A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE RESTORATION PROJECT OF ST. VINCENT DE FERRER CHURCH OF DUPAX DEL SUR: PROJECT IMPLICATION

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Abstract

This research aims to undergo preliminary study on the current condition of Saint Vincent de Ferrer Church of Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya. It exposes its present status in terms of architectural and structural elements carried out through qualitative and case analysis methods. It also aims to provide awareness regarding its cultural significance to the surrounding community particularly the Isinay minority group and the locals of Nueva Vizcaya. It is also in this research that the researchers highlighted the deteriorating structural and architectural conditions of the church as well as the negative and irreversible impact of uncontrolled and improper restoration works to a cultural treasure such as the church - most of them undertaken by persons that do not possess any qualification or knowledge on restoration and conservation. It also provides an inventory of potential hazards to the people particularly to the congregation when the Church's deteriorating structural and architectural components are not properly repaired and restored. With this, the researchers highly recommended conservation and restoration of the church and its support structures before elements of nature and man can wipe them out of sight.

Keywords: ***Saint Vincent de Ferrer Church, restoration, cultural treasure, potential hazards, structural and architectural component***

1. Introduction

1.1 Brief Historical Background

The Dupax Del Sur Church is one of the oldest and biggest several houses of worship built by the missionary priests of the Augustinian Order in the sprawling Cagayan Valley during the 18th and 19th centuries. Built of locally available materials such as bricks, lime, coral or river rock and wood and plastered with stucco which covers the church, it has an aggregate floor area of 7,200 square meters. The architectural design is strikingly similar to that of the cathedral in Tuguegarao, Cagayan.

According to the history of the town, missionaries of the Dominican and Franciscan Order arrived in the locality as early as 1632. The real founding of Dupax, however, took place on April 22, 1726 when the Augustinian missionaries, Father Norbante and San Juan, planted the cross in honor of Nuestra Señora sel Socorro in a little chapel erected at the foot of a hill, a few hundred meters south of the present church. The hill is called "Cudus" (cross) by the Isinays – the local inhabitants of the place.

The Isinay (Isinai, Inmeas) are a small group found principally in the municipality of Bambang and Dupax Sur in the province of Nueva Vizcaya. The total population is set at about 6,000 as per 1980 census. The language belongs to the northern Philippine, central Cordilleran group. (NCCA, 2014)

The present location of the church was chosen following a superstitious and strange story at the small chapel at the foot of the Cudus Hill. According to the legend handed down from one generation to the next, the construction of the rubble walls on the original site was already in progress when, on several occasions, the parish Priest including some natives, noticed *Amorseco* seeds (*Andropogon aciculatus* Retz.) clinging to the robe of the image of the Santo Niño enshrined in the chapel. Some villagers reported that they have seen the image in the forest where *Amorseco* grass is abundant. Because of the incident, the priest and those engaged in the construction work came to the conclusion that the image did not like the new site of the chapel. Accordingly, the builders decided to transfer the chapel site to the spot in the forest where the image had been allegedly seen. After the area has been cleared, the construction of the permanent church proceeded.

The establishment of the structure started with the construction of the sacristy that was completed in 1771. The laying of the church and convent's cornerstone commenced in 1771 and was completed in 1776 and 1778, respectively. The bell tower was built in a span of 15 years: the first tier in 1773, the second in 1776, and finally the third and fourth tiers in 1778.

On September 22, 1972, the National Museum of the Philippines declared Saint Vincent de Ferrer Church "a National Cultural Treasure" under Presidential Decree 374 signed by then President Ferdinand E. Marcos.

In 1979, repair and rehabilitation of the church were carried out under the initiative Fr. Paul Bollen, CICM to mitigate further deterioration of the church's building components.

On July 16, 1990, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake shook the big island of Luzon where considerable damage was sustained by the church including the toppling of the apex crucifix. The damage was later repaired through the combined efforts of the generous parishioners from abroad and all over the country.

Six years after, in 1996, the National Museum in coordination with the NCCA restored the priceless pair of columns adorned by stucco carvings at the interior through a funding provided by the US State Department under the Ambassador's Funds for Cultural Preservation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Preservation and conservation theorists John Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc started the idea of preservation of historical buildings in the 19th century. Because of its significance, the pioneers were eventually followed by other prominent conservationists like Giavannoni, Beltrami, Boito, Sitte, Brandi, Bonelli, Philippot, and Feiden (Ali Miri, 2012).

Spanish colonists left the Philippines with magnificent and monumental baroque churches and other structures clad in locally available materials and painstakingly built by Filipino natives. Baroque, according to Fletcher (1975), is a term applied during the late Renaissance period, when architecture reached a characteristic, non-Roman expression that is considered rich, bold and vital. The definition is reinforced by Harris (1975) that describes baroque architecture as the "… interpenetration of oval spaces, curved surfaces and conspicuous use of decoration, sculpture, and color".

Because of the country's geographic location in the Pacific Rim of Fire and at the forefront of the typhoon corridor, survival of these historic structures has always been a challenge to cope with. As compared to historic structures found in Europe, what remains in the Philippines are just remnants of natural calamities such as typhoons and earthquakes.

