

***Dominican Churches in the Cagayan Valley. Town Building in the Mountains:
A Travelogue***

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Abstract

Located in the northeastern most part of the Philippines, the valley is between the Cordillera and Sierra Madre Mountain Range, the longest mountain ranges of the country. The valley is crossed by the country's longest river which the Spaniards named as the Rio Grande de Cagayan. The Dominican friars worked hand in hand with the Spanish soldiers in the colonization of place. Perseverance, bravery, industriousness and sheer luck gradually chipped the resistance of the native population who were nomadic and headhunters. Initially made of available light materials, Churches were constructed along strategic areas. These were later replaced with durable stones and adobe and were constructed by the native population. The trail of the Dominican churches built is also a narrative of the building of towns, following the colonial rule, *reduccion*, along the banks of the river. Using a travelogue, this shows how the population accepted Catholicism, settled down, and engaged in agriculture and trade. Lands were claimed from the forests for agriculture, crops were introduced for food and export, schools and government institutions were established, literacy is high, migration from other parts of the country increased the population, roads, bridges and other infrastructures are constantly built. Cagayan Valley today is a progressive place, a manifestation of the great labor of the Dominican Order hand in hand with the native population as they strive towards progress.

Keywords: *reduccion*, friars, travelogue

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Introduction

The objective of this paper is the presentation of the active participation of the native Filipinos in the making of their history. Common to Southeast Asian experience is a significant length of time of western colonization, in the case of the Philippines, this started in 1565 that lasted until June 12, 1898. Though all of the countries of the region attained their independence, but in most literatures, it is always the activities of the colonizers that is narrated, usually justifying their colonization and dishing out to the readers the achievements of the colonizers. The presence and the activities of the natives are totally silenced, ignored or presented as undesirable, something that has to be suppressed or a disturbance to the civilized society (Dery, 2006). In presenting the Catholic churches, built during the Spanish colonization to glorify another colonial tool – Roman Catholicism, what the researcher desires to present is that these churches were built by the natives. From the time the native population heeded the call of the Spanish friar to start construction, the building and rebuilding of the edifices until its present form, using the abundant local materials and using the bountiful native labor, these are the manifestations of their religiosity, these were creations of the ordinary Filipinos. In doing so, the activities of the ordinary, colonized Filipinos during the Spanish colonization is given a voice, a space to be known.

Geography



From Google maps

Located in the northeastern most part of the Philippines, Cagayan Valley is surrounded by the Sierra Madre Mountains on the east and the Cordillera Mountains on the west while the valley is crossed by the country's longest river, Cagayan River (Salgado, 1997).

Spanish Conquest

The area were populated by tribal people who were fiercely independent of each other. There were as many dialects spoken in the area as there were tribal groups, examples are the Kalingas, Gaddangs, Isinayes, Itawes, Kianganes, Ibalois and others (Fernandez, 1975).

The successful evangelization of the province is always pointed out as one of the greatest achievements of the Dominicans which was achieved after very long perseverance, bravery, industriousness, sacrifices, death, sometimes sheer luck and good timing on the part of the missionaries. The number of various dialects, the nomadic lifestyle, their propensity for headhunting, the rugged and unknown geographic terrain all posed seemingly unconquerable hurdles to the young, European missionaries. Even the great *conquistadore*, Capt. Juan Salcedo, facing the rugged coasts, the vast mountains thickly covered with impenetrable forests, he chose to skip the area and did not undertake the conquest of the land (Malumbres, 1918).

It was another *conquistadore*, Juan Pablo Carrion, who was ordered to expel the Japanese pirates who built forts at the mouth of the Ibanag River. He successfully expelled the Japanese pirates and undertook the arduous conquest of the inhospitable lands. He later brought the province of Cagayan Valley under Spanish conquest (Aduarte, 1693). Initially assigned to the Augustinian Order, it was the Dominican friars who patiently coaxed the people of Cagayan to live peacefully among themselves, give up their arms, practice agriculture and submit to the Catholic faith.

The Spaniards built *reduccion* in identified areas. To attain peace and order in the conquered territories, the Laws of the Indies was implemented. The houses were ordered constructed within the hearing distance of the bell. The natives were ordered to go to church and their children to go to school. The Spanish administrators, usually a soldier or an official were allowed to collect tribute. In the identified settlements, streets were specifically identified, each house had a space for garden and a space for animals. Natives were forcibly transferred in the Spanish selected areas to enforce political, economic and social supervision (Reed,. 1978). These settlements are called *reduccion*.

Natives were passive, indifferent, some were curious, lukewarm in their reception of the gospel, some native rose in arms, so many Spanish soldiers and friars were killed but gradually, the people were convinced of the goodness of the Dominican priests. Churches made of bamboo and nipa or whatever native materials were used for construction. The patience, perseverance and goodness of the early missionaries brought conversion to the natives, gradually establishing mission areas.

Churches were constructed in the *reduccion* sites by the native population, using the native labor and natural resources, towns gradually grew around these churches.

Since the trip undertaken started from Manila, the narrative of this travelogue starts from the southern most part of the Cagayan Valley.

