

Concept Paper

Meaning and Functions of Monuments: A Sociological and Anthropological Stance

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Abstract: This concept paper explores the importance and functions of monuments in the Philippines from sociological and anthropological viewpoints, emphasizing their impact on collective identity and historical narratives. Monuments, such as the Rizal Monument, symbolizing national heroism, and the EDSA People Power Monument, commemorating democratic triumphs, function as tangible sites that preserve historical memory and connect colonial legacies to postcolonial resilience. Sociologically, they function as spaces for power negotiation, public remembrance, and social cohesion, reinforcing state ideologies while enabling citizens to reinterpret these within the framework of ethnic diversity. From an anthropological standpoint, these structures exemplify syncretic practices, integrating indigenous motifs, Spanish iconography, and American influences, functioning as mnemonic devices for intergenerational storytelling and cultural adaptation. The paper correspondingly outlines five primary themes: the development of national identity, the safeguarding of collective memory, colonial syncretism, social commemoration, and architectural heritage. It demonstrates how monuments such as the Lapu-Lapu Shrine and Heritage of Cebu serve diverse functions within contested spaces, fostering rituals, promoting tourism, and supporting acts of resistance. Ultimately, this study demonstrates the significance of monuments in fostering inclusive Filipino narratives and emphasizes the need for their preservation amidst rapid urban development.

Keywords: cultural preservation; identity; monuments; sociology; anthropology

1. Introduction

A monument is a substantial object, typically constructed from stone, designed to commemorate and honor an individual or collective, or a designated location established for this intent (Benjamin, 2025). A monument, in its most ancient and authentic definition, is a human construct designed to preserve individual human actions or occurrences in the collective memory of future generations (Demewez, 2026). In addition, Demewez (2026) delineates the criteria that governments ought to contemplate when addressing the preservation of monuments. He believes that monuments ought to be conserved when they embody both artistic and historical significance. Caves demonstrated that the conservation of monuments relies on both aesthetic significance and memorial purposes. He has asserted that a monument is a structure or edifice imbued with cultural, historical, and artistic significance. These values warrant the preservation and upkeep of monuments. Historically, commemoration has been closely associated with the concept of the monument (Mensah, 2021).

The examination of monuments is crucial as historians emphasize various facets of these structures. Urban and art historians regard monuments as tangible and aesthetic entities that embody historical and artistic significance (Rana et al., 2025). Iconography has been extensively employed to delineate the traditional symbols depicted in monuments. Alternative method-ologies advocate for a more interpretative comprehension of monuments through iconology to investigate the intrinsic meanings that disclose the fundamental disposition of a nation, an era, a class, or a religious or philosophical inclination (Paloma & Cathy, 2025).

Sociological and anthropological literature has primarily concentrated on the commemorative roles of monuments, highlighting the commemoration practices of their users. In this context, monuments are regarded as constructed forms established to honor

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events and individuals of significance to a group or community. Demewez (2026) elucidates that commemoration has historically been the primary function of monuments since their inception. In urban environments, monuments have evolved into integral components of the cityscape, serving as spatial reference points or elements that establish the identity of a location. Educational, political, artistic, and commemorative functions can enhance monuments.

Geographers have adopted an alternative approach that regards the commemorative functions of monuments as fundamentally political. Given that memory underpins identity formation, geographers have emphasized the significance of monuments in shaping collective and national identity. In this context, they have examined how political elites utilize monuments to cultivate and reinforce feelings of national distinctiveness and unity. The geographical analysis of monuments has fundamentally established itself based on the stark dichotomy between creators and consumers (Almasoudi et al., 2025; Birdsall et al., 2021). Certain geographers have viewed user interpretations as instinctive responses to the prevailing significance attributed to political elites. Consequently, they have posited that dominant cultures possessed greater authority to express their worldviews spatially. This article aims to highlight the hidden meaning and functions of monuments grounded in sociological and anthropological stances. Doing so will help reinforce dominant histories and social cohesion while excluding marginalized voices as well as improve the cultural ideologies, rituals, and evolving human interactions in social spaces. Pedagogically, educators may leverage monuments to teach critical analysis of power dynamics and selective memory via field trips, discussions, and drama, fostering cultural awareness and inclusive identity. This will correspondingly promote deeper sociocultural understanding in social studies.

