
The Filipino Spirit in the Making of Space: An Overview

Emilio U. Ozaeta

Abstract

What makes a place? What makes space? In particular, what makes a space Filipino? This paper proposes that it is not rationality or logic of form that dictates the making of a Filipino architecture but, rather, the unseen core of the Filipino being, *diwa*, which determines the visible form and, more significantly, the intangible space at its core. The author uses a model, derived from Jocano's model of the Filipino value system, to illustrate the various levels at which the *diwa* manifests itself and the corresponding architectural expressions that result. This paper is a work preliminary to a larger study in which the author hopes to derive a theory of Filipino place-making that is more cognizant of a Filipino spirituality of being than the current Western standards by which Filipino architecture is currently being criticized.

Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms provides the following entry: "Architecture, architectonics and their corresponding adjectives architectural and architectonic are often indistinguishable, but they tend to diverge in emphasis. The nouns mean the science of planning and building structures (as churches, houses, bridges, and ships) that involve problems of artistic design, engineering, and adaptation to the ends in view". In relation, Vitruvius holds that an architect must be well versed in the following areas of knowledge: drawing, geometry, optics, history, philosophy, music, medicine and astronomyⁱ. Further, the following statements are made by author Garry Stevens in his work, *The Reasoning Architect: Mathematics, Science and Art in Architecture*: "Consider, for example, the methods that we use to ensure that buildings stay up. First, we assume that there are such methods...second, there is a causal connection between what we do, the materials that we use, and their sizes and the ability of a structure to remain upright...Third, this reason involves properties of the structure, the beam, and the forces acting on it...Fourth, the reasons behind the structure's behavior are discoverable by engineers or scientists...Fifth, we can predict the behavior of the beam...Sixth, we can use all this knowledge to alter the structure, to manipulate it to suit our purposes... (Now consider that) events that fall into patterns or regularities that are the product of rules and natural laws, that an invocation of these rules is the only legitimate explanation of these events, and that these rules can be discovered and understood by humanity, which can then use them to change the worldⁱⁱ."

Given all the above it appears, then, that the popular and, in many institutions, academic view of architecture is one of reason, logic, and rationality. Decisions in the design process should be made by deduction and conscious knowledge. Structures must be built by the reasoning mind and even beauty must be subject to theoretical principles. That is, if the work is to be considered architecture at all.

In contrast, consider the following by Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space*:

"...all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home...The sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and its virtuality, by means of thought and dreamsⁱⁱⁱ".

For millions of years man has made space as an expression of himself, deciding how he is to determine the areas of his cave dwelling or the form of his hut. Rationality may have been used in the practical considerations of shelter from the elements but the impetus, the driving force that dictates the intuitive rightness or wrongness of his space are certainly not dictates of his logic. Why, then, does man make space the way he does?

This paper proposes that it is nothing less than man's innate spirituality that dictates the creation of his tangible and intangible spaces. Individual, cultural, and universal aspects of spirituality, as defined later, are seen to be the forces that determine man's perception of himself, others, and the universe and the impetus to his reflection of this in his architecture. This work hopes to provide a preliminary overview of the topic by examining the phenomenon of Filipino spirituality and its reflections in Filipino architecture. In the following discourse cultural manifestations of this spirituality are discussed and inferential relationships to the ways the Filipino defines his space are determined. In this way a possible direct conclusion may be made on cultural spirituality as the major determinant of the way we, as Filipinos, make space preparatory to further explorations and discourse on the relationship of spirituality and space on individual and, further, universal levels.

Spirit and Space – Some Definitions

Prior to the discussion, it is necessary to make the following definitions of the two critical terms of spirituality and space to provide for a clearer understanding of the discourse.

The following definitions of the term space are given in Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language: "1. The unlimited or indefinitely great three-dimensional expanse in which all material objects are located and all events occur. 2. The portion or extent of this in a given instance; extent or room in three dimensions: The space occupied by a body."

