

State of Strategic Cultural Diplomacy and Business Relations of China-Philippines: Insights from 2000 to 2020

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has increased the importance of cultural interaction in international relations. Countries around the world place a high value on the ease of culture as a new and independent form of diplomacy in international relations. In their bilateral relationship, the Philippines and China are very active in developing cultural diplomacy to increase mutual understanding, collaboration, and friendship, as well as resolving disputes and conflicts of interest peacefully through political and diplomatic agreements. This article delves deeply into the outcomes of the two nation's relationship in terms of cultural diplomacy, making recommendations for further collaboration.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Exchange, Bilateral Relationship, 21st Century, Philippines and China

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “soft power” as defined by Joseph Nye in 1990 is “the capacity to acquire what you want via seduction instead of compulsion” (Nye, 1990, p.33). It results from how appealing a nation's political philosophy, policies, and culture are. Soft power is a non-violent, non-military, and the result of free will rather than force. The statement “in the current period, the significance of culture in the country's synergistic competitiveness is expanding” was highlighted even in the 17th Chinese Communist Party Congress text from 2007. In this intense global rivalry, the person who captures the height of cultural growth can take the lead (Phuong, 2010, p. 134). As a result, China started to focus on “soft power” in the areas of cultural diplomacy after bolstering “hard power” in the military and economic spheres. China will progressively become more competitive in international interactions through cultural spillover.

China has recognized the Philippines as one of Southeast Asia's regional power centers. China and the Philippines are friendly neighbors, only a stretch of ocean, and the two peoples have experienced a time of friendliness and cooperation over 1700 years ago, stated China's Ambassador to the Philippines in October 2003 (Baker, 2004). China is thus always seeking to expand and enhance its collaboration with the Philippines in a number of areas (Philippines Embassy in China, 2020). For instance, the Philippines has traditionally placed a high priority on cooperation with important nations, particularly China. The Philippines has implemented a number of initiatives to improve bilateral cooperation in fields of culture, education, and tourism due to the seed of exchanges and a desire to understand Chinese cultural identity (Wong, 2014).

Historical accounts claim that social and cultural underpinnings of China and the Philippines are similar. Wet rice civilization served as the basis for material culture, which was governed by comparatively comparable environment conditions and led to a close-knit community and worldview. This similarity establishes the foundation for direct bilateral communication between the two nations from the outset. Historians claim that the

earliest Philippine-Chinese commerce took place in the seventh century, when Chinese traders exchanged Filipino handicrafts for Chinese pottery, iron, lead, and zinc (Malindo-Uy, 2021). Up to the tenth century, the Philippines was a crucial transshipment hub for maritime trade between the continent and the rest of the globe. A limited number of Chinese traders stayed in the Philippines to establish towns when they came to sell Cantonese ceramics. Manila developed as a crucial transit hub for Western ships and a business hub for Chinese brokers and agents under Spanish occupation. The mixed Chinese community in the Philippines is the consequence of some of these traders marrying local women.

Under Ming Taizu, China seized control of the island of Luzon in the fifteenth century. The Association of the Philippines-China Undertaking (APCU), a non-governmental with its headquarters in the Philippines, was founded by the two nations prior to the establishment of formal diplomatic ties (Malindog-Uy, 2021). APCU works faster academic cooperation, city twinning, cultural exchange, and business dealings between the two nations. The subsequent nationalization of ties between the two nations was based on this framework. The two nations' relationship had advanced by 1975 and beyond, and many fields had been inked in turn.

