

Creating a Culture by Governance: Issues in Managing Culture

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ABSTRACT

The management of culture involves a network of agencies, institutions and entities both from the public and private sectors. This is part of a collective process by which objects acquire cultural significance. We create images of our nations, tell stories, and construct experiences for other people through exhibitions, festivals and other cultural activities. Our role is never neutral and it is important to recognize this power and the implications of our actions.

In the Philippines, government has taken an active role in the production and management of culture. In spite of the relatively small percentage of funding spent on culture and the arts, it has extended support through various institutions and agencies that, at present, comprise a complex network. Through their respective programs, government has defined the paths of cultural production—from the larger policy framework for organizations to specific commemorative programs. Given this range of involvement, how has the state empowered people and organizations to shape culture? What strategies has it taken to extend support to the production and distribution of culture?

This paper focuses on two case studies that represent strategies the state has taken in cultural management. At a macro level, the changes the Cultural Center of the Philippines underwent reflect shifting policies and priorities. As products of changing political administrations, this institution went through a re-orientation of its mission. This came with an abrupt expansion in scale but without the necessary resources to support the CCP's new programs. At a micro level, the second evaluates the refurbished Rizal Shrine, Fort Santiago, one of the major projects of the now defunct National Centennial Commission. This underscores the need for a more

transparent decision-making process, prioritizing the interest of the museum's public and not just that of the specialists who control the production of knowledge.

As a social phenomenon, culture is “more than a set of artifacts, codes or signs to be catalogued.” Its scope can range from a concrete object like a painting or something nebulous like “a way of life.” Griswold used the term “cultural objects” to refer to “shared significance embodied in form. Significance refers to the object’s incorporation of one or more symbols, which suggest a set of denotations and connotations, emotions and memories” (cited in Hall 5). The significance a cultural object acquires is a product of collective activity that involves the artists, writers, historians, publishers, schools, and museums operating within a network of “organized social action.”

Cultural managers are caught in this process of giving objects “shared significance.” We create images of our nations, tell stories, and construct experiences for other people through exhibitions, festivals, and other cultural activities. Our role in managing culture is never neutral, and it is important to recognize this power and the implications of our actions. This field of practice has been a subject of criticism and re-evaluation by the academe as well as cultural workers themselves. There are critiques on the museum as an institution and as a professional organization, the philosophy of conservation and its practical approaches, and the sustainability of heritage management strategies. A critical approach also takes into account the involvement of a wider set of social institutions, that is, “politics, government bureaucracies, information processing organizations and planning agencies” that have influence over the production and distribution of culture. “If power is defined as the ability to make people do things whether they want to or not, then power to shape culture can be traced to those people and organizations that produce culture” (Hall 151).

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that, at present, comprise a complex network. Through its various programs, government has defined the paths of cultural production—from the larger policy framework for organizations to specific commemorative programs. Given this range of involvement, how has the state empowered people and organizations to shape culture? What strategies has it taken to extend support to the production and distribution of culture?

This paper will focus on two case studies that relate to government strategies in cultural management at the macro and micro levels. The first deals with the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), a government institution that has expanded through the years as a reflection of shifting directions in cultural policy-making. The second focuses on the recently refurbished exhibits at the Jose Rizal Shrine in Fort Santiago, Intramuros, one of the flagship projects of the National Centennial Commission (NCCA). Exhibition concept and design will be assessed in relation to the basic functions of museums. These two case studies are not linked through any institutional program—one deals with the fine arts, the other with social history. Both, however, represent significant efforts of government to directly support culture and define the key players in its production and management.

THE GROWTH OF A CULTURAL CENTER AND BUREAUCRACY

The state has assumed a role as patron and mediator in cultural production through direct and indirect means of support. Cultural agencies initiate programs that encourage art production through exhibitions, research and publication, public art programs, conferment of awards, scholarships and financial grants. State support does not necessarily exclude the private sector. As mediators, government has also created an environment that encourages cooperation and exchange among private and public entities but still in the direction it has already deemed necessary. A common strategy is to offer tax incentives to donors and art patrons. This tax policy has, in fact, contributed much to the rise of private art patronage in the United States.

Cultural policies define the infrastructure and resources cultural workers work with. The scope and directions of these policies are based on political constructs on culture. John Pick describes them as

“thinly disguised control systems which rely upon the persuasive redefinition of art terms to make them seem both benign and credible” (xiv). Policies provide the framework in which these cultural agencies operate and determine how resources are used. Often these statements reflect the notion of a “continuing and common culture” (131) and that cultural and artistic production cannot survive without the support of government.

In general, support for culture is justified as a public good¹ on the following grounds:

1. Culture possesses inherent values ... which are fundamentally opposed to and in danger (sic) by commercial forces;
2. The need for these values is universal, uncontaminated by questions of class, gender, and ethnic origin; and
3. The market cannot satisfy this need (Garnham 54).

This public good argument, however, is used more to justify claims for government subsidy. Even outside the sphere of culture, economic and legislative programs affect the avenues for its production and distribution. Cultural policies often become adjuncts to the more seemingly pragmatic and tangible results of economic programs. For example, in the 1970s, the liberal economic and fiscal policies under the Marcos administration encouraged the entry of foreign investors into the country. As a complement, social and cultural programs, mostly spearheaded by Imelda Marcos, aimed to promote Metro Manila to the international community as a convention center and a cultural hub. This also led to the construction of more hotels to accommodate the growing tourism industry. This gave a significant boost to the art market that lasted until the mid-1980s. The art boom was also attributed to an aggressive art acquisition program of private corporations as well as government agencies. Among the latter were the Central Bank and the Government Security and Insurance System (GSIS) whose art collections are currently considered significant representations of Philippine colonial and contemporary art.

