

Chapter 5

CURRENT CHINESE MIGRATION TO THE PHILIPPINES: LAW ENFORCEMENT CONCERNS AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN PHILIPPINES-CHINA RELATIONS BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC*

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Introduction

When President Rodrigo Roa Duterte assumed his post in 2016, he pursued a great paradigm shift in Philippine foreign policy by deliberately promoting friendly relations with the

*This is the latest version of the lecture originally delivered at the Second Carlos Chan Lecture Series on Philippines-China Relations, organized by the Philippine Association for Chinese Studies (PACS), in cooperation with the Chinese Studies Program of Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), and held at Faber Hall 101, ADMU on April 8, 2019. Updated versions of the lecture were delivered at the Second Benito Lim Memorial Lecture Series on Chinese Studies, organized by Kaisa Para Sa Kaunlaran, Chinese Filipino Friendship Association, and PACS at Bahay Tsinoy Museum, in Intramuros, Manila on July 13, 2019; Third World Conference on Chinese Studies, organized by the World Association for Chinese Studies and held in Germany and France on August 24-29, 2019; and at the 10th International Conference of the International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas, held at Jinan University in Guangzhou, China on November 9-10, 2019.

People's Republic of China (PRC).¹ From the lowest moment of Philippines-China relations under President Benigno Simeon “Noy Noy” Aquino III, the two countries bilateral ties reached greater heights under PRRD. With President Duterte’s China-friendly foreign policy, the Philippine government has attracted dramatic entries of Chinese nationals to the Philippines to enjoy tourism, to conduct business, to gain employment, to acquire foreign studies, and to engage in many other legitimate activities. In other words, friendlier ties between the Philippines and China under PRRD have resulted in a new Chinese migration phenomenon called “China wave” that is unprecedented in the diplomatic history of both countries. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, slowed down the process of Chinese migration to the Philippines in 2020.

The influx of Chinese nationals in the Philippines from 2016 to 2019 generated useful incomes and revenues for the Philippine government. Recent Chinese migration in the Philippines encouraged robust economic activities offering livelihood and business opportunities for Filipinos. The phenomenon also intensified people-to-people contacts, professional exchanges, and academic interactions among Chinese and Filipino citizens.

However, the visible presence of Chinese nationals in the Philippines also generated unintended political, law enforcement, and security issues arising from undesirable social, cultural, and economic consequences of their presence. Activities of Chinese nationals in the Philippines generated unnecessary tensions not only among Chinese and Filipinos but also within the community of new Chinese migrants themselves. This situation, which was regrettably politicized and securitized, aggravated pre-existing problems of transnational organized crimes in the Philippines

¹ For more discussions, see Banlaoi (2017), Chap. 4.12; and Manantan (2019), 643-662.

involving some unscrupulous Chinese nationals in cahoots with some Filipinos.

This paper describes the phenomenon of Chinese migration in the Philippines during the early years of the Duterte administration before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically from 2016 to 2020. It briefly examines the economic, political, social and cultural consequences of Chinese migration in the country. This paper identifies law enforcement concerns and security implications of the sudden influx of Chinese nationals in the Philippines during the Duterte administration. This paper also recommends possible areas where the Philippines and China can cooperate in order to promote their common interests on the issue.

Status of Chinese Migration in the Philippines Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2015-2019

Chinese migration in the Philippines dates back to the ancient times as the Chinese were already conducting trade with the peoples of the archipelago even before Spain began colonizing the Philippines in 1521 (Pacho 1986, 76-91). At least 500 years before Spanish colonizers reached the archipelago now called the Philippines, the Chinese already knew the place not only for mutual trading and civilizational exchange but also for alternative permanent settlement (Chan 1978, 51-82). They decided to migrate in the Philippines to escape economic and political hardships arising from periodic collapse and rebuilding of the ancient Chinese imperial system (Wang 2020). Many Chinese who opted to settle in the Philippines came mostly from Fujian and Guangdong provinces of southern China.

Known scholars have already studied the history of Chinese

migration in the Philippines.² Thus, this paper will concentrate more on presenting the current status of Chinese migration in the Philippines, especially during the Duterte administration.

One major immigration decision of President Duterte as soon as he assumed office was the relaxation of visa requirements for Chinese nationals visiting the Philippines in order to boost tourism, encourage trade, and promote investment from China. The Philippines' Bureau of Immigration (BI) implemented the Visa Upon Arrival (VUA) program for Chinese nationals landing at Manila International Airport (MIA), Clark International Airport (CIA), Mactan-Cebu International Airport (MCIA), and Kalibo International Airport (KIA) (Dezan Shira and Associates 2017). The VUA privilege was also offered to Chinese travelers arriving at the Manila, Puerto Princesa, Subic, Laoag, and Caticlan seaports (Dezan Shira and Associates 2017).

As a result, around 5.2 million Chinese nationals visited the Philippines from 2016-2019. The highest arrival was recorded in the whole year of 2019 with 1.7 million visitors followed by the whole year of 2018 with 1.2 million travelers from China. Though Chinese tourism arrivals to the Philippines were dwarfed by Thailand with more than 10 million Chinese tourists in 2018 alone, the increase in the Philippines was very dramatic and truly historic considering that Chinese visitors only recorded 491,000 arrivals in 2015. Arrivals from China started to increase at the start of Duterte administration in 2016 with 675,000 visitors. Arrivals continued to rise in 2017 with almost a million visitors from China creating a "Chinese wave" as a result of tremendous economic and social presence of Chinese visitors and immigrants in the Philippines (Rabena 2019).

