

# ***Ka-pagmaragulan* (arrogance), *Sistî* (criticism) and *Sábi* (said word) as symptoms of the conception of a Good Life: Insights on Kapampangan Philosophy**

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**Abstract:** Earning a reputation of being arrogant and judgemental, the Kapampangan people has long fostered a culture of *sistî* (criticism) and *sábi* (said word)—one that appeared hostile to outsiders of the culture. Curiously, the ethnic stereotype is affirmed both by non-Kapampangans and the Kapampangans themselves. However, the incongruence between the perception of non-Kapampangans and of Kapampangans toward the cause of this social phenomenon causes a conflicting perception of arrogance. While the Kapampangan culture’s ethnocentric drive has been painted as stemming from their perceived superiority, this paper argues that there is another probable cause for the culture of *sistî* and *sábi*. The celebration of the locals of this stereotype points toward a crucial factor in the way that the Kapampangan people view the world. From their perspective, *sistî* and *sábi*, as precursors of anomalies which were brought about by inauthenticity and mediocrity, are manifestations of life as fundamentally good. One gains an insight that Kapampangans

view the world as grounded in a fundamental goodness. Hence, *sistî* and *sábi*, as normative elements that push the society to constant improvement, serves as a responsibility to one another. With this view, the Kapampangan arrogance may begin to make sense as founded in a worldview anchored in seeking and preserving the good life.

**Keywords:** arrogance, criticism, Kapampangan philosophy, said word

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## KASALÉSÁYAN AT PANAGÁNU (HISTORY AND INTRODUCTION)

Pampanga, a province in the Central Luzon, Philippines, is home to the Kapampangan people who have played a remarkable role in the flourishing of the Philippine nation throughout history. The Kapampangan people are known for many things. In the country, Pampanga is known for being the Culinary Capital of the Philippines for their rich food culture and history, dating back to the Spanish colonial times.<sup>1</sup> For a very short time in the past, Bacolor in Pampanga became the capital of the country, an indication of the Spanish colonial government's trust in Kapampangan leadership and reliability. This may speak of their reliability and trustworthiness, at least from the point of view of the Spanish colonials. In fact, during those times, especially during the battles of the Spanish colonial government against LimaHong, Koxinga and the Chinese pirates,<sup>2</sup> the Moros, the Dutch, and the British, Kapampangans secured key victories in these battles, earning the respect of the Spaniards and key positions within their social hierarchies and courts.<sup>3</sup> Unlike other provinces in the archipelago, the Kapampangans were treated more as allies and comrades rather than slaves due to their relatively more advanced skills and technologies compared to those of other provinces. This made it easier for the colonizers to deal with the Kapampangan people.<sup>4</sup> However, Kapampangans were considered “*dugong aso*”—a derogatory term meaning “dog-blooded

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Tayag, “Rappler talk: From sisig to adobo, why is Pampanga the culinary capital?,” YouTube video, posted by Rappler (22 March 2024), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3q7GJvW1okY>>.

<sup>2</sup> John Larkins, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Perry Gil Mallari, “The Warrior and Mercenary Culture of the Macabebes,” in *Lakas Filipino Martial Arts* (3 April 2014), <<https://lakasfma.com/2014/04/03/pampanga-and-the-macabebes/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Raymon Pangilinan, “Ot Mayabang la ring Kapampangan: What they don’t teach us about Kapampangan History,” in *Sidduan ning Amanung Sisuan Lecture* (14 Dec 2024).

people”—due to their perceived loyalty to Spanish authorities.<sup>5</sup> Even after joining the uprisings during the Katipunan revolution and later, liberating the Philippines in the process, Kapampangans were treated differently because they were perceived as somewhat elitist and arrogant. Michael Raymon Pangilinan states that this trait of Kapampangans is due to the fact that, in many instances, they have proven themselves as somewhat superior and gained honors and merits from Spain.<sup>6</sup> As formerly divided from the rest of the archipelago, Kapampangans being bestowed upon honors by a colonizing parental nation seemed to have made them believe they have the superior grounds among other regions.

Today, Kapampangans are often stereotyped as “*mayabang*” (“arrogant”),<sup>7</sup> proud and arrogant,<sup>8</sup> critical and judgemental,<sup>9</sup> picky and

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Raymon Pangilinan, “Dugong Aso: A Race of Dogs,” in *Siuala ding Meangubie* (18 Jun 2013), <<https://siuala.com/dugong-aso-a-race-of-dogs/>>. Pangilinan wrote about Kapampangans being considered as dog-blooded in contrast to the *salvajes* (wild beasts) and *cimarrones* (wild horses) that is the other natives as they are considered by the Spaniards. This is so because dogs are the only animals that help humans hunt other animals. So, the reference *dugong-aso* pertains to the Kapampangan people being traitors to other Filipino people.

<sup>6</sup> Pangilinan, “Ot Mayabang la.”

