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## Appraising Forensic Anthropology in the Philippines: Current Status and Future Directions

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### Highlights

- Frequent disaster, violence, and atrocity result in high endemic forensic caseloads
- Research in Philippine forensic anthropology is in its formative stage, but growing
- Widespread practice, legislative support, and educational opportunities are lacking
- Parallels may be drawn by other developing countries and international agencies

### Abstract

The increasing significance of forensic anthropology in the 21st century, yet unequitable worldwide distribution of expertise, necessitates a stocktaking of the discipline on a local scale. The purpose of this work is to appraise the current state of forensic anthropology in the Philippines and provide the rationale for its further development within the country. Recent efforts in research, education, and legislation that seek to boost Philippine forensic anthropology specifically and forensic sciences generally are highlighted. Furthermore, this work hopes to serve as a springboard for future students, scholars, and practitioners seeking to advance the field in the Philippines.

### Keywords

Forensic anthropology; Forensic science; Human identification; Human rights; Philippines; Southeast Asia; Forensic anthropology population data

### Introduction

While anthropology broadly employs a holistic study of humans from past to present, forensic anthropology is the specialized application of anthropological knowledge to questions and issues of medicolegal significance. Such issues can range from isolated individual forensic cases to large scale efforts in mass disaster victim identification (e.g., tsunamis, typhoons, fires, transportation accidents) and post-conflict resolutions (e.g., genocide, ethnic cleansing, forced disappearances and migration, clandestine mass graves). Forensic anthropology in the Boasian framework is largely borne out of: (1) physical anthropology, which emphasizes knowledge of human physical variation; (2) archaeology, which provides skills in the systematic search, excavation, recovery, and temporal placement of sites and material evidence; and occasionally (3) cultural and linguistic anthropology, which evaluates the cultural context in which evidence is discovered or crimes are committed. Likewise, anthropology allies itself with other fields of the forensic sciences, particularly pathology, genetics, odontology, entomology, and engineering, to provide scientific and objective interpretations of the body as forensic evidence.

Traditionally, forensic anthropologists work with highly decomposed, skeletonized, or otherwise compromised human remains, but have been increasingly involved with the recent dead (e.g., disaster victim triage, trauma evaluation, age estimation) and the living (e.g., radiographic age estimation of disputed minors, facial recognition) (see [1-2]). The forensic anthropologist is an

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