In 2019, China became the largest source of foreign tourists in

² For an excellent introductory encyclopedic literature, see See (2005).

the Philippines surpassing South Korea, United States, and Japan. Chinese tourists propelled the enormous growth of tourism in the Philippines from 2016 to 2019. In 2019, Chinese tourists represent around 20 percent of the total tourist arrivals to the Philippines. In other words, one and every five foreign visitors in the Philippines was from China. But the Philippine government suspended the VUA to Chinese nationals in January 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Chinese Arrivals to the Philippines, 2015-2019

<i>Year</i>	<i>Volume (in thousand)</i>
2015	491
2016	676
2017	968
2018	1.25
2019	1.71

Source: Department of Tourism, 2019.

Based on Philippine immigration data, 70 percent of Chinese nationals who visited the Philippines from 2015-2019 were from Mainland China while the remaining 30 percent came from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Chinese nationals who sought employment in the Philippines were issued either a Special Working Permit (SWP) from BI or an Alien Employment Permit (AEP) from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). The BI grants SWP to foreign nationals to engage in gainful employment in the Philippines for three to six months (Bureau of Immigration 2020). The DOLE, on the other hand, grants AEP to foreign nationals to work in the Philippines for a period of one year (“Alien Employment Permit,” 2020).

From 2016 to 2018, BI issued a total of 73,000 SWPs to Chinese nationals. The DOLE, on the other hand, issued a total of 169,893 AEPs to foreign nationals during the same period where 50.3 percent or 85,496 AEPs represented Chinese nationals. In



Figure 1. Arrivals of Foreign Nationals to the Philippines, 2015-2019

Source: Department of Tourism, 2019.

2019, DOLE issued more than 143,000 AEPs to foreign nationals where 75 percent of these AEPs represented Chinese nationals.

From the total number of Chinese nationals working in the Philippines from 2016 to 2019, 71 percent worked in the Philippine offshore and gaming operations (POGOs), also known as on-line gambling or e-casinos. The remaining 29 percent worked in construction, manufacturing, entertainment, and others. Based on government figures, around 150,000 Chinese nationals worked in POGO as of the end of 2019. But Leechiu Property Consultants, a real estate services firm, estimated that based on real property rentals, around 470,000 Chinese nationals worked in POGO in 2019.

In December 2019, China suffered an epidemic arising from the spread of another strain of coronavirus causing severe acute respiratory disease. The virus, called COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019), became a pandemic in the first quarter of 2020 when the disease started to rapidly spread globally. The Philippines is one of the countries in the world most affected by COVID-19 pandemic.

Chinese Migration in the Philippines During the Pandemic

Because of the pandemic, the Philippine government suspended the issuance of visas upon arrival for Chinese nationals in January 2020 as one of its initial COVID-19 mitigation measures. In February 2020, the Philippine government implemented an entry ban against non-Filipinos coming to the country from

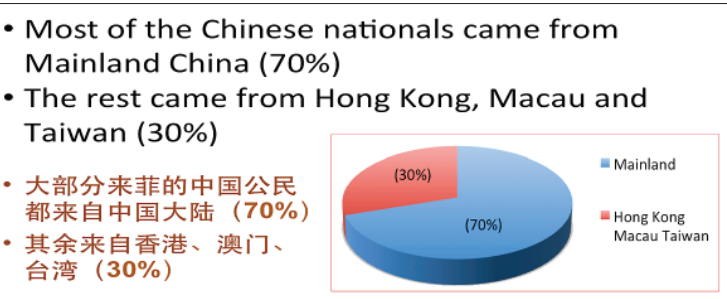


Fig. 2. Origins of Chinese Nationals Visiting the Philippines

Source: Bureau of Immigration, 2019.

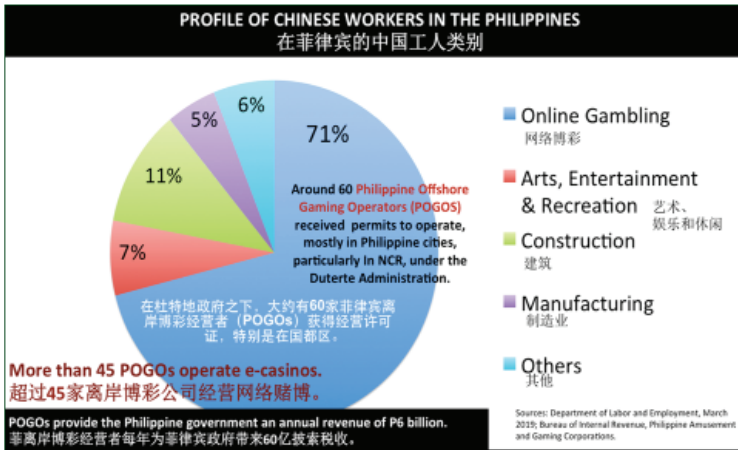


Fig. 3. Profile of Chinese Nationals Working in the Philippines

China, Hong Kong, and Macau. This immigration measure affected the entry of Chinese nationals in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the Philippine government implemented quarantine measures in March 2020, it suspended the arrival of other foreign nationals to the country.

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic halted Chinese migration in the Philippines. In fact, Chinese nationals who were already in the Philippines expressed interest to go back to China. As of March 2020, 300 Chinese nationals wishing to return to China were stranded in Philippine airports due to lockdown measures. Nonetheless, DOLE reported that Chinese nationals continued to dominate the AEP issuances during the first and second quarters of 2020 at height of the pandemic in the Philippines (“1st Semester 2020,” 2020).

The table below shows the top five nationalities on AEP issuance during the said period. From this table, Chinese nationals got 84.50 percent share of the total AEP issuance during the first quarter of 2020 while 50.84 percent during the second quarter of 2020.

