

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES OF THE SPANISH HERITAGE CHURCHES IN ALBAY: PLATFORM FOR PROMOTING BIKOL CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Ruby Ann L. Ayo

Bicol University College of Social Sciences and Philosophy

ABSTRACT

As cultural heritage reflects the historical origin of a certain group of people, it reveals the customs, traits, beliefs, practices and even values they hold on for years. One of the tangible examples of cultural heritage is the physical structures including the century old churches. The study looked into the existing historical narratives of the century old Catholic churches: the Nuestra Señora de Salvacion in Joroan, Tiwi, Albay; the Our Lady of the Gate in Daraga, Albay; the San Juan de Bautista in Tabaco City, and the St. John the Baptist in Camalig, Albay. The secondary sources of history were evaluated on their reliability and validity based on the elements of history. The historical narratives were also analyzed using the following codes: the Patron Saints; factors that paved to their constructions; the people responsible for their constructions; the misconceptions about their constructions; and their contributions to Bikol heritage. The historical documents were found to be reliable and valid based on the elements of history. Based on the codes, themes were identified as Marian Devotees and Christ-centered Patron Saints; geographical, socio-political and cultural factors paved to the construction; church and government officials were responsible in the construction; misconceptions are on the dates of constructions and original sites where the church were constructed; and the contributions to Bikol heritage which include: popular pilgrim sites and well-admired architectural designs. The historical narratives of the century old churches is responsive in promoting resilient, sustainable and inclusive tourism industry.

Keywords: historical narratives, century old churches, cultural heritage, Bikol culture

INTRODUCTION

The church as a “building” often serves a place where people are usually gathered for worship. In the Philippines, historical records show that the construction of churches as “buildings” dates back during the 15th century upon the introduction of the Filipinos to the Catholic faith as a result of Spanish colonization. The churches until now remain to be significant symbols of the Filipino Catholic faith in the country. In most instances, they serve as the sanctuary of the people where they seek refuge in times of difficulties.

The churches as architectural edifices are tangible symbols of Catholic faith in the country. Similarly, they remain as silent reminders of the influence of Spanish colonization 120 years after. Being the lone Catholic country in Asia offers a colorful history which can be traced back to the 333 years of Spanish rule.

In the Bikol Region, Catholicism was introduced with the arrival of the Augustinian missionaries under the leadership of Fray Alonzo Jimenez (Gerona, 2011). Fray Jimenez was the chaplain of the Spanish troops tasked to explore the Kabikolan which was headed by Captain Juan de Salcedo. The Augustinian's stay in the region though was cut short and the Franciscan missionaries then took over.

Gerona in his book *Albay Winding Down the Historic Abaca Trail*, (2011) chronicled the significant events pertaining to the conversion of the Albayanos to Catholicism. He highlighted that the period of Catholicism commenced during the exploration of Bikol region by Juan de Salcedo. In 1578 as the Franciscan missionaries took over the Augustinians, the former introduced certain system so as to facilitate the Christianization of the Albayanos. The Franciscans adopted the system of *reduccion* wherein the mission territories were divided into two geographic categories, the *cabecera* and the *visita* (Gerona, 2011). These areas served as the centers of activities which are religious in nature. At the same time, the areas served as the site of the residence of the missionaries.

The strategies used by the Spaniards proved to be an effective one as reflected by the 333 years of Spanish rule. This supports the analyses of the many historians concluding that the Spaniards succeeded in using the cross and the swords in the colonization of the Philippines. Hence, the Catholic religion is considered as an astounding legacy of the Spaniards. And, the churches are the concrete reminders of this legacy.

It is unfortunate though that some of these churches were not preserved when they were damaged by the wear and tear of times or when destroyed by calamities. Though some of them were repaired, the original design was compromised. But in the publication of *Albay Architectural Heritage Project*, it revealed that majority of the churches in the Province of Albay which were constructed during the Spanish era has retained their original structures. There were efforts though of modernizing their architectural set-up. The people behind this project are concerned that these churches may not eventually be preserved due to the destruction caused by the natural elements or due to modernization (*Albay's Citadel of Faith: A Travelers Guide*, 2006).

