

## **Rational Choice Theory: Reasons behind the Philippines-China Collaboration during Covid-19 Pandemic**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Relations between the Philippines and China are filled with conflict and cooperation. The conflict between the two countries can be seen from the conflict in the South China Sea, while the cooperation between the Philippines and China can be seen in the form of investment, loans, and others. With these dynamics, the author then finds an anomaly related to why the Philippines, which is in conflict with China in the South China Sea still wants to cooperate with China during the pandemic of COVID-19. Through this research, the author aims to find out the reasons behind the Philippines' desire to cooperate. The author then argues that the cooperation happens because of the material benefits that the Philippines has received and the benefit of social relations. In doing this research, the author uses rational choice theory from a journal written by Linda K George. By using rational choice theory, the author will further review what choices the Philippines faces so that it prefers to cooperate with China

**Keywords:** The Philippines; China; COVID-19; Cooperation

### **Abstrak**

*Hubungan Filipina dan Tiongkok selalu diwarnai oleh konflik dan kerja sama. Konflik antara kedua negara tersebut dapat dilihat dari konflik di Laut Cina Selatan, sedangkan kerja sama antara Filipina dengan Tiongkok dapat berupa investasi, pinjaman uang, dan lain-lainnya. Dengan dinamika tersebut, penulis kemudian menemukan sebuah anomali terkait mengapa Filipina yang sedang berkonflik dengan Tiongkok di Laut Cina Selatan masih mau bekerja sama dengan negara tersebut di masa pandemi COVID-19. Melalui penelitian ini, penulis bertujuan untuk mengetahui alasan di balik keinginan Filipina untuk bekerja sama. Penulis kemudian berpendapat bahwa kerjasama tersebut terjadi karena adanya keuntungan materi yang diterima Filipina dan keuntungan hubungan sosial. Dalam melakukan penelitian ini, penulis menggunakan teori pilihan rasional dari jurnal yang ditulis oleh Linda K George. Dengan menggunakan rational choice theory, penulis akan mengulas lebih lanjut pilihan apa saja yang dihadapi Filipina sehingga ia lebih memilih bekerja sama dengan Tiongkok.*

**Kata kunci:** Filipina; Tiongkok; COVID-19; Kerja Sama

## Introduction

Since 1990, the Philippines and China have been in conflict with each other over Kalayaan Island in the South China Sea.<sup>1</sup> China claimed to have occupied Kalayaan Island before the Philippines did, which China has done since 200 years BC.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Philippines insists that Kalayaan Island belongs to the Philippines because under the provisions of the Exclusive Economic Zone, Kalayaan Island is still part of the Philippines territorial sea.<sup>3</sup> Until 2021, the conflict in the South China Sea is still unresolved.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from having a conflict in the South China Sea, the relations between the two countries are also colored by cooperation. The cooperation can be seen in 2021 during the pandemic of COVID-19, China assisted the Philippines by assisting 74 million USD.<sup>5</sup> With the conflict and cooperation that happen between the Philippines and China, a research question arises, why does the Philippines want to cooperate with China?

The author argues that the cooperation between the Philippines and China occurred because of the economic crisis experienced by the Philippines. This question is interesting to study because the ongoing South China Sea conflict does not rule out the possibility of the two countries working together. The purpose of this study is to see why the Philippines wants to cooperate with China.

## Literature review

A lot of authors have written journals about the cooperation between the Philippines and China, such as Bayu Arihito who wrote “*Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Presiden Duterte Terhadap Hubungan Bilateral Filipina dengan Cina*”. The journal explains Rodrigo Duterte's influence on the relationship between the Philippines and China. In this journal, the author said that Rodrigo Duterte's pivot to China has decreased the cooperation between the Philippines and the United States. Arihito further explains that the value, personality, talent, and experience of Rodrigo Duterte have influenced the decision to deepen the relationship with China.<sup>6</sup> The author also gives evidence to prove that the two countries relations have improved by creating a lot of economic cooperation and reducing the tension between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea.<sup>7</sup>

