

Barangay Mintal, Davao City: The Little Tokyo of Prewar Philippines, 1900-1942¹

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This paper is a modest attempt to chronicle the events in prewar Davao, focusing on Barangay Mintal. Essentially a sociohistorical study, this paper recounts local history as well as the social processes of migration, adaptation, and political economic transformation resulting from the activities of a foreign migrant group in the area—the Japanese. Accounts are largely based on available literature and the experiences of selected men and women who have lived through the said period.

Filipinos have always been a highly migratory people. In fact, Mindanao, an “unending kaleidoscope” of colors and designs, is a product of its indigenous peoples’ encounter, especially by the 20th century, with migrants from various parts of the country and of the world. Mangahas (2000) states, “the phenomenon of migration and ‘circulation of people’ within the region have remained extremely important to this day.”

Not all migration in the Philippines has been from the barrios to the city. Another and equally important form of migration has been out to the archipelago’s rural frontiers. Historian John A. Larkin (1972) argues that modern Philippine experience has been shaped by movement of remarkably large numbers of Filipinos from one place to another as they either follow new economic opportunities or escape poverty caused by lack of opportunity. Hence, Larkin continues, the development of the frontier and emergence of an export economy together present an important pattern of change in the country.

This study deals with migration to the city by not only Filipinos but a particular foreign group prior to World War II as well. Mintal’s

significance lies in its being the focal point of prewar economic activities of the Japanese to whom Davao City attributes its prewar economic preeminence, earning for it the monicker “Davaokuo” and for Mintal, “The Little Tokyo of the Philippines.”

Barangay Mintal: A brief overview

Mintal, one of the 180 barangay of Davao City, is a sprawling 600 ha agricultural land situated east of the majestic Mt. Apo (Fig. 2), the country’s highest mountain, and 15 km from the city proper of Davao.² It belongs to the political district of Tugbok under the third congressional district. The barangay is bounded by Catalunan Grande on the east, Catalunan Pequeño and Bago Oshiro on the south, and Mulig, Manambulan, and Tagakpan on the north. Mintal was given the title *Community of Flowers* as it won first place in the 1968 most beautiful park in Davao contest (Barangay Hall of Mintal).

From oral accounts, the barangay was once part of a vast land peopled by the Bagobo under the leadership of Datu Intal, the Bagobo chieftain who died in 1889. The datu left behind the legacy of his name Intal, which was subsequently changed to Mintal. The early Japanese migrants referred to it as Mintaro. Given thus, the name Mintal can be considered as a symbol of the social transformation of Mindanao with migrants, both foreign and local, taking over the island numerically, politically, economically, and culturally.

A familiar landmark of Mintal is the Ohta Monument (Fig. 3), a monolith in honor of Ohta Kyosaburo, considered by local historians as the “Father of Davao development.” Other markers and obelisks of Japanese nationals who died as barangay residents during the war can be seen in and around Mintal, Toril, and Calinan.

Japanese tourists normally come to the place to visit and honor their dead, an important Japanese tradition, in August. They particularly visit Mintal, the site of the biggest prewar company engaged in abaca production, the Ohta Corporation, that had ruled the business for four decades. Local government officials, led by

the deputy mayor, are kept busy preparing for the coming of their foreign visitors at this time.

The Bagobo of Davao

The Bagobo, one of the indigenous peoples found in Davao, occupy the lower slopes of Mt. Apo, extending from Upper Digos on the south to Talomo and Tugbok on the north and to Baguio in upper Calinan on the northwest slope. Central to the belief of the Bagobo, known as the most elaborately dressed among the Davao tribes, is Mt. Apo as the first home of the human race. Corsino (1998) states that the influx of newcomers to Davao, including Americans and Japanese, has gradually displaced tribal communities from their lands. The following discussion centers on the opening of the Mindanao frontier to outsiders, specifically foreigners, and the subsequent displacement and marginalization of the tribal communities, specifically the Bagobo.

Migration and land settlement in the Mindanao frontier

The opening of Davao to modern settlement and migration was credited to the Americans. In 1902, the United States Congress gave the Philippine government the power to administer expensive public lands for the benefit of the Filipinos. Accordingly, the government passed the Public Land Act on 7 October 1903. The Act introduced the homestead system in the Philippines and provided rules for the sale or lease of public lands and confirmation of land titles. With its provisions, the land policy paved the way for foreign entry into Mindanao (Pelzer, 1945: 132).

Drought in Sulu and Zamboanga and grasshopper infestation in Davao in 1911-1912 gave General Pershing of the Moro Province the excuse to call for an immediate importation of homesteaders from congested areas of the Philippines. Fifty men from Cebu responded to the call. From 1913-1918, seven colonies were established in various parts of the island. These colonies included five in the central valley of Cotabato, now called Pikit, North Cotabato; one in Glan, now Sarangani; one in Lamitan, Basilan;

and one in Momungan, Lanao del Norte (Report of the Governor General of the P.I. to the Secretary of War, 1917, 1918: 39).

Prior to the state-sponsored 1913 land settlement scheme, however, privately-led movement of people into Mindanao was already occurring. By 1910, the Mindanao frontier had become a major plantation area with 97 major plantations of approximately 100 ha each. Majority of these plantations were foreign-owned. Of the 97 plantations, 61 were owned by Americans, 19 by Europeans, five by Chinese, and 12 by Filipinos (Quezon Papers, Vol. II, Series VIII).

