

REVIEWS

BOOK

The convents of Manila: Globalized architecture during the Iberian Union

By Pedro Luengo Gutiérrez

Translated from Spanish by Concepción Rosales

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Introduction and brief summary of the work

*The convents of Manila*¹ is a translation of Pedro Luengo Gutiérrez's *Arquitectura conventual en Manila, 1571–1645*.² Submitted in 2008, this was his thesis for a *Diploma de Estudios Avanzados* (equivalent to a Master's degree) at the Department of Art History of the Universidad de Sevilla in Spain. To give this thesis an academic frame, this University is just a block away from the *Archivo General de Indias*, which comprises the greatest collection of documents on the Spanish empire. It is also considered the home base of María Lourdes Díaz Trechuelo, who pioneered Philippine Studies in Spain way back in the 1950s with her dissertation, "Arquitectura Española en Filipinas, 1565–1800." Luengo is currently an associate professor in his home University.

Luengo's project aims to present a panorama of church structures built by the religious orders in Manila—from Legazpi's foundation of the City in 1571 until its virtual destruction due to the earthquake of 1645. He proposes a global perspective toward this end, which is complemented by studies into cultural transfer processes. The time frame coincides with the so-called "Iberian Union," a time when Spain and Portugal were united from 1580 to 1640.³

Luengo's carefully constructed panorama is laid out in chapter one (The historical context of Southeast Asia). Manila architecture during this period was a result not only of local and Spanish knowledge and efforts but also of those of cultures near and far, including those of China, Japan, Indochina, and the islands of Southeast Asia.⁴ Population movements account for the transmission of cultural

processes. For example, one of the architects of the Forbidden City in China came from a Siamese province in the fifteenth century but is now a part of Vietnam (Luengo 2018, 13). Luengo posits that the term *sangley* could just as well refer to other non-Chinese who resided in the Parian (2018, 7). Moreover, as explained in the Conclusion, it was the Iberian Union that facilitated the close relationships between the Portuguese (Macao) and Spanish (Manila) at that time.

Chapters two to six apply the global perspective in seeking evidence of cultural transfer from the meticulous reconstruction of religious architecture (except for that of the cathedrals) during Manila's first century. In particular, chapter two deals with the local labor and materials, the infusion of Chinese building techniques into the process, and the arrival of Iberian master builders or engineers. Chapters three to six provide detailed discussions of the significant buildings erected in Manila by the five religious orders at that time. Although these chapters focus mainly on Intramuros, a complementary digression to Mexico is also included. The influence of these constructions throughout the islands is hypothesized in each chapter, and such discussions certainly open the door for subsequent research on this topic.

Chapter three (The convents of the Augustinian friars) presents an extensive discussion of the church and monastery of San Pablo (popularly known as San Agustin), originally built by the Augustinians. Luengo tries to peel away the later accretions to highlight the details of what may be the original seventeenth century constructions. The church and monastery of San Nicolás de Tolentino are discussed in the latter part of the chapter. These structures were built by the Augustinian Recollects (popularly but not properly known as the Recollects, there being other congregations with their own "Recollects"). Chapter four (Franciscan convents and hospitals), discusses the edifices of the Franciscans: the mother church and monastery and the Chapel of the Third Order, the monastery of the nuns of Santa Clara, and three hospitals meant to serve the Spaniards, the natives, and the lepers, respectively. In Chapter five (Convents and establishments of the Society of Jesus), the vicissitudes of the Jesuit church, convent, and the College of Manila are linked with the developments in Macao. Chapter six (Dominican convents and hospitals), the final chapter, deals with the iconic buildings of the Order of Preachers, namely, the Santo Domingo church and monastery, San Juan de Letran, the Holy Rosary College (later University of Santo Tomas) and the convent of the sisters of Santa Catalina de Sena, all located in Intramuros; the hospital of San Gabriel (built outside the walls of Intramuros); and the Convent of San Jacinto, Mexico, the midway station for Dominicans bound for or coming from the Orient.⁵

Sources

The rich documentation was sourced from archives in Spain, mainly the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, but also from the respective repositories of the religious orders in Madrid, Valladolid, Ávila, and Navarra. Although little archival work

was conducted in the Philippines, digitized materials from the National Archives of the Philippines were accessed in the Center of Social Sciences in Madrid. The Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois, also yielded some materials. The appendix includes transcriptions of key documents from Seville.