**Top Nationalities on AEP Issuance
First and Second Quarter 2020**

<i>Rank</i>	<i>First Quarter</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>% Share</i>	<i>Second Quarter</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>% Share</i>
1	Chinese	45,708	84.50%	Chinese	392	50.84%
2	Vietnamese	1,484	2.74%	Japanese	59	7.65%
3	Japanese	954	1.76%	Korean	43	5.58%
4	Indonesian	996	1.84%	Taiwanese	12	1.56%
5	Korean	854	1.58%	Indian	9	1.17%
	Total	54,090	100%	Total	771	100%

Source: Department of Labor of Employment, August 10, 2020.

Economic Benefits, Social Costs, Cultural Tensions, and Political Consequences

Economic Benefits

Chinese migration in the Philippines from 2016 to 2019 contributed significantly to Philippine economic development. When President Duterte encouraged the Chinese people to visit the Philippines in order to boost Philippine tourism and to invest in the country, Philippines-China economic relations became robust. China became the Philippines' top trading partner and the largest source of imports with a trade volume reaching close to USD 56 billion in 2018 alone. China served as the Philippines' largest foreign investment origin reaching at least USD 67 million in 2018 and the largest source of net equity capital allocation of around USD 100 million in 2019.

China also became the largest source of foreign tourists reaching 1.71 million in 2019 and the Philippines' largest source of foreign assistance to support infrastructure projects of President Duterte under its Build Build Build (3B) Plan. At least 75 projects were earmarked for China funding under the 3B Plan with at least USD 24 billion investments and credit line pledges from China. Under PRRD, China became the Philippines' third largest export destination and the largest export market for Philippine bananas in 2018 and 2019.

In other words, Philippines-China relations enjoyed what President Xi Jinping called as the “rainbow after the rain,” which encouraged the influx of Chinese nationals in the Philippines (Beach and Gutierrez 2018). The Philippines and China have enjoyed a new era of closer friendship like what PRRD described as “the blooming of a big and beautiful flower” (“Philippines' Duterte,” 2018).

Duterte's policy of paradigm shift to China ushered in the new age of closer cooperation between the two countries. When President Xi visited the Philippines in November 2018, the two countries declared their "comprehensive strategic cooperation" in order to have an all-around relationship, which many Chinese officials and analysts would call as "a rapid turn-around in their bilateral ties" (Corrales 2018). As Xi aspired the China Dream for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, he also wished for the rejuvenation of centuries-old friendship between the Philippines and China. Under Xi and Duterte, the Philippines and China enjoyed the highest moment of their bilateral economic relations resulting in new Chinese migration in the Philippines.

The avalanche of Chinese tourists to the Philippines alone encouraged many economic activities that generated local employments. According to the Philippine Statistics Office, tourism industry contributed an average of 12.7 percent to the growth of Philippine economy in between 2016 and 2019 (Rivas, "Online Gambling," 2019). Sectors that benefited from Chinese tourism were transportation (air, land, and water), hotels, restaurants, convenient stores, malls, souvenir shops, and other tourist spots all over the country.

POGOs operated by Chinese nationals in the Philippines also brought some economic advantages. POGO contributed PhP 551 billion or USD 10 billion to Philippine economy annually from 2016 to 2019. This represented almost one third of annual remittances of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) reaching USD 33.5 billion in 2019 (Rivas, "OFW Remittances," 2020). This amount was also close to the 2019 proposed budget of the Department of Education (DepEd) amounting to PhP 659 billion ("Education Still Top," 2018) and much higher than the 2019 proposed budget of the Department of National Defense (DND) amounting to PhP 183.4 billion ("DND to Receive," 2018).

The Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR) reported that POGOs generated licensing and royalty incomes to the Philippine government amounting to PhP 14 billion in 2019, PhP 8 billion in 2018 and PhP 6 billion in 2017 (Ibon Foundation 2020; Leyco and Chipongian 2019). Albay Representative Joey Salceda, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, confirmed these estimates when he said that royalty incomes generated from POGOs reached P22.4 billion in 2018 and 2019 (“Salceda Backs POGO,” 2019). The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), on the other hand, said that withholding taxes of Chinese and foreign nationals working in POGOs gave the Philippine government a total collection of PhP 24 billion in 2018 (Leyco and Chipongian 2019).

Annual Contributions to Philippine Economy, 2016-2019

<i>Component</i>	<i>Information Technology and Business Process Management (IT-BMP) (In PhP)</i>	<i>POGOS (In PhP)</i>
Salaries	400 billion	504 billion
Office Rental	66 billion	11 billion
Housing Rental	n.a.	36 billion
Employees	1.4 billion	470,000

Sources: Leechiu Property Consultants, *Rappler*, 2019.

Licensing and Royalty Incomes from POGOs, 2017-2019

<i>Year</i>	<i>Licensing and Royalty Income (In PhP)</i>
2017	6 billion
2018	8 billion
2019	14 billion

Source: PAGCOR, 2019.

Social Costs and Cultural Tensions

Amidst economic benefits are also social costs and cultural tensions associated with current Chinese migration to the Philippines. Social costs included human trafficking, sex trafficking and prostitution, kidnapping, torture, commission of major index crimes, labor disputes, and many forms of transnational organized crimes to be discussed in detail in succeeding sections of this paper. Cultural tensions also occur among Chinese nationals and Filipino citizens in the workplace and social media exacerbating “anti-Chinese” sentiments and “Sino-phobia,” with Chinese Filipinos suffering the unintended “collateral damages.”