In a journal written by Tina Clemente entitled “The Economic Dimension in China's Foreign Relations: Reflections for China Studies in the Philippines”, economic factors play an important role in

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<sup>1</sup> Ledyashinta Mayasari, Dra. Sri Yuniati, M. Si, Drs. Djoko Susilo, M. Si, “Klaim Filipina atas Kepulauan Kalayaan (Spratly)”, (2013): 3, <http://repository.unej.ac.id/bitstream/handle/123456789/58947/Ledyashinta%20Mayasari.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> “Filipina Kirim Kapal Perang Demi Usir Nelayan China di LCS”, CNN Indonesia, March 26, 2021, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/internasional/20210326093409-106-622329/filipina-kirim-kapal-perang-demi-usir-nelayan-china-di-lcs>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bayu Arihito, “Pengaruh Kepemimpinan presiden Duterte Terhadap Hubungan Bilateral Filipina dengan Cina”, *eJournal Ilmu Hubungan Internasional* Vol. V, No. 3, (2017):954-957.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

relations between the Philippines and China, where China's rapid economic development has a major influence. Due to rapid economic growth, China needs more natural resources and has started to increase imports of natural resources from countries in ASEAN.<sup>8</sup> The contribution given is an analysis of how economic growth can be utilized by the state for diplomacy.

Unlike the previous journal, Tina Clemente's journal entitled "Understanding the Economic Diplomacy between the Philippines and China" discusses China's economic diplomacy with the Philippines. The main argument of this journal is that the Philippines-China economic cooperation plays a role in improving the Philippines economy.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in terms of investment, the Philippines invests more in China.<sup>10</sup> As well as the bilateral economic agreements that have occurred, show that the two countries have established economic diplomatic relations.<sup>11</sup> The data included in the journal comes from the Philippines Embassy in Beijing, China. This journal contributes in the form of an analysis of the economic relations between the Philippines and China from the aspects of the trade, investment, and empirical bilateral agreements.

Of the many journals that examine the Philippines-China relations, the arguments presented tend to be the same, which is the reason behind the cooperation is economic benefits, such as trade, investment, and others. The author feels that these journals do not examine the available options faced by the Philippines. Therefore, through this paper, the author aims to enrich and deepen the literature on the Philippines and China cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic by bringing new perspectives through rational choice theory. This research focuses on the choices faced by the Philippines and what are the advantages that made the Philippines decide to cooperate with China even though they have a conflict in the South China Sea.

## Theory

In the journal of "Rational choice theories: Contributions and limitations" written by Linda, rational choice theory is a theory that explains that every actor will do something to achieve things that benefit them.<sup>12</sup> Rational choice theory comes from the assumption that every actor is rational or at least they try to be rational in making decisions. Therefore, this theory is also often included in economic and social theory. Rational choice theory works on a framework of thinking that in maximizing a profit, every actor needs to think rationally in evaluating existing choices.<sup>13</sup>

Within the framework of economic thinking, the cost and benefits that will be earned are measured using material values, and so the sociologist.<sup>14</sup> However, sociologists also see other aspects that are not considered by economists, such as a sense of security and the benefit of social relations that

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<sup>8</sup> Tina Clemente, "The Economic Dimension in China's Foreign Relations: Reflections for China Studies in the Philippines", *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal* Vol. 3, No. 3, (2017): 1182-1183.

<sup>9</sup> Tina Clemente, "Understanding the Economic Diplomacy between the Philippines and China", *International Journal of China Studies Economic Diplomacy between the Philippines and China* 215 Vol. 7, No. 2, (2016): 216-217.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 217-219.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 219-228.

