

Contextual Relationship of Form and Meaning in Architectural Inculcation

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the relationship of form and meaning in architectural inculcation, which can be seen as a powerful agency to reinforce the sacredness of church architecture. Inculcation process shifted the preferences of having typical Gothic church architecture to new local architecture Christian style. *Ganjuran* Catholic Church in Bantul, Yogyakarta is taken as case study. This is a descriptive, analytical and interpretive study, using an interdisciplinary approach by borrowing structural analysis from the discipline of semiotics and complemented by architectural analysis. Description and analyses are made to identify the local architectural components that are present in Catholic worship and to explain the meaning behind it. The study showed that the relationship between architectural inculcation and meaning, can be understood as the result of an intimate connection that engages people perceptually and intellectually in relation to the formal and spatial design, structural aspects and ornamentation in the context of sacredness. This analytical understanding could be the basis for strategic action to address issues of church architecture and its interaction with local culture.

KEY WORDS : inculcation, church architecture, meaning

INTRODUCTION

Architecture is a product of culture through a long-time process in relation to the context of locality. Gothic architecture as part of the world architecture vocabularies; known as the symbol of sacred architecture, has become an important reference in Roman Catholic church. Most of the early Catholic churches in Indonesia were designed by following the Gothic or neo Gothic style. However, in its development, inculcation process has shifted the preference of having Gothic architecture to a new local style.

Inculcation is a movement in Catholicism to respect the local culture and enrich itself with the local values [1,2]. The practices of inculcation existed since many years ago, however, the term inculcation just gained an official recognition since the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965, defined in the decree as follows: "Inculcation is the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration in Christianity, and the implantation of Christianity into different human culture." [3] Through inculcation process, the Church made the Gospel incarnate in Javanese culture as the local culture, and at the same time introduced people, together with their cultures, tropical environment into their own community [4,5,6].

The Second Vatican Council and its supporting statements did not have a great deal to say about church architecture, however, conciliar statements about liturgy also entered into a movement in thinking about church architectural design. Inculcation is the creation of a new unity and communion, not only within the culture but also as an enrichment of the universal Church. As the most visible expression of Christianity in the public space, architecture was a major challenge to inculcation. It is not necessary for the church architecture in Indonesia to follow the western culture; then, it was designed in a different form, away from the Gothic architecture and be more closely to the local architecture.

Church architecture is packed with meaning. Discourse in the history of church architecture, always distinguished purpose (function), architectural form, and meaning as the main factors. There was a tight relationship amongst these factors. Function accommodated in the Gothic church and the local church architecture sustained as the Catholic place of worship; but the architectural form was definitely different. Then, the question raised is how about the meaning behind the new architectural form? Did it relate to the sacredness of the church?

As we understand through meaning people act [7]. Response to a church architecture are conditioned by certain aspects: culture and by culture interactions, expectations, and also depended on whether it is being used liturgically or not [8]. Sacredness is situational, depends not on substantive dwelling of the supernatural, but the shape, the physical spaces and material objects should give people an experience of sacredness or "the present of the holy", even before anything else happens within the space [9, 10]. There are many instances of new churches or contemporary churches that failing to survive for a variety of reasons [11, 12, 13]. If the building

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complex is devoid of religious imagery it is quite easily translatable to other use, such as school, medical centre, or community centre, etc. which then could influence the way people response and act.

Church buildings in some way conveyed ideas, or bear meaning, embodied beliefs and ideologies, inspired feelings, or in some way "spoke to" those who experienced them. To understand the way in which church architecture was bound up with the experience of worshippers and others, this study attempted to explore the ways in which church architecture might convey ideas, meaning and feelings to people. This paper argued for a clear analytical understanding of the relationship between the form and meaning in architectural inculturation, as the basis for strategic action to address issues of sacred architecture, and to contribute to the discussion of the complex ways in which the forces of inculturation interacted with local culture

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Case study

The church of the Holy Heart of Jesus, located in Bantul District of Yogyakarta Province, is a Catholic church, also known as *Ganjuran* church. The founders were Joseph and Julius Schmutzler, Dutch managers of Gondang Lipuro sugar factory in Ganjuran village. Inspired by the spirit of *rerum novarum*, - a papal teaching about social justice and prosperity for the poor -, the Schmutzler family built some social facilities, - hospital, schools, orphanage and a chapel -, as their social responsibility for the employees and their families. The chapel was established in 1924 in the sugar factory complex. It was developed step by step progressively to adjust the increasing numbers of parishioners, and later on, the chapel became a church and an autonomous parish for the Ganjuran parishioners [14,15].