Norberg-Schulz provides definitions of differing concepts of space:

"The pragmatic space of physical action, the perceptual space of immediate orientation, the existential space which forms man's stable image of his environment, the cognitive space of his physical world and the abstract space of pure logical relations...From remote times man has not only acted in space and thought about space, but he has also created space to express the structure of his world as a real imago mundi. We may call this creation expressive or artistic space^{iv}."

Space created to express man's world, then, shall be the operative definition of the term space to be used in this work.

Again, Webster's provides the following definitions of the term spirit:

"1. The principle of conscious life; the vital principle in man animating the body or mediating between body and soul...9.The divine influence as an agency working in the heart of man." Anthony Lawlor in his work, *A Home for the Soul*, gives a clearer and more appropriate meaning for the term through his use of the word *soul*: "Soul is the force that animates thoughts, words and actions...Soul is the glue that links mind to body, body to home, home to earth, and earth to cosmos...Soul is the spiritual well from which our thoughts and actions pour^v."

A Conceptual Framework

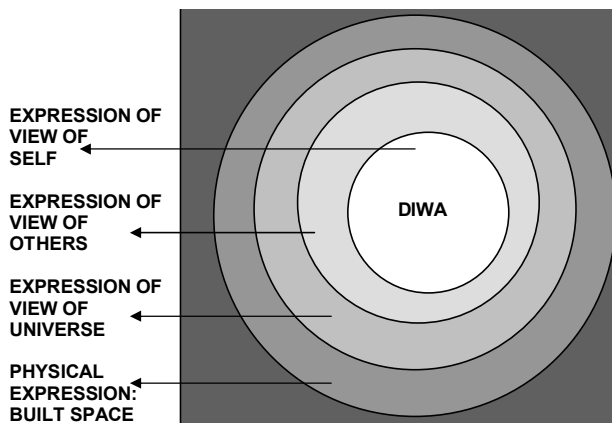


Figure 1 - Diagram of Expressions of the Spirit

In order to clearly understand the relationship of the Filipino spirit to his created physical world it is necessary to provide a referential framework for discussion. It will be seen in later descriptions of aspects of Filipino spirituality that the Filipino's spirit or diwa emanates from his very self to affect his view of himself, his relationships to other beings and then to the universe. It is this manifestation of his diwa that also determines his acts, in particular, his creative acts foremost of which is the act of making space.

In sum, *diwa* radiates from the core of the Filipino's being to affect his larger and larger worlds finally manifesting itself as physical matter in the creation of his built space. It is said that the creation of the universe came about in a parallel manner; that the essence of the Spirit began by manifesting Itself in Creation. "Life is the process through which God creates Itself, and then experiences the creation. This process of creation is ongoing and eternal. It is happening all the 'time.' Relativity and physicality are the tools with which God works. Pure energy (what you call spirit) is What God Is. This essence is truly the Holy Spirit. By a process through which energy becomes matter, spirit is embodied in physicality.^{vi}"

Filipino Spirituality and Value System

Using the given definition that the spirit is that which animates thought, words, and actions, it is appropriate to examine the value system of the Filipino. In his work, *Filipino Value System: A Cultural Definition*, Jocano states that, "Values are made up of assumptions and beliefs which our culture endorses as appropriate bases for responses to events, thoughts and facts. Values are the sources and reasons why we see and do things the way we do^{vii}."

Values, then, are intuitive thoughts and beliefs that determine our words and actions. Given this, it may then be seen that spirituality is that which gives rise to our values which, in turn, affect our behavior.

Jocano categorizes the Filipino value system into three; *diwa* or the spiritual core, *asal* or the expressive core, and *halaga* or the evaluative core^{viii}. Relating this to our conceptual framework of spirituality we see that it is the *diwa* which is the essence or spirit while *halaga* reflects the way the Filipino views himself and *asal* is the behavioral manifestation of the way he relates to others. The Filipino value system, therefore, embodies the same componential framework as that of the Filipino spirit. It may be appropriate, therefore, that discussion of the aspects of the Filipino's spirit be done through a parallel discussion of the Filipino's values.