Furthermore, the Philippines and China have signed many Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in educational matters such as: Memorandum of Understanding between the Higher Education Commission of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Office for Language Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language of the People's Republic of China was signed in Manila on March 12, 2003; Memorandum of Understanding between the Higher Education Commission of the Republic of the Philippines and the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China signed in Manila in March 2007; Memorandum of Understanding on the Philippine Preparatory Chinese Teachers Cooperation Program between the Higher Education Commission of the Republic of the Philippines and the Confucius Institute Headquarters of the People's Republic of China, signed in Beijing on October 27, 2009; The Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees in Higher Education (MRA) between the Higher Education of the Republic of the Philippines and the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China was signed in Manila on the 19th November, 2009. In addition, the two nations have created several initiatives to promote their respective cultures (Philippine Embassy in China, 2020). The Philippine Embassy arranged the "Young Ambassadors of Chinese Culture" program in 2018 to teach students in Tianjin's elementary and secondary schools, ages 6 to 15, about the fundamentals and celebrations of the Philippines (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

In 2001, the Philippine government released statements endorsing tourism as one of the main drivers of sustained economic expansion. The National Ecotourism Strategy (NES), which defines the following ecotourism objectives, was subsequently accepted by the Philippines:

1. Develop globally competitive ecotourism goods.
2. Establish ethical ecotourism markets.
3. Optimize community benefits and raise the caliber of ecotourism visitor experiences.

A chapter on tourism and its economic impact is part of the Philippines' Medium Term Development Plan (MTPDP) for 2001-2004, which aims to reduce poverty and create jobs. Infrastructure must be developed and reinforced and when RA 9593 referred to as the Tourist Act 2009 was approved, the tourism sector has benefited.

According to the statement from the Philippine government, tourism is an essential part of the country's economy and an industry that is vital to the country's interest. It must be utilized as a means of fostering socioeconomic development and cultural affirmation to create jobs, investment, foreign exchange, and a sense of pride among all Filipinos. One of the top priorities for sustainable economic development goals and strategies is tourism cooperation between China and the Philippines. Successful tourism expectedly reduces poverty, advance socioeconomic development, and protects natural, cultural, and cultural assets.

In accordance with the desires of the two countries and the spirit of neighborliness' and friendship expressed by both governments, cultural promotion and cooperation have established a solid basis for the friendship between them helping to build a comprehensive relationship between the Philippines and China. However, recent events such as territorial conflicts over Spratly Islands, for instance, and other unanticipated circumstances may have impact on the momentum of these two nations' bilateral relationship (Guo, 2012; Pemmaraju, 2016). Owing to the main issues, this study looks at the development of cultural diplomacy between China and the Philippines in the fields of tourism, education, and culture over the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Second, it assesses the opinions of stakeholders on these two nations' relationship in the face of potential obstacles throughout the first 20 years. Lastly, recommendations for improving these two countries' relationship in the face of potential obstacles and difficulties in the future.

Cultural Diplomacy between the Philippines and China during the First Two Decades of the Twenty-First Century

Cooperation in the Field of Culture

Based on the “Joint Declaration between China and the Philippines on the framework of bilateral cooperation in the twenty-first century,” which was signed in 2000, bilateral relations between China and the Philippines have steadily developed into a long-term and stable partnership. Following a high-level agreement reached during President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s visit to China in September 2004, the two nations decided to strengthen their strategic partnership and cooperation in all areas, with an emphasis on their bilateral relationship, on the principles of good neighbors, cooperation, trust, collaboration in the area of culture, and mutual benefit. The governments of China and the Philippines have arranged a number of high-profile visits to enhance mutual cultural understanding. During this period, several agreements for cultural and societal cooperation were established. In the first ten years of the twenty-first century, it marks the key pillars for developing the bilateral relationship between the Philippines and China.

It might be argued that fostering cross-cultural exchanges and aiding in the resolution of social issues are crucial to the growth of the Philippines-China relationship, especially in the context of political and security issues. But there are no indications that the two nations’ ties are becoming better. Nine cooperation agreements in a number of areas, including the economy, aid, investment, physical training, tourism, information, and culture, were signed during President Benigno Aquino III’s official visit to China, which took place from August 30 to September 3, 2011. Regular events include music concerts, film screenings, art exhibitions, and food festivals. Additionally, in 2013, the Philippine Consulate in Shanghai launched the “Taste of the Philippine’s program, which included events to promote intangible cultural heritage values, as part of the two nation’s cultural cooperation. Folk dancing, cuisine, and traditional music were introduced to China to promote the intercultural understanding in addition to increasing cultural knowledge (Wong, 2014). To raise knowledge of Chinese territory, culture, and people in the Philippines, the two countries also organized the Philippine-China Knowledge Promotion Award and the Manila Forum on China-Philippines Relations. The nation will open for business in January 2021 (Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, 2021). At the Book Center’s opening ceremony on March 18, 2019, the China International Publishing Corporation presented 1000 books in both Chinese and English about Chinese history, geography, people, and culture. They also declared that the beneficial relationship between China and Philippines would continue to grow to new heights (Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, 2019).

