

# **Material Culture Analysis on the Personal Furniture in the Museums of Silay City: Basis for Cultural and Historical Preservation**

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## ABSTRACT

Culture and history harbor the beauty of one's society. In view, the study of artifacts could best explain our cultural and historical background. The study aimed to examine the personal furniture in the museums of Silay City to preserve the culture and tradition of the old society in Silay through material culture analysis. The study is a qualitative research conducted within the context of descriptive and historical research. Interview method was used in gathering information. McClung Fleming's two conceptual tools of artifact analysis were utilized to help distinguish precise information about its five properties. Personal furniture in Manuel Severino Hofileña Ancestral House and Bernardino-Ysabel Jalandoni Museum were examined and analyze. The result showed that the personal furniture in two museums have significant influence in the culture and tradition of every Filipino-Spanish family in Silay. The study concludes that material culture analysis on the personal furniture could help preserve the culture and tradition of the past. The study further recommends that teachers and students can utilize the result of the study as material for understanding literature, culture, and history. Also, the government could use the study as basis for their cultural and historical preservation programs.

**Keywords** - Archaeology, material culture analysis, personal furniture, cultural and historical preservation, qualitative research design, Bacolod City, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Culture and history have great influence on the individual context. One's culture and history cultivate one's traditional skeleton (Arun, 1995). Also, according to Arun, culture is the set of traditional beliefs and values that are passed on and shared in a particular society. It is also the total way of life and thinking patterns, speech action and artifacts that are passed from generation to generation.

Culture can be seen in the constructed places, design, and artifacts. They are all figurative items that denote to the conducts and standards significance to the way of life (Warner, 1959). The compilation and documentation of these items contribute to the cultural healing of ones' society. Thus, the analysis of these objects instigates with the very outlining of the examination inquiry (Yanow, 2001).

On the other hand, Anderson (1876) claimed that history is a description of the endeavors that occurred among manhood that would include an explanation of the rise and fall of nations, as well as of other great changes which have affected the political and social condition of the human race. Thus, the records of history from the artifacts' study may describe the work of art of our past. In relation, it discourses between the present and the past that could be recorded for the future.

The study of Potshangbam Binodini Devi (2015) on "The prehistoric cultural relations of Southeast Asia with Northeast India" provides key drive region on the interment practice which had occurred since primeval ancient era in India. Some non-synthetic artifacts are essential assemblages associated with the burial. The study discourses on these folk documents in order to link Northeast India with South East Asian countries.

In the Philippines, the ancestral houses in the community owned and preserved by the same family for several generations as part of the Filipino family culture would be the places to take care of the ancient objects of the ancestors. Indeed, there is a need for a wide-ranging platform in protecting the sites which are rich in historical and cultural value (Sison, 2002). The Spanish houses in Vigan, Intramuros, and Silay City are just few socially inherited artifacts that paint out past.

Subsequently, one important point that was raised in this study was how material culture analysis by Fleming (1974) was used in the analysis of the personal furniture found in the heritage houses of Silay City, namely, Manuel Severino Hofileña Ancestral House and Bernardino-Ysabel Jalandoni Museum. Silay City is in the middle part of Negros Occidental. From Bacolod City, it is 14 kilometers north. The total land area of Silay City is 214.8 square kilometers occupying the 2.71% of the total land area of the Negros Occidental, Philippines. Silay City was the Paris of Negros Occidental. Prominent Filipino-Spanish families who owned big haciendas lived in Silay. This made Silay City a perfect place to find ancestral houses that mirrors the Spanish influence through the furniture.

The museums in Silay is the best way of getting acquainted with the history of this place that is a perfect blend of artwork, relics and artifacts which enables every individual to understand the present and past of the city. Through the study, the locals of Negros would have the chance to perceive the beautiful infusion of local culture and Spanish influence in Silay City. Indeed, the study shows a a stunning interaction of two cultures and traditions in the history of Negros. Therefore,

a documentation of a material culture analysis on the personal furniture in the museums of Silay City verifies the preservation and restoration of the beautiful local history infused with the Spanish influence through the significant cultural artifacts in the island of Negros.

## FRAMEWORK

The Material Culture Analysis on the Personal Furniture in the Museums of Silay is propounded by E. Mclung Fleming (1999) which claimed that every culture, primitive or advanced is absolutely dependent on its artifacts. Subsequently, the artifacts made and used by the people are not only a basic expression of those people; they are like culture itself, a necessary means of man's self-fulfillment. The study of artifacts is, therefore, a primary humanistic revise. Moreover, the study may provide the present and future generations to discover the rich and vast history and heritage behind every cultural artifact in their own local history.

This concept was developed from the artifact study of Fleming. With this background, it bears the special impression of thinking oriented toward cultural history, but it should equally be applicable in other areas of study. The model utilizes two conceptual tools- a fivefold classification of the basic property of an artifact and a set of four operations to be performed on these properties (Fleming, 1974).

