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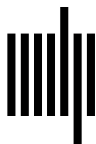

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3 How Do Workers Survive and Thrive in the Platform Economy? Evidence from China and the Philippines

Julie Chen and Cheryll Ruth Soriano

Information and communication technology (ICT) has long been deployed to facilitate the acceleration of capital accumulation and precipitate a spatial reorganization of work on a global scale (Castells 2000; Tsing 2009). Business process outsourcing (BPO) and call centers are early examples of "virtual" workplaces that enable the mobility of labor across national borders without the traveling of immigrant workers (Aneesh 2006). The recent rise of digital labor platforms, particularly crowdwork sites such as Upwork, has led scholars to argue that a planetary labor market is emerging, further disempowering workers and exacerbating existing structural and geographical inequalities (Graham and Anwar 2019). How do platform workers in developing countries adapt to the global expansion of online gig work—work that is performed and paid via the mediation of digital platforms? How can their work strategies inform our understanding of the platformization of work on a global scale?

The chapter, which is based on our respective research projects about platform labor, one based in the Philippines and the other in China, explores these questions. Cheryll Ruth Soriano has spent four years conducting an ethnographic study of online freelance work and digital labor in the Philippines, and Julie Chen has studied drivers on the ride-hailing platforms and riders on the food-delivery platforms in China for four years using surveys, qualitative ethnographic observations, and interviews. Our shared interests in workers' lived experience led us to take a comparative perspective in exploring platform labor in the Philippines and China, two developing countries in Asia that are also major adopters of the platform economy.

This chapter focuses on the individual strategies and associational communities that workers establish in different spaces, virtually and physically, for their survival, development, and self-empowerment in a global context of platformization. Two arguments are advanced. First, the relationships embodied in the digital labor process demonstrate the interconnectedness between global capital and local labor (Kelly 2001). We demonstrate that local labor structures and conditions mediate the flow of global

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and state capital and the global rise of platform-based labor management to produce a local political economy of informal labor transactions and sensemaking. Second, we argue that these localized relationships often exist within the labor regimes permitted or even promoted by the national government through regulatory institutions and policies. This gives rise to diverse means of labor resistance strategies corresponding to workers' local culture of sensemaking, association, and informal organizing. Addressing the poor working conditions worldwide in the platform economy, some scholars have advocated new models for unionizing in digital workplaces (Wood, Lehdonvirta, and Graham 2018; Graham and Anwar 2019), but the challenge posed by planetary labor markets for meaningful collective arrangements is well recognized. The national labor regime provides a good context for understanding why it would be important to look beyond unionizing to examine initiatives emerging from workers to help them survive or even thrive in planetary labor markets.

We first discuss the roles played by state policy and regulations, local labor conditions, and digital platforms in shaping the labor regime for platform work in the Philippines and in China. We then demonstrate the various ways in which workers create informal associations and individual resistance strategies in the platform economy. We conclude with a discussion on the implications of the comparative study for our understanding of platform work in globalized platform capitalism.

Global Capital in Relation to State/National Labor Regimes

The Philippines

The growth and popularity of platform labor in the Philippines has to be understood in the context of the rise of BPO and a long tradition of the government pushing a strategy of labor export. Initially concentrated in metropolitan Manila, the government push for BPO growth as a job-generation strategy has allowed it to spread across the country. In the face of high unemployment rates, and with a significant English-speaking population, many Filipinos have taken on BPO work, most of which involves offshored call center or customer service support, data entry, technical support, or medical transcription work. BPO presents itself as a viable alternative to labor migration and offers many Filipinos a relatively secure tenure, which is not enjoyed by the local workforce in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. However, the precarious conditions of BPO work are well documented, including long work hours and mental and emotional stress resulting from attending to irate customers on a daily basis, constant night shifts, mandatory overtime, and holiday work (EILER 2012; Fabros 2016). Platform labor, which allows workers to earn from home, thereby avoiding severe traffic

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conditions in the metropolis, emerged as a highly attractive alternative for many BPO workers who became discontent with the precarity and stress associated with BPO work.

