

The Evolution of the Philippines' Policy Towards Taiwan Since 2016

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Received: September 1, 2024

Accepted: September 27, 2024

Online Published: September 29, 2024

doi:10.20849/ajsss.v9i3.1455

URL: <https://doi.org/10.20849/ajsss.v9i3.1455>

Abstract

During his administration, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte adhered to the One China principle and Philippine-Taiwan interactions were kept within reasonable limits. Since President Marcos Jr. came to power, Philippine-Taiwan interactions have been enhanced and the One China principle has been relaxed. The dynamic elements that led to the President Marcos Jr. administration's position on Taiwan are the leader's personal experiences and security perceptions, Filipino workers in Taiwan, dissatisfaction with China's handling of the South China Sea disputes, and US involvement in regional affairs. The transformation of the Marcos Jr. government's position on Taiwan has complicated the situation in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. It's almost certain that China would continue to keep its economic cooperation with the Philippines, improve the existing mechanism for dealing with the South China Sea issue, while firmly safeguarding the country's sovereignty and interests in the South China Sea issue and the Taiwan Question.

Keywords: Duterte Administration, Marcos Jr. Administration, the Taiwan Question, One China Principle

1. Introduction

The Taiwan region is an undisputed part of China, and the vast majority of countries in the international community that have established diplomatic relations with China adhere to the one-China principle. After coming to power, the leader of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen, has refused to recognise the "1992 Consensus" and sought to develop so-called "substantive relations" with other countries and international organisations. The Philippines, geographically close to Taiwan, has become a target of Taiwan authorities' efforts to win support.

Since November 2017, the US government has been pushing ahead with its Indo-Pacific strategy. Given the special relationship between the US-Philippine alliance and the importance of its geographical location, the Philippines has become a lever for the US to intervene in the Taiwan Question and the South China Sea issue. However, US-Philippine relations have suffered a major setback due to President Duterte's policy of alienating the United States. Under President Duterte's administration, the level of mutual engagement between the Philippines and Taiwan remains low. Since taking office, the Marcos Jr. administration has also shown a tendency to strengthen US-Philippine cooperation, specifically mentioning the Taiwan Question in the new version of the National Security Policy released in August 2023 and linking the Taiwan Question to the Philippines' national strategy, demonstrating a different policy inclination from its predecessor, which has had an impact on the stable development of China-Philippines relations.

Scholars in Mainland China have conducted some research on the Philippines' policy towards Taiwan, mainly focusing on the following aspects: First, research on the handling of the Taiwan Question in the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines, the Philippines ended all official contacts with Taiwan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 1975). "Taipei's embassy in Manila" was renamed the "Pacific Economic and Cultural Centre", while the "Philippine embassy in Taiwan" was renamed the "Asian Exchange Centre" (Lu, 2020, p. 17). Second, the study of Philippine-Taiwan relations after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines. Some scholars have analysed the overall Philippine-Taiwan relations in different periods. For example, Fan Dai and Yiyu Jin divided the Sino-Philippine relations since the late 1940s into four periods, and pointed out that during the Mrs Aquino's presidency, the Philippine-Taiwan economic relations were strengthened, the Philippines regressed from the "One China" position to "one and a half China", with frequent high-level visits between the Philippines and Taiwan (Dai & Jin, 2009). Speaking on

the strengthening of Sino-Philippines relations under Ramos presidency, Huang (2015, p. 18) reiterated that exchanges between the Philippines and Taiwan are unofficial and civil. Another group of scholars mainly examined Philippine-Taiwan relations in specific areas such as economic and trade interactions and cultural exchanges before 2016 (Jin, 2019, pp. 15-18; Jiang, 2011). Third, an examination of specific incidents affecting Philippine-Taiwan relations. On the issue of fishing disputes, due to the unclear demarcation of economic waters between the Philippines and Taiwan, the fishing disputes between the two sides in the Bashi Channel have remained unresolved for a long time, and conflicts have continued (Xu, 2013). The conflicting interests of the Philippines and Taiwan over the South China Sea also affect the development of relations between the two sides. After the Philippines' South China Sea arbitration case, Taiwan's leader Ma Ying-jeou had expressed his "unacceptable" attitude towards the arbitral tribunal's ruling on the grounds that "the Philippines never invited Taiwan to participate in the proceedings of this case" and "the arbitral tribunal did not seek Taiwan's views on the case" (Wang, 2021).

There is a wealth of research on Philippine foreign policy and Sino-Philippine relations by scholars outside Mainland China, but there are fewer studies on Philippine-Taiwan relations. The existing studies mainly cover the following aspects: Tang Huiyu's introduction to the cultural interactions between the Philippines and Taiwan during the Cold War period (Tang, 2023). Angela Shin-yih Chen studied the relationship between cultural intelligence and the performance of Filipino workers in Taiwan and found that cultural intelligence was positively correlated with the performance of Filipino workers and negatively correlated with culture shock (Chen, Lin & Sawangpattanakul, 2011). RC De Castro discussed the Philippines' policy of neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and argued that the Philippines would strengthen its alliance with the United States to pursue its interests in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea (De Castro, 2023).

