color—remain underexplored. These elements represent not only artistic style but also the embodiment of the dualistic philosophy of *Rwa Bhineda*, which underlies Balinese Hindu spirituality (Ardika et al., 2018). This study addresses that gap by analyzing the mask’s visual symbolism to reveal how its form and color articulate dualistic values and sustain the spiritual foundations of Balinese religious practice.

Rwa Bhineda Cosmology as a Philosophical Foundation

In Balinese Hindu worldview, space and time are perceived through three key concepts: the wind directions (*Dewata Nawa Sanggha*), the duality principle (*Rwa Bhineda*), and the triadic structure (*Tri Hita Karana*) (Ardika et al., 2018).

The idea of wind direction derives from the Tantu Panggelaran, which tells of Mount Meru's transfer from India to Java by the gods, while Penanggungan Mountain's structure symbolized the cosmic compass system (Lombard, 2014).

The concept of *Rwa Bhineda*, rooted in ancient cosmology, views kingdoms as both microcosm and macrocosm, representing universal balance between opposing forces. This duality underlies life equilibrium between *bhuwana alit* (the small world) and *bhuwana agung* (the great world) (Ardika et al., 2018). The term *Rwa Bhineda* – sometimes written Ruwa Bhineda or Ruabineda – is understood as a cultural perception linking spatial and temporal order in Balinese thought.

According to Bandem (1986), duality expresses human balance through contrasts such as good–evil, day–night, *kaja–kelod* (north–south), and *sekala–niskala* (seen–unseen). This contrast is visually represented in *poleng* cloth, where black and white signify good and evil, while gray symbolizes harmony. As Setem (2021) notes, *Rwa Bhineda* reflects a theological understanding of one divine essence manifesting through dual opposites.

Visuality and Materiality of the Barong Ket Mask

The Barong Ket mask functions as both a visual and spiritual entity – a medium for conveying symbolic values rather than a mere art object. Foster (1988) views the visual field as an ideological space shaped by social and cultural frameworks; within this context, the mask's colors, forms, and ornaments act as symbolic constructions reflecting *Rwa Bhineda*, the balance of good and evil in Balinese cosmology.

Similarly, Berger (1972) asserts that visual perception is never neutral, being molded by power, experience, and knowledge. Thus, features like bulging eyes, fangs, and the red black–gold palette should be read as part of a ritual sign system rather than pure aesthetic choices.

Color studies reinforce this symbolic complexity. Nadya (2021) identifies white, red, and black as linked to Tridatu cosmology; Karthadinata (2006) adds pink, blue, brown, and gold; Wirawan (2019) includes yellow for its directional symbolism; while Mudra (2021) and Bandem & Carpenter (2023) stress the sacred harmony of red, white, black, and gold. These findings affirm color as an ideological and cosmological language, supporting Foster's and Berger's views of visuality as culturally constructed.

From the materiality perspective, Miller (2005) emphasizes that materials – wood, hair, *songket*, and metal – carry ritual significance beyond aesthetics, positioning the mask as a living cultural entity within community rites. The integration of visual and material approaches therefore reveals Barong Ket as a living symbol that embodies, preserves, and transmits Balinese spiritual and cultural identity.

Performance of Dualism in the Barong Ket and Rangda Dance

The Barong Ket and Rangda Dance embody the Balinese Hindu principle of duality (*Rwa Bhineda*), serving not merely as an aesthetic spectacle but as a ritual drama uniting opposing cosmic forces – Barong as dharma (good) and Rangda as adharma (evil) (Eiseman, 1990). Their encounter symbolizes the belief that all elements of nature exist in complementary balance.

Within performance theory, Turner (1969) interprets ritual as a liminal experience, a transformative stage mediating old and new social orders. In this view, Barong and Rangda are not static mythological figures but ritual agents of transformation, channeling tension and restoring collective harmony. Schechner (2002) extends this idea through his concept of restored behavior, where symbolic actions are transmitted through generations – dynamic yet faithful to tradition. The recurring conflict between Barong and Rangda thus becomes a dramatic mechanism for sustaining universal equilibrium.