2. Collective Memory and National Identity in Philippine Monuments

Monuments like the Rizal Monument represent heroes and important events, bringing together different ethnic groups to create a single Filipino identity (Baliwas & Estremera, 2025; Yin & Zhang, 2025). They support stories of independence from Spanish and American rule and serve as places for public ceremonies that keep national pride alive. From a sociological perspective, these structures control the power relationships between the state and its citizens. In the Philippines, monuments are important for bringing together people from the country's 170+ ethnic groups and helping to create a national identity (Gabrielsson et al., 2025). This phenomenon was especially important after colonial times and during the fight for independence. The Rizal Monument in Luneta Park in Manila is an example of this. It makes Jose Rizal's death a symbol of heroism against Spanish and American rule all over the world. Built in 1913 while the U.S. was in charge of the Philippines, it cleverly combines neoclassical grandeur with Filipino strength to turn an executed reformist into the national hero of the country. Sociologists see the phenomenon as state-orchestrated hegemony, which puts secular nationalism above religious fervor.

Anthropologically, these monuments exemplify cultural syncretism, where indigenous *datu* motifs merge with Western iconography, as seen in the Bonifacio Monument, which represents the revolutionary Katipunan uprising of 1896. Every year, Rizal Day ceremonies and Independence Day parades utilize these types of buildings. They turn shared stories into rituals that go beyond regional differences, from Visayan to Mindanao identities (Guichot-Reina & De la Torre-Sierra, 2024). They create emotional loyalty, which is clear in the way that diaspora remittances pay for replicas abroad, which strengthens imagined communities according to Benedict Anderson's theory.

From a sociological perspective, monuments deal with power imbalances. For example, during martial law under Marcos, they quietly criticized authoritarianism, and after EDSA, the People Power Monument changed the way people thought about identity by focusing on democratic agency (Ozer & Schwartz, 2025). However, disputes continue – demands to take down colonizer tributes show how fluid identity is. In different places, like Cordillera or Moro lands, they encourage new interpretations that include everyone, changing from symbols of the elite to heritage that everyone can enjoy. Thus, Philippine monuments shape national identity in a dynamic way, balancing unity and diversity in a broken postcolonial landscape.

The preservation of collective memory is a vital function of Philippine monuments, transforming fragile histories into enduring physical representations amidst the archipelago's tumultuous colonial and postcolonial history. Sociologically, structures such as the EDSA People Power Monument – erected in the aftermath of the 1986 revolution – represent non-

violent triumphs over the Marcos dictatorship and serve as communal symbols for intergenerational transmission (Mixer & Henry, 2017). Annual pilgrimages and candlelit vigils lend these events a more formal character, combating official amnesia and uniting individuals across social divisions, in accordance with Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory.

From an anthropological perspective, monuments function as mnemonic devices within indigenous settings, exemplified by markers such as the Cordillera rice terraces or the Ifugao bulol figures, which have been repurposed as symbols of cultural heritage (Moliner & Bovina, 2019). They encode oral epics and ancestral achievements, countering Western linear historiography through cyclical, place-centered narratives. The Pinaglabanan Shrine, commemorating the battles against the Spanish in 1896, serves as an exemplary illustration of this. Its weathered reliefs evoke the valor of precolonial *datu*, blending myth with tangible defiance to sustain ethnic pride amidst urbanization.

However, this preservation is contested; Spanish-era forts such as San Diego Castle in Intramuros embody complex histories of oppression and adaptation, leading to reinterpretation through dark tourism. Monuments preserve not only static facts but also dynamic, embodied memories that enable marginalized voices, such as Moro or Lumad histories, to challenge the prevailing narratives. In a divided nation, they preserve memory as a vital force essential for cultural continuity and the preservation of identity (Viejo-Rose, 2015). Given the preceding premises, this paper highlights the preservation of collective memory via monuments highlights selective histories and power structures in sociological-anthropological views. In learning spaces, this will symbiotically foster critical sociocultural awareness, inclusivity, and trans-mission of shared values across generations.