Overall, current research on the Philippines' stance and policy towards Taiwan is more often included in the study of Sino-Philippine relations and less often appears as a separate study, and research that analyses and compares the evolution of the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations' policies towards Taiwan and their influencing factors is even more lacking. Studying the Philippine government's stance and policies towards Taiwan and their changes since 2016 is enlightening for understanding China's handling of the Taiwan Question, the South China Sea issue, and Sino-Philippine relations. This research article is structured as follows. The next section situates the paper in The Duterte Administration's Position and Policy on Taiwan. The third section delves into The Marcos Jr. Administration's Position and Policy on Taiwan. The fourth section examines Dynamic elements that led to the evolution of the Marcos Jr. administration's position on Taiwan. The conclusions highlight the overall findings and prospects.

2. The Duterte Administration's Position and Policy on Taiwan

2016 was an important year for Philippine-Taiwan relations. On 20 May, Tsai Ing-wen took over as Taiwan's leader and launched the "New Southbound Policy", ostensibly to promote Taiwan's economic transformation and development by seeking to open up diversified markets in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Australia. She hoped to reduce Taiwan's economic dependence on mainland China and gain the "New Southbound" countries' political support for the Taiwan authorities. The Philippines, a nearest Southeast Asian neighbour, is among the countries that Taiwan authorities is seeking to win over. On 30 June, the 16th president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, took office. During Duterte's administration, Philippine-Taiwan relations at this stage have been constrained by the Philippines' policy towards China (Central Government of the People's Republic of China, 2018). The Philippines is firmly committed to developing friendly relations with China and adhering to the One China principle, and although it still maintains some political and economic ties with Taiwan, interaction between the two sides remains within reasonable limits.

2.1 The Duterte Administration's Perception of the Taiwan Question

In April 2017, the Duterte administration released the *2017-2022 National Security Policy* (Presidential Palace of the Philippines, 2017). In July 2018, the *Philippine National Security Strategy* was also released. Both documents define internal threats as the centre of gravity of Philippine national security, including armed conflict, terrorism, transnational crime, employment, poverty, etc., while also placing public safety at the top of the list of national security objectives, stating that "resolving internal armed conflicts remains our top security concern and a key cornerstone of our peace and development strategy" (Presidential Palace of the Philippines, 2018). Among external threats, the Philippines has placed "Overlapping Territorial Claims and Other Maritime Concerns" at the top of the list, emphasising that "the dispute over the West Philippine Sea (WPS) remains to be the foremost security challenge to the Philippines' sovereignty and territorial integrity", but has sought to adopt a pragmatic approach to resolving maritime disputes, such as through diplomatic negotiations to delimit and define maritime

boundaries and jurisdictional limits, and to avoid the outbreak of armed conflict in the disputed waters. outbreak of armed conflict in the disputed waters (Presidential Palace of the Philippines, 2018).

The Taiwan Question is dealt with in only one document. In more than 100 pages of the strategy, the word “Taiwan” appears only once: “there are unresolved territorial disputes in Northeast and Southeast Asia, including conflicts between China and Taiwan, China and Japan, and Japan and South Korea” (Presidential Palace of the Philippines, 2018). As can be seen, the Duterte administration has been more cautious on the Taiwan Question, treating it only as part of a regional affairs and not emphasising Philippine-Taiwan relations or interests in Taiwan. On 26 December 2021, president Duterte said that the Philippines would remain neutral in the escalating conflict between China and Taiwan “because it has nothing to do with the Philippines” and that “we have no reason to oppose China by force for that, that would be the stupidest thing to do” (Parrocha, 2021).

2.2 Philippine-Taiwan Political Interaction Under the Duterte Administration

On the Taiwan side, Tsai met with former Philippine President Rodrigo Ramos on 31 March 2017 and expressed her desire to deepen economic and trade ties with the Philippines through the signing of an economic cooperation agreement, and to cooperate on issues such as the South China Sea, education and visa tourism (Taiwan Authorities, 2017). In November 2017, James Soong Chu-yu shook hands with Duterte on behalf of Tsai Ing-wen during his trip to Vietnam to attend an informal meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders (Peng, 2017). In December 2016, Gary Song-Huann Lin representative of Taiwan in the Philippines, attended the “2016 Philippine Alumni Association in the Philippines” and gave a speech on the “New Southbound Policy” as the theme of his speech (Taiwan Central News Agency, 2016). In February 2017, Lin published articles in *News Tonight*, *the Manila Times* and other websites, highlighting that Filipino criminals in Taiwan can receive fair protection under Taiwanese law and calling for a win-win situation for Taiwan and the Philippines under the “New Southbound Policy” (“Taiwan Representative Office in the Philippines”, 2017).

On the Philippine side, Duterte visited Taiwan in January 2016 and congratulated Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen and said there would be more exchanges in the future in education, fisheries, agriculture, manufacturing, etc (Jin, 2019, p. 47). After Duterte won the presidential election, he adopted a friendly attitude towards China, and political exchanges between the Philippines and Taiwan have been more limited. On 16 May 2016, Duterte met with Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua to exchange views on the development of China-Philippines relations (Central Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2016). This was one of the first three foreign ambassadors Duterte formally met after his election. In October 2016, Duterte paid a state visit to China, the first non-ASEAN country he visited, demonstrating the importance he attaches to China-Philippines relations (Xinhua News Agency, 2016).