China Radio International and the State Radio Administration Philippines have been co-producing the show “Wow China” on the local radio station Radyo Pilipinas since the middle of 2018. The purpose of this program is to further strengthen the cooperation in the field of television to meet the needs of information and cultural exchange between the peoples of the two nations (Hung, 2021). The China Drama Show has debuted on the Philippines’ People’s Television Network (PTV4) and Chinese entertainment channels such as ABS-CBN and Global Media Arts. In the Philippines, (GMA) is also televised (Rocamora, 2018). These communication channels have contributed to develop the Philippines’ and China’s historical affinity, unique solidarity, and comprehensive collaboration. Hangzhou and Baguio, Guangzhou and Manila, Xiamen and Cebu, Shenyang and Quezon, and Fu are just a few of the many provinces and cities that are twinned between the Philippines and China. Moreover, Anhui and Nueva Ecija, Hubei and Leyte, Jiangxi and Bohol, Furjan and Laguna, Thuan and Lipa, Zibo and Mandaue City, Shandong Province and Ilocos Norte, Anhui and Nueva Ecija (Consulate of the People’s Republic of China in Laoag, 2020). By actively supporting the promotion of the image of people and the nation joining together in the spirit of peace and friendship, the link between localities has helped to supplement the people-to-people diplomacy channel between the two nations.

In terms of society, China has actively helped the Philippines with social security issues in the twenty-first century. For example, it has given \$250,000 in aid to victims of heavy typhoons that flooded the country in November 2004; it has given 10 million Renminbi (73.2 Million Pesos) in supplies, mostly blankets and tents, to communities devastated by typhoon Yolanda in 2013; it has supported the drainage system project in rural areas of the Philippines, helping Filipinos improve their standards of living, reduce poverty, and achieve sustainable development; and it has loaned \$232.5 million to renovate urban infrastructure (Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, 2022). A number of initiatives have been finished and implemented as a result of China’s active assistance, which has helped the Filipino people progressively stabilize following the conclusion of the Covid-19 epidemic and natural calamities. The Chico River Irrigation Pumping Project is anticipated to provide water to 8700 hectares of rice field and help 4,250 farmers over 22 bays, Kaliwa Dam may supply Manila with at least \$600 million liters of water per day. The Nam Long Railway, built by the Philippine National Railways, will drastically cut travel times between Manila and Legazpi and connect more than ten cities and villages in South Luzon. Over 730 farmer households have received on-site agricultural assistance from the Philippine-Sino Agricultural Technology Center, which has constructed a 260-hectare hybrid rice-growing area. Over 9,370 households have benefited from the 18,000 hectares of hybrid rice that have been grown thus far, boosting production by 21,000 tons (Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, 2020).

The Chinese government also encourages enterprises to engage in the construction of industrial parks and businesses in this nation to improve the employment situation for Filipinos. In order to maintain social stability

and border security, China and the Philippines also signed a number of agreements, including the Treaty on Cooperation in Combating Transnational Crime (2001) and the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Combating Transnational Crime (2001). Treaty on Cooperation in Youth Affairs (2005), Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Sanitary and Phytosanitary (2007), Sanitation Cooperation (2008), and Against Illicit Trafficking and Drug Abuse (2001).