<sup>12</sup> Linda K George, "Rational choice theories: Contribution and Limitations", *Journal of the American Society of CLU & ChFC*, (1998): 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

will be obtained. Furthermore, Linda explained that the benefit of social relations can be in the form of, including but not limited to, social validation, assistance, and so on. While the cost of social relations includes disapproval, conflict, pressure to compromise one's will, etc.<sup>15</sup>

In analyzing this paper, the author will use the sociologist's framework that takes into account material benefits as well as benefits from relationships and a sense of security that will be earned.<sup>16</sup> There are three elements that are seen to take into account that the actor has made the decision with the greatest advantage. First, take into account the benefits and advantages that will be obtained through the available options. Second, consider all the costs that will be incurred when someone chooses an option. Lastly, take into account the costs and benefits of options not taken.<sup>17</sup>

## **Analysis**

### **a. The War on Drugs policy was the beginning of the Philippines' approach to China**

The relationship between the Philippines and China has always been filled with dynamics of cooperation and conflict. Since Rodrigo Duterte became the President of the Philippines, the relations between the Philippines and China, which were initially hot, have now improved. This started when the Philippines' War on Drugs policy aimed at eradicating drugs by punishing Filipinos to death was supported by China, although the world, including the United Nations (UN), Amnesty International, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and several countries such as the United States criticized the policy.<sup>18</sup> After the incident, the Philippines then decided to get closer to China.<sup>19</sup>

Based on the first element of rational choice theory in terms of benefits, the Philippines gained a significant advantage in maintaining the War on Drugs policy, which was widely condemned by the world. This can be seen from how the Philippines received material benefits, such as military assistance of USD 14 million to eradicate drugs.<sup>20</sup> Not only that, China also assisted the Philippines in the construction of the four main sites for rehabilitation, financial assistance for domestic security, and law enforcement. Seeing this support, Rodrigo Duterte later said that China was the only country that supported the Philippines' policies and efforts in eradicating drugs.<sup>21</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, China still supported this policy even though the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) stated that from March 2020 to April 2021, there were at least 8600 victims were killed because of this policy.<sup>22</sup> The benefit of social relations with China in a form of support can be seen in 2020. More precisely, before the 44th session of the UNHRC was held, China stated that they validate and support the War on Drugs policy to maintain security and social order. At this time, the ICC has attempted to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bayu Arihito, "Pengaruh Kepemimpinan presiden Duterte Terhadap Hubungan Bilateral Filipina dengan Cina", *eJournal Ilmu Hubungan Internasional* Vol. V, No. 3, (2017):955.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 958-959.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dexter, "Cooperation with China on the Philippines' War on Drugs," Foreign Service Institute, 2017, <https://www.fsi.gov.ph/cooperation-with-china-on-the-philippines-war-on-drugs/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ted Regencia, "'State terror': Report Backs ICC Probe of Duterte's Drug War", Aljazeera, July 15, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/15/investigate-ph-human-rights-report>.

conduct an investigation related to the War on Drugs policy that took thousands of lives. The ICC chief prosecutor has examined the conditions in the Philippines and is now requesting the judiciary to conduct a formal investigation.<sup>23</sup> However, China is still trying to help the Philippines by rejecting the investigation proposal.<sup>24</sup> With the condemnation and help from China, Rodrigo Duterte sees that China is a great supporter in maintaining the War on Drugs policy.

In the second element, the Philippines must consider the cost of social relations, which is the possibility of China forcing the Philippines to support various Chinese policies that will be issued or side with China. Related to this, the author finds the reason that the Philippines will not easily obey China's words. In the Philippines' foreign policy strategy, it is shown that the Philippines will not completely side with China because the Philippines will play on both sides of the conflict, which is the United States and China.<sup>25</sup> In this case, the Philippines will take any side that will benefit the conditions. The Philippines does not have to worry about the fact that China will be aggressive because the Philippines can seek help from the United States. In this case, the United States itself has military cooperation with the Philippines through the establishment of military bases. This cooperation is carried out to suppress China's aggressive actions.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, coercion or solicitation from China that might be detrimental can be damned by the Philippines because the Philippines will still receive assistance from the United States.

