

Pámamialúngan: Issues on the Secularization of Kulitan

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ABSTRACT

É YA PIÁLÚNGAN ING KULITAN ‘Kulitan is not a toy!’ This has recently become the most common reprimand delivered by Kulitan conservatives to a new crop of writers who seem to treat Kulitan like their own personal toy.

Kulitan, the indigenous Kapampangan script, is still treated with reverence and awe by those who grew up with it. Until 20 years ago, Kulitan was jealously guarded by only a few Kapampangan families. Its use was limited to communing with spirits, writing curses, talismans, healing prayers, seals, emblems, signatures and indigenous art. To prevent its extinction, Kulitan was reintroduced to secular writing 20 years ago. Many of the PANGÍLIN or ‘taboos’ connected with it were still observed. These taboos include teaching them to non-Kapampangans and in using them to write foreign words or names.

Thanks to the internet and the publication of several academic papers about Kulitan, it was inevitable that a number of non-Kapampangans learned to read and write in them. Among those who became literate in Kulitan through the internet were a number of Kapampangan expat descendants who grew up in foreign countries. Many of them not only broke several taboos by using Kulitan to write a number of popular American brand names, they also started using Kulitan to write dirty American slangs and cuss words. This was naturally considered sacrilege among Kulitan conservatives. To make matters worse, many of these new writers are now proposing changes, additions and innovations to Kulitan so as to accommodate a number of foreign words and names. To those who grew up with Kulitan and all its taboos, these new writers not only lack reverence, they also lack basic understanding and mastery of Kapampangan language and culture that they grew up with. This paper will attempt to discuss and address several of these clashes and issues connected with the secularization of Kulitan.