To address the needs of the unemployed and marginalized groups, the Philippine government is now promoting platform labor, through its digitaljobsPH program, as a complement to BPO work, a catalyst for urban and rural development, and even an attractive option for fresh graduates. The labels of "modern heroes" and "world-class workers" that were previously attached to overseas Filipino workers and BPO employees are now being conferred on platform workers as well. The Philippines' Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT)[1] estimated that at least two million Filipinos obtain gigs through online labor platforms, while Payoneer (2020) reported the Philippines to be sixth among the fastest-growing gig economies globally.

Despite the difficult conditions that platform workers face in the Philippines (Soriano and Cabañes 2019, 2020), including cases of exploitation and over work, it is undeniable that many Filipinos have found online freelance work to be highly fulfilling, allowing them to earn a good wage, raise their families comfortably, and even obtain a sense of self-worth. An important local context to be considered is the continuing expansion of the large informal economy and the continuing "flexibilization" of work that is driving the popularity of platform labor (Ofreneo 2013). The many Filipino professionals and casual employees who are moving into platform labor need to be considered in the context of the many others who belong to the informal economy—including food peddlers, mobile credit sellers, public transportation drivers, caregivers, domestic helpers, and student research assistants—who are also leaping eagerly at opportunities to obtain work on digital labor platforms. This explains why, despite critiques about poor security and the absence of long-term advancement, online labor platforms are often viewed locally as a viable employment option. The absence of adequate alternative job opportunities and the state's promotional attitude are what the Philippines and China have in common when it comes to the local development of a platform workforce.

China

The growth of the platform economy in China is phenomenal. In 2019, more than RMB 3.2 trillion (US$469 billion) worth of transactions took place in China's platform economy, involving 800 million Chinese, an 11.6 percent increase in the number of users from 2018 (SIC 2020). An estimated 78 million people have become service providers on these platforms, with about 12 million drivers working for the largest ride-hailing platform, Didi Chuxing (hereafter DiDi) (SIC 2020) and 2.7 million riders working for Meituan, a food-delivery platform that controls about 65 percent of the domestic market (SIC 2019).

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Behind this exceptional growth is an influx of global and state capital, as well as institutional support from the central government. Chinese Internet companies Tencent and Alibaba are among the 10 largest tech companies in the world (Divine 2020), and they are aggressive investors in, and acquirers of, start-up companies. DiDi, which controls over 90 percent of the ride-hailing market in China, is one of the best-funded tech start-up companies, with $18.57 billion in funding, more than Uber before its initial public offering (CB Insights 2018). Among the top investors in DiDi are tech companies like Apple, SoftBank, Tencent, and Alibaba. In addition to private funds, DiDi has also attracted investment from prominent state-owned enterprises like China Life Insurance, the largest life insurer in China, and China Investment Corporation, a sovereign wealth fund that manages China's foreign exchange reserves and reports to the State Council (see Chen and Qiu 2019). The rapid development and adoption of mobile Internet is inseparable from the long-standing governmental investment in telecommunication infrastructure, including (more recently) artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing (W. Chen 2019).

Apart from offering policy support and investing directly in digital companies, the Chinese central government has also played a prominent role in restructuring the economy. Since the economic reform of the 1970s, the national government has orchestrated, via development strategies, a labor regime that reserves formal, well-protected employment to limited sectors while leaving informal labor practices to dominate manufacturing, construction, and now the urban service sector (Huang 2009; Lee and Kofman 2012). Since 2015, the national strategy to reduce industrial overcapacity in steel and coal has set in motion a new wave of precarious labor by state design (Lee and Kofman 2012), supplying abundant labor, including recently laid-off factory workers and migrant workers from rural areas (such as Hebei and Anhui Provinces) who face a shrinking labor market for manufacturing and construction jobs. Because of an economic slowdown, employment creation has become the top priority for the government to maintain economic and social stability.

The discourses of job creation and platform work as a new form of flexible employment with more autonomy are being promoted by leading platform companies in both the ride-hailing and food-delivery service sectors—as well as in national policies—to legitimate the economic and labor market restructuring (J. Y. Chen 2020). The discursive currency of official terminology such as "new forms of employment" accentuates the aspirations of working in the Chinese digital economy. Empirical studies, however, have found that the platform economy is dominated by informal workers who have little collective bargaining power and usually lack labor contracts or employment-related benefits (J. Y. Chen 2018; Sun 2019; Zhang 2019). Lax enforcement of existing labor

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law in China (Chan 2020) also contributes to the prevalence of precarious work conditions and the absence of social insurance among platform workers.