As time evolves, the present as well as the future generations deserve to be introduced to the rich historical treasures. One of the symbols of these historical treasures is represented by the old churches thus, the attempt to put together and look into the existing historical documents of the old churches specifically in Albay.

The Province of Albay is one of the earlier seats of Catholic faith. Among the municipalities and cities which have a share of old churches as the people's sanctuary are: the Our Lady of the Gate Parish in Daraga, Albay; the Nuestra Señora de Salvacion in Joroan, Tiwi, Albay; the Parish of San Juan de Bautista in Tabaco City; and the St. John the Baptist Church in Camalig, Albay. These were constructed in, 1773, 1776, 1800 and 1842, respectively. These churches remain to be frequently visited by pilgrims almost all year round.

Each of these churches had stood the tests of time as their histories unfolded. Their histories are proofs of the unwavering faith of the people of Albay since the first time they were introduced

to Catholicism until now. And, due to the significant contributions of these churches to the Filipino heritage and history, their historical accounts have to be revisited.

The study aimed on the achievement of the following: the evaluation of the reliability and validity of the existing historical documents based on the elements of history; and the analysis of historical narratives in terms of: Patron Saints; the factors that paved to their constructions; the people responsible for their constructions; the misconceptions about their constructions; and their contributions to Bikol heritage; and analysis of historical narratives as tool for promoting Bikol culture and heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is guided by historicist as a school of historiography. It is a scientific approach in history making use of the sources in the reconstruction of the past. It is supported by Positivism as a method in creating history wherein the sources are utilized as tools to provide accurate and complete vision of the past (Introduction to Historiography).

Specifically, the study used historical analysis- the selection of subject, collection of sources, the examination of genuiness of the sources and extraction from sources (Gottschalk, 1969). It analyzed of the contents of the secondary sources of history- the existing historical narratives of the four century old churches in the Province of Albay, Bikol Region, Philippines. The historical narratives of the four century old churches were taken from the existing secondary sources such as books, articles, and informal interviews of the parishioners.

For objective examination of the contents, a Checklist for Documentary Analysis composed of four parts: source of information; author/speaker of information; reliability of format; and gist of the document was utilized. The statements in the checklist were modifications from the Tips for Evaluating Historical Documents developed by the New Hampshire Historical Society. The documents were likewise submitted for evaluation for the validation of contents to check their historical accuracy and validity. Further, the study considered the identification of themes in the historical narratives with regard to the following codes: patron saints; factors that paved to the constructions of the churches; people responsible for the constructions; misconceptions about the constructions of the churches; and contributions to Bikol heritage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The century old churches in the Province of Albay, Bikol Region, Philippines are living proofs of the faith of the people and are reflective of the cultural heritage. The church in general signifies a place of worship, a building where sacred activities are performed. On the other hand, the Catholics recognize the existence of a parish. Parish refers to the community that includes all catholic members within a geographical area who congregate in a particular church.

The history of these churches has to be known by generations hence, documents have to be preserved and passed on from one generation to another. However, the quality of documents needs to be considered as in the case of the secondary sources of history. The authenticity, reliability,

and validity have to be established. These can be tested using the elements of history as bases. The elements of history are the time, place, and people as bases.

The Reliability and Validity of the Historical Documents Based on the Elements of History

With churches as living proofs of the history of Catholicism in the Philippines there are secondary sources of history in existence which were scrutinized. These sources were not exempted from the constraints of history that “it does not reveal all its secrets” (Fines, 1983). Fines further pointed out that the sources of history are evidences that can be instruments in answering key questions about an event that happened in the past.

Moreover, in order to answer key questions about the past, using the sources of history would necessitate historical analysis. The historical analysis facilitates the objective analysis of the sources of history whether primary or secondary. In the case of the four-identified century old houses in Albay, secondary sources were analyzed.