<sup>7</sup> Jeanette Mendoza, Mary Irene Claire Delena, and F.P.A. Demeterio III, “Comparative Study on the Ethnic Stereotypes and Self-Stereotypes of the Kapampangan, Ilocano, and Tagalog Students of Tarlac State University,” in *Mabini Review*, 9:1 (2020), 9. The term for arrogance used here is *mayabang*, which is the Tagalog word for arrogance, instead of *mapagmaragul*.

<sup>8</sup> Deleted User 1, “I’m trying to love Pampanga, but the Kapampangans make it otherwise,” in *Reddit* (2023), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/1617yvh/im\\_trying\\_to\\_love\\_pampanga\\_but\\_the\\_kapampangans/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/1617yvh/im_trying_to_love_pampanga_but_the_kapampangans/)>.

<sup>9</sup> Deleted User 2, “I grew up in the South (half Kapampangan here), but growing up more often than not I spent my vacations there” [Comment on the online forum post, “Non-Kapampangans, what do you think of Kapampangans? Have you ever met one? If so, how was your experience?”], in *Reddit* (2023), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fq0/nonkapampangans\\_what\\_do\\_you\\_think\\_of\\_kapampangans/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fq0/nonkapampangans_what_do_you_think_of_kapampangans/)>.

meticulous,<sup>10</sup> and self-conscious about their public image<sup>11</sup>—a view reinforced by online commentaries and sociological studies. Such claims often stem from a culture of *sistî* and *sábi* experienced when a cultural outsider steps into the Kapampangan society. While such unlikeable character often attributed to Kapampangans may indeed be arrogance, stopping at arrogance is accepting an external opinion and a superficial reading. One may find some insights should one try to inquire into the way people of a certain culture see themselves and the world in which they exist as was executed by Rodriguez in his book *Mula Bayang Sawi hanggang Lupang Hinirang*.<sup>12</sup> In this case, Kapampangans welcome this external identification as arrogant people, embracing their arrogance albeit only to certain extents. Nevertheless, the fact that this identity sits well with them is probably backed by an internal cultural logic where honor is taken as a cardinal value.

This paper momentarily suspends judgment and brackets this assumption. Here, another possibility emerges; that the culture of *sistî* (criticism) and *sábi* (spoken word) may be more than just about a culture of mass egoistic self-assertion. Following Leonardo Mercado's insight that understanding a culture demands learning the meanings within and uses of their language,<sup>13</sup> this paper reads the speech acts *sistî* and *sábi* within

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<sup>10</sup> u/KuyangKatabi, "Napaka-aarte. Not in a bad way. But brand-conscious, trend-following, spotlight-loving" [Comment on the online forum post, "Non-Kapampangans, what do you think of Kapampangans? Have you ever met one? If so, how was your experience?"], in Reddit (2021), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fqo/nonkapampangans\\_what\\_do\\_you\\_think\\_of\\_kapampangans/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fqo/nonkapampangans_what_do_you_think_of_kapampangans/)>.

<sup>11</sup> u/Stampblueed, "Very conscious of how people see and think of them. Image is everything" [Comment on the online forum post, "Non-Kapampangans, what do you think of Kapampangans? Have you ever met one? If so, how was your experience?"], in Reddit (2020), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fqo/nonkapampangans\\_what\\_do\\_you\\_think\\_of\\_kapampangans/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fqo/nonkapampangans_what_do_you_think_of_kapampangans/)>.

<sup>12</sup> Agustin Martin Rodriguez, *Mula Bayang Sawi hanggang Lupang Hinirang: Ang Pag-unawa ng Pilipino sa Pilipinas*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2024), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban: Divine Word University Publications, 1993), 26.

their worldview, not merely as inherently negative, but as modes of preserving shared cultural standards toward a good life. They are embedded in a worldview where the world is presumed to be *máyap* (good) and deviating from this is considered a threat to it. Within such a worldview, pointing out inauthenticity, mediocrity, and error is less hostility than a communal effort to keep life aligned with the good. This paper thus seeks to uncover how Kapampangans understand themselves, their lived reality, and their relationship to it. It poses the question: are the practices *sistî* and *sábi* merely arrogant habits or are they modes of safeguarding the good life as Kapampangans perceive it? Through phenomenological investigation, this chapter presents two intertwining internal logical structures within the Kapampangan worldview: first, how Kapampangans perceive arrogance and differentiate forms of arrogance (*mapagmaragul vs. paratut*); and, second how *sistî* and *sábi* are directed toward anomaly error, inauthenticity, and mediocrity as threats to a good life.

### **EXTERNAL VS INTERNAL PERSPECTIVES: THE STRUCTURE OF ARROGANCE (KAPAGMARAGULAN) VIS-À-VIS THE KAPAMPANGAN LENS**

Kapampangan people who have long played a significant role in the Philippine history, have also played a vital role as trusted allies of the Spanish colonial government.<sup>14</sup> They secured key victories against foreign enemies and were rewarded high positions, earning both respect and resentment. Their closeness to Spain led to the derogatory label “dugong aso” (dog-blooded),<sup>15</sup> and later to perceptions of elitism and arrogance.