From an interpretive standpoint, Geertz (1973) underscores the value of thick description in decoding the symbolic layers of performance. Every gesture, costume, and rhythm embodies meanings rooted in Balinese cosmology. Hence, the Barong–Rangda performance functions as a living ritual text, where duality is enacted and internalized as a mode of spiritual and social reflection, ensuring balance within the Balinese cultural cosmos.

Contextual Transformation and Contemporary Adaptation

Cultural transformation and adaptation reflect active responses to social, technological, economic, and political change. Traditional forms—such as performance, symbols, and ritual shift in meaning when transferred to new contexts like tourism, digital media, or education. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) note that tradition is not a passive legacy, but a social construct continually reinterpreted to suit contemporary needs, affirming culture’s fluid and negotiable nature.

In this global movement, Appadurai (1996) introduces cultural flows, describing how ideas and practices cross boundaries, generating hybrid forms that merge traditional and modern expressions. The Barong Ket, once confined to sacred rituals, now appears in tourism and online spaces, showing adaptation rather than loss. Butler’s (1997) theory of performativity adds that identity is shaped through repeated practice – shifts in performance style or context reveal renewal, not inauthenticity.

Adger’s (2000) notion of cultural resilience emphasizes the ability to preserve meaning amid change. Thus, when Barong Ket transitions from temple ritual to public stage, its spiritual essence persists as a strategy of continuity. In essence, adaptation ensures the living relevance of tradition, demonstrating that transformation sustains rather than diminishes sacred value.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the visual and symbolic dimensions of the Barong Ket mask, particularly its relation to *Rwa Bhineda* in Balinese Hindu ritual traditions. Such an approach captures the depth of visual meaning and cultural context that quantitative methods cannot address, enabling observation of sacred art as a visual–spiritual phenomenon linked to belief and ritual practice.

The research also employs visual ethnography (Pink, 2007) to interpret images, objects, and performances as active media of social and spiritual meaning rather than static representations. Photographic and video documentation serve as primary data, recording ritual gestures and symbolic discourse in context.

Furthermore, the analysis integrates the principles of visual symbolism in cultural anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1967). Turner views ritual symbols as vessels of collective meaning expressed through performative acts, while Geertz emphasizes thick description to uncover layered interpretations. Within this framework, form and color are treated not merely as aesthetic choices but as manifestations of broader ideological and cosmological values.

Research Questions

This research is designed to answer two main questions (1) How is the aspect of duality identified in the visual form of the Barong Ket Mask? (2) How do the shape and color of the mask represent the aspect of duality in the context of Balinese Hindu rituals?

Case Selection

Case selection was carried out purposively, focusing on Barong Ket originating from Gianyar and Badung Regencies in Bali, regions renowned for their historical and cultural significance in the production of Barong Ket masks. Both Gianyar and Badung are home to communities of artists, craftsmen, and traditional leaders who remain actively engaged in maintaining and practicing the visual and ritual traditions of Barong Ket as a form of worship. Six Barong Ket masks were included from the Gianyar region, and two from the Badung region. The thoughtful selection of these locations and artifacts informed the following data collection strategies.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection employed a combination of field methods and a literature review. Techniques included: (a) Participatory observation of Barong Ket mask ceremonies and performances in villages employing red and white Barong masks, (b) In-depth interviews with mask makers, dancers, and traditional leaders (pemangku), (c) Visual documentation through photography, video, and archival materials, and (d) Artifactual and literary study of palm-leaf manuscripts, mythological manuscripts, and ethnographic and historical documents on Balinese art.