2.3 Philippine-Taiwan Economic Interaction Under the Duterte Administration

In contrast to the lukewarm political engagement, the Philippines and Taiwan have had more frequent civilian cultural and tourism exchanges, as well as increased economic cooperation. On the tourism front, the number of Filipino tourists visiting Taiwan has surged since November 2017, when Taiwan implemented a visa-free programme for the Philippines. In 2018, 419,000 Filipino tourists visited Taiwan, an increase of 44 per cent compared to 2017. In July 2019, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Manila extended its 14-day visa-free entry privileges to the Philippines for one year. In addition, regional airlines from Taiwan and the Philippines have opened new routes to major cities on both sides of the border and introduced more direct flights (Rocamora, 2019).

On the education front, academic exchanges and educational cooperation between the Philippines and Taiwan continued to strengthen. In March 2017, Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Commissioner Briande led a 33-member delegation of seven administrators and 26 presidents of agricultural universities to Taiwan, the largest group of Philippine principals to visit Taiwan in years. In April 2017, the new Chancellor of the University of the Philippines System, Danilo, led 38 law professors to Taiwan to participate in a law forum at Kaohsiung University. In May 2017, Taiwan and the Philippines completed the exchange of letters for the five-year renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Education and Learning Liaison between Taiwan and the Philippines (Lai, 2017). In April 2019, the Mariano Marcos State University of the Philippines and the National Taichung University of Science and Technology in Taiwan expanded cooperation in international exchange programmes, strengthening exchanges in agriculture, engineering, information technology and more (Andres, 2019). The number of Filipino students in Taiwanese universities and colleges reached 2,311 in 2020, an increase of 608 or 35.7 per cent from the previous year (Lin, 2020).

In terms of investment, the Taiwan authorities have been increasing their investment in the Philippines to develop the Philippine market. In April 2017, Taiwan’s “Ministry of Economic Affairs” set up a “Taiwan

Investment Window” at its representative office in the Philippines to provide professional investment consulting services on Philippine investment regulations, taxation, labour, environmental protection, etc., and to introduce Taiwanese businessmen to appropriate investment service agencies and help them grasp investment information and business opportunities to encourage them to invest in the Philippines (FLW, 2017). In December 2017, the Philippines and Taiwan signed the Taiwan-Philippines Investment Protection Agreement (TPPA), which has four main focuses, including the government-assisted processing mechanism, comprehensively upgrading the standard of protection, and providing investors with diversified and adequate remedies to deepen two-way investment exchanges (Chen, 2017).

In terms of industrial cooperation, since 2017, the Philippines and Taiwan have established closer industrial cooperation, of which the Taiwan-Philippines Industry Chain Linkage Summit has become an important platform for industrial communication between the two sides. Co-hosted by the Federation of Taiwan Industries and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, creating 4 industry sub-forums on information and electronics innovation and application, machinery industry, industrial zones, and innovation and entrepreneurship, inviting Taiwanese and Philippine industry experts to exchange and discuss energy, textiles, footwear, water resource management, and so on. As of November 2021, more than 23 MOUs have been signed between Taiwan and the Philippines (Tan, 2021).

In terms of bilateral trade, Philippine imports from Taiwan reached US\$8.659 billion in 2016, up 15.23 per cent from US\$7.514 billion in 2015, while exports reached US\$2.211 billion, up 5.54 per cent from US\$2.094 billion in 2015, with total trade between the two sides reaching US\$10.87 billion. In 2017, Philippine imports from Taiwan were US\$9.553 billion and exports were US\$2.38 billion, with total trade between the two sides reaching US\$11.97 billion. In 2018, total trade between the two sides peaked at US\$11.436 billion. However, the following two years were affected by the epidemic, and the trade volume between the Philippines and Taiwan declined, slowly warming up to \$9.072 billion in 2021 and 10.721 billion in 2022. (See table below for details)

Table 1. Philippines-Taiwan trade statistics, 2016-2022 (in billions of US dollars)

Year	Philippine imports from Taiwan	Philippine exports to Taiwan	Total trade
2016	86.59	22.11	108.7
2017	95.93	23.8	119.7
2018	89.43	24.94	114.36
2019	61.57	21.15	82.71
2020	56.46	21.25	77.71
2021	60.73	29.98	90.72
2022	76.40	30.81	107.21

Source: Taiwan ASEAN Studies Center, Chung-Hua Institution for Economic Research

Overall, during the Duterte administration, Philippine-Taiwan economic interactions have been closer than political interactions. The trade and investment between the two sides have increased, but the overall picture is not impressive. On the one hand, although the Taiwan authorities has encouraged Taiwanese businessmen to invest in the Philippines, the Philippines’ unstable domestic political situation and poor social security conditions make it less attractive to investors than Singapore and Thailand. On the other hand, the Duterte administration has much closer economic ties with China, and the total volume of trade and investment between China and the Philippines far exceeds that between the Philippines and Taiwan. China has been the Philippines’ largest trading partner for six consecutive years and has surged to become the Philippines’ second largest export market. In 2021, Sino-Philippines trade reached \$82.05 billion, double the amount six years ago. Over the past six years, China’s agreed investment in the Philippines has grown rapidly to become the second largest source of agreed foreign investment in the Philippines, with total investment also quadrupling from six years ago (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines, 2022).