In the third element, if the Philippines does not cooperate with China, then the Philippines will lose its benefit of social relations. No one will support the Philippines in maintaining its War on Drugs policy because the Philippines-China relations will return to what they were in 2010-2016 when relations between the two countries were dominated by conflict and the diplomatic crisis.<sup>27</sup> Not only that, China will also not reject the resolution of the investigation into the issue of human rights violations in the Philippines. Thus, if we use rational choice theory, China would not voice the rejection since the Philippines was no longer a partner of China. Rodrigo Duterte himself, who is the decision maker of the Philippines, thinks that the War on Drugs policy is a very important policy in safeguarding the future and security of the Philippines.<sup>28</sup> He even stated that he will kill anyone doing a criminal act and harm the nation.<sup>29</sup> Seeing the War on Drugs policy was established through a big

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<sup>23</sup> "International Criminal Court prosecutor requests green light for probe into Philippines killings", Reuters, June 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/international-criminal-court-prosecutor-requests-probe-into-philippines-killings-2021-06-14/>.

<sup>24</sup> Angelica Garcia, "China Throws Support for Philippines' War on Drugs, Tells UN Body to Stop Prejudice", GMA, June 30, 2020, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/744912/china-throws-support-for-philippines-war-on-drugs-tells-un-body-to-stop-prejudice/story/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ralph Jennings, "China or US? Philippines Foreign Policy Plays Both Sides", VOA, September 3, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/china-or-us-philippines-foreign-policy-plays-both-sides>.

<sup>26</sup> Tommy Sorongan, "Filipina Restui AS Dirikan Pangkalan Militer di Wilayahnya", CNBC, December 1, 2020, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20201201192119-4-206159/filipina-restui-as-dirikan-pangkalan-militer-di-wilayahnya>.

<sup>27</sup> Bayu Arihito, "Pengaruh Kepemimpinan presiden Duterte Terhadap Hubungan Bilateral Filipina dengan Cina", *eJournal Ilmu Hubungan Internasional* Vol. V, No. 3, (2017): 951.

<sup>28</sup> Reuters Staff, "Philippines' Duterte says he takes full responsibility for drugs war," Reuters, October 21, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-duterte-says-he-takes-full-responsibility-drugs-war-2021-10-21/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

ambition of Rodrigo Duterte, the author can say that China's support for the policy became one of the reasons behind the Philippines' decision to cooperate with China.

**b. The economic benefits that the Philippines has earned**

The approach of the Philippines to China has had a good impact on the Philippines economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, China provided infrastructure assistance of 500 million Yuan, and a financial loan of 750 million USD to the Philippines to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>30 31</sup> In addition, based on the agreement made, the Chinese company will also invest 200 million USD in the construction of the Sangley Point airport. The Chinese Panghua Group also decided to invest in the construction of a steel company in Mindanao, Philippines for 3.5 billion USD.<sup>32 33</sup>

Through the first element, there are so many material benefits that are obtained by the Philippines. During this pandemic, China is still providing economic assistance to the Philippines. The Chinese ambassador in the Philippines even said that Chinese investment in the Philippines is increasing despite the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>34</sup> The profit earned by the Philippines alone reached 3.7 billion USD for investment. The assistance was beneficial in the construction of airports in the Philippines as well as the construction of steel companies. Based on data from 2018, the Philippines is the 17th largest country that imports steel with a total of more than 9 metric tons of steel.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the presence of steel companies in the Philippines will provide benefits in the form of reducing steel imports for the Philippines and also countries that invest will benefit from selling steel domestically.

