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Toward a Durable Alliance: A Case Study on the Effects of Chinese Charm Offensive to the Sino-Philippine Relations (2012-2019)

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ABSTRACT

Since the onset of the Duterte administration, the president initiated a radical shift of foreign policy towards China and the rise of foreign investments in the said country here in the Philippines. While amidst a territorial dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, Beijing has been persistent in using other forms of power to increase its influence, of which soft power is one such power that it possesses and utilizes. Specifically, this study sought to comprehend the effects of China's soft power through their charm offensive in the Philippines as seen through cooperation between the two countries, whether economic or political, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, and finally, the Filipino public trust towards China. These were evaluated in light of the objectives for China's charm offensive to determine whether or not their charm offensive has been successful. Based on reviewed related literature, the researchers employed a mixed methods research approach wherein they gathered various documents and surveys to explore explanations for the case. The researchers utilized a Regression Analysis to identify the correlation between the Chinese charm offensive and the dependent variables. The collected data was analyzed through the lens of Kurlantzick, wherein he provided ways to assess the effectiveness of China's charm offensive. According to the collected data, it is evident that China achieved its goals through its charm offensive, as evidenced by the intensification of the partnership between the two nations despite their territorial dispute. Moreover, the Chinese charm offensive prevented the Philippines from pursuing its successful arbitration case.

Keywords: *Soft Power, China's Charm Offensive, Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Relief, Mutual Cooperation, Public Trust*

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INTRODUCTION

In the present world, China is developing itself towards stability and growth in the international arena, characterized by its rising power. Consequently, this country is en route to hegemonic status. In the 1990s, Nye (2008) coined the concept of soft power, which focuses on attracting political actors instead of coercing or persuading them with money, influence, or military might. With the soft power concept and its indisputable importance in global politics, states are now giving importance through economic investments and national policy/ies to develop the infrastructures related to soft power. Examples are South Korea and its entertainment industry, Japan and its Cool Japan project, and many others. Before the Duterte administration, Sino-Philippine relations were unstable due to the ongoing dispute concerning the issue of disputed territories within the West Philippine Sea. However, it changed at the onset of Duterte's presidency, characterized by the sound relationship between the Philippines and China. A series of state visits of Duterte to China and vice-versa manifested this. The international arena is now aware that Sino-Philippine relations are on the path of reconciliation and cooperation.

The relationship between the Philippines and China has existed since the colonization era. Scott (1980), a great historian and scholar, wrote in his book, "Barangay," the political, social, and economic situation of pre-Hispanic Indios before Spain's conquest and

eventual colonization of the islands. Accordingly, there was a high level of interaction between the Philippines and China due to trade and commerce (Scott, 1980). Therefore, the Chinese presence in the Philippines is no longer new. Due to these century-old relations, Chinese culture and values naturally assimilated into Filipinos. This culture and values are evident through *pamahihin* and cuisines. Nye (2008) mentioned that soft power is a tool to succeed globally. Hence, culture is a critical factor in achieving soft power. This study explored how China's soft power affects Filipino public sentiments. In this study, public trust ratings are a tool to determine the effectiveness of soft power.

Going more profound, the primary concern of this study is the effect of the Chinese charm offensive on Sino-Philippine relations. Consequently, Kurlantzick (2006) developed the concept of a charm offensive, defined as a means of soft power by managing soft and hard resources. While soft power focuses on the use of rich history, culture, cuisine, and traditions, China has gone a different approach, mainly relying on its economic capabilities, such as the One Belt One Road policy, which seeks to rebuild the Old Silk Road and reconnect China with the rest of Europe and eventually the world, as one of their strategies to build Soft Power, through investments in infrastructure projects and the like (Sharma, B & Khatri, R. 2019). As Kurlantzick (2006) has stated in his book, China has changed in the context of China. China and the nations it has

influenced enunciate a broader idea of soft power. As for them, soft power means anything outside the military and security realm, including popular culture and public diplomacy and more coercive economic and diplomatic levers like aid and investment, as well as participation in multi-national organizations.

The earlier occurrence can be attributed to the hard power resources of China as another form of their charm offensive. Meanwhile, for soft resources, Kurlantzick (2006) also elucidates that China first utilizes tools of culture and diplomacy- tools related to Chinese culture, arts, languages, and ethnicity. It is to pursue public diplomacy, which Kurlantzick (2006) defines as the cultivation of governments of public opinion in other nations; by cultivating this public opinion abroad, states can more effectively pursue their national interests. Through this, China, in one of its national goals, can foster cooperation within the region as a tool of its charm offensive through Confucian Institutes, scholarship grants, and foreign policy so that, in a way, it can attract other nation-states to them. Furthermore, while compassion and humanity may drive the Chinese Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations, strategic political considerations inspire them, as shown in Haiti (Tubilewicz, C. 2012).

With this pattern, it can be inferred that the charm offensive through humanitarian assistance or disaster relief and cooperation is vital in developing Chinese soft power. China employed these components in its

relations with the Philippines. This paper attempted to connect China's programs for its charm offensive, how it is utilized in the Philippines, and its effects on the overall relationship between the two countries during the Duterte administration from 2012 to 2019.

Background of the Study

This study aims to analyze China's charm offensive and its effect on Sino-Philippine relations and, ultimately, its effect on China's overall soft power. China's soft power is essential since it is a new dimension on which countries compete and vie for power that fulfills their strategic ideals. This study takes the Philippines as a case sample to analyze and describe China's charm offensive and its characteristics from the Philippines' perspective. China is an up-and-coming regional power in Asia and vies for influence and alliances with other powerful countries, specifically the United States and other emerging powers such as India. Given these international intentions and domestic factors such as national security and nationalism, China has started its charm offensive strategy to fulfill its ultimate goal of *hepingjieuqi*, or peaceful rise (Kurlantzick, 2007). Decades past the first onset of China's charm offensive, they are now one of the biggest threats to the Philippine national security and a regional hegemon to the Southeast Asian region and neighboring regions. With dangerous stunts in the South China Sea with their disputes over the Paracel islands and their intrusions into and encroachment on the EEZs of

various countries that were sharing the said contested area. Most notable of their violations and encroachment on territorial waters are their land reclamation operations and building of military bases in the disputed region, with their militarization of Scarborough Shoal as the most discussed among the plethora of their intrusions and infractions. This phenomenon highlights the main objective of this study, which is to determine the effectiveness of China's charm offensive strategy in the diplomatic and economic relations between the Philippines and China.

China as a global power is ideally most achievable when it is surrounded by allies and has a positive international community relationship. However, history and current international relations have shown that they are not. That is because China's version of authoritarian-socialist values contradicts the Western-centric political ideologies adopted by most nations worldwide. Another reason lies within the China Threat Theory, which postulates that China's rise will threaten the powers abroad, such as the United States, Japan, and Australia, forcing China to take another stance on its foreign policy, which is where Nye's (2008) soft power and, ultimately, Kurlantzick's (2006) China charm offensive come in. With China utilizing its hard power resources to generate soft power in its charm offensive, it can overcome the obstacles of differences in values and deftly spread its culture to the world. This utilization strengthens their economy and gains a positive world sentiment. Due to this, China could balance the

United States hegemony in Southeast Asia and compete with other nearby powers, such as India and Australia, for an influential position in South and Southeast Asia.