In the section on the Dominicans, Luengo rues that the foundation document of the University of Santo Tomas cannot be found and may have been stolen (Luengo 2018). Fortunately, this document has been kept since time immemorial in the Archives of said University, still accessible through the *signature* mentioned by Luengo in *Libros tomo 48, Litera D*. Research on the venerable Archivo de la Universidad de Santo Tomás can indeed complement or confirm much of Luengo's suppositions. However, as all serious researchers know, real archival work is never finished and should always be taken as a "work in progress."

With his work, Luengo has gifted Filipino researchers with a mine of new data taken from the archives. However, certain misspellings or mis-accentuations of place-names could have been avoided with just a little more fieldwork.⁶ For instance, some places mentioned to have existed in the late sixteenth century, such as Novaliches, Camarines Norte, and La Union, were not established until the nineteenth century.⁷ Adobe was described but not named in the section on building materials,⁸ and then later used in the rest of the work.

Some factual errors can also be found, and these are indicated in the footnotes for the information of the readers.⁹ However, it is sometimes difficult to make sense of certain texts in the Spanish original.¹⁰

Luengo's points to ponder

Through meticulous archival research and re-reading of earlier treatises, Luengo is able to construct a chronological development of each of the sites mentioned in this book. Thus, this work can be considered a solid contribution not only to knowledge of Philippine architecture, but also to the development of approaches to the study of a multilayered culture, such as that of the Philippines. As such, he qualifies Manila architecture of the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries as having a global quality. This can be attributed to the City's links with several overseas movements as well as its varied ethnicities, many of whom were themselves products of crisscrossing cultures (such as the Portuguese in China or the *Indios Chinos* in Mexico).

According to Luengo, Eastern features—as pioneered by the Jesuits—were applied not out of a taste for the exotic nor because the workers were adept at these, but because of "a fertile encounter of the theological order... The Jesuits went from the strategy of eradicating the beliefs to one of assimilation. They recognized the clear points in common between the two faiths and highlighted them" (Luengo 2018, 165). According to this view, the spread of the pagoda bell tower design in Philippine churches is a manifestation of such a symbiosis. This phenomenon

has important implications for our understanding of, for example, the carving of demon heads in truss supports and refectory table legs.

However, the presence of certain designs or the use of certain materials does not merit a classification based on the source of said designs or materials. Luengo debunks the so-called *pseudomudejar* or Moorish influence imagined by previous authors (e.g., on such churches as Carcar or Malate) just because bricks or wooden roofs were used (2018, 14).¹¹

According to Luengo, the Franciscans were pioneers of a mixed indigenous–Western architecture, arguing that they were possibly the first order to entrust the management of construction to the natives. Sometimes, however, Luengo's statements seem a little premature, thereby necessitating further research. Still on the Franciscans: “All their [seventeenth century Franciscan] edifices were very far removed from the poor quality examples of construction [of the other orders] that were known” (2018, 138).

Concluding the book, Luengo argues that the Iberian Union allowed a fruitful circulation of models and solutions in Asia, facilitated by the movements of patrons, architects, and devotions. Furthermore, the Spanish, Portuguese, and Mexican influences were enriched with the traditions of the indigenes, the Chinese, and even the citizens of other Asian nations; hence, the resulting architecture cannot simply be called “Fil-Hispanic” or *Hispano-Filipina*. Rather, Luengo proposes the use of the term “Philippine architecture,” which is akin to what the Augustinian scholar Pedro Galende called the “Philippine style.” However, one can still appreciate a distinct term for Philippine architecture during the Spanish period. Mexicans call the period under the Spaniards as the Vice-regal period, hence, the use of the terms *arquitectura virreinal*, *arte del virreinato*, and so on.

