



Research Article

## Arem wennu Raem (admiration or respect): A phenomenological understanding of Ilocano courtship

Chase Mark S. Suyat<sup>1</sup>, Mae Angelie V. Salvador-Garcia<sup>2</sup>, Julie May N. Molina<sup>3</sup>

University of Northern Philippines

Corresponding Email: [Chasemark.suyat@unp.edu.ph](mailto:Chasemark.suyat@unp.edu.ph)

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### ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to determine the real meaning of "panagarem" in the concept of Ilocano and its evolution, ways, and practices through the years. This study employed phenomenology using individual interviews. There were 4 participants from each generation. The study revealed that panagarem" plays an essential role in understanding the deeper meaning of Ilocano courtship with new strategies in the courting of the Ilocanos, whether traditional or modern style. The custom of Ilocano panagarem requiring a certain man to work for the woman's family was a "long, arduous, and expensive process of courting. A series of friendly dates is the normal starting point in the Ilocano way of courting, and it is usually beginning with "sinuron" or the process of teasing, a process of pairing off a potential couple. Moreover, material things are the basis of settling down, because they are focused on the idea of stability. However, some of the previous practices are not going away; they use them until now. However, some practices have been added because of technology and social media platforms. However, the bottom line here is that the respect and honor of the parents of the "Maarararem" are still practiced in different generations. That concludes that "Panagarem" is also "Panag- Raem.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Ilocos Region's courtship and dating practices have been significantly shaped through history and time. Since age immemorial, "arem and armen" has always been there; it comes in various ways and forms, and it links a particular set of dating etiquette and taboos. Before Ilocano dating had reached its present configuration, there were couples of traditional courtship or "Panagarem" practices that were genuinely observed by many Ilocanos in the past.

The most popularly-known Panagarem gesture in the Ilocos region is very romantic and emotionally appealing. Harana or serenade is a traditional courtship practice where men introduce themselves and woo their admired lady by serenading underneath her window at night. Given the sweet combination of "kantion," a piece of self-composed music for Ilocanos. During a "panagarem," a couple or group gets to know each other and decides if there will be an engagement. "Panagarem" includes activities such as dating where couples or groups go together for some activity. "Panagarem" can also occur without personal contact, especially with modern technology. Virtual dating, chatting online, sending text messages, conversing over the telephone, instant messaging, writing letters, and sending gifts are all modern concepts of "panagarem."

Traditionally, "Panagarem" in the Ilocano culture begins with regular conversations in some gatherings such as; fiestas, reunions, and family gatherings and visits to the lady's home where the man meets the girl and her family gets to know them more. "Courtship is the best part of a girl's romance and love life." This is why there have been many rituals involved in the earlier courting practices. Thus, in those times, before they get married, they can enjoy the labor of a suitor for her love even if it takes a year or more of courtship (Sarahgat's Blog, 2009). Ilocanos also have long-term "panagarem" to the extent that he offers his services to the women such as; "panag-satdo" for the water they used in their house and also "panagbal-sig" for the wood they use in cooking to make sure about their feelings for each other. Moreover, the man sends love letters to the lady daily as constant reminders and declarations of a willingness to continue the erotic pursuit.

"Panag-serbi" or Servitude. As the courtship stage commenced during the primordial times in Ilocos "Panag-serbi" or act of servitude at the lady's home was executed by gentlemen to depict their genuineness and loyalty toward the woman they love and adore. This act was accompanied by giving certainty presents for the family and consistently visiting the woman. This dating gesture was also purposely required for the woman's parents to assess whether the suitor's intentions were meant for real or not. Moreover, Ilocanos are also fond of having Long courtships to ensure their feelings for each other. The boy sends some love letters to the girl daily as constant reminders and declarations of a willingness to continue the erotic pursuit. Wang and Taylor (2011) reported that "Throughout history, marriage and parenthood have been linked milestones on the journey to adulthood. But for the young adults of the Millennial Generation, these social institutions are becoming delinked and differently valued." Millennials are not married to the idea of seven marriages as previous generations once were as young adults. In a study carried out with 536 young adults between 18-29, Wang and Taylor (2011) also found that "67% of millennials say that happiness is not related to whether you are single or married. From a list of reasons offered in the survey questionnaire regarding reasons to be married or to get married, nearly nine-in-ten (88%) young adults say love is very important, followed by making a lifelong commitment (76%) and companionship (71%)." Fewer Millennials feel the urge to tie the knot at the same rate as their predecessors, shifting the goal of romantic love relationships, even though they still see love as an integral part of what they seek in adult relationships. Wang and Taylor's study begs the question: Does this shift in mentality impact how Millennials experience romantic love and their hopes for their future?