With recent events, Xi Jinping and China's use of varying strategies to undermine states' national sovereignty, either through "debt traps," the use of militias to aggravate other national fishermen in their territorial waters, or the use of their Coast Guard in disputed waters, China has been given an image of vying for territorial concessions in the South China Sea and military aggressiveness in the strait of Taiwan. It has put the whole of Southeast Asia and, recently, other world powers such as the United Kingdom and, most notably, the United States in a state of alert in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Incidentally, under the Duterte administration, the Philippines has taken a radical foreign economic policy heavily in favor of China, such as the Kaliwa Dam project, the Sangley Point Airport, and other contracts awarded to several Chinese companies.

China's Charm Offensive

The China charm offensive, first coined by Kurlantzick (2006), describes and conceptualizes China's attempts at soft power by utilizing its resources. Rothman (2011) supports this definition of soft power, wherein he devised a continuum based on hard and soft resources and their application. One example of this is the usage of hard powers like the military to generate soft power. In contrast, some claim that the

China charm offensive effectively improves China's image, and some claim that it does nothing or even the opposite.

Case studies state that China's form of soft power is effective and gives positive feedback towards China, such as the case studies of the academic exchange between China and the Arab Region (Zreik, 2021). They studied the effect of China's soft power in using one of their soft resources represented through their educational institutions and its adverse effects on the Arab students' perception of China. It stated that the academic exchange between China and the Arab region changed the perception of Arab students studying in China into a more positive view. Second, is the strength of China's charm offensive in the political landscape of Southern Taiwan town (Keng, Yu-Chen Tsen, & Yu, 2017). They explored the implications of China's charm offensive in a Southern Taiwanese town's political landscape through economic means. They found evidence of China's charm offensive succeeding and influencing the political landscape in the said town. Finally, in the case of the reason Hong Kong media failed to counter China's charm offensive (Kit, 2017), findings suggest that it is due to China's commitment to building a responsible power image through its various hard and soft resources. An example is the Chinese educational institutions, infrastructure investments, and trade exchanges, which increased their influence in Hong Kong.

While there may be cases that state a positive outcome for China in their charm offensive, there are also cases where it failed to produce a positive outcome. Some of the cases listed here are just but a few of the said cases. One such case is China's unsuccessful charm offensive by Lee & Hao (2018), where researchers scrutinized South Koreans' perception of China's charm offensive, answering whether it resulted in a positive outcome beneficial for China. Researchers found that China's charm offensive was not enough to change South Koreans' perception of China mainly due to historical, cultural, and political values factors. Another case is that of Chou, Pan & Poole (2016) titled "The threat of autocracy diffusion in consolidated democracies," wherein researchers studied the perception of Australians towards Singaporean and Chinese authoritarian governments and their respective nations as a whole because of increased interactions between Australia and the two states, specifically in trade. Research findings suggest that instead of giving a positive outcome, it did nothing or even negatively viewed China and Singapore. One of the suggested causes is the democratic values that Australians have that do not synergize well with the authoritarian regimes of China and Singapore. Lastly is the case study by Huhe & Min Tang (2020), which looked at China's increased economic influence as it dramatically shapes the regions near China and globally. However, contrary to popular opinion, China's increased economic influence, trade interdependence, and infrastructure investments in other states still show a

soft power deficit, which means China's charm offensive, is not doing as expected. Some reasons cited by the authors to explain this phenomenon are China's cultural and political values and recent hard power actions that will affect the objectives of China's charm offensive and Soft Power.

China's charm offensive has been discussed thoroughly and given ample case studies to prove its capabilities of achieving its goals. Now, as the primary variable, we aim to look at China's charm offensive from the perspective of a Southeast Asian and look at China's charm offensive in general, then China's charm offensive in the ASEAN region, and finally, in the Philippines. First is China's charm offensive, characterized by its peaceful rise. They emphasized various aspects of power, specifically their economic power and interests, which they strengthened through several strategies, such as their Free Trade Area strategy, aimed at developing their economic interests domestically and abroad, which China's political leadership deems necessary to enhance China's "hard" and "soft" power (Yu, L, 2018). Second is China's charm offensive towards the ASEAN nations, wherein China is increasing its interactions with SEA nations. Characterized through trade agreements with ASEAN, an example is China's China ASEAN Expo or CAEXPO held in Nanning from October 31 to November 3, 2006, initially intended for trade and investment between ASEAN and China but morphed into a kind of Forum between the two entities (Suehiro, 2017). With China's charm offensive in East

Asia and Southeast Asia, and with the recent radical shift of Duterte, the Philippines' foreign policy from the U.S. to China (Heydarian, 2017), it is reasonably safe to say that China is practicing its charm offensive here in the Philippines. This charm offensive manifests in their recent mutual corporations and projects, which may generate soft power with policymakers in the Philippines and Philippine society.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Soft Power

Nye (2008) defines soft power as the inducement of attraction of a target country towards the host country. However, his theory was undertheorized in his earlier works, and scholars saw some problems. He further developed the theory in his book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Nye (2008) presented a spectrum of behaviors to distinguish between soft and hard powers. Soft power is the ability to change their preferences, while hard power is the ability to change their circumstances. The spectrum of behavior that Nye constructed supports and answers the questions of his critics.

Reinforcing Nye's theory of soft power utilized in this study, the theoretical framework also incorporates Vuving's (2009) explanation of soft power. While Vuving (2009) relies on Nye's (2009) definition of soft power and his Spectrum of Behavior, Vuving (2009) augmented this with his distinction

between power resources and power currency. He also identified different types of power, developing Nye (2008), a one-dimensional continuum behaviors spectrum wherein coercion at one end represents hard power and attraction at the other represents soft power. Here, Vuving (2009) emphasized the power currency in *benignity*, *brilliance*, and *beauty*, which produces soft power. *Benignity* produces soft power through gratitude and sympathy; *Brilliance* generates the production of admiration; *Beauty* is the production of soft power through inspiration (Vuving, 2009).

However, for soft power to take effect, a crux or tool must be outsourced as power currencies to produce soft power through economic assistance, cultural events, and humanitarian aid (Vuving, 2009). Economic assistance is a way for a host country to project benignity, and at the same time, cultural events can project beauty and brilliance, while humanitarian aid promotes benignity. To which all three power currencies can produce soft power. Vuving (2009) expanded the Theory of Soft Power by Nye (2008) in a way precisely in the context of this study. China's foreign policy utilizes foreign investment, trade, and humanitarian aid to produce power currency, generating soft power. The framework also includes Kurlantzick's (2007) concept of China's charm offensive, which expounds the idea of soft power expanded by Vuving (2009). Consequently, Kurlantzick (2007) explains how China utilized its resources to generate soft power through the charm offensive.

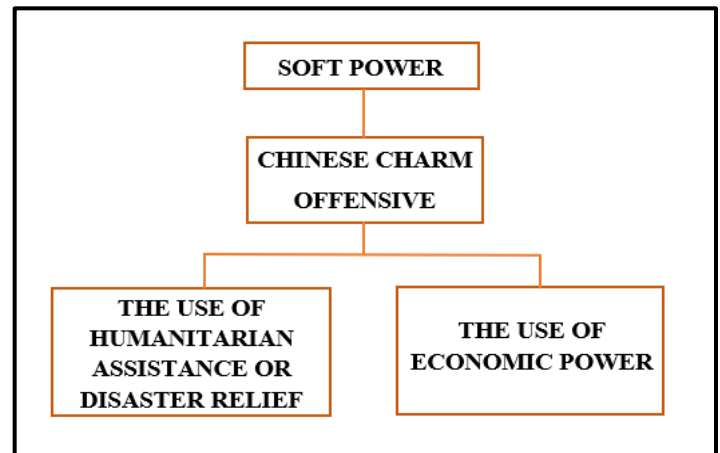


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

To holistically explain this study's theoretical framework, we used the Soft Power Theory of Nye (2008) along with the explanation of Vuving (2009) concerning its mechanizations to describe and analyze China's soft power and correlate it with the description of Kurlantzick (2007) on China's charm offensive. Another is Kivimaki's (2014) argument that Chinese soft power must not be measured by Western standards but by its effects on China's goals based on the Chinese standard.