China and the Philippines became allies in the fight against Covid-19, supporting one another, and forging new bonds. The Philippines intervened to support China during a crucial period in its battle against Covid-19. China has increased its aid and support for the Philippines, providing vital medical supplies, sending a team of medical experts to fight the disease, helping the Philippines buy medical supplies in China, and trading medical items. The Philippines' recovery and prosperity will continue to be aided by experience exchange. At the beginning of the epidemic, the Philippine government received 2,000 test kits from the Chinese Embassy. Three packages of medical supplies, comprising 250,000 test kits, 130 ventilators, 1,870,000 surgical masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other goods, were subsequently sent to the Philippines by the Chinese government. Millions of PPE and other medical supplies have been provided to hospitals and local governments in the Philippines by Chinese companies, civic organizations, and local governments. In order to assist individuals in need in overcoming obstacles, the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines gave 5,000 "Friendship Bags" filled with basic everyday essentials including rice and canned sardines to Manila residents in 2020. A total of around 17.5 million pesos is also being donated to the locals by the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, the Consulate General in Cebu, Davao, and the Consulate in Laoag (Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, 2020).

Sports diplomacy is another kind of soft power used in diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines to counteract the two countries' often unequal relationship. In addition, sports are playing a bigger role in fostering mutual understanding between Chinese and Filipinos. On May 7, 2013, former NBA star Yao Ming traveled to the Philippines to play a friendly game against local basketball teams. The Philippines will participate in the Winter Olympics in China in 2022. The China and Philippines can preserve the warm friendship that began at the Winter Olympics stated China's Ambassador to the Philippines, Mr. Huang Xilian (Xinhua, 2022). In fact, the ongoing planning of cultural, athletic, and medical assistance programs improves ties between the two nations.

Collaboration in the Sphere of Education

China and Philippines have established a variety of multilateral forms of cooperation, such as cooperation in the scientific research, training, and education. A memorandum of agreement to improve higher education collaboration was signed by the People's Republic of China's Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Philippine Higher Education Commission (CHED) during the President's visit. President Rodrigo Duterte visited China in 2016. The following are the essential contents of this memorandum of understanding:

1. Mutual acceptance of credentials in both countries to encourage professional practice and lifelong learning;
2. Expand the list of universities in the registration of both nations;
3. Exchanges between lecturers and students via training courses, country trips, and scholarships;
4. Spread knowledge about the structure of higher education, learning quality, performance criteria, results evaluation, methodological advancement, student concerns, and frameworks for certification;
5. Create a contract for the transfer of credit;
6. Promote involvement in training programs, exhibits, conferences, seminars, symposia, and congresses for education; and,
7. Increase collaboration in language studies and build more Confucius Institutes in the Philippines.

Two Memorandums of Understanding were signed on August 29, 2019, by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. The first concerned cooperation in higher education between the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Philippine Higher Education Authority, while the second dealt with scientific and technological cooperation between the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology and the Philippine Department of Science and Technology.

An essential component of cross-cultural communication is language study. For Filipinos to enter and understand Chinese society, politics, and culture, they must learn and be fluent in the language. Chinese has been formally included to the general curriculum of the Philippine public secondary schools by the Philippine Department of Education as a basic foreign language. Chinese language instruction is currently offered in 82 public middle schools in the Philippines, and a number of Chinese courses have been created specifically for Filipino instructors (People's Daily, 2018).

Studying this language is growing more and more popular among Filipinos, especially for academic, professional, and commercial reasons. A memorandum of agreement was signed in 2003 between the National Office for the Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language of the People's Republic of China and the Higher Education Commission of the Republic of the Philippines.

This incident led to the introduction of Chinese classes in the Philippines. In an effort to promote language learning among Filipinos, four Confucius Institutes were founded in the Philippines between 2006 and 2015: the Confucius Institute at Ateneo de Manila (2006); the Confucius Institute at Bulacan University (2009), the Confucius Institute at the University of Angeles (2010); and the Confucius Institute at the University of the Philippines (2015). The Confucius Institute Headquarters, partner universities, and host institutions in China and the Philippines collaborate in three ways to manage the four Confucius Institutes (Xu & Wang, 2019). Additionally, student exchange between the Philippines and China is one of the accomplishments of their collaboration in education and training. Statistics show that between 1978 and 2015, the Chinese government awarded 198 scholarships to Filipino students. In 2015, there were 3,343 Filipino international students studying in China. From January to October 2018, 116 additional Filipino international students came to study in China. In similar vein, China promised to provide fifty scholarships to Filipino students annually between 2019 and 2021 in the Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Philippines on November 21, 2018 (Huy, 2021).