3. The Marcos Jr. Administration's Position and Policy on Taiwan

On 9 May 2022, Ferdinand Marcos Jr (hereafter Marcos Jr), the son of former Philippine President Ferdinand

Marcos, won the presidential election and became the 17th President of the Philippines. Since Marcos Jr. took office, relations between the Philippines and Taiwan have heated up, with the Philippines frequently touching on the Taiwan Question and strengthening ties with Taiwan. Although the Marcos Jr. administration claims to adhere to the One China principle, in practice it has become more relaxed and speculative.

3.1 The Marcos Jr. Administration's Perception of the Taiwan Question

On 15 August 2023, the current Philippine government released the National Security Policy (NSP) 2023-2028, which sets the framework for the country's domestic and foreign policy for the next five years. The document emphasises that the Philippines is seeking to improve its "threat response" capabilities in the face of heightened geopolitical tensions resulting from the growing strategic competition between the United States and China. In the section dealing with the South China Sea, the document asserts that "the West Philippine Sea issue remains a primary national interest of the Philippines" and that "the divergences of claims, as well as the claimants' methods of asserting their positions, continue to pose strategic challenges, endangering not only the country's territorial integrity, but also the Filipino people's exercise of legitimate rights and their safety and well-being" (Presidential Palace of the Philippines, 2023). In addition, the new version of the national security policy specifically mentions Taiwan, linking it to Philippine national security, stating that "Any military conflict in the Taiwan Strait would inevitably affect the Philippines given the geographic proximity of Taiwan to the Philippine archipelago and the presence of over 150,000 Filipinos in Taiwan" and that "The Philippines is concerned about its economic stability, a potential influx of refugees, and the welfare of overseas populations" (Presidential Palace of the Philippines, 2023).

The Marcos Jr. administration has paid close attention to the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, linking the Taiwan Question to the Philippines' national security interests, suggesting that its strategic thinking on Taiwan is evolving and revealing a tendency for the Philippines to join forces with the United States to "use Taiwan curb China". In practice, Marcos Jr. has also shown a tendency to escalate confrontation with China over the South China Sea and increase political interaction with Taiwan.

3.2 Philippine-Taiwan Political Interaction Under the Marcos Jr. Administration

After Marcos Jr. came to power, Philippine-Taiwan political interactions became more frequent and active than under the previous administration. In terms of high-level dialogue, after Marcos Jr.'s election victory, Taiwan's "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" spokesman Joanne Ou "was the first to tweet congratulations" (Yang, 2022). In June 2022, Taiwan's representative office in the Philippines requested to attend the presidential inauguration, but the Philippines did not honour the request. Despite the refusal to invite Taiwan authorities to attend the presidential inauguration, Marcos Jr. immediately appointed Philippine Labour Secretary Silvestre Hernando Bello III as chairman of the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) after taking office. Taiwan's representative to the Philippines, Michael Peiyung Hsu, said: "This is the first time we have seen a Filipino ministerial-level official as chairman, whereas in the past the highest level was only undersecretary" (Yang, 2022). Jing-lin Cui, deputy spokesman for Taiwan's "Ministry of Foreign Affairs", said that the ministry and its representative office in the Philippines would pay close attention to the personnel arrangements of the new Philippine government and continue to strengthen "official ties" between the Philippines and Taiwan to promote "bilateral substantive cooperation relations" (Lv, 2022).

On 13 January 2024, the DPP candidate Lai Ching-te was elected as Taiwan's leader. On 15 January, Marcos Jr. took to the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) to "congratulate Lai Ching-te on behalf of the Filipino people on his election as Taiwan's next 'President'" and said he looked forward to "working closely together to strengthen common interests, promote peace and ensure prosperity for our peoples in the years to come". Taiwan's "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" retweeted his post and expressed its appreciation (Sputnik News, 2024). The next day, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning strongly protested the inappropriate remarks made by Marcos Jr. (Chen, 2024). Marcos Jr. later clarified that he had congratulated Lai on his election out of "courtesy" and as a "way of thanking Taiwan for hosting nearly 200,000 Filipino workers", and that he was "surprised" by China's reaction. He also said the Philippines remained committed to the One China principle and did not support Taiwan independence (Gita-Carlos, 2024).