In short, while the Chinese government may appear to have played a more direct role than the Filipino government in fostering a platform economy through state capital investment, the cultural promotion of the platform economy as the national scheme to participate in global capitalism is no different. The divergent existing local labor regimes—that is, the preexisting BPO workforce and the information infrastructure in the Philippines, and the state-led shift in the labor market from manufacturing to service industry and a lack of an English-speaking workforce in China—have partially contributed to the booming of crowdwork in the Philippines and also the rapid development of a local-service platform economy in China. However, the economic pressure of global platform capitalism (Srnicek 2016), which has severely constrained the job opportunities available for workers globally, has also contributed to a deterioration of work conditions and labor rights in both developing countries.

Beyond Unionizing

Corresponding to the global spread of platform-mediated labor management catalyzed by the global flow of capital, platform workers across the world are fighting back through protests and strikes to unionize and enact an array of informal tactics of counteraction, and workers in the Philippines and China are no exception. However, their resistance strategies are constrained by local institutions and, at the same time, rooted in the local culture of informal association and workaround practices. There is no denying the importance of institutionalizing workers' right to unionize, but it is also important to explore the wide range of resistance strategies developed by platform workers in developing countries like the Philippines and China, where unionizing is ineffective or absent. In the Philippines, although wage workers have the right to self-organize and engage in collective bargaining, union membership continues to dwindle. Wage workers constitute 53 percent of the workforce in the Philippines, but less than 2 percent of that workforce (that is, less than 1 percent of the total workforce) is unionized, with annual strike numbers in the single digits (Ofreneo 2013; Serrano and Xhafa 2016). Scholars attribute this to the state's inability to properly protect workers and union members from employers' unfair labor practices (Serrano and Xhafa 2016).

In China, worker-initiated unionization is prohibited, and the state-sanctioned All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is the only legal trade union in the country. In the past few years, there have been scattered efforts to unionize platform workers at the municipal level (China Labour Bulletin 2018; Zhang 2019). The ACFTU campaigned

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in 2018 to mobilize various groups of workers, including drivers and couriers in the platform economy, to join the union.[2] But in practice, these newly established local unions for platform workers have been more interested in offering social support than in advocating for workers' collective bargaining rights (China Labour Bulletin 2019).

Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine ways other than formal unionizing in which workers organize in both countries. Specifically, we have observed that both Filipino workers on crowdwork platforms and Chinese workers on local-service platforms enact multiple "hidden resistance" strategies (Scott 1985) in their everyday working lives to circumvent the disciplinary controls embedded in platform labor arrangements.

Resistance Strategies in the Philippines: Enacting Imaginaries of Flexibility

Crowdwork platforms such as Upwork or Onlinejobs.ph impose control and extract value by acting as intermediary agents between workers (contractors) and clients; they also hold the power to determine the rules of interaction within their own digital ecosystems and facilitate conditions of work that they can update without consulting workers (Graham and Anwar 2019; McKenzie 2020). Labor platforms' affordances of search, matching, and datafication serving a large pool of clients (demand) and workers (supply) allow them to charge either the client or the worker (or both) for this service. Clients can explore the platform for workers or launch a competition for a job; at the same time, workers can vie for jobs by building a portfolio filled with personal information and their skills background.

However, we find that despite the disciplinary features of the platforms and clients, workers enact multiple strategies to circumvent and navigate platform and client controls. They engage in subtle forms of resistance and sensemaking (Shapiro 2018) through strategies such as "skills arbitrage," where they strategize in shifting between skills that can give them a better advantage (see Beerepoot and Lambregts 2014) or employ "platform diversification" by opening accounts across different platforms and maintaining as many networks and connections as possible within and outside these platforms. They also engage in temporal negotiation and reoutsourcing strategies that allow them to expand opportunities to take on larger pools of work against the controls of temporal arbitrage and the presumed limits of platform arrangements.

