

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Duterte's 'Pivot to China' and the Influence of the Public

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Abstract: The decline of the U.S. and the rise of China have been one of the main drivers of change in the foreign policy of the countries in East Asia. Although having been often called “hedging,” recent developments show more variation in states’ response in the region. President Duterte’s leaning towards China, possibly in response to the economic opportunities given by the Belt and Road Initiative, has reversed the predecessor’s position. This poses puzzles that demand explanations beyond the state-level analysis. This paper examines what accounts for the shift and whether it is sustainable. Although the Philippines’ foreign policy has traditionally been driven by the ruling elites, the election of President Duterte in 2016 has drawn renewed attention to the public as one of the domestic factors that influence foreign policy. Duterte’s pivot to China appears to be conflicting with the general sentiments of the public about the U.S. and China, but in line with their aspirations for economic prosperity, considering the potential economic benefits that China can offer. This paper argues that recent policies can be explained by the dominant sentiment present in East Asia called “econophilia” (Buzan & Segal, 1994), which refers to the prioritization of economic growth to the point that legitimacy comes from rising living standards. It contends that econophilia is not something imposed by the state, but it is a choice by society as well.

Keywords: Philippines-China-US relationship, hedging, South China Sea, Belt and Road Initiative, populism, public preferences and foreign policy, ASEAN

The election of Duterte on May 9, 2016, as the 16th President of the Philippines, came as a surprise to those who are familiar with elite-led politics in the Philippines. The election result was understood as a response of the Filipinos to the predecessor, Aquino’s failure to deliver the reform he promised. Duterte’s campaign pledge to “restore peace and order within three to six months by any means possible, including extrajudicial killings and a declaration of martial law” (Teehankee & Thompson, 2016, p. 125) appealed to the

broader public—not only to the poor, but also to the middle class and the educated—who were discontented by the incompetence of the Aquino administration to bring order, to provide necessary infrastructure, and to secure safety of the ordinary citizens (Teehankee & Thompson, 2016; Arugay, 2017). In this sense, Duterte’s drastic domestic measures, such as “war on drugs,” were well expected, but his turn to China, distancing the Philippines from the longest treaty ally, the U.S., was not. Keeping a low profile after

the decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in July 2016, which awarded the Philippines a complete victory over the disputes with China in the South China Sea, the newly elected President on a state visit to China declared his “separation from the United States” on October 20, 2016, and secured US\$24 billion in investment pledges to finance the infrastructure-building program called “Build, Build, Build” (Calonza & Yap, 2016). Some argue that this pivot to China was made possible due to the strong presidential system of the Philippines and high approval ratings of President Duterte (Ba, 2016). To what extent does the public support Duterte’s pivot to China amid the ongoing territorial disputes with China, and to what extent foreign policy that is not aligned with the preferences of the public is sustainable?

The Philippines faces two conflicting goals in dealing with China: territorial sovereignty and economic gains. Given the lack of resources to manage the risks coming from great powers, small countries in East Asia have responded to the rise of China’s economic power by hedging—for example, by engaging with China for economic cooperation, but by relying on the U.S. for security, rather than taking the risk of aligning with only one great power. However, since the global financial crisis in 2008/9, the decline of the U.S.’s influence and the assertiveness of China in the region have been more visible. The two great powers are competing for influence in the region. They exercise their hegemonic power by providing security or economic incentives, but, at the same time, by demanding smaller states’ loyalty.

This paper restricts its focus to the period after the global financial crisis in 2008/9 when, arguably, China became more assertive in international affairs (Johnston, 2013), which resulted in the escalation of the tensions between the U.S. and China. The power transition offers small countries challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the security uncertainties were created by a lack of U.S. commitment in the face of territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. On the other hand, rising China is offering both carrots and sticks (Wang, 2016) in the form of economic incentives for trade and investments in infrastructure, such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, hereafter), as well as aggressive claims over territories in the South China Sea.

The radical change of foreign policy from Aquino’s presidency to Duterte’s, nevertheless, occurred without

a comparable change at the systemic level in the region, which requires an exploration of other causes than systemic level power transition. Given the changing environment in the region, small countries such as the Philippines are to react, rather than act, to great powers in the region, and how they respond to this changing environment depends on the constraints they face domestically. This paper illustrates how foreign policymaking has been shaped by the great powers’ actions, at the same time, how it is constrained by domestic factors. Given the public’s preferences for the U.S. over China, public support for Duterte’s pivot to China may be eclipsing once economic benefits coming from China turn out to be less than expected.

Competing Views on International Relations of East Asia: The Puzzles

Post-Cold war East Asia has been peaceful, although it has been fraught with territorial disputes among different states (Pempel, 2010). In the presence of such threats of conflicts, nevertheless, East Asia has experienced the most notable economic development, raising the living standards of the people in the region. These are the puzzles that existing international relations theories cannot fully explain (Khong, 2014).