Today, Kapampangans continue to be perceived as a proud people. A quick survey of search engines and social media platforms reveals numerous posts and discussions that reinforce stereotypes of

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<sup>14</sup> Mallari, “The Warrior and Mercenary Culture of the Macabebes.”

<sup>15</sup> Pangilinan, “Dugong Aso: A Race of Dogs.”

Kapampangans as *mapagmaragul* (arrogant).<sup>16</sup> For instance, threads in the subreddit “r/Philippines” feature extended discussions of Kapampangan behavior, where they are frequently described as proud and arrogant (*mayabang*),<sup>17</sup> critical and judgemental,<sup>18</sup> picky and meticulous,<sup>19</sup> and self-conscious about their public image.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, a sociological study conducted at Tarlac State University identified arrogant (*mayabang*) as the most prominent ethnic stereotype associated with Kapampangans<sup>21</sup>. Taken together, these descriptions often cast Kapampangan identity in a negative light, portraying them as generally difficult or unlikeable to outsiders. A Facebook page even exists under the name, “*Kapampangan Mayabang* (Arrogant Kapampangan)” established in 2012, which only seemed to attempt at mere ridicule to the Kapampangans.<sup>22</sup>

People in the Reddit threads and Facebook posts—often cultural outsiders who have experienced being immersed in the place or being acquainted with Kapampangans—say that they generally appear to be unlikeable because of the way they project themselves in social scenarios. Among the reasons ascribed to their arrogance are being impractically gallant about their clothing,<sup>23</sup> conservatively purists toward their cuisine,<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In the interest of clarifying the differences of the Kapampangan perception from non-Kapampangan perceptions of arrogance, this paper has accepted both the terms “*mapagmaragul*” which is a Kapampangan term and “*mayabang*” which is a Tagalog term. It is noted here that the conception of arrogance ascribed by non-Kapampangans to Kapampangans denote the concept “*mayabang*,” not “*mapagmaragul*.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted User 1, “I’m trying to love Pampanga.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted User 2, ““I grew up in the South.”

<sup>19</sup> u/KuyangKatabi, “Napaka-aarte.”

<sup>20</sup> u/Stampblueed, “Very conscious.”

<sup>21</sup> Mendoza, Delena, and Demeterio, “Comparative Study on the Ethnic Stereotypes,” 9.

<sup>22</sup> See *Kapampangan Mayabang*, <<https://www.facebook.com/KapangpanganMayabang/>>.

<sup>23</sup> u/KuyangKatabi, “Napaka-aarte.”

<sup>24</sup> u/SpiritlessSoul, “Italians of the east haha, Filipino cuisine purists” [Comment on the online forum post, “Why are some Kapampangan rude?”], in *Reddit* (2025), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/1cryxsc/why\\_are\\_some\\_kapampang\\_an\\_rude/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/1cryxsc/why_are_some_kapampang_an_rude/)>.

inexcusably loud in social settings,<sup>25</sup> and most of all, highly critical and always opinionated about many things.<sup>26</sup> Forums containing these opinions have become epistemic bubbles, which had already amplified judgments toward the arrogance of the Kapampangan people. The overwhelming amount of stereotypical discussion on their arrogance, reveal an intense ethnocentric character of the Kapampangans or a kind of “clannishness”<sup>27</sup> in the perception of cultural outsiders.

Why does this perception endure? Several factors converge. Firstly, the colonial-era hierarchies and the *dugong-aso* characterization of Kapampangans may still be coloring how other Filipinos perceive the Kapampangans.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, they are considered unlikeable and arrogant, possibly, due to a perceived excessive celebration of their art, food, language, culture, etc., coming off as already bragging to others. It is also possible that the persistence of this stereotype is because of linguistic and conceptual gap—the concept of honor being lost in translation in other ethnicities’ experience. Lastly, it may also be due to the fact that Kapampangans themselves embrace the stereotype as a cultural identity. What outsiders see as arrogance, Kapampangans reinterpret as justified honor, which makes the stereotype self-perpetuating.

Most of these external perspectives toward Kapampangans, while valid embodiments of their particular experiences with the Kapampangan

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<sup>25</sup> u/Low\_Conversation0196, “Ang iingay sa Victory mag-usap! Please lang wala pa akong tulog tuwing bumibahe, manahimik kayo” [Comment on the online forum post “Non-Kapampangans, what do you think of Kapampangans? Have you ever met one? If so, how was your experience?”], in *Reddit* (2025), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fq0/nonkapampangans\\_what\\_do\\_you\\_think\\_of\\_kapampangans/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fq0/nonkapampangans_what_do_you_think_of_kapampangans/)>.

<sup>26</sup> Deleted User 2, “I grew up in the South.”

<sup>27</sup> Julieta Mallari, “King Sinukwan Mythology and the Kapampangan Psyche,” in *Coolabah*, 3 (2009), 228.