When it comes to matters related to culture, the CCP immediately comes to mind. It was inaugurated in 1969, the first among many cultural institutions established through the initiatives

of Imelda Marcos.² As the most prominent and extensively subsidized of her cultural programs, it was the object of much criticism from the regime's detractors. Nevertheless, it became a major cultural arm for government. The CCP organization underwent significant changes in the last three decades that reflected the shifts in strategies and priorities government pursued to assume a seemingly broader definition of culture.

The CCP was conceived as a "shrine of the Filipino spirit". Its programs were then perceived as vital components to the realization of the "New Society". Its main thrusts were focused on the performing arts and visual arts. Between these two, however, the performing arts were given a higher priority as reflected by the resources provided. The CCP master plan included a museum and gallery building but this did not materialize due to lack of funding. Initial funds and other resources generated subsequently were used to complete the Main Theater building—the venue for major performances by local and international artists. The CCP eventually adopted a system of resident companies to implement its performing arts program. These included the Bayanihan Dance Troupe, the Ballet Philippines, the Opera Company of the Philippines, and the Bulwagang Gantimpala, an experimental theater group.

In spite of the lack of proper facilities, the CCP was still able to pursue its visual arts program through the Museum Department. Using available spaces within the Main Theater building, venues were developed and the department pursued an active exhibitions program that encouraged new artistic forms. These venues included hallways, a theater lounge converted into what is now known as the Main Gallery, and a maintenance storage room now called the Small Gallery.

CCP Museum exhibitions privileged experimental and anti-market artistic expressions following the intellectual orientation of the New York art school. It was in the 1970s that conceptual forms like installation art and performance art were introduced in the Manila art scene. Abstract and minimalist art also gained the state support that was vital to its success in the art market. By empowering these artistic expressions which dissociated itself from the oppressive and authoritarian rule, the dictatorial Marcos regime supported and promoted cultural production to the international community. In

retrospect though, the state's visual arts patronage should be acknowledged as a significant factor in the development of Philippine contemporary art as we know it now. While the government's economic programs led to a boom in the art market, the CCP Museum programs were directed to those artistic expressions that otherwise would not have survived in the commercial art scene.

Outside of these state-supported entities was another network of cultural producers engaged in expressing social realities. Visual as well as performing and literary artists joined mass-based movements and political rallies. They created forms attuned to its ephemeral and makeshift sites which were without walls. Streets became the stage for plays that were highly critical of government. In the visual arts, social realism flourished outside of the state's cultural domains. But it is important to note that these anti-establishment expressions also benefited from the art market. Its own network of supporters—writers, patrons, and art dealers—also nurtured interest for what has come to be known as “social realist art”. Mainstream venues like commercial art galleries eventually absorbed them. For example, in painting, mural artists began to produce easel-sized paintings to accommodate the demand of the commercial market.

As an organization, the CCP began in a modest scale. Its administrative structure for the first five years reflected only its core artistic functions and facilities namely the theater, museum and library (*Fig. 1*). Its privileged position in the eyes of the executive branch allowed it to operate more like a private entity, that is, without the usual bureaucratic constraints meant for government agencies. It was not bound by rigid guidelines for transparency and accountability in policy and procedures but was directly accountable only to its board of trustees whose chairperson was its founder, Imelda Marcos. For example, the hiring of personnel was not limited by civil service regulations. Thus, the CCP was able to hire good artists as managers even without the educational requirements generally prescribed by civil service regulations. Similarly, the purchase of equipment and supplies and contracting of services were also not bound by procedures defined by the Commission on Audit. Operationally, this special status made it easier for the CCP to implement its daily duties and programs. These details may seem quite bureaucratic and menial, but collectively these had considerable effects on the quality of its output and artistic programs.

