The Philippine Carabao through the Lens of American Colonial Scientists:

Dean Worcester and the Bureau of Agriculture’s Scientific Reports on the Bubalus Bubalis Carabanesis (Philippine Water Buffalo) during the American Occupation of the Philippines, 1899-1928.

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Abstract: Dean Worcester, an American zoologist who was appointed as a member of the Philippine Commission in 1899 and 1900 and as head of the Philippine Interior Department in 1901, studied the state of Philippine agriculture when the United States annexed the archipelago in 1898. In the course of his survey, Worcester noted the role of carabaos or water buffalos in rice farming. His reports about the carabaos were reflected in the Report of the Philippine Commission to US President William McKinley (1901) and in his publications about the Philippines, namely, The Philippine Islands and Their People (1899) and The Philippines: Past and Present (1914). In these books, Worcester described and at the same criticized the Filipino farmer’s use of the carabao as beast of burden. Aside from Worcester, veterinarians from the Bureau of Agriculture also published numerous reports about the carabaos in the Philippines. Aside from reporting about the role of carabaos in Philippine agriculture, both Worcester and the veterinarians also described the health conditions of Philippine carabaos which were decimated by rinderpest, a highly contagious bovine disease. Their reports also included the different policies of the colonial government against this infectious contagion. Using the agricultural survey and scientific reports of Worcester (1899-1914) and the Bureau of Agriculture (1901-1928), my paper examines how the American colonizers’ perspective about the carabao diverge from that of the colonized Filipinos. In the process, I want to explain how American colonial officials and their policies against rinderpest failed to recognize and understand both the economic and cultural significance of domestic carabaos in Philippine rural life.
1. **The Filipino Farmer’s Carabao**

Rice cultivation is an important economic activity in the Philippines because rice is a staple food for Filipinos. In the Philippines, the water buffalo (scientific name: *Bubalus Bubalis Carabanesis*) or carabao (*kalabaw* in Tagalog) is also considered as an important farm animal. In fact, Filipinos consider the carabao as a symbol of Philippine agricultural life because of its principal role in rice cultivation. The carabao, says D.F. Doepers, is “the animal best suited for work in muddy swampy environments and which thrives on poor quality browse” (Doepers, 2004, 314). Horses were not utilized in the same way as carabaos were used in the Philippines because horses have small physique and poor strength that made equines “unsuitable for employment in the mud of rice paddies” (Bankoff, 2004(a), 235). Although scholars debate on the time when it was first used in the Philippines but they all agree that the Filipinos and the carabaos had a “long standing relationship” (Doepers, 2004, 314).

Dr. Victor Buencamino, the first Filipino veterinarian and Director of the Bureau of Animal Industry, summarizes the invaluable role of the carabao in this way:

> [The carabao is]...life itself [because] ... it drew his [farmer’s] plow in the field, carried his harvest on its back, [and] provided milk. The carabao was so precious usually kept in a comfortable area under his nipa hut and cared for like it was a member of the family (Buencamino, 1977, 107).

Amidst the lead role played by the carabao in Philippine agriculture, the American colonial officials who studied the country’s state of agriculture failed to understand both the economic and cultural value of the *kalabaw*. Unlike the colonized Filipinos who dearly cared for their beloved work animals, American scientists, like Dean Worcester and the veterinarians from the Bureau of Agriculture, who studied the carabaos in the Philippines viewed this bovine animal as a simple beast of burden that can easily be replaced if it cannot perform farm work.

2. **Dean Worcester’s Agricultural Survey: A Colonizer’s Perspective on the Kalabaw**

Dean C. Worcester was one of the most influential American colonial administrator in the Philippines during the early part of the American occupation. Before he became a colonial administrator in the Philippines, he served as an assistant professor of zoology at the University of Michigan and as a curator of the Zoological Museum. Prior to his appointment in the Philippines, Worcester was not unfamiliar with this American colony. In fact, he was considered an expert on the Philippines having been in the country twice as part of two scientific expeditions organized in 1887-1888 and 1890-1893. The first expedition was organized by Professor Joseph B. Steere of the University of Michigan. His scientific sojourn focus on the investigation of the origin and distribution of zoological species in the Philippines. It also aimed to collect various species of mammals, fishes, birds and reptiles that can be found throughout the islands (Sullivan, 1992, 13 and 15).

