Living Architecture: The *Bahay Kubo* and Its Reflection of Philippine Identity

by

Honey Ibanez

AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

Delft University of Technology

Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of the *bahay kubo* during Spanish colonial rule and how it became a symbol of Philippine identity. Constructed from local materials, the *bahay kubo* reflects Filipino values of community and spirituality, shaping the architectural form of the vernacular dwelling. Spanish colonization introduced new religious and socio-political structures, such as Christianity and the encomienda system, which altered the built environment and transformed the *bahay kubo* into the *bahay na bato* (stone house). Despite attempts at cultural erasure, elements of the *bahay kubo* were preserved by blending them with colonial architecture and practices. After the declaration of independence, Filipino architects discovered a new appreciation for the *bahay kubo*, symbolizing national identity, which carried a hidden political agenda. By analyzing the architectural, cultural, and historical aspects surrounding the *bahay kubo* through literature study, this paper argues that Philippine architecture should be defined not only by its physical form but also by its ability to coexist with its people, adapting to their cultural, social, and environmental needs.

Keywords: *bahay kubo*, Philippine architecture, cultural identity, colonial transformation, vernacular architecture

Introduction

The *bahay kubo* is a vernacular dwelling that has housed countless indigenous communities in the Philippines. Built from local materials, this one-room house reflects the culture and traditions of its Indigenous Filipino inhabitants while providing space for their daily lives. Over time, the *bahay kubo* evolved and has become more than just a shelter; it has become a symbol of Philippine architectural identity (Cabalfin 2020).

The transformation of the *bahay kubo* started at the arrival of Spanish colonizers in the 16th century (Jackson 2020; Rafael 2018), introducing Western views and ideas on religious, socio-political, and architectural systems (Boquet 2017). Colonial hierarchies and religious reorganizations (Stošić et al. 2016; Fitzpatrick 2013) were reflected in urban planning and architecture (Chias and Abad 2012; Stanislawski 1947), changing the *bahay kubo* into the *bahay na bato* (stone house) by fusing indigenous Philippine and Spanish architecture (Luga 2019; Villalon 2002). Despite the shifts and cultural takeover, the *bahay kubo* rose after World War II and embodied Philippine identity to modern Filipino architects (Cabalfin 2020; Lico 2017).

The *bahay kubo* inspired many Filipino architects and is still regarded as classic Philippine architecture. While the symbolism of the *bahay kubo* has been widely discussed (Cabalfin 2020; Lico 2017), its transformation through the Spanish colonial era and its essence have not been studied as much. Current literature focuses on the architecture (Alaron 1991; Lumbera 2007) or its use to push a political agenda (Cabalfin 2020; Lico 2017; Paredes-Santillan 2009), overlooking how an understanding of its capabilities and reflection of culture could form a more grounded and authentic form of Philippine architecture.

This thesis aims to document the evolution of the *bahay kubo* and its transformation from a simple settlement to a symbol of Philippine identity, to explore how Philippine culture could be translated through architecture using ideas inspired by the *bahay kubo*. An architectural and historical literature study will be conducted to analyze the influence of Spanish-enforced religion and social structures, such as Christianity and the *encomienda* system (Anderson 1976), on the *bahay kubo* to determine how Indigenous Filipino communities preserved their beliefs and traditions through architecture. Archival images will be used to visually support the results of the literature study.

The thesis will start by introducing the *bahay kubo* and explaining the indigenous spiritual and social beliefs tied to the building and design process. The following chapter discusses the shifts in social and religious structures during the Spanish colonial era linked to the urban and architectural developments that led to the creation of the *bahay na bato*. After discussing the transformation of the *bahay kubo*, Philippine architecture after World War II will be analyzed to illustrate how the *bahay kubo* became a source of inspiration for modern Filipino architects. In the closing chapter, a reflection on the research and a standpoint regarding the definition of Philippine architecture will be stated.

Indigenous Architecture of the Philippines: *Bahay Kubo*

"…the bahay kubo is a house that breathes." (Lumbera 2007)

Skyscrapers, interchanging highways, and large malls have replaced the mountainous landscape of the Philippine capital, Manila. Outside the city center is the neighborhood Intramuros, where the ruins of the defense fortress Fort Santiago and houses from the Spanish era still stand. The three-story houses with balconies poking out from their stone façades are the *bahay na bato*, derived from Indigenous Filipino dwelling: the *bahay kubo*.

Architecture of the *Bahay Kubo*

What started as a simple shelter made of tree branches, twigs, and walls of leaves evolved into a housing typology used by all Indigenous Filipinos in the Philippines (Perez III 1994). Fishermen and hunters created a portable shelter to accommodate their nomadic lifestyle. When they started to live a more settled life, the design of the *bahay kubo* became more permanent (Lumbera 2007). Despite indigenous groups deciding to stay in one place for a longer period, the makeshift and demountable character of the first variations of the *bahay kubo* persisted.

Elements used to build the *bahay kubo* depended on the availability of local materials. Bamboo posts formed the main construction and allowed the floor to be raised from the ground (Figure 1). The space underneath, the *silong*, could be used as a granary, and it protected the inhabitants from predators and floods (Alarcon 1991). Most floors were made of wooden slats, which allowed natural ventilation, creating an airy 'breathing' home. To demarcate the raised open space, inhabitants weaved grass on a bamboo frame to create walls called *amakan, pawid,* or *sulirap*, depending on the region. Intricate and traditional patterns were woven into the bamboo walls in zigzag, diagonal, or diamond-like shapes. The final element to complete the *bahay kubo* is its high and steep roof made of bamboo and grass (Jagor 1875; Villalon 2002).