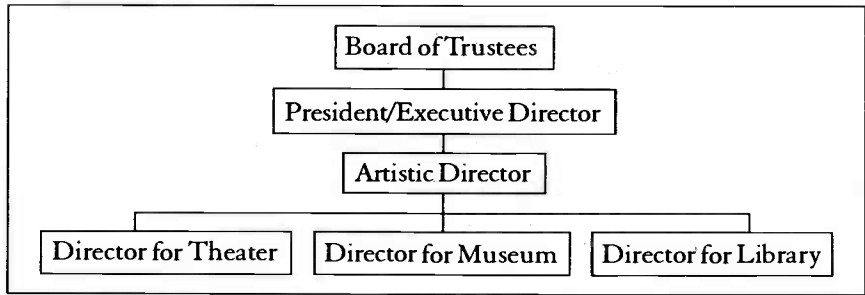
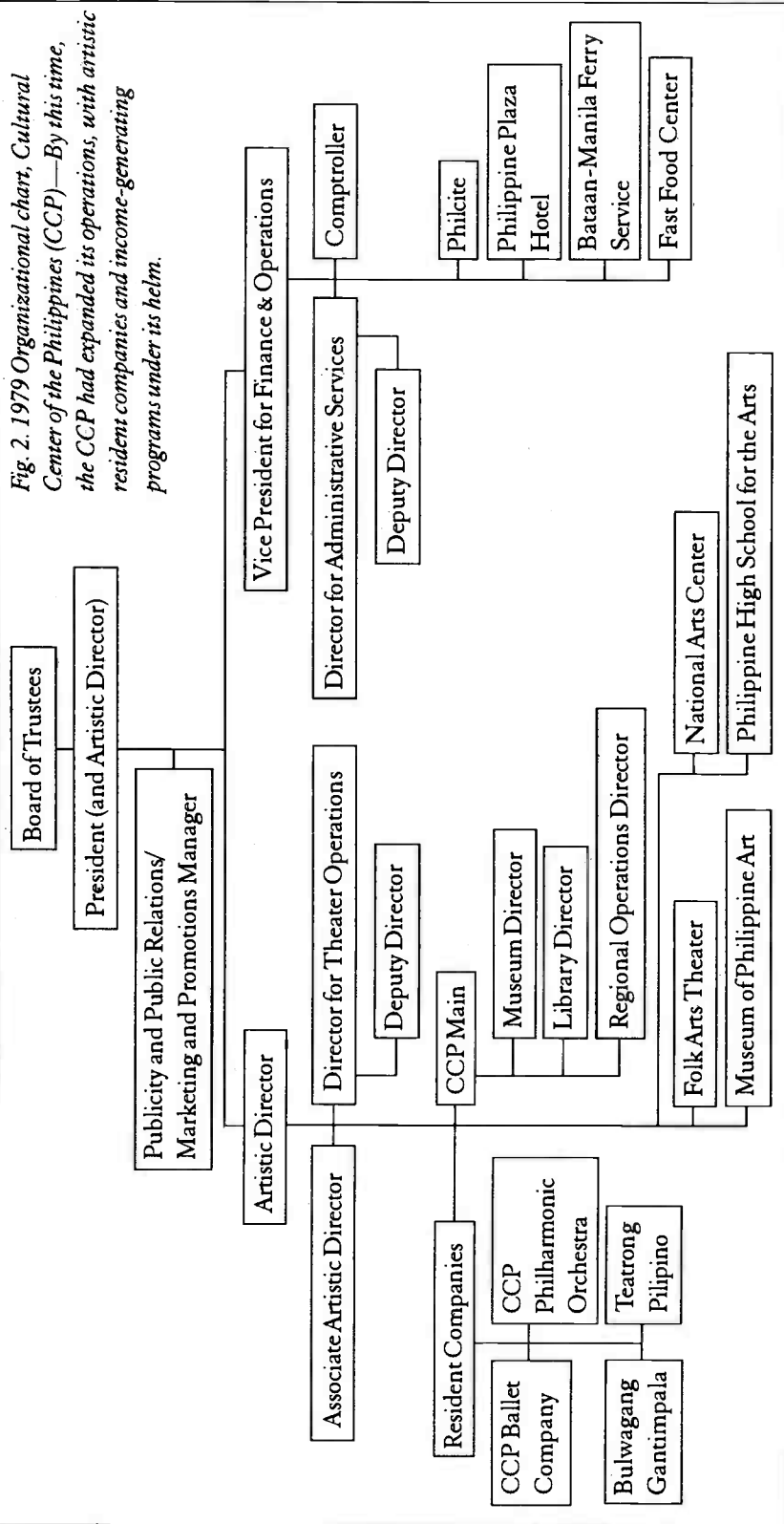


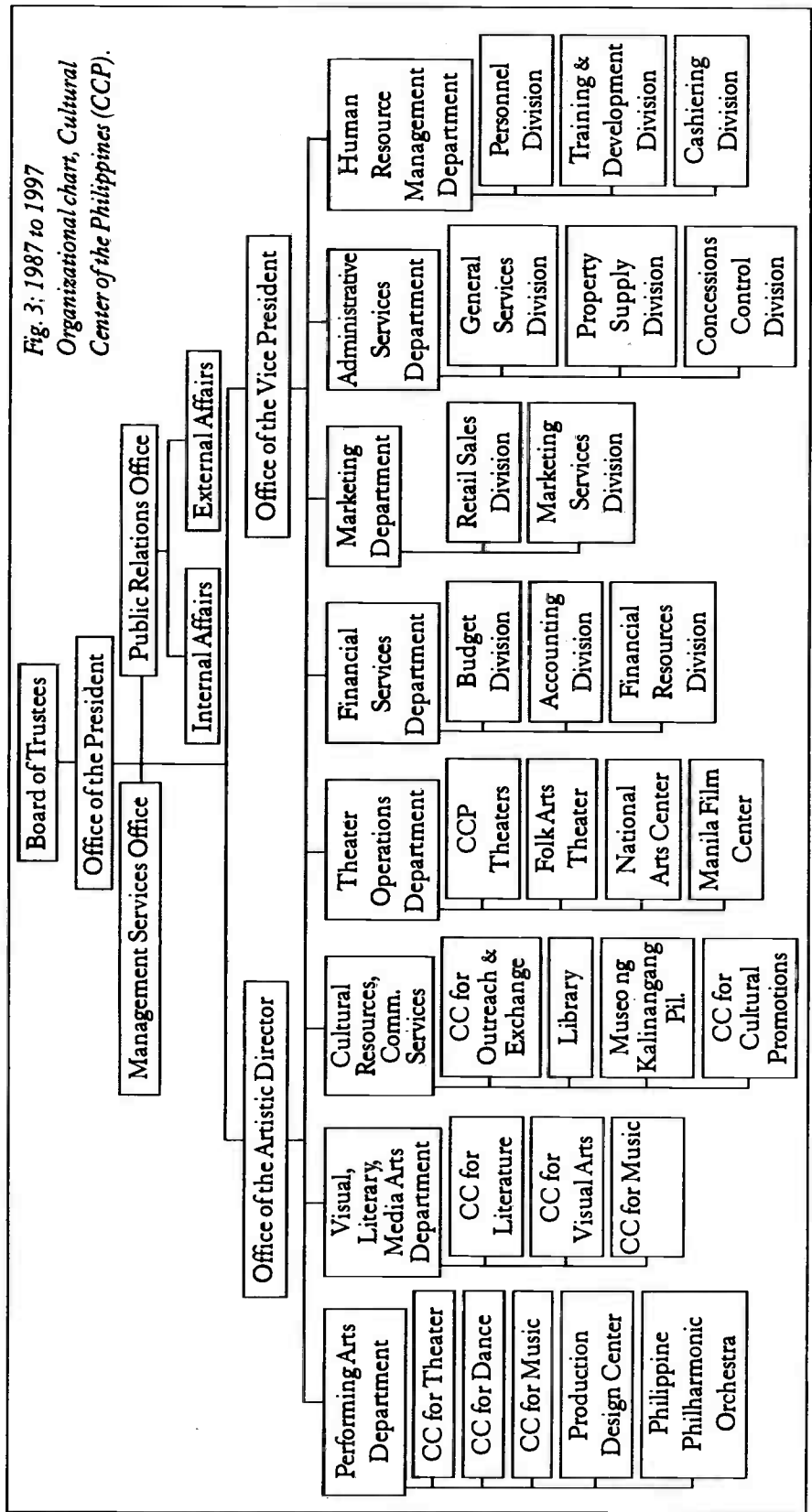
Fig. 1. 1969 Organizational chart, Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP).

