

## The Academic Lifestyle as a Cultural Innovation\*

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I consider the academic lifestyle as a cultural innovation here in the Philippines and would like to make a few suggestions on the diffusion of this cultural innovation in Philippine society.

### Theoretical Considerations

Cultural anthropologists have studied the process of cultural interaction and cross-cultural influences in great detail. Very few societies are entirely self-sufficient. There is need for the cross-fertilization of ideas among societies for mutual enrichment. In fact, following Spengler and his predecessors, societies have a cycle, crests and troughs, periods of ascendancy and periods of decline. Often, it is only through contacts with a society which is on the path to ascendancy that another society can take on new life and vigor through a marriage of resources. Thus, cultural innovation is seldom *ex nihilo* but more a process of cross-fertilization of ideas borrowed from a

temporarily superior culture on the ascendancy.

There have been all kinds of theories for this kind of cultural borrowing; why certain societies are more open or more closed than others, why certain societies are impervious to foreign influence (at least to a large extent) and why some societies are more permeable. Witness for example Japan on the one hand, where Christianity has hardly made a dent for almost three hundred years, and Korea, where Christianity is making such giant strides, second only to the African Continent.

This process of cultural borrowing takes many forms — from the simplest borrowing of realia (objects and things, for example, Western appliances in the Philippines perhaps represented at their worst by the American motorcar) to the more profound borrowing of ideas, concepts, principles, knowledge. One can borrow realia and not lose one's soul. Japan under the Meiji Restoration borrowed the science of the West but not its culture and lifestyle. On the other hand, here in the Philippines, we seem to have been victims of almost a total cultural imperialism in that we have uncritically accepted North America's "good things in life" but hardly any of its science (thus far) and not its

genuine spirit of democracy.

Cultural borrowing is too large a topic to delve into at this stage. I merely wish to focus on one Western, specifically American, innovation that we seem to have imbibed only rather superficially. I am talking of the academic lifestyle.

### The Academic Lifestyle in the Philippines

Although tertiary-level education dates back to 1611, as we so proudly remark in speaking of our educational system, higher education as we know it today was introduced by the Americans only after 1898, specifically through the land-grant type institutions the American Colonial Government introduced into the Philippines early in the century, through the agricultural school at Los Baños, the medical school in Manila, and eventually the merger of these institutions as the University of the Philippines in 1908.

Whatever one's feelings are about the American Period, the Americans did bring in some very competent people to manage the government for them. William Howard Taft eventually became President of the United States and Justice of the Supreme Court. Benjamin Ide Wheeler, a member of the First Philippine Commission, was for-

\*An earlier draft of this paper was given as an address to the new Pi Gamma Mu members, Alpha Chapter, of the University of the Philippines during their induction on 12 April 1984. The author was inducted as an honorary member of this international honors society for the social sciences, the first non-UP professor to be so honored.

mer president of Cornell University. David Barrows eventually became one of the leading lights of the University of California at Berkeley. Dean Worcester, the founder and for many years Director of the Bureau of Science, was an outstanding scientist. The first President of the University of the Philippines, Murray Bartlett, was an outstanding White Anglo-Saxon Protestant who was a former minister, in line with the tradition early in the century of appointing Protestant Church intellectuals as heads of institutions of learning.

The first professors at the University of the Philippines were not only outstanding teachers but researchers in their own right. Otto Scheerer, the founder of the Department of Linguistics, although not a formally trained linguist, was an outstanding researcher who made sure that his successor in the person of Cecilio Lopez was trained in the best center of Austronesian studies at the time, at the University of Hamburg in Germany, under Otto Dempwolff.

Just more than a month ago, Doreen Gamboa Fernandez of Ateneo de Manila University, and Edilberto N. Alegre of the University of the Philippines, launched a book published by De La Salle University Press, which contains reminiscences of our first writers in English. The volume is full of praise for Paz Marquez Benitez, who inspired so many of our writers. If nothing else, the book is an excellent testimony to the intellectual ferment among our literary authors at the time.

As far as I can glean, research activity at the University of Santo Tomas was likewise impressive before the war. For at that time, in many fields, doctoral degrees were conferred only at the University of Santo Tomas. In fact, outside of medical doctorates, UP (Padre Faura) did not confer a single doctoral degree before the War!