Table 1 Explanation of data from lontar

No	Data Sought	Document Type	Document Name	Year/Source
1	A narrative description of the Barong Ket story (including the visual elements of shape and color)	Lontar	<i>Barong Swari</i>	Book (2019) Website (downloaded 2023)
2	elements of shape and color)	Lontar	<i>Siwa Tattwa.</i>	

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, encompassing the following stages: (a) Categorization of visual elements based on themes of shape and color. (b) Narrative elaboration and symbolic

interpretation based on observations and interviews. (c) Exploration of meaningful correspondences between visual expressions and spiritual values in Balinese Hinduism, using a symbolic hermeneutic approach as an interpretive basis. Eight Barong Ket were used in the analysis.

Interpretation and Validation

Interpretation of visual meaning was conducted in-depth through a combination of symbolic reading, thick description, and ritual context. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, which combines visual, oral, and textual data to ensure a richness of perspective and consistency of findings.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To identify aspects of duality in Barong Ket, this study examines the visual dimensions of form, color, expression, and symbolic function. Barong Ket is one of the most important performing arts in Balinese tradition, widely known for its formal choreography and rich movement structure (I. W. Dibia, 2018; I. W. B. R. Dibia, 2004). This dance is traditionally performed by two dancers, called juru bapang (two dancers), and depicts a mythological creature with a combined form of various animals, such as a boma, an ox, a lion, and a tiger. Its physical features reflect animal anatomy, with details such as meaningfully designed eyes, ears, mouth, and teeth. The face features a dull red base color with gold, white, and black details, and its eyes reflect a rainbow-like spectrum of colors (N. L. N. , S. W. Bandem, 2014; Mudra, 2021; Triguna et al., 1993).







More than just a decorative visual element, the Barong Ket Mask holds a powerful symbolic role in the spiritual life of the Balinese people. The origin of the name "Barong" refers to the Sanskrit term barwang or bahrwang, meaning bear—a large animal that, although not found in Bali, is believed to be a protective creature with supernatural powers (I. W. Dibia, 2018; Titib, 2003). In this context, the Barong is understood as a mythological entity that carries the values of protection, balance, and spiritual strength. As a cultural symbol, the Barong Ket reflects the intricate relationship between humans, nature, and transcendent powers highly valued in Balinese Hindu cosmology. Therefore, this mask serves not only as a dance prop but also as a manifestation of the sacred values and collective identity of the Balinese people.

Identifying Aspects of Duality in the Barong Ket Mask Form and Structure

The Barong Ket mask is used in the Barong Ket dance, a famous dance in Bali. This dance is often performed both sacredly and profanely (for tourist entertainment). Its form resembles a combination of a boma and an ox, a lion, or a tiger. Its face resembles a boma, its body resembles that of an ox, with a long, lion-like tail and fur (N. L. N. , S. W. Bandem, 2014; I. W. Dibia, 2018; Mudra, 2021; Triguna et al., 1993). The development of the Barong Ket form to date has an anatomy divided into the head, often referred to as a tapel (mask in Balinese), and the body (Table 2). The anatomy of the tapel consists of the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and teeth. The Tapel Barong Ket has a facial color consisting of a red base,

white teeth, gold jaws and spurs, black pupils, a moustache, and a beard (Table 2).

Table 2 Visual form of Barong Ket (Asthararianty, 2024)

Barong Ket Mask Section	
Head	Body
	
Anatomy of the Barong Ket Mask	
	Ear
	Eye
	Nose
	Teeth and fangs

Use of Color

Another important aspect besides form is color in the Barong Ket, particularly evident in the Barong Ket *tapel*. The color distribution of the Barong Ket parts is shown in the following table. The color used is derived from the Barong Ket mask created by Tjokorda Raka Tisnu in 2017 (Figure 2), which was colored with Balinese colors by artist Ajik Arya Kembar and is part of the private collection of Putu Bagus Wisnawa.

















