



America's Unsuccessful Conquest of the *Tropics*: An Analysis of the Cattle Importation Policies in the Colonial Philippines, 1903-1922

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Abstract: During the American occupation of the Philippines, the United States implemented programs directed towards the conquest of the Filipinos' hostile tropical environment. Collectively called by British historian David Arnold as the *tropics*, the Philippines, like any other colony of the West, was described as a territory with an unfriendly and harmful environment that needs to be tamed by its colonial master. The United States considered the spread of communicable animal diseases as a part of their new tropical colony's hostile environment that needs to be tamed. As a response to the animal contagions problem, the insular government of the United States imported carabaos and cattle both for work and breeding purposes. This was implemented in accordance to the Lamarckian notions of acclimatization. This paper examines how the American colonial government implemented the cattle importation policies from 1903 to 1922 to solve the scarcity of bovine work animals and to produce new breeds of disease-resistant cattle in the Philippines. Moreover, it analyzes the reasons for the failure of the cattle importation policies of the United States in the Philippines.

Key Words: Epizootics; Cattle importation; Nellore Cattle; Tropics; Carabaos

1. INTRODUCTION

As the new colonial master of the Philippines the late nineteenth century, the United States exerted its powers not only to capture the hearts and minds of the native inhabitants but also to conquer the country's hostile tropical environment. British historian David Arnold, in his book entitled *Warm Climates and Western Medicine, The Emergence of Tropical Medicine, 1500-1930*, introduced the concept of *tropicality* to label the colonial imperatives directed towards the domination and control of the unfriendly and harmful tropical environments or territories of the colonies (Arnold, 1996). The United States considered the harmful tropical environment of the Philippines as a highly

dangerous territory that must be subjugated. One aspect of the Philippines' hostile tropical environment was the threat of dangerous animal contagions that decimated thousands of water buffaloes or carabaos and beef cattle in the country. Rinderpest, a bovine viral disease was killing thousands of carabaos and cattle in the Philippines since it was recorded in the late nineteenth century. As a response to the problem, the American colonial government imported cattle to restock the Philippines with a sufficient supply of bovine animals intended for both work and breeding purposes. Colonial officials implemented cattle importation policies in accordance to the "Lamarckian notions of acclimatization" that dominated the scientific world in the nineteenth century. This notion views



domestic animals as "*locomotoras vivientes* --living machines or engines susceptible to improvement through breeding..."(Bankoff, 2001). American officials accepted the Lamarckian concept of acclimatization and they believed that Science can "provide the means by which humanity could manipulate nature to compensate for any defect of function or pernicious effect of environment" (Bankoff, 2001).

Through the use of primary sources, namely the *Reports of the Philippine Commission to the United States President* and the *Reports of the Bureau of Agriculture*, I want to examine how the American colonial government implemented the cattle importation policies from 1903 to 1922 to solve the scarcity of bovine work animals and to produce new breeds of disease resistant cattle in the Philippines. In the process, I want to discuss the reasons why the animal importation policies of the United States in the Philippines failed.

2. THE THREAT OF ANIMAL CONTAGIONS

The animal disease problem haunted the American colonial government when it colonized the Philippines in 1898. The agricultural sector of this former Spanish colony was paralyzed when thousands of domestic carabaos and beef cattle throughout the islands were killed by a deadly animal contagion that was known in Europe as rinderpest. Considered by historians as an agricultural crisis in the nineteenth century Philippines, the rinderpest epizootic was introduced into the country during the 1880s when the Spanish government imported breeding cattle from Indo-China (Gomez, 1926). The epidemic caused the death of thousands of carabaos and cattle in many provinces throughout the country which left many farmlands untilled due to the lack of work animals that will cultivate the farm lands. The crisis brought about by the rinderpest epidemic needed an immediate solution from the American colonial government. One solution was suggested by Supreme Court Justice Charles Burke Elliott, in his book *The Philippines to the End of the Commission Government: A Study in Tropical Democracy*. He noted that it was "increasingly important to restock the islands with the draft animals with which the Filipinos are accustomed" (Elliot, 1968).

3. RELIEF FUND FOR CATTLE IMPORTATION, 1902-1904

American colonial officials restocked the Philippines with imported animals as a solution to the scarcity of domestic animals. However, this measure was not always practical. The Philippines lacked stable financial resources to purchase work animals. The measure taken by William H. Taft, the first Civil Governor, was to request United States President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) to appropriate \$3 Million as distress relief for the Philippines (Stanley, 1984).

