Will Academic life bring tourists to the Philippines? Those tasked to reflect on the future of Philippine universities are probably asking how higher institutions of learning can attract more international visitors. What would be some of the reasons for a foreign academic to come to the Ateneo de Manila?

*Philippine culturati* love to rummage through old postcards of Manila. A growing nostalgia for the Manila of old has invaded our consciousness, brought about by the urban decay of the present. These postcards show that following the “Beautiful City” movement that directed the urbanization of Manila during the American period, urban planners then envisioned a University district north of the urban center. It would be the academic equivalent of the Neo-classical complex that surrounded *Intramuros*. This would explain the Neo-classical architecture of the University of the Philippines campus, which would have formed a complex together with the Waterworks Company. Nevertheless, how the campus of the Jesuit university fit into this grand plan is not clear. Possibly, the ecclesiastical colonialists envisioned a parallel complex that included the Ateneo and Maryknoll campuses. One wonders if they envisioned the complex to include the romantic *Beaterio de Sta. Clara* on Aurora Boulevard, which would loop back to Manila *en route* to the Quiapo district.

History, naturally, is on the side of the Ateneo de Manila for now it is more accessible from the airport through C. P. Garcia Avenue (C-5). In the process, the monastery of the Poor Clares became more invisible when it moved to its present location due to the construction of the flyover bridging C-5 and Katipunan Avenue. This road, which goes straight to Congressional Avenue, is a part of the highway from Makati the elite have created for themselves.

These developments have created a nightmare that balk any massive plan to make the University a major tourist destination; for this created the hellish traffic on *Katipunan* Avenue, now renamed C. P. Garcia Avenue. (*Katipunan* [Gathering] refers to the Filipino Revolutionary movement in the 19th century.)

Humor aside, the idea of a university being a major tourist destination is not completely from the left field. Universities through international conferences and research could attract the “good kind” of tourist. Since most of these researchers also teach classes, they could also spread the word and attract their students to travel this direction. Another way the University can become a major tourist destination is through its Library, which should
house unique and rare collections. A prime example is the Rizal Exhibit curated by Ambeth Ocampo, which we feature in the Arts Section.

Be that as it may, the question still has to be asked: how would the University life be envisioned if academics saw themselves as part of the tourism industry? According to Lee Kuan Yew himself (contrary to the belief that it was due to Math and Science education), one reason Singapore developed the way it did was because it engaged in the “hospitality industry.” Seeing the flight of investments from China as an opportunity, this tiny island played host to foreign companies on a level similar to a five-star hotel. This meant educating a citizenry trained in technical know-how that could cater to the needs of foreign investors.

If the university were to attract “good tourists,” it would also have to re-imagine itself. Perhaps this means retrieving the original design according to the “Beautiful City” plan of old, or perhaps striving to solve some of its most basic problems, such as the traffic, the mushrooming of parking lots, or building satellite campuses closer to already existing tourist centers.

Viewed this way, academic life, no matter how esoteric it can become, can be at the forefront of nation-building, not by doing social work _per se_ but by engaging in its theoretical function more seriously. Universities have built up cities and nations because they became centers of learning and hubs of innovation and change. It is often the case in the Philippines that universities understand themselves as temples of “formation,” not unlike convents that cast individuals in a certain mould.

Our proposal is simple: the university is not just a place where people study the history of a race or a nation (this is _not_ the idea of the Humanities that we propound), but a space where solutions to problems are imagined. Humanities research is a form of re-understanding and re-imaging what the problems are, for the solution will come in the astute analysis of the problem as well.

An example of what we mean is a study on how Daoist concepts were used in the development of the economy of China (Jack Barbalet, “Market Relations as Wuwei: Daoist Concepts in Analysis of China’s Post-1978 Market Economy” [Asian Studies Review 35, no. 3 (September 2011)]). The study connects the idea of _wu-wei_ and market economy. Another example is an essay entitled “La dificil fundamentacion de la izquierda: vida, moral, y naturaleza” by Guillermo Graino Ferrer [Caudernos de Pensamiento Politico 27 (Julio/Septiembre 2010)], which portrayed the Leftist ideology as a moral position, starting with salient quotes from the writer Fernando Pessoa: “Circumscribo a mi la tragedia que es mia.”
But why cite these works when the articles we publish in this issue of *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities* are precisely this kind. So far the Editorial Board has not solicited articles based on a particular theme. Colleagues have submitted articles based on our general call for papers. We publish those that have been approved by peer review and have revised in time for the production for this March issue. We notice also that our articles have become more clearly Asian: with papers on *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, on Middle-Eastern universities, and on the use of Filipino in the legal system. We are also publishing papers by three ardent scholars who teach Humanities courses in the Core Curriculum. These papers, on poetic Self-renewal, Christian discipleship, and Pastoral theology, echo the current of dynamic and conflicting theories that underpin the core curriculum classes in the Philippines.

We are grateful to belong to a vibrant community of inquirers who seek to re-imagine the problems in the hopes of presenting solutions. In the corrupt and oligarchic political life of the nation, academics engaged solely and simply in academic life are crucial. We represent a sector of Philippine society responsible for the education of the young, and we occupy a unique position propelled by critical theory and not partisanship. More and more, academics must insist on their role in the political life of the nation, for they are more able to resist the seduction of media images and rhetoric.

Academic life reverberates with the voice of the people; it continues the revolt of the masses. We solitary academics are political because we inhabit the sacred space of the people. We are neither legal experts nor technocrats, and often we read texts too onerous for the many. What we have is an inquiring spirit that ultimately arises from “compassion” when our writing emanates from a desire to unite our voices to those of the voiceless. This way our young journal becomes the articulation not unlike that of the *La Solidaridad*, a voice crying in the desert, waking us to freedom and reform. Academic life—it is more fun in the Philippines.

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February 14, 2012, Makati
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