

“Philippine native scripts as identity, promotion and preservation in the
Filipino American diaspora through art”

Kristian Kabuay

Abstract

Due to our unique history, self identity has been a complicated matter and even much more in the diaspora. We seek recognition from the place we migrate to but we don't even recognize ourselves. While we have some symbols such as the Philippine Sun and Stars and Manny Pacquiao, it's time to use our scripts to identify ourselves to foreigners and ourselves.

One of the challenges Philippines businesses in the diaspora is identity. In intimate businesses such as real estate, insurance and medicine, we usually go to people we trust and who do we trust? Usually someone that speaks our language is familiar with our cultural traditions. The problem is that Filipinos can look like many different races. My father sells real estate but had a tough time getting walk-in Filipino clients because they didn't know he could look Chinese or Mexican.

Many Filipino Americans in their twenties and thirties may not be fluent with Philippine native scripts but they recognize it as much as the eight ray sun and 3 stars. Philippine businesses need to be identified by indigenous Philippine writing systems such as our Asian neighbors. We have “Filipino” plazas in San Francisco, California where you can witness our identity crisis.

Every person starts off as an artist. As we get older we forget how to let loose and create. Kids pickup on writing shapes of Baybayin without any issues. Using calligraphy art methods to write Philippine scripts has a unique trait that it can teach as well as entertain. Since the art usually doesn't stand alone, context and a conversation is needed. While many may not be willing to learn the script via books or the internet, art is a digestible way to educate. The younger generation is looking for something tangible and right now. Art can provide that immediate need. Can one learn Philippine scripts through a canvas piece? Dance? Apparel? Tattoos? Perfume? Movies? Martial arts?

By taking art artistic approach to the Philippine scripts, it makes it more acceptable to the masses. It opens up opportunities such as in 2011, I did a project with a the Contemporary Jewish Museum where I met with a female scribe hand writing the Torah to discuss similarities of our writing systems. In 2012, I introduced Philippine Calligraphy Art at the Asian Art Museum with Japanese calligrapher Aoi Yamaguchi with a 3 day lecture, workshop and live performance art on 15' long paper. It was the first time a Philippine writing system was prominently featured in the museum.

On a lecture, workshop. performance and art showing tour in Europe in June 2013, I saw the hunger for indigenous Philippine culture for identity purposes in their 1st generation with my own eyes. If this 1st generation is able to pickup on Philippine scripts, it will be a domino effect. I'm currently working on a series of calligraphy pieces that explores the subject of Filipino Americans in the United States Post Office, Baybayin & Ballet performance, Baybayin & Photography book, a documentary and expanding my apparel to Europe.

“Philippine native scripts as identity, promotion and preservation in the
Filipino American diaspora through art”

Kristian Kabuay