The Davao frontier

Davao was declared ready for settlement in 1905. Five municipalities were created, including Davao, Mati, Caraga, Banganga, and Cateel, as well as four tribal wards covering 48 villages (Abinales 2000: 73). The most popular product was hemp, used to make rope. The opening of the American and British markets to Philippine hemp led to an unprecedented demand for the product. By 1909, 40 plantations existed in Davao, ranging from 100 to 1,024 ha each (Abinales 2000: 74).

Early settlers were encouraged by the area's peaceful condition. The dream of acquiring a parcel of land made possible by the passage of land laws and the availability of regular means of transportation greatly fueled migration to Davao. Corsino (1998) notes that around 50 discharged American soldiers began some 30-odd plantations along the coast of Davao. They introduced large-scale coconut, abaca, and livestock production and formed the first organization of Davao planters, the Davao Planters' Association, thus paving the way for Davao's entry into foreign commerce.

The years 1906-1909 saw the height of abaca production in the area. After 1909, however, the American settlers failed to sustain the "abaca boom" owing to problems, such as pestilence and sporadic labor supply. Hence, the American population, which reached 5,000 at the time, dwindled after 1909 (Abinales 2000). At this time, the Japanese entered the scene.

Through the initiative of the American colonial administration,

several hundred Japanese, mostly from Okinawa, arrived in the country to work on government projects. They came in batches. The first large group to arrive was contracted to construct the Benguet Road (now Kennon Road). As a result, the Japanese population in the country reached more than a thousand, 1,215 to be exact, in 1903. It more than doubled by 1913. By 1919, the total number of Japanese residents had increased to 9,874, more than 50 percent of whom were in Davao (Corsino, 1998: 132). Jose (1992:13) states that the Philippine-Japan relations during this period centered basically on two economic activities: Japanese investments and sending of Japanese laborers to the Philippines.

Abaca industry, migration, and the Bagobo

The development of the abaca industry in the Davao Gulf region was a major turning point in the lives of the Bagobo of Davao. The area under cultivation increased from 34,280 ha in 1921 to 75,070 ha in 1930. Hayase (1984) notes that the land expansion meant that the Japanese made incursions into tribal lands. The Japanese used a variety of methods to gain possession of tribal lands. The forestry department identified the methods as follows:

1. Through the public land and corporation acts.
2. Subleasing lands that individuals or American and Philippine corporations previously leased.
3. Leasing lands claimed as private property and paying the owner a certain percent of the product, or other agreements.
4. Inducing a native to apply for or occupy a certain tract of land. The Japanese would pay the entry fee of P100 per hectare (homestead, purchase, lease or land tax) to the applicant besides the 10 percent as soon as the land began to produce.
5. Marrying a non-Christian, especially one belonging to a datu's family, thus gaining an intimate relation with the tribe and woman's relatives and succeeding in managing their lands.
6. Inducing non-Christians and other natives who were landowners to buy on credit from Japanese stores, scattered throughout the plantation, but at the same time requiring them to pay with their

lands upon failure to pay such credits in cash.

7. Buying the rights of a lease and paying the lessee for all the improvements. The lessee would then request the cancellation of his application while the buyer would submit a new one.
8. Establishing several corporations, financed and maintained by a single capitalist. It was known in Davao that Ohta & Co. , Furukawa & Co., and Nampy & Co. financed most, if not all, Japanese corporations in the city, and that an investigation of said corporations would result in the cancellation of a great number of them due to noncompliance with the requirements of the Corporation Law.

Hayase (1984) reports that the early Japanese had the opportunity to establish harmonious social relations with tribal people, particularly the Bagobo. The Bagobo highly esteemed the former that several became *datus*. The abaca boom in World War I, however, changed the landscape of the Japanese-Bagobo relations. It brought in a great number of Japanese capitalists to the area pushing the Bagobos further into the middle and upland regions. The opening of virgin forests to abaca plantation consequently resulted in the destruction of the habitat of wild animals and birds. Some creeks became dry depriving the Bagobo of their sustenance, such as fresh fish, wild animals, and fowl. The 1917-1918 smallpox and influenza epidemics in the Guianga district exacerbated the condition of the tribe. The diseases, claiming a number of Bagobo lives, were seen as chastisement from the gods of the forests for the destruction of the forestland (Mori, 1988).

The epidemics forced the Bagobo to temporarily abandon their lands. With the Bagobo gone, the new settlers wasted no time to “legally” acquire the lands. To the Bagobo, alienating them from their hunting and fishing grounds meant war. Hayase (1984) notes, in the most aggressive period of Japanese land expansion in 1918-1921, more than 100 Japanese settlers were killed.

The coming of foreign investors to Davao also profoundly changed the traditional Bagobo society. The introduction of cash economy, including credit and debt system, to the previously self-

sufficient native economy pushed the Bagobo to acquire cash like everybody else. The colonial government induced them to settle on the plantations, or at least clear the land, plant abaca, and build permanent houses at the center of the cultivated areas. They earned money as small planters or plantation laborers, then often spent these at the Chinese- or Japanese-owned local stores.

Ohta Kyosaburo

One name stands out in Davao history: Ohta Kyosaburo, owner of one of the two biggest pre-war abaca plantations in Davao. The story of Ohta Kyosaburo is a story of a foreign migrant who made good in the Philippines through a favorable public land policy of the American era.