Presence of Chinese workers in the Philippines also created disputes with Filipino workers. Because of China-friendly policy of President Duterte, it encouraged Chinese migrant workers to “flood” the Philippine labor market, particularly in Chinese-run POGO firms and China-funded construction projects (Beltran 2019). Though President Duterte asserted that Chinese investments would bring more jobs for Filipinos, Chinese investors preferred to employ Chinese workers to overcome the language barrier. The influx of Chinese migrant workers to the Philippines caused enormous worries to Filipino workers who felt that the Chinese were stealing jobs from Filipinos. The situation prompted Philippine labor groups to stage protest rallies against the influx of Chinese workers in the Philippines being unfair and unconstitutional.

The National Union of Lawyers in the Philippines even stressed in its position paper that the massive entry of Chinese workers in the Philippines “is inequitable and harmful to Filipino enterprises and violates the constitutional preference for Filipino labor” (Beltran 2019). In the a survey conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS) in September 2019, 70 percent of Filipino respondents expressed strong worries about the surge of Chinese nationals working in the Philippines (Gita-Carlos 2019). Filipinos

who raised serious concerns over Chinese workers' presence in the country was highest in Metro Manila (75 percent), followed by the Visayas (71 percent), Balance Luzon (28 percent), and Mindanao (67 percent) (Gita-Carlos 2019).

Social costs associated with the increased presence of Chinese in the Philippines also unleashed some cultural tensions. Chinese migration in the revived the old patterns of cultural conflicts involving the Chinese and Filipinos. The Chinese wave in the Philippines intensified existing anti-China sentiment or Sinophobia first associated with territorial disputes and now with labor disputes as well as other social issues associated with Chinese presence. Confusing the Chinese government with the Chinese people, some Filipinos accused China of stealing not only Philippine territories in the South China Sea but also Philippine jobs in its own territory. In the July 2019 SWS survey, 51 percent of Filipinos expressed their distrusts of China and doubted China's friendly gestures to the Philippines ("More Filipinos Distrust," 2019). Filipino distrusts of China affected even affected the situation of Chinese Filipinos whose political and cultural loyalty to the Philippines was being doubted. Chinese Filipinos became the usual collateral damage in the political and cultural conflict between Chinese and Filipinos.

Even academic and columnist Solita Collas-Monsod wrote a controversial piece explaining why Filipinos distrust China ("Why Filipinos," 2018). Monsod accused China of "taking away what is ours" and insinuated that Chinese Filipinos were part of it ("Why Filipinos," 2018). Fellow columnist Boying Pimentel challenged Monsod for writing "a racist rant" and for being "confused, incoherent, dangerous (Pimentel 2018)." Another academic, Caroline S. Hau, disagreed with Monsod for being racist with a narrow understanding of China, the Chinese, and the Chinese Filipinos ("Why I Distrust," 2018).

Social activist and academic Teresita Ang See warned that

Monsod's racist view might target Tsinoy (Tsinong Pinoy or Chinese Filipino) as an ethnic group ("Stop Scapegoating," 2019). Ang See also expressed her disappointment with F. Sionil Jose for sharing this racist view with Monsod and argued that they might have been misinformed and misguided about "our intense love and loyalty to the Philippines and equally intense pride in our ethnic Chinese heritage. We are Tsinoy or Tsinong Pinoy, Chinese Filipinos whose blood may be Chinese but whose roots grow deep in Philippine soil and whose bonds are with the Filipino people" ("Stop Scapegoating," 2019). Another Chinese Filipino academic explained, "The view that recent Chinese immigrants and Chinese Filipinos identify more with China is one that is, unfortunately, shared by many Filipinos. This is mainly due to ignorance. But I had not expected this type of ignorance from someone like Solita Monsod, who, as an educator should know the importance of doing one's homework to avoid perpetuating such an erroneous view" (Chu 2018).

In social media, some Filipinos described China and the Chinese in pejorative ways like "bullies," "land grabbers," "job stealers," and the like. On the issue of Chinese migrant workers, others even demanded the Philippine government to immediately deport all illegal Chinese workers back to China prompting the Chinese Embassy in Manila to urge the government to treat Chinese workers humanely ("China Envoy," 2019).

Political Impacts

Social costs and cultural tensions associated with current Chinese migration also reached the Philippines' domestic political dynamics. Senator Joel Villanueva, chairman of the Philippine Senate Labor Committee, called for a series of congressional inquiry on the influx of Chinese workers in the Philippines. He questioned the preference of POGOs in hiring Chinese nationals

and described the existing practice as unconstitutional. He stressed, “Section 12, Article 12 of the Constitution is sacred. It guarantees preference for Filipinos in any job. Filipino first before foreigners” (‘Filipino First,’ 2019). In his privilege speech, Villanueva even claimed that some Chinese nationals were working illegally in the Philippines and asserted that the influx of illegal foreign workers in the Philippines posed a threat to Philippine sovereignty (“Influx,” 2019). Senator Risa Hontiveros also delivered a privilege speech specifically describing illegal Chinese workers as an assault on Philippine sovereignty and economy (“Influx of Illegal,” 2018).

Thus, the Philippine Senate urged concerned agencies of the Philippine government to pursue a crackdown against illegal Chinese workers particularly those working in POGOs. This encouraged various labor groups in the Philippines to organize mass rallies to denounce the situation. Some rallies even articulated anti-China sentiments associated with South China Sea disputes.