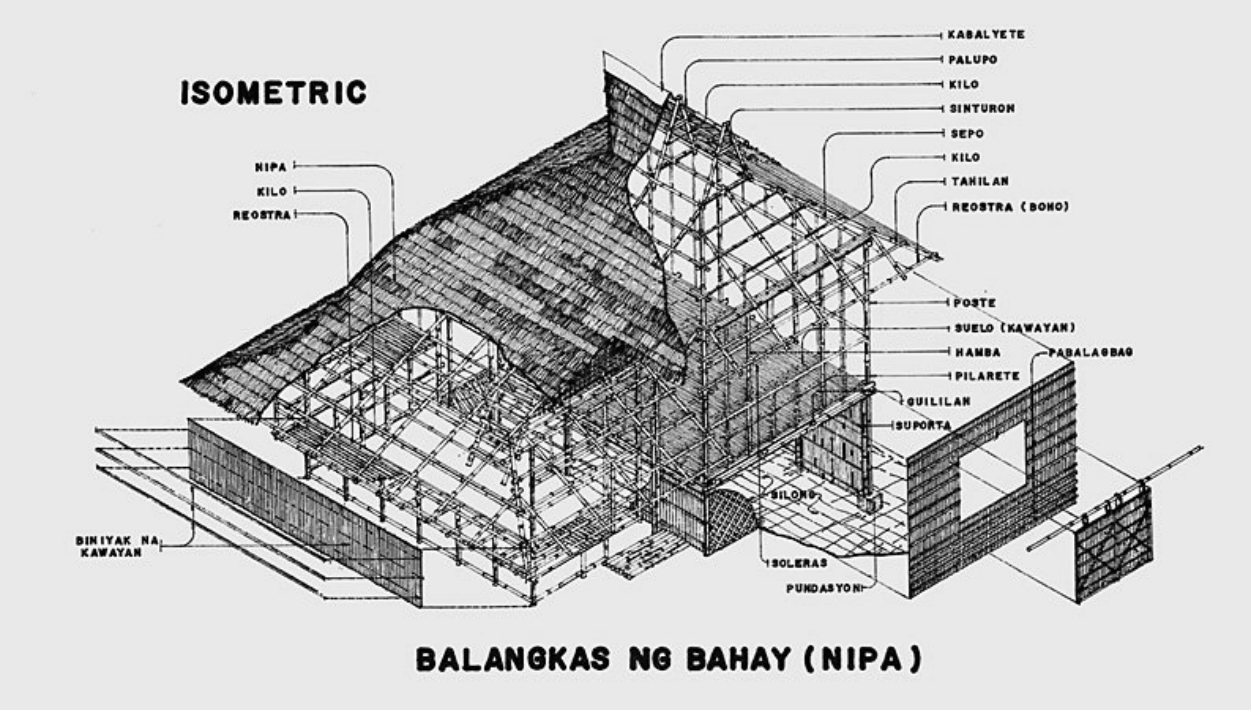

Figure 1 Hila. *Balangkas ng Bahay (Nipa)* (Structure of the *bahay kubo*). 1992. Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.

Together, these elements create the one-room *bahay kubo*, an architectural embodiment of Indigenous Philippine culture that reflects family values and openness. The open plan allows flexibility and spontaneous interaction between people inside and outside the house, creating a stronger sense of community and connections with neighbors and nature (Hila 1994).

Cultural Expressions in the *Bahay Kubo*

The terrain of the Philippine islands is never the same. From rice fields in the North to rough mountains in the South. A different landscape means different lifestyles and housing needs. Most of the communities lived on rice terraces in the northernmost province of Luzon. In this region, the locals created variations of the *bahay kubo* that tended to their needs as rice farmers, called Cordillera houses. One group in Luzon is the *Ifugao*, which lives in their version of the *bahay kubo* called *fale* (Figure 2). This square-shaped one-room house rested on 4 bamboo posts raised to shoulder height. Its bamboo walls were slanted and directly connected to the roof using mortise and tenon.[1] Unlike the classic model of the *bahay kubo*, the runo and thatch roof had a slight slope and was less steep (Lumbera 2007; Perez III 1994).

[1] Joining pieces of wood by inserting one piece into the other, creating a 90-degree angle.

Figure 2 National Geographic. *Ifugao fale.* 1913. Cornell University Collection.

At the end of the Philippine islands in the province of Mindanao is the T'boli community of Southern Cotabato. Their version of the *bahay kubo* did not differ much from the original version. Its materiality and construction were the same, but the floor plan differed slightly. The interior still consisted of one space, but the middle section of the floor was slightly lower than the sides, creating new borderless spaces within this one-room house. The side sections were used for working or resting, and the entrance was placed across the space reserved for the head of the house (Hila 1994; Lumbera 2007). This minute adjustment to the floor plan resulted in a new way of utilizing space in the one-room *bahay kubo* while establishing hierarchy within a family (Lumbera 2007).

Spirituality and Rituals Reflected in the *Bahay Kubo*

Indigenous Filipinos were polytheistic (Macdonald 2004) and worshipped supernatural beings with names, personalities, and characteristics (Britannica n.d.). Their polytheistic belief and rituals influenced their daily routines and the building process and design of the *bahay kubo* (Hila 1994; Villalon 2002).

Selecting a desirable plot at the site was crucial to ensuring spiritual harmony. One method was burying an egg or a coconut overnight on site; if it shook, it indicated evil spirits residing at the location. Once a site was selected, the start of construction had to be an auspicious day or season. Warmer seasons were avoided, as they believed they would bring misfortune to husband and wife (Alarcon 1991; Hila 1994).

Rituals were performed before construction started, and they differed across indigenous communities. The Bukidnon avoided building near the *balete, kanaway,* and *bago* trees because they believed the ancestral spirits, *tagolar* or *engkanto*, inhabited them. The Yakan only built a few windows to stop evil spirits from going inside, and the Ilokanos avoided bamboo nodes that faced the interior, as they considered it an omen of death (Alarcon 1991). Furthermore, building the *bahay kubo* was never a solo activity. Family, friends, and neighbors would support the house owner during the building process, embodying the Philippine culture of *bayanihan* (Hila 1994), meaning the tradition of working together as a community (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.).