After the end of the Cold War, at the end of bipolarity, realists predicted disorder and increased conflicts, as the power vacuum created by the retreat of the Soviet Union from the region would be filled by other powers such as China, Japan, or India. Although none of them challenged the U.S. unipolarity in East Asia, China began to emerge with decades of double-digit GDP growth in combination with military spending expansion. Before the emergence of China, the U.S. played a hegemonic role in the region. The U.S.-led alliances and power projection into the region provided security, which lowered uncertainties due to security competition between China and Japan. The U.S. also built transpacific trade relations and opened its markets to East Asian exports and encouraged trade-oriented development (Ikenberry, 2016). This order has changed with the rise of China’s economic power. John Ikenberry (2016) described the current order in East Asia as “dual hierarchy”: a security hierarchy dominated by the US; and an economic hierarchy dominated by China. Countries in the region have relied on the U.S.-led alliance system called a “hub and spoke” system, but in most countries in East Asia,

China is the leading trade partner and major investor, replacing the U.S. Although the military capabilities of China are still far behind those of the U.S., it is China's assertiveness in the region based on economic power that raises concerns. With the rise of China, countries that have stakes in the region have begun to react to this power transition (Medeiros, Crane, Heginbotham, & Levin, 2008).

Existing theories cannot fully explain the developments in East Asia. Over the years, realism's prediction of alliance formation to balance the U.S., or arms racing has not been observed. Moreover, small states in Southeast Asia have not taken sides with either of the great powers in the region, the U.S., and rising China; instead, they tend to align with both of the great powers (Acharya, 2013; Khong, 2014). Likewise, liberal views also cannot explain why states in East Asia tend to have territorial disputes with China in the midst of deepening economic interdependence with the country, as liberals contend that mutual dependencies in trade, finance, and technology both raise the costs of conflict, lowering the incentives for war (Acharya, 2013; Khong, 2014).

Furthermore, the institutional developments in East Asia, mainly revolving around ASEAN, also are hardly explained by existing theories. Realism either dismisses the effectiveness of institutions or believes that order can be achieved through institutions only if one or more dominant status quo states have power or political will to enforce the type of world that benefits them. However, ASEAN, created and maintained by weak powers, has been playing an instrumental role in managing great powers as well as political transitions in the region (Ba, 2006, 2014; Goh, 2008, 2014). Liberals also find it hard to explain why widely heterogeneous states—in terms of political regimes, economic development, religion, and ethnicity—managed to maintain long-standing institutions in the absence of strong economic interdependence among the member countries during the Cold War. In the meantime, the sense of community with a shared identity in East Asia, in contrast with the constructivists' claims, does not appear to be strong enough to override the states' incentives to pursue material interests (Acharya, 2013).

In their discussion of international security in East Asia, right after the end of the Cold War, Buzan and Segal (1994) predicted that despite a "remarkable econophoria" in East Asia, the liberal optimism would not be necessary outcomes in the region (pp. 11-14).

They argued that an alternative perspective using the concept of "international society" to understand the future of security in East Asia (Buzan & Segal, 1994, pp. 15-17). Although their concerns over lack of democratization and less degree of region-wide economic interdependence, in particular in comparison to Europe, have been relevant, the economic deepening between the small countries in East Asia and China, if not among small countries in the region, has been prominent. Buzan and Segal (1994) were correct in pointing out how economic interests in terms of energy source can operate as a source of conflict, while increases in trade and finance can operate as deterrence of conflict (p. 13). The recent assertiveness of China and conflicts in the South China Sea between China and the neighboring countries are often explained in terms of energy security, as well as in nationalism (Fallon, 2015; Wang, 2016).

Recent studies on alignment behavior demonstrate that states show a wider range of policy options beyond the simple balancing-bandwagoning divide and run along a spectrum between the two (Ikenberry, 2016; Kuik, 2016). The diversity in alignment pattern in East Asia (Goh, 2016) demands a revisit of theory to explain the puzzles described above. The Philippines presents an interesting case in this regard. The next section illustrates an analytical framework to be adopted to discuss it.

Two-Level Politics and the Role of the Public

To explain what has driven Duterte's pivot to China and to gauge the influence of the public on Duterte's stance towards China, both international and domestic factors will be considered. There have been several attempts to address the heterogeneous responses to go beyond system-level elements. Neoclassical realism departs from neorealism's emphasis on systemic features and combines it with unit-level factors to explain state behavior (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016).

Foreign policy analysis emphasizes unit-level variables such as threat perception, national identity, ideology, and leadership (Hudson, 2013; Khong, 2014). Liberal approaches emphasize two-level analysis of considering both international and domestic factors (Putnam, 1988; Moravcsik, 1993). This paper attempts to expound the shift of the Philippine foreign policy from the state-society perspective by examining the

preferences and incentives of societal actors as well as domestic politics and institutions. Duterte's allegedly populist appeal opens a question on how much populist politicians are constrained by public demands. Thus, this study focuses on the preferences of the public and to what extent the public shape the foreign policy of the Philippines.