Worcester and his friend, Dr. Frank S. Bourns, who also joined the Steere Expedition, returned to the Philippines for another scientific expedition in 1890. Their visit was supported by the University of Minnesota and financed by Mr. Louis F. Menage, a wealthy businessman from Minneapolis, Minnesota. This scientific expedition which became known as the Menage expedition, was organized to continue the exploration and scientific studies about the Philippines (Worcester, 1899, ix). Worcester and Bourns stayed in the Philippines for two years and eight months and during their visit in the islands, they went to Luzon, Panay, Guimaras, Negros, Siquijor, Cebu, Mindoro, Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Palawan, Culion, Busuanga, Samar, Romblon, Tablas, Sibuyan and Masbate. They stayed in different

provinces to “get a fairly representative collection of its birds and mammals” (Worcester, 1899, ix). Worcester documented his report about the Philippines in his work entitled The Philippine Islands and Their People. Published by the MacMillan Company in London in 1899, this book also included Worcester’s scientific survey on various topics about the Philippines including its agricultural conditions.

As a zoologist involved in the scientific expeditions, Worcester was also interested in the variety of animals found in the Philippines. In The Philippine Islands and Their People, he was particularly curious about the kalabaw. He described the carabao as the universally employed beast of burden in the Philippines (Worcester, 1899, 511). This bovine animal, Worcester adds, can travel “where a horse cannot” but it has “certain peculiarities of disposition” that made this work animal “a rather unreliable means of conveyance” (Worcester, 1899, 60). The “peculiarities” of the carabao that Worcester mentioned refers to the very unique behavior and exceptional characteristic of this quadruped draft animal that seems to be very unusual from the perspective of an American scientist like Worcester.

Worcester accused the carabao of having “an inborn prejudice against white men” that the smell of an American “is sometimes enough to stampede all the buffaloes in a village” (Worcester, 1899, 512). This bovine animal, he adds, is usually tame and submissive “when only natives are around him” but when it smells the presence of white men, it suddenly panics and goes crazy. Worcester recalls his trips in secluded native villages in the Philippines where he experienced “racist carabao.” Worcester recalled that he has “stampeded half the buffaloes in a place by simply walking along its main street” (Worcester, 1899, 512).

Worcester also described the Philippine carabao as an inferior bovine animal. His conclusion was based from his personal observations on this draft animal. First, he described this draft animal as a very lazy and sluggish work animal because it cannot stay continuously under the sun. He noted that the carabao often takes a spur-of-the-moment mud-bath, and “will seldom work without it for more than a couple of hours during the heat of the day” (Worcester, 1899, 60). In his report, Worcester writes:

The worst trouble with him [carabao] is that he absolutely declines to work in the middle of the day if the sun is hot. When one urges him against his inclination, an impromptu mud bath is likely to result; for sooner or later he will get his eye on a tempting slough, and into it he will go regardless of what happens to be attached to him or on his back (Worcester, 1899, 60).

Another report supports the sensitivity of the water buffalo to the sun’s heat. In their 1901 Report to the US President McKinley, Worcester and the other members of the Philippine Commission2 wrote that the carabao “cannot long endure the heat of the tropical sun when at work” (United States, Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1901, 309). The report further stated that:

If one forces them [carabaos] on, they are likely to lie down in the first puddle or stream encountered, and refuse to get up. If pushed too hard, they die of the heat, and in cases of emergency water

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1 The First Philippine Commission, also known as the Schurman Commission, was composed of civilian and military officials. Aside from Dean C. Worcester, the other members of the Commission included Jacob Gould Schurman, President of Cornell University; Major-General Elwell S. Otis, military governor of the Philippines; Rear-Admiral George Dewey, naval officer in command of the United States fleet in the Philippines, and Colonel Charles Denby, United States Minister to China
should at least be poured over their heads and along their backs from time to time. If left to themselves they will pass greater part of the day in a mud bath” (United States Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1901, 309).