Modern "panagarem" among young Ilocanos does not have a pattern. It could start from a group date where friends would pair friends up and tease them. Friends could play cupid and set a couple up and leave them on their own to talk then before you know it, they are going out on a date. With the influence of technology, modern courtships these days are going fast. Men and women go to nightclubs, and some of them meet on the corner or in public places to talk. "Panagarem" in certain relationships is not easy. They are full of difficulties; partners can be happy, enjoying each one's



company one minute, and the next minute they can be angry and upset with each other. That's just the nature of relationships, and whenever two different people who have had different upbringings and life experiences and the natural differences we have as men and women try to function as one unit, there are bound to be problems and challenges. If a man or woman has been in the process of "panagarem" and is entering a relationship, they will begin to notice that they are walking in a bed of roses. There are obstacles and challenges that they will face and are probably facing right now in the process of courtship. If your courtship can stand and be strong despite all the challenges you face, it is a good sign that you have something solid. If the challenges drive the two of them apart, their relationship probably is not strong enough, and the courtship should break up than for their marriage to break up. No relationship does not experience one challenge or the other; even the happiest of couples have areas of differences; what keeps them happy is that they can still love each other unconditionally despite their differences. So, do not run just because of differences and misunderstandings; learn to communicate and strive to overcome challenges and obstacles.

Many of the millennials use the modern "panagarem." So, this study will be conducted to know the evolution of the "panagarem" throughout the years. It will be for the millennial to know more about "panagarem" and how to be courted or "armen." The researchers conducted this study to know more about the practices of "panagarem" in the Ilocano culture. It will help them know the real meaning of "panagarem" in the Ilocano culture accepted in society.

### **Objectives**

This study was conducted to determine the real meaning of "panagarem" in the concept of Ilocano's and its evolution, ways, and practices through the years. The section contains the following areas related to this study:

1. Concept of "Panagarem" among Ilocanos,
2. Evolution of Ilocanos "panagarem",
3. Ways and practices of "panagarem" in Ilocano Culture, and
4. Contributions of "panagarem" in the Ilocano's life.

This study mainly focuses on exploring the evolution of "panagarem" and what types of "panagarem" they want to use that could question that in some selected participants in the concept of Ilocano culture. It gains identification of the respondents and their contribution to all millennial that has this stage. In addition, it discovers the significant development of "panagarem" in the millennial generation.

### **METHODS**

This research study used phenomenology on the general account of the concept of "Panagarem" in the Ilocano Culture. And also examine ways and practices of Ilocanos in terms of "panagarem." Furthermore, this study also aimed to determine the contribution of "panagarem" to the life of every Ilocanos. Phenomenology is a technique that is commonly used in social science research to investigate and describe people's lived experiences (Gumarang, 2022; Dela Fuente, 2021).

### **Participants**

There were 4 participants from each Generation (from Traditionalist or silent Generation to Generation Z or the Millennials). This sampling is utilized to provide the researcher valid and complex information. The distribution of the participants is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

| Participants                        |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Traditionalist or Silent Generation | 4  |
| Generation X                        | 4  |
| Generation Y                        | 4  |
| Generation Z                        | 4  |
| Total                               | 16 |

Each participant is a trustworthy and full-blooded Ilocano who experienced to court “agarem” and be courted “armen.” The researcher preferred these informants because they believe that they have enough experiences and background information on what the researcher seek to know, investigate and clarify.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used open-ended questioning one-on-one in-depth interviews. Follow-up interview questions were asked during the interview to further clarify the investigation. The interview was recorded and transcribed right after. The following are the overarching research questions:

#### *Ancillary Questions:*

1. What is the true meaning of “Panagarem” among Ilocanos?
2. How do they value the importance of “Panagarem”?
3. What are the ways and styles of Ilocanos “Panagarem”?
4. What are the changes to the system of Ilocanos “Panagarem”?
5. Is styles of “Panagarem” a factor in forming relationships?
6. What are the traditional practices in “Panagarem”?
7. What changes are implied by technology and social media to the traditional?