Besides local rituals determining the site, some beliefs about obtaining prosperity, good health, and protection also influenced the architecture of the *bahay kubo*. It was believed that the family's father had to be present when placing the first row of bamboo posts, as he symbolized strength and stability. The orientation of the *bahay kubo* was important as well. The main door had to face the east and swing open to the inside to bring good luck (Alarcon 1991; Hila 1994).

Influenced by cultures and various beliefs, the *bahay kubo* provides more than shelter. It is connected to its people and rituals created by their resourceful use of local materials. Every step of the process is executed with intent and reflects the relationship between indigenous communities and nature.

The *bahay kubo* is not only a house that breathes because of its natural ventilation, but also because of its rich history and ability to adapt to the needs of different communities across the Philippines.

Spanish Structures and Indigenous Adaptations

Many tales and folklore exist about the creation of the Philippines. The myth about Pili and Pinas, who asked their god Bathala to stomp on what once was one piece of land, and another legend about fighting gods that caused the formation of the islands. Indigenous Filipinos believed in one or the other, depending on their group's beliefs. However, from the moment Legazpi set foot in Cebu, these tales and myths were replaced by stories in the Bible. During Spanish rule, Legazpi acquired spices while simultaneously converting Indigenous Filipinos to Christianity and reconstructing social structures (Boquet 2017; Jackson 2020; Wilberforce 1898).

Religious Reconstruction and Architectural Influences

Converting Indigenous Filipinos to Christianity did not pose many complications due to the lack of a structured religious organization, as most were polytheistic (Boquet 2017). Catholic traditions showed similarities to the practices and beliefs of the indigenous (Macdonald 2001). They believed in the afterlife (Fitzpatrick 2013), feared the unknown, and believed in concepts of heaven and hell (Rafael 2001). However, they were selective about the rituals and traditions they would apply (Jagor 1875; Stošić et al. 2016). The ones that would benefit them were the ones they would exercise and connect to their animistic beliefs, such as using baptism to wipe away sins and cure bodily ailments (Phelan 1967), creating a new form of Christianity.

The Augustinians who accompanied Legazpi implemented the *reducción* system. Scattered communities congregated to *reducciónes*, Spanish settlements, to convert Indigenous Filipinos while being monitored by the local friar (Hernandez 2010; Macdonald 2001; Stošić et al. 2016). Small chapels were built where priests from neighboring settlements could speak during mass. The churches and convents constructed in the Baroque style became an integral part of the lives of indigenous communities (Boquet 2017).

Due to the tropical climate on the islands, the original style and construction methods of the Baroque churches had to be altered to accommodate the physical conditions of the location and its local materials. A typical characteristic of these churches is their massive stone buttresses, which were designed in response to the seismic activity on the islands (Figure 3). Each church

displayed a unique fusion of local and Baroque architecture, such as altars in high Baroque style or a folk pediment made of local trees showing the life of Christ (UNESCO 1993).

Figure 3 National Historical Commission of the Philippines. *Paoay Church.* 2020.

Shifting Social Structures

As there was no separation of church and state (Morley 2012), changes and decisions made by the church had consequences for the social structures of the indigenous communities.

In the political and social domain, indigenous communities did not have a centralized government and lacked unity. This was due to "a myriad of indigenous settlements scattered throughout the vast region," (Boquet 2017) who spoke in their dialects and were physically separated by the landscape. Indigenous communities had their social hierarchy with the town leader, *datu*, on top, followed by minor nobility and the middle class with peasants and servants at the bottom of the social pyramid (Asuncion 2023; Boquet 2017; Stošić et al. 2016).

The Spanish used stronger communities to impose power on the weaker ones and implemented the *encomienda* system. The *encomienda* system was a reward system for the *encomendero*, the chosen Spaniard, who was given the right to collect taxes or free labor from Indigenous Filipinos living in their assigned area (Anderson 1976; Boquet 2017). This created a feudalistic system (Forster 1956) that controlled rural areas and helped structure the scattered society (Lumen Learning n.d.). A new social hierarchy was formed (Figure 4), delegating the *datu* to a lower class and replacing them with the *peninsulares*, the Spanish. The rest of the upper class were Spanish-born in the Philippines and *principalía*, chosen Indigenous Filipinos who were *encomenderos*. Descendants of Spanish and locals, the *Filipinos*, were in the middle class together with the *mestizos*, and the remaining Indigenous Filipinos were enslaved or seen as savages (Asuncion 2023; Boquet 2017; Rodriguez 2006). Despite the transformed social hierarchy, the *encomenderos* were required to protect the indigenous (Stošić et al. 2016). However, the law did not stop the *encomenderos* from abusing their power. Acts of brutality, sexual abuse, and forced labor caused some Indigenous Filipinos to neglect their work as a way of protest (Anderson 1976; Forster 1956).