Ohta Kyosaburo settled in Davao in 1905. He initially worked in the plantation of Libby, Awad and Sanchez, then put up a *sari-sari* store at Talomo. After saving enough capital, he established the first and one of the biggest Manila hemp companies in Davao, the Ohta Development Corporation (Gloria, 1979: 157-158).

A Japanese writer, as quoted by Jose (1992), noted that Ohta Kyosaburo initially faced difficulties in acquiring land in Davao. He bought a piece of land from a Bagobo in 1906 only to be informed that his purchase was illegal because tribal lands were public lands and, under the 1903 Public Land Act, foreigners had no right to own public lands. Ohta later learned that the Act permitted any legally organized corporation to purchase or lease agricultural lands of public domain up to a maximum of 1,024 ha with leases for 25 years and renewable for another 25 years. He therefore established a corporation, which was granted 1,015 ha of public land (Jose, 1992: 80). Nonetheless, the land controversy persisted.

In 1918, a new public land act was passed restricting land purchases to Filipino citizens but was vetoed by the US president in consideration of Japan, a World War I ally. A year later, another law was passed providing for ownership of the land only by US or Philippine citizens. Governor-General Harrison, however, recommended the exemption of some 44 corporations, 17 of which were finally reconsidered by the Philippine Legislature (Jose, 1992:

80-81). The Ohta Corporation, one of the 17 corporations that filed an application for purchase before the 29 November 1919 deadline, got exempted from Act No. 2874.

With the 1919 Public Land Act, Japanese corporations could no longer legally acquire lands. As a result, the Japanese resorted to acquiring lands through dummy corporations or in the name of their native or Christian wives. Mori (1988: 10) states that in 1934, of the 26,086 ha of land held by Japanese corporations, only 18 percent or 4,716 ha were legally purchased from the government.

Another way of acquiring lands that could be considered “economies of scale” was through partnership with Filipinos. Such partnership took various forms, including “joint venture agreement,” “farm management contract,” or “managerial contracts.” Ohta popularized a system called *pakyaw* described by Farolan (1935) and as quoted by Abinales (2000: 83):

A [Japanese] fellow gathers a group of workers then enters into a contract with a [usually Filipino] lessor or landowner to work up the latter’s landholding, the crop proceeds to be divided between the two parties in accordance with the nature of the work to be done. Where the land to be worked is still a virgin forest, the crop proceeds are so divided as to give the contractor 85 or 90 percent and the owner over 10 or 15 percent. Where the land has been partly cleared, the share of the owner may be more. Generally the contractors have insisted on a definite period in which they should develop and cultivate the land, 10 to 15 years, so as to be able to recover with a fair return the investment of capital and labor they have made.

Many Filipino landowners, due to lack of capital, labor, and government support, gladly leased their lands to the Japanese because of the assurance of a share in the produce for 10-15 years. This was considered an outright violation of land laws, prohibiting subcontracting and subleasing. The commonwealth government, however, did not do anything about such violation. Even local officials were said to protect the Japanese. By 1917, Japanese control of plantation lands stood at 19,833 ha, American control had been

reduced to 4,543 ha, and Filipino control, 7,294 ha (Abinales 2000: 85).

Why were the Japanese more successful than the Americans in promoting Davao's economic development through abaca production? Abinales (2000) gives us the following answer:

After the 1906-1909 "abaca boom", which attracted over 5,000 Americans, the population did not increase further because Davao was unable to compete with other locations for settlers and capital . . . Potential investors opted to invest in Hawaii and Cebu. And within the Philippines, Zamboanga, the provincial capital, and Manila, the colonial capital, were more attractive areas for start-up business. Furthermore, hemp could be purchased in Bicol where production would peak in 1915, rather than in Davao, which lacked a sizeable local market for goods from outside. . . settlers unable to sustain the boom in the face of problems like pestilence and a sporadic labor supply (supply of indigenous labor could not keep up with the increase in the number of plantations).

The Japanese addressed the problem of sporadic labor supply by recruiting workers from Japan through the help of their consulates. A classic example of a campaign for the Japanese to go to Davao is the following August 1916 article by Kobayashi Senkichi (Jose, 1992: 48-49) entitled *Let us Build a Shinshu Village in the Philippines*, aimed at attracting the youth of Shinshu to go to and settle in the Philippines.

In March, April, and May, the temperature in the Philippines does not go higher than 93 degrees Fahrenheit. It is lower than Shinshu's. In the cold months of December and January the temperature does not go lower than sixty-eight. In this tropical climate farming can be done throughout the year. Our farmers can easily work here. Abaca stripping is done under the shade. Daytime in summer is not as long as in Japan.

There are several ships that go to Manila from Kobe. The fee is around sixty yen, and traveling time is from twenty-one to twenty-two days.

If you are hired as a tenant, you may at first try the following

jobs: weeding; removing dried leaves from abaca plants; cutting trees; burning and clearing the fields; and abaca stripping. You will earn one yen and twenty sen for a nine-hour work.

After gaining experience in these jobs, you can contract for abaca stripping, where the employer and you share fifty-fifty with the profit. A day's work can yield five yen and fifty sen of stripped abaca, and therefore, you can earn around two yen and seventy sen, or around seventy yen a month.