This paper helped examine China's soft power in the Philippines. China has been considering investing in the Philippines' infrastructure, such as roads, dams, airports, and telecommunications. On the other hand, while there are limited discussions on the Chinese military cooperating directly with the Philippines, it is also true that the Chinese army and navy are both active in humanitarian response/disaster relief in the form of peacekeeping missions in Africa and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief in typhoon stricken areas such as in the

Philippines and most recently is their donation of military hardware to the AFP during the recently concluded Siege of Marawi under the Duterte administration.

Research Objectives

Having concrete research objectives is a significant component of detailed research. Research objectives serve as a guide in the process of addressing the issues of the study. Consequently, the research objectives generated here result from the assumptions after reviewing related literature. The research objectives of this study are the following:

General Research Objective:

To identify the effects of China's "Charm Offensive" on the diplomatic and economic relations between the Philippines and China

Specific Research Objectives:

1. To illustrate the inconsistent relationship between China's "Charm Offensive" strategy and Filipino public trust despite the centuries-old Sino-Philippine relations.
2. To characterize how Sino-Philippine relations evolved due to the charm offensive utilized by China.
3. To describe the effectiveness of the Chinese charm offensive in the context of Sino-Philippine relations.

METHODS OF THE STUDY

Overview

The study utilized a mixed method approach that allowed the researchers full appreciation and analysis of the causation between the Chinese charm offensive and its concerned dependent variables, with an exploratory research method at its core and a case study research design. For its data and data gathering procedure, the researchers employed a documentary analysis, collating several documents and reports necessary for the study.

Research Approach

This research utilized a mixed method approach to allow us to extensively analyze and understand the causation between the Chinese charm offensive and the concerned dependent variables. The qualitative aspect of this study involved document analysis that helped us gather as much information and data and understand opinions, underlying reasons, insights, and other non-quantifiable factors that supplemented the study flow. Moreover, the qualitative aspect of this study helped describe the machination, causes, and effects of a particular phenomenon by giving us the liberty of gathering data without being restricted by numbers and statistics.

Meanwhile, the quantitative aspect of this study involved Regression Analysis. Through this quantitative method, the research interpreted and characterized whether there is a positive

or negative correlation between the independent and dependent variables. The quantitative analysis supplemented the qualitative analysis for this study to become holistic and dynamic in discussing the concept of the Chinese charm offensive and its utilization in the Philippines. Finally, this method was appropriate due to the broad nature of soft power as an academic concept in the international relations subfield of the political science discipline.

Research Methodology

The study utilized exploratory research methods because the study's context looks at China's charm offensive from the recipient's perspective within the current geopolitical atmosphere brought by the ongoing passive-aggressive territorial dispute between China and the country under the charm offensive, the Philippines. While there is a similar case study conducted from the perspective of Taiwan, this research provided different insights because, unlike in the China-Taiwan context, where the two countries have conflicted for decades, the China-Philippines context only started to gain serious international attention in the middle of the 21st century. Furthermore, there is a vast ideological and cultural disparity between China and the Philippines as compared to China and Taiwan. While Chinese cultural influences are present in the Philippines, it is not at the level of Taiwan and China.

Analyzing the relational variables between the Philippines and China, the study intended to integrate a Philippine

perspective on China's soft power, contrasted with other case studies focused on Southeast and East Asia. This research filled the gaps that previous comparative studies have only mentioned in passing but have not further explored.

Research Design

Since this study mainly revolved around the effects of the Chinese charm offensive on Sino-Philippine relations, it aimed for a case study research design that will bring insightful analyses within the existing passive-aggressive environment created by China's expansionist policies toward the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone. Moreover, a case study approach is appropriate because China's charm offensive strategy is employed in the Philippines and different countries. One similar case to this is successful China's charm offensive in Taiwan, wherein the former was able to influence the latter's political dynamics indirectly. If true, this study might also see a similar effect in the Philippines. China's Belt and Road Initiative, or the BRI, has also been argued to be a tool for its Charm Offensive strategy, hence its soft power, in its different partner states. One example would be China's Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia and Southeast Asian countries, which produced varying degrees of admiration or soft power influence per state. It is interesting to investigate this issue in the case of the Philippines, given the different BRI-financed infrastructure projects in the country, such as the

botched Sangley Point Airport and the ongoing Kaliwa Dam.

Data and Data Gathering Procedure

This study collected reports and documents describing the current status of Sino-Philippine relations under the context of the Chinese charm offensive. On Filipino public sentiments, the study gathered the SWS survey reports concerning Filipinos' net trust rating towards China. The SWS survey reports were beneficial as one of the ways to assess the effectiveness of the Chinese charm offensive in the Philippines. Accordingly, soft power is adequate if the people in the receiving country are developing a sense of attraction towards the source country. Meanwhile, on the issue of humanitarian assistance or disaster relief, this study collected documents showing the agreements between the Philippines and China and the deed of donations of China for the Philippines.

Moreover, on the issue of cooperation, this study collected data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) on Philippine exports and imports statistics. The report helped reveal which country is the biggest partner of the Philippines in terms of trade. Meanwhile, this study also gathered documents on the foreign policy of the Philippines towards China within a specific time frame. All of these data were beneficial in explaining the current status of Sino-Philippine relations under the context of the Chinese charm offensive.

Data Analysis

All the data for this study are in document form since we intended to utilize document analysis. Researchers commonly utilize document analysis for an exceptional case like a case study because of its flexibility. Accordingly, document analysis allows the researcher to analyze data with proper background and context (Bowen, 2009). Consequently, one can notice that soft power is a dynamic concept that requires a deep understanding to generate a credible analysis. Moreover, document analysis is the best in cases like this because it is challenging to measure charm offensive through a statistical or quantitative approach. Also, the study always referred to the information and data from the document analysis to meet the objectives. The study conducted a regression analysis to characterize the correlation between the Chinese charm offensive and dependent variables. It statistically determined the correlation of the variables. This particular regression analysis gave the study a strong foundation for its analysis concerning the effects of the Chinese charm offensive on Sino-Philippine relations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

In the gathered data below, the study scoured available sources from the internet, primary sources such as data and statistics from government archives, local and or international, and

secondary sources from news sites and or government publications. The data have been categorized accordingly under the following: (a) An Economic Partner: a China's Foreign investment in the Philippines which looks at the incoming foreign investment of China towards the Philippines, (b) China as a Friend: The Increasing Official Development Assistance of China to the Philippines which looks into the Official Development Assistance, (c) A Culture of Gratitude: China's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in the Philippines which looks into the HA/DR in application of Vuvings mechanization of soft power, (d) China as the Biggest Trade Partner of the Philippines which looks into trade data between the two countries, (e)Regression Analysis: Understanding the Correlations of the Variables which looks into the correlation among the variables, (f)Filipino Skepticism towards China: The loophole of Soft Power Theory, which looked into the PSA's data on Filipino's overall view on China under the Duterte administration, (g) Philippine and China's Foreign Policy: "Charm Offensive" as the Independent Variable, which looked into the foreign policy between the countries and finally,(h) Stronger Partnership: The Effect of Chinese Charm Offensive in the Sino-Philippine Relations which concludes all data presented as such.