Little had been written about the historic Churches in the province of Nueva Vizcaya. One reason maybe is its distant proximity to the renowned urban areas such as Metro Manila where appreciation to historical structures is at a considerable level brought about by the presence of the walled city of Intramuros at its center. It may also be because of the simplicity of living in the locality where the old structures have become part of the locals' daily life. It may also be because of globalization particularly the appreciation of western culture that we failed to appreciate our own structures – the reminders of our rich

cultural past. Indeed, it is an irony that those who notice and appreciate these monuments are mostly tourists from other places, from different races and tradition. Adding to the challenge of preservation is the truth that the ***building has outlasted the builders***. No records have been passed on by the church builders for historical reference. More so, the supposed to be knowledge passed on by the original builders to the next generations of the locals of the Province seems to have been lost in – present generations of locals have no idea how the structure was built.

So it is in this research that the researcher aimed to take a glimpse of one of our diminishing structures – the Saint Vincent de Ferrer Church of Dupax del Sur, one of the best surviving churches in the province that exemplifies a high degree of Baroque type of architecture.

With this research, the researcher developed the main research question: how can Saint Vincent de Ferrer Church be restored without compromising its historical and cultural accuracy, integrity and relevance and at the same time upholding existing policies on conservation and structural restoration of architectural heritage? (ICOMOS Zimbabwe, 2003)

From the main research question, the following secondary questions were derived:

1. What is the current status of Saint Vincent de Ferrer Church in terms of its architectural and structural elements?
2. What are the existing international policies applicable to the restoration of historical buildings?
3. How can the existing conditions of the historic church be restored?
4. How can the Church be protected from subsequent destruction and deterioration threats?

1.3 Research Objectives

This particular study aims to inspire architects, designers, future architects, developers, and the local populace particularly the present and future generations of Isinays and Novo Vizcayanos. It is of prime importance that they fully appreciate their architectural heritage and to address the challenges of preserving remaining structures of cultural importance - to cherish the masterpieces created by skilled Filipino craftsmen and builders of the past. The study also aims to create awareness among priests assigned to the different parishes with surviving heritage structures about the dangers of uncontrolled and improper renovations that could destroy and eventually take away its historical accuracy and significance. (N. Santopuoli, 2012)

The research also is also intended to draw public support and the commitment of proper government and non-government agencies in protecting and supporting restoration works of our diminishing cultural treasures.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research Methodology

The study employed the research methodologies of Qualitative research method and Case study method. Qualitative research method is a specific methodology that involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical material like actual surveillance, inspection and site visit of the subject heritage structure. Case study method, on the other hand, involves an in-depth study of a particular situation, to narrow down a very broad field of research into one easily researchable topic.

In the case of the subject structure, obtained data from actual surveillance such as photographs were subjected to scrutiny and analysis to determine the significance of the imposed architectural style and the specific architectural characters featured by the structure.

2.2 Research Subject

The research subject of this study is the 239-year old Baroque Church of Saint Vincent de Ferrer located in the municipality of Dupax del Sur in the province of Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines.

3. Findings of the Study

Through careful study and scrutiny of the existing conditions of the subject structure

during the actual survey, the researcher came up with the following outputs:

3.1 Identification of "At Risk" structural and architectural elements

A. Church Building exterior (exposed to the elements)

Plate 1. The four-tiered belltower as photographed from the ground with a tree and its roots clinging to the crevices of the brickwork.

Plate 2. Detail of the belltower façade. The century old original image of the patron saint inside the arch was allegedly stolen.

Plate 3. The newly installed image of Saint Vincent de Ferrer.

Plate 4. Support buttresses on the right side of the church where grass, algae and moss thrive on its outer face. Also shown is the area for grotto and candle lighting area for parishioners.

Plate 5. Dilapidated windows and a support buttress invaded by grass, moss and algae.

Plate 6. A support buttress covered in algae and moss. Upon closer look, water has already penetrated a portion of the core and slowly washing away the mortar and plaster that bind the bricks together.

Plate 7. The crucifix tower originally at the highest point of the church, toppled down by the July 16, 1990 killer quake.

Plate 8. An improvised signage written in concrete plaster commemorating the exact time and date the earthquake occurred.

Potential Risks/hazards

a. Disintegration and breaking down of existing building materials.
b. Destruction of structural elements by tree's outgrown roots.
c. Deterioration and weathering of architectural features such as mouldings, caps, etc.
d. The presence of algae, moss and grasses clinging to the walls and exposed portion of the buttresses.
e. Gradual breaking down of brick mortars due to water penetration – could lead to deterioration of inner core of the massive walls (most old churches have no steel reinforcement and rely mostly on massiveness for strength).
f. Water leaks caused by corrosion on roofing sheets (can destroy the ceiling and interior components).
g. Dilapidated wooden framed capiz windows including damaged transoms.
h. Exposed original crucifix being treated as children's play structure – possibility of vandalism, and accidents to children.
i. Fire hazard due to exposed electrical wiring and a candle lighting area in close proximity to the church walls.
j. Potential harm/injury to unsuspecting person/persons below.

