

Entangled island: Filipino colonial technocrats, the Philippine legislature, and mindanao settlement plans from the 1920s through the late 1930s

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Abstrak

Mindanao, a large tract of fertile, unexplored land with abundant natural resources in the southern Philippines, attracted much attention from American capitalists and entrepreneurs as well as Filipino policymakers and settlers beginning in 1898. However, little is known about how it attracted Christian Filipino settlers in the early twentieth century. It remains unclear how the government-led national settlement project of 1939 evolved and was implemented following the Cotabato agricultural colony project. This paper, focusing on the vital role of Filipino technocrats, aims to explore their contribution to the planning of Mindanao's settlement and the motives behind their drafting of related bills in the Philippine legislature. The technocrats, taking their inspiration from California's State Settlement Land Act of 1917, drafted bills to promote a similar project—yet their plans had little chance of being enacted, as they were enormously expensive. The settlement plan materialized as the Quirino-Recto Colonization Act of 1934, in response to American concerns that the growing Japanese community in Mindanao threatened the Philippines' national security. Depicted as a national security issue, the plan became increasingly divorced from its original aims of increasing food production and promoting population redistribution. Further, American intervention both altered Mindanao's development plans and overlooked indigenous people's rights.