An Economic Partner: China's Foreign Investment in the Philippines

Studies have shown under the Xi Jinping administration that China has been pursuing another round of charm

offensive in the Asia-Pacific Region, wherein China has contributed US\$40 billion to set up a Silk Road Fund to "strengthen connectivity and improve cooperation in [China's] neighborhood (Poh & Li, 2017)," using its economy as a charm offensive toward its neighboring countries to attract cooperation and improve its soft power. However, China's charm offensive only started to kick off at the start of the Duterte administration, a staunch advocate of Sino-Philippine relations. It was due to

China isolates the Philippines from the Belt and Road Initiative, a project of China regarding its charm offensive (Zhang, 2015). It can be seen in the data provided that his predecessors' administration received less due to the numerous diplomatic clashes between the Aquino administration's Philippines and the People's Republic of China at



Figure 2. Total Approved Investments from China to the Philippines

It can be gleaned from the data above that the total approved foreign investment per year under the Duterte

administration was more extensive compared to the Aquino administration. The lowest total approved foreign investment under the Aquino administration in 2013 reached the value of 1240.9 million USD compared to the previous year's foreign investment of 7018.8 million USD. It may have been attributed to the shaky relationship between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of the Philippines (RP) under the Aquino administration. Wherein it was under the new administration of Xi Jinping, China has become much more aggressive in pushing for its national interests. With the new administration, China has put forward its national core interests, which it is willing to protect while thrusting for 'peaceful development' (Zhang, 2015). Furthermore, in the same line of thought, China has changed its approach toward its foreign policy, wherein its commitment to 'peaceful development' has now been based on the condition of reciprocity. Thus, for a Chinese commitment to 'peaceful development,' other countries must do so likewise (Zhang, 2015).

The scarce foreign investment under the Aquino administration may be attributed to the carrot-and-stick strategy of the Chinese Foreign Policy that it has adopted under the Xi Jinping administration. Wherein it has graced Southeast Asian countries with the benefits of the Chinese charm offensive with the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative and economic benefits; however, China has also utilized its sheer economic size to coerce a carrot-

and-stick approach towards the Philippines, such as in the banana war of 2012 as a response to the Philippines legal action towards the South China Sea Dispute (Russel & Berger, 2020; Thu, 2018). The data gathered above shows that from 2012-2016, Chinese foreign investment towards the Philippines has been inconsistent, wherein there was a downtrend of foreign investments to the Philippines in 2012 and 2014 and an upward trend of foreign investments in 2013.

The radical foreign policy move of the Duterte administration, which opted for strong Sino-Philippine economic relations at the expense of the Philippine-US military alliance and the Philippine arbitral ruling awarded to the Philippines under UNCLOS, offset the trend. Former President Duterte at the time declared that the July 12 Permanent Court of Arbitration Award to the Philippines is purely a bilateral issue between the Philippines and China, which echoes China's position on the matter; this is to win the confidence of China that the Philippines is willing to pursue 'peace' in accordance to China's conditional term of reciprocity for 'peaceful development' (Zhang, 2015). After several state visits of the Duterte administration to China, as well as the first-ever state visit of China's head of state in the last thirteen years, as a part of President Xi Jinping's round of three state visits after he visits the 26th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting. In his [Duterte] state visits to China along with several businesspersons in tow, he was able to secure several economic deals

and agreements that would allow for Chinese investments to flow into the country, wherein after his few meetings with President Xi Jinping, he [Duterte] agreed to the stressed need for practical bilateral cooperation between the two disputing countries (Castro, 2020).

Accordingly, the Duterte administration, in its efforts of rapprochement and establishment of Sino-Philippine economic ties, has received a generous amount of total approved FI from China, coming in at 1519.1 million USD in 2016 and has been steadily increasing, wherein it saw a total of 2333.9 million USD in 2017 and 2018, foreign investments to the Philippines has seen an enormous jump to 50692.6 million USD and finally in 2019 has seen 88674.6 million USD, all under President Duterte's term.

Data sets have shown that the Duterte administration, which has pursued closer cooperation and economic ties with the People's Republic of China, has received gargantuan-approved foreign investments. From this, it can be inferred that China utilized its charm offensive, being the BRI, and economic partnerships to attract the Philippines under the Duterte administration. The attractive Chinese charm offensive made itself favorable to the Philippines, to the point that the Philippines has become apathetic to China's actions in the South China Sea. It also shows that China's charm offensive has successfully established cooperation between the two countries.

China as a Friend: The Increasing Official Development Assistance of China to the Philippines

China has recently pursued relevant efforts to establish deeper connections with the Philippines. This deeper connection was due to a shift in the foreign policy of former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte. However, achieving the current status quo took many years and compromises. Based on the data presented below, it is evident that China has been consistently increasing its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the Philippines since the onset of the Duterte administration.

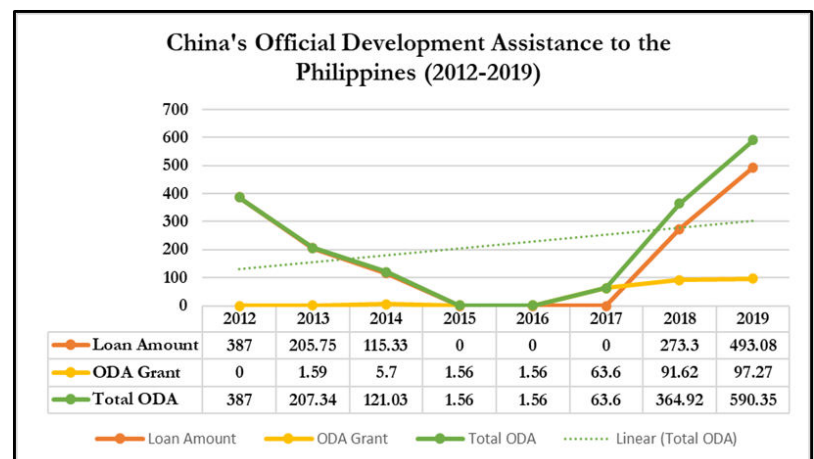


Figure 3. China's ODA to the Philippines

In 2012, the Philippines had a severe conflict with China due to the arbitration case filed by the Philippines to gain legal sovereignty over the disputed islands within the West Philippine Sea. From the empirical data presented above, one can notice that the Official Development Assistance (ODA) for the Philippines declined in 2012. In the worst case, due to the territorial

disputes, the Philippines received only 1.56 Million US\$ from China's ODA grant in 2015 and 2016. However, when former President Duterte came into office, China's Official Development Assistance increased again. From 1.56 Million US\$ in 2016, the Philippines received 590 Million US\$ of total Official Development Assistance from China in 2019. The comprehensive Official Development Assistance (ODA) from China in 2019 is the highest from 2012 to 2019.

Gratitude is one of the endeavors of the Chinese charm offensive. The increasing Official Development Assistance (ODA) of China is an apparent effort of China to impose gratitude on the Philippines. One of the possible consequences of this gratitude is favors and compromises from the Philippines. Indeed, increasing China's ODA is a great tool to project that they are an ally of the Philippines. Moreover, China's ODA is geared toward building a better image within the international system.

A Culture of Gratitude: China's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in the Philippines

Studies have shown that it is a recent trend in disaster-prone and conflict-ridden regions to be a hotspot of International Aid and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Risk Response or HA/DR wherein countries such as Japan, China, and the US would be sending peacekeepers, donations, and Naval ships to perform humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations in the said region or country.

It is a way to build soft power among those they helped through the *Benign* nature of HA/DR that would build indebtedness of the receiving country towards the host country, which would be an avenue for the host country to forge an affinity with the recipient country.