Another reason for the carabao’s inferiority, according to Worcester, was due to its slow movement and mediocre strength. According to him, the carabao was “most unconsciously slow at the best, and his strength and endurance are not what one would expect from an animal of such huge bulk” (Worcester, 1899, 511-512).

3. Worcester and the Bureau of Agriculture on the Bovine Rinderpest Problem

On July 4, 1901 civil government was established in the Philippines and William H. Taft was named as its first civil governor. Three months after, Taft appointed each of the members of the Second Philippine Commission to serve as executive officials. Worcester was appointed to head the Department of Interior. As the Secretary of the Interior, Worcester supervised the Bureau of Agriculture. As part of his duty as Interior Secretary, he studied the state of Philippine agriculture during the early part of American rule. In the course of his career as a colonial administrator in the Philippines, Worcester faced the most serious problem concerning the health conditions of carabaos in the Philippines.

In *The Philippines Past and Present*, Worcester (1914, 413) was alarmed by the decimation of thousands of carabaos in the Philippines due to cattle plague or rinderpest, a highly communicable animal contagion that ravaged bovine animals throughout the Philippine archipelago. In his book, Worcester made the following remarks about this dreaded animal contagion:

Rinderpest, a highly contagious and very destructive disease of horned cattle, was introduced in 1888 and spread like fire in prairie grass. No real effort was made to check it prior to the American occupation, and it caused enormous losses, both directly by killing large numbers of beef cattle and indirectly by depriving farmers of draft animals.

What Worcester described in his book was the “great bovine rinderpest epidemic” that killed thousands of carabaos and cattle in the Philippines in the late nineteenth century until the early 1900s. When the disease was first recorded in the late 1880s, it had already decimated almost 90 percent of the carabaos in the Philippines (Bankoff, 2004(b), 5). During the beginning of American occupation of the Philippines in the early 1900s, the animal contagion continued to spread like wild fire and created fear among Filipino farmers and American colonial officials alike. From 1900 to 1901, American military authorities estimated that many provinces lost about 50 to 60 percent of their carabaos and cattle due to this highly infectious animal contagion (Youngberg, 1922, 205).

Empirical data supported Worcester’s report on the disturbing impact of the plague. In the Census taken by the Bureau of Census in 1903, data shows that there were 629,176 carabaos and cattle that succumbed to rinderpest (United States, Bureau of Census, 1905, 225).

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2 President McKinley created the Second Philippine Commission in 1900 and its goal was to establish civil government in the Philippine Islands. Aside from Dean Worcester, President McKinley also appointed William H. Taft of Ohio; Luke E. Wright of Tennessee; Henry C. Ide of Vermont; and Bernard Moses of California as members of the Second Philippine Commission or the Taft Commission.
Most of the deaths were recorded from the Visayas and Mindanao provinces because the plague had already killed thousands of draft animals in Luzon during the previous outbreaks of the contagion (United States, Bureau of Census, 1905, 225 and Youngberg, 1922, 205). In the succeeding years, the animal contagion continued to decimate the carabao and cattle population in the provinces but in varied intensities. Some areas were attacked severely while others were only hit mildly.

Table 1 presents the number of deaths due to rinderpest from 1912 to 1928. Data indicates that deaths due to rinderpest steadily rose from 1912 to 1921. Data shows that in 1921, veterinarians from the Bureau of Agriculture recorded the most number of deaths due to rinderpest. There were 35,740 carabaos and cattle that were decimated due to rinderpest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
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<td>1914</td>
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<td>1915</td>
<td>2,305</td>
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<td>2,123</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>2,692</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Commonwealth of the Philippines, Department of Agriculture and Commerce, Bureau of Animal Industry, 1939, p. 72.


