

## Gender Representation in the Begenjoh Pantun of Tingkilan Music in the Kutai Community

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### Keywords

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### Abstract

*This study aims to examine how gender values are represented in Tingkilan music pantun begenjoh, a traditional cultural expression of the Kutai community in East Kalimantan, and to explore the symbolic meanings, narratives, and moral expectations embedded in the structure of pantun begenjoh lyrics. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, grounded in sociocultural and gender analysis. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. The findings show that Tingkilan lyrics encode culturally constructed gender norms, including ideals of female modesty, social reputation, and family honor, as well as expectations of masculinity related to responsibility and leadership. The study concludes that the contemporary adaptation of pantun reveals emerging forms of gender negotiation that challenge traditional roles. The implications of this study, as a source of knowledge on how local musical traditions function as a medium for reproducing and renegotiating gender meanings in community life, provide essential insights for gender-responsive cultural and educational studies.*

### Kata Kunci

Representasi Gender;  
Begenjoh Pantun;  
Musik Tingkilan;  
Masyarakat Kutai

### Abstrak

Tujuan studi ini mengkaji bagaimana nilai-nilai gender diwakili dalam pantun begenjoh musik Tingkilan, sebuah ekspresi budaya tradisional komunitas Kutai di Kalimantan Timur, serta mengeksplorasi makna simbolis, narasi, dan harapan moral yang tertanam dalam struktur lirik pantun begenjoh. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif yang didasarkan pada analisis sosiokultural dan gender. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa lirik Tingkilan mengkodekan norma gender yang dibangun secara budaya, termasuk ideal kesopanan perempuan, reputasi sosial, dan kehormatan keluarga, serta ekspektasi maskulinitas terkait tanggung jawab dan kepemimpinan. Kesimpulan studi mengungkap bahwa adaptasi kontemporer pantun menunjukkan bentuk-bentuk negosiasi gender yang muncul dan menantang peran tradisional. Implikasi studi ini sebagai sumber pengetahuan bagaimana tradisi musik lokal berfungsi sebagai medium untuk mereproduksi dan menegosiasikan kembali makna gender dalam kehidupan komunitas, memberikan wawasan penting bagi studi budaya dan pendidikan yang responsif terhadap gender.

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional music in Indonesia functions not only as artistic expression but also as a cultural text through which social values, moral expectations, and gender norms are transmitted across generations. In the Kutai community of East Kalimantan, Tingkilan, which features the interplay of *gambus*, *marwas*, and *begenjoh* pantun, serves as a medium for articulating communal identity and ethical worldviews. As oral literature, *Begenjoh Pantun* encodes culturally sanctioned notions of femininity, masculinity, propriety, and social conduct. However, despite its cultural significance, gender representation in Tingkilan remains underexplored, leaving a gap in understanding how traditional arts shape gendered cultural reproduction.

The transmission of cultural norms through music begins in early childhood, making traditional songs powerful tools of socialization. Studies show that local songs carry ethical reasoning, relational values, and collective memory, forming part of a broader enculturation process within families, schools, and communities (Jama & Menggo, 2024; Zubaidah & Amaliyah, 2025; Kapoyos et al., 2022; Subroto & Nadilla, 2024). These cultural forms often embed implicit models of gender roles, contributing to children's early understanding of social expectations (Andalas & Qur'ani, 2019; Ritawati, 2018). Such evidence highlights the importance of examining representational patterns within Tingkilan to understand how musical narratives may reinforce or challenge established gender constructs.

At the broader societal level, gender studies indicate that cultural narratives, including curricula, media, and traditional arts, continue to sustain gender stereotypes (Teshome, 2025). Indonesian textbooks, for instance, still depict men as leaders and women in domestic roles (Fitriani, 2019). Similarly, Robbani et al. (2025) found that gender mainstreaming (PUG) often remains symbolic in school practices, reinforcing patriarchal assumptions within cultural systems. Complementary research on local wisdom also reveals that cultural ethics, such as *silih asah*, *silih asih*, and *silih asuh*, significantly influence children's character formation when consistently integrated into learning (Damayanti et al., 2025; Rezqi & Furqan, 2025). However, few studies have examined how traditional musical texts, particularly pantun, contribute to the construction of gendered identities.