In the second element, the Philippines has to take into account its dependency on China's economic assistance because it affects the conflict in the South China Sea. Dependence as in when a country's economy will be fully controlled by another richer country and then will be exploited.<sup>36</sup> This calculation is based on the fact that China is widely known for its debt trap, where China loaned billions of dollars to a lot of countries and took over those countries' economies when they could not pay the loan, like what happened in Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, and many more.<sup>37 38</sup> In the context of the cost of social relations between the Philippines and China, China, which is the largest investor in the Philippines, has more possibilities to control the Philippines economy. Moreover, China is eyeing areas

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<sup>30</sup> CNN Philippines Staff, "China grants ₱3B to PH to support infra, other development projects", CNN Philippines, January 16, 2021, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/1/16/China-P3-billion-grant-to-PH-for-infra-development-projects.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Reuters Staff, "China-backed AIIB approves \$750 million loan for Philippines' COVID-19 response", Reuters, May 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-aiib-philippines-idUSKBN2350B8>.

<sup>32</sup> "China-Philippines cooperation promotes economic recovery in Philippines: Chinese envoy", Xinhuanet, January 19, 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-01/19/c\\_139680828.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-01/19/c_139680828.htm).

<sup>33</sup> "China encourages companies to invest in Philippine infrastructure projects", Xinhuanet, February 4, 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/04/c\\_139721038.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/04/c_139721038.htm).

<sup>34</sup> CNN Philippines Staff, "PH sees surge in Chinese investments amid the pandemic, says Beijing's envoy", CNN Philippines, December 10, 2020, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/12/10/china-ph-investment-surge-pandemic.html?fbclid=IwAR2>.

<sup>35</sup> International Trade Administration, Steel Imports Report: Philippines, 2019, 1, <https://legacy.trade.gov/steel/countries/pdfs/imports-Philippines.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Biereenu-Nnabugwu M, "Political Theory: An Introductory Framework", (Enugu: Quintagon Publishers, 2013), 179.

<sup>37</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "China has a hand in Sri Lanka's economic calamity," The Washington Post, July 20, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/20/sri-lanka-china-debt-trap/>.

<sup>38</sup> Achmad Dwi Afriyadi, "Daftar Negara Kena 'Jebakan' Utang China, Infrastrukturnya 'Disita'," Detik, November 29, 2021, <https://finance.detik.com/berita-ekonomi-bisnis/d-5831796/daftar-negara-kena-jebakan-utang-china-infrastrukturnya-disita>.

in the South China Sea to get natural resources there.<sup>39 40</sup> More possibilities that China is trying to own the Philippines' territory in the South China Sea can be seen from how since 1947, China has been claiming the territory through nine-dash lines and keep doing a lot of intrusion until 2021.<sup>41 42</sup> But then, the author finds several reasons that prove the Philippines will not be that easy to give up its territory in the South China Sea even though China has provided a lot of economic assistance.<sup>43 44</sup> In the South China Sea conflict, the Philippines is supported by the United States to counter China's aggression and intrusion. It can be seen from how in 2021, the United States ambassador in the Philippines supported the Philippines in forcing Chinese fishing boats to leave its territory.<sup>45</sup>

As the author has stated before, there is also a cooperation agreement in increasing security between the Philippines and the United States which states that the United States will help the Philippines to protect its territory.<sup>46</sup> The author understands that there is a cost of social relations where the United States often stops the aid if the Philippines' action doesn't align with the interests of the United States.<sup>47</sup> If we are talking about a scenario where the United States stops giving military aid to the Philippines or no longer helps the Philippines when China violates its sovereignty, the author believes that the territories belong to the Philippines in the South China Sea may still indirectly receive assistance from the United States. The argument comes from the fact that China is the United States' biggest enemy. The United States thinks that the South China Sea is important because it is a transit route for ships from the United States to East Asia and vice versa. The United States thinks if China succeeds in getting the South China Sea, China will make policies that disadvantage and harm the United States.<sup>48</sup> That is why the United States will not allow China to control the South China Sea and they will intervene to create stability in the world.

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<sup>39</sup> Yuwa Hedrick-Wong, "Philippines' Richest 2019: Chinese Infrastructure Investments Could Inject Much-Needed Growth", *Forbes*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yuwahedrickwong/2019/09/25/philippines-richest-2019-chinese-infrastructure-investments-could-inject-much-needed-growth/?sh=576799f825fa>.