<sup>28</sup> u/TheHigherCalling3, “Lupa ng mga traydor or mga macabebe” [Comment on the online forum post “Non-Kapampangans, what do you think of Kapampangans? Have you ever met one? If so, how was your experience?”], in *Reddit* (2025), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fq0/nonkapampangans\\_what\\_do\\_you\\_think\\_of\\_kapampangans/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/ym2fq0/nonkapampangans_what_do_you_think_of_kapampangans/)>.

people, remain partial. They describe how Kapampangans appear to outsiders but do not yet explain why Kapampangans collectively embrace and even reframe this arrogance as part of their identity. The deeper question is whether a cultural logic underlies this behavior—whether what seems like arrogance from without may in fact be an expression of a moral commitment to honor from within.

The curious thing about Kapampangans is that they do not seem to deny the ethnic stereotype that they are arrogant and judgemental. They admit that even in their social settings they perceive each other as people who always have something to boast and to criticize. In fact, it would even be more peculiar if they do not do so.<sup>29</sup> In social media platforms such as YouTube and Tiktok, Kapampangan content creators have tried to rationalize the arrogance of the people as a Kapampangan identity.

When asked, some Kapampangans say that their arrogance is capitalized on clothing, since, even when they are penniless, they would usually dress extravagantly or in fashion so as none would look down on them in public.<sup>30</sup> There is even an old saying in Kapampangan, “*Lumual yang maranup dapot e ya lumual lubas* [One would rather go out hungry than naked or not dressed well],” which shows their pride in clothing.<sup>31</sup> The famed Kapampangan cook, Atching Lilian Borromeo of the *Queng Cucina* television series explains that they are arrogant mainly in terms of their cuisine in such a way that they strongly desire that people who taste their food will not be disappointed, showing their pride in their cuisine.<sup>32</sup> A

<sup>29</sup> Based on my personal conversation with Leo Angelo Aquino (02 March 2025).

<sup>30</sup> “Ot Mayabang La Reng Kapampangan? | SM City Clark 3-Day Sale | Pampanga, Philippines | Vlog #033,” YouTube video, posted by We The Lokal (13 September 2019), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvgHhHe8O2I>>.

<sup>31</sup> u/dipper02, “Masama ang ugali ng mga Kapampangan,” in *Reddit* (2022), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/wphxtk/masama\\_ang\\_ugali\\_ng\\_mg\\_a\\_kapampangan/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Philippines/comments/wphxtk/masama_ang_ugali_ng_mg_a_kapampangan/)>.

<sup>32</sup> Lilian Borromeo, “Pampanga: Desserts of the Philippine Islands,” Facebook video, posted by BiteSized PH (7 March 2025), <<https://www.facebook.com/BiteSized.ph/videos/1079969567507081>>. Borromeo is a Kapampangan food historian hailed as “Guardian of the Kapampangan Kitchen,” “Most Outstanding Kapampangan Awardee (2012),” and “Gatekeeper to Kapampangan Cuisine.”

Facebook post attempts at explaining this arrogance from an essentialist standpoint, stating that Kapampangan people are naturally filled with pride or *mátas a puluk* because they hate being humiliated or losing. Consequently, this pride itself, is what pushes them to work hard and be ambitious.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, Pangilinan presented an attempt at rationalization from a historical perspective, highlighting the Kapampangan traits and their commitment to excellence throughout history which may have directly contributed to their self-perception as arrogant people.<sup>34</sup> Though greatly varying in reasons, these internal identifications and attempts at rationalizations for why Kapampangans are arrogant reveal an internal cultural logic that may only make sense when viewed with their lens. Conspicuously, from the way they describe it, arrogance does not appear to be entirely negative as manifested in the different reasons enumerated here. Unlike the unified external opinions against them being arrogant, the Kapampangans embrace and accept the stereotype with a hint of humor and reason. This suggests that a diverging understanding of arrogance exists within their culture, which explains why this arrogance—as both cause for and perks that come with excellence—is reasonable.

Even linguistically, arrogance is not monolithic in the Kapampangan thought. The term “*yabang*” is not seen in Fray Diego Bergano’s dictionary *Vocabulario de Pampango en Romance*, and is instead a shared word among Kapampangans and Tagalogs. According to Pangilinan, arrogance has different significations in Kapampangan like “*mapagmaragul*,” “*mapanganyáyâ*,” “*mapangalimáyû*,” “*mapangalálû*,” “*mamais*,” and “*paratut*.”<sup>35</sup> All of these terms pertain to arrogance with subtle regional variations.

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<sup>33</sup> “Nothing’s Special in Pampanga,” Facebook video, posted by Lifestyle Pampanga (29 March 2019), <<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1BFAMwm3Yw/?mibextid=ssXfr>>.