Although historical criticism is more appropriate to test the primary sources, the principle was similarly used as guide to ascertain the reliability and validity of the historical documents as secondary sources which were used in this study. Both external and internal criticisms were utilized. The external criticism focuses on the testing the form of the sources while the internal criticism tests the contents.

The external criticism focuses on resolving the problem of the authenticity of the historical sources. It applies the test of authenticity in order to determine whether the document or in the case of the narratives of the old churches- the historical documents are fabricated, forged or faked. The test of authenticity includes the determination of anachronism of the dates of the documents, the handwriting and signature of the author, anachronism in terms of style and reference to events, the origin and custody of the documents, semantics and hermeneutics (Gottschalk, 1969).

Meanwhile, the internal criticism resolves the problem of credibility. It revolves around the determination of the approximate date when the document was written, the author’s ability and willingness to tell the truth, as well as the corroboration of information.

To determine the reliability of a certain source of history, one must consider the conditions under which the source was produced. It means the intentions that motivated “the person behind the source” in producing the source of history. Reliability can likewise be ascertained by considering the historical context by which it was produced (Howell, 2001).

The element of time as reflected in the secondary sources of the four identified churches provides clear and consistent information on the chronology of events. They provided adequate understanding of the series of events that happened relative to the constructions of the old churches as identified in the study. Similarly, the element of time was presented as one of the essential elements.

The comparisons and contrasts in terms of the year when the four churches were constructed show one thing in common. They are all centuries old. Data further show that they were all constructed during the Spanish period. This is the period when the Spaniards aggressively introduced the Filipino natives to the fold of Catholicism. Historical data further reveal that one of the factors that motivated Spain to engage in exploration and colonization is the propagation of Christianity along with the acquisition of gold and silver as well as achieving glory being a pioneer in this endeavor along with Portugal (Perry, 1989).

The two Catholic countries in the Iberian Peninsula, Spain and Portugal became rivals in exploration and colonization. Pope Alexander VI even had to issue a Papal Bull to prevent disputes between them. The Pope established an imaginary “line of demarcation” in the Atlantic Ocean assigning lands which were discovered and to be discovered west of Europe to Portugal and to those in the east of Europe to be given to Spain. This was later followed by the Treaty of Tordesillas, setting another dividing line, 370 leagues (about 1,100 miles) west of the Azores (Perry, 1989).

Historical data similarly revealed that these were the years when the Franciscan missionaries were sent to the various parts of the Philippines for immense propagation of Catholicism (Gerona, 2011). This then supports the analysis of the Filipino historians that the greatest legacy of the Spaniards among the Filipinos is the Catholic faith. To date, there are 2,940 recognized Catholic churches all over the country which serve as sanctuary of the 76.18 million Catholic Filipinos (Uy, 2013).

Meanwhile, the element of place was another central theme reflected among the secondary sources that were evaluated. The element of place was even identified as one of the themes among the codes acknowledged pertaining to the misconceptions of the four century old churches. The Parishes of Nuestra Senora de Salvacion, San Juan de Bautista and St. John the Baptist had a common misconception on where the original site where the churches were constructed.

On the other hand, the element of people as reflected among the secondary sources evaluated show that the sources presented said element guides the readers to understand the human conditions in years 1700s and 1800s. The documents likewise presented the element of people in a manner that separated historical facts from fiction.

This further shows that the Province of Albay, Bikol Region was not spared along with the other provinces and regions of the Philippines from the massive Christianization of the early Filipinos. Along with fulfilling the mission of converting the natives to Christianity, the Spanish missionaries likewise introduced their culture. Gerona (2011) wrote “As a means for achieving their comprehensive program of evangelization, the system of reduccion compelled the natives scattered in far-flung areas to congregate in a strategic site and laid the groundwork for the rise of the town”.

The evaluation of the secondary sources of history considering their validity and reliability had satisfied the three elements of history.