One of the new strategies in the Philippine-China education-training cooperation mechanism following the serious outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic is increased collaboration in online education training. Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian and Philippine Ambassador to China Jose Santiago participated in the online China-Philippines Educational Exchange Seminar 2020 (51Talk) in Beijing in October 2020 to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the two nations' establishment of diplomatic relations (Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, 2020). Filipino educators were able to talk about scientific subjects, share their experiences, and assist Chinese students in becoming more fluent in English.

Tourism Cooperation

It has been said that tourism is a “key” economic sector, a “smokeless” industry that makes a substantial contribution to China's and Philippines' economic growth. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the bilateral tourism collaboration between the Philippines and China had some benefits. When group tours of Chinese residents to the Philippines were formally launched in 1997, the Philippines became one of the first nations to welcome groups of Chinese people visiting abroad. In 1998, about 40,000 Chinese tourists travelled to the Philippines, since then, the number of Chinese visitors has increased to varied degrees each year. The Philippines is the ninth most popular foreign tourist destination for Chinese citizens, with over 500,000 Chinese visitors (Consulate General of China in Cebu, 2006).

The primary advantages of the Philippines as a travel destination for Chinese tourists are its early openness, short distance, and comparatively low cost. However, the number of Chinese visitors to the Philippines increases along with the variety of foreign travel destinations available to Chinese nationals. Although there were 119,000 Chinese visitors to the Philippines in 2005, a 16% increase from 2004, it was still significantly fewer than the 370,000 Chinese visitors to Malaysia, 480,000 to Singapore, and 600,000 to Thailand in the same year. There are several reasons why Chinese travelers choose different destinations. Firstly, Chinese travelers are taking more international routes, and their taste in destinations are becoming better. Chinese tourists now require more than just sightseeing excursion to satisfy their requirements. Second, the avian flu pandemic that followed the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, and inadequate travel safety in different regions of the Philippines. Third, most Chinese tourists would not choose the Philippines as their first destination, even though direct flights have been added, and China and the Philippines are close. Fourth, Chinese visitors do not fully comprehend Philippine tourism offerings (Consulate General of China in Cebu, 2006).

Nonetheless, the Chinese government has a number of initiatives to encourage Chinese nationals to travel to the Philippines to improve the tourism situation between the two nations. For instance, the China National Administration of Tourism proposed the following measures to further encourage tourist cooperation and exchange between countries. For instance, the China National Administration of Tourism proposed the following measures to further encourage tourist cooperation and exchange between China and the Philippines: (1) To improve mutual understanding and trust, the two governments' tourist management agencies must improve communication and conservation. Take advantage of existing mechanisms and platforms to constantly enrich content and forms of cooperation and promptly exchange the latest information and policies. In response to the situation of Chinese tourists visiting the Philippines, the China National Administration of Tourism will actively implement the tourism cooperation plan and other documents signed with the Philippines and cooperate more closely; (2) Philippine tourism departments and businesses should conduct a thorough analysis of China's source market, continuously develop new products to meet the needs of tourists, and further strengthen promotional efforts in China to attract more Chinese tourists to learn about the Philippines; (3) encourage airlines to increase direct flights and foster cooperation among tourism businesses (Consulate General of China, 2006).

Chinese Ambassador Song Tao met with Philippine Tourism Minister Durano on January 3, 2008, and the two had a cordial and in-depth discussion on strengthening their bilateral tourism cooperation partnership. According to Song Tao, China and the Philippines have enjoyed a friendly relationship for a long time, especially

in recent years when their bilateral ties and tourist cooperation have grown significantly and quickly. China and the Philippines both have a wealth tourism resources, and there is great potential for tourism collaboration between the two nations. It is hoped that the two sides would collaborate to further develop tourist cooperation. Durano said that the Philippines-China tourism cooperation partnership had produced remarkable results and welcomed Ambassador Song to the Philippines. The number of Chinese visitors to the Philippines has increased annually, making them the country's fourth largest source of international tourists. The Philippines will keep investing in tourism infrastructure, improve service quality, and welcome more Chinese tourists since it values China's tourist market.