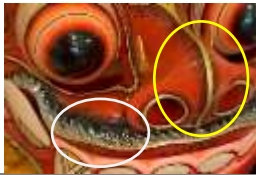
Figure 2 Barong Mask. The symbols used to describe its color (personal document)

The color of the Barong Ket mask is commonly associated with red. The interior decoration of the mask typically features black, white, and yellow, often complemented by gold. Red is widely used in Barong Ket masks and is a color often seen in both sacred and profane (tourist entertainment) forms. However, until this research was conducted, it was known that different regions have different Barong Ket mask colors. The colors that appear are white, brown, and maroon, depending on the deity represented in that region and the prevailing

belief system. The use of red in the Barong Ket mask is explained in the table below.

Table 3 Explanation of the colors of the Barong Ket *tapel* section by section (Astharianty, 2023)

No.	Photo	Explanation of the colors
1.		The base color is red with a hint of orange. M=c2m82y97k0 
2.		The base color is red with a hint of orange with gold and black motifs. M=c2m82y97k0 H=c75m70y53k54 E=c0m13y52k0 
3.		White base color, black eye circle color, red circle color with a slight orange tinge, red line with a slight orange tinge M=c2m82y97k0 H=c75m70y53k54 MM=c0m39y36k0 P=c5m2y7k0 
4.		White teeth color, white fangs color with gold motif P=c5m2y7k0 E=c0m13y52k0 
5.		pink gum color red gum line color with a slight orange tinge M=c2m82y97k0 MM=c0m39y36k0 
6.		Black H=c75m70y53k54 
7.		Gold E=c0m13y52k0 

8.	Motifs in tapel	(white line) white pattern color on black (yellow line) black pattern color on red
		

Barong Ket Mask Style

The shape of the Barong Ket mask remains a matter of contemplation. We obtained only oral information in the data collection process, with no written documentation regarding the various mask shapes. The shape of the Barong Ket mask is determined by the basic shape of the mask's head. The size of each mask also influences this shape. This shape also influences and represents the region where the mask was produced and the artist. This influence is also related to how the history and stories surrounding the Barong Ket mask were developed in each region. The classification of the mask shapes can be seen in the table below, which lists the shapes and names used, along with the regions where each mask shape was used.

Table 4 Barong Mask Styles (Asthararianty, 2024)

No	Style	Characteristics	Regional
1.	Bebadungan/Intaran Style	This style usually uses large sizes and is a form that has existed since ancient times. Initial formation.	Sanur, Nusa Dua, Jimbaran
2.	Singapadu Style	There are three: a. Square, like a lion, with long, sharp fangs b. Trapezoidal, with the tips of the right and left eyebrows being slightly closer together, softer c. Python head, round but flat, with fangs that aren't too long	a. Karang Asem, Tolakan b. Kederi Sila Karang, Sengguan, Pejeng c. Singapadu
3.	Klungkung Style	Development style of the Bebadungan/Intaran Style	Klungkung
4.	Bangli Style	Square, flattened at the back	Bangli
5.	Ubud Style	Development of the Singapadu Style, leaning more towards the Puaya Style	Ubud and surrounding areas
6.	Puaya Style	Boxier than Singapadu Style	Puaya

Representation of Duality in Ritual Context

Duality in Symbolic Context

The Barong Ket mask is part of the concept of duality, paired with Rangda. This study aims to examine the visual aspects of the Barong Ket mask. By explaining the overall visual form of the Barong Ket mask, we can map out the dual aspects of this Barong Ket mask.

The duality aspect is a perception called *Rwa Bhineda*, which is the concept of duality. According to theory, duality is a contrasting understanding of one thing and another, between good and evil, black and white. Balinese religious life is closely and deeply connected to the concept of duality. The battle between Barong and Rangda is not aimed at victory, but reflects the principle of cosmic balance (Belo, 1960; Geertz, 1973).