In short, current Chinese migration in the Philippines became a big political issue creating different political cleavages that exacerbated political conflicts between the opposition and the government in power. It even created diplomatic tensions between the Philippines and China. The Chinese Embassy in Manila expressed serious concerns on the involvement of Chinese nationals in online gambling. In its official statement, the Chinese Embassy lamented, “The fact that the Philippine casinos and POGOs and other forms of gambling entities are targeting Chinese customers has severely affected the Chinese side” in the following aspects (“Remarks,” 2018):

First, huge amount of Chinese funds has illegally flown out of China and illegally into the Philippines, involving crimes such as cross-border money laundering through underground banking, which undermines China’s financial supervision and financial security. A conservative estimate shows that gambling-related funds flowing illegally out China and into the Philippines amounts to hundreds of

millions of Chinese Yuan (Renminbi) every year. There are analysts who believe that part of the illegal gambling funds has flown into local real estate markets and other sectors in the Philippines.

Second, the fact that a large number of Chinese citizens are lured into illegal gambling has resulted in an increase of crimes and social problems in China. In particular, some gambling crimes and telecom frauds are closely connected, which has caused huge losses to the victims and their families.

Third, many of the Chinese citizens working illegally in Philippine casinos or POGOs and other forms of gambling entities are subjected to what media described as “modern slavery” due to severe limitation of their personal freedom. Their passports are taken away or confiscated by the Philippine employers. They are confined to live and work in certain designated places and some of them have been subjected to extortion, physical abuse and torture as well as other ill treatments. At the same time, dozens of kidnappings and tortured cases of Chinese citizens who gamble or work illegally in gambling entities in the Philippines have taken place. Some Chinese citizens were physically tortured, injured or even murdered. (“Remarks,” 2018)

Furthermore, the Philippine Senate also conducted public hearings on reported involvements of Chinese nationals in various criminal activities linked with POGOs. On March 5, 2020, the Blue Ribbon Committee of the Philippine Senate conducted a public inquiry on the involvement of Chinese nationals in money laundering, human/sex trafficking, illegal gambling, cybercrimes, bribery of Philippine government officials, and even espionage (“Senate Hearing,” 2020). Thus, current Chinese migration in the Philippines created serious law enforcement concerns and security challenges.

Law Enforcement Concerns

For Philippine law enforcement authorities, the following are criminal activities associated with illegal activities of Chinese nationals involved largely in POGOs:

Illegal gambling. There are two types of gambling in the Philippines: legal and illegal gambling. Existing Philippine laws allow operations of legal gambling through the casinos, lotteries, Sweepstakes, horse racing, and cock fighting. PAGCOR is the main agency of the Philippine government regulating the operation of these legal gambling activities. Duly registered POGOs are allowed to operate legally in the Philippines. Under President Duterte, around 60 POGOs received permits to operate. Most of these POGOs are run by Chinese nationals employing more than 100,000 Chinese workers.

However, between 2016 to 2019, there were more than 100 sites operating illegal online gaming activities in the Philippines where other illegal activities involving Chinese nationals also occurred. The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) identified in 2019 around 500 POGOs operating in the country without proper licenses or permits from PAGCOR (“They’re Everywhere,” 2020). Based on this report, PAGCOR closed down in 2019 around 200 small-time POGOs illegally operating in the Philippines (“PAGCOR,” 2019). A Chinese-Filipino POGO operator even admitted that he knew around 30 POGOs operating illegally in Metro Manila alone (Gonzales 2019).

Because these POGOs operated illegally, they also hired Chinese workers illegally. Most of the Chinese workers recruited illegally came from rural villages “where life isn’t particularly easy and the lure of a higher-paying job in faraway Philippines is irresistible. (Gonzales 2019). Some Chinese workers recruited illegally could enter the Philippines with tourist visas and would stay illegally if they failed to get working permits. Illegal recruitment also caused human and sex trafficking and other criminal activities to be discussed later. Because of many criminal activities associated with POGOs, the Philippine Senate called for the declaration of all POGOs in the Philippines illegal (Ramos 2020). In China, online gaming is illegal. It regards Chinese citizens involved in

online gaming as committing criminal activities whether in China or overseas. This prompted Senator Franklin Drilon to point out, “I’m just saying that we should have all options on the table, including possible legislation which would declare this illegal. The theory of the Chinese government if it is illegal in my country, it should be illegal for my citizens to do the illegal thing outside of my borders” (Ramos 2020).

Human trafficking, sex trafficking, and kidnapping. Illegal POGO operations also encouraged human trafficking, sex trafficking and kidnapping involving Chinese nationals in the Philippines.

Human trafficking of Chinese nationals to the Philippines occurred mostly in POGOs. Trafficked persons were offered decent jobs (like secretaries or administrative assistants) during recruitment. Using only tourist visas, syndicates forced trafficked victims, particularly females, to work in POGOs as prostitutes (“POGOs Linked” 2020). Syndicates built prostitution dens around POGO areas. Prostitutes included Chinese but also Filipinos, Russians, and other foreign nationals. Several luxury hotels around POGO areas were prime locations of prostitution activities. In Metro Manila alone, the NBI, with the assistance of the Philippine National Police (PNP), raided some well-known hotels in Pasay City, Parañaque City, and Makati City where prostitution activities thrived. In 2019 alone, the PNP’s Women and Children Protection Center (WCPC) raided six prostitution dens that were linked to POGOs in Metro Manila. These raids resulted in the rescue of 140 foreign victims, mostly Chinese followed by Koreans and Russians. Some Filipino women were also involved in POGO prostitution, but their numbers were not specifically reported.