As Interior secretary, Worcester was tasked to provide an immediate solution to the rinderpest problem. Unfortunately, Worcester’s inability to understand the dynamics of Philippine rural life including his failure to recognize the existence of a culturally-rooted attachment between the Filipino farmers and his carabao prevented the American colonial government from crafting a successful anti-rinderpest campaign.

Worcester was critical to the Filipino farming techniques since the very start. He described their method of using carabaos as draft animals in the rice fields as very obsolete. He said that even though agriculture was the main source of wealth in the Philippines, it was still “conducted in a most primitive manner, [where] modern methods and modern machinery being practically unknown” (Worcester, 1930, 667). Another proof of Worcester’s lack of appreciation and understanding of the important role of the carabao in rice farming was his response to the inquiry of Filipino farmers who asked about the American colonial
government’s plans on how to restock the country with carabaos after their draft animals were decimated due to rinderpest. He advised Filipino farmers to “be innovative, suggesting that they replace the carabao... with mules or steam gang-ploughs” (Sullivan, 1992, 101). He even warned Filipino farmers that they “must abandon the belief that they could plant rice or plow with the carabao looking on” (Sullivan, 1992, 101). He even reminded farmers that they should not only rely on carabaos as farm animals but rather they should try to use other work animals that can help them till the farmlands (Sullivan, 1992, 101).

Worcester’s statements and response about the carabao, the rinderpest problem and the state of Philippine agriculture provided us a clear picture as to how the American colonial government plans to solve the animal disease problem. Based from his statements, Worcester and the Bureau of Agriculture, the principal government tasked to implement the anti-rinderpest campaign, will solve the agricultural problem in a manner that was consistent to the American colonizer’s point of view. They will apply modern scientific remedies and solutions to the problem and in the process undermine the Filipino farmer’s culturally-rooted emotional attachment with his beast of burden.

Aside from Worcester’s works, the annual reports of the American veterinarians from the Bureau of Agriculture provided invaluable data so that we can understand better how the Americans disregarded important role of carabaos in Philippine agriculture and how they failed to understand the strong attachment that existed between the Filipino farmer and his beast of burden. This lack of understanding of Filipino culture was highly evident in the different policies that were implemented by the American colonial government to address the rinderpest problem.

**Inoculation of anti-rinderpest serum**

An initial solution to the rinderpest problem was the inoculation of the anti-rinderpest serum to susceptible carabaos and cattle. From 1903 to 1911, veterinary surgeons implemented the anti-rinderpest serum inoculation campaign. In this program, healthy and susceptible carabaos were inoculated with 30 cc of anti-rinderpest serum and 1 cc of virulent blood or blood from a sick animal. This method gave healthy animals the disease and the remedy at the same time (United States, Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1904, 378; 1906, 47 and 117; Robles, 1931, 307). Field trial results showed that an animal needed to be injected with 20 to 30 cc of serum for 10 to 15 times for it to receive immunity but unfortunately, trials also proved that the inoculated animal only acquired temporary immunity. Because of these reasons, the use of the anti-rinderpest serum was discontinued in 1911 (Kern, 1922, 243 and Youngberg, 1922, 207-209 and 215).

**Slaughtering method**

With the failure of the serum inoculation, a new policy against the contagion was implemented in 1911. The Bureau of Agriculture began using the slaughtering method. In this campaign, veterinary forces of the Bureau went to the provinces to kill and then burn all carabaos infected with rinderpest. As indemnity, owners of these sick animals received from the Bureau of Agriculture a certain amount of payment as compensation (Commonwealth of the Philippines Department of Agriculture and Commerce, 1939, 21-22). When the campaign was implemented in the field, it was a complete failure because many Filipinos did not cooperate with the Bureau of Agriculture. In several places livestock owners hesitated to report the presence of sick animals in their localities. They believed that if they will report any infected animal in their respective area then their own carabao or cattle will also be placed under strict quarantine. In other places, the presence of sick animals was only reported when they were already on the verge of death and every other carabao in the barrio had been hidden
elsewhere. Instead of helping suppress the disease, such actions only encouraged the spread of diseases (Bureau of Agriculture, 1912, 14).