Nowadays, *Ganjuran* church has been recognized as the pilgrimage destination. People from many cities come either to participate in the Mass celebration or taking part in the devotional activities. In 2006, an earthquake stroke Yogyakarta province and the early church was collapsed. The church was rebuild in 2009, in the spirit of inculturation, as related to the result of the Second Vatican Council. The new church building was designed by a team from Atmajaya Catholic University and the parish priest, Gregorius Utomo, Pr., located in the former church complex. The design was referring to the concept of Javanese traditional architecture as local architecture.

Method

This is a descriptive, analytical and interpretive study. Structural analysis were made by borrowing the semiotics approach and complemented by architectural analysis. Based on data collected in the field study, - which consist of recording rites and liturgical activities, architectural form where those activities took place-, and literature studies, the analytical steps are taken. Firstly, exploring the architectural components of *Ganjuran* church by categorizing all physical architectural components that are present in the church architecture into degree of similarity to the Javanese traditional architecture as its reference. The next step was explaining how they got there, interpreting the relation to the context of Catholic liturgical activities, and the Javanese culture. Through this analysis, relationship between the architectural form and the meaning behind it could be unveiled.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Architectural Semiotics

Architecture is operating in some way as language. It is hard to say how we are introduced to the language of architecture, how we learn to distinguish domestic architecture from sacred architecture, for example. In doing so, we often are aided by verbal or iconic signs; but the existence of such signs, even the need for such signs, does not take away from the fact that we learn to "read" what the buildings, - or different places in which we find ourselves - "speak". To claim that "building speaks" is merely to claim that they are signs. A sign can reflect more than one type of relationship between its *representamen* (sign vehicle) and its *object* (referent). Since architecture is a complex sign, then contextual relationship is needed to understand the language, which signify something in virtue of having a structure or form of expression, and a corresponding content structure [16,17].

In architectural semiotics, architecture is seen as integral to the production of meaning. The church architecture as sign is seen first of all as a single autonomous object and is concerned with its specific system of manifestation, i.e. how its meaning takes form in its appearance. Architecture is realized and concretized in such a form that confronts our senses, that we perceived. Architectural form or the plane of expression is running from the more abstract to the more concrete one, and the plane of content is running from the unconscious to the realized/conscious one, or from the deep level to the surface level (Figure 1).

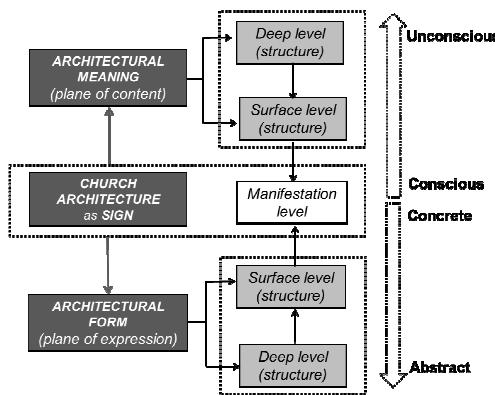


Figure 1: Contextual relationship of form and meaning

To understand architecture in the context of sacredness is to examine the correlation between the plane of expression and the plane of content. The plane of expression is dealing with the actual structures or the materiality of the signifier. It is the physical sense in which the architectural space or the building is constructed and recognized. The plane of expression can be categorized in two main categories. First, is the topological category covering categories of position and orientation; the second category is the plastic category which are covering the chromatics and eidetic aspects. Meanwhile, the plane of content refers to the meaning communicated by the sign, i.e. the semantic and syntactic structures of the architecture.

