Architecture as Embodied Culture; the Traditional as a Cultural Body in Ganjuran Church, Yogyakarta

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Abstract. Architecture has been regarded as a cultural manifestation of a society. Architecture is an embodied cultural experience formed, transformed and lived. This paper attempts to describe and present architecture as embodied cultural edifies & real dimension towards how the global and the local could form contemporary reality. By using Ganjuran Church, Yogyakarta, Indonesia as an example on how architecture is actively present in the cultural process.

Keywords: Architecture, Embodied Culture, Ganjuran Church

1. Architecture; embodied culture.

In history, architecture has been a powerful cultural vehicle to carry messages and symbols. This works by the operation of representing architecture as an iconic artefact. Symbols are brought up using several design and formal strategies. Ideas are transformed and being modified when it is placed on the new place. Place becomes a powerful invisible borders. Place is borne with its specificity, its historical entities, its cultural veils. This is mostly apparent in public, historic, sacred and meaningful architecture.

The introduction of new cultural values (e.g. religion) may come with many strategies. One of the strategies is acculturation, selection, acceptance and toleration of old values. Values are manifested in symbols. Architecture, embodied with symbols, is an organ of cultural body. Architecture becomes a manifestation of an embodied culture.

Architecture’s roles in culture manifested in three phases; 1. Conceptualization; when architecture becomes representation of certain values (especially introduction of new ones). 2. Replacement; when architecture, through its ritualized form and space, becomes a process of interactions between cultural values where they were lived and practiced. 3. Constitution; architecture is an on going process of making a new and stable value. These phases are occurring in parallel states. One may precede the others, but not in a linear fashion. These three processes are the practices of interaction between ‘space’and ‘place’. ‘Place’, upon Michel de Certeau’s idea is ‘definable, limited, and enclosed’, just as ‘space’ is constantly being produced by the practices of living.

Ganjuran Church is one example on how architecture represents the above process. Architecture is actively present when the cultural values (e.g. Christianity, Catholicism) were being introduced, represented, and adapted to a local culture (e.g. Javanese). Ganjuran Church is also an example on how traditionalism is a strong cultural idea that always presents to constitute new cultural values.

2. Ganjuran Church

2.1. Location and history

This church is located in Ganjuran. Ganjuran is located around 20 kilometers south of Yogyakarta. It’s on the rural area of Bantul residency. The church’s official name is The Jesus’ Sacred Heart Church (Gereja Hati Kudus Tuhan Yesus), but it’s well-known as Ganjuran Church.
Ganjuran church is one of the cultural heritages in Bantul. As the first Catholic Church in the area, built by an initiative from Julius Schmutzer’s family in 16 April 1924. Julius Schmutzer was the owner of sugar cane factory in Ganjuran.

The church was conceived with Julius Schmutzer’s ethical idea towards local inhabitants and their culture. He initiated a devotional area beside the main church. This devotional area is dominated by a sculptural altar which mimics the Prambanan temple. Prambanan temple is a major Hindu temple in Yogyakarta area. This devotional ‘altar’ was inaugurated in 11 February 1930. The devotional area’s design is an outdoor version of the classical church aisle.
The devotional area’s altar is surrounded by water taps, distributed from a natural source around the church’s area. This altar becomes a meditative space for the visitors and prayers. The altar’s form mimed the formal figure of Prambanan temple, despite the fact that Prambanan temple is a Hindu temple.

![Fig. 4: Ganjuran devotional altar (left) and Prambanan Temple (right); formal comparison](image)

The main church building was shaken by 27 May 2006 earthquake and being replaced by a copy of traditional Javanese-styled building envelope. The skin of the original main church transformed, from a balance language of western classical church style with local ornaments to a dominance of local traditional architectural style.

![Fig. 5: The destruction of the main church after 27 May 2006 earth quake](image)

The post earthquake building is using a “Javanese-hall” or the “Pendopo”. It’s basically based on an open plan design, with four main columns supporting the middle area of the hall.
Fig. 6: Plan, Sections and Elevations Ganjuran Church post-earthquake design

Fig. 7: the reconstructed main church building; exterior

Fig. 8: the reconstructed main church building; interior
2.2. Traditional culture; in the contemporary setting

Ganjuran Church is to be understood as the strengthening of traditional culture. The destruction brought by natural disaster came as a chance for the traditional representations to replace the non-local symbols and representations. The toleration from Catholicism during the initial building of the church is being replaced by a totally domination of traditional image and representation.

Ganjuran Church is becoming a cultural hybrid. The phases of conceptualization, replacement and constitution are apparent. New values brought by Christianity (e.g. Catholicism) are blended over the time, represented in a dominant local, traditional symbolism.

3. References