**Quarantine Policy**

Act No. 2172 of the Philippine Commission authorized the implementation of animal quarantine. Under this policy, the Director of Agriculture was empowered to place under quarantine any province, island, municipality, barrio, township, settlement, parcel of land or district of whatever size if the area was determined to have been infected by an infectious animal disease. The Act empowered the Director of Agriculture to isolate infected animals and to place them in quarantine stations. On the other hand, he was also authorized to declare any place to be free from infection and establish lines or districts for the protection of animals that were not infected by any animal disease (United States Philippine Commission, 1912, 343).

The Philippine Scouts and the Philippine Constabulary assisted the Bureau of Agriculture in the implementation of the quarantine policy. As a partner of the Bureau of Agriculture in the implementation of the quarantine policy, the Scouts were tasked to inspect provinces and towns placed under animal quarantine. They acted as quarantine guards to ensure that only authorized personnel from the Bureau of Agriculture entered the isolation corrals built for infected animals (Reardon, 1913, p. 387). Quarantine was implemented in Ilocos Sur, Abra, Ilocos Norte, Laguna, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Bataan, Capiz, Rizal, Zamboales, Pampanga, La Union, Leyte, Cebu, Negros Oriental, Negros Occidental, Iloilo and Davao (Reardon, 1913, 389-390 and Ward, 1912, 642).

5. Filipinos’ Response to the American Campaign against rinderpest

Many Filipino farmers opposed and even resented the campaign of the veterinarians and officials from the Bureau of Agriculture. One reason behind this opposition was due to the lack of information provided by the American colonial officials to explain the treatment provided to the farmer’s work animal. Since many Filipinos were unfamiliar with the latest scientific advances in the treatment of animal diseases, they should have been properly informed about the methods employed by the colonial government against the contagion. Unfortunately, due to lack of information dissemination, many Filipino farmers did not cooperate. They expected American veterinarians and inoculators to give medicine to their sick carabaos. However, they were astounded when they saw veterinarians injecting into their beloved carabao a serum made up of blood taken from a sick animal.³ Filipino farmers got angry with the American veterinarians because they the injection of virulent blood did not cure but only aggravated the sick condition of their animals. Moreover, the inoculation method became very unpopular to the farmers because the mortality rate after the inoculation was high. In the official reports of the inoculators, the death rate incurred following the inoculation of bovine animals in some areas was as high as fifty percent. This was mainly due to the lack of field trials before the serum inoculation method was implemented (United States Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1905, 21 and Sullivan, 1992, 102-103).

Many farmers showed resentment to the campaign by chasing government veterinarians with bolos (machete) to prevent their animals from being inoculated (Buencamino, 1977, 107-108). Proof of the intense opposition of many Filipino farmers in the countryside against the

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³ The blood injected into the carabao is an anti-rinderpest serum. The serum was extracted from the blood of an animal that had been infected with the rinderpest virus but had fully recovered. Experiments showed that the serum of an animal that recovered from rinderpest was able to provide immunity to susceptible animals. The potency of the serum depended on the animal’s reactions when it was still suffering from the disease.
veterinary forces of the colonial government was the term “precursors of evil” which farmers used to call the American veterinarians. The term was coined because everywhere the American veterinarians went to conduct inoculations, many of the animals died (Buencamino, 1977, 107-108). In some areas, farmers even hid their animals in the mountains to escape the inoculators.

Like the inoculation method, the implementation of the slaughter method and quarantine policy in the field did not win the support and cooperation of many farmers. When the American colonial government implemented the slaughtering of sick animals, the presumption was for Filipinos to surrender their sick animals because of the expected compensation from the government. Much to the disbelief of the Americans, many Filipino farmers refused to surrender their sick animals for slaughter. The method did not receive popular support because owners did not want to see their animals to be slaughtered (Ferriols, 1929, 401). In fact, slaughtering became very unpopular. Filipino farmers preferred their sick animals to die a natural death than to be slaughtered by the government. Despite the government’s promise of reimbursement of the full value of their animal, they still refused to cooperate. Officials of the Bureau of Agriculture witnessed many instances of “grown men weep bitterly when their sick animals were taken out and shot,” a proof of how valuable the carabos were to the farmers (Youngberg, 1922, 212).