After deduction of living expenses, around fifty yen a month is left. Since there is limit in the number of hours that you may work, savings can be increased as you increase your working hours, and vice versa.

If you are a newcomer, the employer will give you food, cigarettes, and sake (Japanese rice wine) for free. You will be provided with free housing until you are able to build your own house. You do not have to buy vegetable and meat because you can grow them, and also raise pigs and chickens. Daily needs can be bought from the store attached to the company where you work.

If you can contribute one yen a month, you can get the regular services of a doctor. It is best to get a regular medical examination when one is in a tropical country. It is important to get enough rest. In a tropical country one must not work as hard as he does in a cold country. Therefore, you should not try to save as much money in as short a time as possible and dream of coming back to Japan to enjoy your savings. Such an attitude is the usual cause of sickness and failure.

If you have a capital of 400 yen and you go to Davao to cultivate Manila hemp, in ten years you will have 6,000 yen. The computation is based on the labor of one person. If you go with your wife and children, and they work too, your combined income will be three or four times more.

The Philippines is near Japan. The job, especially on the second year, is not so difficult. There is a company that can take care of you and give you security as an immigrant.

Youth of Shinshu, what are you waiting for? Build a house. Raise animals and plant vegetables.

Besides the institutional support, Abinales (2000) also cites the

major difference in attitude between the Americans and Japanese in Davao. While the Americans saw themselves as plantation owners taking possession of a frontier region and "superior to all other residents," the Japanese came with the "intention of amassing savings and were therefore willing to do any kind of work from retail trade to hired plantation workers." Thus, even plantation owners were reported to build their own houses.

The Japanese established roads that would link their farms in the mountains to the nearest highways. Japanese women were said to work in the farm with their babies tied at their backs. One needs only to visit the dam that provided electricity to Mintal of pre-war days to appreciate the back-breaking work the Japanese did in opening roads and building dams. Roads from Toril going to Eden, Bayabas, Tungkalan, Manambulan, however mountainous, were built. (See Fig. 5 showing the dam in Calinan said to be built by the Japanese).

Economic activity in Davao was further spurred by the acquisition by Japanese corporations of extensive landholdings for abaca plantations with concentration in Mintal and Bago Oshiro in Tugbok District (See Fig. 6 for a picture of an abaca plantation). The Japanese did not only engage in abaca production; they also engaged in other economic endeavors. Corsino (1998:131) describes their multifarious activities in Davao:

Where the Americans planted vast tracts of land to coconut, the Japanese had abaca as their prime crop. As they collected capital for investment from their home country, the Japanese bought out the American coconut plantations. Soon, they engaged also in logging, fishing and large-scale merchandising with goods being sent by big business houses in Japan. A number of them established shops of all sorts - from barber to foundry shops, refreshment parlors and bars, to plush restaurants. Others operated *apa* (Spanish *barquillos*), *manjo* (Japanese cake) and candy factories while still others engaged in the manufacture of *toyo* (soy sauce), liquor and softdrinks. Some ran hotels, newspapers and printing shops as well as ice and cold storage plants.

Other Japanese corporations

Aside from Ohta, other Japanese corporations engaged in abaca production in Davao before the war. Ohta's biggest competitor was Yoshizo Furukawa who came to the Philippines in 1914. He settled in Daliao and engaged in abaca plantation and other subsidiary industries, such as coconut, ramie, kapok, and maguey. He also put up a candy factory. Furukawa's strong presence in Davao rivaling that of Ohta Kyosaburo was noted by Consul Kaneko Toyoji in a letter to the foreign office in 1935. The consul complained that visitors who came to Davao tended to neglect the Consulate, and went directly to avail of Furukawa's hospitality (Jose, 1992: 80).

Images of prewar Mintal

Prewar Mintal was a place peopled by the Japanese and their Filipino employees. Some people even thought that there were no Filipinos in Mintal before the war. Allegedly, the only Filipinos allowed to stay in Mintal were workers and employees of the Japanese. According to Sofio Villejo of Leyte (Gloria, 1979: 152):

Ang aming tirahan ay isang mahabang gusali na nahahati sa dalawang bahagi—ang isa ay para sa mga may-asawa at ang ikalawa ay para sa mga walang pamilya ... Ang mga Hapon ay iba ang tirahan—ang mga matataas na katungkulan ay may kaniyang kanyang mga bahay na magaganda at napapaligiran ng hardin.

The Japanese reportedly built their own houses, usually two-story of narra or apitong wood. (Fig. 9 shows a typical Japanese house surrounded by a garden of flowers.)

A distinguishing feature of a Japanese corporation, such as the Ohta, was its paternal attitude towards its workers. Individual accounts of employees of the corporation illustrate this fatherly concern for its workers. Villejo, as narrated to the historian and anthropologist Heidi Gloria (1979), mentioned free housing, medical services, movies and other entertainment, and most importantly, provision for food and other household needs through a credit line

in the company store. The store was said to be located at the back of the present Mintal gymnasium.

The housing the company provided its workers was one long building divided into two: one for the married, and the other for the unmarried workers. Japanese and Filipino workers were given separate quarters, perhaps to avoid potential conflict. The hierarchical nature of the company manifested in the individual houses provided to the Japanese with high positions.