In terms of visits by senior officials, Philippine officials have been more active and high-profile in their visits to Taiwan. On 12 May 2023, Philippine Senator Risa Hontiveros visited Taiwan, met with Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen, and discussed two sensitive issues: first, she expressed support for Taiwan's participation in the World Health Assembly held in Geneva, Switzerland, that same month, and promised to support the Taiwan's accession to the WHO and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO); second, she discussed the issue of Filipino workers in Taiwan, urging the Taiwan to take care of and protect the workers in Taiwan in case of

emergency, sending a signal that the Philippines might be concerned about China's reunification in the future. In response, Taiwan regarded this as "an important step in support of Taiwan" (Taiwan's foreign affairs department, 2023). The above interactions between the Philippines and Taiwan seriously exceeded normal limits, and on the day of the Philippine senator's visit to Taiwan, Chinese PLA military aircraft again patrolled Taiwan and issued a warning to Taiwan authorities and the Philippines. According to the Taiwan "Defence Ministry", a total of 32 PLA military aircraft and four warships were sighted near the Taiwan Strait in just 24 hours of continuous activity (Netease News, 2023).

There is also political instability in the Philippines' attitude towards Taiwan. In an interview with the *Philippine Star* in June 2023, Taiwan's "Foreign Minister" Joseph Wu Jaushieh claimed that if China moves against Taiwan, "who will be the next target, I think it could be the Philippines", and stressed that since the Philippines and Taiwan face "the same threats", the two sides should consider security cooperation. On 24 July, Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro bluntly stated that "the possibility of [Philippine-Taiwan security cooperation] is zero", indicating that the Philippines does not want to interfere in China's internal affairs and therefore will not sign a security cooperation agreement with Taiwan (Yan, 2023). The Philippine government has also repeatedly stated publicly that it adheres to the One China principle.

3.3 *Philippine-Taiwan Economic Interaction Under the Marcos Jr. Administration*

During this period, the overall performance of Philippine-Taiwan economic cooperation was relatively stable, with a continuation of previous economic cooperation projects and meetings, but no breakthrough cooperation. In 2022, there were nine Philippine investments in Taiwan, totalling US\$404,000; Taiwan was the tenth largest source of investment in the Philippines, with nine investments totalling US\$25.83 million. In 2023, there were fifteen Philippine investments in Taiwan, totalling US\$0.61 million; and there were nine investments from Taiwan in the Philippines, totalling US\$190.08 million. In 2023, Taiwan was the ninth largest source of investment in the Philippines, with major investments in electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning (82.4 per cent), manufacturing (12.5 per cent) and administrative services (1.9 per cent) (Taiwan International Trade Department, 2024).

On the trade front, Philippine-Taiwan trade has been generally stable but not outstanding. The Philippines' main exports to Taiwan are electrical machinery and equipment and their parts, while Taiwan's main exports to the Philippines are electronic products such as semiconductors and oil refinery equipment. In 2022, the Philippines exported US\$3.081 billion to Taiwan and imported US\$7.64 billion from Taiwan, bringing the total trade between the two sides to US\$10.721 billion, an increase of 18.17 per cent from the previous year. In 2023, Philippine exports to Taiwan will be US\$2.346 billion and imports from Taiwan will be US\$5.064 billion, for a total of US\$7.410 billion in trade between the two sides, an increase of 30.89 per cent from the previous year (Taiwan Bureau of International Trade, 2023). Meanwhile, the level of trade between the Philippines and Taiwan is much lower than that between China and the Philippines. In 2022, China's import and export trade with the Philippines will reach US\$87.725 billion, eight times the value of Taiwan's trade with the Philippines, making China the Philippines' largest trading partner for many consecutive years (Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

In terms of meetings, the most important meetings between the Philippines and Taiwan include the Philippine-Taiwan "Ministerial Conference on Economic Cooperation", the Philippine-Taiwan "Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology Cooperation", the Philippine-Taiwan Joint Economic Meeting, and the Philippine-Taiwan Industrial Chain Linkage Summit, among others. After Marcos Jr. came to power, these meetings continued. On 21 October 2023, the 8th Philippine-Taiwan "Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology" was held in Panglao, Philippines. Officials and scientists from both sides discussed a number of cooperation programmes, including assessing the progress of the second phase of the Taiwan-Philippines Volcanoes, Oceans, Typhoons and Earthquakes (VOTE) Programme; adopting the Healthcare, Agriculture and Talent Training (HAT) Initiative; implementing the "Taiwan-Philippines Sandwich Programme" to train Masters and PhD students; and strengthening cross-strait cooperation in natural disaster prevention, epidemic control and human resource training (Taiwan Science and Technology Council, 2023). On 23-24 November of the same year, the 7th Taiwan-Philippines Industrial Chain Linkage Summit Forum, hosted by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Industrial Development Agency of "the Ministry of Economic Affairs" of Taiwan, was held offline again (suspended for three years during the epidemic). The forum discussed four industrial topics, including smart applications of information and communication electronics, agricultural and fishery machinery, electric vehicle innovation and ecosystems, and industrial zone development and management, and signed a memorandum of understanding and two industrial cooperation projects, namely cold chain logistics, innovation and breeding, industrial zone fleet management, and agricultural manpower training,

and the two parties will cooperate on technical solutions, business models, technology rooting, and network establishment (Taiwan Economic and Industrial Development Agency, 2023). Taiwan is more mature in the development of electric vehicles, agro-processing, cold chain warehousing, etc., while the Philippines is in the process of transformation and modernisation, and the two sides are cooperating more closely in the industrial sector.