The story from the palm-leaf manuscript of Siwa Tattwa and Barongswari is the basis for Balinese Hindus' identification with Barong Ket. The story of Barong Ket's emergence stems from the presence of good and evil forces. This reasonable force neutralizes the evil force. The concept of duality is conveyed through the symbols of Barong Ket and Rangda. The duality of the Barong Ket mask can also be seen in its visual form. The limits of understanding this duality, or *Rwa Bhineda*, are not limited to good and evil, but to the existence of two contrasting things that unite to create harmony. The harmony sought is embodied in the visual form of the Barong Ket mask.

The Barong Ket mask is created through an agreement between the priest, the traditional village head, and the community. The necessity of a Barong Ket mask must be determined by the village, the community, and the individual. If no agreement is reached, it will not occur. This agreement is one example of this duality, the agreement between the two parties, whether they agree or disagree on creating a Barong Ket mask.

Once an agreement has been reached, deciding what color to use for the Barong Ket mask is necessary. Whether the color is an existing one or a new one, this process differs when creating a new one or repairing it. The duality aspect is seen in the Barong Ket tapel, which differs from region to region. The colors that appear are red, white, maroon, and brown. The colors on the Barong Ket tapel can be the same as those on the Rangda tapel. For example, in the image below, the Barong Ket tapel is white, while the Rangda tapel is white and red. The Barong Ket and Rangda in figure 3 are *sesuhunan* or *sungsungan* from Let Village, Gianyar.



Figure 3 *Sesuhunan* or *Sungsungan* in the form of 2 white Rangdas, one red one and 1 Barong Ket. This *Sesuhunan* or *Sungsungan* is in Let Village, Gianyar-2024.

Duality in the Context of Color

The basic color of the Barong Ket should be red, as shown in Figure 1.4 below, which shows a red Barong Ket. Most Barong Ket colors are red. The duality in using different colors stems from historical connections with ancestors who passed down red from generation to generation. Some also derive from a blessing from a priest, requesting the use of a new color, such as white, when repairing or remaking a new one.



Figure 4 Tapel Barong Ket in red - 2024 (left to right: Tulikup Village, Blahbatuh District, Gianyar Regency; Carangsari Village, Petang District, Badung Regency; Pelaga Village, Petang District, Badung Regency)

Barong Ket, a protector, goodness, and with the power to neutralize evil, is depicted in red. Red is often depicted as courage, anger, and passion. This image contrasts with Barong Ket's function as a protector and goodness. Another color that often appears is white, which is usually depicted as purity, cleanliness, and sincerity. The visual purpose of the Barong Ket mask is said to be created to appear *aeng* (aeng), where *aeng* means powerful, fantastic, and frightening. The color white and the desired impression also have differences. This purpose is also combined with the desired impression, which is also related to the color choice. The impression that can be conveyed in this Barong Ket mask is either sweet or fierce. The impression and use of color in this mask shows aspects of duality that are opposites but are combined into one in the Barong Ket mask.



Figure 5 Photo of a white and red Barong Ket mask/tapel - 2024 (left to right: Banjar Penginyahan Payangan, Gianyar; Banjar Silakarang Kederi, Gianyar, Pura Dalem Silakarang, Gianyar)

Red of the Barong Ket is interesting considering its presence in Balinese religious life. According to the *Lontar Barong Swari* story, Brahma is depicted as the *Bang Mask*, Vishnu as the *Telek Mask*, and Shiva as the Barong Ket. The color of the Barong Ket is not mentioned here. Red itself is the color of Brahma, who resides in the south. The Barong Ket itself, according to its placement and storage, is in the Pura Dalem or Pura Desa temples, where the Pura Dalem represents Shiva, while the Pura Desa represents Brahma. This red color represents a duality, contrasting its origins and significance within Balinese Hindu teachings.

White is also not mentioned as a mandatory color for the Barong Ket. The use of white could be related to Shiva, who resides in the center of the cardinal directions in the Dewata Nawa Sangha, and whose color is white. These red and white colors intersect or interchange, reflecting the facts and stories in the field. Color is an aesthetic element and a symbolic function that reinforces Barong's cosmological significance. Each color on the Barong's body has a spiritual significance, connected to the Dewata Nawa Sanga system (Lansing, 2006).