President Theodore Roosevelt referred the matter to the United States Congress. In 1902, the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives introduced House Resolution 17202 which allocated the budget for various civil expenses of the United States government (United States Congress, 1903). Under this bill, the United States Congress appropriated \$3 Million as aid for the Philippines, thereby approving President Roosevelt's earlier request for emergency relief for the Philippines. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge explained the reason why the United States Congress appropriated the relief fund. It was because the Philippines was afflicted, not only by war but also by cattle pestilence, cholera and other forms of natural disasters. Lodge emphasized that Congress appropriated the relief fund to enable the colonial government to purchase cattle to restock farmlands in the Philippines (United States Congress, 1903).

Final approval of the sum of \$3 Million or PhP6,000,000 for the relief of distress in the Philippines came on March 3, 1903. The money was placed in the depository of the Philippine Government in New York City to the credit of the Insular Treasury. The Civil Governor of the Philippines submitted to the Secretary of War a statement of all expenditures under this fund to make sure that the money was spent wisely. As of December 1, 1903, the colonial government appropriated PhP1,703,000 for the purchase, sale and distribution of draft animals (United States, Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Department, 1904-1908).

The Philippine Commission used a portion of the Congressional Relief Fund to purchase draft



animals. Through Act No. 738, enacted on April 8, 1903, the Philippine Commission ordered the purchase of imported carabaos worth \$100,000. Mr. M. L. Stewart, the Acting Insular Purchasing Agent, and Mr. A.G. Washburn, Manager of the Culion Stock Farm, were sent to Shanghai, China to conduct preliminary investigations. Thereafter, they advertised in newspapers the opening of bids to supply the government 10,000 carabaos already immunized with virulent blood and anti-rinderpest serum. The Shanghai firm Keylock and Pratt won the bidding. It promised to deliver to Manila 10,000 temporarily immunized carabaos at 88 Mexican pesos per head under the condition that the Insular Government shares the risk of loss by paying PhP40 per head of carabao that notwithstanding precautionary measures dies nonetheless after the inoculation. Under the terms of the contract, Keylock and Pratt brought to Manila a total of 3,750 heads of carabao valued at PhP248,750.32. Unfortunately, many carabaos died after the simultaneous inoculation of anti-rinderpest serum and virulent blood. The percentage of death was quite high that both parties agreed to renegotiate the contract. Under the new contract, Keylock and Pratt agreed to deliver 10,000 heads of carabaos of a certain age and weight to Manila at PhP79 per head. The animals were temporarily immunized in China and inspected upon arrival in Manila. Under the terms of this contract, Keylock and Pratt delivered to Manila 5,293 carabaos and 399 cattle from 1903 to 1905 (United States, Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Department, 1904; Sales, 1935).

With the arrival of the carabaos imported from China, the Philippine Commission passed Act No. 828 on August 7, 1903. The Act directed the Insular Purchasing Agent to distribute the carabaos from China. Priority in the distribution was to be given to those provinces that made earlier requests and which were duly approved by the Philippine Commission. The minimum price given to provincial boards was fixed at PhP70. But if *hacenderos* or farmers from Manila wanted to buy just a few, the selling price was fixed at PhP100 per head of carabao. Unfortunately, the distribution and sale of the imported carabaos was quite slow. Farmers did not buy the animals because the price was too high. Moreover, many of the carabaos were not immunized. A number of them died when they arrived in the Philippines. Reports show that 2,731 of these imported carabaos and cattle died upon arrival in the

Philippines due to rinderpest and other animal diseases. Officials of the Insular Purchasing Bureau considered the purchase of imported carabaos in Shanghai a big blunder because the colonial government spent so much money on something that did not give any positive result (United States, Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Department, 1904; Sales, 1935).

The Philippine Commission also appropriated the US Congressional Relief Fund in some other ways. For example, draft animals were purchased for work, serum production and breeding purposes. This was accomplished through Act No. 797 which authorized the Civil Governor to allocate \$7,500 from the Congressional Relief Fund for the purchase of cattle intended for the manufacture of the rinderpest serum and feeds for cattle (United States, Philippine Commission, 1904). The Act also authorized the Civil Governor to appropriate \$3,500 for the purchase of 60 imported Jersey grade dairy cows and heifers (United States, Philippine Commission, 1904). On August 25, 1904, the Philippine Commission passed Act No. 1220 appropriating \$50,000 for the purchase of draft cattle (United States, Philippine Commission, 1904).

From 1905 to the 1930s the Bureau of Agriculture continued to import bulls from Arabia, Australia, India and United States. These animals were brought to the government stock farm in Alabang. Others were brought to breeding stations in Batangas and Cebu (United States, Congress, Senate, 1932). Some were sold while others were given to provincial authorities. Unfortunately, the raising of imported cattle for breeding purposes proved to be unsuccessful endeavor because many of the imported animals eventually succumbed to diseases (Elliott, 1968).