Spanish Churches of Cagayan Valley



Dupax del Sur Church, San Vicente, an 18th c. Baroque Church located at Barangay Dopaj, Dupax, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines. Dupax started as a mission by the Dominican priests to convert the Isinays in 1602 (Hornedo, 2002). Picture from Google images.

In the next two slides, arrival was nighttime, the market, public school, government offices, like any *reduccion*, surrounded the church.



Personal pictures



The Santa Catalina and St. Dominic Churches It was September 8, 1739 when a group of Dominican missionaries landed in Turayong, a barangay of this town which was later named Cauayan. From the very start of their mission work, the missionaries managed to convert to the Christian Faith some 140 Gaddangs, the pioneer inhabitants of this city (Hornedo, 2002).



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Parish of Our Lady of Atocha, Alicia, Isabela. In Spain, Atocha was a place of imprisonment of Christians during the Moorish rule. Even at that time, Atocha was a Dominican parish in Madrid, Spain. This place was assigned to the Dominicans, its original name was Angaran. Its original site was in the Magat River, a strategic place where the conquistadores staged their attacks against the Ilongots. The Dominican missionaries decided to build the Angaran town in 1745 on this site. In 1885, a brick

church was constructed to serve as refuge for the natives against the Ifugaos. Data from the Our Lady of Atocha Church. Personal pictures.



In 1741, Dominicans in Manila declared Cauayan, Isabela a parish, Our Lady of the Pillar.

The Gaddangs and other migrants made Cauayan their homes. The initial constructed was completed in 1843. Data from the parish church. Personal pictures.



Nuestra Señora del Pilar, Cauayan, Isabela



Schools, government offices, commercial establishments surround the Church.
Personal pictures.



San Matias Parish Church, found in Tumauni, Isabela. Built in 1783, this church of stone has a cylindrical bell tower (Hornedo, 2002). Personal pictures.



Schools, government offices, residential homes and commercial establishments surround the Tumauni Church. Personal Pictures.



The Ruins of the Church of San Pablo.



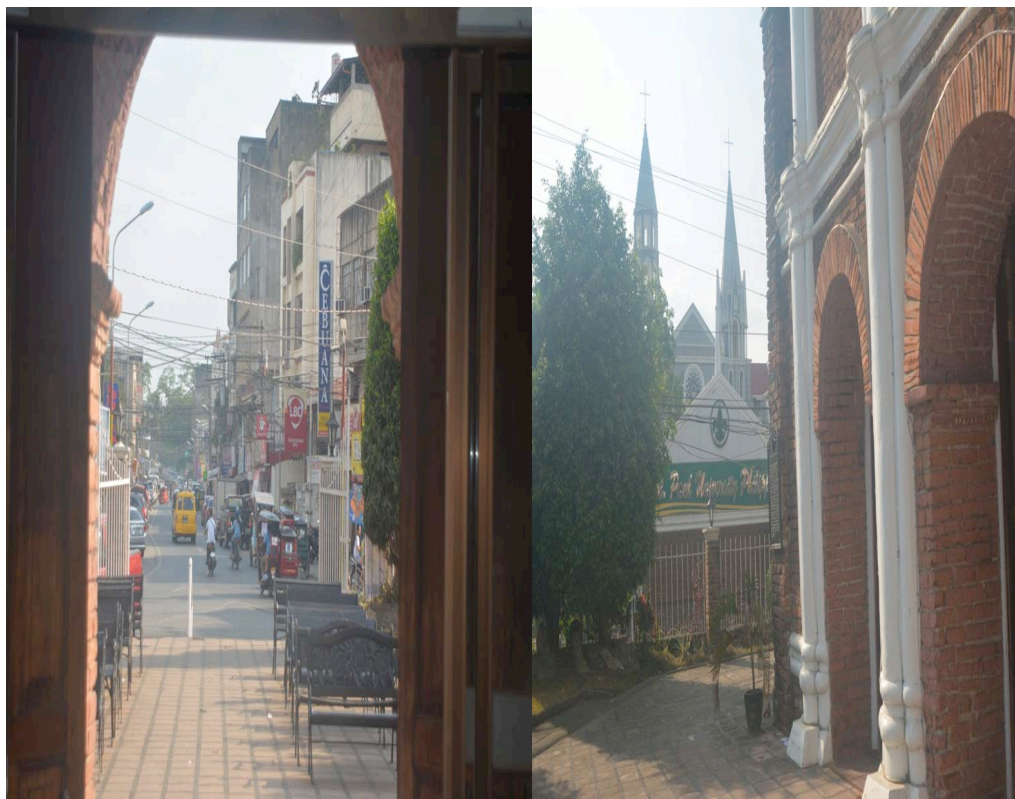
The Church of San Pablo, Isabela, this was built in 1624 has a very tall, six layers bell tower. It is a church in ruins but there is another church built within the ruins.



The Church of San Pablo, Isabela, this was built in 1624 has a very tall, six layers bell tower. It is a church in ruins but there is another church built within the ruins. Government offices and residential houses surround the ruins (Hornedo, 2002). Personal pictures.