Duality in the context of form and expression

Another aspect of Duality is the color of the eyes. As previously mentioned, the desired impression is "aeng," meaning powerful, mighty, and frightening. This impression is conveyed through the eyes. As the word "aeng" suggests, the Aeng mask is characterized by round or bulging eyes, thick eyebrows, mustaches, and exposed teeth. These characteristics symbolize the strong, courageous, and arrogant nature typically found in the prime minister (Patih), namely Barong Ket himself. The eyes are expected to radiate power but also serve to protect the community.

Field data indicates that these eyes do not convey a frightening impression, but rather a reassuring one, and provide a sense of security. The eyes represent an aspect of life, reflecting both life and death. This is like when a doctor checks whether a patient is alive. Balinese Hindu teachings suggest a third eye in the Barong Ket mask, indicating its position as a *sesuhunan/sungsungan* object. This position signifies the sacredness of this *tapel* as a medium for practicing their beliefs. Eyes are deeply spiritual. The God or deities they believe in see all their people, and vice versa. The colors used, however, differ depending on the artist's style. For example, the black eyeballs are larger and smaller, a feature related to their beauty. However, other colors have more profound meanings, such as the use of red that gradates towards the white of the eye. The colors used are those of the Dewata Nawa Sangha, which has nine cardinal directions and colors. The colors in the eyes are red, orange, and white, a blend of gradations that combine to create a deep, rosy color, located in the center of the Dewata Nawa Sangha. The color of these eyes brings joy to those who look at them; if they are blurry, no life radiates from the eyes.



Figure 6 Eye part of the *Tapel*/barong mask

Another aspect of duality is the shape of the Barong Ket *Tapel*. The shape of the *tapel* is based on the shape of a lion, a form with frightening power, but simultaneously makes the viewer feel safe rather than afraid. The Barong's face shows a combination of fierceness (fangs, bulging eyes) and friendliness (smile, funny expression) (I. M. deBoer, F. E. Bandem, 1995). The duality of this form is not only based on its visual form but also its size. According to stories and previous research, it is said that this form refers to the height and width of the

tapel and is usually approximately 30 cm. As time went by, when the Barong Ket Tapel was used as a performance for tourists, there was an adaptation to the size. The Barong Ket dance is a very popular performance, and the story is based on the story of Calon Arang. The Barong Ket dance originated from the Gianyar area, specifically from Singapadu. The Barong Ket dancer, Juru Bapang, requires two dancers to carry and dance the Barong Ket intact. The movements of the Barong Ket dance are dynamic compared to other dances.

The ideal size for the dance is 22-23 cm. This adaptation also applies to sacred objects. If a village or hamlet already has a 30 cm Barong Ket mask, a duplicate will be made and used for the sacred dance. However, if a new mask is created, the size will be adjusted to 22-23 cm, matching the size used for profane or tourist performances. The duality is evident in the form, particularly in this size. The sacred and profane masks should differ, but they are created or adapted to be the same.

Duality in the context of symbols in ritual and spiritual functions

The Barong is a sacred symbol sanctified and cared for in temples; it is not simply a performance figure (Hobart, 1991). Ritual processes in Bali are typically synonymous with religious ceremonies. Each process has its stages and may have different or similar goals. Ritual traditions in Bali are not simply a series of religious processions but also reflect harmony, balance, and the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and God. Ritual expresses a system of symbols that shape a group's religious understanding and social identity (Geertz, 1966). Ritual can also be understood as a transformative process that moves individuals from one social status to another (rites of passage) (Turner, 1969). This study explores the relationship between aspects of Duality (*Rwa Bhineda*) in the visual manifestation of the Barong Ket mask, particularly its shape and color, within Balinese ritual traditions. The ritual function of Barong Ket demonstrates how the principles of *Rwa Bhineda* are lived out spiritually and socially in Balinese cultural practices (Eiseman, 1990).