Analyses of the Secondary Sources According to the Codes Identified

The historical documents of the four identified century old churches were identified to be all secondary sources based on the classifications. Based on the codes identified, there are six themes used as basis for analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes in the historical narratives on the four century old churches

Codes	Nuestra Senora de Salvacion	Our Lady of the Gate Parish	Parish of San Juan de Bautista	St. John the Baptist
Location	Tiwi, Albay	Daraga, Albay	Tabaco City	Camalig, Albay
Patron Saints	Nuestra Senora de Salvacion	Our Lady of the Gate Parish	San Juan de Bautista	St. John the Baptist
Factors that paved to constructions	The “miraculous” non-withering of the calpi tree that upon consultation with the parish priest of Buhi, it was carved into 3 statues of the images of Nuestra Senora de Solidad, San Antonio and Nuestra Senora de Salvacion.	The geographical location of Cagsawa Church susceptible to the destruction brought by the eruption of Mt. Mayon hence, the preference for a higher ground for the construction of the “new” church.	The conversion of visita into a town and a parish in 1616.	The fire that occurred in 1837 which caused the destruction of the church in Baligang.
People/ personalities responsible for constructions	Don Silverio Arcilla- the landlord; Mariano Dacoba- the caretaker The Parish Priest of Buhi, Camarines Sur	Don Simon de Anda y Salazar- Spanish Governor General who granted the request for the construction of the church on the hill. Alcalde Mayor of Camarines who was instructed to supervise the transfer of Cagsawa to Daraga.	Fr. Pedro Alcaraso- the first parish priest.	Gen. Capt. Pedro Acuna- the lord governor who signed the decree for the reconstruction of the stone church. Fray Francisco Latoba. Fray Manuel Brihuega- who supervised the reconstruction of the stone church as well as the convent.
Misconceptions/ fallacies about the construction	The present site of the church is not the original site where the first chapel “ermita” was constructed. Instead, the first chapel was constructed in Kagnipa, a sitio of Buhi, Camarines Sur. The ermita was made of bamboo and nip situated on top of the hill. (Earthen Vessels, 2001)	Contrary to the common belief that it was built after the destructive 1814 Mt. Mayon eruption, the construction was 40 years earlier, in 1773 to be exact.	The need to reconcile the data that the church to date is 151 years old but the parish is 399 years old. This is because after the establishment of the parish, church (referring to the physical structure) had been built several times in different locations due to the threats of Moro attacks as well as the destructions of typhoons.	Unknown to what the people today know, the formal inauguration of the town and the parish took place in 1579. And, the original town was in Binanua-an also the same site where the original church called “escuelacatolica” was built. However, due to the destructive 1814 Mt. Mayon eruption it was transferred to the mountains of Tondol. And later to Quilaponte then after 2 years was transferred to Baligang.

table 1 continuation...

Codes	Nuestra Senora de Salvacion	Our Lady of the Gate Parish	Parish of San Juan de Bautista	St. John the Baptist
Contributions to Bikol heritage	The consecration of the parish as diocesan shrine making it a regular destination of the Marian pilgrims a manifestation of the religiosity of the Filipinos. The religiosity then is an indicator of the influence of the long years of Spanish colonization in the Philippines.	The “hybrid” architectural design blending the Renaissance Gothic and Mexican Baroque evident in the façade and side gate, respectively. According to experts, the design is the distinguishing mark of the Our Lady of the Gate from among other Philippine churches built during the Spanish era. And, this was preserved through the passage of time. Architects similarly pointed-out that the four spiral columns called “salomonica” found in the façade of the said church make the church unique from other churches found in the country.	The original parish that was established gave birth to four rural parishes which are the parishes of San Miguel established in 1897, San Vicente in 1957, San Antonio also in 1957 and Panal in 1999.	The church being built made of volcanic stones from Mt. Mayon thereby making use of the debris of eruption. Similarly, the design of the church is comparable to the designs of the cathedrals found in Europe.