According to the expose of Senator Hontiveros, who called for a Senate investigation of human trafficking and prostitution

activities linked with POGOs, prostitutes could be ordered online through special social media platforms like WeChat and Telegram. The price varied depending on time to be spent with the “service provider,” to wit:

For Chinese women, the price ranged from PhP 13,000 (RMB 1,000) for 60 minutes to PhP 26,000 for an “all night.” For Korean women, it was PhP 12,000 for “fastfood,” lasting 40 minutes, to P32,000 for an all nighter.

Russian women were the most expensive, starting at PhP 13,000 for 60 minutes to an “all night” of PhP 45,000. In another chat group called Puding Club, a 40-minute “fastfood service” would cost PhP 3,000, and it had “packages” priced at PhP 12,000 to PhP 16,000 (“Sex on the Menu,” 2020)

Aside from human trafficking, sex trafficking and prostitution, kidnapping was also a law enforcement problem associated with POGOs. Based on PNP data, a total of 73 cases of POGO-related kidnappings were recorded from January 2017 to March 2020, and all 80 victims identified were Chinese (Rey 2020). During the same period, there were a total of 142 suspects linked to the kidnappings and most of the perpetrators were Chinese in cahoots with some Filipinos. In a position paper prepared by the PNP Anti-Kidnaping Group (AKG), the sudden increase of kidnapping cases in the Philippines was attributed to the influx of Chinese nationals working in POGOs or Chinese tourists playing at casinos being run by fellow Chinese (Recuenco 2019). Kidnapping incidents associated with POGOs and casinos had different motives, to wit (Recuenco 2019):

Casino Kidnappings

In casino-related kidnappings, the victims are usually Chinese tourists who are invited to the country to play in casinos as part of their itinerary. Those who invite them to play are usually members of loan shark syndicates run by Chinese suspects with Filipino cohorts.

Once the potential victim arrives in the country, he is encouraged

to play at the casino with the loan sharks offering him huge sums of money once he runs out of cash.

When the victim loses and fails to pay, he is taken to the hideouts of the loan shark syndicates where he is beaten and treated like an animal.

The video of the torture and the victim's living condition is then sent to the relatives of the victim in order to force their family to pay.

POGO Kidnappings

In POGO kidnappings, the victims are mostly Chinese invited to work at POGOs in various parts of the country. The POGO operators take care of the travel documents and expenses of their employees from China.

But as soon as the Chinese workers arrive in the country, the monthly salary promised them is cut by 50 percent. The victims are also duped about their food and accommodation.

Since their passports and other travel documents are controlled by the operators who recruited them, most of them have no choice but to stay.

But for those who attempt to flee with the help of their countrymen, they are allegedly abducted by those who recruited them and forced to go back to work.

Prostitution and kidnapping incidents also resulted in commission of crimes like murders, homicides, tortures, extortions, loan-sharking, and thefts (Chanco 2020). Most kidnap victims suffered tortures and physical abuses to extort money from their families during captivities, with some cases leading to murders and homicides. In 2019 alone, the PNP recorded seven homicide and murder incidents of Chinese nationals associated with POGOs. There were many anecdotal stories of other crimes related to POGOs but they were not officially reported ("Crimes against Chinese," 2019). Sadly, some of the POGO Chinese workers were fugitives from China for various criminal cases. Thus, POGOs in the Philippines became safe havens of criminals and fugitives from China. As of February 2020, more than 2,000 Chinese nationals working for POGOs were deported after Philippine authorities

discovered their criminal records in China (“Over 2,000 Chinese,” 2020).

Money laundering. The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) of the Philippine government admitted that POGOs raised the risk of money laundering in the country to the high level. Based on reports of suspicious transactions in online gaming or e-casino from 2013 to 2019, AMLC reported an amount of at least PhP 14 billion involved in money laundering activities (Lucas 2020).

Senator Richard Gordon, chairman of the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee, disclosed that around PhP 10.5 billion in cash linked with POGOs was laundered into the Philippines in 2019 alone (“Money laundering,” 2020). Gordon warned that failure to stop the flow of dirty money to the Philippines coming from POGOs could fund illegal drug trade, prostitution, and even terrorism. Gordon exclaimed that these things could pose serious threats to Philippine national security (Casayuran 2020). In extreme cases, Gordon argued that dirty money coming from POGOs could fund coups or armies that could take over government. He also stressed, “It is also a threat to our economy because it can cause artificial inflation, often times dirty money is used to purchase real properties which will cause the value or price of these properties to increase by creating the illusion of a demand when there is none. It causes a decrease in productive employment by causing businesses to fail, hence, workers lose their jobs” (Casayuran 2020).

Cybercrimes. POGOs operating illegally in the Philippines violated Philippine cybercrimes laws. In 2019, the PNP arrested hundreds of Chinese workers for cybercrimes (“Authorities Arrest,” 2019). In September 2019 alone, the PNP arrested at least 600 Chinese nationals for cybercrimes connected with illegal employment and illegal operations of POGOs (“601 Chinese

Arrested,” 2019). In December 2019, the PNP arrested another 342 Chinese nationals for investment scams and cyber frauds associated with POGOs in Quezon City (Alquيران and Cabrera 2019).

To fight cybercrimes accompanying illegal POGOs, PAGCOR in collaboration with the PNP invested PhP 11 million for the purchase of information technology equipment (“Philippine PAGCOR,” 2020). PAGCOR even forged partnership with the Chinese embassy in Manila in order to combat cybercrimes using POGOs as covers (“PAGCOR Working,” 2020). In fact, the Chinese embassy in Manila said that on the basis of Beijing’s crackdown against cybercrimes, it was already working closely with the Philippine government to counter cybercrimes and to protect the rights and interests of nationals of both countries (Pazzibugan and Ramos 2020). As a result, the Philippine government deported to China around 2,000 illegal POGO workers with criminal records in China and who have committed various crimes in the Philippines (“Pagcor: 2,000 Illegal,” 2020).