Architectural Inculcation

Dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation are instruments of the inculcation process [18]. Creative assimilation starts from what there is in culture, while dynamic equivalence confines itself to transmitting the message of liturgical rite in the local cultural pattern. Inculcation involves the Spirit's call for each culture and people to elicit their own creative response to the Gospel. The architecture of Ganjuran church is a concrete expressions of the Javanese worldview and their hopes and aspirations. The true dialogue taking place between the culture and the Gospel message is manifested through visible and concrete works of church architecture.

Based on the understanding of the form-meaning relationship in semiotics approach, the architectural form of Ganjuran church is analysed by breaking it down into topological category and plastic category. In reference to the basic concept of Javanese traditional architectural form [19], i.e. the lower part (the ground or *batur*), the middle part (wall, column or *soko*) and the upper part (roof and ceiling or *empayak*), the case study is thoroughly explored. The study showed numbers of architectural components that constructed similarly with reference to traditional Javanese architecture (Figure 2).

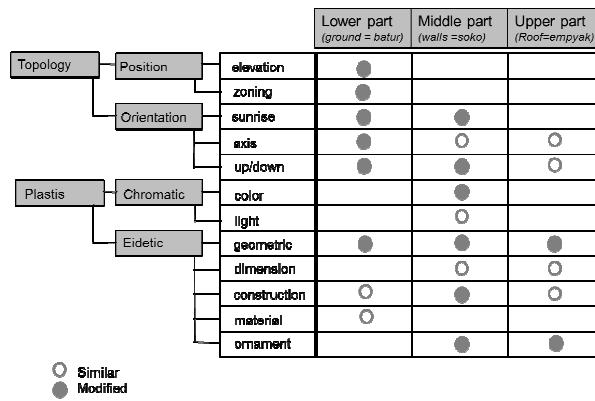


Figure 2: Architectural Inculcation in Ganjuran Church

Next, was the study to explore the relationship of the particular architectural form with the meaning behind those architectural form, in relation with the liturgy and the concept of Javanese culture.

Manifestation Level

The complex of Ganjuran Church is located in the rural area bounded by plantation and rural housing, and by an access road running to the city of Yogyakarta on the south and a rural road on the west. The whole

complex is marked off by a boundaries wall, thus it is clearly delineated from the neighbouring property. When looking to the church building from the outside, how could people recognize that it was a Catholic church? Topologically, position of the church building that was blocked by the boundaries wall and some gazebos, make it difficult for the people outside to have visual access. The only sign that indicates the church was the nameplate of the church, placed on the boundary wall. Another sign which was not easily seen, is a cross feature on the top of the church building.

Imposing front entrance or, statues such as the characteristics of typical Catholic church, is lacking in this building. Tower and bell which is associated with traditional church, existed in Ganjuran church, but it is placed at the back of the church and the height is much lower than the roof, so that there is no visual access for the visitor. At this level, the discursive memories play a role, which relates the architectural form with patterns in mind about the arrangement of a church, and then confirms the building appearance as a place of worship. So that people could successfully recognize what they see and identify the form of expression accordingly,

Surface level

As we enter the complex, the church building is found as the largest building. Does the building itself give the clue of its function, as place of Catholic worship? It seems that the church is exposed to the view of the visitors. Clear visual and physical access from the front yard, are given to the church building (Figure 3).