On the 2018 translation and publication

The footnotes are richer and longer in the Spanish original than in the Ateneo version. Some of the footnotes in the 2008 version are reduced to in-text citations in the 2018 version, with some loss of annotations, which might appear pedantic to some readers but invaluable to serious researchers. In the 2018 version, the sequence of paragraphs was changed and some paragraphs disappeared, although many new paragraphs appeared in recompense. Finally, a Conclusion was added, which was absent in the original 2008 version.

The Ateneo de Manila University Press is to be commended for such an important undertaking as the translation and publication of Luengo's *The convents of Manila*. As this is a rare Spanish-to-English project, some misspellings and mistranslations are inevitable, especially because the present work used a great deal of architectural terms.¹² There also exists the perpetual (Filipino) problem with

Spanish names.¹³ As stated previously, some place-names, local words, or dates in the old version (Luengo 2008) were erroneously presented in the 2018 version.¹⁴

In 2019, *The convents of Manila* won the John C. Kaw Prize for Best Book in History, during the 38th National Book Awards, an annual undertaking of the National Book Development Board and the Manila Critics Circle. Although truly deserved, the History Award should not “box” the book from scholars of population movements, architecture, religion, art, geography, linguistics, botany, and studies of each of the cultures in and around the Philippines, among others.

Like an intricate Bach fugue¹⁵ or a well-seasoned *adobo*, one discovers something new upon every re-reading of Luengo’s *The convents of Manila*. Luengo is passionate in promoting research on the heritage architecture of the Philippines, especially during the Spanish period. Before and after the completion of his thesis, he published several articles on his favorite theme. Two books followed in 2012 and 2013, respectively, both on Manila architecture in the eighteenth century. It would be well worth the trouble to have these two books translated (with the safeguards pointed out here) and published; the same goes for his set of articles, which could make up a complete Luengo anthology.

A parting shot

To connect with this journal’s title, the way to achieve change in society is good research. In the Philippine setting, the current anti-Spanish bias reflected in the consistent negative attitude toward the Spanish period of Philippine history, along with the consequent underdevelopment of studies during that era hamper the Filipinos’ completion of their identity. This anti-Spanish bias masquerading as nationalism is deflecting the Filipinos from learning Spanish, the language in which majority of the documents (including those of the Filipino patriots) from that period have been written.¹⁶ Ironically, foreign scholars with cultural backgrounds that are less connected to Spain, such as Russians, Australians, Japanese, and Chinese, are learning much more about the Philippines’ Spanish-era history than Filipino scholars. Their findings are published in their own languages, to our detriment. (Translations into English are not always to be trusted, as has been all too proven in analyses of the famous Blair and Robertson series.) Moreover, although they do not necessarily love the Spaniards, the Latin Americans have enriched their identity due to the fact that they have direct access to their sources of history, which are written in Spanish. Given the abundant but endangered Spanish language archival resources that can be found in the Philippines, our local scholars should prioritize these.