The Patron Saints

From the point-of-view of Catholic belief, the Patron Saints play significant roles. They are believed to play the role of “mediator” between the devotee and their God. As mediators they facilitate the bringing of the messages through the prayers of thanksgiving more so in the prayers of petitions.

The data revealed that in terms of the Patron Saints of the four old churches, the Parishes of Nuestra Señora de Salvacion and the Our Lady of the Gate are Marian Devotees. The Marian devotees believed that Virgin Mary serves as mediator who “bridged” between the believers and Jesus Christ as well as the God the Father and Spirit as their Patroness. The parishes identified as Marian Devotees were both constructed in the year 1700s. This is supported by other historical documents wherein other Marian Devotee Parishes were also constructed in the same period such as the rest of the churches in the Diocese of Albay (Earthen Vessels, 2001).

However, historical records show that the first church in a region is usually consecrated with James the Great or Santiago Matamoros as patron saint. St. James is the patron of the pilgrims and the laborers, the first apostle to become a martyr. He is also known as the Patron Saint of Spain, having earned the Spanish title Santiago Matamoros which means “Saint James the Moor-slayer” (Camino Adventures).

The Filipinos have seemingly “intense attachment and devotion to the Mother of God- the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is called with different names by the Bikolanos such as the “Ina” (Mother), the Our Lady of Penafrancia, the Our Lady of the Gate, the Nuestra Senora de Salvacion, among others (Reyes, 1992). And, this was reflected in the Patroness of two of the four churches

identified, the Nuestra Señora de Salvacion as she is known in the Parish in Tiwi, Albay, and Our Lady of the Gate among the parishioners of Daraga, Albay.

On the other hand, the Parishes of San Juan de Bautista (from visita a town and a parish were born in 1616, Earthen Vessel, 2011) and St. John the Baptist (formally inaugurated as a town and parish in 1579, Earthen Vessel, 2011) instead of being Marian Devotees- are Christ centered. They have the same Patron Saint, St. John the Baptist the Precursor hence, they celebrate the same date of town fiesta on the feast day of their patron saint, June 24.

The identified Patron Saints as revealed in the analyses of the secondary historical documents show what is typical in the Catholic religion. The Catholics although they believed in the Trion God- “the God the Father, the God the Son and the Holy Spirit”, yet, most of the Catholics would focus on their beliefs in the God the Son- which was revealed in the secondary sources as Christ centered. And, along with the belief in Christ is the belief in the role played by His Mother- Virgin Mary.

Factors that Paved to the Constructions of the Four Identified Churches

The construction of any physical structure is caused or motivated by a strong force which may be physical or non-physical. At times, it is influenced by the socio-cultural belief of a person or group of persons. In other instances, the reason behind the construction of any physical structure could have been driven by the location considered to be strategic to serve a particular purpose. In other instances, it could be due to the change in political leadership hence, the change in policies. Or, it could have been brought by the effects of the natural or man-made disaster which affected the physical environment.

The comparisons and contrasts of the factors that led to the constructions of the four identified churches vary. The factors vary from the geographical location to political division, from socio-cultural belief to disaster. This implies that there is no common factor that binds the four identified churches when it comes to the reasons of the constructions of these churches. They were built to serve a common purpose which is to serve as the sanctuary of the people. However, in terms of the specific reason of their constructions, they vary.

Data further show that the Nuestra Senora de Salvacion in Joroan, Tiwi, Albay was constructed due to the socio-cultural belief of a certain Don Silverio Arcilla (Earthen Vessels, 2011). His belief in the supernatural being coupled with the influence of his conversion to Catholicism convinced him of the need to honor the “supernatural” power which later led to the construction of the church. This implies that Don Silverio Arcilla believed in miracle. And the miracle was caused by the power exercised by someone powerful.

Meanwhile, the construction of the Parish of the Our Lady of the Gate was influenced by strategic geographical location due to its high elevation. The foresight of the Franciscan friars was instrumental to the construction of the said church. To date, the Parish of Our Lady of the Gate is being referred to as “Church on Top of the Hill”.

