

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Architecture in the Philippines, by Klassen

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Philippine Studies vol. 35, no. 2 (1987) 270–274

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The stories in this collection speak of conflicts—the conflict between tradition and modernity (“The Male Chauvinist and the Liberated Woman”; “Death of a House”); between idealism and reality (“Maria Clara”); between virtue and moral turpitude (“The Bottle,” “Petrona, the Housemaid,” “Reflections in the Water,” “The White Horse of Alih”); between parents and offspring (“The Doll,” “Old Man and Old Woman at the Mill”); and between rule and practice (“The Twelfth of May”). Man’s relationship with women, with his family and with society, is also embodied in the stories—from a rather negative view. The man and woman relationship is reduced to a meaningless level with sex as the prime factor in the relationship. Enriquez’s picture of man’s varied relationships shows them undermined by modernity, idealism and moral turpitude.

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ARCHITECTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES: FILIPINO BUILDING IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT. By Winand Klassen. Cebu City: University of San Carlos, 1986. xiv, 435 pages.

Fr. Winand Klassen, S.V.D. is known to Manilaños because of his occasional lectures at the Goethe Institut on architecture in the Philippines and in the West. *Architecture in the Philippines* makes available to a wider range of readers the information and insights that Klassen presents, lucidly and forcefully, in his amply illustrated lectures.

The book’s six chapters—“How it All began: Primitive Architecture in the Philippines”; “The Bahay Kubo: Vernacular Architecture in the Philippines”; “Three Hundred Years Under Spain: Spanish Architecture in the Philippines”; “Six Hundred Years of Islam: Muslim Architecture in the Philippines”; “Fifty Years with Uncle Sam: The American Period”; and “A Nation At Last: Contemporary Architecture in the Philippines”—might give the reader the impression that this is a history of Philippine Architecture. It is not. To quote the author, “This is not a history of Philippine architecture, although historical portions appear in it” (p. xiii). Nor is it an attempt to define that elusive quality of Filipino-ness” in local architecture. “This study is about architecture in the Philippines, not about Philippine architecture, to avoid for the moment the burden of defining what Philippine architecture is” (p. 10).

What then is this book about? We can describe it as a work of architectural criticism that hopes to affect building designs in the Philippines so as to make them more humane and humanizing. Or as the author puts it, “As before (referring to a previously published work on Western architecture) it is again written from a designer’s point of view, with the intention of

narrowing the gap between architectural historian and critic and the practicing architect" (p. xiv).

To accomplish his objective, Klassen situates buildings and architecture within the twofold context of Philippine and world culture. To accomplish the first task of contextualization, he enters into lengthy historical excursus and discussions of the anthropological significance of different architectural artifacts. He spends time, too, narrating the lives and careers of prominent architects in the Philippines—architects being the artificers. Toward the second task, the author relates architectural developments in the Philippines with "similar developments elsewhere, without necessarily implying that there was always a direct influence of one on the other" (p. xiv). Where there are notable historical influences, Klassen argues his point as an experienced teacher would, drawing for example a direct line of influence from Philip II's lifestyle and the architecture he inspired to the laying out of the streets and plazas of Intramuros. He demonstrates how Daniel Burnham's involvement in the "City Beautiful" movement produced the general plans he proposed for Manila and elsewhere.

Because the book's main focus is not architectural history, the author relies upon previously published works. While he takes a critical stance towards them, there are some slips in Klassen's presentation of historical data that might irk the historian. To give an example: Citing Isacio Rodriguez's study on the Augustinian monastery and church in Intramuros, the author remarks that the legend that Juan Antonio de Herrera, the son of the architect of the Escorial, worked on the Augustinian buildings is simply that — a legend (p. 88). Then a few pages later, commenting this time on the church of the Jesuit Antonio Sedeño, he remarks that "it is possible that Sedeño's church, finished in 1596, served as a model for the Augustinian church, which took its present shape under Herrera from 1599 on" (p. 96). Did Herrera work on the church or did he not? The question begs for an answer, which Rodriguez's masterful study does give. There seems to be no point in citing Coseteng's opinion (p. 90) as this merely confuses the issue. The historian would look at the sources of Rodriguez's and Coseteng's opinions, then judge that Rodriguez's opinion is better documented than Coseteng's, who had no access to archival records in the same way Rodriguez did.

The task of architectural criticism is a difficult one, as the critic translates the system of "architectural form, meaning and reality" to the "word-concept and reality" of criticism. In his evocative descriptions of architecture, the author avoids the twin pitfalls of overenthusiasm and hypercriticism and opts for a presentation that gives the reader a balanced picture of a work under study. To complement verbal description, Klassen has prepared 186 pages of plates, divided into line drawings and colored photographs. The colored photographs seem to have been shot for the book, while the line

drawings are drawn from published sources and properly documented. The plates serve as a surrogate experience for visiting the actual buildings being commented on. Among the plates, and also analyzed in the text, are photographs and line drawings of buildings in Cebu, in some of which the author has had a hand. The presence of some paragraphs and plates on Cebu-built structures is a refreshing development. So is the inclusion of whole chapters on vernacular architecture and Muslim architecture. Often Manila-written books are guilty of a narrow parochialism that does not pay heed to developments outside the primate city. That the book was written in Cebu may have contributed to the author's sensitivity to architectural development beyond the Luzon metropolis.

Although the author does not try to define what is distinctively Philippine in Philippine architecture, he does speak frequently of the "polarity concepts of massive yet light or strong yet delicate, as one of the qualities of genuine contemporary Philippine architecture" (p. 22). He also cites the "floating" (p. 57) quality of vernacular architecture, a theme that continues to persist even in contemporary design. He further proposes that a "cool" approach is a better means of arriving at "an architecture which is truly Filipino" (pp. 9-10). "In other words, what the architect should strive for *directly* is a good piece of architecture, in the context of the physical and cultural conditions of the Philippines. If there is Philippineness in his work, it is arrived at indirectly and often subconsciously, depending upon the cultural background and creativity of the designer" (pp. 9-10).

Though we may not always agree with Klassen, his book is worth reading for the thoughts and possible controversy it may evoke. If the book leads to greater thought, the author has accomplished his objective. We hope, too, that better thought can be translated into better architecture.

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