# Going after another Alice Guo

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They must really think the Philippines is a big joke and that one can easily get away with fraud. First, there was Alice Guo, aka Guo Hua Ping, who had claimed she grew up on a farm and would later run—and win—as mayor of Bamban, Tarlac. Guo was unmasked for her links to illegal Philippine offshore gaming operators involved in criminal activities including human smuggling, cyber crimes, and even spying for China.

As if the entire caper that put to shame many government agencies caught in Guo’s web of deception was not enough, another similar case emerged last week. Sen. Risa Hontiveros, who had exposed Guo’s case through a Senate hearing, sounded the alarm on Joseph Sy, a mining executive, who has allegedly acquired fraudulent Philippine citizenship.

“It seems that the process that Joseph Sy, aka Chen Zhong Zhen or Shi Zhenzhong, went through was the same [as] what Alice Guo underwent,” Hontiveros said in a privilege speech on Aug. 27. She was referring to the late registration of Guo’s birth when she was 19 years old that paved the way for her fraudulent citizenship.

Last June, a Manila Regional Trial Court declared that Guo was “undoubtedly Chinese,” citing that there were no birth, death, or even marriage records of her alleged parents. The court also gave weight to the testimony of a signature expert, who stated that her fingerprint matches that of the Chinese national Guo Hua Ping.

## Loopholes in the system

Guo’s case has exposed loopholes in the system that foreigners exploit, given the entrenched corruption in the bureaucracy. Her case showed how easy it was for foreigners with dubious agenda to obtain Filipino birth certificate, passport and other identification documents, and even run for public office without raising alarm from officials and citizens.

In Sy’s case, Hontiveros’ research revealed that while he carried a Philippine passport issued in 2021, the Bureau of Immigration’s (BI) Alien Registration Division matched his fingerprints to those of Chinese national Chen Zhong Zhen. Chen had applied for a visa under Republic Act No. 7919, also known as the Alien Social Integration Act. This law grants amnesty to foreigners who entered the country before 1992. He was issued an alien certificate registration identity card stating that he is a Chinese citizen.

Like Guo, who assumed a prominent role in her community, Sy was chair of Global Ferronickel Holdings, Inc., a publicly listed mining and exploration company. At one point, he was appointed as an auxiliary rear admiral in the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary, the volunteer arm of the country’s Coast Guard. While it is a civilian support group by nature, and the rank is an honorary and volunteer role, his appointment reflects his influence in business and civic circles.

## Constant flashpoint

The BI admitted this week that foreigners securing Philippine citizenship through late birth certificate registration could be a systemic problem. And once they acquire a birth certificate, it becomes easy for them to secure other Philippine documents, including a passport.

As BI spokesperson Dana Sandoval said: “It’s okay if it would only be used for business, but what if it is used to embed themselves in society, use it for espionage and other criminal activities? It is scary.”

While Sy’s mining company was quick to defend him and vouch for his Filipino citizenship, there are enough red flags that should prompt the government to subject him to the same rigid, if belated, scrutiny that Guo had undergone. His affiliation with the Coast Guard must be immediately cut because of implications to our national security.

“At a time when the West Philippine Sea is a constant flashpoint of foreign incursions, these kinds of loopholes in our security are no longer acceptable,” Hontiveros said.

Chinese ’sleeper cells’Last year, the Armed Forces of the Philippines sounded the alarm on Chinese “sleeper cells” following reports of unusual online recruitment for “part-time military consultants” posted on a website that was traced to China.

Sen. Panfilo “Ping” Lacson revived this warning about Chinese sleeper cells and agents this week after the arrest of 19 individuals allegedly involved in espionage. One of the arrested Chinese was allegedly gathering intelligence about the recent midterm elections.

Lacson said he had received “good information” that there are many sleeper agents, including members of the People’s Liberation Army of China, in Palawan, Dumaguete, and Metro Manila, including near Camp Aguinaldo, the Commission on Elections, and Malacañang.

The government must act with haste in addressing these issues, given the precarious situation in its territorial dispute with China. It needs to review the laws, including RA 7919, look into the civil registration process, and plug the loopholes that allow nefarious elements to exist within our midst—seeping into every corner of Philippine society and putting at risk our sovereignty and national security.