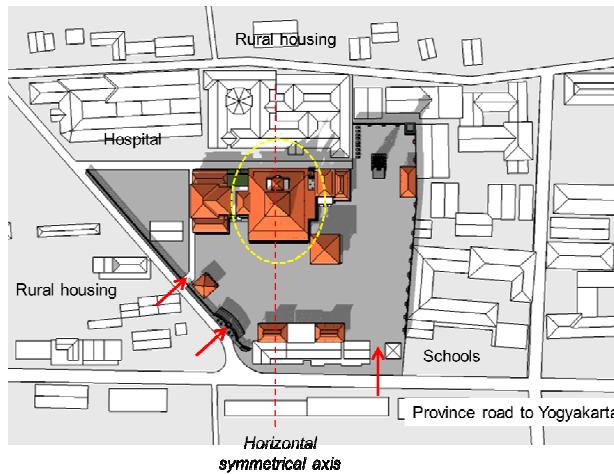


Figure 3: Topological Dimension -position and orientation

Visually, geometrical configuration of the church building, - characterized by its ground plan, columns and roof -, is identified as similar to the “*joglo tajug*”, a type of Javanese architecture. There are also no walls, on the front and rear sides of the church building; like the typical “*pendopo*”, an assembly hall in the Javanese architecture. Traditionally, a complete Javanese house consists of front yard, *pendopo*, *pringgitan* (transition hall terrace), *dalem* (main hall building, which are divided into three parts: *senthong kiwo*, *senthong tengah*, *senthong tengen*) and *gandok* (for daily life activites), sequentially. A strong horizontal symmetrical axis charaterized the arrangement of Javanese house. *Senthong tengah*, position at the end of the axis is known as the spiritual space where sacred belongings are stored, and a contemplative place for the owner to meditate.

Pendopo is an open building, steps are provided surrounds “*pendopo*” building, allowing people to enter the building from many sides. This kind of configuration is also identified in the Ganjuran church, inviting people to come in from all sides. Steps are the physical boundaries in “*pendopo*”, to distinguish the inner and outer space, the public and private space. In the church building, the steps indicate the degree of holiness, separate outer space and inner space. Here, the form-meaning relationship occurs in a functional meaning. Even though there are no walls, nor church doors, entrance to the main body of the church is determined by the existence of the “stoup or the fountain of holy water” (Figure 4)

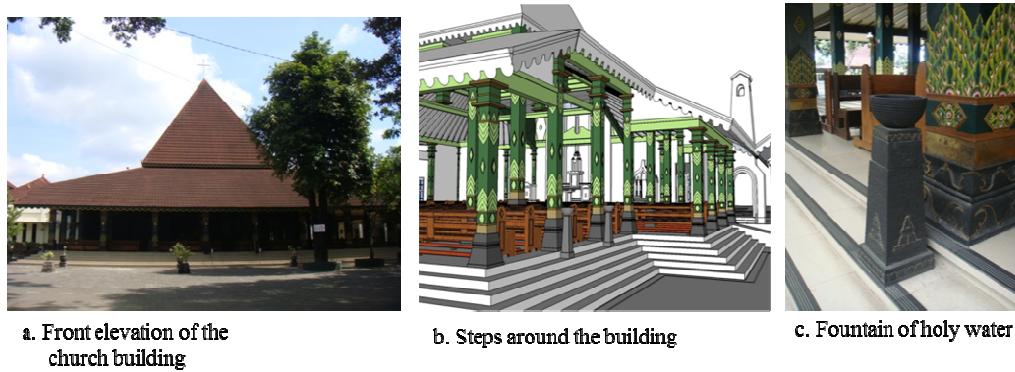


Figure 4: Boundaries of Sacred Area

The “stoup of holy water” or the fountain of holy water indicates the church entrance. Since for the Catholic congregation, before entering the church, they dip their fingers in the holy water and cross themselves with it, as the symbol of the person’s wish to be spiritually clean before entering the church building and take part in the liturgical activities [20, 21].

Thus, the relation of the architectural and non-architectural form with its symbolical meaning is religious-specific, especially for those coming from the Catholic community. When we looked at the interior of the church building, configuration and construction of columns and ceiling is following the concept of “*soko guru*” (main columns of the building) and “*tumpangsari*” (carved ceiling in between the main columns) from the Javanese traditional building (Figure 5). Does it relate to the liturgical activities? Would it take to make the space work in terms of sacred space?

