

# PSSR Editor's Notes

The Philippine Social Sciences Review (PSSR) continues to provide the platform for scholars to disseminate their research findings to a broader audience of researchers, students, and educators. This issue of PSSR contains two articles that are both interesting and insightful, written by scholars from the disciplines of History and Political Science.

Using a dynamic institutionalist approach, Jean Paul Zialcita points out in **Presidential influence in the legislative process: The passage of the RH Bill in the Philippine House of Representatives** that presidential endorsement is key to a proposed legislative measure being able to see the light of day as law. Making the specific case on the Reproductive Health Bill in the House of Representatives, Zialcita shows how crucial the backing of the president is in eventually securing its passage into law. Reproductive health, contraception, and sex education are somewhat taboo subjects in the official public discourse, the Philippines' burgeoning population notwithstanding. Measures to address the country's population boom have been previously proposed as far back as 2001. However, Zialcita observes the key ingredient missing in previous legislative initiatives is the added push coming from the political executive.

Presidential endorsement offers an effective antidote against opposition to a proposed (and especially controversial) measure. Presidential support can weaken or neutralize the opposition. The president can also rally the support of congressional leaders (especially the Speaker of the House) towards ensuring the smooth passage of a bill into law both at the committee level and in plenary. Presidential endorsement can also take the form of reframing the narrative surrounding an issue. Aside from certifying the RH bill as urgent, Zialcita notes that in 2011, then-President Benigno Aquino III used the term "responsible parenthood" instead of "reproductive health" to distance himself from a controversial term that had been associated with abortion in the United States – a subject that would have been unpalatable to a Christian-majority public. Aquino would eventually insist that the term be included in the title of the law – the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012.

Jely Galang in **Prosecuting the “Criminals”: “Undesirable” Chinese and court system in the Nineteenth-Century Philippines** speaks not only to an historical matter but also to a current concern – the presence of Chinese workers in POGOs or off-shore gaming activities in the Philippines. Galang describes how these so-called undesirable Chinese (vagrants, drunkards, petty criminals, and *indocumentados*) were dealt with by the Spanish authorities. He interrogates the actors and special colonial courts (particularly the *Tribunal de Sangleyes*) involved in prosecuting cases against these so-called undesirable aliens of the 1800s.

Beyond simply describing how undesirable aliens were treated in the Philippines in the nineteenth century, however, Galang also renders an interesting take on the colonial justice system as one that seeks to control both the colonized population as well as outsiders. The *Tribunal* had a unique dual feature – it was both an instrument of Spanish colonial administration and a Chinese institution at the same time as it was also expected to observe Chinese customs and traditions. While the *Tribunal* was considered part of the Spanish colonial justice system it also had features that allowed it to protect Chinese interests.

Galang describes some of the peculiar proceedings observed in the *Tribunal* at the time, perhaps not unlike how undocumented Chinese in the Philippines would do today. One practice was, instead of swearing on a Bible or some such item, a witness being questioned and asked by the *Tribunal* would be told attest to the truth by cutting off the head of a white rooster. According to one contemporary account, this proved to be disconcerting to a Chinese who was not telling the truth and would eventually convince the suspect to admit to everything and be punished accordingly. Expulsion or deportation to China was the common form of punishment for undesirable Chinese in colonial Philippines. Some Chinese defendants employ a variety of means to escape conviction and certain punishment. These included lying, pretending not to understand the language of the court, hiding information, giving false identities to the authorities and even claiming to be someone else they knew from before their arrest (identity theft). Many of these tactics are likely still being used today.

PSSR continues to offer articles across disciplines on issues and questions that impact the Philippines and other developing areas. PSSR publishes original papers from various fields in the social sciences and philosophy. We also encourage contributions from young researchers and educators in the social sciences from different institutions. In addition to original research papers, the journal also publishes book reviews, research notes, and articles on thematic issues.