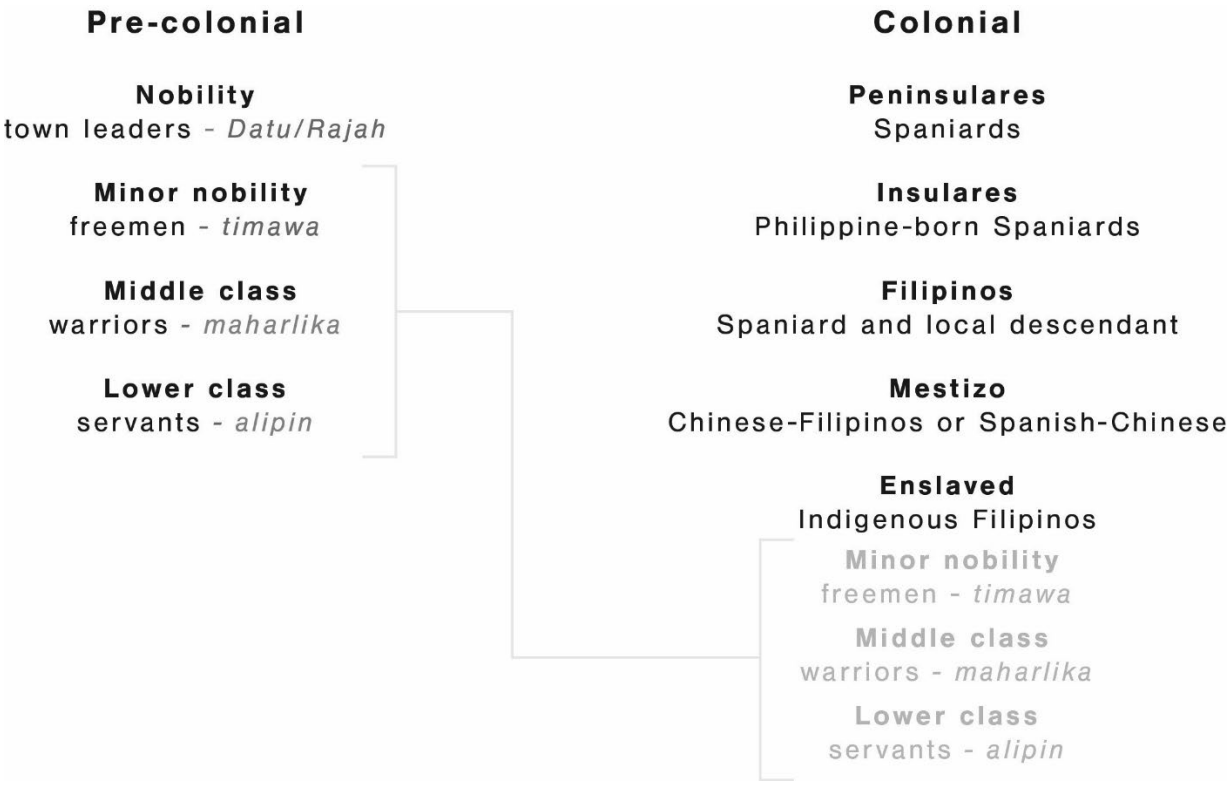

Figure 4 Author's illustration of the shifts in social hierarchy based on interpretations from Asuncion (2023) and Rodriguez (2006).

Spanish-imposed religion and social structures reshaped Philippine society, enforcing Christianity and enslaving Indigenous Filipinos as an attempt to culturally erase indigenous culture. Despite the violence and mistreatment, Indigenous Filipinos found ways to preserve their beliefs and traditions by merging them, creating folk Christianity and architecture. This illustrates the strong roots of indigenous culture and its translation into their daily lives, built environment, and beliefs, symbolizing resistance and resilience.

Bahay Kubo Reconstructed

Remnants of indigenous Philippine culture endured and evolved during the Spanish colonial era and quietly influenced architecture and urban fabric. Structures for spiritual practices emerged, fusing indigenous construction techniques with Baroque architecture, integrating themselves into the community. New social hierarchies reshaped town structures and housing architecture, adapting them to the needs of the Spanish.

Spatial Hierarchy in the Built Environment

The Spanish followed a set of laws called the *Leyes de Indias* (Boquet 2017; Chias and Abad 2012; Morley 2012; Stanislawski 1947), which were enacted to govern their colonies. The laws touched upon government organization, religion, indigenous rights, and urban planning and settlement (Britannica n.d.). Thus, forming the standard for town planning, including the *reducciónes*[2] (Doeppers 1972; Hernandez 2010).

A dominant law concerning urban planning was applying the grid structure (Figure 5) (Chias and Abad 2012; Morley 2012; Stanislawski 1947). In these town structures, the *Plaza Mayor* (main square) was the center for trading, business (Boquet 2017; Morley 2012), and the community. The design of the main square reflected the hierarchy within society. Every *Plaza Mayor* was surrounded by a Church, town hall, and military structures, indicating the religious, political, and military authority over the indigenous communities (Doeppers 1972). Buildings in the inner part of town were designed to be admired by Indigenous Filipinos, an essential part of Spanish propaganda and their image, boasting their wealth and power (Chias and Abad 2012).

[2] The *reducciónes* are Spanish settlements where scattered indigenous communities were congregated to convert them to Christianity.

Figure 5 *Plano de Manila y sus arrabales* (Map of Manila and its suburbs). 1894. Reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library.

Furthermore, the grid structure was the basis for spatial segregation as they believed that a thriving society was one where different cultures were separated and not allowed to live "in helter-skelter fashion" [3] (Wickberg 1964). Indigenous Filipinos were pushed to the unplanned outskirts of town, while the Spanish lived as close to the *Plaza Mayor* as possible. The closer to the *Plaza Mayor*, the higher the status (Boquet 2017; Chias and Abad 2012; Doeppers 1972).

The architecture in town differed strongly from the others. Indigenous Filipinos lived in their vernacular *bahay kubo*, while the Spanish in the center had structures inspired by Antillean stone-constructed homes (Alarcon 1991). Building a permanent and stable house became necessary due to the wooden construction of the *bahay kubo* easily burning down, destroying entire towns (Luga 2019; Mercado 2023). The permanent houses were a twist on the indigenous *bahay kubo*, which made alterations to adapt to the tropical climate while maintaining thermal comfort

[3] Lack of order or plan. (*Merriam Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "helter-skelter.")

and structural stability (Boquet 2017). A fusion of Spanish architecture with indigenous construction techniques created the *bahay na bato*, the stone house. It became the standard for Filipino urban housing (Luga 2019; Zialcita 1994), representing status and wealth, replacing the *bahay kubo*.

Bahay na Bato

The *bahay kubo* and *bahay na bato* differ from each other in terms of materials and floor plan (Alarcon 1991; Luga 2019). A combination of *adobe*, volcanic tuff blocks,[4] and bamboo was used for the construction of the *bahay na bato* (Figure 6). Its wooden structure was placed on top of the stone base (Mercado 2023), making the lightweight structure sway instead of collapse (Luga 2019; Perez III 1994). This is an ideal solution for building a seismic-proof house in an earthquake-prone country. On top of the wooden construction was a tiled roof inspired by Chinese and Mediterranean architecture, making the house fireproof and waterproof (Alarcon 1991; Boquet 2017).