Bribery of Philippine government officials. Because of illegal POGOs, Chinese nationals wanting to enter the Philippines to conduct various illicit activities bribed some government officials. Bribery was prevalent at the immigration office where airport officials would split P10,000-bribe from each Chinese national paying their ways to the immigration processes (Abad 2020). The money wrapped in a paper *a la pastillas* (milk candy) guaranteed very important person (VIP) treatment to entering Chinese national.

In a Senate hearing on February 17, 2020, Senator Hontiveros disclosed a modus called *pastillas*, “where POGOs pay PhP 10,000 per person and provide free lunch to get VIP treatment, PhP 2,000 is split among airport immigration workers, while PhP 8,000 is distributed among the operators and syndicates” (Abad 2020).

The PhP 2,000 for immigration and airport workers would be divided in the following manner:

- Immigration officers (IO) get the highest cut at PhP 650;
- Duty immigration supervisors (DIS) get PhP 470;
- Travel central enforcement unit (TCEU) gets PhP 280;
- Border control and intelligence unit (BCIU) gets PhP 240;
- Operations (OPS), or administrative/clerical officers, get PhP 260
- Terminal head (TH) gets PhP 100 (Abad 2020).

Immigration Officer Allison Chiong blew the whistle in the said Senate hearing by presenting video footages showing five immigration officers assisting Chinese nationals in the airport so they could easily enter the Philippines to work for POGOs. Because of these evidences, President Duterte decided to sack these migration officials involved in the *pastillas* scandal (Gonzales 2020).

In another public hearing conducted by the Philippine Senate on March 10, 2020, Senator Gordon revealed that he was offered PhP 20 million by a family suspected of money laundering activities related with illegal POGOs (“Gordon Reveals,” 2020). The emissary of the said family also offered PhP 5 million to the Philippine Red Cross as bribe not to be summoned in Senate investigations.

Security Challenges

For the security sector, particularly from the DND, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), National Security Council (NSC), and National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), the influx of Chinese nationals in the Philippines and the proliferation of POGOs in the country have concomitant security challenges.

Some of the main security challenges associated with POGOs and illegal activities of Chinese nationals in the Philippines are the following: 1) espionage, 2) interference in domestic affairs, and 3) assault to Philippine sovereignty.

Espionage. National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana admitted that the spread of Chinese-run POGOs in the Philippines could make the country vulnerable to Chinese espionage activities, especially those online casinos located near military and police camps (Gotinga, “Defense Chief,” 2019).

POGOs located in Cubao and Eastwood in Quezon City could be used to spy on military headquarters in Camp Aguinaldo and police headquarters in Camp Crame. Those located in Bonifacio Global City in Taguig could be used to spy on Philippine Army headquarters in Fort Bonifacio. POGOs at Resorts World Manila and in Pasay could be used to spy on Philippine Air Force headquarters in Villamor Air Base while e-casino hubs in Cavite City could be used to spy on Philippine Navy base in Sangley Point. POGOs in Clark and Subic could also be used for Chinese espionage.

Lorenzana argued that the Chinese government could mobilize some of their Chinese workers in POGOs to collect intelligence information. Intelligence experts agreed that China could deploy their intelligence agents in POGOs to gather information about the Philippines (Romero 2020).

Senator Panfilo Lacson claimed that around 2,000 to 3,000 Chinese intelligence agents reached the country on “immersion missions” and still “unknown purposes” (Romero 2020). Chinese intelligence agents might not be as high as 3,000 as alleged by Senator Lacson, but they could be really around us (Gotinga, “Probably Not 3,000,” 2020). Nonetheless, Senator Gordon believed that agents of China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) already penetrated POGOs and pointed out that “the Chinese

spies were probably out to determine invasion areas and to ascertain the location of Philippine military bases, among others” (“Gordon believes China,” 2020).

President Duterte also considered the possibility that POGOs could serve as springboards for Chinese intelligence agents to operate in the Philippines. But he explained that Chinese spies could still conduct espionage activities even away from military or police camps arguing, “You don’t even have to be near any military camp if you want to gather intelligence” (Punzalan 2019).

Interference in domestic affairs. If POGOs could be used for Chinese espionage, Philippine security officials exclaimed that they could be utilized to interfere in Philippine domestic affairs (Andrada 2019). National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. was, in fact, the first official who considered POGOs in the Philippines as a national security threat not only because some of them worked illegally but because they would also interfere in Philippine internal affairs.

With the increasing presence of Chinese in the Philippines, “We must not let our guards down,” said Esperon (Andrada 2019). Though PAGCOR maintained that POGO workers in the Philippines posed no threats, Esperon stressed that undocumented and illegal POGO workers could pose serious security risks (“Gaming Regulator Says,” 2019). Esperon also cautioned that while some POGO workers could create security problems, to say that they were part of a Beijing army could just be a wild imagination (Esguerra 2019).

Assault to Philippine sovereignty. Philippine opposition forces emphasized that POGOs and illegal Chinese migration in the Philippines could be “direct assaults” to Philippine sovereignty. Senator Hontiveros warned that online gaming and illegal Chinese workers could undermine national integrity of the Filipinos as they

could take advantage of the weakness of the Philippines' tax laws and the negligence of the Philippine government (Galvez 2018). She said, "As a country with a large number of citizens working abroad, we are not against foreign workers. What we oppose is the government's negligence and timidity on this issue that has made our people, particularly Filipino workers, second class citizens in their own country" (Galvez 2018).