Jocano's *diwa* refers to the "inner core" which lies at the heart of the Filipino's *kalooban*. All personal and emotional feelings arise from this. "It holds together different elements of existence and transforms them into one functioning whole called *buhay* or life^{ix}. This is the same as our stated definition of the spirit and therefore may be said that the Filipino *diwa* is also the Filipino spirit.

The Filipino Spirit as Expressed Through the Self

From the *diwa* emanate creative expressions of self. This is typified in the next core of *halaga*. This level refers to the qualities we attach to ideas, observations and events and is, therefore, an intrinsic expression of how the Filipino views himself^x. This manifests itself in several ways such as the Filipino thinking patterns.

Mercado records the following usages of the Tagalog word *loob*:

1. intellectual as in *isaloob* (to bear something in mind)
2. volitional as in *kusang loob* (voluntary)
3. emotional as in *magbago ng loob* (change of attitude or feeling)
4. ethical as in *utang na loob* (gratitude)

Filipino thinking, then, is non-compartmentalized and holistic. In language, one word will suffice for many uses yet meaning is clearly understandable within the given context. Interiority is indivisible and intrinsic to the Filipino spirit^{xi}.

Other thinking patterns include the Filipino traditional usage of poetic speech. Symbols play an important role in conveying messages as seen in the *bugtong* and *salawikain*. Phenomena are better understood when metaphorically compared to known objects, actions or events (*Nakaakit ang iyong pangalan sa aking palad*).

A further expression of Filipino holistic thinking is his “non-scientific” acceptance of things. The Filipino does not distinguish between subject and object; he and his world are one. This may explain why there is a tendency not to ask questions in classrooms and exhibits, for example. It is not that the Filipino is shy but that he accepts things as they are. This is even further expressed by his tendency to imitate^{xii}. Thus we have peculiarities such as an “Elvis Presley of the Philippines” where identification is so complete to the point of unabashed imitation. A deeper manifestation of this is the observed phenomenon of an elderly widow who would wear her deceased husband’s men’s watch for some time, not only in memory, but also as an unconscious expression of connection.

The Filipino Spirit as Expressed through Relationships

Expressions of spirituality further manifest themselves in expressions of views of one’s relationship to others. From looking at himself, the Filipino now considers his connection to his *kapwa*. This is seen in Jocano’s level of *asal* or behavior towards others.

Jocano notes that there are three behavioral aspects of *asal*. *Kapwa* refers to the importance given to harmonious relationships or *pakikipagkapwa-tao*. The Filipino believes that it is desirable to be treated as a human equal. (*Pantay-pantay ang tingin*). He believes that *kanya-kanyahan* is a negative trait and that family, clan and group, are ordered priorities in his life. The individual, in many cases, is subordinate to the desires or requirements of a larger self.

Damdamin refers to the emotional requirements of our relationship system. This is our guiding criterion used to understand others and to judge whether one is good or bad (*Ano’ng dating niya sa iyo?*).

Dangal refers to the Filipino dignity and social honor. Related to this are our concepts of *pagkabahala* or concern for others, *paggalang* or respect and *utang na loob* or moral obligation.^{xiii}

The Filipino view of relationships with others, then, is an expression of oneness to the point of subordination of the self. Filipino dramas stereotypically contain such classic lines as, “*Ano na lang ang sasabihin ng ibang tao? Nasira ang pangalan ng ating pamilya!*” And the Filipino teenager will always find an outlet in his *barkada* as he begins to expand his view of the world from himself to his family to his larger peer group. Unity with others, it seems, is no less valuable than unity with one’s spirit.