These operations could answer the most important questions about an artifact. These properties of an artifact are its history, material, construction, design and function. History includes where and when it was made, by whom and for whom and why and successive changes in its ownership, condition and function (Fleming, 1999).

Materials involve what materials are made of- woods, fibers, ceramic bodies, metals, glass. Construction has to do with the techniques of manufacture employed, workmanship and the way parts are organized to bring about the objects function. Design includes structure, form, style, ornament, and iconography of the object. Function embraces both the uses (intended functions) and the roles (unintended functions) of the object in its culture including utility, delight, and communication (Fleming, 1999).

Description begins with the measurements that specify the dimensions and sometimes the weight of the object. The essence of the description is the concise and orderly delineation of the physical aspects of an object. The chief objective

of description is to provide accurate information about the five properties of the artifact (Fleming, 1999).

Evaluation has to do with judgments of aesthetics quality and workmanship. Although, the understanding of an artifact begins with the identification of its properties, it can be greatly extended by the evaluation of the properties in terms of culture values standards (1999).

Cultural analysis is the third operation which begins where identification and evaluation leave-off. Meanwhile, functional analysis indicates the ways in which the artifact became an agent of major change within its culture. The purpose of cultural analysis is to isolate characteristics common to the group that enables the researcher to make inferences of a general nature about society that produced or used the body of artifacts (Fleming, 1999).

The last of the four basic operations involved in artifact research is interpretation. Whereas cultural analysis is concerned with the relations of the artifact to its culture, interpretation is concerned with the relations of the artifact to our culture. More specifically, interpretation focuses on the relation between some facts learned about the artifacts and some key aspects of our current value system, and the relation must be sufficiently intense or rich to have self-evident meaning, significance, or relevance.

Interpretation does not result in a statement of facts that can be documented, but a statement of relationship born of “synthetic intuition” and imagination that goes beyond documentation. As in content analysis, an artifact is not subject to just one “correct” interpretation, but many.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study aimed to examine the personal furniture in the museums of Silay City, namely, Manuel Severino Hofileña Ancestral House and Bernardino-Ysabel Jalandoni Museum. Specifically, the study sought to: 1) Determine the uses and roles of an artifact in terms of history, material, construction, design and function; 2) Identify the four operations of an artifact in terms of identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation; and 3) Determine the cultural and historical preservation program that can be formulated.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study is conducted within the context of a multi-methods research designs which are particularly helpful in contributing to a holistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Baker *et al.*, 2001).

Moreover, Mason (2002) describes qualitative research approaches as being grounded in an 'interpretivist' situation. It is based on research approaches which are malleable and profound to the social framework. Thus, it was founded on critical methods which take justification of involvedness, feature, and perspective. With the use of qualitative study, the researchers logically developed adequate proofs to present the uses and roles of an artifact.

Subsequently, qualitative research is best paired with descriptive historical method. Descriptive method is used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena to describe with respect to variables (Key, 1997). Consequently, the historical method is used as a system accompanying to reflection.

Interview was used as a tool in gathering information.

### Research Informants

In gathering the information, the researchers interviewed the following people: 1) Mr. Ramon J. Hofileña, one of the owners of Manuel Severino Hofileña Ancestral House; 2) Mrs. Carmen K. Puentevella, the President of Silay Heritage Foundation Inc.; 3) Mr. Gilbert L. Nemenzo, the tour guide of Manuel Severino Hofileña Ancestral House; 4) Mrs. Amor M. Condrada, the curator and tour guide of Bernardino-Ysabel Jalandoni Ancestral House; and 5) Mr. Raymond Bayot, curator of Ramos-Dizon Museum.

Mr. Ramon J. Hofileña and Mrs. Carmen K. Puentevella are the owners of the furniture that the researchers analyzed and examined. Indeed, they are the people who best know the furniture. In addition, Mr. Gilbert L. Nemenzo, Mrs. Amor M. Condrada and Mr. Raymond Bayot are the curators and tour guides of the museums. Their experience gave them the authority to explain the information that the researchers asked.

Subsequently, The Hofileñas and Jalandonis are prominent Filipino-Spanish families who live in Silay City. They played a major role in the development of Filipino-Spanish culture and tradition in the city. Their influences are evident in the arts and artifacts inside their ancestral houses. Lastly, their ancestral houses are among the three museums open to the public viewing.

## Instrumentation

The selection of the problem was the result of the researchers' thorough study and survey of the relevant and up-to-date issues about the importance of strengthening local history in building national pride. The researchers attended a seminar/forum that discussed issues about the matter.

