The Architectural Identity of Quezon City Hall in Different Contexts

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Abstract

This critique is to show the studies of the Quezon City Hall and how the cultural identity is manifested. It tries to answer if there is a presence of cultural identity or not. This critique explores different ideas based on different concepts and on-site observation. Involving the analysis of different architectural concepts, the aspects and characteristics of the structure involves descriptive analysis and the use of signification and spirit of place. This tries to prove that Quezon City Hall has an identity trying to reflect the culture of the people by examining the details and concepts and looking at it from a new perspective.
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The city hall, “The building housing the administrative offices of a municipal government.”(http://www.thefreedictionary.com/city+hall), is an architecture designed to house offices that are intended to serve the public. Given the heavy roles of this institution, it must reflect and maintain the government’s purpose and integrity. Housing the local officials of Quezon City is a structure which tries to uphold its integrity. Once intended to be the capital of the nation, it has an architecture which tries to capture the essence of a functioning government, the public building tries to represent a body which is open, accessible, and efficient for the people. However, as one ponders through the notions of reflection and of culture, does the city hall prove worthy to be a structure of duty and service? Does it present an identity reflecting its people and culture?

Introduction to the Governing Body and its Representation

In almost every civilizations present all over the world, a governing body is one of the most important concept instigated in a society. This arises from the desires of the people to maintain peace and order in the society. Without a governing body, society would be in extreme chaos and peril. As one ponders through these concepts, a governing body must first reflect the society it wishes to maintain and organize.

The complexity of the culture of the Filipino people is very interesting. Though it is formed through the integration of several cultures, there is a distinct trait which people could proudly call “Filipino”. Supposedly governing and reflecting the people and its culture is the government. Upholding the people’s culture, the government is the one maintaining and leading the people through its integrity and values.
Discussion

“Architecture is subject to wide social, political or cultural influences. It reflects society and communicates the values of that society.” (Hellman, Louis). As it is affected by several influences, architecture is a reflection of society. There is a strong presence of an identity found in the city hall. This is supported by the aforementioned discussion of the different concepts and facts in architecture.

Quezon City Hall Analysis and Review. As one moves around the building, one would feel the spirit even more. With its prime location, it is easily accessible to the public. Entering the premises is not a hassle due to its walkways leading to the main buildings. As Quezon City, as the name implies, is a tribute to the late president Manuel Luis Quezon, there are numerous references found in this building. From the imposing large sculpture of the late president to quotes of his words carved in walls, President Quezon’s evident importance is made known. Composed of three massive structures, the structure could easily garner the attention of the public. Showing different images and symbols represented in art, the massive and blocky legislative building is an interesting sight to see. Seeing the imposing pillars, the structure is bound to be strong. Even for an enclosed structure, air and wind flow is not a concern. With good lighting and ventilation given the courtyard and openings, the city hall proves comfortable to its users. With the presence of inter-connections between buildings, a notable feature is the circulation from one building to the other making it easier for people to locate offices. With its vision that “The Quezon City Government envisions itself to be a model of effective governance and responsible leadership, working in partnership with its citizenry in building a quality community.” the architecture housing the government shows that it embodies this goal. “Government of the people, by the people, and for the people” as President Lincoln’s famous
quote goes. From the service oriented plans to the accommodating staffs, the Quezon City hall embodies a structure where a governing body works efficiently to serve its people.

**The Significations Present in the Building.** Looking at architecture diverting from the physical aspect, a new perspective of the building could be seen. However, using the concept of signification, whether coincidence or not, a light might be shed on the topic at hand. From a different point of view if by coincidence, there are many notable subjects that seems symbolic in nature. Using the concept that “they can be understood best as the intersection of two distinct structural principles” (Gottdiener, Mark), and in a government office’s case, a principle that involves serving its people. Though not visually grand and appealing, the architecture of the place focuses on ways to do work efficiently and in turn serve the public well. Seen in its motif is the desire to keep the focus within its walls and to articulate well the movement of the people inside the building. Another thing to note is that even without knowing it is a public office, its imposing design and massive size patterned after different offices shows the signification that it is an important building. Moving much deeper in thought, the imposing sculpture of President Quezon is placed in a manner that one could not miss. An interesting note is that President Quezon was shaping Quezon City to be the "Nation's Capital". Interestingly, with both the sculpture and buildings facing the Philippine flag and the Quezon Memorial Circle with its three angels representing Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, it is a move to show the importance of President Quezon and that it faces and gives honor to the nation. With all these signification, the architecture of the city hall imposes that it signifies an identity that it is an important institution geared towards the nation.

**The “Diwa ng Lunan” of the Building.** “The house is an institution created for a complex set of purposes” (Rapoport, Amos). This also applies to any buildings made to facilitate
different people's needs. From providing service to caring for its people, truly its architecture is designed to incorporate these different purposes. "Diwa ng Lunan" is a concept that involves the designed environment. From the different trees to the man-made lake in the city hall complex, the vast importance of nature to the people is shown. Possibly one of the interesting concepts, they involve one's feelings, emotions, and memories. Instead of looking at a structure from a physical aspect, it ponders on its emotional value. Grounds for formation of experiences and memories, the city hall is an example of an architecture which facilitates the flow of users. As a city hall, many would see it differently from other places. Why? Through the memories created by the users, they create a new image that makes it unique from the others. It may be foremost a government building where duties and responsibilities are performed, a meeting place for strangers, or even a place where friends hang out. Depending on the people, they create new ideas and beliefs which makes up the identity of the building.

How it Reflects its Identity and Culture. What makes its identity a reflection of the people and their culture? Pondering on its design, there is an evident strive to show its Filipino identity. But first, What is the Architecture of the Philippines? In the observation of Arch. Leandro V. Locsin, "It is a residue of the different overlays of Foreign influence."; "What resulted may have been a hybrid, but the blending was distinctly Philippine"; "Older building traditions - massive supports, interior lattices and trellises, spacious interior layouts, the raised floors". Aside from the presence of elements that adapt to the tropical climate of the Philippines, there are several aspects which show its Filipino identity. Although the building's exterior poses a formal approach in the design and proportions, an evident American influence, the way that the elements where integrated makes it Filipino. From the layout to the choice of materials (Capiz, Wood), there is a strive to show its Filipino identity. According to Felipe L. Jocano, we do things
because they are important values that we Filipinos cherish. He stated that the basis of the Filipino Value System revolves around "Halaga", "Asal", and "Diwa". Ideas that try to explain the values from the person to the society; the person to himself; and the person to God relationship respectively. A "Halaga" in his value system, the importance of interacting with others show. Whether in public transportations or buildings, every Filipino is fond of interacting with different people. A social intercourse, "There is a Basis for commonality" (Laya, Jaime). Although these value system may seem simple, they affect a large portion in the design of the building. In different locations, several open spaces and areas could be seen. These courtyards and open areas provide grounds for communal interaction and gathering. The fact that the facilities have several benches that could seat several people shows that it is intended for interaction and communication. From time to time, this area could serve as a place for gathering or meeting. From the simple to the complex practices, every aspect of one’s culture must be considered in architecture. Architecture stands as reflections and testaments to the culture of these people.

Conclusion

Is there an identity present? With the presence of evidences found in the concepts of culture and context, there is a manifestation of an identity. The architecture of the Quezon City Hall tries to reflect on the culture and values of the people. From the strive to incorporate a Filipino designs and concepts to those that allow the practice of Filipino values, there is a strong presence of an identity. It tries to embody a governing body which efficiently serves the public yet it tries to strongly manifest and reflect a cultural identity. An identity that is Filipino.
References