There have been studies separately focusing on either the influence of international systemic features on government's decision making, including foreign policy ("the second image reversed" by Gourevitch, 1978) or the impact of domestic factors on foreign policy (the two-level games approach pioneered by Putnam, 1988). Although the second image reversed approach is in line with the international-to-domestic causal connection, Putnam's (1988) two-level games framework deals with the opposite direction of "domestic-to-international half of the loop" (p. 433). The analytical framework this paper uses combines the two, which requires a drop of the state-as-unitary-actor assumption. Weak and small states such as the Philippines mostly react to changes in power transition in the region. Thus, the causal chain starts with structural features. Firstly, changes in the international and regional operating environment are examined. Then how these international and regional structural factors influence the domestic actors and whether and how they influence foreign policy will be examined.

This paper starts from the observation that the aspirations for economic prosperity or econophilia that are dominant in East Asia, including the Philippines, are critical in foreign policymaking (Medeiros et al., 2008, p. 97). However, an East Asian country's policymaking has been analyzed by putting more focus on leaders and elites or the characteristics of governments. It is argued that East Asian governments "prioritize economic development over irredentist territorial claims and military freelancing" (Pempel, 2010, p. 221). Likewise, "East Asian rulers pivoted their political survival on economic performance, export-led growth, and integration into the global political economy" (Solingen, 2007, p. 760). The discussion on econophilia so far, in other words, has treated states as unitary actors without taking into account the preferences of the public in foreign policy decision making.

This paper factor societal preferences into foreign policy decision making. Two propositions are derived and discussed to understand the extent to which

societal preferences influence the foreign policy of the Philippines.

Proposition Societal Econophilia: Societal actors in a country put order and stability first, implying that any policies that would potentially disrupt social stability, which are harming economic activities, will not be supported by the public.

Proposition State-Response: In the case of preference misalignment between state and society, the state changes its policy so that they are in line with public preferences.

Depending on the state-society relations, which may be shaped by domestic politics and institutions, the results of the test of the propositions will vary. This paper argues that Philippine society demands policies that can boost economic prosperity, and the Philippine governments have responded to the demands in case the preferences of the state and society are not aligned.

This analytical framework is used to explain the Philippines' recent pivot to China. The Philippine case is interesting because Duterte's pivot to China is not fully explained by the systemic factors. In particular, the preferences of the state and society may not be aligned in the face of the decision between national security and economic benefits. Although former President Aquino opted for territorial sovereignty at the expense of economic opportunities, Duterte has chosen the potential economic gains offered by China by publicly distancing the country from the U.S. Although Duterte's domestic policies are widely supported by the general public, it needs further investigation on how much the public supports Duterte's position towards the U.S. and China. In this paper, the preferences of the Filipinos will be identified from several public surveys. By examining the policy choices by the Aquino and Duterte administrations, whether and how the public preferences have been translated into domestic and foreign policies will be discussed.

A Shifting Landscape Since 2008 and Philippines' Responses

The first part of this section discusses state-level responses of the Philippines to great powers in East Asia since the global financial crisis, and in the

second part, Philippine political institutions, societal responses, and whether and how they influence Philippine foreign policy are discussed.

The Influence of the Power Transition in East Asia

The declining U.S. and rising China is a systemic change that all the states in East Asia, including the Philippines, face. However, the Philippines has been meeting the challenges and opportunities more directly, as it has been involved in territorial disputes with China, at the same time, benefiting from economic cooperation with it. This presents an excellent opportunity to examine how the government and society of the Philippines have chosen between the two conflicting incentives towards China. Firstly, the power transition of declining U.S. and rising China is discussed, then how the Philippines has responded to China's confrontations in the South China Sea in the midst of increasing trade with China will follow. The limited role of the ASEAN as a mediator of disputes will also be discussed.

The global financial crisis in 2008/9 is often recognized as the tipping point when China became more assertive in the international scene (e.g., Johnston, 2013). Deepening and broadening economic interdependence that was brought about by globalization has led to the greater prominence of China as the leading Asian power, reinforced by three decades of annual double-digit economic growth, over two decades of annual double-digit military spending increase, and active diplomatic involvement in both bilateral and multilateral relations in the region. China became the world's largest manufacturer, largest trader, and the largest creditor nation, with over US\$3 trillion in foreign exchange reserves (Allison, 2017). In the meantime, countries in East Asia also have benefited from the economic rise of China with increased exchanges of goods and services, as well as financial transactions. Countries in East Asia have been increasingly integrated mainly through the deepening economic dependence, in particular, on China.

China used to follow Deng Xiaoping's instruction of keeping a low profile in world affairs and tried to assure the neighboring countries with the rhetoric of peaceful development/rise in fear of the creation of a counterbalancing coalition in the region. However, it began to be more assertive globally as well as regionally, pushing its national interests in various issues more boldly (Breslin, 2013; Johnston, 2013).