The case of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) donations to the Philippines reflected the relations between the two states at that time, whether the PRC donated to the Philippines or not. Relations between the Philippines and the PRC during the Aquino administration, for example, were shaky due to several issues, of which the most contributing factor would be the South China Sea dispute, which the Philippine administration under the Aquino administration filed legal action against the PRC to the International Tribunal Court, for them to be the arbitrator to which the PRC did not attend, this shaky and even tense relationship reflected in 2012 and 2013 when China seized a shoal under Philippine jurisdiction in 2012 and when the Aquino administration filed a legal action the following year. Wherein in 2012, PRC donations during Typhoon Pablo amounted to only 200,000 USD (DFA, 2012), while in 2013, Chinese donations during Typhoon Haiyan amounted initially to 100,000 USD, which was criticized by several international organizations and a Chinese newspaper, increasing their donations to at least 200,00 USD in cash and 1.4 million pesos in relief supplies (Perlez, 2013).

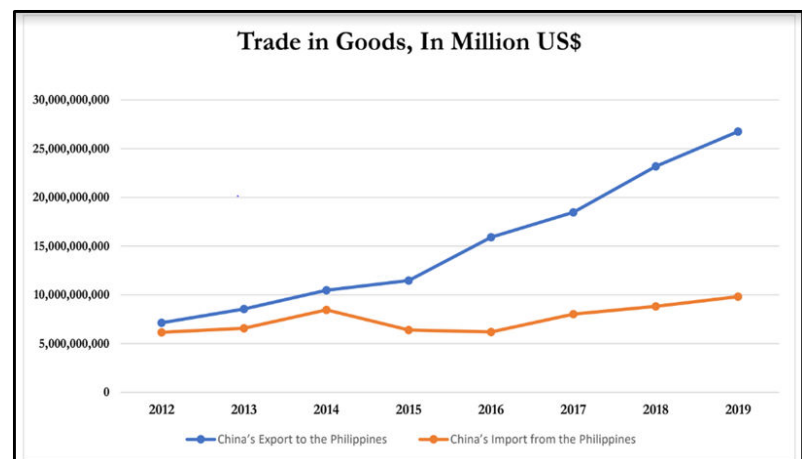
In contrast, the Duterte administration, with his radical foreign policy of appeasement, wherein he established a much better connection with China by downplaying the arbitration of the International Court in favor of the Philippines in the South China Sea issue and promoting Pro-China policies was a recipient of the PRC's gracefulness. In the first year of the Duterte administration, during Typhoon Lawin, the country received a total of 90 million pesos in monetary aid from the PRC (Custer et al., 2021); in the following year, the Philippines received humanitarian assistance from China in response to the Surigao earthquake worth 1-million dollars, according to the Philippine Daily Inquirer (2017); military equipment, and other types of equipment worth 3.3 million dollars in rifles in response to the blocking of sales by the U.S. government in response to human rights abuse allegations to the Duterte administration as a result of the war on drugs as reported by Reuters (2018); the monetary aid in response to the Marawi siege, which was fought between ISIS-inspired Maute fighters and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, as reported by the DFA (2022); as well as 5.1 Million pesos in aid for Typhoon Urduja in December in that same year as reported in the website of the Peoples Republic of China Embassy to the Philippines (2017).

The enormous disparity in donations and interaction between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Philippines under the two administrations shows how the PRC utilized hard resources like monetary

aid, medicine, and equipment to generate and improve its soft power. In this case, the benign aspect of soft power, wherein indebtedness from the Philippines towards the PRC is established, in which case, friendship and cooperation as well. It would better reflect in the public's trust rating of the PRC and even the willingness of elites to cooperate with the PRC in definite fields, such as trade.

China as the Biggest Trade Partner of the Philippines

The status of Sino-Philippine relations is becoming warmer and more robust. This more substantial relationship is manifested in the recent economic trends between the Philippines and China, particularly in trade. The data gathered for this study reveals that from 7.1 Billion US\$ in 2012, China's export to the Philippines surmounted the amount of 26.7 Billion US in 2019. This particular phenomenon happened within just eight years. Notably, the trajectory of China's export to the Philippines has been stable even if there is a territorial dispute between the two concerned countries.



**Figure 4. Trade Statistics Between
Philippines and China**

This average increase is relatively small compared to the 3.8 billion US\$ average increase in 2016-2019. In this observation, the average rise of China's exports from 2012-2015 is heavily affected by the critical Sino-Philippine relations due to the South China Sea issue, which former President Benigno Aquino III heavily contested. On the contrary, there is empirical evidence that when President Rodrigo Duterte shifted its foreign policy toward China, which created stronger Sino-Philippine relations, China opted to increase its exports to the Philippines by an average of 3.8 billion US\$.

On the other hand, the study also analyzed the economic data of China's imports from the Philippines from 2012-2019. Evidently, from 2012-2014, there was a positive trajectory in China's imports from the Philippines, which manifested through 6.1 billion US\$ imports in 2012 up to 8.4 Billion US\$ in 2014. However, this positive trajectory was disrupted from 2014-2015. Based on the data presented in this study, there was a decline in China's imports from the Philippines, manifested through 8.4 US\$ imports from 2014 down to 6.1 billion US\$ at the onset of 2016. This decline is attributed again to the territorial dispute between the Philippines and China. It was in 2014 that the Philippines formally submitted a case against China in the arbitration of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, the situation changed after Duterte came

into power. When Duterte shifted his foreign policy toward China, data suggests that China's imports from the Philippines increased from 6.1 billion US\$ in 2012 to 9.8 Billion US\$ in 2019.

Generally, despite these phenomena, the Philippines is not profiting from trading with China. Empirical data reveals that the Philippines imports massively from China, with 27.6 billion US\$. On the most remarkable contrary, China, the most significant trading partner of the Philippines, has low imports translated in the amount of 9.8 Billion US\$. With this, it is notable the Philippines is willing to lose a tremendous amount of money from trading with China.

In this study's context, the Chinese charm offensive is responsible for maintaining this economic relationship. The Philippines is unwilling to decrease imports from China because there is a possibility that the investments and donations of China for the Build Build Build Project may be negatively affected. In this phenomenon, China utilizes hard resources to increase its soft power through economic relations and investments to maintain admiration and instill a debt of gratitude to the Philippines.

**Regression Analysis: Understanding
the Correlations of the Variables**

To better comprehend the effect of the Chinese charm offensive on the context of challenging diplomatic relations between the Philippines and China due to the existing territorial dispute, we conducted a regression analysis to see

the correlations between the dependent (exports, imports, ODA, and FI) and independent variable (Chinese charm offensive). In this regression analysis, we assigned a value to the Chinese charm offensive with an increment of 1000 per year because of the trend that this particular Chinese diplomatic strategy has been in a stable increase during the scope year of the study, which is from 2012-2019. This steady increase is depicted on the broken line of each graph. Presented below are the results of the conducted regression analysis.