Since 2014, the Philippine Toursim Board has promoted "It is More Fun in the Philippines" as a marketing initiative for travelers and foreigners living abroad. A database system of hotels, resorts, and travel agencies around the Philippines will be successful to visitors, along with listings for all tourist destinations. From there, tourists will be able to easily and affordably plan their long-distance travel and adventures in the Philippines. Consequently, this is one of the factors contributing to the increasing number of Chinese visitors to the Philippines. China is one of the most well-known tourist destinations in the Philippines, according to the data provided by the Department of Tourism (DOT). Despite the maritime conflict with the Philippines, 490,841 Chinese tourists visited the nation in 2015, a 24% increase over 2014 and the third-largest market behind South Korea and the US (Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, 2020).

China-Philippines ties have improved and gained speed since President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office in 2016. At the moment, China is the Philippines' biggest export market, biggest commercial partner, biggest source of imports, and second-largest tourism destination. The Philippine Department of Tourism reports that tourism earnings increased by 20.81% from \$7.71 billion in 2018 to \$9.31 billion in 2019. According to the data from the Planning Office Tourism Development, Research, and Information Management, South Korea is the top customer market, spending the most on travel (\$2,614,685,263), followed by China (\$2,330,491,557), and the United States (\$1,208,907,514) (Rocamora, 2019). Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, the Minister of Tourism, added that the steadily rising numbers demonstrate the results of a strong cooperation between the government, business, and civil society in achieving the nation's strategic objectives. The country's inclusive and sustainable tourism agenda's National Tourism Development Program 2016-2022 (NTDP) Master Plan aims to support stakeholder livelihoods and allocate benefits to rural areas. As a result, the number of Filipino visitors visiting China is rising everyday. Only 996,000 individuals arrived in 2013, but in 2018, that number had risen to 1.205 million according to the data published by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Xinhua, 2020)

Table 1. Number of Chinese tourists to the Philippines from 2008 to 2020 (Unit: thousand people)

Years	Number of Tourists
2008	163,689
2009	155,019
2010	187,446
2011	243,137
2012	250,883
2013	426,352
2014	394,951
2015	490,841
2016	675,663
2017	968,447
2018	1,257,962
2019	1,743,309
2020	170,432

Source: Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT)

According to Jose Romana, the Philippine Ambassador to China, the number of tourists and companies requesting permits to enter the country increased by a record of 200 percent, indicating that the "golden days of the Philippine tourism sector is returning." He added that, Chinese citizens travelled to Southeast Asia but did not visit the Philippines during the period of strained ties between China and the Philippines. Due to more thorough coverage of the issue by Chinese media, tourists and traders have started returning to the Philippines in larger numbers (Huy, 2021).

According to DOT data, 1.33 million Korean tourists visited during the first 10 months of 2017, accounting for 24.33% of all visitors. With 810,807 arrivals, or 14.81% of the market share, Chinese visitors came in second, while Americans came in third with 785,269, or 14.34%. Chinese visits rose by 39.28% and Indian visitors by 20.28% during the same time in 2016. The overall number of foreign arrivals increased from 4.91 million in 2016 to 5.47 million in the first ten months of this year, a rise of 11.54%. In addition, the Philippines had a double-digit growth in tourist income from January to September of 36.28%, or 243.23 billion pesos, compared to 178 billion pesos during the same period in 2016 (Rappler, 2017). The primary cause of the unexpected surge of Chinese visitors is the easing of Visa requirements in nations that are favorable to China, such as the Philippines (Punongbayan, 2019). Chongqing, Tianjin, Anchuan, Baicheng, Suzhou, and other recently established Chinese cities are served by direct international flights from Philippine cities. Lastly, “tourism diplomacy” is a type of “soft power” employed by the Chinese government.