Contemporary shifts, including digital influence, youth reinterpretation of heritage arts, and rising gender awareness, have introduced new dynamics into Tingkilan performance. Improvised pantuns and modern themes reflect emerging forms of gender negotiation; yet, it remains unclear whether these changes alter or merely repackage traditional gender norms. Addressing this gap, this study examines how *Begenjoh Pantun* reflects gender values within the Kutai community. By applying a sociocultural and gender-based analytical lens, the study highlights how femininity, masculinity, relational ethics, and social expectations are encoded in pantun structure and imagery, offering insights relevant to gender-responsive cultural education and heritage preservation.

Previous research on gender representation in traditional Indonesian arts has shown how music and literature serve as mediums for conveying social and cultural values related to gender (Boer et al., 2023; Wallis, 2011; Argyriou, 2025). Several studies have revealed how pantun in Malay culture portrays the role of women in both domestic and public contexts (Adnan, 2020). Additionally, research on traditional Balinese music has noted how gender is defined through song lyrics that express societal views on masculinity and femininity (Mohamad & Muhammad, 2019). However, there has been limited research specifically exploring gender representation in the begenjoh pantun of Tingkilan music within the Kutai community, despite this music playing an important role in the social and cultural life of the community. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how gender values are constructed and negotiated through the lyrics of *Begenjoh Pantun* in Tingkilan music, as well as their impact on the social roles within the Kutai community.

The research gap in the study of gender representation in traditional Indonesian music, particularly in the context of Tingkilan music within the Kutai community, lies in the lack of focused exploration on how gender roles are portrayed and negotiated through the begenjoh pantun. While existing studies have examined gender in other traditional music forms, such as Malay pantun and Balinese music, there

is limited attention given to the specific cultural and gender dynamics embedded in the lyrics of Tingkilan music. This gap is especially evident in understanding how local music traditions not only reflect gender norms but also serve as a space for renegotiating these norms in response to changing societal values. This research aims to address this gap by offering a detailed analysis of how gender is represented in the begenjoh pantun of Tingkilan music and its implications for the social fabric of the Kutai community.

This study aims to analyze the representation of gender values in the begenjoh pantun of Tingkilan music within the Kutai community. By examining the symbolic meanings and narratives embedded in the lyrics, this research seeks to uncover how traditional music reflects and negotiates gender norms, particularly in relation to ideals of femininity and masculinity. Through a qualitative approach that includes sociocultural and gender analysis, the study aims to understand the impact of these gender representations on social roles within the community and explore how contemporary adaptations of Tingkilan music challenge or reinforce traditional gender expectations. This research also intends to contribute to broader discussions on gender dynamics in local cultural expressions and their role in shaping societal norms.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine how gender values are represented in *Begenjoh Pantun* within Tingkilan musical traditions. This approach enabled an in-depth interpretation of cultural texts, linguistic symbolism, and sociocultural meanings embedded in performance practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2020). Research was conducted in Tenggarong, Kutai Kartanegara, recognized as the cultural hub of Tingkilan, with participants selected through purposive sampling. They included *gambus* and *marwas* players, *begenjoh* vocalists, cultural practitioners, community elders, and audience members who possessed contextual knowledge relevant to interpreting the symbolic dimensions of the pantun (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The data consisted of transcribed *begenjoh* pantun from live and archival performances, field notes from participant observation, and semi-structured interview transcripts. Observation documented performance settings, performer-audience interactions, and gendered role divisions, aligning with ethnomusicological research traditions (Barz & Cooley, 2019). Semi-structured interviews with 12 participants provided insights into the meanings and cultural assumptions embedded in the pantun. Additional data were gathered through a review of community archives and local folklore documents to contextualize traditional interpretations (Saldana & Omasta, 2021).