3.4 The Marcos Jr. Administration Panders to the US Military Deployment in the Philippines and Engages in the Cause of China's Reunification

In contrast to the Duterte administration's "pro-China, detached from the United States" stance, the Marcos Jr. administration is returning to its traditional pro-American stance. Although there is no direct military cooperation between the Philippines and Taiwan, the Philippines often cooperates with the United States in its military deployments and activities near the Taiwan Strait, demonstrating its tendency to follow the US policy of "using Taiwan to curb China" and using the Taiwan Question to help resolve the South China Sea issue.

On the one hand, the Philippines has expanded base cooperation with the U.S. In 2014, the U.S. and the Philippines signed the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which allows U.S. forces access to only five Philippine military bases. On 2 February 2023, Marcos Jr. met with U.S. Secretary of Defense Austin and announced that he would open four new military bases in "strategic locations" for U.S. forces. On 3 April, the Philippines officially announced the locations of the new bases, three of which are in Northern Luzon, including the Camilo Osias naval base in Cagayan province, the Lal-Lo airport and Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Isabela province. Another military base is located on the island of Balabac in the southwest of the Philippines, facing the South China Sea (Cao, 2023, p. 87). The northern island of Luzon in the Philippines is separated from Taiwan only by the Bashi Channel, and three of the four new military bases are located on Luzon, with the northernmost Camilo Osias Naval Base just 389.79 kilometres, from the southernmost tip of Taiwan itself (Xiong, 2023). Currently, six of the nine bases that the Philippines allows the US to use are directly on the Taiwan Strait or in the South China Sea, which is included in the US-Philippine joint defence perimeter.

On the other hand, the Philippines and the United States have intensified their joint military exercises aimed at Taiwan and the South China Sea. The joint Philippines-US "Balikatan" military exercise took place from 22 April to 10 May 2024 in the provinces of Palawan and Bataan, involving 16,000 people. For the first time, the US and the Philippines deployed in the northern part of the Philippines a new land-based missile system, the Typhon Weapon System, which has a range of more than 2,000 kilometres for medium-range missiles capable of deterring China's south-eastern coastal strip and the sensitive South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. US-Philippine exercises include the rapid deployment of a high-mobility artillery missile system on Palawan Island and amphibious assault drills along Palawan's western coastline facing the South China Sea (Wang & He, 2023).

Overall, since Marcos Jr. came to power, the Philippines has adopted a more active stance towards Taiwan, taking the initiative to make contacts and speculate on the situation in the Taiwan Strait, and political interaction between the Philippines and Taiwan has increased significantly. During this period, the Philippine government's One China principle has been relaxed. Although the Philippine government officially stated that it adhered to the One China principle, in practice it frequently contacted Taiwan to test China's bottom line and pressure China to make concessions on the South China Sea issue. However, the Marcos Jr. government also took China's pressure into account, and its stance on Taiwan was more contradictory.

4. Dynamic Elements That Led to the Evolution of the Marcos Jr. Administration's Position on Taiwan

4.1 The Philippine President's Personal Experiences and Security Perceptions Influence His Foreign Policymaking

From personal experience, Duterte from the southern Philippines Mindanao, is a native Filipino politician, in the early years of the left-wing influence to form an anti-American consciousness. In 2016, Duterte came to power and openly criticised US interference in the Philippines' internal affairs, warning the US not to "point fingers" (Xu & Wang, 2016). During Duterte's administration, the Philippines has generally adhered to the One China principle and maintained a restrained attitude towards Taiwan. Marcos Jr. comes from an elite family in the northern province of Ilocos and spent much of his youth in the United Kingdom and the United States. Moreover, the Biden administration in the US has granted the Marcoses immunity from prosecution while they live in exile in Hawaii (Huang, 2023; Wang & Xie 2023, p. 39). Under the lure and pressure of the US, Marcos Jr. adopted a pro-American foreign policy stance and followed the US in intervening in the resolution of the Taiwan Question.

In his perception of national security, Duterte sees "internal threats" as the most serious national security challenge. Coming from the drug and crime-ridden region of Mindanao, Duterte's greatest achievement during

his term as mayor of Davao City was to solve the security problem in Davao City. Pragmatism and a focus on domestic issues were important reasons for his election as president. Duterte has also prioritised internal security in the two national security documents he has issued since taking power, and in practice he has cracked down on law and order as a key measure to deliver on his campaign promises and maintain stability in power. Marcos Jr. was more concerned about “external threats”, emphasising sovereign rights in the “West Philippine Sea”, insisting that the “South China Sea arbitration ruling is binding”, and expressing concern about a possible “military conflict” in the Taiwan Strait (Xue, 2023, p. 87). In practice, the Marcos Jr. administration has manifested itself in strengthening the US-Philippine alliance and deterring China’s rights defence activities in the South China Sea.