Although the construction of the “Church on Top of the Hill” started in 1772 when the Don Simon de Andoy Salazar, the Governor General instructed the Alcalde Mayor of Camarines to supervise the transfer of the town of Cagsawa to Daraga, the church was still under construction in 1777. And it is not clear whether the construction was fully completed in 1814. Records however reveal that the church was consecrated in 1854. The order given by the Governor General for the church to be transferred was a response to the request of some people of Cagsawa. But in the order given by the Governor General to the Alcalde Mayor the reason was “so that the town be formed with streets near the church that is to serve as the center of the natives (Earthen Vessel, 2011).

In the case of the Parish of San Juan de Bautista, the factor that prompted its construction is due to the political division, a manifestation of the typical situations in the Philippines during the Spanish era. Typically, there was no clear line that divided the authority exercised by the church and the authority exercised by the government. The same factor influenced the construction of the Parish of St. John the Baptist.

The transfer of sites and the renovations of the identified churches were also influenced by the disaster that happened. This implies that the physical destruction prompted the people to construct stronger physical structure as their place for worship. It also suggests that the people were keen in maintaining a place where they could worship.

The Persons Responsible for the Constructions of the Identified Churches

The data reflect that the four identified churches share something in common with regard to the persons who initiated their constructions. These are the people who held important positions both in the government and the church. Except for the Parish of Nuestra Senora de Salvacion, the rest of the identified churches were constructed due to the efforts of the church and government officials. Again, this is an indicator of the union between the church and the state during the Spanish era (Zulueta & Nebres, 2003).

Data in Table 1 further imply that the government officials played an active role even in religious affairs. A decree even had to be signed legitimizing the construction of the churches which is a function of the government. This strengthened the observations of the Filipino historians pertaining to the dominant role played by the church officials in political matters.

The Misconceptions on the Constructions of the Identified Churches

The mistaken belief of anything may lead to misinformation which could have been handed down from generation to generation. And, this could be eventually embraced as truth. In the case of the four identified old churches in the Province of Albay, there were fallacies which were eventually accepted through the years. Hence, revisiting the reliable and valid historical documents will correct these misconceptions.

Table 1 similarly reflects the misconceptions on the four identified churches. The common misconceptions among the four churches are although all of them are century old yet, the present sites are no longer the site where the very first church was constructed due to varied reasons.

Some of reasons for moving to another site are classified as political and geographical (prone to destructions caused by calamities).

Contrary to the common belief that it was built after the destructive 1814 Mt. Mayon eruption, the construction was 40 years earlier, in 1773 to be exact. There is a need to reconcile the data that the church to date is 151 years old but the parish is 399 years old. This is because after the establishment of the parish, church (referring to the physical structure) had been built several times in different locations due to the threats of Moro attacks as well as the destructions of typhoons. Unknown to what is known to the people today, the formal inauguration of the town and the parish took place in 1579. The original town was in Binanua-an also the same site where the original church called “escuela catolica” was built. However, due to the destructive 1814 Mt. Mayon eruption, it was transferred to the mountains of Tondol. And later to Quilaponte, then after 2 years was transferred to Baligang.

Among the four identified churches, it is the Parish of the Our Lady of the Gate with the most popular misconception. It has become a popular belief that the construction of the present church was brought about by the destructive 1814 Mt. Mayon eruption. Historical records show that its construction took place 40 years earlier than the eruption (Earthen Vessel, 2001). This misconception was affirmed in the results of the studies of renowned Bikolano historian when he emphasized in several lectures that he delivered that “contrary to the impressions by most that the Our Lady of the Gate was constructed due to the destruction of the Cagsawa Church, the former was built prior to the destruction of the latter”. He further explained that the construction of the Our Lady of the Gate was in anticipation of possible strong volcanic eruption thus, explains its location.

The Contributions to Bikol Heritage of the Four Identified Churches

As heritage describes the customs, traditions, beliefs, legacies, of a certain group of people. Relatedly, the churches of the Nuestra Senora de Salvacion, the Our Lady of the Gate, the San Juan de Bautista and the St. John the Baptist tell about the Bikolano heritage.