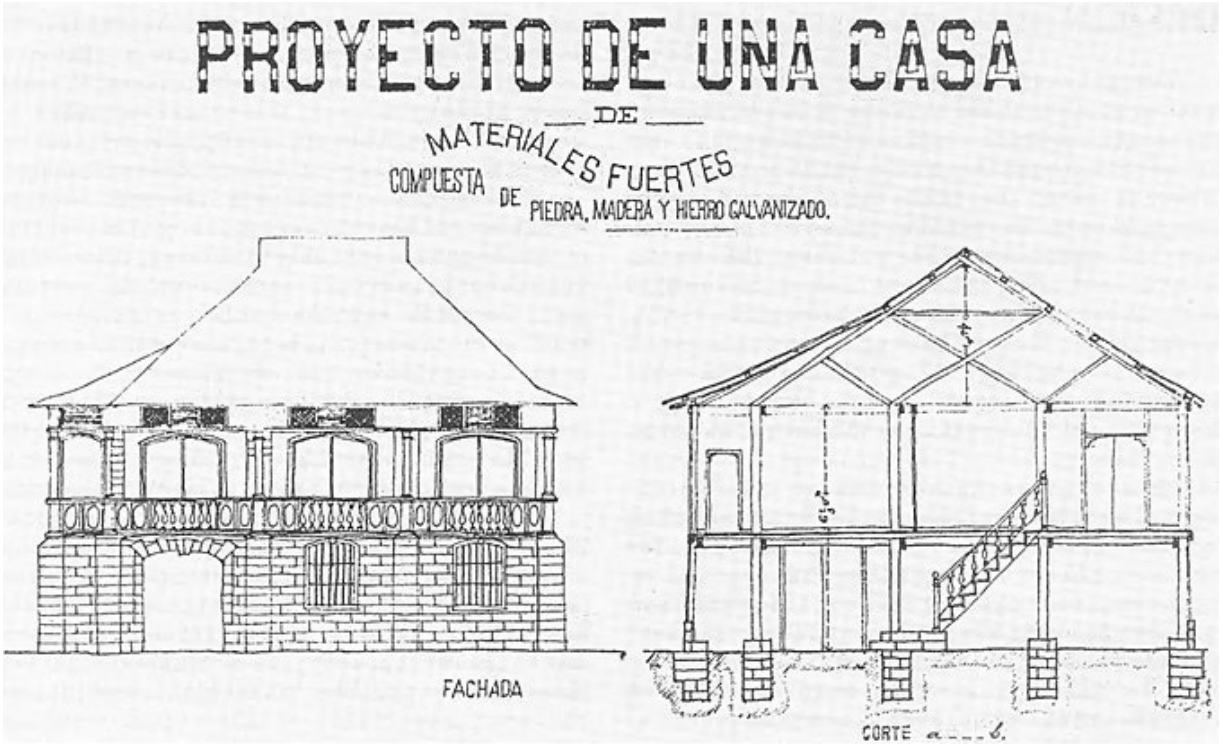

Figure 6 Zialcita and Tinio Jr. *Proyecto de una Casa* (Section of a house). 1980. Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.

[4] Compacted and cemented rock made of material released during a volcanic eruption. (Britannica, s.v. "tuff.")

The floor plan of the *bahay na bato* was more intricate than that of the *bahay kubo*. Contrary to the *bahay kubo,* which consisted of one multipurpose space, the *bahay na bato* had numerous rooms for specific functions (Perez III 1994; Zialcita 1994). The first space upon entering the house was the *zaguan*. The storage for carriages, grain, and old furniture. From there, a large flight of stairs would go up to the first floor into the *caida* (Figure 7), a hall where guests would be received and then led to the *sala*, the main room where balls and dances would be held (Alarcon 1991). Adjacent to the *sala* was the *comedor* (dining room) with the *cocina* (kitchen) in the back, where plants for cooking and healing would be stored. A mezzanine would be reserved for the office of the head of the house and the servants' living quarters (Boquet 2017). Its interior would be heavily decorated by European artefacts, such as furniture, porcelain, and tapestries, in spaces where the ceiling would be covered in large paintings (Alarcon 1991), showcasing their status.