<sup>34</sup> Pangilinan, “Ot Mangayabang Ia.”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Among these significations, the difference between “*mapagmaragul*” and “*paratut*” is what is most notable. To understand this, one must know that Kapampangans believe in confrontations more than in harboring hidden aggressions. They do not believe in crab mentality, as is often criticized as a negative Filipino trait.<sup>36</sup> Rather, they believe in a cultural idiom of competition expressed as “*singkaragul taklâ at singkakâtas imî* (competing on the biggest poop and the highest pee),”<sup>37</sup> or the idea that one must always be better than the rest. This may apply to many things, ranging from the simplest objects (e.g. toys among children) to grandest things (e.g. wealth, job security, or inheritance among adults). People who are perceived “better” according to societal standards tend to have bragging rights since they would have something with which to substantiate their claims. This explains why the term for arrogance is “*mapagmaragul*” or one who tends to show off the biggest, hence the best. However, if one is merely arrogant without anything to substantiate one’s claim, that person is considered “*paratut*” coming from the phrase “*para atut* (just farts or gas)” in reference to the cultural idiom of competition.<sup>38</sup> A *paratut* is considered one who has nothing to brag or is plainly arrogant about nothing.

In contrast to the perception of the non-Kapampangans toward them, the Kapampangans adopt a more structured and non-monolithic perception of arrogance. In this cultural logic, the Kapampangans do not just consider themselves as *paratut*. They seem to be accepting of the characterization as arrogant but only in the sense of *mapagmaragul* and not of a *paratut* alone. When they admit to this arrogance, they pertain to the arrogance that comes from their belief that they have the right to be arrogant since they have something to show for it. Although

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Raymon Pangilinan, “As a Kapampangan growing up 40 years ago,” in *Facebook* (20 January 2018), <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10228659971425706&set=a.1136647937893>>.

<sup>37</sup> Jericho Arceo, “Things about Kapampangan,” YouTube video, posted by Jericho Arceo TV (08 May 2018), <<https://youtube.com/watch?v=3wtnkRaXaJo>>.

<sup>38</sup> Pangilinan, “Ot Mayabang la.”

Kapampangans embrace the arrogant and judgemental identity, they pride themselves with an arrogance, which they can substantiate, rather than an empty kind of arrogance. This is manifested in one of their favorite maxims, “*Kapampangan ku pagmaragul ku*” (I am a Kapampangan and I take pride in it), often followed by the remark, “*mapagmaragul tamung Kapampangan uling atin tamung pagmaragul!*” (We Kapampangans are a proud people because we have many things to be proud of!).<sup>39</sup> This may explain why Kapampangans comfortably embrace the stereotype that they are arrogant.

Hence, in the Kapampangan rationality there appears to be a dichotomy between substantiable arrogance (*ka-mapagmaragulan*) and an empty arrogance (*ka-paratutan*). As demonstrated in how they rationalize this stereotype, they do not simply see arrogance as a negative trait—the point, in which they diverge from the depiction of cultural outsiders. In Kapampangan moral imagination, substantiable arrogance is not merely tolerated but judged against standards of authenticity and perfection—standards that point toward the deeper cultural value of honor. While empty arrogance boasts of empty achievements and mediocre work, substantiable arrogance celebrates authenticity and perfection. In such moral dichotomy, Kapampangan people tend to favor one over the other. Arrogance, in what appears to be a Kapampangan ethic of pride, becomes socially acceptable, when it is substantiable, and criticized, when not. So even if they do not deny the arrogant stereotype, they still avoid being described with empty arrogance. Even Kapampangans who respond to public forums that ridicule them as arrogant and unlikeable, clarify that their arrogance is only to certain extents.<sup>40</sup> This strongly appears, in the previous section, in the various attempts of individuals to rationalize why

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>40</sup> Immediate\_wasabi\_362, “I think kase di ba pag may bisita tayo, di bale pangutang basta may i-hapag dun sa bisita ...” [Comment on the online forum post, “Saan ba talaga nangaling yung ‘Kapampangan = Mayabang’ stereotype?”], in *Reddit* (2025), <[https://www.reddit.com/r/Pampanga/comments/1lr3ncm/saan\\_ba\\_talaga\\_nangaling\\_yung\\_kapampangan/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Pampanga/comments/1lr3ncm/saan_ba_talaga_nangaling_yung_kapampangan/)>.

they tend to be arrogant. They mention certain reasons such as the fear of being belittled in appearance,<sup>41</sup> a desire to make others experience good food,<sup>42</sup> a pride that motivates good results,<sup>43</sup> and a commitment to excellence.<sup>44</sup> All these rationalizations focus on admitting to this arrogance only to certain extents; none of which self-identifies with an empty kind of arrogance.

However, beyond justifying the *ka-pagmaragulan* as part of their cultural identity, this internal cultural logic also fosters and perpetuates a culture of *sistî* (criticisms) and *sábi* (said word)—the objects of which demands a phenomenological investigation. Eventually, understanding the nature and objects of these speech acts reveals another intertwined structure tying the culture of arrogance and these speech acts to what is honorable in the Kapampangan rationality.

## THE NATURE AND THE OBJECTS OF *SISTÎ* AND *SÁBI*

Curiously, the word *sistî* does not appear in Bergano's dictionary (1732), Michael Forman (1971) or in Luther Parker (1905), and only enter Jeol Mallari's dictionary (2011). Here, the term *sistî* is taken to mean a "criticism."<sup>45</sup> In the addition of the prefix "*pamag-*" or "*paman-*," it is meant as the act of giving criticism, while adding the prefix "*mapag-*" as in "*mapagsistî*," or "*mapan-*" as in "*mapanistî*" pertains to a person who frequently criticises others. To add the prefix "*a-*" to say "*ásistî*," then means the capacity to criticise something. Used in a sentence, one could say "*Pane na lá mûng mánintun ásisitî*" (They are always looking for something they can criticize).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> We The Lokal, "Ot Mayabang La Reng Kapampangan?."