4. THE IMPORTATION OF INDIAN NELLORE CATTLE

American veterinarians from the Bureau of Agriculture found out that all native carabaos and cattle in the Philippines were highly vulnerable to rinderpest and other deadly animal contagions. After years of battling epizootics in the Philippines, they realized that the control of animal contagions would not be successful unless a new breed of disease-



resistant cattle will be introduced into the country. With this in mind, the Bureau of Agriculture decided to augment the number of work animals in the Philippines by purchasing imported cattle that were resistant to diseases. Officials from the Bureau of Agriculture bought the Nellore Cattle from Madras, India because they found out that Nellore Cattle could readily adapt to the conditions of lower altitudes such as those found in the Philippines. Moreover, they learned that this breed of cattle were highly resistant to the Philippine strain of rinderpest. The first shipment of Nellore cattle arrived in May 1909 and it consisted of ten Nellore cows, two bulls and one calf.

The experiment did not yield positive results because after conducting several experiments, Dr. Stanton Youngberg, Chief Veterinarian of the Bureau of Agriculture concluded that Nellore cattle were not absolutely immune to rinderpest (Youngberg, 1917; Edwards, 1914).

5. CATTLE IMPORTATION BAN, 1922

The continuous entry of infectious animal contagions caused by imported cattle became a problem of the Bureau of Agriculture. Colonial officials realized that the spread of animal contagions cannot be controlled if the importation of live cattle from rinderpest-infected countries like French Indo-China, Hong Kong and British India will continue. Because of this, American colonial officials implemented a more drastic measure to combat the spread of animal diseases. In 1922, the Philippine Legislature passed Act No. 3052 calling for a ban on the importation of bovine animals in the Philippines by prohibiting "any person or corporation from importing, bringing or introducing into the country live cattle from any foreign country" (United States, Philippine Commission, 1924). However, the Act authorized the Director of Agriculture to import various classes of cattle from foreign countries for breeding purposes. Moreover, the Act also limited the importation of cattle in that no more than 500 heads were to be imported per year. The Director of Agriculture was also authorized to issue permits for the importation of cattle for serum manufacture. However, these animals were to be submitted for inspection by the Bureau of Agriculture (Philippine Legislature, 1922).

The implementation of the cattle importation ban proved that the Bureau of Agriculture failed to solve the animal contagions problem by importing live cattle and carabao into the Philippines. Although only a partial ban was imposed by the colonial government because it did not include breeding animals, it was evident that the implementation of the cattle importation program to restock the Philippines with new breeds of cattle and carabaos was unsuccessful. This was evident when the colonial government limited the entry of live cattle for breeding purposes to 500 heads only every year in accordance to Act No. 3052 because they feared that these animals will either die due to the diseases or it can be a source of new strains of the disease. Whatever the case maybe, introducing new stocks of imported animals was an impractical program until a vaccine can be developed to immunize the livestock from the epizootics.

6. CONCLUSION

The failure of the cattle importation program of the United States government in the Philippines can be attributed to the colonizer's lack of complete understanding of the overall picture of the animal disease problem. American agriculture officials were unaware of the widespread infection brought about by the rinderpest virus. No matter how many cattle or carabaos were imported into the country either for work or breeding purposes, these animals will just die because the disease was epizootic in the Philippines. Moreover, animals that were imported into the country did not have any immunity from the disease. This was also true in the importation of Nellore cattle. After several attempts, the American colonial government abandoned the Nellore cattle importation program because half-bred Nellore cattle did not produce immunity from the disease. The importation of disease-resistant cattle for breeding purposes was just a waste of money and at the same time impractical because it needed to replace all the domestic carabaos and cattle throughout the Philippines to ensure immunity of the domestic work animals in the country. The impracticability of the cattle importation program to restock the supply of bovine animals in the Philippines was proven when the colonial government imposed an importation ban on beef cattle and reduced the number of imported cattle for breeding purposes to 500 heads only.



In this paper, I have explained why the American colonial government did not successfully control nature, that is, the eradication of animal diseases through the importation of animals because all imported animals were eventually infected by animal contagions. The failure of the Americans to dominate nature and control the dangers posed by the tropical environment was evident in the inability of the colonizers to address the animal diseases problem. American veterinarians' failure to develop a vaccine against rinderpest during the early part of American rule in the Philippines was an important reason why cattle imported into the country died due to the disease.

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