With 1,743,309 arrivals in 2019, a 38.58% increase from 2018, China was the second-largest source of tourist. The island off the coast of Alkan province has 107,164 visitors in the first two months of 2019. The Alkan government’s decision to reopen the island of Boracay following its month-long shutdown last year has drawn many tourists. The number of Chinese tourists visiting the island increased by 155.64% according to the city’s Department of Tourism. Chinese visitors to the Philippines in 2019 spent a total of \$2.33 billion according to the Philippine Department of Tourism. There were 1.74 million visits overall, according to the DOT figures. In 2019, there were 38.58% more Chinese visitors to the Philippines than in 2018 (See Table 1).

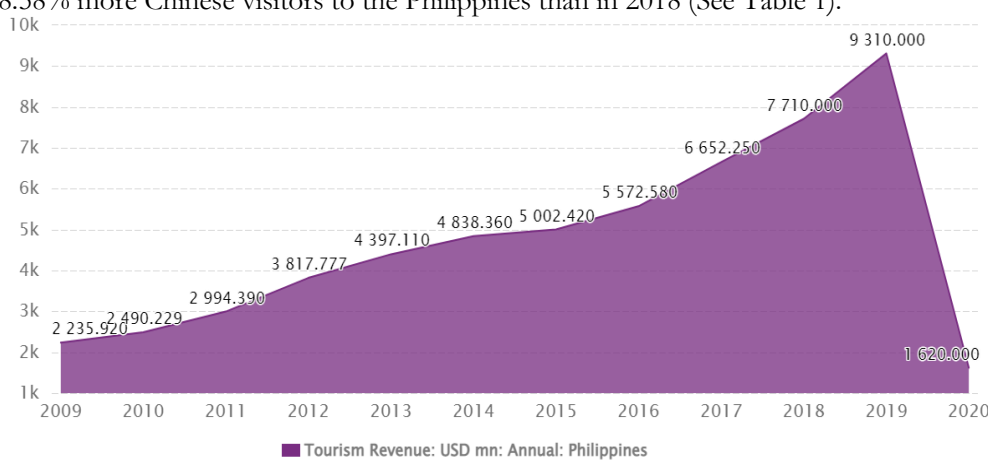


Figure 1. View Philippines's Tourism Revenue from 2009-2020

Source: Philippines Tourism Revenue (<https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/philippines/tourism-revenue>)

The DOT reports that 8.2 million foreign visitors arrived in the Philippines in 2019, generating \$9.31 billion in visitor revenue, a 20.81% increase over the \$7.71 billion in 2018 (Xinhua, 2020). However, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the travel and tourism sector in December 2019 because of the implementation of anti-pandemic measures, aside from anxiety, demand for travelers sharply declined. Due to the travel restrictions put in place by the government to stop the Covid-19 epidemic from spreading, the Philippines tourism sector has suffered. International visitor arrivals decreased by 22% during the first quarter of 2020, when travel restrictions and bans were implemented in many nations. This resulted in an estimated \$80 billion loss in global tourism income (PWC Philippines, 2022). The abrupt decline in visitor numbers during the Covid-19 epidemic caused the Philippines to lose almost four hundred billion pesos (about \$8.3 billion) of tourism earnings in 2020 (Xinhua, 2021).

China has always been a major market for the Philippines, based on the information above. In the meantime, the number of Filipinos visiting China has been steadily rising. Chinese visitors who are especially interested in the kind of beach resorts accessible in the Philippines, have made several Philippine locations popular. The two nations’ tourist cooperation is demonstrated by a few initiatives, including attending tourism fairs, inviting delegations from businesses and the media to participate in tourism surveys, and organizing tourism introduction and development programs. Initiatives for cultural and tourist cooperation have improved ties between China and the Philippines.