<sup>42</sup> Borromeo, "Pampanga: Desserts of the Philippine Islands."

<sup>43</sup> Lifestyle Pampanga, "Istung inawus dakang mayabang."

<sup>44</sup> Pangilinan, "Ot Mayabang la."

<sup>45</sup> Joel Mallari, *Tálabaldúgan: English-Kapampangan Glossary* (Angeles City: Holy Angel University-Center for Kapampangan Studies, 2011), 83.

<sup>46</sup> This is how I understand the use of the prefix; I also cite the example based on this usage.

*Sábi*, on the other hand, may be easier to understand since it has very direct translation—almost similar to the Tagalog language. It actually takes the form of the infinitive “to say.” However, it can also be taken as a noun meaning “the spoken word.” To add the prefix “*mapan-*” as in “*mapanyábi*,” takes the meaning of someone who incessantly talks.<sup>47</sup> The addition of the prefix “*a-*” also talks about the capacity of saying something e.g. “*Ing ásábi ku mû, e maniáman ing sabó*” (All I can say is that the soup does not taste good). However, with the prefix “*ma-*” and the repetition of the first syllable, the word “*masasábi*” transforms the meaning into “to be reputed” or “to have a reputation”—often negatively expressed. This also works for the prefix “*ke-*” partnered with the suffix “*-an*” as “*kesábian*.” One may hear the sentence, “*Kesábian yang malikut a gámat king barriu ra*” (She/he has a reputation of being kleptomaniac in their hometown). To have something said about oneself therefore is to gain a reputation. This greatly amplifies the linguistic value of this word.

Here, linguistic analysis reveals that speech itself carries moral weight. While the etymology of *sistî* may not offer much historical or philosophical insight, the nuance of the word *sábi* reveals that it is often tied to reputation—frequently in the negative sense. Even though the word may be neutral at face value, the common practice utilizes it to award a negative reputation to something or someone. It appears that in the Kapampangan moral thought, to criticise or to say something is not only to describe experience but to participate in shaping the communal standards of authenticity and excellence, imposed on to the society at large. Just as *sistî* denotes the act of fault-finding, *sábi* carries reputational force. Both terms show that speech is never neutral—it assigns value, either by exposing flaws or by cementing reputation.

However, one may ask: What exactly is the object of *sistî* and *sábi*? Are they simply arrogant habits intended to highlight a person’s superiority

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<sup>47</sup> Diego Bergano, *Vocabulario de Pampango en Romance y Diccionario en Romance de Pampango*, trans. by Venancio Samson (Angeles City: Holy Angel University Press, 2007), 289.

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or of her/his culture over others', as is understood by cultural outsiders? If this external perspective is set aside, the objects of the speech acts *sistî* and *sábi* come to light: inauthenticity, anomaly, and mediocrity.

### A. Inauthenticity

For newly immersed cultural outsiders in an already accepted culture of *sistî* and *sábi*, it may seem to them that the target of these speech acts is only what is foreign about them. This leads some to conclude that Kapampangans are plainly ethnocentric.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to this idea, the short story *Y Miss Phatuphats* offers insight into this dynamic. In this story, Yeyeng, once a humble Kapampangan, returns from the city speaking English and denying her roots, claiming Kapampangan is stiff and inelegant. Trying to pass as a city woman, she is dubbed "Miss Phatuphats," mockingly making a tightly wrapped rice cake sound sophisticated. Locals criticize her for rejecting her language and culture—especially when she eventually drops the act and reverts to a typical Kapampangan demeanor.<sup>49</sup>

While some, like the columnist Ethan Mosuelo, suggest she was mocked for speaking English,<sup>50</sup> a closer look reveals she was judged not for her foreignness, but for her rejection of her origins and the hypocrisy therein. The locals probably also knew English and Spanish; their issue was not the language, but Yeyeng's hypocrisy. She was not condemned for changing, but for pretending to be someone she was not, despite still being unmistakably Kapampangan. This suggests that the true objects of *sistî* and *sábi* is not the foreign, but the hypocritical and the inauthentic—the disavowal of one's identity while trying to adopt another. This can also be seen in Pangilinan's memento about the Kapampangan grievances toward

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<sup>48</sup> Deleted user 1, "I'm trying to love Pampanga."

<sup>49</sup> Lourdes Vidal and Ma. Crisanta Nelmidia, *Maikling Kwentong Kapampangan at Pangasinan* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996), 30-37.