4.2 Filipino Workers in Taiwan

The Philippines is one of the most westernised countries in Asia, with a generally high level of English proficiency, and Filipino workers are in high demand. The Philippines has become one of the world’s largest exporters of labour, and remittances from overseas workers are an important pillar of the Philippine economy, with overseas workers promoted in the country as “national heroes”. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said individual remittances from overseas Filipinos hit a record high of \$37.2 billion in 2023, up 3 per cent from \$36.1 billion in 2022, as a result of increased deployment of OFWs (FLW, 2024). By 2023, there will be around 150,000 Filipino workers in Taiwan, one of the backbones of the country’s manufacturing sector. Some politicians and media in the Philippines have begun to speculate that the Philippines has “significant strategic interests” in Taiwan. Marcos Jr. has also said that the Philippines must consider the safety and evacuation of its workers in Taiwan in light of the tense situation in the Taiwan Strait. Under the pretext of defending the interests of Filipino workers in Taiwan, the Marcos Jr. administration’s public concern over the resolution of the Taiwan Question was actually an attempt to pressure China to make concessions in the South China Sea. After January 2023, tensions in Sino-Philippine relations continued over the Ren’ai Reef and Huangyan Island. In February 2024, after his visit to Japan, Marcos Jr. told the media that “considering the geographical location of the Philippines and Taiwan, there is no reason for the Philippines not to be involved in the Taiwan Strait” (Venzon, 2023). In April 2024, during talks with the Chinese foreign minister, Marcos Jr said that “the Taiwan Question is China’s internal affair and the Philippines will continue to adhere to the one-China policy” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2023). However, after his visit to the United States in May, Marcos Jr. stated that “agreeing to the use of Philippine military bases by the United States is a defensive measure that could be ‘useful’ in the event that the PLA conducts operations against Taiwan” (Song, 2023).

4.3 Marcos Jr. Unhappy With China's Handling of South China Sea Disputes

In November 2023, Marcos Jr. said in a speech in Hawaii that the Philippines would not cede any territory in the territorial dispute in the “West Philippine Sea” (South China Sea) and would continue to abide by the 2016 South China Sea arbitration ruling (Presidential News Desk, 2023). Since 2023, the Philippines has repeatedly stepped up its activities in disputed maritime areas, while expressing disappointment at China’s “unilateral and illegal actions that have violated our sovereignty, territorial rights and jurisdiction and exacerbated tensions in the South China Sea” (Gita-Carlos, 2024). At the same time, the Philippines has strengthened its military cooperation with the United States, Australia, Japan and other countries, holding large-scale military exercises and joint maritime patrols in the waters in the South China Sea. Comparing the Philippines’ position on the Taiwan Question and the South China Sea issue, the Philippines is paying more attention to its interests in the South China Sea. The Philippines, with the support of the United States, is using Taiwan as a “pawn” to pressure China by testing China’s bottom line through contact with Taiwan. By playing the “Taiwan card”, the Philippines hopes to gain concessions from China on the South China Sea islands and other issues.

4.4 US Involvement in Regional Affairs

The Philippines has a special geo-strategic location, bordering Taiwan to the north and the South China Sea region to the west, and is considered by the US to be the eye of the first island chain. Since the Biden administration came to power, it has continued to promote the “Indo-Pacific strategy”, and the strategic competition between the US and China has intensified. The U.S. has continuously increased the level of US-Taiwan contacts in recent years, which shows that the US is trying to use the Taiwan Question to contain China’s strategic influence. In January 2021, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that restrictions on exchanges between US and Taiwan officials would be lifted. In February 2022, the US released the “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report”, stating that it would support Taiwan's ability to defend itself and enhance Taiwan’s military capabilities to respond to “coercion” (Xinhua News Agency, 2022). In August, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan marked a serious escalation in official interaction between the US and Taiwan. At the same time,

the volume and value of US arms sales to Taiwan have continued to increase.

The US has tried hard to bring the Marcos Jr. government into the U.S. camp of “countering China with Taiwan”. On the one hand, the Biden administration has frequently signalled to the Marcos Jr. government that it would strengthen cooperation. In May 2002, Biden was the first to call Marcos Jr. to congratulate him. In November of the same year, US Vice President Harris visited the Philippines and pledged to strengthen economic and investment cooperation between the two countries in areas such as civil nuclear energy cooperation agreements, the mineral supply chain, and the Mindanao geothermal energy project. In February 2023, US Secretary of Defence Austin visited the Philippines and stated that the U.S. Department of Defense plans to allocate more than \$100 million at the end of FY2023 for the construction of existing and new military bases, and to work with the Philippines to support the operation of four new bases (Cao, 2023, pp. 87-88). In April, the US and the Philippines resumed “2+2” talks between foreign and defence ministers in Washington, D.C., and further confirmed plans for cooperation in areas such as the digital economy, food security, and renewable energy. In April 2024, the leaders of the United States, Japan and the Philippines held a much-anticipated trilateral and bilateral summit in Washington. The US expressed unequivocal support for the Philippines on issues related to the Renai Reef, the Philippines’ South China Sea arbitration case, and illegal fishing, and pledged to invest money and equipment to strengthen the Philippines’ maritime military capabilities. The US and Japan also pledged to invest \$100 billion to establish the Luzon Economic Corridor, the first economic corridor in the Indo-Pacific region under the Global Infrastructure and Investment Partnership Framework. In May 2023, Marcos Jr. visited the US, and Biden said he would send a presidential trade and investment mission to the Philippines to promote investment in areas such as the Philippines’ clean energy transition, food security and key minerals (Cao, 2023, p. 91).