Data analysis combined thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Thematic analysis identified recurring representations of femininity, masculinity, relational ethics, and moral expectations following Braun and Clarke's (2022) coding framework. CDA examined how linguistic structures, metaphors, and narrative positioning reinforced or challenged gender ideologies within the Kutai sociocultural context (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, 2021). Triangulating textual, observational, and interview data strengthened the validity of emerging interpretations (Fusch et al., 2018).

To ensure trustworthiness, the study incorporated member checking to verify interpretations with participants (Birt et al., 2016), peer debriefing with experts in gender studies and ethnomusicology, and thick description to provide contextual clarity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail documenting analytical decisions was also maintained. Collectively, these strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and cultural grounding of the study's findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The analysis of *Begenjoh Pantun*, supported by participant observation and interviews with performers and cultural practitioners, generated three significant findings concerning the representation of gender in Tingkilan musical traditions.

Femininity is Represented Through Themes of Modesty, Emotional Restraint, and Familial Responsibility

The first significant finding shows that *Begenjoh Pantun* consistently positions femininity within the framework of modest behavior, emotional restraint, and devotion to family obligations. This is reflected in lines such as:

*“Coba lihat peelan kanak bini... beber sida begincu... baju baru bajunya bepinjaman.”*

(“Look at the behavior of the young girl... her lips red with lipstick... her clothes new though borrowed.”)

These lines highlight social expectations placed upon young women to maintain appearance, politeness, and controlled behavior. Metaphors of beauty, delicacy, and borrowed clothing symbolize cultural pressures regarding reputation and propriety. Observation data further revealed that female performers frequently employed soft vocal tones and refined gestures, thereby reinforcing these textual associations.

Masculinity is Constructed Through Themes of Leadership, Authority, and Moral Responsibility

The second finding reveals that masculine representation is tied to imagery of assertiveness, social authority, and responsibility. Pantun lines frequently depict young men as active, mobile, and socially dominant, such as:

*“Lain pula peelan kanak laki ngaltu malam mulangnya dini hari.”*

(“And look at the behavior of the young boy, he stays out late and returns at dawn.”)

*“Ngasak sloar bapak jenang bahari endik berokok, rokok kawan dipintai.”*

(“He takes his father’s old trousers, and when he lacks cigarettes, he asks a friend.”)

These narratives normalize broader social freedom and agency for men, reflecting cultural constructions of masculinity as assertive and autonomous. In performance contexts, this was mirrored by male musicians frequently assuming leadership roles in coordinating rhythm and tempo.

Indicators of Gender Negotiation Emerge Through Contemporary Improvisation and Performer Innovation

The third significant finding identifies evolving shifts in gender portrayals introduced by younger performers. Improvised pantun lines and humorous segments often signaled more relaxed social boundaries, such as:

*“Jangan mose mun dengar lagu ini, kami begurau sambil bernyanyi.”*

(“Do not be angry when you hear this song; we are just joking while singing.”)

This reflective humor softens traditional moral messaging, opening up space for new interpretations of gender behavior. Observational data captured moments where women took stronger melodic roles, or men adopted gentler expressive styles. These changes suggest that, while traditional gender norms remain dominant, Tingkilan is also evolving into a space where gender expectations can be negotiated rather than strictly adhered to.

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that *Begenjoh Pantun* in Tingkilan music functions as a cultural medium through which gender norms are articulated, reinforced, and transmitted within the Kutai community. The pantun narratives consistently encode expectations surrounding femininity, such as modesty, emotional restraint, and loyalty, as well as ideals of masculinity, including leadership, responsibility, and social authority. These representations align with broader patterns identified in gendered cultural texts across Indonesia, where traditional oral forms often transmit normative values to younger generations (Jama & Menggo, 2024; Subroto & Nadilla, 2024).