<sup>40</sup> Thea Fathanah Arbar, "3 Alasan Mengapa China Klaim Laut China Selatan", *CNBC Indonesia*, July 24, 2020, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20200724161343-4-175213/3-alasan-mengapa-china-klaim-laut-china-selatan>.

<sup>41</sup> Steven Mollman, "The line on a 70-year-old map that threatens to set off a war in East Asia," *QUARTZ*, July 8, 2016, <https://qz.com/705223/where-exactly-did-chinas-nine-dash-line-in-the-south-china-sea-come-from/>.

<sup>42</sup> "Daftar Ulah China yang Bikin Gerah Negara ASEAN di Laut China Selatan," *CNN Indonesia*, November 26, 2021, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/internasional/20211126153823-106-726528/daftar-ulah-china-yang-bikin-gerah-negara-asean-di-laut-china-selatan>.

<sup>43</sup> Ralph Jennings, "Kurangi Ketergantungan dari China, Filipina Perkuat Hubungan Ekonomi dengan AS", *VOA*, October 4, 2017, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/filipina-perkuat-hubungan-ekonomi-dengan-as-/4055650.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Emir Yanwardhana, "Kontroversi Laut China Selatan, Filipina Melunak ke China?", *CNBC Indonesia*, May 22, 2021, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20210522190731-4-247588/kontroversi-laut-china-selatan-filipina-melunak-ke-china>.

<sup>45</sup> Deutsche Welle, "AS Dukung Filipina dalam Perseteruan dengan China di Laut China Selatan", *Detik*, March 24, 2021, <https://news.detik.com/dw/d-5505420/as-dukung-filipina-dalam-perseteruan-dengan-china-di-laut-china-selatan>.

<sup>46</sup> U.S Embassy in the Philippines, Signing of Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, 2014, Filipina, [https://ph.usembassy.gov/signing-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/#:~:text=Monday%20April%2028%2C%202014%20%E2%80%94%20Ambassador,Enhanced%20Defense%20Cooperation%20\(EDCA\).&text=The%20EDCA%20affirms%20the%20understanding,the%20territory%20of%20the%20Philippines](https://ph.usembassy.gov/signing-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/#:~:text=Monday%20April%2028%2C%202014%20%E2%80%94%20Ambassador,Enhanced%20Defense%20Cooperation%20(EDCA).&text=The%20EDCA%20affirms%20the%20understanding,the%20territory%20of%20the%20Philippines).

<sup>47</sup> Prashant Parameswaran, "Why the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte Hates America," *The Diplomat*, November 1, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/why-the-philippines-rodrigo-duterte-hates-america/>.

<sup>48</sup> Michael D. Swaine, "America's Security Role in the South China Sea", *Carnegie Endowment*, July 23, 2015, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/07/23/america-s-security-role-in-south-china-sea-pub-60826>.

The third element relates to the calculation of the choices not made. The opposite decision is if the Philippines does not cooperate with China. When the Philippines does not get closer to China, all cooperation, agreements, infrastructure assistance, and other assistance coming from China will not exist. This makes the Philippines return to the way it was during the Aquino III administration where tensions in the South China Sea escalated, and there were only 2 cooperation agreements for 6 years, whereas during the Rodrigo Duterte administration there were 13 agreements in less than 1 year.<sup>49</sup> Not only that, the value of the Philippines exports will also decline because it is difficult for its products to enter the market in China. This can be seen from how during the reign of Aquino III, China deliberately made it difficult for the Philippines to export its fruits.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the Philippines must lose the country's largest infrastructure investor.<sup>51</sup> According to Forbes, China is the main source of infrastructure development in the Philippines. It must be known that 2020 was a very sad year for the Philippines because the country had to experience an economic decline and was perched at -9.5%, this figure made the Philippines economy at its lowest level since 1946.<sup>52</sup> The decline in the Philippines economy was of course caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and also several natural disasters. China's presence to provide financial assistance such as loans and investment is of course not to be missed because the assistance can be used to repair infrastructure destroyed by natural disasters and also to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the three elements of rational choice theory, it can be proven that the Philippines can maximize its profits from taking side with China.