The special privileges granted to the CCP entitled it to five percent (5%) of annual amusement tax collections and also allowed it to expand into various income-generating operations to sustain artistic pursuits. Thus, apart from the regular government subsidy, the CCP earned from the operations of commercial ventures such as the Philippine Plaza Hotel, a trade center, and the operations of food and transportation facilities within the complex. Its later organizational chart (Fig. 2) reflected the growth of both artistic and administrative concerns.

The fiscal framework provided under the Marcos administration made it almost self-sufficient for over fifteen years. This support system, however, eventually collapsed. With the change in government in 1986, the CCP underwent major organizational and program changes (Fig. 3). Adopting the Aquino administration's thrust towards democratization and decentralization, regional art councils were established in several cities outside of Metro Manila to widen its cultural network. To counteract the elitist image of the CCP then, the modest-sized organization that promoted the performing and visual arts, grew into a "coordinating center" for more artistic forms.³ The Center expanded the scope of art forms by including the literary arts, broadcast and media arts, and film. New divisions were created; managers and staff were hired to pursue these new artistic programs.

The art community, especially those outside the metropolitan center, welcomed this new orientation. But eventually, the CCP's fiscal framework could not support its enlarged bureaucracy and ambitious projects. The financial and other tax privileges it used to enjoy in the previous administration, which were vital in ensuring the stability of





its trust fund, were no longer there.⁴ The Aquino government's policies also subjected the CCP to the constraints of civil service and auditing requirements. Without cutting its basic budget allocation, the government significantly reduced financial support to the CCP. By 1994, management began to scale down its staff size and adopted cost-cutting measures to address dwindling resources.

It was about the same time, in the late 1980s, that the state gave way to the creation of another cultural agency, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts or NCCA. It began in 1987 as a Presidential Commission (then PCCA) under the Aquino administration and was later formalized as a national agency through Republic Act 7356 in 1992 under the Ramos administration. This came after a series of consultative meetings and lobbying by artists who sought for a separate cultural body without the "bureaucratic hazards" associated with a government agency (Marasigan 5).

The NCCA was originally created as a policy and grant-giving body in different areas of Philippine art and culture. In its early years, it funded a number of programs that duplicated those of the CCP. These included the establishment of its own art councils in the regions and the organization of workshops and festivals. With resources abundant in one agency, the NCCA, and scarce in the other, the CCP, the two government entities streamlined programs to maximize their respective resources.

Today, the NCCA has evolved into another cultural bureaucracy. Its organizational set-up reflects a broad range of programs that include artistic production as well as cultural and heritage management. By virtue of Executive Order No. 80 (dated 1998), it now serves as the umbrella organization that coordinates policies and programs among the various attached national cultural agencies—the CCP, the National Museum of the Philippines, the National Historical Institute, the National Library, and the Records and Archives Management Office. This is viewed by many as a path towards the creation of a Department of Culture, particularly as a result of the recent separation of cultural matters from its former lead department, the Department of Education (formerly known as the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports).

The transformation of the CCP in terms of scale and scope and the creation of the NCCA reflect a strategy of supporting and controlling