3. Colonial Legacies and Syncretism

Colonial legacies and syncretism in Philippine monuments exemplify a complex fusion of imposed and adaptive cultural elements, fundamental to sociological power structures and anthropological hybridity. Constructed during the Spanish (1565-1898) and American (1898-1946) eras, structures such as Fort Santiago in Intramuros exemplify the integration of European fortification techniques with indigenous construction methods (Chirikure & Clack, 2025). They symbolize conquest while also demonstrating the resilience of the local inhabitants. The Lapu-Lapu Shrine in Mactan commemorates the defeat of Magellan in 1521. It contrasts the resistance of precolonial *datu* with Iberian symbols. For instance, the Sandugo Shrine's blood compact sculpture integrates Boholano ceremonial traditions with elements of Spanish treaty symbolism.

From a sociological perspective, these monuments serve to perpetuate colonial hierarchies. For instance, Cebu's Basilica Minore del Santo Niño played a pivotal role in the evangelization of Catholicism and the transformation of social structures during the period of feudal *encomiendas* (Chukwurah et al., 2025; Chirikure & Clack, 2025). However, syncretism promotes negotiation: festivals centered on Magellan's Cross integrate animist dances with Christian processions, leading to the development of mestizo identities. From an anthropo-logical perspective, they exemplify Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space," where subaltern agency modifies dominance, as evidenced by the neoclassical shell of the Rizal Monument from the American period, which symbolizes Filipino revolutionary spirit. Postcolonial reinterpretations, such as the restoration of Vigan's Calle Crisologo houses, demonstrate how legacies may be challenged. They seek to achieve a balance between tourism revenue and demands for decolonization. Therefore, monuments serve as symbols of syncretic vitality, uniting elements of oppression and innovation within the cultural mosaic of the Philippines (Chukwurah et al., 2025; Chirikure & Clack, 2025). This paper contends that colonial legacies and syncretism in monuments reveal blended cultural identities and power imbalances from sociological-anthropological lenses. In social studies cognitive field, educators can teach hybrid heritage through monument analysis, field visits, and debates, promoting critical thinking on imperialism's enduring effects. This will nature multicultural empathy, decolonial awareness, and inclusive curricula.

4. Architectural Heritage and Collective Memory in Philippine Monuments

Philippine monuments designated for social commemoration transform static structures into dynamic venues for collective rituals, protests, and assemblies, exemplifying sociological solidarity and anthropological performance. The EDSA Shrine, featuring twin towers over-

looking the People Power Monument, annually commemorates the 1986 revolution. Numerous individuals congregate for masses, candlelight processions, and speeches, sustaining the essence of democracy through generations. The Heritage of Cebu Monument attracts visitors for Sinulog festival reenactments, which combine historical vignettes with street dances to commemorate Visayan identity (Mensah, 2021; Paloma & Cathy, 2025). From a sociological perspective, these locations unite individuals despite their disparities. Durkheim describes them as “totemic” spaces where collective emotions unite individuals during national holidays or periods of crisis. From an anthropological perspective, they enable the creation of embodied memories, vendors, tourists, and activists collectively generate meanings through their interactions, as demonstrated by Luneta Park’s Rizal Monument, which functions as a site for Independence Day parades and anti-government demonstrations. This commemorative vitality underscores the significance of monuments in public life, which have transitioned from exclusive sites for the elite to inclusive venues for discourse on power and belonging within the fractured social fabric of the archipelago (Mingoy & Estremera, 2025). The article accentuates that sites of social commemoration in monuments preserve collective histories and foster unity from sociological-anthropological perspectives. In the classrooms, teachers could leverage these sites for experiential learning via visits, discussions, and role-plays to analyze memory construction and social cohesion (Jalmasco & Estremera, 2025; Dimalig & Lomarda, 2025; Lucas, 2025). In so doing, this will certainly foster critical citizenship, empathy for diverse narratives, and awareness of power in heritage conservation.