### **c. Medical equipment and vaccine assistance from China**

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines has recorded that 1.41 million citizens have been infected with the COVID-19 virus, with 24,557 citizens dying from COVID-19.<sup>53</sup> Seeing this, in 2020 China participate in helping the Philippines in dealing with the COVID-19 virus. China is helping the Philippines by providing medical equipment, such as 40,000 N95 masks, 15,000 PPE, 400,000 surgical masks, and 102,000 COVID-19 test kits.<sup>54</sup> The assistance that came from China did not only stop in 2020, in 2021 China assisted the COVID-19 vaccine to the Philippines. At the beginning of the year, China donated 600,000 doses of the Sinovac vaccine.<sup>55</sup>

According to the first element, the Philippines decided to cooperate with China in dealing with the COVID-19 issue because China brought a lot of material benefits to the Philippines. It can be seen

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<sup>49</sup> Bayu Arihito, "Pengaruh Kepemimpinan presiden Duterte Terhadap Hubungan Bilateral Filipina dengan Cina", *eJournal Ilmu Hubungan Internasional* Vol. V, No. 3, (2017):959.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Yuwa Hedrick-Wong, "Philippines' Richest 2019: Chinese Infrastructure Investments Could Inject Much-Needed Growth", Forbes, September 25, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yuwahedrickwong/2019/09/25/philippines-richest-2019-chinese-infrastructure-investments-could-inject-much-needed-growth/?sh=576799f825fa>.

<sup>52</sup> Thea Fathanah Arbar, "Babak Belur, Ekonomi Filipina Minus 9,5% di 2020", CNBC Indonesia, January 28, 2021, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/market/20210128135153-17-219413/babak-belur-ekonomi-filipina-minus-95-di-2020>.

<sup>53</sup> "Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)-the data", Our World Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-data?country=~PHL>.

<sup>54</sup> New Worlds, "Philippines-China Relation Under COVID-19 Pandemic", The Manila Times, May 3, 2020, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/03/opinion/columnists/philippines-china-relations-under-the-covid-19-pandemic/722013>.

<sup>55</sup> Giovani Dio Prasasti, "Dapat Bantuan Vaksin Sinovac dari China, Filipina Mulai Vaksinasi COVID-19", Liputan 6, March 1, 2021, <https://www.liputan6.com/health/read/4495277/dapat-bantuan-vaksin-sinovac-dari-china-filipina-mulai-vaksinasi-covid-19>.



from the data listed previously, China has provided medical equipment and vaccines in large quantities. The profits obtained from the Philippines were then used by the Philippines to inject the COVID-19 vaccine to 70 million people in the Philippines.<sup>56</sup> The benefits of the vaccine itself are many, one example is what Rodrigo Duterte stated that workers who had received the COVID-19 vaccine were re-employed, helping companies and businesses reopen which in the end could benefit the Philippines because its economy could improve.<sup>57</sup>

Based on the second element, the author finds two things that can show the Philippines not to worry about the costs that will be incurred because first, through all the donations given by China, of course, the Philippines does not need to spend a dime. The second is related to image improvement by China. The Philippines has calculated what if China asks for a reward. In this regard, many perspectives state that the assistance that China provides even though other countries do not ask is aimed at restoring its bad image.<sup>58</sup> According to the World Health Organization (WHO), China was the first country to confirm the COVID-19 virus.<sup>59</sup> Through this fact, it is reported that the hatred towards China by some people in several countries is deepening.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, if China helps the Philippines just to ask for something in return, it will only damage China's image.