The Filipino Spirit as Expressed through View of the Universe

From his relationships to others the Filipino now looks at his relationship to the world and to the universe.

Mercado records that the Filipino also has a non-dualistic concept of place, that is, he measures place not so much in objective numbers but in terms of meaningfulness to himself. Thus he identifies with place so much that he is not able to stand apart from it, viewing it objectively but becomes one with it that he must view it subjectively. Mercado writes, “A meaningful place can be the center of one’s life, and other places are measured by it^{xiv}.” It is not uncommon, then, that on being asked by a child how much farther a long trip would take a parent might answer, “*Isang tulong na lang*” because this is how both would identify with the place at the end of the journey.

The Filipino does not have a “mastery-over-nature” orientation unlike the Westerner. He is at one with nature, which is why the Filipino is not clock-conscious. The Westerner seeks to master nature by creating calendars and diaries while the Filipino living in remote barangays may not know how long he has lived on this earth^{xv}.

And, “Unlike the Westerner who dichotomizes the sacred and the profane, the Filipino does not have such dualism. For him the sacred and the profane co-exist although separately distinguished^{xvi}. The Filipino’s natural relationship with the Other World is such that he sees it as part of his reality. The unseen, *dwende*, *aswang*, *multo* and others are such a part of his world that even the unseen *Bathala* does not require a special place of worship. Early recorders of our history have noted that the Filipino did not build temples as part of his architecture. *Bathala* apparently does not live in one spot but everywhere.

The Filipino Spirit and Oneness

It may be seen, then, that the underlying concept behind the Filipino spirit is that of Oneness. He has a unified view of himself, his *kalooban*. He readily identifies with his larger self: his family, clan, or group. His view of place, time and the Other World is also non-dualistic, with no separation between himself and the other but at once instinctively one with the universe.

Oneness is that which characterizes the Filipino *diwa*.

It colors every aspect of the way the Filipino lives. As the operative principle working in his spirit, it may be assumed that this same spirit of Oneness governs every nuance of his behavior. It will be seen that the physical expressions of his spirit are likewise governed by this same concept.

The Filipino Spirit in the *Balai*

Because the home is the first built space that one creates, *diwa* will most readily be experienced in this building type.

The *balai* is the vernacular term for 'house' in pre-Spanish Philippines. From academic surveys it appears that the *balai* of the many cultures around the country share many similarities. In general, it is a multipurpose, single-room dwelling raised above the ground on stilts. Its one room appears to serve as eating, cooking and sleeping areas all at once. Made of readily available materials, it readily observes the general climate of the region by having features that allow the users to maintain a certain level of comfort chiefly through natural ventilation^{xvii}.

It is readily seen that the instinctively-created *balai* easily reflects the Filipino spirit of Oneness. In terms of the Filipino's view of himself, the one-room home appears to emanate from this holistic view. Because his *loob* is at once one and varied, so too is his space which is one in physicality but varied in its use. The Filipino sees no need to compartmentalize the uses of his space because the internal, mental areas are all that is needed. He knows which area of the space is used for what therefore order still exists in himself. The Filipino lives within himself and he finds order there.

His relationship with others is physically manifested in the relationship of his dwelling to other dwellings. Arranged in close proximity to the others, the *balai* does not mark off its

surrounding territory with fences but rather shares an unstated understanding with its neighbors as to where the space ends and others begin. Sharing of space thus becomes an expression of oneness with others and a larger reflection of the oneness within himself. His unified private home-space is reflected in the larger unified public space where order is realized internally.

The Filipino view of the universe is seen in the openness of his dwelling to the outdoors, through its perennially open door and windows and its exterior partitions which manage to let the outside in through its floor, walls and roof.

The outside and the inside become one because the Filipino will not allow himself to be separated from nature. He is neither master nor slave to nature but works in harmony with, and a clear understanding of, the ways of the universe. One space is not separate from the other as one space is not sacred and the other profane. Place and time, then, are holistic elements of the Filipino reality and this universal view is seen in the Filipino space that is, in a sense, "no-space."