The researchers secured research approval from the school and letters of permission were sent to everyone who was interviewed. Then, compiling of objects in Hofileña Residence and Jalandoni-Bernardino Museum for research analysis followed. The researchers took pictures and interviewed people for documentation. Next, the artifacts that would be analyzed were complemented with necessary documents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Artifact Analysis in Manuel Severino Hofileña Ancestral House



Figure 1. The Camphor Trunk in Manuel Severino Hofileña Heritage House

### The uses and roles of an artifact in terms of its five properties

According to Mr. Ramon Hofileña, the trunk (See Figure 1) was made of camphor wood from China in the early 20th century by a Chinese craftsman.

The trunk was owned by his mother, and it was used for storing clothes and other personal things. Mr. Hofileña claimed that a lot of labor went into making it artistic with hand carved figures, flowers and abstractions in the relief all around the trunk including the back. He also added that all its parts were practically handmade, and there was a lot of emphasis on its appearance and craftsmanship. It is excellent in all parts, knitted well, the style is very Chinese and the ornamentation is very attractive. As for its iconography, the sculptured figures are Chinese which may be depicting one offering something, maybe a gift to a noble person. All the decors are well thought of artistry by a professional artist of its kind. The trunk is off the ground, shouldered by four sculptured birds. Since it was made of camphor wood, it could drive away the insects to protect materials inside especially the clothes. It is a beautifully designed work of art. It indicates that the owner is well-to-do or even very wealthy, he added.

### **The four operations of an artifact**

Every part of the camphor trunk is excellent and attractive. The craftsmanship shows imaginative and impressive ornamentation and design. As to its comparison to other specimens, the camphor trunk in Hofeliña residence could be best compared to the traveler's chest or Baul in Bernardino/Ysabel Jalandoni Museum (See Figure 2). According to Mrs. Amor M. Condrada, the curator of the said museum, it was made of hardwood with arched lid and hand forged fittings. Also, it is 45 cm. wide and 97 cm. in length.

Mrs. Carmen K. Puentevella owns the furniture. According to Mrs. Puentevella, the baul was owned by the aunt of her husband. The aunt told her that she could get whatever she wanted to have in her house. Mrs. Puentevella then chose to have the baul. According to the story of her aunt, the baul was owned by the pirates. The pirates would put their money and jewelry inside the baul. The pirates just left the baul by the sea. The aunt found the baul then kept it for herself.





Figure 2. The trunk in Bernardino-Ysabel Jalandoni Museum

Through the examination of the camphor trunk, the researchers found out that there are no significant changes in the general forms, construction and popularity of the items since the 18th century. However, the decoration and iconography have a considerable difference.

Wooden trunks with intricate designs and carvings like camphor chests were made for elite people, Mr. Ramon Hofeliña said. Their expensive and elegant style would give us the idea that they were also symbols of status quo during their time (Gilbert L. Nemenzo, personal communication, (September 4, 2013).

However, the trunks in Bernardino/Ysabel Jalandoni Museum and the University of St. La Salle Bacolod Museum showed evidence that both rich and poor owned them. Subsequently, the rich and the poor people put their important things inside the trunks. According to Mrs. Puentevella, the family of her helper owned it. When the father knew that she was collecting antiques, he sold it to her. The picture (See Figure 3) is the trunk owned by Mrs. Carmen K. Puentevella which she bought from the father of her helper.



Figure 3. The trunk in the USLS-B Museum

Wooden camphor trunks were a part of Chinese culture as early as the 18th century. When Chinese people started to trade, they also brought with them their practice. Thus, they used to store everything from blankets, clothes and linen to food and personal papers. When they reached the shores of the Philippines, they also brought with them the camphor trunks.

Rich Spanish/Filipino families during the old times own camphor trunks. The trunks would have intricate designs and carvings that would show fame and wealth during that time (Crow, 1937).

### **Interpretation**

According to Mr. Ramon Hofeliña, the camphor trunk was owned by his mother. The wedding dress of his mother and the suit of his father were inside the trunk. It was originally placed in the master bedroom, but it was transferred in the stairways of the house when his mother died.

The family lost the key of the camphor trunk after they buried their parents. It would be then forever closed with the wedding dress and suit of the Hofeliña parents (Mr. Ramon Hofeliña, personal communication, September 4, 2013). This personal furniture of their mother would always be one of the significant pieces of furniture of the Hofeliñas.

## Artifacts Analysis in Bernardino-Ysabel Jalandoni Museum



Figure 4. The Butaca/Planters' Chair in Bernardino-Ysabel Jalandoni Museum.

### The uses and roles of an artifact in terms of its five properties

According to the curator of the house, Mrs. Amor Condrada, the Planters' chair (See Figure 4) was made in the Philippines. "It could not be traced when exactly it was made because this piece of furniture was only loaned by Ms. Carmen Puentebella", Mrs. Amor Condrada said. Since it was made in the Philippines, Mrs. Condrada concluded that it was made by Filipino craftsmen. She added that this chair was intended for men to sit on. It was also made to assist women in giving birth. They just simply sat and spread their legs on the two long arms of this chair.