The four old churches being the seats of century old Catholic beliefs are living witnesses of the strong influence of Catholic faith brought about by Spanish colonization. They also became known pilgrim sites often visited both by local and foreign tourists. Similarly, they are examples of the rich architectural designs comparable to the designs of the old physical structure in Europe.

Among the four old churches, the Parish of Our Lady of the Gate is the most famous in terms of architectural design. The church is even recognized as a National Cultural Treasure by the National Museum as early as 2007 (Pinoy on the Road, 2013). As the said church was recognized as a national treasure a restoration project was conducted with the supervision of the National Museum and the Parish Commission on Temporalities (Pinoy on the Road, 2013).

The cross-validation of data revealed that the four churches have no commonality in terms of the factors that paved to their construction. The church in Tiwi, Albay was built on the basis of myth- the story of the “miraculous” non-withering of the calpi tree. Meanwhile, the church in

Daraga was built due to the threat of destruction to the Cagsawa Church by volcanic eruption. Hence, the factor that favored its construction is the geographical factor. For the churches in Tabaco and Camalig, they were constructed in the site where they are currently located due to the change in political division/boundary and calamity specifically the fire, respectively.

In terms of the personalities involved in the construction, data show that the four identified churches have commonality. All of them were influenced by the parish priests and the Governor Generals. This affirms the political set-up that prevailed in the Philippines during the Spanish era. This reflect the union of the church and state at that time. And, on several occasions, the leaders of the church even exercised more power than their political counterparts.

The misconceptions or fallacies which were involved in their construction similarly have commonalities. These are the original sites where the four-identified churches are located as well as the year in existence along with the year they were constructed.

Lastly, in terms of contributions to Bikol heritage, all of them are regular pilgrim destinations with the Nuestra Senora de Salvacion in Tiwi and the Our Lady of the Gate in Daraga as the most popular among them. All the four-identified churches are recognized for their architectural designs, a combination of western architectural influences intertwined with the unique local construction materials and skills of the local laborers. The architectural strength of these churches was tested by times considering their years of existence.

Generally, the secondary sources which narrated the history of the constructions and the evolutions of the Parishes of Nuestra Senora de Salvacion, Our Lady of the Gate, San Juan de Bautista and St. John the Baptist addressed the questions “What is the truth about history?” and “What is the value of history?” (Fines,1983). These questions are essential in unveiling the truth. And, once truth is revealed then, it can effectively guide the people in the contemporary times.

Analysis of historical narratives as tool for promoting Bikol culture and heritage

The historical narratives of the old churches in Bikol partly represent the origin of the Bikolanos hence, the possibility to serve as tool for promoting the culture and heritage. The 2019-2018 Tourism Development Master Plan of the City of Legazpi “emphasized the need to preserve and reflect the best of its people: bayanihan, respect for cultural identity, heritage and tradition...” Outside of academic milieu, the tourism industry explores various strategies and instruments to promote culture and heritage. In the Philippines, record shows that an average of 9.5% foreign visitors arrived in the country annually between 2017 and 2010. And the Bikol region is one of the five top tourist destinations with an annual growth rate of 7.3% (Primer, Legazpi City Tourism Development Master Plan). The growing number of tourists suggests the possibility of aggressive strategies to introduce, promote, and sustain their interests in Bikol culture and heritage. In the same Tourism Development Master Plan, one of the enabling principles for policy formulation is “the promotion of Bikolano culture and historical heritage in any promotional strategy”. The strategy will necessitate materials such as historical narratives.