The Filipino Spirit in the *Bahay na Bato*

The *bahay na bato*, it is now agreed, is a derivation of the original *balai*. The term refers to the type of residential dwelling prevalent during the period of Spanish colonization of the country. Most often found in now-urbanized areas, the *bahay na bato* has evolved into a grander structure reflective of the upper-class tastes of the Hispanized upper-class Filipino.

Although it is now constructed of hardier materials, the physical features of the *bahay na bato* still retain similar expressions of the Filipino spirit in its design.

The Filipino expression of oneness in his view of himself may again be seen in the fact that, although specific and separate physical rooms are now designated for different functions, divisions between such rooms are psychologically transparent. This is seen in the open and curtained doorways and latticework that grace the upper openings of the partitions. Rodrigo Perez writes, "Space in the *bahay na bato* is not enclosed or contained...In the *bahay na bato* we find space surrounded by space, or islands of space in seas of space^{xviii}".

The Filipino spirit as expressed in relationships with others may also be seen in the wide sliding

windows which wrap around the house and allow the occupants to sit at the window and indulge in a favorite pastime, that of watching the street life below. (This was so much a part of life then that special tall chairs were designed for the express purpose of allowing the occupants to sit at a comfortable height while watching). The houses themselves were arranged around a focal open space, the *plaza*, which allowed a sense of unity through a common orientation.

The Filipino spirit of place, time and oneness with the universe can still be seen in the way the *bahay na bato* opens itself to nature, much as in the way the *balai* did. Windows were not only wide open but also enhanced with *ventanillas* to further let the outside in. Breezes were encouraged to flow through the house and from everywhere could be seen at least a glimpse of the outdoors.

Again, oneness can be found in the holistic way outside and inside, and therefore place and time, appear to merge with one another.

The Filipino Spirit in the Squatter Shanty

With the coming of the Americans, the notion of duality of outlook entered the Filipino psyche. Perhaps it was because of our holistic view of our relationship with our *kapwa* coupled with the American strategy of educating their little brown brothers that we readily assimilated this. Today we find Filipino versions of Western room specializations: living room, dining room, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom, even maids' rooms and study. Although this was already being made known to the upper classes during the Spanish era, it was during the American period that this became the ideal for all. Not only do the dwellings of the rich embody these features but so too those of the middle and lower income classes. Room designations and configurations share similarities among the houses of Corinthian Gardens and U.P. Teachers' Village.

Perhaps it is only in the urban squatter shanties, which are not designed for them by others, that the instinctive spirit may be found in a form evolved from that of the *balai* and the *bahay na bato*. This is not to say that this same spirit is not found in our contemporary architect-designed dwellings but rather that, because the shanty spaces were made from an instinctive impulse and not from rational, academic

methods, a clearer view of the Filipino spirit may be glimpsed from this example.

Perez writes, "The one-room squatter house resembles the primitive one-room dwelling where minimal space served a multiplicity of uses - sleeping, cooking, eating and storage^{xix}." This single unity of space may reflect the Filipino's instinctive holistic view of himself. Although rooted in poverty leaving the users with no choice but to have only one room, the users' desire for additional enclosed spaces merely reflect the learned response to Western intervention by allowing them to believe that what was taught to them was the "correct" way.

Similarly the presence of whole colonies of squatter shanties may reflect the Filipino spirit of oneness in relationships. "Misery loves company" is an apt saying.

But to open up the dwelling to nature may no longer be pragmatically feasible as the surroundings of such squatter dwellings are usually inhospitable and unhealthy, forcing the users to barricade themselves against the oppressive outdoors. Perhaps it is here that the Filipino spirit finds least expression although it may be observed that the Filipino still manages to obtain even one potted plant to symbolize his relationship to the universe.

