

Early Spanish Colonialism in Manila: A Historical Archaeology Viewpoint

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Abstract

This is a report of a museum study titled “Early Spanish Colonialism in Manila: A Historical Archaeology Viewpoint”. The author aims to re-examine the information from the archaeological sites in the Manila area in order to understand the nature of early Spanish colonialism in the Philippines. The main works include checking the related archaeological reports and inventories, re-examining archaeological artifacts, and establishing a database. In this two month study, the author has collected forty-six inventories and established the form of database. 1,674 pieces of porcelain sherds, 375 bone fragments and 232 shell fragments from the Mehan Garden Site have been re-examined and incorporated into the database. In addition, the author also visited several museums and sites relating to the topic. The contribution of this working season will become a fundamental research process for the future study.

Introduction

The establishment of Spanish Manila in 1571 marked a turning point in global history. My dissertation seeks to elucidate the nature of power relationships between the Spaniards, the indigenous Tagalog, and the Chinese during the early Spanish colonial period in the Manila area by studying the archaeological evidence of consumption (e.g. trade ceramics, local earthenware, animal bone, metal, and glass) in conjunction with other textual and ethnographic evidence.

Historians have extolled the roles of Manila in early modern history as a hub of global trade networks and a key locus of cultural exchange between the East and the West. Nevertheless, the power relationships that defined colonial life in the Manila area were taken for granted by scholars. The major ethnic groups of colonial Manila - the Spaniards, the indigenous Tagalog, and the Chinese - formed a specific urban landscape during the early colonial period. The Spaniards lived in “Intramuros” (the Walled City), the Chinese were assigned to live in “Parián”, and the Tagalog occupied the rest of the area. Based on limited Spanish and Chinese accounts, previous historical studies have constructed these three groups as parallel but distinct societies. However, such separations are problematic because they ignore the complexity of inter- and intra- group relationships of colonial society. Moreover, it is worth to note that the indigenous Tagalog, the majority population, has been overlooked in most historical accounts and existing research. Archaeological data, I argue, could offer an alternative perspective of colonial history and provide a fine-resolution narrative on the underrepresented indigenous population.

Reevaluating the power relationships between the ethnic groups in the Manila area will be executed through an analysis of consumption in colonial and global contexts. Consumption theory has opened a much wider vision of colonialism in postcolonial

archaeological study. Instead of using theories such as acculturation or center-periphery framework to explain the appropriation of material culture, scholars argue that by re-contextualizing archaeological data, patterns of the consumptions would shed light on the agency of different peoples. Consumption theory has been successfully applied to the studies of colonial histories in Classic Mediterranean and the New World. Likewise, my previous research has discussed how European encounters indirectly influenced the social life of the Kiwulan people in Taiwan. Manila, as a place that experienced direct cultural encounter, will be the best case study to examine how this theory applies in an Asian context.

Although there are considerable excavations in the Manila area since the 1960s, no one has used these archaeological data to study colonialism in Manila. I argue that because different ethnic groups were spatially segregated during the early Spanish colonial period, it is possible to identify archaeological sites that represent specific ethnic groups and compare the contexts of consumptions between these sites. This project aims to establish an archaeological database for dissertation analysis. By establishing this dataset, it will be possible to examine artifacts in the contexts of consumption, patterns of association, relative qualitative representation and relative quantitative representation. A multi-scalar analysis then could be conducted to contextualize the consumption and interaction within and between each ethnic group.

The archaeological sources employed for this project will mainly come from previous excavations and survey works. During my previous survey at the National Museum of the Philippines, I noticed that their archaeological reports do not offer sufficient information for my research objective. Therefore, it is necessary to visit the storage room of the National Museum of the Philippines and re-examine primary archaeological artifacts.

During June to August, 2014, I was able to be a volunteer in the National Museum of

the Philippines and access the archaeological inventories and specimens during the open time of each section. I was also allowed to hire Andrea Dominique Cosalan, a student from Archaeological Studies Program at the University of the Philippines - Diliman (UP-ASP), as an assistant to help my project. The work was conducted in the record section, the storage section, and the osteological-zooarchaeological section of the archaeology division in the National Museum. The following is the working progress in each section.

Working Progress

A. Record section

1.1. Correcting several system errors found from last year

Several system errors have been found from the report database, such as incomplete PDF file and mismatches between file title and content. With the assistance of the staff in the record section, I was able to find the correct files and scan them.