China's assertiveness began to raise concerns among the neighboring countries, in particular, among those countries that have been exposed to territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. After the overt clash between China's foreign minister and other countries, including Hilary Clinton in Hanoi in 2010, President Obama announced a set of initiatives in November 2011 that raised the priority of the Asia-Pacific in U.S. foreign policy, which became known as a pivot to Asia. It involved an evolving emphasis on military, economic, and diplomatic dimensions that were built on existing U.S. strengths. The Obama administration was focused, on the one hand, on advancing U.S. relations throughout the region, which at times were competitive with China. On the other hand, it sought to sustain close engagement with China to avoid significant U.S.-China frictions that would not be welcomed by Asian governments and would be contrary to U.S. interests in fostering regional stability (Obama, 2011).

China responded vehemently to Obama's pivot to Asia. China's efforts to spread its influence evolved in recent years from a strategy of mutual accommodation with other nations and peaceful development, to a more assertive China Dream (Breslin, 2013). In the meantime, neighboring countries in East Asia welcomed the U.S.'s enhanced engagement in the region, but the U.S.'s increasing trade deficit with China has weakened the incentives and capacities for the U.S. to engage in East Asia. The BRI that was announced in 2013 and the creation of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are the two main projects that demonstrate the shifts in China's stance to boost its influence in the region, by which China can pursue its national interests through the China-centered regional order (Fallon, 2015; Wang, 2016).

However, China's bold move began to backfire. The warnings of the Thucydides trap (Allison, 2017) appeared to have materialized into the U.S.'s trade war against China that the Trump administration has launched since 2018 by imposing tariffs and other trade barriers. The U.S. has been blaming China for its unfair trade-related practices and demanded to introduce laws to guarantee a level-playing field, including the protection of intellectual property. In the meantime, on October 5, 2018, the U.S. Senate joined the U.S. House of Representatives in passing the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development (or BUILD Act), a bipartisan bill creating a new U.S. development

agency—the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC). The new U.S. development finance institution (DFI) will help developing countries prosper while advancing U.S. foreign policy goals and enhancing U.S. national security interests (S. 2463, 2018). In May 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense published the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR) that outlines the U.S.'s priorities in the region. Broadly, the Indo-Pacific concept inherits much of the groundwork laid by the Obama administration's pivot or rebalance to Asia. The Trump administration in the IPSR declared that China is a "revisionist power," which is in contrast with the posture of the Obama administration that tried to avoid outright confrontation or competition with China. It emphasizes more cooperation with democratic countries in the region (US Department of Defense, 2019). Such strategic plans illustrate the U.S.'s intention to counteract the expanding influence of China in East Asia.

ASEAN used to have offered member states an additional strategic mechanism beyond U.S.-centric economic and security commitments (Ba, 2009). Historically, U.S.-related uncertainties have provided regular catalysts triggering states' interest in developing ASEAN mechanisms by which to manage great powers. Although the small ASEAN countries use "equibalancing," a form of soft balancing (Paul, 2005, p. 58 for definition) to adjust to China's emergence as a regional power, they prefer to retain their independence, and not to gravitate toward a China-centered order (De Castro, 2016a). Ba (2009) argued that ASEAN small countries aimed to strategically deter by bringing in the U.S. and Japan, at the same time, to diplomatically engage China in a complex relationship through an exercise of reassurance, persuasion, and socialization.

The capability of the ASEAN as a force of managing great powers (Goh, 2008), nevertheless, began to show its limitations. Although ASEAN, since the late 1990s, has enjoyed remarkable influence in providing the driving force behind East Asia in moderating some of the tensions in the region, the environment that fostered the effective ASEAN mechanism has been changing (Kraft, 2016). The most evident case of this argument can be found in the disputes in the South China Sea since 2010, over which members of the ASEAN showed different alignment with powers in the region. In the middle of the claim of freedom of navigation by the U.S. and China's claim of sovereignty over the South China Sea, division began to appear among ASEAN

members in the 2012 ASEAN Ministers Meeting in Phnom Penh in Cambodia, where the members failed to produce a consensus on a joint statement at the end of the meeting due to the disagreements on whether to mention issues over the South China Sea (Kraft, 2016).

In a sense, this need for a balance between great powers in the region explains why most states in East Asia adopt insurance policies of hedging in the face of the transition of power in the region (Kuik, 2016). Hedging is defined in this paper, following Kuik (2016) as

an insurance-seeking behavior under high-stakes and high-uncertainty situations, where a sovereign actor pursues a bundle of opposite and deliberately ambiguous policies vis-à-vis competing powers to prepare a fallback position should circumstances change. (p. 504)

Hedging is a strategic behavior that works for the best and prepares for the worst (Kuik, 2016). Hedging states avoid the tight and binding alignments in favor of diverse arrangements with various powers to support security and other state interests in the uncertain regional environment. In dealing with China, in particular, the states in the region have adopted a hedging strategy of "deep engagement accompanied by soft or indirect balancing against potential Chinese aggression or disruption of the status quo" (Goh, 2014, p. 469). For the ASEAN states, the uncertainties regarding the U.S.'s role in East Asia made it especially important to engage China and improve relations to mitigate the risk in the case of U.S. retrenchment (Ba, 2006, p. 163).