However, outside of the University of the Philippines it seems that research as a normal component of an academician's life has been neglected since the War. There are many reasons for this: the rise of private proprietary institutions after the War to take care of the educational demands of a growing population, the lack of educational planning which created a *laissez-faire* attitude among school administrators, the failure of the Government to take leadership and direction in manpower planning until lately, the unrealistic financing of Philippine education.

In any case, the academic lifestyle at present obtains in only a few campuses and only among a few members of our professorial ranks.

What are the components of the academic lifestyle?

I am thinking of academic degrees (normally the doctorate), teaching, research, consultancies, regular publications, regular attendance at national and international meetings of learned societies, worldwide correspondence with one's peers, frequent travel on invitations to give papers and to address various international bodies. These features should be part and parcel of the life of an academician, a professor who "bears witness" or "professes" a specific academic area, joins ranks with others like him, confers with them on a regular basis, collaborates with them, and like them is governed by a code of ethics of the profession.

While these components are taken for granted by many University of the Philippines professors, they cannot be taken for granted outside the UP campus, with the exception of a few other campuses of universities which are painstakingly attempting to bring about this lifestyle. For most of our so-called college professors, even in Manila, are part-time instructors convinced that their only role is not to discover new knowledge but merely to disseminate the knowledge they

acquired as undergraduates at the universities where they got their degrees. One cannot even speak of graduate students since over 70% of our professors do not have advanced degrees. Most of them are unable to do research, having no training in this enterprise. Neither can they publish works since so many are unable to write. Above all, what I find especially appalling is that they do not really have any conception of what a genuine academician is like or of what good university life really is. For the most part, they do not have the experience of what a living university offers and hence cannot think beyond the kind of limited education they had in their own undergraduate days. For many of these professors, conventions and attendance at international meetings and therefore the opportunity to travel are rewards given by administration for compliance and good behavior and not opportunities to share what one had done research on. They feel jealous when the same professors seem to be leaving the country again and again, not realizing that the reason why they themselves are never invited to these conferences is that they have nothing to communicate about!

Specifically, our social scientists must set about diffusing this way of living among their peers in the various learned societies in the social sciences which presently exist in the Philippines and which are gathered together under the umbrella of the Philippine Social Science Council. They must constitute the group of "significant others" who set the pace for the profession and whose own lives are witnesses of the fulfillment that comes from a life of study, communication, and discovery of new knowledge so as to inspire a new generation of talent such as one finds in such shining lights as Gelia Castillo in rural sociology, Mercedes Concepcion in demography, Alfredo Lagmay in psychology, Rodolfo Bulatao in sociology, Arsenio Manuel

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in anthropology, Gloria Feliciano in mass communication, Cecilio Lopez in linguistics, Cristina Parel in statistics, Jose Encarnacion in economics, Teodoro Agoncillo in history, and their peers.

This type of role-modeling becomes especially necessary as the number of practicing social scientists in the country compared to humanists and management as well as technology experts is relatively small, perhaps comparable in smallness only to the paucity of mathematicians and natural scientists in this country.

What our social scientists have to bring to Philippine society is their expertise in various areas of social

life so that the basis of decision making in this society will be empirical rather than impression, opinion, and feeling.

What our social scientists have to bring to Philippine culture is their world-view and their values as researchers so that as they encounter social reality and innovation, they shall bring to these encounters the paradigms of their own fields of specialization to bring their considerations and courses of action to the level of near-science and not merely guesswork.

This cultural diffusion will take many means to accomplish. It will demand leadership in our learned societies, a steady volume of publications in our social science journals, conti-

nuing reports of on-going research in our annual meetings and conventions, and generous help to other universities and colleges not equally blessed with trained manpower.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the ideals, values, behaviors of this academic lifestyle have to become internalized by our colleagues through their association with practicing social scientists. Through cooperative projects with these social scientists, such ideals, values, and behaviors will become operative not just on a few select campuses in our country but in many centers of excellence where competent social science will be realized.

## editorial

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*Finally, the professional manager must understand the strategic implications of his decisions. He must be able to envision how his decisions will relate not only to the overall performance of the enterprise but to the various sectors of the economy as well.*

*When we combine all these elements, we can say that the true professional manager who is a man for others is someone who gives dignity to his profession through proper management of the resources available to him. This man does not depend and will not only depend on the inherent earning capability of available resources. This is stagnation. Rather, he seeks further the greater returns to be gained from the effective and efficient management of these resources.*

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