But China assured the Philippine government that it would respect Philippine sovereignty on POGOs. Though China regarded online gaming illegal, it acknowledged Philippine sovereignty over POGOs where some Chinese nationals gained their employment (Leyco 2019).

Areas for Philippines-China Cooperation

Chinese migration in the Philippines has affected Philippines-China relations. Thus, problems and challenges associated with it are not just the responsibility of the Philippines. China and the Philippines have shared responsibilities to mitigate and address all unintended negative consequences of the current Chinese migration phenomenon as both also enjoy its positive effects. This phenomenon, therefore, calls for a closer bilateral cooperation as both countries aspire to have comprehensive strategic cooperation in the 21st century. These are some areas where the Philippines and China can cooperate in order to boost their bilateral ties in the context of current Chinese migration in the Philippines:

Tourism relations. Tourism is one important area where the Philippines and China can boost their bilateral ties. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the security and law enforcement issues associated with Chinese tourists in the Philippines, both countries can review the implementation of the

2002 Memorandum of Understanding on Tourism Cooperation between the Department of Tourism of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China, particularly the Implementation Program 2017-2022. The bilateral review is very important in the context of the implementation of the Philippine National Tourism Development Plan 2016-2022 and the establishment in 2018 of China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism replacing the PRC's National Tourism Administration (Department of Tourism 2016). The national tourism authorities of both countries can share their respective experiences in tourism cooperation, particularly on the challenges they face during the COVID-19 pandemic. They can hold regular bilateral tourism conferences to learn more about their respective tourism policies, organizations, targets, priorities, and issues that both countries need to address together.

Despite the pandemic and some problems associated with Chinese tourists in the Philippines, both countries should sustain their efforts to encourage investments in tourism infrastructure and to level-up tourism traffic from both sides in order to advance their mutual interests on this area. More importantly, the two countries should pay greater efforts to develop tourism protection measures to promote safety and security of their respective nationals in cooperation with their respective law enforcement authorities.

Labor relations. With the influx of Chinese workers in the Philippines during the Duterte administration and the intention of the Philippine government to deploy more OFWs to China (primarily English teachers) the labor departments of both countries should sustain and improve their labor relations, particularly in the hiring, deployment and protection matters. An exchange of their respective labor attachés is essential for these purposes.

In April 2019, during the Second Belt and Road Forum for

International Cooperation, Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III visited China to meet his counterpart in order to strengthen the two countries labor relations. Secretary Bello planned to establish three Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLOs) in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen (Patinio 2019). China should also establish its counterparts in the Philippines, particularly in Manila, Davao, or cities where most Chinese-run POGOs are located. These labor offices shall emphasize not only hiring and deployment issues but also protection concerns in accordance with international labor laws. Towards this end, labor relations shall also facilitate law enforcement cooperation between the two countries.

Law enforcement cooperation. Tourists and workers from both countries need protection from illegal and illicit activities. There are cases where tourists and workers are involved in human trafficking and smuggling, illegal drug trade, money laundering, cybercrimes and others. Confronting these cases require stronger law enforcement cooperation from both sides. In fact, the Chinese embassy in Manila already urged the Philippine government to strengthen law enforcement cooperation with China to combat gambling-related crimes in order to effectively protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens (“China urges Philippines,” 2019). The Philippine government should also do the same in China with the establishment of POLOs.

Police authorities from both countries should intensify their bilateral cooperation not only at the policy levels but also at the tactical and operational levels in order to solve crimes committed by their respective nationals in both countries. Their police attachés must broaden the scope of their missions from mere coordination to actual joint operations in accordance with their respective domestic and international practices.

Security cooperation. Because the issue of current Chinese migration to the Philippines has raised security concerns, the two countries should also broaden their security cooperation not only in traditional but also in non-traditional areas. Migration problems are already considered non-traditional security problems. The Philippines and China can widen the scope of their cooperation in non-traditional security.

China and ASEAN countries have exemplary practices in non-traditional security cooperation (Arase 2010, 808-833). China-ASEAN non-traditional security cooperation has, in fact, entered the realm of geopolitics (Xue 2020, 29-48). Security authorities from both countries can learn lessons from China-ASEAN non-traditional security cooperation in order to forge their own bilateral mechanism. The Philippines-China Bilateral Consultative Mechanism (BCM) in the South China Sea can also serve as a template for bilateral security cooperation to tackle the security challenges associated with the current Chinese migration phenomenon. This will entail participation of their respective defense, military, and intelligence establishments. The Philippines and China have done this process in peacefully manage the South China Sea disputes (Banlaoi 2012). They have also done it in the field of counterterrorism (Banlaoi 2007; Banlaoi, ed. 2019). Thus, the two countries can also pursue security cooperation the area of migration.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the Duterte administration in 2016, the Philippines has become one of the preferred destinations of Chinese tourists and workers in Southeast Asia. The Duterte administration saw the massive influx of Chinese tourists and workers in the Philippines. This phenomenon also produced

unintended law enforcement and security problems that both countries needed to address, particularly those associated with POGOs. Law enforcement problems involved illegal gambling, human and drug trafficking, kidnapping prostitution, money laundering, and cybercrime. Security concerns pertained to the issues of espionage and assault to Philippine sovereignty. Addressing these problems requires the strengthening of Philippines-China bilateral cooperation in the area of tourism, labor relation, law enforcement, and security.

While there is no doubt that Chinese migration in the Philippines has many challenges, these challenges can also provide opportunities for the Philippines and China to cooperate in various fields in order to sustain their friendship and enhance their bilateral relations even beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

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