Ritual traditions in Bali are not solely religious but also encompass profound social, cultural, and philosophical dimensions. These ritual traditions are based on the concept of Tri Hita Karana, which honors nature, ancestors, and the power of God. Tri Hita Karana is a three-fold concept, embodying balance between humans and God, each other, and nature.



Figure 7. The artistic aspect of religion in Balinese Hindu religious ceremonies

Maintaining this balance and respect, each ritual has a variety of meanings, each with its context and purpose. Ritual traditions can serve as offerings, a form

of respect, part of the cycle of life, and a form of harmony with nature. Religious practice among Balinese Hindus is inextricably linked to the arts, as they are deeply embedded in their daily lives. Art is a form of devotion to their faith. Therefore, it is no surprise that the creation of art forms such as the Barong Ket and others accompanies this devotion to their faith. It is no surprise how seriously they take the creation and repair of the Barong Ket, paying attention to every detail.

Aesthetic and Cultural Implications of Visual Duality

The Barong Ket Mask represents aesthetic achievement in visual form and contains rich symbolic layers and cultural values. In the Balinese cultural context, the mask's visual elements serve not merely as decoration but as a means of symbolic communication that reflects cosmological views, spiritual beliefs, and the community's social structure. Therefore, the Barong Ket Mask is viewed as an intersubjective artistic artifact interpreted collectively by the community that experiences it, both in the context of performance and religious ritual (I. M. deBoer, F. E. Bandem, 1995; Geertz, 1973).

Visual Form as a Medium of Symbolic Communication

The Barong Ket Mask's visual representation contains various complex symbolic elements, including facial features, color palettes, dynamic body movements, and ornamental attributes such as feathers, fangs, and crowns. These elements function not merely as aesthetic elements but as manifestations of spiritual and cosmological values within Balinese culture. Through its visual aspects, the Barong conveys meanings of protective power, cosmic harmony, and the principle of dualism that balances good and evil in the universal order (Eiseman, 1990).

From a cultural semiotic perspective, the Barong Ket visualization can be interpreted as a sign system representing Balinese society's unique visual communication model. These signs have functions and meanings that can only be understood within the underlying social and ritual contexts and are inseparable from local religious narratives. Therefore, the visual aspects of the Barong do not merely represent artistic value but also serve as an important medium for expressing and preserving collective cultural identity (Hobart, 1991; Turner, 1969).

Diversity as a Reflection of Culture

The variations in the shape, color, and visual style of the Barong Ket Mask found in various regions of Bali reflect a high degree of adaptability to local social and cultural conditions. Each region has its unique take on the Barong, influenced by the historical background of the traditional village, the orientation of the temple, and the characteristics of the revered guardian deity. This demonstrates that the aesthetic development of Barong Ket occurs dynamically and contextually, adapting to the changes and cultural needs of each community (Picard, 1990).

This Diversity is not a manifestation of disorder, but rather a manifestation of the flexibility of tradition in responding to local needs without abandoning its

philosophical roots. From a cultural anthropology perspective, this plurality of appearances demonstrates how Balinese people respond to local values with a contextual approach, while maintaining the cosmological core underlying their belief system. This confirms that the visual aspects of Barong Ket function as a structured and living medium for the expression of communal and spiritual identity (Geertz, 1973).

Preservation and Implementation in the Present

In the contemporary context, preserving the Barong Ket Mask faces a dynamic mix of challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, globalization and the growth of the tourism industry create space for increased appreciation of this traditional performing art. However, there are concerns about the commodification of culture and the weakening of its sacred meaning, particularly when Barong Ket performances are positioned as mere spectacles in profane spheres such as the tourism industry (Yamashita, 2003).