The Philippines was an exception to this trend of hedging in the region, particularly in terms of its response to the disputes with China in the South China Sea (Kuik, 2016, p. 504; Goh, 2016; Ikenberry, 2016). The Philippines has been under different circumstances from the other ASEAN states because it is a treaty ally with the U.S., and it faces territorial conflicts with China in the South China Sea. After years of equibalancing between China and the U.S. during Arroyo's presidency (2001–2010), the Philippines shifted its policy by challenging China's claim in the South China Sea and aligning itself with the U.S. The shift of President Aquino (2010–2016) to balance against China was a reaction in the face of the standoff at the Scarborough Shoal in 2012 (De Castro, 2016a,).

In 2012, there was a tense two-month standoff starting on April 10, between the two countries when China seized the Scarborough Shoal, and as a result, Filipino fishermen were denied access to the fishing grounds around the Scarborough Shoal. In the face of the escalating tensions with China, the Aquino administration took several actions. Firstly, the Philippine military spending increased to modernize their armies. It also resorted to the arbitration from the third party by filing a case with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague in January 2013. President Aquino's decision to go to an international court and balance against China, however, did not generate the expected military guarantees from the U.S., despite the favorable arbitration award three years later in July 2016.

The Philippines wanted greater involvement by the U.S. through Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that allows for the rotational presence of the U.S. and the construction of support facilities in selective Philippine defense bases (Baviera, 2016; De Castro, 2016a). As one of the two U.S. security allies and the only former U.S. colony in the region, the Philippines has had a Mutual Defense Treaty with the U.S. since 1951 and used to host U.S. bases for over 40 years after WWII until the early 1990s. A new Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in 1999 allowed the U.S. to resume ship visits and conduct large military exercises with Philippine forces. From 2002, U.S. combat forces were deployed to support troops fighting an insurgency in Mindanao. This revitalized Philippines-U.S. alignment during the Aquino era was focused on developing capabilities specific to countering Chinese incursions and defending Filipino claims in the South China Sea. However, during the tension with China over the Panatag Shoal, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the U.S. would not take sides in the territorial dispute between the Philippines and China (Trinidad, 2017). In the face of U.S.'s unwillingness to get involved in the confrontation with China in the South China Sea, President Aquino later made a deal with Japan for strategic partnership in 2015 (De Castro, 2016b; Trinidad, 2017) for an alternative source of military support for a potential military conflict with China in South China Sea. This position of balancing against China, nevertheless, has changed somewhat since President Duterte took office in June 2016.

Although initially expected to follow the predecessor's footsteps (De Castro, 2019), Duterte has been unraveling the position made by the predecessor and leaning towards China. Although President Duterte has been eager to make a bilateral deal with China on the disputes in the South China Sea to attract aid and loans from China, he has taken an ambiguous stance when it comes to the disputes in the South China Sea. President Duterte and his administration showed a low key welcome to the Philippines' legal victory at the PCA at The Hague on July 12, 2016, to strike a bilateral deal with China. Later on December 22, 2016, Duterte declared his readiness to set aside the PCA ruling (De Castro, 2019). He also is sending a mixed message on the recent collision between Philippine and Chinese fishing boats in the Recto Bank in the South China Sea on the evening of June 9, 2019, in that he has been criticizing China's confrontation, but also commented that the Philippines is not ready to go to war against China. In the meantime, the Philippines participated in joint military exercises with the U.S. and Japan and other security partners in the South China Sea (Heydarian, 2019b).

Two points demand special attention to understand Duterte's turn to China. Firstly, the U.S.'s failure to step in to defend the Philippines in the event of military confrontation with China in the Scarborough Shoal crisis in 2012 has made the Philippines resort to other means for security. For decades, U.S. allies, including the Philippines, have relied on U.S. security guarantees, but skepticism has been increasing in the Philippines as the U.S.'s influence has been declining in the region (De Castro, 2019). Secondly, China's assertiveness in economic development demonstrated in the BRI and the establishment of the AIIB, presented new incentives with states in the region, including the Philippines. By early 2017, President Duterte's efforts to appease China began to bear fruit. China committed US\$13.5 billion to facilitate economic cooperation between China and the Philippines, of which US\$9 billion was allocated for Philippines infrastructure development (National Institute for Defense Studies, 2017). The Duterte administration believed that China's BRI would complement the Philippines' Build-Build-Build project (Crismundo, 2019).