Strengthening the portfolio: Skills arbitrage and platform diversification Portfolio construction is important in crowdwork because this determines a worker's likelihood of attracting a client amid increasing competition. Some workers strategically curate their portfolios, adding skills that they may not yet have mastered but that, when contracted, they then attempt to gain through intense consultation with peers, joining Facebook groups with free coaching advice, and watching training videos on YouTube.

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Given the increasingly competitive environment, this "fake it till you make it" mantra is articulated by workers and coaches in freelancing training and meetup events. Curation of one's skills is related to skills diversification, in which workers learn multiple skills and shift from one to another depending on the circumstantial demands of the client. As one worker explained to us, "Although building expertise in, say, search engine optimization is important, we have to be flexible and learn as many different skills and tools as possible. If you don't keep up with what the platform demands, it will be hard to compete." It appears that skills diversification is part of the workers' imaginaries of flexibility that attract them to platform labor in the first place—some begin with basic skills like data entry but believe that the relative flexibility afforded by platform work will allow them to experiment with different projects and learn skills as they go. Thus, in the worker imaginary, their capacity to shift and expand from one skill to another (and also expand their project portfolio) is limited only by their entrepreneurialism, which primarily involves a mindset of persevering through, adapting to, and "rising above" the platform's conditions.

Related to skills diversification is platform diversification, in which workers learn how to flexibly shift from one platform to another (see Beerepoot and Lambregts 2014) to meet their own goals of earning a good wage and maintaining their competitiveness. Although the precarity embedded in the design of most labor platforms is well known, it is common practice for workers to diversify and create accounts in as many platforms as possible and expand their network to mitigate the challenges of labor seasonality and labor arbitrage. As an online freelancing coach explained to one of the authors, "Workers must learn how to explore as many platforms as possible. For if they stay in just one, like Upwork, they will be forced to take any project or rate offered to them by the platform."

Platforms have different focuses, features, and control mechanisms. As workers become familiar with them, they find it important to compare and make use of the respective advantages of each platform. Some, like Upwork, charge for fee cuts and "connects" (the number of projects a worker can bid on) that link them to a global pool of clients, for which Filipino workers must compete with aspirants from all over the world. However, Upwork also has a large number of clients and has institutionalized more safeguards against scams. On the other hand, Onlinejobs.ph, a foreign-owned platform that hires only Filipino workers, does not charge fee cuts for contracted projects. However, the rates can be lower, and the platform does not incorporate complaint mechanisms to protect workers from dishonest clients. There are also global platforms like 99Designs that attract those with specialized skills, and while they have relatively fewer jobs, the offered rates are higher, and there is a smaller pool of competitors. In

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sum, workers cushion against labor seasonality and precarity by selecting platforms that match their goals and capacities and by maintaining portfolios in diverse platforms.

Temporal negotiation Belying the imaginaries of flexibility, many workers also told us of the requirements to work within inflexible and predetermined schedules and to be constantly responsive to clients via email. Whereas "flexibility" and mobility have come to be important selling points of digital labor platforms, the professional habits that workers have created around these "always-on" and highly monitored work arrangements have forged new standards of professionalism that continue to be legitimized in platform work. This leads to an unspoken yet compulsory need for workers to assume the habit of constantly "performing presence" (Gregg 2013), which can lead to a "presence bleed," generating anxiety and compelling workers to develop an extra sensitive attunement to staying on top of their work, along with the ability to anticipate what needs to be done.

Filipino crowdworkers in our study describe the tension between flexibility and constraint in platform work, such that, although the work caters to their imaginaries of flexibility, some clients require them to install time-monitoring apps such as Hubstaff. In response, they may employ various strategies to fake working time, from having their partners move the mouse occasionally as they attend to their children's needs to having multiple screens that allow them to perform other jobs while showing the client that they are actively working. Some workers strategize by completing a task ahead of schedule but not immediately notifying the client about the completion. This allows them to take on other jobs or perform household chores while still being paid for the job. Thus, although they are bound by time-monitoring tools and controls, crowdworkers develop temporal negotiation strategies to regain some autonomy from the constraints on "flexibility" that platforms impose. Nonetheless, because of fears of labor seasonality, some Filipino crowdworkers take on more work than they can cope with when it is available or substantially extend their working hours, ending up feeling overworked but anticipating that they will reap future benefits such as client loyalty, good evaluation ratings, or higher rates.