Conclusion

It is clearly seen, therefore, that the Filipino spirit, this spirit of Oneness emanates from the Filipino *diwa*, finds expression in views of the individual self, in views of relationships to others and in views of relationships to the universe. And that this same spirit finally takes created, material form in the instinctively defined spaces made by the Filipino. From the indigenous *balai* created without academic rationality, to the *bahay na bato* designed as an evolutionary form from the former, to the contemporary squatter shanty, much diluted but still retaining vestiges, the Filipino spirit has managed to survive in its principle of Oneness - with self, with others, and with the universe.

Felipe de Leon gave the following assumptions on the Filipino culture in his lecture in 1995 at the National Symposium on Filipino Architecture and Design. These appear to be nothing less than statements of the Oneness of the Filipino spirit and these are:

1. Life is an integrated whole; we share each other's concerns.
2. All things are connected.

3. Everything is alive.
4. Life is a creative process.

Reality is not finite. It grows, expands, changes, and evolves.

From these we may also conclude that the spirit of the Filipino may not be extinguished even in the face of poverty or foreign intervention but, rather, that it may change and evolve into different expressions of the same spirit. Walsch writes, "The soul's greatest desire is to experience higher and higher aspects of itself. And so it seeks to move upward, not downward, on the evolutionary scale, until it experiences what has been called nirvana - total Oneness with the All.^{xx}" In this desire to express itself in physical form, in this case defined space, the spirit also continually seeks evolutionary growth in order to achieve the ultimate Oneness.

This study of the relationship of the Filipino spirit to his space concludes that this innate spirit is not so far removed from the true essence of being, that is, it is in tune with the impulses of the soul in all its expressions. Much, if not all, of what we do finds its root in our spirituality which is the essence of who we truly are. We may take solace from the fact that the developing state of this nation has not completely dampened or suppressed the clarity of the spirit's expressions and that it will eventually evolve into a form still truly Filipino.

The preliminary nature of this study is cognizant of the fact that this is intended to be merely an overview of the topic of the relationship to spirit and space. The establishment of this fact from a cultural, racial level may be indicative of the possibility of establishing this same conceptual fact on an individual level, that is, the determination of the spiritual roots of how we as individuals make our personal spaces, and on a universal level which is the determination of the spiritual roots of how the human race as a whole defines its spaces. An understanding of the ultimate bases of architecture, then, may lead us to a parallel understanding of who we are and how we can create nothing less than a Heaven on earth.

When we create Place with Spirit in mind and in Remembrance of Who We Are then are we truly creating our Heaven on this Earth.

- (Unnamed source)

Endnotes

- ⁱ *Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms*, pp. 5-12.
- ⁱⁱ Garry Stevens, *The Reasoning Architect: Mathematics, Science and Art in Architecture*, p. 5.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 5.
- ^{iv} Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, NY: Prager, n.d., p. 11.
- ^v Anthony Lawlor, *A Home for the Soul*. pp. 23-24.
- ^{vi} Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations With God*, vol. 3. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 1998, p. 305.
- ^{vii} F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Value System*, Metro Manila: Punlad Research House, 1997 p. 16.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*, pp. 16-28.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, pp. 87-90.
- ^x *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*, pp. 53-66.
- ^{xii} Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD. *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*. Tacloban: Divine Word, 1976, pp. 79-82.
- ^{xiii} F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Value System*, Metro Manila: Punlad Research House, 1997, pp. 59-83.
- ^{xiv} Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD. *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*. Tacloban: Divine Word, 1976, pp.127-128.
- ^{xv} *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- ^{xvii} Ma. Corazon A. Hila, Rodrigo D. Perez III and Julian E. Dacanay, *Balai Vernacular: Images of the Filipino's Private Space*, Manila: Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas: 1992, pp. 14-16.
- ^{xviii} *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ^{xix} *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- ^{xx} Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations With God*, vol. 3. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 1998, p. 135.