San Jacinto was originally a hermitage built by the Dominicans in 1604. The land and its surrounding areas were turned over to the Paulinian Sisters of Chartres to establish a Catholic school for girls in Cagayan Valley in 1907 (Hornedo, 2002). Personal pictures



Tuguegarao Cathedral



Also known as the St. Peter Metropolitan Cathedral parish church. This is the biggest church in the Cagayan Valley. The Dominican priests arrived in the valley in 1600 and started evangelization. The Diocese of Nueva Segovia was created in 1595, Fr. Miguel de Benavides, O.P. was its first Bishop, the founder of the University of Santo Tomas (Fernandez, August 1975). Picture from Google images.



The St. Peter Metropolitan Cathedral parish church.
Personal pictures



Basilica Minore de Nuestra Señora de Piat



In 1604 the Dominicans brought the image of Our Lady of the Rosary from Macau. It was initially installed in Lallo, this image was later transferred to Piat in 1622. (Fernandez, 1975). Picture from Google images



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One of the oldest and remotest areas of evangelization, the Saint Raymund de Penafort, Church of Malaueg was administered by the Dominicans in 1608. Construction of the Church started in 1617. (Fernandez, August 1975).



Personal pictures.

St. James the Apostle Church, Iguig





Picture from Google images.

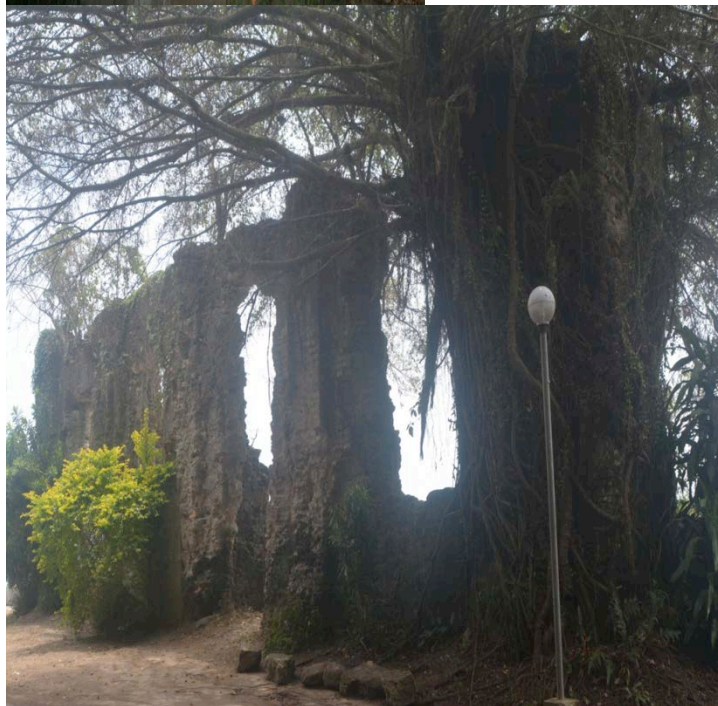
Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary, Aparri, Cagayan



Personal picture



Spanish Capt. Juan de Salcedo reached Buguey. He found a very active and prosperous fishermen town of Ibanags. He continued with the conquest of Cagayan Province but left behind Dominican friars. The people built this church which was named St. Anne Church. Its convent was said to have the biggest library in the Dominican province of Cagayan but it was burned in 1732. (Data from St. Anne Church) Personal picture.



Ruins of San Jacinto de Polonio. These are on the banks of the Cagayan River.
Personal pictures.



San Jacinto de Polonio. The Church was rebuilt but its bell tower is said to be the oldest, built in 1595. Bell towers were important not only for the announcement of religious rituals but also for warnings in cases of invasions. (Data from the San Jacinto de Polonio Church).



Lallo, Cagayan was the seat of the parish of Nueva Segovia. Initially, this was a Spanish military headquarters and was called Nueva Segovia, in honor of Segovia, Spain, the place of its conqueror, Juan Pablo Carron. Nueva Segovia became a Dominican mission in 1596. (Salgado, 1997). Picture from Google images.



At the back of the cross is the Cagayan River



The Dominicans planted this evangelical cross more than 400 years ago, this is found right in front of the Lallo Church.
Personal pictures.

Conclusion

The pilgrimage to the various centuries old Spanish Churches and the use of secondary sources, these two endeavors fulfill the objective of this paper which is to highlight the activities of the native Filipinos during the period of colonization. The Spaniards may have left, the *reduccion* is no longer practiced but there are towns that were built from the foundations of the *reduccion*, places which were built and populated by the native population. The Churches are still standing, these are still useful because, like the Spanish period, these were kept alive by the religiosity of the native population. These edifices are still relevant because Catholic celebrations are still held and are patronized by the Filipinos until today. The innate religiosity of the Filipinos caused the people to volunteer their services to build the Churches and the same religiosity keeps the relevance of these ancient buildings. Even the young people seek comfort and heartily participate in the activities of the Catholic Church, thus retaining the relevance not only of the edifice but also of the faith until today.

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