A critical discourse perspective further highlights how metaphorical language, imagery, and structural patterns in *Begenjoh Pantun* reproduce hierarchical gender relations. For example, feminine characters are depicted through imagery of beauty, refinement, and moral propriety. The line “*Coba lihat peelan kanak bini... beber sida begincu... baju baru bajunya bepinjaman*” reflects expectations placed

upon young women to maintain physical appearance, social grace, and reputational modesty. These portrayals index cultural ideals of propriety, reputation, and traditional Norms, positioning femininity within a framework of controlled behavior and social respectability.

In contrast, masculinity is portrayed through depictions of active mobility, autonomy, and social dominance. The line "*Lain pula peelan kanak laki ngaltu malam mulangnya dini hari*" illustrates the broader social leeway afforded to young men, who are culturally permitted to occupy public spaces at night and demonstrate behaviors associated with independence. Further, the phrase "*ngasak sloar bapak jenang bahari*" reflects expectations of male assertiveness and agency, resonating with cultural notions of men as decision-makers and community stabilizers. Such patterns mirror findings in earlier studies, which show that traditional songs often serve as vehicles for internalizing ethical values and gendered expectations (Kapoyos et al., 2022; Krismanti, 2020).

The findings also resonate with gender mainstreaming literature, particularly the argument that gender bias persists in educational and cultural systems due to the uncritical adoption of inherited norms. Robbani et al. (2025) demonstrate that patriarchal assumptions continue to shape school practices even under formal Gender Mainstreaming (PUG) mandates. This study extends that insight to the domain of traditional music, illustrating how unexamined *begenjoh* texts may perpetuate gender hierarchies if interpreted as culturally authoritative rather than culturally constructed. Likewise, Damayanti et al. (2025) emphasize the power of cultural ethics in shaping children's character formation. This influence is clearly reflected in Tingkilan, where pantun lines such as "*jangan mose mun dengar lagu ini... kami begurau sambil bernyanyi*" reveal how cultural advice and moral instruction are embedded subtly within humorous or playful forms.

However, the study also identifies emerging shifts in pantun performance practices, particularly among younger generations who incorporate improvisation, humor, or contemporary themes into their pantun delivery. Moments where male and female performers cross traditional expressive boundaries—such as women adopting more assertive vocal lines or men engaging in softer communicative gestures—indicate a subtle negotiation of gender norms. These creative modifications sometimes soften rigid gender binaries or introduce more egalitarian depictions of social relationships. In this sense, Tingkilan performances function as negotiated spaces where traditional values coexist with evolving gender perspectives.

The intersection of tradition and transformation raises important implications for gender-responsive cultural education. Given the influence of traditional music on children's early enculturation (Irawati, 2019; Jama & Menggo, 2024), educators, cultural practitioners, and policymakers need to critically assess the types of gender messages transmitted through local arts. Tingkilan, as shown in this study, can either reinforce conventional gender roles or be harnessed as a tool to promote gender equity, depending on how performers, teachers, and communities frame and interpret its narratives. Integrating Tingkilan into educational programs with a reflective and critical lens may therefore support more inclusive understandings of gender while preserving cultural heritage.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of analyzing gender representation in traditional arts. It demonstrates that *Begenjoh Pantun* plays a significant role in constructing and circulating gender meaning within the Kutai community. The findings show that while Tingkilan remains rooted in symbolic traditions, it is also responsive to contemporary reinterpretations, suggesting that cultural practices are neither fixed nor immune to social change. Through this dual function—as a preserver of heritage and a space for negotiation—Tingkilan offers valuable insight into how communities navigate gender norms within shifting sociocultural landscapes.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Tingkilan's *begenjoh* pantun articulates a gendered worldview that: 1) reinforces traditional expectations of women's modesty and moral responsibility; 2) upholds masculine ideals of leadership and authority, and 3) is beginning to incorporate more flexible and contemporary expressions of gender through performer creativity. These findings provide the empirical