### **Ethical Consideration**

To ensure that the study's findings were valid and trustworthy, the researchers observed the ethical principles. They are as follows: a.) honesty in all scientific communications; b.) objectivity to avoid bias in the research methods; c) respect for intellectual property by honoring patents and copyrights, and d) confidentiality to protect communications and personal information of the informants. Thus, during the casual interview, the researcher acted as the facilitator and took notes for the validation of data. To ensure the truthfulness of the recording, the participants validated the note-taking done. After which, the participants signed the informed consent to show that they affirmed the correctness of the recorded information of the researcher.

### **Data Collection**

The researchers sought permission for the conduct of the study from the participants in the Province of Ilocos Sur. After which, the participants were interviewed one-by-one after the letter of consent is distributed and their approval is solicited. The responses were recorded using a sound recorder, pen, and paper.

## Data Analysis

This study aimed to explore the evolution of the “panagarem” throughout the years. It will be for the millennial to know more about “panagarem” and how to be courted or “armen.” Moreover, to know more about the practices of “panagarem” in the Ilocano culture. Because we have a rooted-cultural tradition of courtship as an Ilocano in a different generation, the intention was to understand better and help the existing and future generations know the real meaning of “panagarem” in the Ilocano culture that is accepted in the society. A qualitative approach was used in the study and presented detailed descriptions of the understanding of Ilocano courtship to describe the phenomenon accurately. The data were coded using the InVivo type of coding processed “in that which is alive” and as a code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, the term used by the participants themselves (Strauss, 1987), and organized utilizing four intertwined processes of the philosophical phenomenological method: 1) the epoche, 2) phenomenological reduction, 3) Imaginative variety, and 4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas’ four steps are outlined below. The epoche was the initial phase, which required the researchers to write down their predispositions and preconceptions to get away from the familiarity of ordinary happenings, events, and people, allowing them to view things for what they were. The second step, phenomenological reduction, is divided into numerous stages. All preconceived notions were set aside at first. Each statement was given equal weight and removed irrelevant statements. The statements were then categorized into themes. Finally, a textural description was created by repeating a pattern of looking and describing. By developing structural themes, the third phase, creative variation, sought the core meaning of the phenomenon. Finally, all textural and structural descriptions were merged into a single theme of the essences which are; “Panagserbi”-Service to the Family, Honor to the Parents and Camaraderie, Personal feelings, and Respect to the woman and her Parents.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Traditionalist/Silent Generation*

Theme: “Panagserbi”-Service to the Family

Traditionalist strictly believes in principles, a principle that can be evidenced through actions. And for this reason, in the olden times, a man who courts a woman will go to the residence of the beloved to serve and assist in the daily household chores.

*Katulungan nak ni amang na dijay taltalon, siak ti mangibaklay jay pagpadanum kasta metten nga magkadjadwa ken amang na amin nga trabaho sajay taltallon da. Ket dayta met ngatan ti nakaasasikgan ti rikna ni baket ko kanyak. [I assist his father in the fields, carry the hose and machinery moreover, I accompany him on all the errands that must be done on the farm. That could be why my wife's feelings became closer to mine.]*

The “Agararem” or the suitor really takes it seriously, one has to visit the family of the “Maararem”, or the one being courted, and introduce oneself formally. This particular importance on the family has been part of the Filipino tradition even before the pre-colonial era. The custom of Ilocano panagarem requiring a certain man to work for the woman’s family was a “long, arduous and expensive process of courting in ancient Philippines (Filipiknow, 2018).

