

A Study on Jeepneys as the Epitome of Filipino Culture

Cristina Domingo

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Abstract: This study will stress out the specific aesthetics that gave trend to the Filipino culture. The labor relations in the jeepney industry affected the economic stability in the Philippines. The role of jeepneys as a beneficial transportation and the economic problems will be the object of discourse.

1 Background

There were conflicts being held during the jeepney's emergence. The authorities, who had an endeavor to ban jeepneys, were quite displeased about its performance in the streets (Aruta et al., 2024). Instead of looking at it as a useful tool for tourism, they considered jeepneys as a hindrance of transportation (Fernandez, 1996). Jeepneys caused so much traffic, and its arrogant drivers always had this hobby of pushing their way just to get through the overcrowded streets of Manila (Westerman, 2018). For the non-commuters, jeepney creates disharmony, while for the commuters, it's their adequate source of transportation.

According to Torres (2001), in the early 1970's, operators were required to specify their routes by one or two colors so that it makes easier for the police to identify such as blue for España, red and white for Pasay and Quiapo (Maher, 1983). This method didn't prevail because the operators are having a hard time identifying these color codes. It partly started the jeepney's multi-colored appearance with a form of Baroque outlines and Rococo trimmings, and since then, it needed something new to change its appearance (Meñez, 1988).

Fernandez (1996) cited that the Americans were the ones who brought the first jeepneys in the Philippines. After the Second World War in 1945, Filipinos have adopted the American culture (Roces, 1994). Filipinos were fond of a small vehicle called the jeep or from the derived word *jitney* (Parrucho & Padullo 2023). The soldiers used jeeps during their span of duty on and off the road (Fernandez, 1996). It allowed to withstand mud holes, rocky roads, tropic heat, and rainfall. When the Americans left the country, the jeep remained as a war souvenir (Westerman, 2018). The Filipinos began to find ways for better use of the jeep such as for hauling goods.

Ever since the Filipinos started using jeepneys, women were usually the companions of the drivers (Meñez, 1988). They were called pom-pom girls and most likely to be referred as whores or *pok-pok* as what the society calls today (Verceles & Alqaseer (2024). Unfortunately, it caused so much of a sexual scandal and it was a feast of gossip everywhere in the village (Torres, 2001). The jeepney had a great impact on the Filipinos, not only with its design, but also on what it can possibly do by its flashy functions (Westerman, 2018). The jeepney would

elevate them against poverty and lessen the economic crisis being encountered during that time.

2 Design

According to Rodriguez (1994), vintage jeeps were small, boxy, and simply lacks character. The early innovators transformed the body, reshaping it into a curvy Pop Baroque style (Meñez, 1988). The painting was colorful and the motif was a contemporary folk culture. It was only the beginning and it doesn't end there. The early structure of the first jeep can hold not more than ten passengers with three or four on each side, including two on the front seat (Webb & McCardle, 2022). In the later structure, it can be occupied from fourteen to eighteen people and was already called as Public Utility Jeepney, or PUJ (Torres, 2001).

The secondary structure of jeepneys were more emphasized and detailed in its every corner. The person who brought out this creation is a musician and a bandleader, Clodualdo "Clod" Delfin (Fernandez, 1996). He briefly entered in the jeepney business and pursued other passions. The design made an opening at the back serving as its entrance, supported by handrails for safety purposes. Bumpers were also included. At the side, they also put fenders or a so-called egg-shaped roof for the tires. Aside from its passenger capacity, the bench or seats were upholstered with creative designs on it (Zulueta et al., 2024). Its interior had a long aisle and metal handrails were placed on the ceiling. Overall, it had no baroque shapes and it was very old-fashioned.

3 Economic Impact

With its low-fare transport, through which it provides a cheaper withdrawal of money, the fare ranged from PHP2.00 to PHP4.00 and increased its fare again to PHP5.50 (Torres, 2001). It served the commuters at all hours because of its reliability. According to Bandayrel et al. (1989), jeepneys provided labor for the Filipinos who are sinking in deep poverty. Since the jeepney operation is a small-time business, there have been existing problems such as gasoline price increases. The high costs of spare parts became a burden, unlike bus operators who can afford for the proper maintenance of their vehicles (Southern, 1997). OFW's (Overseas Filipino Workers) also utilized their income savings in opening up a transportation business (Rodriguez, 1994).

Later, the pioneers came to the scene. They were men who belong in low-middle-class background (Torres, 2001). These pioneers saved the real art of jeepneys through studying from its basics to its complexities. These well-suited silverworks driving with a great sound system that is blaring every corner of the city for everyone to hear (Westerman, 2018). It was definitely an art filled with outstanding colors, externally and internally. It eventually became the soul of folk culture. The names of these pioneers were engraved on the aluminum, namely Sarao, Tabing, Francisco, and Legaspi, and even the less popular ones came out in the open too (Rodriguez, 1994). According to Torres (2001), Leonardo Sarao was one of the oldest pioneers in the jeepney business. Regardless of his educational background, he was very hardworking and was able to remain in the profession. His contribution greatly transformed the direction of the jeepney industry. His work became renowned for his design and left an indelible mark on Filipino culture.

4 Conclusion

Jeepneys are considered as one of the most artistic innovations in the Philippines. To the public, the jeepney is the symbol of Filipino ingenuity, which however became a nuisance in the socio-economic context. Jeepneys epitomize the Filipino culture and contributed to the Philippines' economic growth. It is an invention that changed the country and established a true Filipino identity.

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