Japanese workers interacted with Filipino workers, especially during social gatherings. Villejo related: "*At kung may okasyon sila ay malayang nakikisalamuha sa aming mga Pilipino. Kung minsan may mga programang itinatanghal ang mga Hapones at nakakakita kami ng mga sayaw at mga palabas ng mga Hapon.*"

For entertainment, the company provided "free movies." During such occasions, some naughty Filipinos made fun of the Japanese. Hilaria of Bohol reminisced: "*Maldito man ang mga Pilipino kay guinpangawat man ang tsinelas sa mga hapon.*" Besides movies, programs were also held wherein the Japanese presented Japanese songs and dances.

The hospital (Fig. 10) in prewar Mintal was an important feature of the place. Here, workers enjoyed free medicines and services. Doctors and nurses, on the other hand, accessed free housing near the hospital. Irene Peñano, now 87 years old and a former nursing aide in a Talomo dispensary, confirmed this when she said that serious cases they could not attend to were sent to the Japanese hospital in Mintal.

Due to a government policy prohibiting Japanese doctors to practise their profession other than as assistants to Filipino doctors even when attending to Japanese patients (Jose 1992), the hospital became a service unit of the Ohta Corporation headed by a Filipino rather than a Japanese. A long-time director of the hospital, Dr. John Santos Cuyugan, became a victim of Japanese atrocity during the Japanese occupation.

The hospital was located just across the street from the Mintal elementary school. Informants recalled a certain Dr. Kojima, Dr. Palma Gil, Mrs. Peralta, Mrs. Cuaresma, and Mrs. Linteja as among

the hospital personnel.

Unlike the other barangays in Davao, Mintal had its own electricity powered by the dam the company built. Also, there were roads leading to the plantations in Mintal, Bago Oshiro, and Calinan. The Philippine government paved these dirt roads after the war.

Hilaria Calacar of Loay, Bohol, a sister of two employees of the ice plant of the Ohta Corporation, mentioned that the Japanese expected industry and hard work from their employees. In exchange, the company provided for the latter's needs. This company's service to its employees extended well into the beginning of the war. Calacar recalled that they were provided provisions, such as rice, sugar, clothing, and a 6 x 6 transport vehicle as they evacuated to Miral, Bansalan, Davao del Sur with the impending arrival of the Japanese occupying force in Davao.

The Japanese opened Japanese schools in places where a great number of Japanese resided. The prewar Japanese school, Mintal Kokominga Ku, was where the elementary school of Mintal now stands.

The following are personal accounts of five individuals who were minors just before the outbreak of World War II to provide readers with a "feel" of prewar Mintal.³ These individuals, two males and three females, include Julian Tomatsu Mani, Moises Mandalunes, Hilaria Calacar, Irene Peñano, and Remedios Peñano.

Julian Tomatsu Mani

"Mani is from my mother," Oda Mani explained. The anti-Japanese sentiments after the war necessitated the adoption of his mother's name. A son of a Japanese named Okayama and a native of Upper Calinan, Oda represents one of the many Japanese descendants found in the city today. His continuous link with his paternal relatives in Japan is shown by the fact that six of his children were working in Japan at the time of the study. Oda shared that he studied at *Mintal Kokuminga Ku* from grades 1 to 5. The school was a two-story building with around 40 students per class. "There were sufficient books then," he said, in oblique reference to the scarcity of books in public schools today. The school emphasized order,

discipline, cleanliness, respect for those in authority and for elders, and hard work among its students.

Oda remembered taking lessons in sumo (*dumog-dumog*), judo-kendu, English (one hour of lessons), arithmetic, practical arts, and Nippongo. He could not forget his first day in school. His teacher confiscated his money because students were not allowed to bring money to school. Unlike today, there were no stores near the schools. The idea then was for the students to eat well during mealtime. They brought *baon* (packed food), which they ate inside the room under the supervision of their teachers, whose food were sent to them by the administration. He remembered Mr. Marquez and Mr. Mayor as his Filipino teachers. A certain Yoshimura was the school principal.

It appears that his lesson in English was not good enough after the war. He had to return to Grade 3 because by then English was the medium of instruction. The Niponggo he learned was not enough either because he could not read Kanji, used for photo captions in Japanese books. "*Sa high school gutudlo kana. Eh, hangtod Grade 5 lang ako,*" he explained.

He was 12 years old when war broke out. As a son of a Japanese, he was conscripted into the army and made to choose the service he would like to get into. He chose the *kokovung* or airforce and was sent to Lasang. It was mostly janitorial work. Oda expressed gratitude towards the Japanese commander, a certain Capt. Yamada, who decided to send the civilians in the camp, especially children, back to their homes just before the American bombing of Davao. His scar on the leg was a reminder of that fateful day. The thunderous sound of exploding bombs caused him to take cover near a tree by the riverbank where he accidentally tripped on a G.I. sheet, cutting an ugly wound on his leg.

Oda believed that his mother's decision not to follow Capt. Yamada's order to evacuate to Tamogan saved their lives. They instead took refuge in their kinfolk in Wangan, Upper Calinan. A lot of civilians reportedly died of hunger in Tamogan. His father did not survive the war as he succumbed to an illness while under American detention.

He and his mother survived the postwar period by working their 53 ha land. He went back to school but had to stop in third year high school upon his mother's death to tend fulltime to their farm. A young man reputed to be landed and very industrious, he eventually married a young lady with long flowing hair from Astorga.