Entering the third element related to the calculation of the choices not made, if the Philippines does not take donations of medical devices and vaccines, the actual impact is not too significant because the Philippines can still buy AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer vaccines and other vaccines, but if the Philippines does not cooperate with China then Sinovac's stock of 12 million doses of vaccine will not be in the hands of the Philippines.<sup>61</sup> <sup>62</sup> Although the impact is not very significant, based on rational choice theory, each individual will make choices that are in favor with their interest, and so does the Philippines. The Philippines is trying to maximize existing profits by accepting donations and all reinforcements from China to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the hypothesis stated by the author in the background section is true because the Philippines wants to cooperate with China for economic reasons and medical assistance to deal with

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Giovanni Dio Prasasti, "Dapat Bantuan Vaksin Sinovac dari China, Filipina Mulai Vaksinasi COVID-19", *Liputan 6*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.liputan6.com/health/read/4495277/dapat-bantuan-vaksin-sinovac-dari-china-filipina-mulai-vaksinasi-covid-19>.

<sup>58</sup> Hemant Adlakha, "Did China Join COVAX to Counter or Promote Vaccine Nationalism," *The Diplomat*, October 23, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/did-china-join-covax-to-counter-or-promote-vaccine-nationalism/>.

<sup>59</sup> "Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 94", World Health Organization, April 23, 2020, [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200423-sitrep-94-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=b8304bf0\\_4#:~:text=The%20first%20human%20cases%20of,%2C%20some%20did%20not](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200423-sitrep-94-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=b8304bf0_4#:~:text=The%20first%20human%20cases%20of,%2C%20some%20did%20not).

<sup>60</sup> Hemant Adlakha, "Did China Join COVAX to Counter or Promote Vaccine Nationalism," *The Diplomat*, October 23, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/did-china-join-covax-to-counter-or-promote-vaccine-nationalism/>.

<sup>61</sup> T. Montemayor, "Vaccine price list circulating online not negotiated prices: DOH," *Philippine News Agency*, January 18, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1127686>.

<sup>62</sup> Nur Aini, "Filipina Miliki 12 Juta Dosis Vaksin Sinovac", *REPUBLIKA*, June 28, 2021, <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qvf2rp2013189304/filipina-miliki-12-juta-dosis-vaksin-sinovac>.

the COVID-19 pandemic. The more economic or material benefits obtained by the Philippines make the Philippines want to cooperate with China, this can be seen from the many investments from China that benefited the Philippines then this triggered the Philippines to continue to cooperate with China during the pandemic. This was later proven by investment, loans, medical equipment assistance, and also vaccines that were given by China which were very valuable for countries during a pandemic. Not only economic assistance, the author also finds that the Philippines earned a benefit of social relations. This can be seen from how China supports the Philippines' War on Drugs policy despite getting a lot of criticism from the international community. Based on rational choice theory, the Philippines has proven to have taken into account everything such as the advantages, benefits, costs of the choices made, as well as considerations of the choices not made when working with China. The analysis also shows that the Philippines' steps in cooperating with China have also yielded good results.

The research conducted by the author contributes to enriching the variety of Philippines-China cooperation research by presenting new perspectives through rational choice theory. In contrast to several journals listed in the literature review, the author presents a different study because it explains in more detail the choices faced by the Philippines and the benefits of these choices in the Philippines-China cooperation relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study has limitations in the form of sources used mostly from Indonesian and English news sites. The author feels that it would be better if the selected sources also came from news sites in Tagalog or Mandarin. The author is also aware that this research will be better if the sources and data used are from websites or government documents. However, because this is a contemporary issue and has recently occurred, very little information can be obtained through the official government website. Therefore, the authors suggest that readers can continue this research if the data contained in this study has been provided by the government.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the author also suggested that the Philippines should maintain its foreign policy that played on the side of China and also the United States. The author suggests this so that the Philippines does not forget the fact that the United States military assistance is also still very much needed. In addition, the Philippines must also make China economically dependent so that China can soften the ongoing conflicts such as the conflict in the South China Sea. Lastly, bringing the context of China's debt trap, the author hopes that the Philippines can sort out which help coming from China that has an intention to a debt trap and which one is not.

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