Endnotes

- ¹ Pedro Luengo Gutiérrez, *The convents of Manila: Globalized architecture during the Iberian Union* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2018).
- ² Pedro Luengo Gutiérrez, "Arquitectura conventual en Manila 1571–1645" (Master's thesis, Departamento de Historia del Arte, Universidad de Sevilla, 2008).
- ³ Curiously, this Iberian Union, which forms part of the title, is not explained in the book, although it is mentioned in the Conclusion section. It is not even in the Spanish original (Luengo 2008), a copy of which has been sent to the reviewer by Luengo himself in 2014.
- ⁴ Luengo carefully included the rendering of the many names of Chinese persons, places, and institutions in Chinese characters.
- ⁵ Each of the other religious orders had similar way stations or hospices in Mexico, all maintained by their respective mother houses in Manila (not in Spain). The paragraph on the Franciscan house in Mexico, San Agustín de las Cuevas (Luengo 2008, 137), is not included in the Ateneo version. The Augustinian house in Mexico City is now a hotel, but it still maintains its facade with the name and image of Santo Tomás de Villanueva.
- ⁶ Wrong accents on place-names in the Spanish text were not corrected in the translation: Meycauayán for Meycauyan (Luengo 2018, 29, 107), Tambobón for Tambobon (2018, 51), etc. Thankfully, some erroneous accents in the original were omitted in the translation (for example, the final accent was taken from Baclayon, which should be Báclayon).
- ⁷ Paco is later named "Dilao," which should have been originally used (Luengo 2008, 118; Luengo 2018, –119); today's province of Rizal should have been identified as the province of Tondo (Luengo 2008, 118–; Luengo 2018, 120; Rizal has been identified as the re-named province of Morong, which had been formed in the nineteenth century from parts of Laguna and Tondo). In the Spanish version (and therefore repeated in the English), some place-names may have been mistranscriptions, such as Bacaa (possibly Bigaa) and Malues (possibly Molucas) (Luengo 2008, 1078–1109, Luengo 2018, 107). A few geographical slip-ups can also be found: "*en provincias mas alejadas como Tondo*" (Luengo 2008, 140); "the more distant provinces... like in Tondo" (Luengo 2018, 141; Tondo in fact was the province nearest Manila).
- ⁸ Adobe in the Philippines refers to volcanic tuff that is quarried, whereas in the Latin American context, it refers to a building block of dried mud and straw.
- ⁹ "This makes one think that it must have formed part of the facade because the Dominicans did not include it" (Luengo 2018, 162) vs. "*No es tenida en cuenta por Huerta... por lo que no incluye el dominico*" (Luengo 2014, 165–166); Luengo was referring to *Huerta*, who was not Dominican but Franciscan. "Jeronima de la Asunción, ... who much later would be canonized" (Luengo 2008, 120; Luengo 2018, 122); actually the process for her canonization is still ongoing.
- ¹⁰ One cannot make out the sense between the statement that the Parian church did not use a single nail (*clavo*) like the houses in Nagasaki, and the footnote that the houses in that Japanese city had their crossbeams nailed (*se clavan*) above the sheets, while the whole structure was assembled with nails (*clavos*), which also served as ornaments (Luengo 2008, 202; Luengo 2018, 205).
- ¹¹ Actually, the basis of labelling these structures as "Moorish" was more stylistic, such as "minaret-shaped bell-towers" rather than based on what kinds of materials were used.
- ¹² The following are some corrections placed here for the benefit of researchers and other interested readers. *Cuerpo*, referring to the bell tower or the facade, is "module" (Luengo 2018, 64–164),

but can be better translated as "level" or "story." *Recuadro*, within the capitals on the wall, is "tabernacle" (2018, 78), but would be better understood as "panel" or "rectangle." *Lienzo del muro* (Luengo 2008, 155) is "canvas wall" (Luengo 2018, 154), but the sense is a length or section of a wall of the main chapel. *Portada de tres calles y dos cuerpos articulados por pilastras* (Luengo 2008, 165) refers to "a facade of three horizontal rows and two vertical rows, joined by plaster" (Luengo 2018, 161), but it should really be a facade of three vertical bays and two rows, articulated by pilasters. A confusing sentence about stone construction can be found (italics supplied): "Rules of the order prohibited the use of *stonework*, which . . . leads one to believe that *masonry* was used" (2018, 98). The original Spanish terms (Luengo 2008, 98–99), namely, *cantería* (cut stone-work) and *mampuesto* (uncut stone or rubble work) clarify the sentence.

¹³ Manuel y Pérez (2008, v) should be Manuel Herbella y Pérez, whereas Gómez Pérez Bustamante (2008, 18) should be Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas.

¹⁴ *Almon*, *apitong*, *narig*, and *tangile* (2008, 40) appear as *almond*, *piton*, *nary*, and *tangible* (Luengo 2018, 35). Bagnotan and Baratao, correctly spelled in Luengo 2008 (186, 188), are misspelled in the translation (Bacniotan and Baratoa, in pages 188 and 189 respectively). The year 1601 in Luengo 2018 (96) should be 1610 (Luengo 2008, 98).

¹⁵ Pedro Luengo also plays the organ at the cathedral of Sevilla. Personal communication, 2019.

¹⁶ As seen by Resil Mojares, "Nationalism ... [is] a straitjacket blocking the emergence of new thinking in the field of Philippine studies." See Karlo Mikhail Mongaya, "Militant struggles and anti-imperialism in Resil Mojares' *c*," *Philippine Studies Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints* 2019, 67, nos. 3–4: 584.

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