A former barangay councilor, Oda got the 8th slot in the recent barangay elections despite lack of political party. This seems to indicate the possibility of a political comeback. Found in Oda's farm in Catalunan is a marker in honor of Yamada.

Moises Mandalunes

Moises, a native of Toledo, Cebu, came to join his brother working in an abaca plantation in Mintal in 1937 when he was barely 14 years old. But age was not a hindrance to finding work in Davao. He was hired in a plantation owned by a certain Satorre. "*Basta kugihan lang, madali ka madawat sa trabaho,*" Moises said.

He remembered the Japanese houses as separate from the houses of Filipinos. The Japanese built their own houses made of narra or apitong. One could imagine the efforts given in the construction of a house because no sawmill existed at the time.

A hard-working employee had no problem with a Japanese boss, he continued. He was treated and paid well. Moises thought that his failure to see Satorre before the Americans shipped the latter back to Japan was a lost opportunity. He received word that Satorre wished to see him. But his natural fear of being identified with a fallen enemy must have prevented him from going to Daliao. Was Satorre planning to give him the papers for the land in Mintal? Or a sketch map for a buried treasure? He would never know. A portion of Satorre's land was left to him despite the confiscation of the land. He got married in 1948 and had nine children. Now, he spends most of his time as a lay cooperator of the Catholic Church in Mintal.

Hilaria Calacar

Hilaria was in her teens when she came to join her two brothers who were workers at the Ohta Corporation. She had favorable

impression of the Japanese she knew during the pre-war period. When asked whether stories of Japanese atrocities during the war were true, she replied: "*Pero labi man god nga mga Hapon kadtó sila.*" She preferred to dwell on the good things the Japanese had done in the area.

Hilaria did not have much to tell about the Japanese at the time. She stayed in the house most of the time and was not an employee of the corporation. It was her two brothers who worked with the Japanese but they were no longer around to tell their story.

Hilaria returned to school after the war but got married before finishing her studies. She had a sizeable land in her possession although her house remained the same *barong-barong* she had been living in through the years.

Irene Peñano

A former nursing aide in a dispensary in Talomo, Irene narrated the goodness of the prewar Japanese whom she came in contact with. Despite the cruel death Dr. Cuyugan, the director of the hospital, together with his wife and daughters, suffered in the hands of the Japanese, Irene was convinced that the prewar Japanese did a lot of good for Davao.

Irene Peñano was an example of a Filipino who in her own little way rendered "service to humanity" regardless of race, color or creed. She mentioned that she gave medicines to both Japanese and Filipinos, even when she suspected the Filipinos to be guerillas. Now, at age 87, her modest house by the river in Calinan was being maintained through the help of younger relatives and a sister in the United States.

Remedios Peñano

The modest Remy, now 79 years old, recalled that she had not seen Irene who had been away from home since the latter started to work in 1935. Even their meeting on the road during the war was accidental. Her elder sister was more daring and adventurous than she had ever been. Being a homebody, Remy had fewer interactions with the Japanese than her sister had. Remy confirmed the term

“Little Tokyo” used by the Japanese when referring to Mintal. Both sisters had remained unmarried.

Unlike Irene, who had favorable experiences with the Japanese, Remedios and her father experienced evacuation and near execution from the Japanese. Upon learning of the presence of Filipino soldiers in the fleeing group Remedios and her father joined, the Japanese planned to ambush the group once it reached Km 20. Having been informed of the planned ambush, the group escaped death by changing direction. Soldiers in the group included certain Col. Donesa, Lt. Abella, Capt. Roa, and Maj. Batongmalaki. Also included in the group was a principal by the name of Mr. Dagdag.

Conclusion

In general, the individual accounts of surviving witnesses present an image of prewar Mintal whose activities revolved around abaca production dominated by the Ohta Development Corporation. Prewar Mintal appears as a self-sufficient community with the company providing for the health, education, cultural, and economic needs of the community.

The following sketch map of the poblacion area of prewar Mintal (Fig. 12) shows the school and the monument within the school; the hospital along the highway and just across the Ohta Monument; the warehouse, now the Mintal Gym; the Bazaar at the back of the warehouse; some houses and abaca plants. The map portrays a simple agricultural community whose primary economic activity is based on a single product—abaca—under the auspices of a foreign group, the Japanese. This became the basis for one historian (Quiason, 1958) to say that “Davao is essentially a Japanese creation.”

Notes

1. This study is a collaborative effort between the authors and Hon. Ramon “Abay” Bargamento II, deputy mayor of Tugbok District, Davao City.
2. Davao is one of the better endowed cities of the country in

terms of natural resources. Its favorable ecological characteristics as a whole have contributed to the city's popularity as "a city of bloom."

3. It is noted that searching for surviving residents of prewar Mintal proved difficult because very few are still living today.

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Lumbayan, Dominador, translator of some Japanese documents.

Mandalunes, Moises, 80 years old, prewar employee of a Japanese planter.

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Peñano, Irene, 87 years old, Calinan, Tugbok District.

Peñano, Remedios, 79 years old, Calinan, Tugbok District.