1.2. Searching for reports and inventories about sites in the NCR area.

Inventories are crucial for checking the specimens. Forty-six scanned inventories have been collected in this season. I noticed that some of inventories and the archaeological reports did not match, so I create a checking list to try to resolve the discrepancies. In addition to find missing document, such as Mehan Garden 2005 excavation inventory, I also digitalized some documents that have not been digitalized yet. I have given all of the scanned files to the record section.

B. Storage section and Osteological-zooarchaeological section

1.1. Searching for materials from sites in the NCR area.

The specimens in the record section have been transferred and re-bagged during the past decade. As I understand, so far the Museum is still working on the re-organization. The specimens I requested have been found from three storage rooms. Some of the materials cannot be found at this moment. In addition, I also notice that some of the materials excavated by the UP-ASP are preserved in UP.

1.2. Re-examining the specimens and establishing a database

Based on the information in the inventory and the specimens, I am able to develop a database in this season. The database are typed in an excel file, which is flexible to input in any database application in the future. During this season, this project mainly focused on re-examining porcelain from Mehan Garden 1967~1968 excavation and bone and shell fragments from Mehan Garden 2001excavation. The following is the process of re-examining the specimens. The working progress are different because of the storage condition. The results of the database are attached in this report.

2-1 Porcelain from Mehan Garden 1967~1968 Excavation

A total of 1,674 porcelain sherds from Mehan Garden 1967~1968 excavation were checked, reanalyzed, and photographed.

- a) Checked if there is any bags missing. There are several missing bags in this case.
- b) Checked the accession number on each specimen. Some of the specimens were bagged incorrectly.
- c) Checked the specimens in the bag, the information written on the bag slips, and the inventory. These information did not always match.
- d) Re-sorted the specimens and give further classification. The specimens were only classified as “porcelain” in this case, and did not have any further information. In addition, few of the materials were even not ceramics at all. This project gave more information to these archaeological artifacts.
- e) Photography. All of the specimens were photographed for future research. The file name of the photos are attached in the database.

2-2 Bone and shell fragments from Mehan Garden 2001 Excavation

A total of 375 bone fragments and 232 shell fragments of known provenience from the 2001 Mehan Garden Excavation.

- a) Separated bone materials from non-bone materials (e.g. shells, ceramics, stones) that were found intermixed with the accessioned bone assemblages.
- b) Separated faunal remains from human remains.
- c) Taxonomic classification. When the toxin was unknown, relative faunal size categories were made.

- d) Re-bagged and re-labelled different kind of material accordingly.
- e) Combined with the information in the inventory. Typed the information in the database.

Results

A. Making a check list about materials of the NCR area

A check list has been made to identify which NCR materials are available in the Museum. The Appendix 1 mainly shows the checking results of the archaeological reports and inventories. During this season, the checking of the specimens is incomplete. The project plans to complete the checking list next year and hopes each section can help to find the missing documents / specimens next season.

B. Establishing the format of database

The digitalized data in the record section is only the scanned PDF file of the hard copy. In order to make the information became searchable and comparable, this project has to transfer the information from the PDF file to a database.

Database of Mehan Garden 1967-1968 porcelain sherds and Mehan Garden 2001 bones and shell fragments were created in this season. (See Appendix 2 to 4)

Other than the museum study

In addition to the main work in the National Museum, I have visited the National Archive of the Philippines. However, the access of the archive needs a specific documentation that they do not announce in the website. Although I was not able to get the access because of this reason, I was able to inform a historian from UC-Irvine who was coming for the same reason.

The staff in the archaeology division invited me to visit the site of Department of Tourism where a rescue archaeology project is carrying on. The other relating destinations that I have visited including Intramuros, the Paco Church, The Binondo Church, The National Gallery, Bahay Tsinoy, The Archaeology Studies Program in the University of the Philippines-Diliman, Lopez Museum, The Metropolitan Museum, and the Corregidor Island.

Conclusion

After this season, I have much better idea of how the archaeological records have been recorded, sorted and preserved in the Museum. Although some of the data cannot be found in this point, the amount and the content of the data are still enough for the objective of the project. However, this project do need much more time to digitalize the materials and records. I will propose a longer research term next season to the Museum.

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