<sup>50</sup> Ethan Mosuelo, "Sincerely Yours, Mister Phatupats," in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (8 May 2024), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/173532/sincerely-yours-mister-phathupats>>.

the *Sísig*<sup>51</sup> of non-Kapampangans. He claims that the Kapampangan people are not against the culinary innovations nor creativity, especially that their own *Sísig* also experienced innovations throughout the years. Rather, it is the inauthenticity of the dish which non-Kapampangans outrightly present as “authentic *sísig*” and the disrespect to culture for profit’s sake, that infuriates the Kapampangan people.<sup>52</sup> What may be tagged as traditionalistic inclination of the Kapampangans, in terms of their food, is arguably a discontent with inauthenticity. This may explain the constant *sistî* of Kapampangans to the dish which non-Kapampangans pass on as “authentic *sísig*.”

## B. Anomaly

If inauthenticity provokes criticism because it betrays identity, anomaly draws it because it disturbs harmony and coherence. To outsiders, *sistî* and *sábi* may seem hostile, especially without understanding what they truly criticize. Interpreting them as signs of Kapampangan superiority only suggests that the foreign are the object of criticism—what is not of the Kapampangans. However, this paper contends that it is not the person herself/himself, not her/his foreignness that draws critique. Intertwined with inauthenticity, another category toward which criticisms are directed is anomaly or whatever seems out of place—what does not “suit” someone or something. In Kapampangan, this is called *manauang* or *manong*, referring to what is ugly, erroneous, or anomalous.<sup>53</sup> Some Kapampangans

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Raymon Pangilinan, “Sisig is a process rather than a dish,” in *Facebook* (04 May 2019), <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10218803361896628&set=a.1136647937893>>. *Sísig* is a Kapampangan manner of cooking (*pamanyísig*), rather than merely a dish, generally referring to making things sour. It can be done with pig ears, fish, shellfish banana heart, mangoes, etc. Mixing egg and mayonnaise to *sisig* makes it rather sweet than sour and is often criticized by natives because *sisig* is supposed to be sour.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Raymon Pangilinan, “The Kapampangan word SISIG originally meant ‘to make sour’,” in *Facebook* (25 Apr 2013), <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10230296725663539&set=a.1136647937893>>.

<sup>53</sup> Bergano, *Vocabulario de Pampango*, 248.

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even outrightly justify their delivery of criticisms as concern for their familiars who come off as “*manauang*.”<sup>54</sup> Yeyeng in the story showed anomaly in the way she presented herself hypocritically and inauthentically. The non-Kapampangan “authentic *sísig*” has been criticized for not being sour, hence, being actually inauthentic and anomalous. Mariano, in the earlier example noticed and pointed out what was seemingly *manauang* in the things around him.

### C. Mediocrity

Another intertwining category is mediocrity. Kapampangans often have something to comment on—an instinct to criticize or to say about anything they find off. What might seem trivial to outsiders quickly catches a Kapampangan’s eye. They boast a sharp sensitivity to incongruities in dress, speech, behavior, or lifestyle, which they eventually link to mediocre effort. A local real estate content creator claimed that what is perceived as arrogance is actually the discontent with mediocrity, or what she called “*just just*.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, “*soso-palipit*” is an expression used by Kapampangans which also conveys that thought. Literally, it means “washing clothes with minimal effort,” amounting to not actually washing the clothes. However, it is also taken to mean as “doing things mediocrely and improperly” as amounting to not doing things at all.<sup>56</sup> This suggests that mediocrity in craft is also seen as anomalous or *manauang* to the Kapampangan eye. For them, what is acceptable quality to others may still fall short, especially when they have an idea what non-mediocre or non-anomalous work is. This is also supported by the Kapampangan maxim,

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<sup>54</sup> Based on my personal conversation with KC John Jimenez (25 June 2025).

<sup>55</sup> Ella Mae Flores-Cruz, “Sabi ng iba mayabang daw ang mga Kapampangan,” Tiktok video, posted by @ey\_realtourpampanga (17 December 2023), <[https://www.tiktok.com/@ey\\_realtourpampanga/video/7313487819744218374](https://www.tiktok.com/@ey_realtourpampanga/video/7313487819744218374)>. Despite using this phrase, I believe that what might have been meant in this statement is the term “so-so,” or mediocre work.

<sup>56</sup> Based on my personal conversation with Rev. Fr. Jayson Miranda (25 March 2016).

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“*Milábas mû rin ... dápot é mu lalábas*” (Everything shall pass ... but do not let everything just pass you by)<sup>57</sup> that talks strongly against the idea of doing things out of mediocrity.

The author Robby Tantingco notes that *sisti* is often triggered when something seems wrong. These acts are responses to flaws or mismatches, and not personal attacks. Kapampangans take pride in doing things well, aiming for authenticity and excellence in their pursuits.<sup>58</sup> It then becomes clearer, that to the Kapampangan eye, at least, the object of *sisti* and *sábí* is neither the foreign nor the intrinsic personal traits of a person. Instead, the Kapampangan criticizes what seems unsightly and anomalous in things. It may either be the inauthentic and hypocritical, the anomalous or erroneous, or the mediocre, perceived through the high standards they set upon their experience. In themselves, these categories are not exactly distinct from one another. They may overlap—as with Yeyeng who is seen as both inauthentic and anomalous—or one may serve as cause for the other—as with a mediocre work that leads to erroneous result. A hypocritical act may also appear anomalous; mediocrity can itself result to anomaly. What unites them is that all three are threats to authenticity and excellence, and thus to the good life as Kapampangans conceive it. Taken together, they paint a vivid picture of the standards against which criticism and commentary weigh something or someone.