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Appendix A

On Kyosaburo Ota in the ethics textbook used in all elementary schools in Japan during the war (Yu-Jose, 1992: 14-15)

In 1903 a group of 250 Japanese sailed to the Philippines. They were followed later on by other groups. Their aim was to construct 35 kilometers of road in a mountainous region 300 kilometers north of Manila, the capital of the Philippines. This region was Baguio.

Filipino laborers had tried to construct this road. Americans too. Chinese too. But not one of them completed the construction. Pathways nearly completed would be destroyed by landslides. Falling rocks would kill many laborers. That was why this time the Japanese would show

them how to complete it. The Japanese worked very hard. However, this road construction was indeed not an easy job. Many had fallen ill. Many had been wounded in the job. On top of this, what made the Japanese suffer the most was food. They longed for Japanese food. If the Japanese continued working under such condition of homesickness for food, they might all get sick.

So thought the public-spirited Ota Kyosaburo, a Japanese residing in Manila. Kyosaburo went to Manila in 1901. He was only 26 years old then. In Manila, he managed a shop for Japanese goods. When Kyosaburo saw the difficulties of the Japanese laborers, he could not sleep. He talked with the officials of the Philippine government on how the Japanese could be helped. He helped them through his own efforts. He bought fish from the fishermen and sent them to the laborers. He also sent them a lot of pickled plums and radish.

"Ota is wonderful. We should be thankful to Ota," said the Japanese who knew what Ota did. With gratitude in their hearts and newly gained energy, the laborers worked harder. Not long, the splendid Benguet Road was completed. It was completed through the efforts of the Japanese.

However, now those laborers were out of jobs. Kyosaburo had earlier realized this would happen. Once again, he thought of how he could help them.

"Davao! This is the place where my compatriots could work anew," Kyosaburo thought. Giving hope to the laborers who had been worrying about their future, he first sent 180 of them to Davao. There, they produced Manila hemp.

At that time Davao was a desolate place. At that time Kyosaburo was not quite twenty-nine years old.

In 1905 the second batch of workers from Benguet transferred to Davao. This time, Kyosaburo came along with them. He decided to move and settle in Davao. He closed his shop in Manila, and established the Ota Development Corporation. The corporation began to manage a large Manila hemp plantation.

"A Japanese producing Manila hemp?" commented the Americans and Spaniards, who looked down on Kyosaburo. But Kyosaburo's company gradually prospered. He enticed able-bodied Japanese to come to Davao, and taught them how to make Manila hemp. "I'm happy. Now, the Japanese have a place to settle in Davao," thought Kyosaburo.

Kyosaburo's lifetime dream was for the Japanese to expand overseas. He did not cease to strive to attain fulfillment of this dream.

In Davao, there were times that a typhoon (*sic*) would destroy all

the abaca plants. Kyosaburo would say to the laborers, “do not give up.” He never stopped giving encouragement to the disappointed Japanese. In times of drought, he would fetch water. He always had foresight, he worked meticulously.

Kyosaburo had schools built for the Japanese children in Davao. He also had recreation centers built for all the Japanese in Davao. Above all, he had hospitals and ports built for the benefit of the Filipinos.

Long before the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War, long before the Americans were driven out of the Philippine Islands, Kyosaburo had been known as the father of Davao’s development.

On top of a deep green mountain in a town called Mintal, there stands a monument for Kyosaburo. In the background is Mt. Apo, the highest mountain in the Philippines.

Images of Pre-War Mintal



Fig. 1. The flowers which made Davao the "City of Bloom"



Fig. 2. Crater of Mt. Apo, ca. 1976.
(Taken from Corsino, 1998: 45)

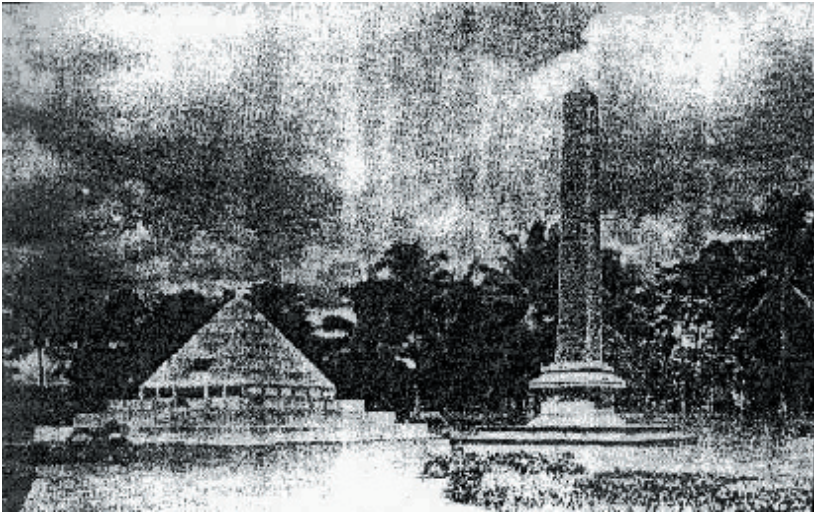


Fig. 3. Ohta's memorial located at Mintal Elementary School, Barangay Mintal, Tugbok District, Davao City. The triangle-shaped garden beside the memorial was destroyed by treasure-hunters after the war.



Fig. 4. The marker of the Japanese captain Yamada located at the farm lot of Oda Mani, a former barangay kagawad and a major informant of this paper.



Fig. 5. A body of water (dam) said to be the source of hydroelectric power found in Calinan built by the Japanese.