*Ta numampay nakurapay nak laeng a baro idi dayta nga panawen, ngem gaget met ti innak nagpuonan nga magserbi kadakuada, haan laeng nga ni amang na nu diketdi ti pamilya da baket ko. [Although I was just a poor young man at the time, I also invested hard work in serving them, not only his father but also my wife's family.]*

Since the beginning of the courtship or “Panagarem” stage, gentlemen have performed “panagserbi,” or acts of service at the lady's home, to demonstrate their sincerity and loyalty to not to the woman they love and adore but also to her family. This act was accompanied by gifts for the family and regular visits to the woman. “This implies that the young man, in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines, still give high regard to the albasiador or mediator and his parents in courting a woman as well as giving respect and concern to the woman's family by rendering household chores or labor.”(Alviento, 2017). This courtship gesture was also required on purpose for the woman's parents to determine whether the suitor's intentions were genuine or not. Because modernization had not yet reached the country during those times, the wooing gentleman was required to perform certain traditional chores for his level of hard work and patience to be revealed. These included bringing water from the well to the woman's house, chopping firewood for traditional cooking, pounding rice grains, and various other tasks. Subsequently, we can then realize its philosophical underpinnings to the experience of the people and their historical continuity and ancestral connectedness. Drawing Water from the well is acquiring the wisdom of your ancestors “panagsakdo,” “panagsareb.”

### Generation X

#### Theme 2: Honor to the Parents and Camaraderie

Based on the data gathered, the generation X's primary and initiatory way of courtship is through the mediator, and they called it “albasiador or rangtay ti panagsingalot” or bridge wherein this “albasiador or rangtay ti panagsingalot” will minimally assist the “maarem”/“agarem” until the two parties form an official relationship. “In my generation, courting was really tough because of my lack of self-confidence and timidity, but I am extremely grateful to my friend Myrna, who introduced me to the woman I am now married to today. In the name of love, we agreed to run to our family because we were terrified of our parents, who we were afraid of since we were not yet financially stable. But, you know what? Despite everything that happened, we never lost our love and respect for our father and mother. That's why we went back to show them how much we cared for one other and how much we missed them. As a chance to mingle with my fellow ladies and gentlemen during our time together, we gathered together on a special occasion known as “pasala sakbay ti kasar.” However, I was filled with worries and uncertainties because my spouse was under the effect of alcohol when he danced with me at the time. Because of the peculiar sentiments I was experiencing, those questions in my thoughts drove me to think about him more, and it was then that I realized I was already falling in love with him.”

*Narigat ti agarem idi panawen mi, ta rumsuak met ti bain kanyak ken makitak met dagiti kakadwak a babbaro isu dakkal met a nga pagyamanak ni kumarek a myrna a nangiamammu ken nangiasasideg ken baket ko. [It was difficult to date during our time, because I was also shy and could see my fellow men, but I am also very grateful to my sister myrna for introducing me and brought me closer to my wife.]*

Although having a series of friendly dates is the normal starting point in the Ilocano way of courting, Courtship usually begins with “sinuron” or the process of teasing, a process of pairing off a potential couple (His Our Archives, n.d.). The process helps in discerning whether the feelings of the people involved are mutual, and this process ends either in avoidance or further courtship (Cohen, 2017).

*Gapu met ti ayat mi ti maysa ken maysa, napagnumuan me kas agnobyoy ken agnobyoy nga agtaray gapu ti buteng ko iti nagannak na ta awan kami pelang ti nasayaat nga istado a biag. Ngem ammu yo nakkong, uray kasjay ti napasamak mi haan pulos nga naawan ti respeto mi nagiti naggannak mi isu nga nagsubli kami met laeng kadakuada a nangipablaak ti ayan-ayat mi. [Because of our love for each other, we agreed as a couple to run away because of my fear to her parents and because we didn't have a good state of life. But you know,*

*Nakkong, even though that happened to us, we never lost respect for our parents, so we went back to them and confessed our love.]*

Taray is when the girl leaves her home without her parents' permission and live a life together with her man. This usually happens during the hours of deep sleep of the household. She is awaited by her lover nearby who then takes her away. The next morning, the distraught parents are clueless of the whereabouts of their daughter. But in the end of the day they will realize to go back to their parents and asked for forgiveness and to prove their love and care for each other.