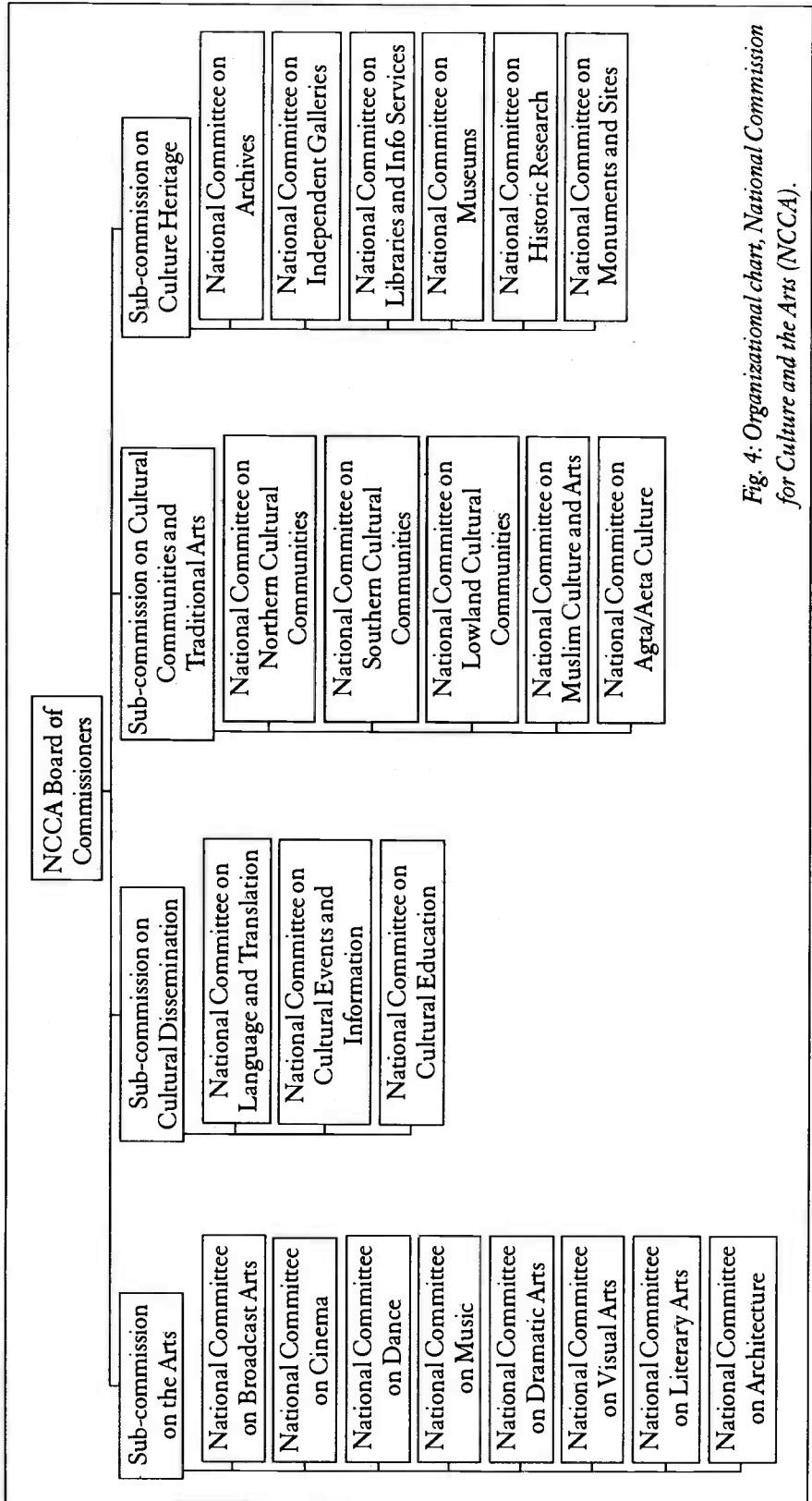


Fig. 4: Organizational chart, National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

cultural production by means of a centralized bureaucracy. The expansion of artistic programs and the regional representation of these agencies were initially intended to counterbalance the elitist notion of art and culture encouraged by the Marcos administration. Just when funding for the CCP was being scaled down, government justified the need to spend more on culture but through a new agency, perhaps because of the personalities these entities represented. This attitude and strategy led to a duplication of roles which resulted in waste of limited financial resources.

An Ad Hoc Body for the Centennial

At a micro level, we also encounter similar problems of duplication and inefficient use of resources. For the celebration of the Philippine Centennial (1996 to 1998), the Ramos administration created the National Centennial Commission (NCC) in 1993 as an ad hoc body to oversee different programs related to the commemoration of a series of historical events leading to our independence from Spanish colonial rule. Even with the cultural network already in place, the government still found it necessary to create another body to manage funds from both public and private sources and to administer programs that concerned several state museums and cultural agencies.

The ad hoc status of this body made it even more complicated to address issues regarding long-term development planning and accountability. Public funding was drawn from the Department of Tourism and the Office of the President. It was granted technical and administrative support to form a Secretariat from the existing agencies—the NCCA, the National Historical Institute (NHI), and the Presidential Management Staff. Implementation of projects, however, was contracted out to different private entities.

One of the flagship projects of the NCC was the refurbishment of several history museums as shrines dedicated to the heroes of the Philippine revolution. These shrines, which are under the management of the NHI, include three for Jose Rizal—the Rizal Shrine in Calamba, Laguna, his birthplace; one in Dapitan, Zamboanga, his place of exile; and another in Intramuros, Manila, his place of detention prior to execution. Other shrines included the

Emilio Aguinaldo Shrine in Kawit, Cavite, the birthplace of this military leader of the Revolution and the Barasoain Church, the site of the Malolos Convention, the first congress held by the Philippine Republic.

The commemorative and historical nature of the Centennial logically explains why these museums played a prominent role in the centennial programs. But apart from the content and contexts of these historical spaces, it is important to keep in mind the value of the museum as an institution and a signifying activity.

The Decision-Making Process in Museums

Museums play a significant role in the collective activity of creating significance. This is carried out through its core functions: (1) collecting and preserving objects; (2) studying them through research and documentation; and (3) communicating ideas and meanings of objects through exhibitions and educational programs. The curator, however, has responsibilities not only to the objects to be displayed but to the visitors as well. Exhibitions are meeting grounds for histories: the formal and official versions of the past meet with memories, our personal versions of the past (Kavanagh 1). The basic functions of a museum, therefore, give us the power to exercise influence and control over the selection of objects to preserve, whose stories to tell, and for whom.

The museum has become a symbol of a nation—its independence, development, and progress. Museums are used by governments to “reinforce and confirm a sense of national identity and to give status within the world community” (Hudson & Nicholls, 1985 cited in Prösler 24). The very stature of museums as national symbols is a product of its own history—who has used it and for what purpose. Thus, the museum can also be taken as a “cultural object” that has acquired its own significance or meaning to different peoples through time.

Museums usually began as private collections of the elite gathered through conquest and exploitation. When the doors to these collections were opened to the public, “museums came to conserve cultural heritage and to educate the public.” As home to our national heritage, museums represent “a national identity that often fulfilled

national ambitions” (Kaplan 9). Thus emerged the public museum as we know it now, which is identified with the ideals of democracy. Today this public mission and responsibility has guided the field of practice of curators and museum managers. This public accountability has become one of the guiding principles in defining their code of ethical practice. This has also been used by states and museum-governing bodies to justify its existence and continued support.

Bennett, however, qualifies this democratic significance of museums as merely rhetorical. Although museums aimed at providing a space where the publics—the elite and the popular—can mix and intermingle, it has also served as an “institution of differentiating populations” (100). He refers to how the physical environment of the museum demands forms of behavior not normally associated with other popular places of assembly. We have rules that forbid eating and drinking and touching of exhibitions. These, of course, are based on practical conservation reasons. Yet why are most people compelled to lower their voices or avoid boisterous laughter while inside the confines of a museum or gallery?