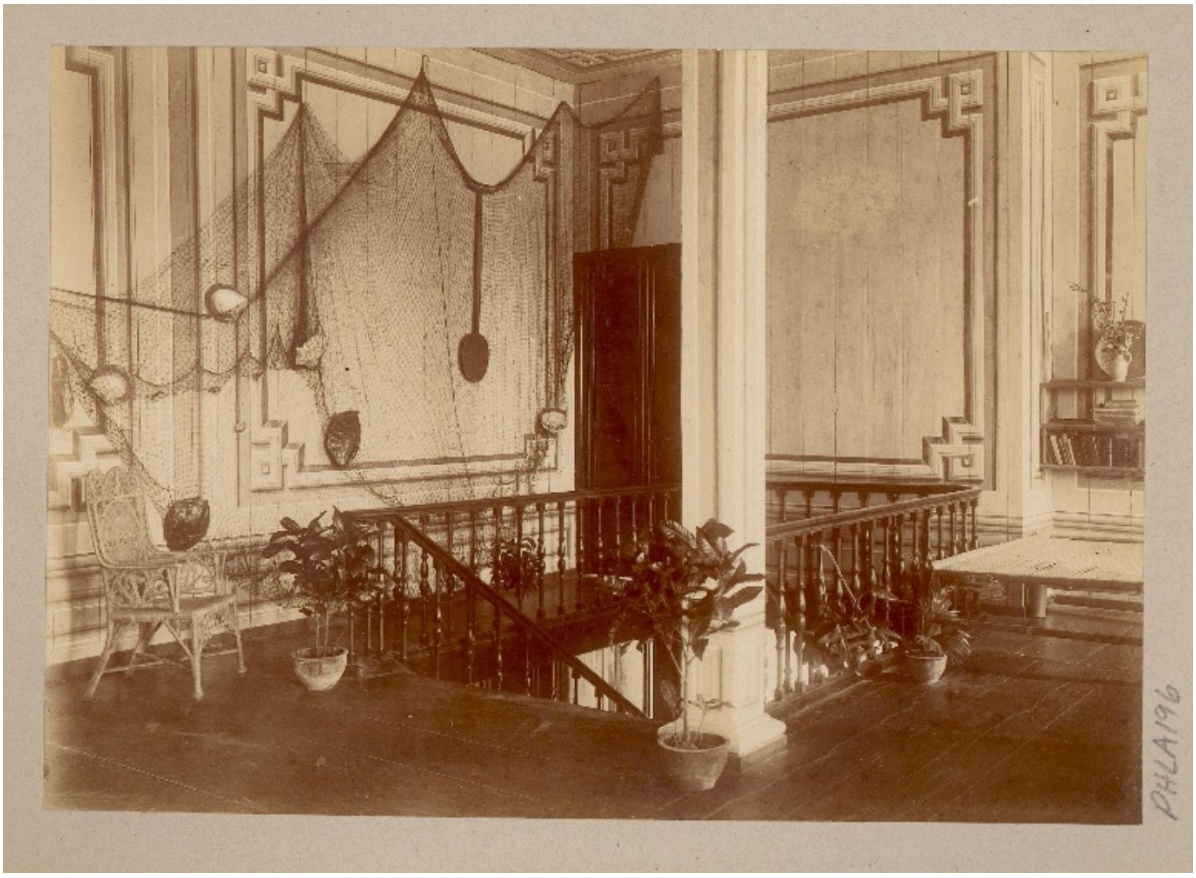

Figure 7 *Interior of a Spanish-style house, showing a stairway*. 1890. Philippine Photographs Digital Archive, Special Collections Research Center.

There were also similarities as the *bahay na bato* was a reconstructed version of the *bahay kubo*. Both constructions used a post and beam system to support the structure (Luga 2019), with the living areas placed on top (Alarcon 1991). The wooden construction on top of the *adobe* base allowed tall and wide openings in the façade for cross-ventilation (Boquet 2017). The Spanish created a ventilation system that used *ventanillas* at the bottom of the window to let air in and cool the house. The ventilation slits were covered with balusters or grillwork so they could be opened at night without anyone breaking in. Some *bahay na bato* had a larger-scale ventilation system that could cool multiple spaces. These houses had a *volada*, enclosed balconies wrapped around the building, allowing air to circulate through the rooms (Figure 8). Due to the passive cooling system, the *bahay na bato* has been described as *ma-aliwalas*, meaning airy, light, and spacious (Alarcon 1991; Boquet 2017; Zialcita 1994).

Figure 8 Jose Honorato Lozano. *Casa de la Yntendencia* (*Bahay na Bato*). 1847. Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.

The *Leyes de Indias* set the groundwork for urban planning and architecture that reinforced a new social hierarchy, translating the country's new religious and socio-political structures. The hierarchy can be traced back to the transformation of the *bahay kubo* and its replacement with the more permanent, stable, and fireproof *bahay na bato*. Its elaborate floor plan, stone walls, and ventilation system represent its colonial and resilient indigenous Philippine architecture in terms of construction and climate-responsive design. Although there are clear similarities with its predecessor, the *bahay na bato* misses the architectural embodiment of Philippine values of openness and community. While providing more privacy, separate rooms and a closed-off façade create a barrier between people, limiting spontaneous interactions and changing perceptions of space.

Putting the *bahay kubo* and *bahay na bato* side by side raises the question of what defines Philippine architecture. Is it the materials and construction, or the reflection of Filipino values, cultures, and lives?

The Search for Philippine Architectural Identity

Questions regarding the characteristics of Philippine identity have fueled the search for a national Philippine identity since the declaration of independence in 1946 (Cabalfin 2020; Lico 2017). The curiosity about what makes Philippine culture is connected to years of colonization by Spain and America, along with Chinese and Arab influences of the trading industry, to a nation of Indo-Malayan origins (Paredes-Santillan 2009).

The search for identity started when the Philippines had to rebuild itself. This brought the opportunity to create a new identity for the nation (Cabalfin 2020; Lico 2017). Due to years of colonization by Spain and America, Western ideas, values, and architecture became the standard for Filipino architects; it symbolized modernity, order, and power. These structures were built to proclaim the country's sophistication, causing indigenous Philippine architecture to be regarded as old-fashioned (Mustafa 2017; Paredes-Santillan 2009). Instead of returning to indigenous structures, architects built modernist architecture to separate themselves from colonial history and its remains, symbolizing freedom. Local ornaments and motifs from pre-colonial architecture were removed from the designs to build up as quickly as possible (Lico 2017), erasing part of their indigenous history.

However, the tropical climate made it difficult to create a comfortable indoor environment inside these new modernist buildings, causing Filipino architects to rethink indigenous architecture and follow the design principles of the climate-responsive and culturally adaptable *bahay kubo* (Cabalfin 2020; Lico 2017). Thus, it became the main inspiration for Philippine architectural identity. The *bahay kubo* was considered an architectural embodiment of Philippine culture with its motifs, materials, and floor plans that reflected indigenous communities in their ways (Cabalfin 2020). Certain elements from the *bahay kubo* were used to build modern architecture, creating a hybrid architecture. A recurring element frequently adopted was the floating effect inspired by the bamboo stilts that lifted the vernacular houses off the ground. Connected to that element was lightness, where the contrast between light and dark was essential. In most of these buildings, the ground floor functioned as storage, with the public areas above, like the layout of the *bahay kubo*. This design created a dramatic effect of entering a dark space and ascending to the naturally lit top floor. Inside these modern structures, the layered spaces created an enclosed openness where the

spaces were simultaneously separated and connected. A concept also applied in the *bahay kubo*, where one part of the house was lowered, creating raised spaces around it that served different functions (Paredes-Santillan 2009).