For men, they just tie the cloth between the two arms of this chair and laid their tired feet on it. Mrs. Condrada mentioned that it was used during the day when relaxing or sleeping or could also be used for birthing. The chair was made of hardwood with woven cane set and has two flat overextended arms. The object was mass produced. The chair is quite simple because it has no intricate designs on it yet very functional because it was made of hard wood. The chair has long flat, extended arms that support the outstretched legs.

It has dark brown varnish. It is 193 cm high and 77 cm wide. It is a hardwood with woven cane set and has two flat over extended arms. According to the curator, the furniture is usually placed inside the bedroom, but could also be put in the living room. She also added that the chair could be used for birthing and resting. Lastly, a well-to-do family owned it because an ordinary person before could not afford to purchase a chair like this one (Mrs Amor Condrada, personal communication, (September 4, 2013).

### **The four operations of an artifact**

Though it is simple in its design, it is visually pleasing to the eyes. It is made of wood with neatly wooden cane set. There are many different types and designs of planter's lounging chair. As to its purpose, the chair is only used for relaxation nowadays.

As to the comparison with other specimens, planter's lounging chair in Bernardino/Ysabel Jalandoni Museum could be best compared to the planter's chair in Ramos-Dizon Museum.



Figure 5. The Butaca/Planter's Chair in Ramos-Dizon Museum

The chair was used for resting and relaxation. Also, it was a reminder of the past objects. Then, it conveys wealth in society. The chair was always placed in the room, but it could also be in the living room. This chair played significant role in the society before especially for the elite people for they used this chair for relaxation by placing a cloth in between its two long arms.

The furniture is considered to be an art decoration bed. It has a mixture of designs from different cultures. Also, it was brought in the Philippines for rich Filipino families. Later, it became an emblem of wealth or status symbol of the elite in the society, Mrs. Carmen K. Puentevella claimed. The chair is still part in today's culture. Consequently, it is still common among the elite in the society especially the original ones. Thus, its designs and constructions have not changed significantly.

The Philippines was colonized by Spaniards for over 300 hundred years. The influence of the colonizers left a colorful blend of cultural and traditional impacts. Thus, the bearing of Spanish influence is clearly seen to the things they left behind. These things paint a clear image of how these people live and influence the Filipino society.

The artifacts that could be found in the ancestral houses describe the ways people live. They have the direct connection to their owners. This link makes them the primary sources of cultural and historical studies.

The future generation could see the bridge between the past and the present through the artifacts. With this, the study of artifacts plays a very important role in the preservation and conservation of the culture and history. The study could document pictures and compile stories behind these pictures. The documentation and compilation are the resources of the future generation in understanding their roots.

Material Culture Analysis by Fleming (1974) is the best tool to use in conducting an artifact study. The uses and roles of an artifact in terms of history, material, construction design and function are vividly defined. Consequently, the four operations of an artifact in terms of identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation are clearly discussed. Lastly, the result of the study could make a beneficial cultural and historical preservation program to our society.

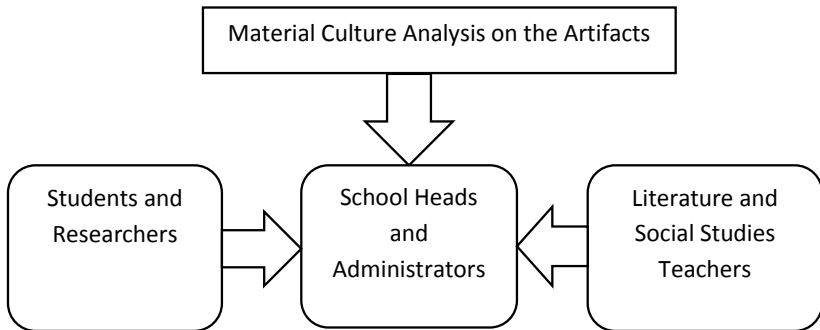
## CONCLUSIONS

Cultural and historical preservation could be best done through Material Culture Analysis. As the proponent of Material Culture Analysis, Fleming (1974) presents the steps of artifact study to write about the object.

Moreover, the five properties for understanding an object's meaning and significance: material, history, construction, design, and function could provide a formula for including and interrelating all the significant facts about an artifact.

Through the material culture, the relics from the two heritage houses would give us better understanding of our past culture and tradition. Thus, the personal furniture from the two heritage houses were fragments of our ancestors to be restored, preserved and conserved. Lastly, the furniture in the two heritage houses could be the physical evidence of the marriage between Spanish and Filipino cultures.

## TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH SECTION



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