Similarly, a museum’s representation of the public is also contentious. Curators and museum managers are situated in a privileged as well as precarious position. They are accountable to several entities—the administration, the public they serve, the discipline they belong to, and the objects they keep. They have responded to this issue by expanding the scope of their collections, exhibitions, and other programs to accommodate different sectors of their community. Still, important questions remain: how are these representations made, how are choices arrived at?

What happens within the “hidden spaces” before exhibitions open for public viewing? Bennett proposes: “attention needs to be paid to the processes of showing, who takes part in these processes and the consequences for the relations they establish between the museum and visitor.” They are then asked to evaluate the power structures inside museums and how it is employed in the process of displaying objects. This requires a shift in their role as curators and museum managers—“from the source of an expertise... claiming the status of knowledge ... to the possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its resources and make authored statements within it” (103-4).

The politics that take place within those “hidden spaces” in museums become more crucial especially when the design of the exhibition is privileged as the end rather than as a means for the public to make meanings out of objects. While a museum’s collecting policy already assumes a process of selection, exhibitions represent another layer of inclusion and exclusion. “Material is transformed by the collecting processes in museum collection archives, and clearly it is transformed again as a further stage ... in the exhibition process” (Pearce 141). Exhibitions display and create meanings through the organization of enclosed space. And regardless of the explanatory materials created—labels, notes, guided tours, and other educational programs—the public takes the initial signals for interpretation from the exhibition itself (Weil 60). The choice of objects and the manner of display reflects whose views within the museum hierarchy are privileged.

RELIQUARIES AND HISTORY IN GLASS CASES

The refurbishment of the Rizal Shrine in Fort Santiago, Intramuros makes one wonder about the decision-making process that transpired in those hidden spaces. As what happened in the other shrines under the NCC program, a private design team was commissioned to conceptualize and implement the renovation and refurbishment. According to NHI officials, the terms of reference between their office, the NCC, and the private team were not clear. Consultation between the design team, headed by Marian Rocas, and their organization did not take place as part of a formal process. Such dialogues could have been an opportunity to share perspectives and experiences at the conceptualization and planning stage. The fault here lies largely on the terms of reference government has defined (through the NCC) between the concerned groups.

The end result was a history exhibition devoid of most of the objects originally on display. The design is minimalist in approach. It is even reminiscent of a conceptual installation one would find in contemporary art museums. This is especially seen in the room called “Chamber of Texts” (*Fig. 5*). Two rows of three-tiered glass cases line half of the room containing a variety of objects—photographs, sculptures, natural specimens, seashells, optometry tools, and reproduction of books. On the other side are three rows of tall narrow

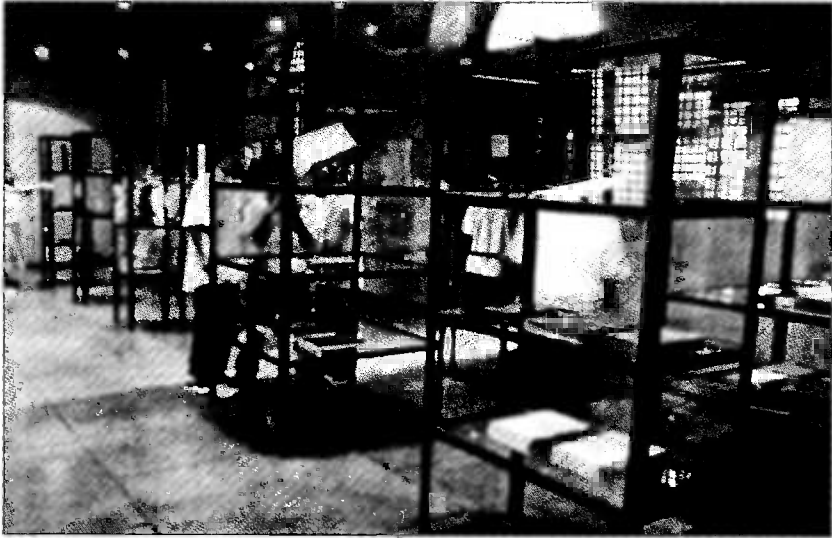


Fig. 5. Display cases, “Chamber of Texts,” Rizal Shrine, Fort Santiago, Intramuros, Manila.

iron panels bolted to the floor and ceiling with six to seven panels in each row (*Fig. 6*). These contain quotes in several languages—Filipino, English, Spanish, French, and German.



Fig. 6. Text panels, “Chamber of Texts,” Rizal Shrine, Fort Santiago, Intramuros, Manila.

At first glance, the viewer is awed by the sleek approach akin to installation art not often seen in history museums. After a while, one would realize that the objects encased in glass cases are displayed together without apparent logic or order. Although their significance is connected to different aspects of Rizal's life—his family and youth, his professional career as a doctor, his artistry as a sculptor, the years he spent in exile in the southern island of Mindanao, copies of his literary works, the *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, instrumental to the revolutionary movement against Spain—one would realize the significance of these objects only with sufficient knowledge about the hero and the person. Otherwise, unknowing viewers, especially foreign visitors, are left to look at these objects from the past without their social and historical context.

“The Cell,” for instance, presents an eerie image of Rizal's last days—he is shown sitting alone in a dark corner, preoccupied with writing his last literary piece. I remember visiting this room as young girl. It contained more objects—a bed, books, and other personal paraphernalia. Another instance is “The Reliquary Room” at the second floor which contains five glass cases. At the center is the “reliquary” containing Rizal's vertebra where the fatal bullet was embedded (Figs. 7 & 8). The other cases contain clothes, a cane, and a pair of iron weights. It is not clear, however, if he used these objects



Fig. 7. “Reliquary Room,” Rizal Shrine, Fort Santiago, Intramuros, Manila.