Philippine monuments represent a blend of indigenous craftsmanship and colonial influences, serving as tangible connections to the archipelago’s complex historical heritage (Rana et al., 2025). The Pinaglabanan Shrine and similar structures incorporate bahay kubo architectural elements with Spanish neoclassical design. Sociologists interpret these as instances of mestizo aesthetics that demonstrate the potential for cultural integration. The Baroque Paoay Church in Ilocos Norte exemplifies the enduring strength of coral stone. It integrates animist spatial orientations with Catholic iconography to facilitate communal worship. From an anthropological perspective, these structures serve to safeguard intangible cultural heritage. For instance, festivals in the vicinity of Miagao Church animate UNESCO-recognized stone carvings through folk dances, thereby preserving and transmitting traditional craftsmanship (Fernandez, 2025; Villena, 2024). They oppose the degradation of urban areas by educating youth about precolonial loom motifs in Ifugao woodcarvings and Moro okir patterns in brass monuments. The preservation initiatives of the National Historical Commission promote elite heritage while simultaneously fostering grassroots museums, thereby enhancing accessibility to cultural heritage for all. Hence, monuments remain significant, as they house valuable artifacts and integrate remarkable structures into enduring cultural narratives (Almasoudi et al., 2025; Birdsall et al., 2021). To put emphasis, this article underscores the fact that integrating architectural and cultural heritage monuments into pedagogy fosters sociocultural awareness, critical thinking, and identity formation. In actual learning spaces, students could explore symbolic meanings, historical narratives, and community functions, enhancing empathy, global citizenship, and interdisciplinary skills like anthropology and sociology analysis redounding in a contextualized language learning in real-world heritage preservation.

5. Conclusions

This concept paper elucidates the profound significance and varied functions of monuments within the Philippine context, analyzed through a synthesis of sociological and anthropological perspectives. Monuments transcend mere stone and bronze; they serve as dynamic records of collective memory, identity negotiation, and cultural resilience amidst a history marked by colonial impositions, revolutionary fervor, and postcolonial nation-building. These structures serve as sociological pivots. The Rizal Monument in Luneta represents Filipino heroism against Spanish and American domination, while the EDSA People Power Monument signifies a nonviolent triumph over dictatorship. They facilitate power dynamics between the state and its varied citizenry – comprising over 170 ethnolinguistic groups – reinforcing dominant narratives while permitting subversive reinterpretations via protests, rituals, and quotidian appropriations.

From an anthropological perspective, monuments display syncretic compositions, wherein indigenous anito elements merge with Hispanic baroque and modernist styles, as evidenced by the Lapu-Lapu Shrine’s assertive stance and the Heritage of Cebu Monument’s

depiction of multicultural history. These locations function as memory anchors, transmitting narratives across generations, uniting individuals during festivities and dark tourism, and combating erasure in areas where indigenous populations are underrepresented, such as the markers on the Cordillera rice terraces. The 5 delineated themes involving national identity formation, collective memory preservation, colonial legacies, social commemoration, and architectural heritage, collectively illustrate the dynamism of monuments. They are not static artifacts; instead, they function as performative spaces where meanings evolve in reaction to societal shifts, encompassing martial law reflections and contemporary decolonization dialogues.

This analysis reveals vulnerabilities like the swift urbanization, political iconoclasm, and climate threats jeopardize these custodians of heritage. Monuments such as the Pinaglabanan Shrine, which commemorate struggles against colonialism, risk obliteration as Manila expands; therefore, preservation is imperative. Policymakers must prioritize inclusive curation. This entails incorporating indigenous perspectives and employing digital archiving to enhance the accessibility of narratives for all individuals. Future research should include ephemeral monuments, such as street art and temporary installations, that document transient expressions of Filipino agency. Philippine monuments exemplify a resilient spirit: within a fragmented archipelago, they amalgamate diverse elements into a unified whole, fostering empathy and awareness. The nation commemorates its history while also safeguarding its sociological and anthropological strength to foster equitable futures. This role promotes monuments as catalysts for dialogue, ensuring their permanence as symbols of collective progress.

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