Fig. 6. One-year-old abaca cultivated by Japanese planters before WWII which made Davao famous for its Manila hemp.



Fig. 7. Kashiwara Hotel and Osaka Bazaar at the corner of San Pedro and Anda Streets in 1936. (Corsino, 1998: 149)



Fig. 8. Ohta Kyosaburo, the founder of the Ohta Development Corporation, then the biggest pre-war abaca plantation in Davao City.

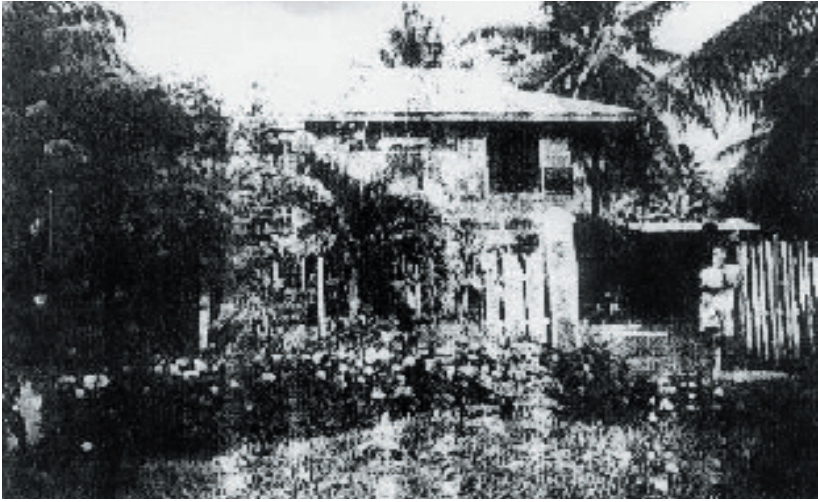


Fig. 9. A typical Japanese house in pre-war Mintal

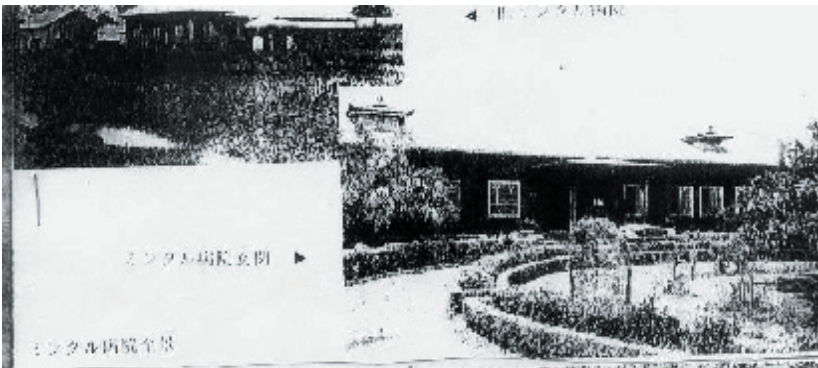


Fig. 10. Japanese Hospital in Mintal of pre-war days

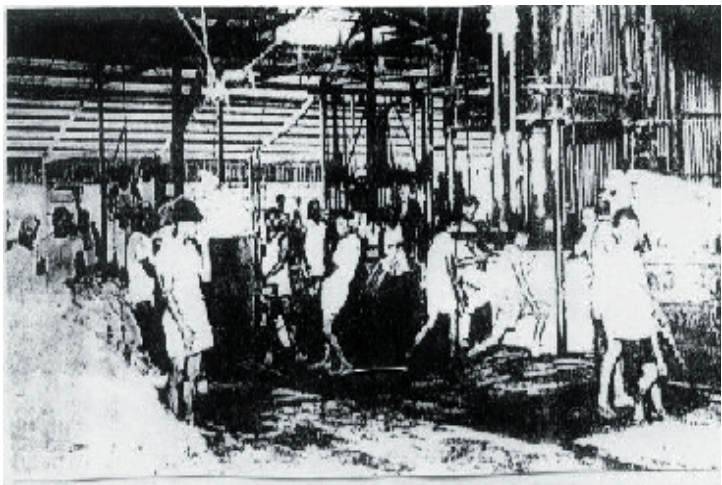


Fig.11. Employees of the Ohta Corporation at work

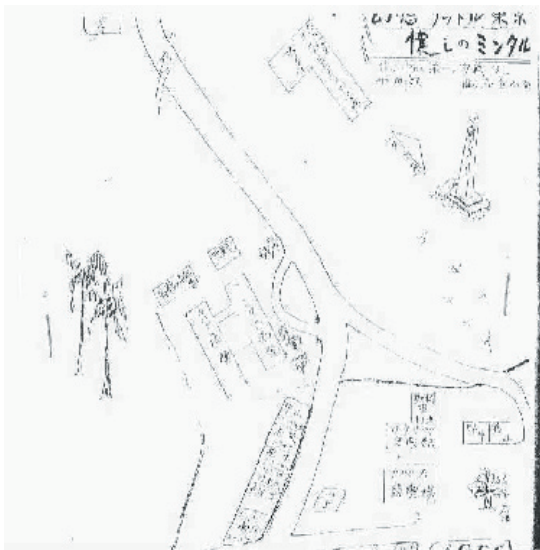


Fig. 12. Sketch of the *poblacion* of pre-war Mintal