*Pasala iti rabii sakbay ti kasar ti nagamamuan mi ken lakay ko, ta isu met dagita ti pagdadangayan mi nga babbalasang kada babbaro iti dayta nga panawen. Ngem adda latta a ti danag ken damag ti panunot ko ta nakainum met ni lakay ko idi insala nak.hahaha. Iti dayta nga damag ti panunot ko isu metten ti nagrimsuatan ti rikna nga haan ko pulos ninamnama. Ayat met gayamen nakkong. [My husband and I got to know each other at parties the night before the wedding, as those time were only chances to hang out with the boys and girls. But I still had the worry and questions in mind because my husband is was drunk when he danced with me. hahaha. With all that questions in mind were the reasons of change in my heart that I didn't expect. It was love, "Nakkong".]*

Another way relationships begin with this generation is through the social gathering or event called "pasala ti salunan" wherein single individuals are encouraged to participate. Commonly, the activity of this event is the "pasala" or dancing, wherein a person finds a partner to dance with. In turn, this event would create an opportunity for the individuals to get to know each other. It can somewhat determine the potentiality or the "potentiality." It can be a prelude to what can be or what cannot.

### *Generation Y*

#### Theme 3: Personal feelings

Generation Y usually relies on Technology for communication, such as Texting and Calling through phone to express their feelings. This generation was usually afraid of commitment; that's why it's hard to date. Lovers usually cannot balance their work and love life, which may lead to separation. Many settled at ages 28- 30, waiting until they were stable.

*Buteng iti nagannak gapu ti respeto kadakuada ti maysa nga petpetetak isu nga adda ti panawen nga mabutengak nga agpa arem. "Mapakan naka met laeng, wennu Adda pagpakan mun?" dagiti ti damag da kanyak ken dagiti kakabsat ko nu agarem ken agpaarem kami. [Fear of parents out of respect for them is the one thing I hold so there are times when I am afraid to date. "Can you be fed, or do you have something to feed?" these are the things they hear from them with my siblings when we are dating.]*

We all go through life with a set of ethics and goals related to our money. Beyond major life choices such as having children and owning a home, it's important for soon-to-be spouses to know if charitable giving, international travel or other large expenses are part of one partner's personal and financial identity. Financial aspect of life of every individual is very important most especially today that we are in the fangs of pandemic. We need to set our priorities before getting into a certain relationship that includes more responsibilities.

*Isu ngata daytan ti makagapu a naimula iti panunot ko nga agpili nak ti asawaek ken mangasawaak nu addan ti urnong ko. Ngem haan ko binabbabalaw dagiti nagannak ko iti dayta, ta adda nasaayat nga nagturonan na. Ket ditak a nakita ta nalukatan ti nakulaapan a matak nga haan nga*

“buteng” iti naritnak nu diketdi “Ayat ken Respeto” iti nagannak ko. Isu nga nasaayat ti langen langen ti pamilyak kenni lakay ko. [*That's probably the reason why it was planted in my mind that I would choose whom to marry and will get married when I had my savings. But I didn't blame my parents for it, because it has a good result. And there I see and realize that I wasn't "fear" that I felt but "Love and Respect" for my parents. That is why my family and my husband have a good relationship. Material things are the basis of settling down, because they are focused on the idea of stability and good relationship.*]

### Generation Z or Millennial

#### Theme 4: Respect to the women and to her Parents

This is the sequence of the specific research problem regarding the understanding of Ilocano Courtship in the Millennial or Generation Z perspective. Facebook ti umuna a nakakitaak ken nobyak sir, isu nga inadd ko ti facebook na ket inpadas ko nga armen babaen ti messenger, ket idi bumaybayag ket inted na metten ti cellphone number na isu nga nadardaras ken masasan metten ti panagpatpatang mi. It was in Facebook the first time I saw my girlfriend sir, so I added her facebook account and I tried to court her via messenger, and as time goes by she then gave me her cellphone number, and that's the reason why we talk more often. In the past, single people may have met potential dates mostly through family, friends, or colleagues. These days, people can increase their dating choices exponentially via online dating services such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tinder, Tantan, Grindr, Blued, and Fem etc. These online dating sites are still very profitable. On the grounds that these applications speed up what is a “slow and arduous task” for some, technology enabled platforms have become a virtual bar where singles lurk and look for a potential partner (Loresco, 2015).