Reoutsourcing Large-scale projects, which normally entail better payment, are valuable for crowdworkers to enhance their portfolios but difficult to obtain if one is new to the platform or works alone. Upwork, for example, charges a 20 percent cut of the first $500 a registered worker bills a client on the platform, but the rate drops to 5 percent for contract billings starting at $10,000 (Upwork 2020). In order to take on large and more profitable projects, some workers in our study became single "worker-agencies" who outsource projects or segments of their projects to other workers, including family members or neighbors. These agencies are able not only to command flexibility in choosing the scale of projects to bid on and navigating across platforms, clients, or projects

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but also to negotiate for higher rates. In so doing, they can improve their online portfolios while also increasing their influence and reputation among their local community of recruits and the online clients alike, from which they generate significant social and financial capital. The arrangement of worker-agencies can help mitigate the risks and precarity of labor seasonality because it enables relatively stable incoming work—the segments of a large project—for the recruited workers and allows worker-agencies to take on longer-term projects and establish trust with clients, which may lead to higher rates and noncash benefits some clients are willing to offer to "trusted contractors."

In sum, the strategies enacted by Filipino crowdworkers involve multiple negotiations of the controls enacted by labor platforms and clients, underscored by imaginaries of flexibility (Soriano and Cabañes 2019) that workers associate with platform labor. Skills and platform diversification, temporal negotiation, and reoutsourcing, are strategies developed by workers to negotiate vulnerability. In rural development theory, "livelihood diversification" has been a long-running strategy applied by peasants to allow them to manage the seasonality of farming (Ellis 2000, 1999). The theory argues that poverty reduction hinges on the capacity of precarious workers to combine different livelihood strategies and resources, reducing their vulnerability to shocks and risks. Similarly, diversifying skills and platforms allows digital workers to generate a cushion to not only manage the challenges of platform labor but thrive amid these controls. Scholars have also asserted that the dominant temporal order requires workers to synchronize (Snyder 2016) their time with employers or with other workers, and that this expectation also tends to be present in platform labor. The attempt—where workers have few mechanisms for formal negotiation due to labor arbitrage—to be in harmony with clients' expectations can also "destabilize workers' other social tempos" (Chen and Sun 2020, 1565). However, as we have shown in this chapter, negotiated temporality can be crucial for workers to circumvent the temporal arbitrage strategies embedded in the design of platform labor. The reoutsourcing of larger-scale projects is made possible through the informal self-organization of local workers. Within these local systems of exchange, workers are able to gain important bargaining capacity to transact with clients and at the same time obtain control in determining the price of labor for each worker under their agency.

Resistance Strategies: Building Vernacular Knowledge and Solidarity via Community of Practices

The resistance strategies deployed by Filipino platform workers are underscored by neoliberal ideologies of "individual entrepreneurial initiative" (Gandini 2016, 4; also see van Doorn 2017), which compels workers to circumvent the controls of traditional

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corporate institutions and the inefficiencies of local institutions to seize the imagined opportunities of economic gains. Social media groups, such as Facebook groups dedicated to online Filipino freelancing, play a crucial role in helping Filipino crowdworkers to learn through communities of practice. By sharing everyday experience and practical strategies (tips) to navigate the crowdwork platform system, Filipino workers build "entrepreneurial solidarities" (Soriano and Cabañes 2020).

Like Filipino crowdworkers, Chinese drivers and couriers also employ platform diversification (registering on multiple platforms to seek jobs) and temporal negotiations. For example, food-delivery riders engage in temporal negotiations by comparing orders at different apps and picking the ones with better payment (Chen and Sun 2020). Chen (2018) also documented that some drivers not only register multiple accounts on multiple ride-hailing apps but participate in "algorithmic activism"—using cheating apps or bots to manipulate the algorithms. Some bots enable drivers with lower ratings to circumvent the rating restriction so that they can be available for high-fare ride requests, and others allow drivers to reject as many requests as they like without risking their ratings.