On the other hand, Marcos Jr. also faces pressure from pro-US forces at home. The US, in its long colonial process, has achieved political, economic, cultural and military penetration in the Philippines, and there are strong pro-American forces in the country. Most interest groups in the Philippines have close ties with the United States. Taking the military as an example, the establishment of the Philippine Army is basically based on the US military system, and the US military provides it with military assistance and training throughout the year. Most of the top officers in the Philippine military have studied and worked in the United States, and it is common for the military to be pro-American and to have a greater influence on the government’s foreign policy decisions (Wang & Xie, 2023, p. 39). The complex history of the Marcos family also makes the Marcos Jr. government subservient to the United States. Marcos Sr. ruled the Philippine political arena for 21 years and was forced to resign and go into exile in the US because of corruption. While in the US, most of his assets were declared illegal by the US courts and he had to pay billions of US dollars in compensation. Given that the US government has mastered many of the Marcos family’s tricks, Marcos Jr. wants to stabilise the ruling regime in the country, to reproduce the family’s political glory, he also needs the support of the United States.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

The Philippines and Taiwan are geographically close and have longstanding historical ties. Taiwan’s leader, Tsai Ing-wen, has taken the initiative to seek closer political engagement and economic cooperation with the Philippines as part of the “New Southbound Policy”. However, the Duterte administration is more focused on developing relations with China and has not responded enthusiastically to overtures from the Taiwan authorities. The two sides have fewer political ties and more economic cooperation, and the level of relations has remained within reasonable limits. The Marcos Jr. administration has focused more on pursuing its interests in the South China Sea, hoping to use the Taiwan Question to force China to make concessions in the South China Sea. At present, although the Marcos Jr. government has increased its focus on the Taiwan Question and intensified its interaction with Taiwan, there has been no substantial breakthrough in Philippine-Taiwan relations. Marcos Jr. administration’s faltering stance on Taiwan Question poses challenges to China’s geopolitical security. First, it fuels the arrogance of Taiwan independence forces on the island, which is not conducive to the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan Question; second, the Philippines’ interference in the Taiwan Question and its attempts to gain advantages in the South China Sea by playing the “Taiwan card” seriously interfere in China’s internal affairs and will also affect the friendly development of China-Philippines relations; third, it will make the regional situation more tense and complex. The strengthening of the US-Philippine military alliance has fuelled the Philippines’ hardline stance against China on the South China Sea issue, threatening peace and stability in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Based on past experience, it is almost certain that China’s policy will continue with its usual firmness and flexibility. First, it would continue to deepen China-Philippines economic cooperation. As of 2023, China has been the Philippines’ top trading partner for seven consecutive years, and China-Philippines economic and trade

cooperation has achieved fruitful results (Embassy of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of the Philippines, 2023). In the future, China would promote the construction of the Belt and Road under the framework of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), strengthen cooperation between the two sides in the areas of infrastructure, digital economy, energy and other fields, so as to achieve mutual benefits and win-win results, and to consolidate the foundation of the friendly relations between China and the Philippines; Second, China would consider improving the existing mechanism for dealing with the South China Sea issue. In 2002, China and ASEAN signed and issued the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. On this basis, China and ASEAN countries are promoting the consultation process on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC), which has been accelerated since 2018, with the completion of the first and second rounds of reading of the draft framework and the single draft consultation text. The third round of reading has been officially launched (Jiang, 2023). The Guidelines are more legally binding than the Declaration. Among them, the requirements of “maintaining the status quo” and “setting aside disputes” are conducive to regulating the behaviour of countries in the South China Sea and maintaining the stability of the situation in the South China Sea (Ding, 2023); Third, from China's point of view, an easy compromise will inevitably lead to a risk to the legitimacy of the regime and to being backed into a corner. In the face of the Philippines' strategic temptations and provocations, China must uphold the one-China principle, firmly safeguard territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea and defend national sovereignty and security interests.

There are also some limitations to this study. First, due to the problem of network firewalls, the authors encountered the obstacle of not being able to open websites when searching for relevant websites involving Taiwanese officials. Easier access to these websites might have helped to supplement some of the economic and trade data in this study; second, since President Marcos Jr. has only been in power for more than two years, the impact of his policy towards Taiwan remains to be further observed; and finally, Philippine policy towards Taiwan is also more subject to the change of government in the US this year. Future researchers should pay close attention and find out whether the election of Harris or Trump will have the greatest impact on the Philippine government.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the reviewers for their advice, support, and comments through the revision process. I would like to express my very great appreciation to Guangdong University of Foreign Studies for their support through the Scientific Research Special Funding Project. This study is also supported by the National Social Science Foundation Project under Grant No. 21CGJ049.

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