Table 1. Regression Table of China's Export to the Philippines

| SUMMARY OUTPUT | China's Export |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Regression Statistics</i> | |
| Multiple R | 0.984980535 |
| R Square | 0.970186654 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.964223985 |
| Standard Error | 1288.897081 |
| Observations | 7 |

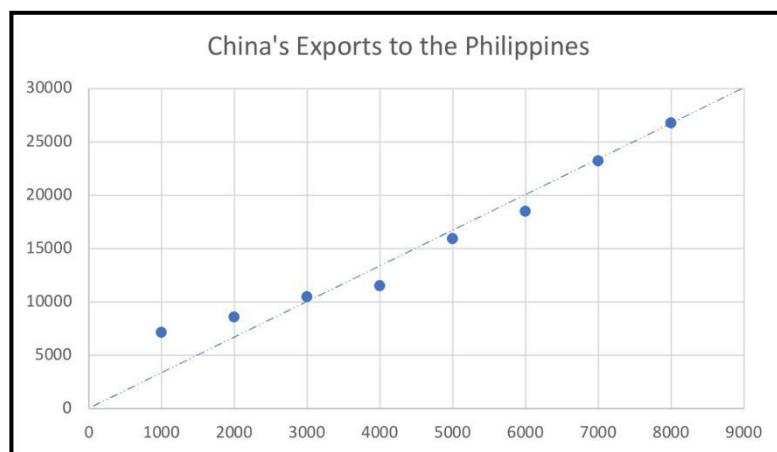


Figure 5. Regression Graph of China's Export to the Philippines

Of all variables in this study, the Chinese exports to the Philippines manifested the strongest positive correlation with the Chinese charm offensive, with a numerical result of .985. Based on this, as far as Chinese exports are concerned, the Chinese charm offensive has been successfully implemented in the Philippines. This result manifests that the Chinese charm offensive has been effective because as China implements CCO towards the Philippines, the Philippines is inclined to import Chinese products. Through these economic relations, China benefits significantly from the Philippines because of the enormous profits from exporting products to the Philippines. Furthermore, the R Square result of .97 means that 97% of the data on Chinese exports falls on the regression line.

Table 2. Regression Table of China's Import from the Philippines

| SUMMARY OUTPUT | China's Import |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Regression Statistics</i> | |
| Multiple R | 0.666402229 |
| R Square | 0.444091931 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.332910317 |
| Standard Error | 1136.428416 |
| Observations | 7 |

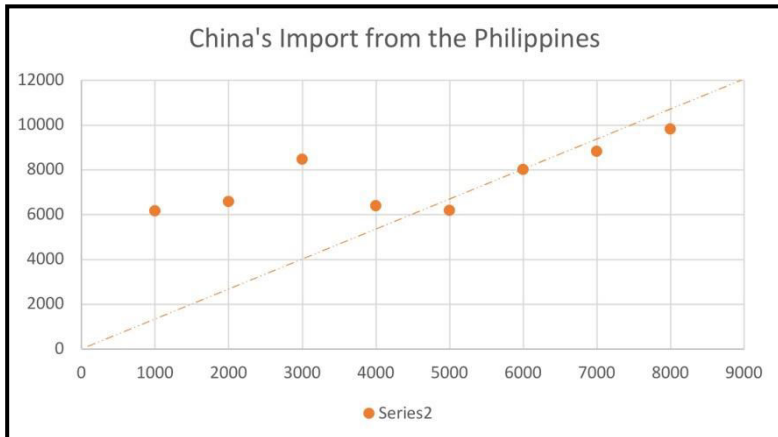


Figure 6. Regression of China's Import from the Philippines

Meanwhile, China's imports from the Philippines depicted a Multiple R of just .666. This numerical depiction means that Chinese import has a weaker correlation than China's exports to the Philippines. This regression result also proves the effectiveness of the Chinese charm offensive in the Philippines. In this data, the asymmetrical trade relationship between the Philippines and China is caused by the Chinese charm offensive because, under this relation, China is not compelled to import from the Philippines.

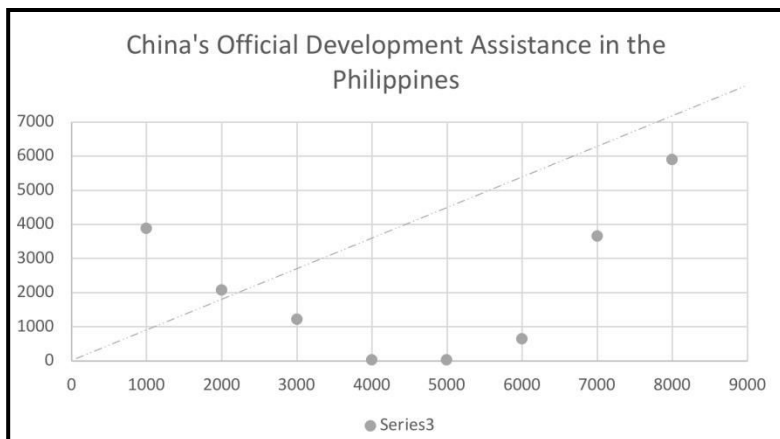


Figure 7. Regression Graph of Chinese ODA to the Philippines

Table 3. Regression Table of Chinese ODA to the Philippines

| SUMMARY OUTPUT | Total ODA |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Regression Statistics</i> | |
| Multiple R | 0.603644556 |
| R Square | 0.36438675 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.2372641 |
| Standard Error | 1896.296306 |
| Observations | 7 |

Consequently, concerning the Official Development of China to the Philippines, it resulted in a Multiple R of .603, proving an effective Chinese charm offensive strategy. This is because despite the increasing and warmer diplomatic relations between the Philippines and China during 2012-2019, the Official Development Assistance of China to the Philippines has been unstable. Moreover, despite the favors the Philippines is giving China, the said country was not listed as the top donor of Official Development Assistance in the Philippines.

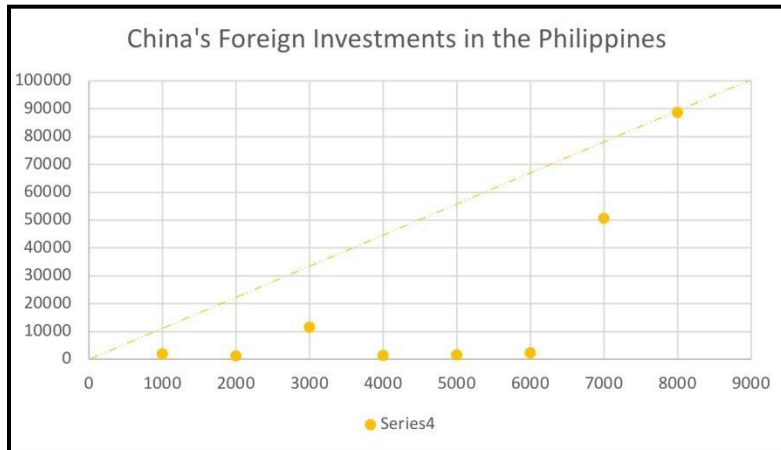


Figure 8. Regression Graph Approved Foreign Investments of China to the Philippines

Table 3. Regression Table of Chinese ODA to the Philippines

| SUMMARY OUTPUT | China's FI |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Regression Statistics</i> | |
| Multiple R | 0.769614815 |
| R Square | 0.592306963 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.510768356 |
| Standard Error | 23954.40224 |
| Observations | 7 |

Lastly, the foreign investments of China in the Philippines garnered a modest Multiple R of .77. With this statistical result, it could mean two things. First, it means that the Chinese charm offensive has been effective in the Philippines because it has influenced the country to accommodate (or even prefer) more Chinese businesses in the Philippines. It could be empirically backed by the increased presence of Chinese businesses within and outside the

National Capital Region, like the Aseana City in Paranaque. On the other hand, it could mean that the Chinese charm offensive is ineffective because the Philippines may have influenced China to increase its foreign investments in the country.

Through the assistance of Regression Analysis, this study established an empirical correlation between the dependent (exports, imports, ODA, and FI) and independent variable (Chinese Charm Offensive). However, the effectiveness of the Chinese charm offensive is impossible to measure through the lens of quantitative methods. The Chinese charm offensive is a topic that requires a particular qualitative analysis for a thorough comprehension of the complexities of the topic.