Fig. 8. Reliquary containing Jose Rizal's vertebra with the embedded bullet.

while in detention. True to its name, “The Reliquary Room” invites us to pay homage to objects that presumably have been touched by the hero himself. This recalls how relics of saints or holy persons housed in cathedrals were the central focus of pilgrimages in medieval Europe. A final instance is the last and largest room, called “The Valedictory Poem,” which contains only a single glass case containing the oil lamp where Rizal hid his poem *Mi Ultimo Adios* or *The Last Farewell* (Fig. 9). The original manuscript is pressed against glass sheets. This he gave to one of his sisters in their final meeting a day before his execution in December 1896.

The absence of explanatory notes and labels, however, is offset by the abundance of exhibited texts—these are quotes from Rizal or from historical narratives, and biographical accounts about the hero. Texts are displayed not as a supplement to the objects but as objects themselves. These are either reproduced on glass panels (some based on handwritten manuscripts), incised or engraved on marble or iron panels, or in-laid on a wooden floor (Figs. 10 & 11). The enlarged scale of these texts does not necessarily provide for easy reading, especially those reproduced on the surface of glass cases or on white marble walls. The “holiness” of the museum as a shrine also creates a distance between the viewer and the display. Also, viewers tend to avoid stepping over the letters on the in-laid floor text. (Doesn't it remind one of ground-level grave markers?) Instead, they stand from the side to read but force their bodies to follow a twisted pose.

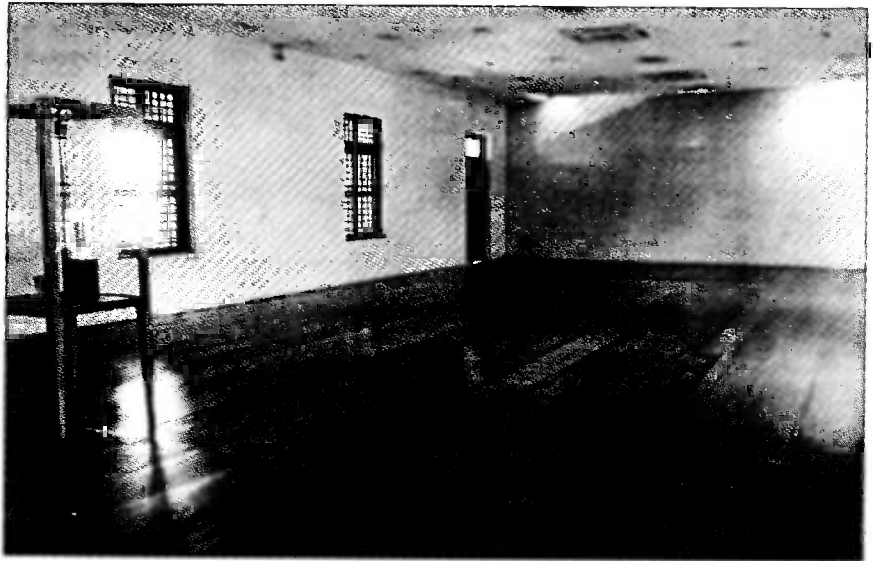


Fig. 9. The room called “The Valedictory Poem.”

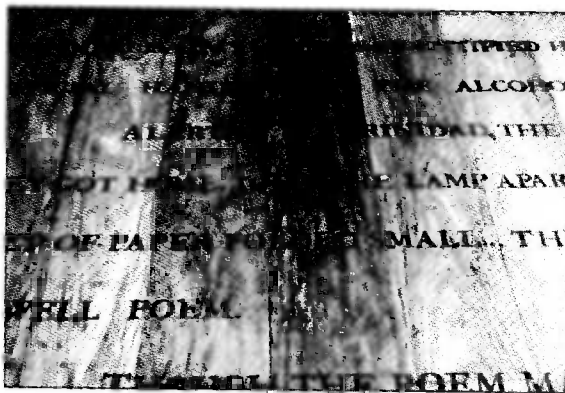


Fig. 10. Detail of text in-laid on wooden floor.

For visitors interacting within the exhibition spaces, objects seem to become mere curiosities, especially for foreign visitors who account for a large percentage of the Shrine’s regular clientele.⁵ How much are they able to relate Rizal’s life and achievements, as represented by these objects, to the person or the cause of the Philippine revolution? The rationale for the “new look” adopted in the Rizal Shrine is not clear even to NHI officials. After the project’s completion, the private team pointed out to one NHI official that a “minimalist” approach to exhibit design is the trend in social history museums abroad. It makes one wonder if it is also applicable to national history museums such as this. The exhibition does not

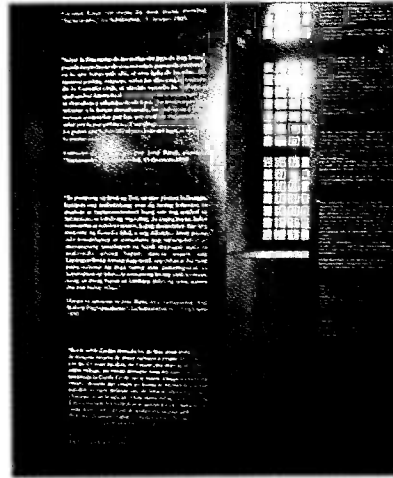
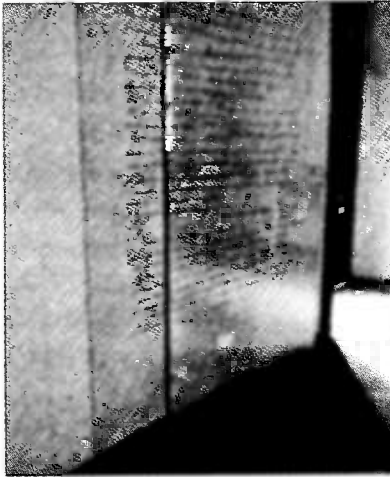


Fig. 11. Examples of text panels found in the Rizal Shrine—etched on glass panel; engraved on iron panels and marble walls

seem to provide sufficient intellectual and emotional space for the viewer to connect Rizal's life or historical significance with his/her own experiences.

