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Being under the Spanish regime for more than 300 years, the Spanish colonial period brought a huge impact on the architectural style still seen on many structures like churches, houses, government buildings, and many others today. Here, let's discover more about the characteristics of Spanish colonial architecture in the Philippines, a part of the various influences and cultures that makes the country a genuine melting pot of architectural design. Pre-Hispanic Era Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the earliest records of architecture in the Philippines were primarily caves and rock shelters. Early Filipino were nomadic. They had permanent abode and had to move from one place to another to find food, either by fishing or hunting. As such, they didn't require to build actual structures and rather depended on nature for shelter. As tools and farming became available to get a stable source of food, settlements started to arise. Filipinos began building fixed structures as their houses. Native houses were primarily built on stilts, usually rectangular in shape. Being an archipelago composed of 7,107 islands, the materials used for these native houses varied immensely, depending on the topography and climate. With that, there are many differences between houses created by the people in the valleys of Ifugao, the nipa hut of Filipinos in the lowlands, and the Maranao's intricate torogan (house of the nobilities), malia-a-walay (big house), and lawig (small house). Meanwhile, the Mindanao region already saw the creation of stunning mosques with the religion of Islam emerging even prior to Spanish colonization. Hispanic Era In 1565, the Spaniards arrived in the Philippines and brought the Antillean architecture style. While this type is considered European, it didn't originate in Spain. Rather, it traces its origins from the Antilles in Central America. As it didn't fit the tropics, the style was adjusted to fit the Philippines' tropical climate. Thus, providing it its own distinct Filipino twist and character. Part of the goals of the Spanish colonization was to spread Christianity. With that, there was the need to build religious structures to support the growing number of devotees. Unlike ones erected in Europe, the Philippine churches were incredibly unique, perfectly highlighting the influence of Spanish colonial architecture. These glorious colonial churches were deemed to be a beautiful reinterpretation of the Spanish-Mexican Baroque style. Friar architects designed these structures that were erected between 1600 to 1750. Initially, churches were built using nipa and bamboo. However, the friars soon realized that more imposing permanent structures are needed to bring a sense of awe. Plus, it would also serve as protection from the constant natural disasters (typhoons and earthquakes) that hit the country, as well as shield them from human destruction. Faced with limitations in materials and technical means, these grandiose structures required years to decades to erect. Eventually, Filipino, Chinese, and Muslim craftsmen took over the helm and injected their local touch into the style and elements, like the tropical plants from the Filipinos, dragons and lions figures, red air-dried bricks, and the Moorish and Islamic designs seen in some of the interior and facades of churches. Note that construction work was mandatory for the natives in non-Muslim regions, which means local Filipinos took part in many tasks, such as transporting, cutting, and processing the materials needed to build these religious structures. Many of these Spanish colonial churches are present today and are still standing firm in the Ilocos Region, Southern Luzon (Laguna and Batangas), Visayan region (specifically in the islands of Cebu, Panay, and Bohol), and Manila. Some of these churches were never altered, while others were tainted by insipid renovations. Among these most beautiful Spanish colonial churches that one could visit until today is the San Agustin Church in Manila, the first church erected in Luzon, which has been standing on the same spot since 1571. It has been dedicated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993. There's also the Basilica Minore del Santo Nino in Cebu, dubbed as the birthplace of Christianity in the Philippines, also standing in the same location since 1565. Nuestra Señora de la Asuncion in Ilocos Sur, Santo Thomas de Villanueva Church in Iloilo, and the San Agustin Church in Ilocos Norte are also examples of these Baroque churches. While Spanish colonial architecture was primarily characterized and seen in churches, Filipino houses also evolved during the Spanish period. From the traditional nipa hut (bahay kubo), it was replaced by bahay na bato, the upgraded version of the former. It basically had the same spatial arrangements and architectural principles of the bahay kubo, but what made it different it was built using stone and other sturdier materials. Other bahay na bato had lower levels supported by brick or stone, with upper levels made of hardwood and covered by tiles or galvanized iron. The first floors serve as a cellar, storage room, or shop, while the second floor serves as an elevated residential apartment. Windows open from floor to ceiling, to let the tropical wind in and get the best ventilation. Spanish colonial architecture also allowed the rise of military fortifications built across the Philippine Islands. The most popular and extensive among these is Intramuros or the "Walled City" in Manila built in 1571. It's a beautiful architectural form with a trapezoidal layout, erected by the sea and the Pasig River. It aimed to protect the Spanish city from attack, contained Fort Santiago, the topmost military outpost, and was the seat of the Spanish government during the Spanish colonization. Other Spanish colonial architectures that were built during the Spanish period were hospitals like Hospital de San Juan de Dios, and schools like the University of Santo Tomas, Ateneo Municipal, and Colegio de Letran. All of which follow the characteristic of the tropical Baroque style of architecture that was prevalent during that time. Takeaway Spanish colonization brought the Antillean style and was tweaked to the Philippines' tropical climate, heralding the construction of some of the country's most beautiful structures. While the succeeding American and Japanese era had their own influence, the Spanish colonial architecture and style endured as seen in many of its structures that still stand today. journal article Review: SPANISH PHILIPPINE ARCHITECTURE Reviewed Work: ARQUITECTURA ESPAÑOLA EN FILIPINAS (1565-1800) by María Lourdes Diaz-Trechuelo Spinola, Don Diego Angulo-Íñiguez Review by: Fernando Zobel de Ayala Philippine Studies Vol. 8, No. 3 (JULY 1960), pp. 656-659 (4 pages) Published By: Ateneo de Manila University This is a preview. Log in through your library. Preview Journal Information Publisher Information The School of Social Sciences is a constituent member of the Loyola Schools of the Ateneo de Manila University. 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