These century old churches in Albay can be instruments in promoting Bikol culture and heritage as they represent the history and customs of the people. Two of the identified churches, the Our Lady of the Gate in Daraga and the Parish of San Juan de Bautista are both included in the list of the National Treasures of the Philippines along with the Cagsawa ruins. Those which are included in the list are considered to be important cultural property of the Philippines. According to the Official Gazette of the Philippines, an Important Cultural Property is a cultural property that possesses “exceptional cultural, artistic and/or historical significance”, whereas the highest designation of National Cultural Treasure pertains to “a unique cultural property found locally, possessing outstanding historical, cultural, artistic and/or scientific value which is highly significant and important to the country and nation.” (Official Gazette, n.d.)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analyses of the secondary sources of history of the four identified churches revealed the validity and reliability of the historical documents. These documents were found to be valid and reliable thus reflective of the elements of time, place and people. And, these are essentials for history to be considered legitimate and consistent.

Further, the analyzed data revealed the themes of the codes identified as basis. The codes were: the Patron Saints of the old churches- Marian devotees and Christ-centered patron saints; the factors that paved to their constructions are geographical socio-political and cultural; the people responsible for their constructions are the church and government officials; the dates of constructions and the sites where the church was originally constructed are the common misconceptions; and the churches contributions to Bikol heritage as popular pilgrim sites and their well-admired architectural designs.

The historical narratives of the century old churches is responsive to one of the five enabling principles for policy formulation in promoting resilient, sustainable and inclusive tourism industry.

Among the salient recommendations are: Expand the locale of the study which may include the analysis of the secondary sources of other century old churches both within the Province of Albay as well as in the Bikol region; Instead of analyzing solely secondary sources of data, explore the inclusion of primary sources of data to deepen the analysis; Come-up with classifications of existing old churches both in the province and in the region categorized into constructed in the 1700s and 1800s, architectural designs, contributions to Bikol heritage; conduct another study on other tangible cultural heritage with National Heritage criteria on the facets of cultural worth as basis; and Partner with the Local Government Units for the promotion of resilient, sustainable and inclusive tourism industry.

REFERENCES

Albay’s citadel of faith: A travelers guide. (2006). Albay Architectural Heritage Project, the Office of the Provincial Governor of Albay and Aquinas University of Legazpi.

- Andal. Introduction to Historiography. Retrieved from <http://www.andalthat.co.uk/uploads/2/3/8/9/2389220/introduction-to-historiography>.
- Difference Between Church and Parish. (2011). Retrieved from <https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-church-and-vs-parish/>.
- Earthen vessels. Golden anniversary of Diocese of Legazpi 1951-2001.* (2001). Legazpi City: The Chancery Office, Diocese of Legazpi.
- Fines, J. (1983). *Teaching history*. Edinburg: Holmes McDougall Ltd.
- Gerona, D. (2011). *Albay winding down the historic abaca trail*. Albay, Philippines: Provincial Government of Albay.
- Gottschall, L. (1969). *Understanding history: A primer on historical method*. New York: A.A. Knopf.
- Howell, M. & Prevenier, W. (2001). *From reliable sources: An introduction to historical methods*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- List of cultural properties in the Philippines. Retrieved from <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/lists/national-cultural-treasures-of-the-philippines/>.
- Official Gazette, (n.d.) *List of national cultural treasures and important cultural properties of the Philippines*. Retrieved from <http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/lists/national-cultural-treasures-of-the-philippines/>
- Pinoy on the road. Adventures of Filipino traveler from the Philippines around the world (2013).
- Perry, M. (1989). *A history of the world*. Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Primer on Legazpi City Tourism Development Master Plan 2019-2028. (2018)
- Reyes, J. (1992). *Bikol maharlika*. Philippines: JMC Press, Inc.
- Saint James the Greater or in Spain as Santiago Matamoros. Retrieved from <https://www.caminoadventures.com/st-james/>.
- Tips for evaluating historical documents. New Hampshire Historical Society Retrieved from <http://kwlibguides.lonestar.edu/c.php?g=277502&p=1851368>.
- Zulueta, F. & Nebres, A. (2003). *Philippine history and government*. Mandaluyong City: National Book Store.
- Uy, J. *Filipino Catholics population expanding says church officials*. newsinfo.inquirer.net. Available at newsinfo.inquirer.net/463377/filipino-catholics.