The Philippines' Two-Level Politics and the Influence of the Public

In the midst of the continued system-level pattern of declining U.S. and rising China, the shift in the Philippines' foreign policy from the Aquino administration to the Duterte's has taken place in the absence of comparable system-level reversal of global or regional politics. Although international factors undoubtedly affect the Philippine foreign policy decision-making, it does not fully explain the drastic shift in posture towards the two countries from Aquino to Duterte. This paper draws attention to the domestic structure of the Philippines to explain the foreign policy shift and focus on public preferences because the shift occurred without any changes in domestic institutions. The most significant change was the fact that the Filipinos chose Duterte as their president. Duterte's election indicated voters' repudiation of the previous government, which in turn can operate as a constraint to the current government.

The election of allegedly populist Duterte (Curato, 2017; Montiel, Boller, Uyheng, & Espina, 2019) has raised the question of to what extent the public preferences influence foreign policy. The recent territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea received a full spotlight in the media. As the conflicts with China are well-known and non-complex, the main task comes down to identifying whether societal preferences are aligned with the state's preferences and if they are not aligned, whether and how societal preferences translate into state's foreign policy to correct the misalignment. In this subsection, domestic institutions and some of the actors' interests will be discussed first, and then public preferences will be identified from recent surveys.

The strong presidential system in the Philippines, the first and most durable in Asia, has fostered highly personalized policymaking (Ba, 2016). "As a political institution, it has been rendered enough constitutional power to have a formal semblance of a "strong presidency" but not enough to totally control strategic interests in Philippine society" (Teehankee, 2016, p. 293). Weak party system and frequent party switching (Teehankee, 2012) which also occurred with the election of Duterte whose party was minority but became the majority in the Senate as of 2017 (Cook, 2018), together with weak judiciary (Atienza, 2019), have not managed to install a mechanism to check and balance the executive. Moreover, "a

combination of weak central bureaucracy and strong local autonomy" (Teehankee, 2012, p. 208) has resulted in "building local political dynasties that constantly negotiate political exchanges with the national political leadership through the president and Congress" (Teehankee, 2012, p. 208).

Thus, the policy-making has been influenced by local powers that have networks of "well-entrenched political clans," but "the vote for Duterte can be considered a protest vote" against the way the post-Marcos system favored the "political and economic elite over the interests of ordinary Filipinos" (Casiple, 2016, p. 180). The elite capture of political power can be seen in the 2016 presidential election, where only Duterte out of the five candidates, had no "substantive political link to the national political elite" (Casiple, 2016, p. 181). However, with the overwhelming victory in the midterm election in May 2019, President Duterte even further consolidated his position to "alter Philippine politics for generations to come" by securing a supermajority in both houses of the Philippine Congress" (Heydarian, 2019a).

Former President Aquino was elected with the pledge of good governance and eradication of corruption, yet, after six years' ruling, the Aquino administration did not manage to get the mandate from the constituents to continue to run the country, in particular, due to the unfulfilled reforms and infrastructure plans (De Castro, 2019). Although the confrontations with China in the South China Sea and the ruling by the PCA after three years of waiting could have mobilized the public's nationalistic sentiment against China in his favor, Aquino's failure to deal with corruption issues resulted in spreading the sense that the Aquino government was incapable of enforcing the law (Teehanhee & Thomson, 2016).

Therefore, despite the good macroeconomic records of economic growth with, for example, unemployment rates at an all-time low (decreasing throughout the Aquino era to around 6% in 2016), the economic benefits were not distributed across the population, resulting in discontent among many people. Duterte's pledge to bring order and stability by using "any means" led to his victory in the 2016 election (Casiple, 2016). In a sense, some of Duterte's drastic measures such as the war on drugs struck a chord with the public sentiments who dismissed the elites' failure to address the structural problems of the country. "The Duterte's victory signals a historic shift in Philippine politics,

towards a more inclusive democracy” (Casiple, 2016, p. 180).

In the meantime, China was offering the Philippines opportunities to meet Duterte's election pledges when it comes to infrastructure building. President Duterte sought Chinese assistance for the construction of drug-rehabilitation centers for Filipino drug dependents, soft loans for the constructions of railways in Mindanao, and even the acquisition of Chinese-made weapons for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (De Castro, 2016b).

His approach to the entrenched problem of corruption, including drugs, has raised concerns about the end of liberal reforms that have been pursued since the end of the Marcos era (Teehankee & Thomson, 2016). He harshly criticized President Obama's comments on the war on drugs, resulting in the cancellation of their meeting at the ASEAN summit in 2016 and, in the end, demanded the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Mindanao. On October 20, 2016, in Beijing, Duterte announced his intention of “separation from the United States.” In the meantime, he was eager to pursue economic cooperation with China. At the same time, he continues the military cooperation with Japan, a long-time rival of China. President Duterte was critical of Aquino's balancing strategy against China and declared his willingness to negotiate with China bilaterally over the South China Sea disputes and to pursue joint development of resources in the disputed waters and to build railroads in Mindanao in exchange for his temporary silence on the maritime dispute (De Castro, 2016b).