Proposed Design Considerations to be adopted in the restoration work (D. Alcaraz, 2010)

a. Respect of the old fabric
b. Previous material as basis for size and volume
c. Utmost consideration on the user's need

Suggested Restoration Works:

a. Cleaning, replacement and repair of damaged brickwork (including mortar and plaster).
b. Removal of birds' droppings, nests and cleaning of affected areas.
c. Removal of tree trunk, branch, roots and also grasses, moss and algae present in the brickwork (walls and buttresses).
d. Cleaning and reconstructive work of architectural components.
e. Replacement of corrosive G.I. roofing sheets and application of protective paint film whenever possible.
f. Reconstruction of damaged wooden doors and capiz shell windows (taking into consideration the original design and the materials used).
g. Relocation of electrical service entrance including wiring.
h. Provision of surrounding barrier at crucifix to fend off children and curious onlookers.
i. Research, documentation and reconstruction of the crucifix's design including original wood specie.
j. Provision of brass marker stating the history behind the fallen crucifix tower.

B. Church Interior

Plate 8. The elevated pulpit *(pulpito)* as seen from the altar. Originally, it was used by the priests before to deliver their sermon to the congregation.

Plate 9. The detail of the pulpit's overhead cover. Paint is obviously peeling off and needs to be restored.

Plate 9. The pulpit panel, historically destroyed by the introduction of an electronic speaker in recent renovation works.

Plate 10. A 124-year old tombstone of Padre Antonio Xabet near the altar.

Potential Hazards

a. Elevated pulpit
   Loss of historical accuracy and integrity due to incorrect modification work of the elevated pulpit – installation of electronic speaker on pulpit panel.
b. Identical stucco cladded columns (restored in 1996 by NCCA & National Museum)
   - Enlargement of cracks of the identical stucco cladded columns if left untreated.
   - The danger of plasters falling off that can harm parishioners.
   - Loss of heritage treasure.
c. Floor tiles
   - Enlargement of cracks
   - Thinning of tile / appearance of crater due to wear and tear

Suggested Restoration work

a. Removal of speaker.
b. Reconstruction of pulpit panel and replacement of dilapidated elements taking into consideration the original design and material.
c. Restoration of newly emerged cracks using the same material as the original and investigation of potential cracks on both columns (through x-ray if possible).
d. Repair and replacement of broken and worn-out tiles.

3.2 Results of Uncontrolled, Unplanned and Careless Renovations.

Plate 11. The arched brickwork entrance's keystone had been covered by the recent addition of ceiling. The original clay fired floor tiles have been replaced by modern ceramic tiles.

Plate 12. A column done with modern tools and procedures using the same brick as the chief material but mixed with concrete rather than stucco plaster. Resembles a modern decorative stone effect rather than reconstructing the original.

Plate 13. The old well *(bubon)* at the left side of the church, now covered with concrete slab and topped with electric water pumps, steel tanks cylinders and electrical wires.

Plate 14. The interior wall of the Adoration chapel. The original location of windows are covered with bricks to recreate the same material but destroyed the uniformity of the brickwork pattern. Also shown is the exposed electrical wire moulding attached to the brick wall.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the information gathered and the facts presented in this research, the researcher had come up with the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Proper documentation and research of building elements before reconstruction or restoration work should commence.
2. NCCA and the National Museum should designate experts on conservation and restoration work to oversee and guide restoration efforts.
3. Original materials should be preserved as much as possible and minimize the use of modern construction technology.
4. Rampant and unplanned renovation should be avoided.
5. Documented history of the church should be researched and established in the Royal Archives in Spain to establish authenticity.
6. Structural evaluation of experts should be conducted to strengthen the structure.
7. Parish priests, bishops and the religious orders in-charge with heritage structures should be oriented on the proper coordination with experts on restoration before pursuing such tasks to avoid negative and irreversible effects of instantaneous and unplanned renovations.

5. Appendices

Plate 15. The Amorseco plant and seeds (*Andropogon aciculatus* Retz.) Retrieved from: http://www.stuartxchange.com/Amorseco.html

Plate 16. The map of Nueva Vizcaya highlighting the map of the Municipality of Dupax del Sur. (Retrieved from: http://www.nuevavizcaya.gov.ph/municipalities/dupaxdelsur/)

Plate 17. A current satellite image of Dupax del Sur, at the center is the Church of Saint Vincent de Ferrer. (Retrieved from https://www.google.com.ph/maps/place/Dupax+Del+Sur,+Nueva+Vizcaya)

Plate 18. Saint Vincent de Ferrer Church photographed in 1954. (Retrieved from: http://isinay-bird.blogspot.com/2012_05_01_archive.html)

Plate 19. John Ruskin, the leading art critic of the Victorian era. From his idea, the concept of historical preservation of buildings was derived. (Retrieved from: http://www.citelighter.com/art-architecture/art/knowledgecards/john-ruskin)

Plate 20. Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, a French Gothic Revival architect, restorer of French medieval buildings, and writer whose theories of rational architectural design linked the revivalism of the Romantic period to 20th-century Functionalism. (Retrieved from: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/629711/Eugene-Emmanuel-Viollet-le-Duc)

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