Ti haan nga bumayag a panawen mas umasasideg metten ti rikna mi ti maysa ken maysa. Ngem mabuteng kami nga duwa nga mangiamamu ti bagbagi mi ti nagganak ti tunggal maysa gapu ta estyudante kami pay laeng ken adda isistrikto ti nagannak na. [*The sooner we get closer to each other. But we were both afraid to introduce ourselves to each other's parents because we were still students and his parents were strict.*]

In the past, the man who was courting needed to go to the girl's house but now the generation has a lot of changes like using gadgets, technologies through using cellphones and now you can text and call. You can use it now as an instrument to connect with one girl that we wanted to court. The participants say that the courting process of today's generation was implied with the use of technology. In the form of social media apps, they can easily communicate with the one they court, but as they along the process of courtship or “panagarem” they still derive the stage of “Panangiamammo” which is the way of the women to present the boy to the whole Family formally.

Agsarsarak kami iti arwar nu adda tiempo mi gapu ta mabuteng kami iti nagannak mi. Ngem idi maysa a daras inpadas ko nga inpakada ken papang nu palubusan dakon nga agnobyoy, haan nga simmungbat a dagus ni papang ko isu nga nagbuteng ken nagbain nak ken papang, gapu met ti daras ti communication kadagitoy a tiempoon gapu t FB ken Cellphone, naibagbagak ken nobyok dagiti nga mapaspasamak a panangipakadak. Ngem napilit met daytoy nobyok a nagdisnudo nga ummay nainyamammo ti bagi na kadagiti nagannak ko gapu kanu ta ayayaten nak unay. [*We hang out outside when we have time because we are afraid of our parents. One time I tried to tell my dad if he would let me be in relationship, he didn't respond immediately so I was scared and embarrassed with my dad, because of the fast communication these days through FB and Cellphone, I told my boyfriend what happened during my talk with dad. But this boyfriend of mine was also*





*determined to come and introduce himself to my parents because he loved me so much.]*

There is a significant factor that technology has changed, and social media is now the instrument for courting; using chat and text is now easier to court with a girl. Therefore, the participants mentioned the same practices before. This finding shows that some practices before are not disappearing; they used them until now. However, some practices have been added because of technology and social media platforms such as; Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The guy millennials also use this to be nearer to the women's relatives, especially her parents.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

The researchers conclude that “Panagarem” plays an essential role in understanding the deeper meaning of Ilocano Courtship with new strategies in the courting of the Ilocanos, whether traditional or modern style. However, the bottom line here is that the respect and honor of the parents of the “Maarar-arem” are still practiced in different Generations. That concludes that “Panagarem” is also “Panag- Raem.” On the meaning of Ilocano courtship, their target is to win the lady’s heart as an Ilocano. This implies that even though people are now living in the modern age, they still preserved some of the practices of Ilocano Courtship. The young man still gives high regard to the albasiador or mediator and his parents in courting a woman and giving respect and concern to the woman’s family by rendering household chores or labor. On ways and practices of Ilocano courtship, it was understood that today’s generations have these newly improved ways of courting using technologies and social media. This kind of courting will be more accessible to courting a person based on what the informants have mentioned. On contributions of courtship in having a successful relationship for the Ilocanos, the informants shared their ideas about the contributions. They were able to share their practices in courtship as an Ilocano and the remarkable experiences they had in courtship. It was understood that the contributions of courtship were good as long as they realized the importance of love and respect in a specific relationship. Some informants mentioned some principles that they hold to during courtship, like honor and respect for their parents. That they learn something as they go along with their relationships. Advanced technologies significantly have a more straightforward courting method because it demands less time and effort. This implies that the advancement in courtship brought by modernization allows a person to divert from traditional courting to modernize courting. Therefore, courtship is a great help in having an intimate relationship through their experiences and what they have learned from it.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. There are a lot of changes and modifications in Ilocano courtship that have been rampant, but only a few have any access to this. Traditional courting diverts in modern ways; the millennials must learn to adapt themselves to the reformation of traditional courtship. Hence, the old folks must guide the millennials toward the right way of courting.
2. As to the new practices and style of courtship, the millennials must acknowledge and adjust to the different ways of courting that newly improved using technologies and social media.
3. The millennials must focus on enhancing their different skills and abilities for them to gratify the style of traditional courtship. Millennials must consider the ways and practices needed in courting to attain intimate relationships.
4. They must embrace the changes in traditional courtship because it contributes to the formation of intimate relationships in society and personal lives. Other researchers should continue or expand the study to discover more essential data or information that may lead to

the expansion of knowledge about the Ilocano courtship in forming an intimate relationship by consulting the Ilocanos.

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