Filipino Skepticism towards China: The loophole of Soft Power Theory

Joseph Nye, Jr, the prime author of soft power theory, argued that one's soft power's effectiveness could be objectively measured through things related to perception, like trust ratings. However, this standpoint of Nye, Jr. was contested by numerous scholars parallel with the development of the Soft Power theory. In this section, the researchers will explore how Filipino trust ratings evolved over time through various Sino-Philippine issues. Moreover, the researchers will also argue why perceptions or trust rating is a big loophole in Soft Power theory as a conclusive section of the data interpretation of this study.



Figure 9. Net Trust Rating of China in the Philippines

In 2012, when the Philippines was still under the leadership of late President Benigno Simeon Aquino, III, the Philippines had a Scarborough Shoal stand-off with China. The Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey found that China had a -20-trust rating from Filipinos. According to the classification of the SWS survey, this number falls under the category of 'poor' trust rating. Consequently, Filipino trust ratings toward China increased minutely from -20 in 2012 to -17 in 2013. As the year progressed, Filipino trust rating toward China declined adversely to -44 in 2015 compared to -17 in 2013. In 2015, the arbitration court released its first unanimous decision in favor of the Philippines concerning the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In the same year were the final moments of late President Benigno Simeon Aquino III in office. The fate of the arbitral case will now depend on who will be the successor of the seat of Chief Architect of Philippine Foreign Policy. Similarly, Beijing's trust rating will depend on

how the next president will navigate Sino-Philippine Relations.

In 2016, former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte ascended as the most powerful person in the Philippines. Consequently, Duterte pursued a different foreign policy compared to his predecessors. Former President Duterte pursued relevant efforts to establish a stable and more friendly relationship with Beijing. As a result, from a -44 (bad) Filipino trust rating toward China to a +9 (neutral) at the end of 2016. It is the highest increase in China's trust rating within this study's 2012-2019 scope. As the year progressed, there was a decline from +9 to +7 in 2017. The Filipino trust rating decline toward China continued in 2018, translating to a -7 and a -33 in 2019. However, despite the negative trust rating of Filipinos toward China, former President Duterte continued to pursue more amicable relations with China, expecting the Philippines to benefit from this sooner.

The trust rating of the Filipinos towards China, as the data shows, denotes the ineffectiveness of Chinese soft power in changing the perception to a more positive outlook; this may have been caused by different factors that stem from past historical events, current events, and cultural perceptions that have long been ingrained despite efforts between governments to interact and collaborate and or the establishment of cooperation between the two countries, which may come in various forms, such as trade, technological, academic, and cultural exchanges. However, data also shows that despite the negative trust

rating of the public towards China, it does not change elite interaction towards China and that instead, the charm offensive of China, which comes in various forms such as foreign investment, official development assistance, and trade, has invited the cooperation of Filipino elites with China, showing how despite having a soft power deficiency, China still has its hard power as its power currency that helps incite cooperation among states of different values and ideologies to interact and collaborate with it.

Philippine and China's Foreign Policy: "Charm Offensive" as the Independent Variable

China's foreign policy under the Xi administration has, for the most part, changed from its predecessor's foreign policy, in which, under the Hu Jin Tao administration, there was a focus on the peaceful development rhetoric, wherein China has substantially increased its relationship with the "outside world" through their so-called 'charm offensive' diplomacy, most seen in their expansion of trade and economic ties as well as the increasing engagement with regional institutions (Zhang, 2015). Nevertheless, the Xi administration altered this, wherein while there has been stress towards its promise of a peaceful rise or development, there have been three fundamental changes. First is China's pronounced determination to forcefully protect China's national interests, wherein it is the first time that a Chinese administration has linked the so-called peaceful rise to its protection of national interests, giving the impression that

China would not sacrifice its core national interests for the sake of maintaining peace. Second, Chinese commitment to a peaceful development policy has become conditional and is premised on reciprocity. According to Xi, only when all countries are committed to peace will countries be able to co-exist peacefully (Zhang, 2015). Third and last is a more proactive and coordinated approach to create and shape a stable external environment that serves China's domestic development (Zhang, 2015). At the same length, the Xi administration is continuing its past predecessor's use of soft power diplomacy to help cultivate relations with countries worldwide. Through its soft power diplomacy, China has obtained good results in developing countries, most commonly in Latin America and Africa, using their investments in infrastructure development. It is concluded that China will continue its soft power diplomacy and "charm offensive" to improve its image and expand its power of influence. China's charm offensive and its concurrent mechanisms have then been improved and even renewed, wherein under the Xi administration, China is pursuing another round of charm offensive in the Asia-Pacific region. China has contributed US\$40 billion to establish a Silk Road Fund to strengthen connectivity and cooperation between China and its neighbors. This initiative is predicted to enhance and or boost maritime connectivity and provide substantial investment opportunities for Chinese and foreign companies, focusing on infrastructure,

manufacturing, and service sectors (Poh and Li, 2017).

From the data gathered, the Chinese charm offensive in the Asia-Pacific region has considerably affected the Duterte administration's foreign policy choices, resulting in the distancing of the Duterte administration from the United States, its traditional ally, and has instead conducted its own diplomatic choices free of US influence, which seeks to establish a bilateral connection between China and the Philippines. In the most basic understanding of soft power, it is the power to attract states toward the wielder of soft power, wherein the Chinese charm offensive is employed to attract countries and have them align with China's foreign policy. In the Philippine context, due to the conflicts under the Aquino administration, the Philippines were excluded or isolated by China under the Xi administration, even encouraging other countries to do the same (Baviera & Arugay, 2021); this has put the Philippines most especially under the Duterte administration left behind the rest of Southeast Asia, as they are enjoying investments under the Chinese led initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative. The fear of exclusion from such an initiative caused the Duterte administration to embark on an appeasement strategy toward China that would allow the country to establish bilateral diplomacy between the two states (De Castro, 2019).

Philippine foreign policy under the Duterte administration was mired with tirades against the West. During this

period, the chief architect of Philippine foreign policy has used profanities against Western world leaders, most especially against US President Barack Obama. Consequently, the Duterte administration has then embarked on the said China appeasement strategy, wherein on Duterte's acceptance of his rotating chairmanship of ASEAN, has said in his speech that the president was not ready to terminate its relationship with the United States; however, he is committed to intensifying diplomatic relations with China and Russia (Heydarian, 2017). This rhetoric was the hallmark speech that has significantly diverted Philippine foreign policy strategy.

Under this new foreign policy of the Duterte administration, manifestations of the successes of the China charm offensive are evident in the willingness of the Philippines to set aside the current territorial dispute between the Philippines and China in exchange for bilateral relations. The willingness of the Philippines to downplay the Arbitral ruling in favor of the Philippines shows how committed the Philippines is to peace to assure China that it is committed to establishing a diplomatic approach that does not impede on China's national core interests. It is about the Xi administration's new form of foreign policy under the Xi administration wherein Chinese commitment to peaceful development is conditional to the extent that it is based on reciprocity. The Philippines must willingly set aside issues with China to be able to participate in any form of bilateral relationship with China and

join in on the Belt and Road initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative is the most significant tool of China for its charm offensive, as it can attract countries in need or interested in the economic opportunities and investment present in the said initiative. The said initiative would allow the Duterte administration to fulfill its promises during his campaign of economic rejuvenation, which the previous administration was unable to do. According to De Castro (2019), President Duterte noted that the Belt and Road Initiative is a beneficial mechanism to boost the economic growth of the Philippines.