Since the naval battle at Scarborough Shoal in April 2012, territorial disputes between the Philippines and China have grown more intense. The disputes were made worse by China’s illegal occupation, construction of infrastructure, and encroachment into the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone. To prevent needless animosity, the two administrators nonetheless attempted to propagate the populace. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs arranged a “Travel to get to know the Chinese people” in August 2013 (Wong, 2014). In order to help produce a genuine news, the event invited Chinese media people to learn about the history, politics, and foreign

policy of the Philippines. Another attempt to bridge the significant knowledge gap between the two nations and their inhabitants is through festivals and cultural interactions between the embassies in the two nations.

Some Comments on Cultural Diplomacy between the Philippines and China during the First Two Decades of the Twenty-First Century

With the help of the media, which advances a nation's culture quickly, soft power has become more important than ever in the current globalization period. In light of this, countries strengthened their soft power in the early 21st century by enhancing cooperation and understanding through cultural diplomacy initiatives. Through cultural diplomacy, nations encourage investment and commercial cooperation. Soft power was initially effectively employed by China and the Philippines in their cultural diplomacy.

Nevertheless, the two governments faced several challenges while attempting to execute cultural diplomacy measures: China rejected those Filipinos who backed the US, and the Philippines faced difficulties due to the Chinese language. Preventing repeated provocative activities in contested maritime regions from provoking negative reactions from the population of both nations is crucial for the diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines. This entails just shifting the focus of the diplomatic relations away from maritime conflicts and territorial disputes rather than completely ignoring them in order to free up more time to concentrate on other constructive and fruitful areas. Moreover, the long-standing relationship between China and the Philippines might be totally destroyed by a single instance of maritime conflicts. China is a significant economic partner for the Philippines, with whom it must cooperate to get financial advantages for the country's advancement.

China views the Philippines as a crucial nation that it must cooperate with in order to gain the respect and confidence of other Southeast Asian nations, particularly as it works to establish itself as a responsible power. China and the Philippines will work together to preserve peace and stability in the Southeast Asia, a region with potential for global growth. This is difficult to do and calls for twofold effort on both sides. China and the Philippines, two significant members of this organization, ought to maintain their commitment to an autonomous foreign policy focused on ASEAN and strengthen their international strategic alliance. China-ASEAN representation and support the bloc's growth and stability.

The tourist cooperation between China and the Philippines has grown significantly. The two administrations have done everything that can to foster an environment where they may interact and exchange views. The cultures and societies of the two nations are quite similar, and when they cooperate, they may achieve much more. The most obvious indicator is consistent and ongoing travel. China has always been one of the most popular travel destinations in the Philippines. Chinese visitors, who are especially interested in the kinds of beach resorts accessible in the Philippines, have made several Philippine locations popular. China and the Philippines have improved their connection via cooperative cultural and tourist initiatives. Both countries have numerous advantages, thus their connection will only get stronger. The Philippines has improved its standing internationally, stabilized the domestic crisis, and developed its economy, thanks to its tight tourist partnership with China. One thing that is evident is that the Philippines has strengthened its ties with important nations both in the region and globally in recent years. The Philippines' influence in regional and global forums is growing.

CONCLUSION

The history and development of cultural diplomacy between China and the Philippines throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century, with a focus on culture, education, and tourism, are the main topics of this paper. It also considers assessing the various remarks made by interested parties about the current state of cultural diplomacy. Evidence suggests that the Philippines and China's relationship grew in the three aforementioned areas, with close cooperation even during the Covid-19 pandemic through resource sharing and numerous agreements for cooperation to further strengthen the relationship through soft power strategy. However, the recent dispute on Spratly Island, the number of Filipinos who supported the US at the expense of China, and the perceived difficulty of embracing the Chinese language pose threats to the peaceful relationship. If these difficulties are not properly addressed, they might have long-term effects. It is possible to provide suggestions to both nations to put aside their disagreements and improve their diplomatic ties by working together in the fields of tourism, education, and culture.

While upholding the ASEAN-centered foreign policy and strengthening the global strategic relationship, both nations will work together to preserve peace and stability in the direction of economic and other development potentials. However, it is recommended that additional research be done to look at other dimensions of culture, education, and tourism to determine the strengths and weaknesses of cooperation for areas that could use improvement. In addition, follow-up studies should be carried out to quantify the impact of these relationships using data and information.

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