Despite the ardent support from the public, however, Duterte is not entirely without constraints in pursuing the policies he prefers. The pro-U.S. military, which removed two Filipino presidents in recent history (Heydarian, 2017), has not been wholly in line with the positions of the Duterte administration (Heydarian, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). The disagreements were found in dealing with the Mindanao issues and the disputes in the South China Sea (Bello, 2017; De Castro, 2019) when Duterte acknowledged that the military had bypassed him in asking the assistance from the U.S. (De Castro, 2019). Duterte, therefore, has to respect the views of the military. Indeed, he named retired officers to government posts (Atienza, 2019) and took several measures, including military modernization, to appease the “defense establishment” (Heydarian, 2017; the military spending was as high

over the Duterte presidency as that in the Aquino's era).

Due to the weak institutionalization of the Philippines, and heavily personalized politics (Baviera, 2012; Teehankee, 2012; Ba, 2016), the interaction between the international environment and domestic politics is less involved. Thus, this paper focuses on the underlying driving force of the change that put Duterte in the position of power, that is, the general public. Traditionally, Philippine foreign policy is not the realm that the general public takes an interest in and has been decided mainly by the elites (Medeiros et al., 2008; Montiel et al., 2019). Indeed, foreign policy was not the main agenda during Duterte's presidential campaign. In the rest of this section, the public preferences are identified from public surveys and test the two propositions: proposition societal econophoria and proposition state response.

Despite the widespread controversy overseas and the divisions inside, Duterte remains popular at home. As of 2018, nearly over two years into his presidency, one public poll reported that his approval ratings reached more than 80% (Pulse Asia Research Inc., 2018). Domestically, Duterte's policies also have been widely supported. One Pew Research Center's poll results showed that domestically, Duterte and his policies are widely popular. Eighty-six percent had a favorable view of Duterte himself, 78% supported his handling of the illegal-drugs issue, and 62% said that the Philippine government was making progress in its anti-drug campaign. Also, 78% believed the current economic situation was good, and 57% were satisfied with the economic policy of the country, a 21-percentage-point increase from 2014, the last time this question was asked in the Philippines (Poushter & Bishop, 2017). Duterte's domestic policies appear to be an econophoric governance that has been recognized to be dominant in East Asia.

Proposition societal econophoria can be tested by using the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS; collected in 2002, 2005, 2010, and 2014 in the Philippines with the sample size of more than 1,000). According to author's calculation from the ABS, around three-quarters of the Filipinos answered that “economic development is more important than democracy” (Hu Fu Center for East Asia Democratic Studies, 2014, p. 18) (around 77% in 2002, 73% in 2010, and 75% in 2014). To a similar question comparing in terms of economic inequality with political freedom in Wave 3

and 4, around 60% of people answered that reducing economic inequality is more important than protecting political freedom (56.34% in 2010 and 63.75% in 2014). However, over three-quarters of the Filipino people also believed that “democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government,” (Hu Fu Center for East Asia Democratic Studies, 2014, p. 18) with 75.75% agreeing with this statement in 2010 and 79.42% in 2014.

This preference for democracy, however, may have to be qualified by other questions on democracy. To a question on whether “democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society,” only 39.25% answered positively in 2002, but the positive answers increased later to 54.42% and 64% in 2010 and 2014, respectively. On the other hand, to a question about what form of the regime is preferred (democracy vs. authoritarianism), only 18.92% answered that “democracy is always preferable” in 2002, but a significantly increased number of people, 55% and 46.83%, answered so in 2010 and 2014 respectively. Interestingly, quite a proportion of people, albeit decreasing, 64.58% in 2002, 21.42% and 25.08% in 2010 and 2014 answered that “for people like me it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime.” One relevant finding is that 30.17% of the people in 2014 answered corruption as the most critical problem that the government should address when other economic issues, such as unemployment and poverty, were picked up as the most crucial problem by 19.92% and 11.58% for each.

From these, one can conclude that societal econophilia has been present in the Philippines, and proposition societal econophilia is true in the Philippines. The findings from the ABS indicate that although the Filipinos acknowledge democracy as the best form of government, they do not believe it is something that the government needs to pursue at the cost of economic development. Instead, economic issues are viewed as more important than democracy or political freedom. These observations can explain why the public supports Duterte. The significant concern about corruption, even over other economic issues, shows that Duterte’s measures to tackle corruption, such as the war on drugs, resonate with the public’s demands, in particular, after the disappointment of the previous administrations’ involvement in and failure to tackle some of the corruption scandals. Likewise, as long as the policies can bring opportunities for

economic development, the public is likely to support Duterte’s position regarding China.

To test proposition state response in relation to foreign policy towards the U.S. and China (i.e., whether the Duterte administration needs to adjust its foreign policy), public surveys can also be used to identify public preferences over the U.S. and China. The Aquino administration’s foreign policy showed a bias towards the U.S., whereas Duterte’s foreign policy is biased towards China. The poll by the Pew Research Center is helpful in identifying public preferences.