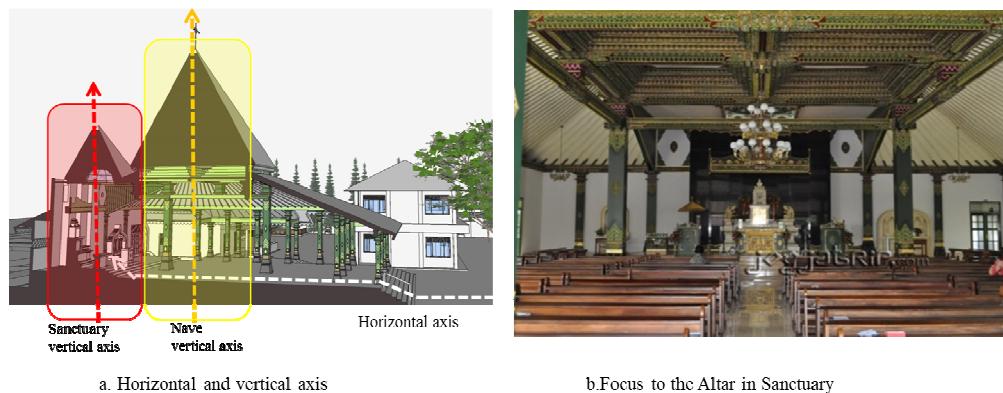


Figure 5: Interior Space

The central area of the church, - the main aisle flanked by rows of pews which is known as the nave-, is the area of the congregation; it is the area where the “*saka guru*” and “*tumpangsari*” existed. The space in Ganjuran church may function well as people expect if the liturgy they celebrate in it is dynamic and conveys a sense of participatory in the celebration, focusing on to the altar as a place of sacrifice. The spatial dynamics and the centering focus of the church architecture might be said to express its purpose [22]. In this case study, altar in the sanctuary as the focus of attention, is highlighted by its architectural setting. The quality and color of architectural ornaments, the shape, height of the sanctuary, the lighting and the way the altar is place with respect for the congregation affect the way a congregation experiences the celebration of the Eucharistic prayer. Meanwhile, the form of *sakaguru* and its *tumpangsari*, do not directly play this role.

Architecture as signs can be culture-specific; in fact, most signs are produced for and by a specific culture to allow communication among its members. The symbolic resonance might be taken to express its meaning. Now, let see the relationship of the more abstract form and its meaning, which might be sensed in a more unconscious way.

Deep Level

Configuration of the “*soko guru*” and “*tumpang sari*” constructed in a horizontal symmetrical axis; on the other hand, it constructs a vertical centrifugal axis (Figure 5). The horizontal/longitudinal axis provides a processional lane of movement. Position of the altar could be interpreted as not to be seen at a distance, but to be approached from a distance. The existence of the fountain of holy water at the entrance way is seen as the point of departure in this movement. Processional organization of space, focus on the altar as a place of sacrifice is an emphasis on the immanence of God and the transcendence of human experience.

The longitudinal axis of most churches is west-east, with the entrance on the west side, and the altar on the east [20]. East as recognized as the location of the garden of Eden where humankind began, as the direction from which Christ would come at the Last Judgment, and most obviously as the direction of sunrise. The longitudinal axis as the processional lane of movement in Ganjurian church is following the concept of Javanese traditional houses, that is building should be oriented to the south, thus the entrance way is on the south and the altar on the north. This local preference differs from the honoured side orientation of the traditional church, i.e. east and south, north and west are less favoured. Facing eastwards for worship, in the direction that the sun rises, is a practice that is probably pre-Christian, and there are number of biblical references to God in the east. The aesthetics character of Ganjurian church in Javanese art and architecture, the concept adopted will determine its capacity to evoke a sense of the interplay of transcendence and immanence, especially for the local community.

Form-meaning relationship in a deep level, showed that sacredness of a church is not only concerning conceptions of the architect or those who planned, but also it is dealing with the appropriation of churches by generations that view and respond to them and experience them. A church can be marked by a sacredness not of the separation of the sacred and the profane, but rather of association, its connectedness to images and narrative that bear on the deepest questions of human life.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description and analyses above, it can be concluded that the architectural form of Ganjurian church signifies the expression of inculcation spirit. There are many Javanese traditional architectural elements adopted in the new church, indicating the dynamism of the relationship between the Gospel and local culture. However, not all features were relating to the content of the Catholic church architecture in terms of liturgical activities and Christian symbols.

From the analysis of the case study, it could be understood that the relationship between the form of architectural inculcation and meaning in terms of sacrality, is the result of an intimate connection that engages people perceptually and intellectually through formal-spatial design, structural aspects and ornamentation.

This analytical understanding might be important for those who have particular concern for the Catholic church architecture; it could be the basis for strategic action to address issues of church architecture, and further to contribute to the discussion of the complex ways in which the forces of inculcation interact with local culture.

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