Many Filipino architects in post-war Philippines created buildings that reflected their interpretation of Filipino architecture. Architects Francisco Mañosa and Leandro V. Locsin were the most prominent. According to Mañosa, the *bahay kubo* represented Filipino values, Philippine climate, and the use of local materials (Cabalfin 2020). One of his works that reflected his interpretation is the Coconut Palace in Manila (Figure 9). From its construction to its detailing, the main material was coconut. The trunk of the coconut tree formed the structure and was topped with an angled roof made of coconut wood tiles. The spaces separated by coconut shell panels were lit by the coconut chandeliers hanging from the ceiling (Taylo n.d.).

Unlike Mañosa's vernacular architecture, Locsin interpreted the *bahay kubo* using modern materials, such as concrete, glass, and metal. The National Arts Center mirrors the thatched steep roof of the *bahay kubo* (Figure 10). The large pyramid structure is lifted by 8 large concrete piers, like the bamboo stilts of the *bahay kubo* (Cabalfin 2020). The multi-functional space in the center of the building reflects the Filipino idea of openness (Paredes-Santillan 2009) and community.

Figure 9 Tylo. *Coconut Palace.* n.d.

Figure 10 Philippine High School for the Arts. *National Arts Center*. n.d.

Besides its structural advantages and climate-adaptable design, selecting the *bahay kubo* as the symbol for Philippine identity had an underlying political agenda during the dictatorial rule of President Marcos (1965-1986) (Lico 2017; Paredes-Santillan 2009). A tactic he used to push his political agenda was using cultural practices from indigenous communities and presenting them as

tradition (Cabalfin 2020; Hobsbawm and Ranger 2004). According to Hobsbawm and Ranger (2004), these "invented traditions" are meant to indoctrinate specific norms and values that seem to relate to the past to create the illusion of longevity. The "return to an assumed primal form" (Cabalfin 2020) is connected to Anthony Smith's (1971) doctrines of nationalism, where claiming a spot as a newly free nation is determined by the distinctiveness and uniqueness of their culture. While this renewed appreciation for the *bahay kubo* seems like a reclamation of cultural roots, it raises the question of whether it is another form of appropriation. President Marcos used the *bahay kubo* and its symbolism to claim authority (Cabalfin 2020) while changing the purpose of the *bahay kubo* from providing shelter to controlling the national narrative in a period where it had to rebuild itself following its colonial past.

Finding architectural authenticity did not come without problems. Appointing one form of architecture to represent various communities across a country that is inherently multi-cultural disregards the traditions and beliefs exclusive to each indigenous community. Instead of picking and choosing architectural elements of the *bahay kubo*, architects should examine the socio-cultural values and traditions tied to it. Philippine architecture is not only characterized by its materiality, structure, and open floor plan but also by its ability to respond to the family's needs while creating a pleasant indoor climate in a house reflecting their Filipino identity (Nierras 1978).

This cultural fusion is "both our weakness and our strength," as architect Locsin said. It is the task of the modern Filipino architect to understand and accept their bipolar traits (Klassen 1986) to fully reflect and communicate Philippine culture through architecture.

Conclusion

Philippine culture is diverse by nature. Indigenous communities around the islands developed traditions tied to their beliefs and environments. Despite being divided by culture and nature, the *bahay kubo* united them, reflecting a cultural connection. Spanish enforced religious and socio-political structures, such as Christianity and the *encomienda* system, reconstructed the *bahay kubo* to the *bahay na bato* (stone house), representing wealth and status. Still, Indigenous Filipinos preserved parts of their culture by merging them, creating folk Christianity and architecture. After declaring independence, the Philippines searched for its identity and proclaimed the *bahay kubo* the national symbol. However, its resurgence had an underlying political agenda used to promote Marcos's nationalist agenda.

The issues behind the reclamation of the *bahay kubo* and its political weight were unexpected discoveries. While its architectural form has been used for personal and nationalist agendas, its true essence is its connection with people and nature. The idea of the *bahay kubo* as a "breathing" house not only refers to its lightweight structure and natural ventilation but also to its interaction with the lives of its people.

Rather than focusing on its visual aspects, like steep roofs or bamboo materials, Philippine architecture should revolve around Filipino communities' social and cultural needs. The architectural adaptability of the *bahay kubo* illustrates how one housing typology can shape itself to the needs of different communities across the islands. Its single room reflects Philippine values of openness and community while providing privacy. An open plan with flexible use of space and areas designed for gatherings would reflect these values while having the possibility to change depending on the needs of its people.

Rooted in Philippine culture, the values of openness and community have persisted through centuries of colonization and have influenced how Filipinos live. Spanish-imposed social and religious structures changed the urban fabric along with its architecture, but the transformation of the *bahay kubo* to the *bahay na bato* (stone house) did not alter its essence. Its adaptability, openness, and breathability continued to shape Philippine architecture even after its colonial era. The resilience of the *bahay kubo* and its reflection of culture motivated the reappreciation of the *bahay kubo* as the embodiment of Philippine culture.

Creating Philippine architecture is more than designing its physical form to simulate tradition. It is about embodying the essence of the *bahay kubo*: adaptability, community, and connection to nature. Thus, architecture becomes more than just shelter; it becomes a living and breathing space that grows with its people.

Bibliography

Alarcon, Norma. *Philippine Architecture during the Pre-Spanish and Spanish Periods*, 1991. http://archive.org/details/philippine-architecture-during-the-pre-spanish-and-spanish-periods.

Anderson, Dr Eric A. "The Encomienda in Early Philippine Colonial History." *Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (1976): 25–36.

Asuncion, Ronahlee A. "Classes, Changes, and Challenges in the Post-Covid-19 Period Philippines." *Japan Labor Issues* 7, no. 45 (2023): 31–42.

Boquet, Yves. "Spatial Structures of the Philippines: Urbanization and Regional Inequalities." In *The Philippine Archipelago*, edited by Yves Boquet, 419–64. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51926-5_14.