According to the same 2017 poll by Pew Research Center (Poushter & Bishop, 2017), people in the Philippines still liked the U.S. and had confidence in its leader. However, Filipinos’ attitudes toward China and its leader have not changed much since 2015. This attitude towards China can be confirmed in many cases, including the Philippines’ decline of China’s humanitarian assistance in the wake of Haiyan (Howe & Bang, 2017). As of spring in 2017, 78% in the Philippines had a positive view of the U.S., down from 92% who had expressed positive sentiment in 2015. In spite of these drops, people in the Philippines still supported the U.S. military presence in the region and said that the U.S. would defend them should they get into a conflict with China. Three-quarters said having U.S. military personnel based in the Philippines is a good thing for the country, and 68% assumed the U.S. would use military force to defend their country from China (Poushter & Bishop, 2017).

Amid the continuing support of the U.S. military backing for their nation, the Filipinos have softened their views on China. An increasing proportion of people acknowledged the importance of economic benefits from China. As of 2017, two-thirds said having a strong economic relationship with China is more critical than territorial sovereignty, whereas 28% said being tough with China on territorial disputes is more vital. This is a dramatic shift since 2015 when the same question was asked. At that time, the public was almost evenly divided between creating a robust economic relationship with China (43%) and being adamant about territorial conflicts (41%; Poushter & Bishop, 2017). This observation is, to some extent, in line with the findings by Montiel et al. (2019), who examined whether the populist Duterte’s shift in rhetoric regarding cooperation with China would shift Filipino Facebook users’ attitudes towards China. They found that the sentiments towards China shifted only

partly after several main events by Duterte regarding China, such as Duterte's visit to China and subsequent comments by him. In other words, the positions of the Duterte administration have influenced public views to some extent. Nevertheless, the same does not hold for the security issue where the public still prefers the U.S. as a security guarantor. In other words, the public prefers the hedging strategy that is liaising with the U.S. for security and China for economic benefits. This implies that Duterte's pivot to China separating from the U.S. is not reflecting societal preferences. According to proposition state response, therefore, the state will adjust its policy following societal preferences.

Conclusion: Duterte's Pivot to China – is it Sustainable?

Populism is not new in the Philippines; the previous populist president was impeached and ousted by the elites. What is new with President Duterte is his wide popularity across different sections of the population, encompassing from the poor to the middle class and the educated (Teehankee & Thomson, 2016). His high approval ratings throughout his term in office, despite the controversies over his draconic measures, such as the war on drugs, demonstrate the public's support for the current government's domestic policies. However, Duterte's pivot to China turned out to be misaligned with public preferences. According to proposition state response, the government will adjust the misalign policy, and indeed, it has been happening as can be seen in the changes in Duterte's position towards the U.S. and China as a presidential candidate, then as a newly elected President, and then most recently, in the wake of the Reed Bank collision in June 2019. Duterte's message was mixed towards China condemning China, but restraining himself in his condemnation. Although Duterte has been willing to attract China's investment in infrastructure, the Philippines also participated in joint military exercises with the U.S. and its other allies, including Japan.

The landslide victory in the presidential election offered Duterte the mandate to push forward the agenda he pledged. He has been able to continue to push some of the strong positions due to high approval ratings. Although Duterte's pursuit of economic benefits by engaging with China, in particular in the new infrastructure projects laid out by the BRI, would be

widely supported by the public, the public appeared to want the U.S. presence in the region and to rely on the U.S. for security. This implies that Duterte's pivot to China may not be enduring if China's guarantee of economic opportunities fails to materialize, possibly due to the recent system-level change in East Asia, that is, the trade war with the U.S. and its willingness to engage in the region. U.S.'s soft power edge in the Philippines also implies that once the U.S. offers economic opportunities in whatever forms, the public may demand a change of foreign policy to tilt towards the U.S. The various responses from both the state and society, to the recent collision at the Reed Bank on June 9, 2019, may indicate a possible division within the Philippine society regarding the issues on the South China Sea disputes with China, which will make the current stance of the Duterte administration towards China appear less tenable.

Finally, based on the discussion above, one may be able to argue that the dominant sentiment of econophilia across East Asian states and societies is the underlying cause of the puzzles identified in the literature. As the Philippine case illustrates, even when there are territorial disputes, the Philippines opts for economic benefits and avoids potential military conflicts by taking a hedging strategy, which is often accounted for the benefits with which China could present them in the presence of the uncertainty regarding China's intention when it comes to security (Goh, 2008). Such a doubt on China's intention among the public appears to be still lingering. It appears that Duterte is leaning towards China for economic incentives and is hedging against the lack of commitment from the U.S. by standing close to Japan, which can be confirmed by his decision to maintain the military alliance with Japan, which the predecessor Aquino initiated. Furthermore, when society puts order and stability first and economic growth over political freedom, the policy choices by the state tend to reflect the preferences of the society whose degree will depend on the domestic structure, including state-society relations. The typology of to what extent and under what conditions state preferences translate into state policies may be established by examining other country cases, which will be left for future research.

Declaration of ownership

This report is my original work.

Conflict of interest

None.

Ethical clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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