In this context, the Philippines must soften its approach towards China and its existing disputes to increase economic cooperation between the two countries. Based on this, Philippine foreign policy has immensely changed from the Duterte administration's predecessor, which focused on a confrontational approach, established with its close ties to the US and is characterized by its arbitral ruling win against China and its illegal nine-dash-line. The Duterte administration downplayed the 2016 UNCLOS awards to the Philippines and met President Xi Jinping to solicit Chinese loans. President Duterte also toned down the South China Sea dispute when the Philippines hosted the 27th ASEAN Summit in 2017 (De Castro, 2019). Through these efforts, the Duterte administration was able to secure Chinese loans for infrastructure for the Duterte administration's 'Build, Build, Build' program.

Due to the said rapprochement under the Duterte administration, China has also reciprocated in kind, with the opening of bilateral cooperation between the two countries through trade, investments, and state visits by high-profile politicians such as President Xi Jinping himself. In 2018, as a part of a three-country Asia Pacific tour, President Xi Jinping visited the Philippines as a last stop after visiting Papua Guinea and Brunei, after he attended the 26th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2018). President Xi Jinping thus said that the *"said visit will cement the traditional friendship, deepen the mutually beneficial cooperation and enhance the joint efforts of China and the Philippines for common development"* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2018).

The visit is a huge turnabout to the once-cold relationship between China and the Philippines. The said visit was unprecedented as this was the first visit of a Chinese head of state to the Philippines after (13) thirteen years. One manifestation of cooperation established as tensions were eased between the two was the signing of an agreement to explore oil and gas reserves in the South China Sea, which was the hotspot of conflicting territorial interests, of which China and the Philippines were one of the two participating claimants along with others, this was despite it being ruled as unconstitutional by the Philippine Supreme Court in 2005 (Khaliq, 2023). Another foreign policy

change the Duterte administration made was to distance itself from the United States, its traditional military ally and China's main threat in the Asia-Pacific region. Under the Duterte administration, the Philippines has downgraded its Philippines-U.S. Security arrangements in favor of Philippine-Chinese economic ties (De Castro, 2019). It was most evident in the cancellation of joint patrols between the Philippine Navy and the US Navy in contested areas in the South China Sea, as well as the kicking out of US SF present in Mindanao, offering technical assistance to the Armed Forces of the Philippines in its efforts to curb insurrection and terrorism in Mindanao. While there were reservations about the statements of President Duterte regarding his statements of independent foreign policy, this was made certain by the Department of National Defense, Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who stated that the Philippines would put on hold the current military engagements of the AFP and the US Navy, wherein Joint Patrols, Military Exercises would be put on hold, as well as the asking to leave off the 107 US troops in Southern Mindanao (The Guardian, 2016). Furthermore, according to De Castro (2019), this has signified the willingness of the Philippines to pursue a softer approach regarding the South China Sea dispute, as the US is considered the chief adversary of China in the South China Sea.

From the gathered data above, it is evident that the Chinese charm offensive has been successful in attracting and or influencing Philippine

foreign policy, wherein the benefits of a bilateral economic relationship with China, as well as the benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative of China, was much weightier in terms of benefits for the Philippines under the Xi administration, resulting in the downplaying of the UNCLOS arbitration ruling in favor of the Philippines, as well as the downgrading of the Philippine-US military alliance to be able to secure China's attractive investments, cooperation, and friendship.

Stronger Partnership: The Effect of Chinese Charm Offensive in the Sino-Philippine Relations

China's efforts in the charm offensive have its goals, one of which, according to Kurlantzick (2007), is the shift of influence on a regional level from the West, mainly the US, towards China. In the Philippine context, in which US or Western influence is dominant, a change in favorability to China over the West would signify a shift in the balance of power between the US and China in terms of influence. Wherein through FI's, ODA, and other tools of the Chinese charm offensive, they would try to gain a significant impact on Philippine foreign policy choices. From the data gathered, if one were to look into the FI and ODA, the massive increase and growth of Chinese investments and assistance to the Philippines started during the Duterte administration, as well as the pro-China sentiment and rhetoric of former President Duterte, it has shown that Beijing's influence is growing in the Philippines. Furthermore, the immense

gap between Philippine imports from China and its exports toward China, wherein the Philippines is on the negative in trade with China, shows that the Philippines is willing to lose in trade in exchange for a cooperative relationship with China.

In the past decades, China has conducted relevant efforts to alter its negative perception in the international community. Beijing wants to build an image as nonthreatening. This study unveils some efforts China has been utilizing to amend its negative perception, particularly in the Philippines. Despite the existing territorial conflict with the Philippines, China has massively increased its Official Development Assistance allocation for the Philippines to generate a sense of gratitude from the recipient country. Consequently, to eliminate the aggressive image of China, they focused on economic aspects like increasing its foreign investment and intensifying trade relations with the Philippines. However, despite these benign efforts of Beijing, their trust rating from Filipinos is still low, highly due to their continuous efforts to assert their authority within the disputed territories. China is only successful in changing the perception of public officials from the Philippine government, allowing it to increase its influence. Furthermore, through the Chinese charm offensive, China has successfully prevented the Philippines from pursuing its successful arbitration case concerning the disputed territories within the South China Sea.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has effectively filled the research gap mentioned above as it contributed to the field by providing new perspectives on China's soft power through its charm offensive in the context of an existing territorial dispute. Under this study, the general research objective of the effects of China's charm offensive and its effects on the Philippine's diplomatic approach towards China and vice versa can be seen through its foreign policy under the Duterte administration as well as the economic relationship between the nations as can be seen as well in the data shown beforehand. Specifically, despite the inconsistencies in Filipino trust ratings towards China and the latter's attempts to charm offensives in the country, it is apparent that most of it applies at the top, mainly at the policy-making level. The study was also able to essentially characterize the evolving Sino-Philippine relations between the Aquino administration and the Duterte administration, with Philippine foreign policy at its core, and describe how China utilizes its charm offensive and its effectiveness, as shown beforehand in the data provided as manifested through foreign investments, official development assistance, and trade between the two countries.

This study proved that although there is a territorial dispute between the Philippines and China, it did not prevent China from executing relevant strategies to attract the Philippines, increasing Beijing's influence here in the

Philippines compared to the previous administrations. It manifests through the fostering of stronger ties between Beijing and Manila, as seen under the Duterte administration, despite the negative trust rating of the Filipino public towards China. Moreover, through the Chinese charm offensive, as seen regarding foreign policy, China has gained significant ground regarding relevant national security issues, such as successfully preventing the Philippines from pursuing its successful arbitration case concerning the disputed territories within the South China Sea.

Political Science as an academic discipline is always known for its ever-changing ideas and concepts that often contradict one another. This dynamic nature of the discipline also proves that the field is not static. Consequently, as evinced by the review of related literature of this study, the concept of soft power, which originated from Nye Jr., has been subjected to numerous criticisms and changes. Subsequently, this study would like to recommend some matters to develop how people understand Chinese soft power through its charm offensive. First, the study recommends including the pandemic years (2020-2022) in the treatment and analysis of data as soon as the concerned research and statistical institutions have updated data on the given variables. In this manner, one can also analyze how the pandemic affected China's enforcement of soft power strategies in the Philippines and how it generally affected Sino-Philippine relations. Second, this study recommends taking into account the

effects of Xi Jinping's administration and his "Wolf-warrior Diplomacy" and its effects on Chinese soft power and charm offensive, which is a style of coercive diplomacy employed under his administration. It would have adverse effects on China's soft power, but due to it being a recent phenomenon, the study was unable to include it in its variables due to a lack of data. Finally, the study recommends a revisit or further studies on China's soft power and its effects on Sino-Philippine Relationship in 5-10 years, as the results may change as time passes due to how soft power is a strategy in IR that usually takes a long time to ripen for the benefits to reap rather than in a short time like hard power.

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