Animal Quarantine was also unpopular and usually violated by Filipino farmers because it was against their regular routine. Farmers are used to pasture their animals during the day and allowed them to move and mingle freely after work in the river or in muddy swamps. However, quarantine meant the isolation of their carabaos and cattle in corrals. Many Filipino farmers even considered quarantine to be far worse than the disease itself because it separated them from their carabao. Consequently, many farmers brought them to the mountains to hide them from the government’s search teams. In other districts, farmers submitted their animals for quarantine but asked for work passes during the night in order to pasture them. Others did not even apply for passes. They just took their animals out of the isolation corrals and pastured them (Decker, 1913, 392-393; Tecson, 1908, 422 and Youngberg, 1917, 177).

In Pampanga, a province in Central Luzon, Philippines, John Larkin recounts how the farmers in this province opposed the quarantine policies of the government. Larkin writes:

By late 1912 and early 1913 the situation became critical. Farmers evaded the quarantine and brought infected animals to clean areas... Farmers and veterinarians countered each others’ move with evasion and strict controls. Tensions sprang up. At one point a farmer from Arayat, Andriano Panlilio, with a group of armed men chased the vets of his property (Larkin, 1972, 259).

6. American Colonial perspective versus Filipino perspective on carabaos and the rinderpest problem

Worcester and the officials from the Bureau of Agriculture believed that the policy being implemented by the colonial government to address the rinderpest problem in the Philippines was the most effective and scientifically-proven response to prevent the spread of the contagion. They argued that their solution was in fact for the good of the Filipino farmers and their carabaos. The Bureau of Agriculture attributed the popular bias and opposition of the Filipino farmers to the point of “indifference, amounting at times to active
opposition of people” to their “ignorance” to modern scientific methods and superstitions (United States Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1911, 183-184 and United States Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1908, 53). American colonial officials believed that the farmers’ obliviousness to modern science and their skepticism to the veterinary work prohibited the colonial government from implementing scientific programs against infectious animal diseases.

The Filipino farmer’s response to the methods of the American veterinarians against the animal contagion was nothing but normal. A farmer cannot just submit his carabao for inoculation or quarantine without any guarantee that it will be cured. For a Filipino farmer, to lose a carabao is like losing a job or a family member because the carabao is the main source of livelihood of a farmer. Taking chances and risking the only source of the farmer’s income to an unreliable cure is something that is not easy to do. This is an important aspect of Filipino farming culture that the American colonial officials failed to understand. The American colonial officials misunderstood the reaction of the Filipinos to the programs that they implemented against rinderpest. For the Bureau of Agriculture, the opposition of the Filipinos to the campaign was attributed right away to their ignorance and superstitious beliefs but it was not because of ignorance. Rather, it was due to colonial government’s lack of appreciation and understanding of the culture and emotional attachment that existed between the farmer and his carabao.

Kay Milton made an interesting study that would help us understand the conflicting views of the American colonial government and the Filipino farmer with respect to the carabao. In Loving Nature: Towards an Ecology of Emotions, Milton (2002, 78-79) characterized the different ways of how people identify with nature. She called these relationships of people with nature as identity-based identification and person-based identification. Identity-based identification means that humans find some sense of identity with something else because humans and other entities are of the same substance and can be transformed into one another. Person-based, on the other hand, is a type of entity identification where humans perceive quality of personhood with others. Milton believed that humans could perceive personhood on natural entities because they can also relate to us and appear to do so in responsive ways. People enjoy the company of animals because it comes at least partly from identification with them as persons. They feel a sense of commonality that allows them to empathize and understand nature (Kay Milton, 2002, 78-79).