An effective preservation strategy cannot simply rely on material conservation; it also requires revitalizing the philosophical and spiritual values contained within the performance. This involves culture-based education, the transfer of knowledge to the younger generation, and the active participation of indigenous communities in the performance management. Furthermore, developing the visual form of Barong Ket in contemporary art, design, and digital platforms also presents a strategic opportunity, if it maintains its symbolic meaning (Lansing, 2006). Therefore, preserving the Barong Ket Mask is not merely about preserving cultural heritage as an object, but also ensuring its continued function as a means of symbolic communication in the ever-evolving life of Balinese society.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research comprehensively addresses two main objectives: first, to identify aspects of symbolic dualism (*Rwa Bhineda*) in the visual form of the Barong Ket Mask; second, to analyze how this visual expression deeply relates to ritual practices in Balinese Hinduism. Through a qualitative approach based on case studies in Gianyar Regency, supported by visual ethnography and analysis of cultural symbolism, this research successfully uncovered six primary forms of visual duality inherent in the Barong Ket Mask:

1. The existential duality of Barong Ket as a spiritual entity (*sesuhunan*) that is both present and invisible.
2. The duality of color based on regional context—each region exhibits different visual interpretations.
3. The duality of meaning in red (fire, courage, *Bhuta*).
4. The duality of meaning in white (purity, serenity, *God*).
5. The duality of expression in the shape and color of the eyes is the central representation of transcendent power.
6. The duality of the *Tapel*'s shape and size indicates a balance between masculine and feminine elements, strength and beauty.

These six aspects do not stand alone but are interconnected within a system of meaning that lives within the context of Balinese Hindu rituals. This finding

strengthens the argument that the visualization of the Barong Ket Mask is not merely an aesthetic manifestation, but also a theological and cosmological medium for establishing a relationship between humans, the universe, and God.

As explained in the literature and methodology section, the concept of *Rwa Bhineda* is a fundamental principle in Balinese Hindu thought, stating that the universe always exists in balance between two opposing yet complementary poles. In the visual context of Barong Ket, this duality is not only manifested in the symbolic opposition between Barong and Rangda, but also concretely embodied in the forms and colors that serve as tools for articulating collective faith. The body shape, facial structure, eye configuration, and color are all designed with aesthetic considerations and as visual representations of spiritual doctrines rooted in local mythology and classical Hindu teachings.

Furthermore, the results of this study demonstrate that artistic practices in Balinese tradition are not profane entities separate from faith, but rather a form of visual devotion that serves as a channel for society to respond to and represent the universe with beauty, sincerity, and harmony. The presence of the Barong Ket in rituals symbolizes spiritual unity capable of mediating the polarities between good and evil, light and dark, masculine and feminine. Thus, the visualization of the Barong Ket serves as an important medium for the embodiment of faith, as well as a social mechanism for maintaining cosmic harmony.

This research contributes theoretically to studying visual art, symbolic anthropology, and aesthetic theology. It provides insights into preserving sacred artifacts, which must be protected for their form and meaning within their cosmological and ritual context.

This study reveals how the Barong Ket mask embodies visual and symbolic duality within Balinese Hindu ritual traditions. Future research is advised to: (1) Broaden comparative scope – Explore regional and cross-cultural variations to understand how local cosmologies shape Barong Ket's visual forms. (2) Adopt interdisciplinary methods – Integrate visual anthropology, material culture, and semiotics to enrich interpretation of sacred art as symbolic communication. (3) Use digital preservation tools – Apply digital ethnography, 3D scanning, and color analysis to document and safeguard visual diversity for future generations.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This research advances understanding of visual symbolism and religious aesthetics by showing how Barong Ket embodies *Rwa Bhineda*, the Balinese principle of duality. Future work should pursue cross-cultural and longitudinal analyses to trace how sacred visual expressions evolve with socio-religious change. A mixed-methods approach combining ethnography and digital visualization can capture both *sekala* and *niskala* (seen and unseen) aspects of ritual art. Investigating perceptual and emotional responses to the mask will also deepen insight into the interrelation of aesthetics, faith, and cultural identity within living heritage contexts.

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