basis for the interpretive discussion that follows and highlight Tingkilan as a dynamic cultural space where tradition and social change intersect.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Begenjoh Pantun* within the Tingkilan musical tradition serves as a significant cultural medium through which gender norms are articulated, reproduced, and gradually renegotiated in the Kutai community. The findings reveal that femininity is predominantly represented through themes of modesty, emotional restraint, and familial responsibility, while masculinity is constructed through images of leadership, authority, and social accountability. These gendered portrayals reflect long-standing cultural expectations embedded in Kutai values such as Propriety, Reputation, and Traditional Norms, which are reinforced both textually in pantun narratives and performatively in musical roles.

At the same time, the study identifies emerging shifts introduced by younger performers who incorporate improvisation, humor, and contemporary perspectives into their pantun delivery. These innovations demonstrate that Tingkilan is not a static cultural form but a dynamic site where traditional values intersect with evolving gender understandings. Such transformations suggest that traditional music can serve as both a preserver of heritage and a space for subtle negotiation of social norms, including those related to gender.

The results highlight the importance of critically engaging with local cultural texts as part of gender-responsive education and policy. Given the influential role of traditional arts in shaping children's early moral and social development, educators, cultural practitioners, and community leaders must be attentive to the implicit gender messages conveyed through Tingkilan. By integrating reflective pedagogical approaches, recognition of cultural heritage can be aligned with efforts to promote gender equality and inclusive social values.

Overall, this study contributes to the broader discourse on gender in local cultural practices by providing empirical evidence of how traditional music functions as a carrier of gendered meaning. It underscores the need for further inquiry into the intersections of gender, oral literature, and performance arts within Indonesia's diverse cultural contexts.

Future studies may extend this work by conducting comparative analyses between Tingkilan and other regional musical traditions to identify broader patterns of gender construction across Indonesia. Further research could also investigate how audiences both within and beyond the Kutai community interpret gendered messages embedded in *begenjoh* pantun, particularly among younger generations influenced by digital culture. Longitudinal studies may examine whether contemporary improvisations and reinterpretations lead to substantive shifts in gender representation over time. Additionally, research exploring the integration of Tingkilan into gender-responsive pedagogical models would provide educators with practical insights for promoting cultural appreciation while fostering more equitable gender perspectives in learning environments.

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## Supplementary

### APPENDIX 1. ORIGINAL BEGENJOH PANTUN KUTAI LANGUAGE BEGENJOH

*Coba lihat peelan kanak bini petik limbai bejalan selop tinggi  
Beber sida begincu behabangan baju baru bajunya bepinjaman  
Lain pula peelan kanak laki ngaltu malam mulangnya dini hari  
Ngasak sloar bapak jenang bahari endik berokok, rokok kawan dipintai*

**Reff:** *Lalunya lalang silih haru hadapan urang  
Tegak kesulu tengah mahakam beterbangan  
Gepak kekiwa gepak kekanan betunjulan  
Sampai tegepak indu petuan sgala penene`an*

*Jangan mose mun dengar lagu ini  
kami begurau sambil bernyanyi  
Mengembangkan adat tradisi  
tulak tempo dulu sampai wayah ni*

### APPENDIX 2. ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF BEGENJOH PANTUN BEGENJOH

Look at the behavior of the young girl,  
she walks like a model in high-heeled sandals.  
Her lips are red from wearing lipstick,  
her clothes are new, though borrowed from someone else.

And look at the behavior of the young boy,  
he stays up late every night and comes home at dawn.  
He takes his father's old trousers,  
and when he has no cigarettes, he asks for his friend's.

#### Refrain:

Back and forth they wander here and there,  
like dragonflies fluttering over the Mahakam River.  
Walking around, shoving one another,  
until they bump into their grandparents.

Don't be angry when you hear this song,  
we're just joking around while singing.  
We're voicing the customs and traditions  
from long ago until today.