Display techniques also tend to overlook conservation concerns and technical considerations of visitor experience. For example, artifacts such as Rizal's garments come in direct contact with varnished wooden surfaces; an air conditioning vent hangs directly over the mural painting; and glass cases contain a mixture of organic materials that require different environmental conditions. Display cases and text panels do not conform to the average height of its viewing public.

The weakness of the exhibit design could have been avoided if an open dialogue took place among historians, educators, and conservators from the NHI, and the exhibition design team. In this case, the consultative process was sacrificed to give way to the intervention of an ad hoc committee created by the national government. After renovation was completed, the NHI was handed back the task to manage the Shrine. They are now left with the responsibility to complement the exhibition with education programs to assist visitors in making sense of the display. But with little support staff available, the minimalist display is left to speak for itself.

CONCLUSION

The two case studies took place under different political administrations, each with its own cultural agenda. The creation of the CCP, the NCCA, and later the ad hoc NCC proves the willingness of government to support cultural production but mainly through entities it can govern and directly control. There is, however, a lack of foresight in assessing the virtues of the cultural infrastructure already put in place by preceding administrations. Cultural institutions have also been closely identified with the personalities of their respective patrons. This attitude and the centralized notion of government support have led to a thickening of our cultural bureaucracy.

In spite of the political turmoil that transpired then, the cultural programs under the Marcos administration represented a major effort from government to establish an organized system of support for the art community. Its programs in the early years have been criticized as leaning towards western ideals and marginalizing more indigenous and traditional expressions. In a larger context, however, the CCP fitted well within the framework of national development then. In many ways, it was instrumental in introducing new strategies and approaches in arts management. But this was made possible because it was granted a privileged status and was assured of a large cache of financial resources. It had a fiscal framework that was short-sighted and temporary.

The changes in political administration gradually revealed the extent of support required to operate a cultural institution like the CCP. Unfortunately, succeeding governments were not willing to

provide the same amount of resources, at least to this institution. The expansion of its programs was an attempt to show a more democratic support for culture and an effort to shake off the stigma of the Marcos regime. Considering the existing network of cultural managers already under the CCP organization, the Aquino and the Ramos administrations could have opted to strengthen support instead of creating a new cultural agency, the NCCA.

The ad hoc status of the NCC further posed problems on the already complex network of cultural agencies. The grand scale of the Philippine Centennial programs may have required a central body to oversee its implementation. But the power granted by the Ramos administration to the NCC obscured the human resources that were already in place for them to use and work with. The centennial celebrations encouraged cooperation between the public and private sectors although it could have transpired on a level playing field. The case of the Rizal Shrine underscores the need to evaluate and explore working relations between these two sectors that will lead to a mutually respectful process of decision-making.

At present, the organizational framework provided by our government for culture may have expanded, but it remains highly centralized. Top-level positions in these agencies are state-appointed and ends with current political administrations—a system which weakens the feasibility of long-term planning. There are more key players now. However, the creation of regional art councils and the inclusion of regional representatives within this centralized network may not necessarily give privilege to the voices of those outside the city centers. In her critique of Philippine state art awards, curator and art critic Ana Labrador provides an apt description of awarding procedures that also reflect the state of our cultural bureaucracy:

Many assume that the added fingers stuck in the cultural organizational pie do not amount to equal participation or access to funds. It may only mean that there is just more space for lobbyists to take on more personnel (74).

The expansion of a state-owned cultural network is not necessarily an effective solution towards development. What it leads to is the thickening of what may already be a convoluted bureaucracy struggling for more government support and subsidy. At the end of

the day, decisions regarding programming and funding approval are still in the hands of bureaucrats situated at the city centers, more often than not Metro Manila. The accountability expected of them is directed more towards the entities that have placed these officials in positions of power and towards those who control the resources rather than to the communities and publics which they serve.

Faced with dwindling resources, our national cultural agencies are still burdened with the responsibility of assuming a lead role in managing culture. This may require adopting new processes in cultural management that, to a large extent, may even lead to devolving responsibilities and power on the part of the national government to the local community. Participation of the private sector is important since this is where resources and expertise can be tapped. Simultaneously, however, the training of cultural managers in government agencies needs to be assured. This is to develop an effective bureaucracy equipped with the technical and theoretical framework needed in museum and cultural management. This, hopefully, will ensure a more constructive basis of cooperation among different entities in our culture sector working towards the production of a negotiated culture for a community and a nation.

ENDNOTES

¹In economic terms, a public good cannot be provided to one consumer without others benefiting from it. Thus, the consumption of art by one consumer will not, in any way, reduce the amounts available to others.

²Other state cultural institutions that followed include the Intramuros Administration (IA), the Museum of Philippine Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, the Museum of Philippine Costumes, the Nayong Pilipino, and the Manila Film Center. Of these, only the IA continues to operate, now under the Department of Tourism.

³This, of course, led to an increase in human resource and funding requirement. But with the adoption of more stringent procedures of accountability, the CCP was subjected to financial constraints—realities that it did not have to deal with before, given the unlimited support extended by the Marcos administration. Within eight years, the Center adopted cost-cutting measures. This was also a result of large-scale programs in infrastructure development and publication.

⁴It was only again in 1998 when the CCP got approval to collect 5% share of the amusement tax collections it had always received from government.

⁵The Rizal Shrine is located in the Walled City of Intramuros. It is one of several historic and cultural places cited in most travel books as a “must” site to visit. It is also one of the most visited destinations of school field trips.

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