Using Milton’s categorization, the American colonial government had an impersonal understanding of nature. They considered the carabao as an impersonal agent or an object or resource for human use. They acted as outsiders who did not try to look within the cultural lens of the Filipino farmers. American colonial officials, like Worcester, failed to understand the strong emotional bond between the Filipino farmer and his carabao because the animal was seen as an impersonal agent. On the contrary, the Filipino farmer had a personal understanding of his draft animal because he considered the carabao as a person or even a family member that is worthy of love, moral concern and respect.

The antipathy of the American colonizers to the carabao and their lack of understanding to the carabao-Filipino farmer relationship can also be attributed to the colonizers’ dearth of appreciation about the “tropical” environment and its indigenous society’s culture. British Historian David Arnold argued that “the tropics,” or colonies of western powers like the Philippines, was seen by the West as “something culturally and politically alien, as well as environmentally distinctive, from Europe and other parts of the temperate one” (Arnold, 1996, 6). The scientific knowledge learned from the tropics “substantiated by statistical enumeration of morbidity and mortality and by a medical geography” provided a new discourse wherein the
westerners created “a sense of otherness attached to the tropical environment” (Bankoff 2011). Arnold argues that this sense of otherness in the tropical environment was “reflected in accounts of plants, animals, climate and topography, and in descriptions of indigenous societies and cultures...”(Arnold 1996, 6). Using Arnold’s tropicality discourse, the Americans viewed the Philippines as a tropical environment and its animals, like the carabaos, as part of the tropics. During the duration of their stints in the Philippines as colonial administrators, American scientific experts, like Worcester and the veterinarians from the Bureau of Agriculture failed to understand the tropical environment of the Philippines. Their lack of understanding of the indigenous society’s farming culture was reflected in Worcester’s descriptions about the carabao and in the formulation of colonial policies against animal contagions. They viewed the Philippine carabao and its role in Philippine agriculture as absurd or “culturally and politically alien” to their own agricultural conditions and experiences.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I explained how Dean Worcester and the American scientific experts on animal contagions misunderstood and undermined the economic and cultural significance of the carabao to the Filipino farmer and to Philippine agriculture in general. The American colonial government’s lack of appreciation of the carabao’s role in Philippine farm life and its officials’ inability to understand the strong bond between the water buffalo and the Filipino farmer became the main issue of contention during the formulation and implementation of colonial policies against rinderpest. Since the beginning of Worcester’s term in the Philippines, he did not have any appreciation of the carabao. He considers this draft animal as a distinct animal from the tropics primarily used for farm work that can easily be replaced by farm machineries. In other words, Worcester and the American veterinary experts viewed the carabao and its role in Philippine agriculture as something that is environmentally and culturally alien. This sense of otherness attached by the American colonizers to the carabao and the Filipino farmer’s attachment to this draft animal was evident in the failure of the colonial administrators to implement a widely accepted campaign against rinderpest.

The disregard of the Americans to the significance of the carabao led to violent reactions of the Filipino farmers to the campaign against rinderpest. American scientists attributed the negative reactions of the farmers to ignorance to western medicine. Further analysis of the situation will show that it was actually the Americans who were ignorant because they failed to consider the cultural importance of the carabao to the farmers when they crafted policies against rinderpest. They simply crafted policies that revolved around science and medicine without considering the indigenous society’s culture.

For the Filipino farmer, the carabao is his beast of burden. It was his draft animal that helps him till and cultivate wet paddies so that he can farm rice and transport his goods to the market. Because of its economic significance, the carabao became an important part of Filipino farming culture. A Filipino farmer takes care of his carabao like a wife, son or daughter. It is considered as a family member that is worthy of love, moral concern and respect. He will not allow anyone to harm his only source of income. And so, when rinderpest attacked his draft animal, he did not allow the Americans to slaughter, inoculate or quarantine his animal without any assurance that it will not die. This shows how the Filipino farmers loved his draft animal.
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