———. "The Spanish Creation of the Philippines: The Birth of a Nation." In *The Philippine Archipelago*, edited by Yves Boquet, 61–90. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51926-5_4.

Britannica. "Laws of the Indies." Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/event/Laws-of-the-Indies.

———. "Tuff." Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008. https://www.britannica.com/science/tuff.

Cabalfin, Edson G. "Bahay Kubo as Iconography: Representing the Vernacular and the Nation in Philippine Post-War Architectures." *Fabrications* 30, no. 1 (2020): 44–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2020.1721054.

Chias, Pilar, and Tomas Abad. "Colonial Urban Planning and Land Structures in the Philippines, 1521-1898." *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 11, no. 1 (2012): 9–16. https://doi.org/doi.org/10.3130/jaabe.11.9.

Doeppers, Daniel F. "The Development of Philippine Cities Before 1900." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 4 (1972): 769–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/2052101.

Fitzpatrick, Kristine. "Religion and Colonialism in the Philippines." University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, 2013.

Forster, Jane C. "The Encomienda System in the Philippine Islands: 1571–1597." Loyola University Chicago, 1956. http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1010.

Hernandez, Jose Rhommel B. “Reducción: Ang Pag-Uwi Sa Diskurso Ng Pananakop at Pakikipagtunggali.” *Pamantasang De La Salle* 1, no. 23 (2010): 67–30.

Hila, Ma. Corazon A. “Indigenous Traditions and Transformations in Philippine Architecture.” CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art, 1994. https://epa.culturalcenter.gov.ph/2/4/208/.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. “Introduction: Inventing Traditions.” In *The Invention of Tradition*, 1–14. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Jackson, Emma. “Ferdinand Magellan’s Voyage and Its Legacy in the Philippines,” 2020.

Jagor, Fedor. “Chapter IV.” In *Travels in the Philippines*, 34–48, 1875. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433082438734?urlappend=%3Bseq=11.

Klassen, Winand W. “Towards a Filipino Architecture.” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 6, no. 4 (1978): 218–27.

Lico, Gerardo. “Rising from the Ashes: Post-War Philippines Architecture.” *DOCOMOMO Journal*, no. 57 (2017): 46–55. https://doi.org/10.52200/57.A.UP2JBXRH.

Luga, Ena A.C. “Building in 19th Century Philippines.” *Hukay* 19 (2019): 1–23.

Lumbera, Bienvenido. “Early Shelters and Houses.” *Tuklas Sining: Essays on the Philippine Arts*, 2007.

Lumen Learning. “Feudalism, n.” Western Civilization, n.d. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/atd-herkimer-westerncivilization/chapter/feudalism/.

Macdonald, Charles J-H. “Folk Catholicism and Pre-Spanish Religions in the Philippines.” *Philippine Studies* 52, no. 1 (2001): 78–93.

Mercado, Gregoria. “Filipino Vernacular Scales and Their Use in Construction.” *Envisioning Architectural Scales in the Analogue and Virtual Representation of Architecture*, (2023), 48–59.

Merriam-Webster. “Helter-Skelter, Adj.,” n.d. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/helter-skelter.

Morley, Ian. “The Creation of Modern Urban Form in the Philippines.” *Urban Morphology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 5–26.

Mustafa, Shada. “Place Identity: The Production of Space Through the Logic of Identity, Reflections from Contemporary Manila,” 2017.

Oxford English Dictionary. “Bayanihan, n.,” 2023. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4029693593.

Pangilinan, Esthel. “Colonial and Post-Colonial Architecture,” 2021.

Paredes-Santillan, Caryn. “Decoding Architectural Heritage: A Formal Study of the Architecture of Leandro V. Locsin.” *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 8, no. 1 (2009).

Perez III, Rodrigo D. “Philippine Architecture.” CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art, 1994. https://epa.culturalcenter.gov.ph/2/4/207/.

Phelan, John Leddy. *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967.

Rafael, Vicente L. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*, 1993.

Rodriguez, Evelyn I. “Primerang Bituin: Philippines-Mexico Relations at the Dawn of the Pacific Rim Century.” *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* 6, no. 1 (2006): 14–12.

Smith, Anthony D. In *Theories of Nationalism*, 23. London: Duckworth, 1971.

Stanislawski, Dan. “Early Spanish Town Planning in the New World.” *Geographical Review* 37, no. 1 (1947): 94–105. https://doi.org/10.2307/211364.

Stošić, Sanja, Ljiljana Marković, and J.M. Andrew. “Early Spanish Reign over the Philippines: Social and Spiritual Remodeling.” *Uluslararası Medeniyet Çalışmaları Dergisi* I, no. II (2016): 187–202.

Taylo, Armee Sedillo. “The Coconut Palace: A Showcase of Filipino Ingenuity, Sustainability, and Excess.” Billion Bricks, n.d. https://billionbricks.org/blog/spotlight-coconut-palace/.

UNESCO. “Baroque Churches of the Philippines.” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 1993. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/677/.

Villalon, Augusto F. “The Filipino Bahay Kubo, Where Form Does Not Necessarily Follow Function.” *Vernacular Architecture*, 2002.

Wickberg, E. “The Chinese Mestizo in Philippine History.” *The Journal of Southeast Asian History* 5, no. 1 (1964): 64.

Wilberforce, Archibald. “The Philippines.” In *Spain and Her Colonies, Compiled from the Best Authorities*, 1898.

Zialcita, Fernando N. “*Bahay Na Bato*.” CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art, 1994. https://epa.culturalcenter.gov.ph/2/5/220/.

List of Figures

Figure 8 *Casa de la Yntendencia (Bahay na Bato).* Jose Honorato Lozano. 1847. Biblioteca Nacional de España Collection.

Figure 9 *Coconut Palace*. Tylo. n.d. https://billionbricks.org/blog/spotlight-coconut-palace/.

Figure 10 *National Arts Center*. Philippine High School for the Arts. *National Arts Center*. n.d.