By bracketing the external perspectives toward Kapampangan culture of *sisti* and *sabi*, one realizes that these speech acts are directed toward the inauthenticity, anomaly, and mediocrity in the lived experiences within the Kapampangan society. These objects that stand as threats to experiencing life as good reveal a cultural dynamic that is tied toward their conception of what is honorable. In this internal cultural logic, the speech acts *sisti* and *sabi* are no longer simply descriptive; rather they play a

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Robby Tantingco, “Ten Things You Need to Know About Kapampangans,” in *Positively Filipino* (24 June 2015), <<https://www.positivelyfilipino.com/magazine/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-kapampangans>>.

normative role in safeguarding against these threats to *mayap*. Viewed in this manner, *sistî* and *sábi* become less as a hostility and more as a responsibility. To point out that which is anomalous and unsightly is no longer to be seen as an insult but as a desire to push one another toward the authenticity and perfection of things.

This may not always be the case with everyone's intention. They may not all see *sistî* and *sábi* in a constructive way. In fact, some Kapampangans themselves are also gradually resisting this cultural structure<sup>59</sup> which potentially opens up to more cultural, sociological, and moral discourse. However, it is still perhaps deeply embedded in their psyche that life works this way and that these acts exist to push one another to their boundaries in achieving the good life. Everyone, then, is responsible for evading, inauthenticity, anomaly, and mediocrity—the objects of *sistî* and *sábi*.

## THE KAPAMPANGAN PERCEPTION OF THE GOOD LIFE

Should one, then, reflect about the reason why the Kapampangan people have a certain sensitivity to anomaly one may be led to the insight that this is precisely because they have an idea and an understanding of a good life. Although it may be difficult to ascertain this, Kapampangan luminaries such as Tangingco,<sup>60</sup> Pangilinan,<sup>61</sup> Borromeo,<sup>62</sup> and Arceo<sup>63</sup> seems to have found consensus that the good life is lived by the Kapampangan people. The very condition of this life is goodness. Goodness is experienced as a part of life. It is even expected of it. This may explain why it is easier for them to spot anomalies in it. They do not simply do things, but they do things well,

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<sup>59</sup> JuperTV, "Mapanisting Kapampangan," Facebook video, posted by JuperTV (18 September 2020), <<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=330113504903632>>.

<sup>60</sup> Tangingco, "Ten Things You Need."

<sup>61</sup> Pangilinan, *Ot Mayabang la*.

<sup>62</sup> Borromeo, "Pampanga: Desserts of the Philippine Islands."

<sup>63</sup> Arceo, "Things about Kapampangan."

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for oneself and for one another. They seem to be attached to this life and do not see their activities as a trivial part of existence. Instead, they work hard and well on the things that they do probably because the very thing they are doing is, precisely, life unveiling itself.

In his vlog entitled “Things about Kapampangan,” The Kapampangan content creator Jericho Arceo, introduces Kapampangans as people who “love the good life”<sup>64</sup> He takes this to mean as Kapampangans are fun loving people in many things. Tangingco calls this as a “*joie de vivre*” (joy of living) mentality leading to a lavish living among Kapampangans that puts them in strong contrast with the thrifty Ilocanos.<sup>65</sup> This *joie de vivre* in the present moment sets them apart. While this does not fall far from the good life that is mentioned in this paper, it is not the only thing about the good life that appeal to the Kapampangans. However, one may still ask: what is this conception of good life?

With all that has been discussed about the way Kapampangans perceive life, one may come to the conclusion that they do not see the good life as separate from the life they are presently living. In this manner, the good life is not just a utopic conception that is beyond the lived experience. Instead, in their perspective, it is precisely life as it is. There is an unspoken goodness in that life that is understood by the common people.

This assumption, then, justifies the subsistence of the acts of *sisti* and *sábí* in the Kapampangan culture. If the world is indeed grounded on a fundamental goodness, life must also be good. It is supposed to be good. Because of this, whatever falls out of this goodness, the inauthentic, the anomalous, and the mediocre, will be—and must be—pointed out through the acts of *sisti* and *sábí*. This structure of *sisti* and *sábí* as cultural regulators is strongly tied to the earlier internal cultural logic of *kapagmaragulan* (substantiable arrogance) that does not simply hold arrogance as a negative trait but as a progressive identity. While they may not be morally justified within the bigger community of the Filipino people,

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Tangingco, “Ten Things You Need.”

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they must constantly be viewed and reviewed together with this internal cultural logic. To deny the Kapampangans of this right to be understood through their own rationality is to eternally be consumed by an epistemic bubble that constantly casts Kapampangans into the shadows.

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