Chinese platform workers develop their livelihood survival strategies to cope with fierce labor market competition catalyzed by the platform companies and by weak regulatory enforcement in the absence of institutional labor protection. In China, despite the legalization of ride-hailing platforms in 2016 and the passage of relevant local policies regarding the labor rights of drivers, the platform companies' blatant regulatory violations are rampant (Chen and Qiu 2019). The labor market for on-demand service platforms aggravates the existing informality, resulting in a proliferation of informal work. According to Chen, Sun, and Qiu (2020), the online ride-hailing market in China includes taxi drivers, private drivers (self-employed), drive-to-own drivers,[3] and full-time subcontracted drivers. There is also a small fraction of drivers who are formally employed by the platform companies with access to institutional labor protection.[4] Subcontracted drivers are hired and managed by fleet companies that affiliate with platform companies. Each group of drivers faces different levels of flexibility, labor protections, and income deductions by the platform or the employer company. Similarly, for the online food-delivery market, there are platform-hired riders, crowdsourced riders, subcontracted riders, and in-house riders. The number of platform-hired food-delivery riders has seen a sharp decline accompanied by the rapid growth of other types of workers since the online food-delivery market was consolidated in 2018 by the two market leaders in China—namely, Meituan and Ele.me (the latter is now part of Alibaba, the giant e-commerce company).

The categories and labels for different types of riders keep changing, suggesting the platform capital's response to market volatility. For example, the leading platform

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Meituan started to call subcontracted, full-time food-delivery workers *Zhuansong* riders and created a new category called *Lepao* for the crowdsourced riders who are willing to work full-time or near full-time. Compared with ordinary crowdsourced (self-employed) riders, *Lepao* food-delivery riders face stricter labor controls with a required number of fulfilled orders, minimum online time of nine hours with four-hour covering the peak time, and limited right to reject assigned orders, but they are prioritized for job allocation on the platform. The discrepancy among the employment types illustrates varied levels of informality, labor protection, and schedule flexibility (table 3.1).

The proliferation of informal work in China's platform economy points to the measures platform capital has taken to enhance the flexibilization of production and services by pitting workers against each other—with the result of undermining labor unity in the respective sectors. Against the context of a deteriorating and volatile labor market in the Chinese platform economy, the online communities and the historical tactics of informal organizing contribute to a certain level of collective action among Chinese platform workers, albeit with limited scale and impact. Informally employed taxi drivers in China have tended to rely on their social networks to mitigate the vulnerabilities of their informal occupations (Ding 2014). The practices of forming virtual communities and using communication tools to maintain strong ties with coworkers (who may also be fellow villagers or relatives) are preserved when these workers migrate to ride-hailing apps. It is now common for private drivers on ride-hailing platforms to

Table 3.1
The labor rights of Chinese food-delivery riders

Rider type	Employer	Base salary	Institutional labor protection and social security	Flexible schedule
Platform-hired	Platform company	Yes	Yes	No
Crowdsourced	Self-employed	No	No	Yes
Subcontracted	Third-party labor agencies	Occasionally	Occasionally	No
In-house	Restaurant	Mostly no	Mostly no	Depending on the employer
Zhuansong (Meituan)	Third-party labor agencies	Yes	Partly	No
Lepao (Meituan)	Self-employed	No	No	Minimum online time

Source: Table modified and updated from Chen, Sun, and Qiu (2020).

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join one or two social media groups at the national or local levels or both. There are also driver groups based on existing social networks.

Similar to crowdworkers in India (Gray et al. 2016) and the Philippines, drivers in China establish groups on social media to help build communities of practice (Wenger 2000), which allow drivers to disseminate information (Qiu 2016) and produce vernacular knowledge about how to survive and make a living in the platform-mediated work environment. Scott (1990) called this vernacular knowledge made visible and collective, produced, and articulated in a wide spectrum of activities "hidden transcripts" of resistance. For example, workers post daily performance and jokes, exchange tips and advice on how to handle unjustified customer complaints, develop quasi-open-access manuals for license tests, and sometimes share illegal tricks on how to get away with declining assigned jobs. Drivers rely on their digital literacy as well as on the collective wisdom of their extended social networks to cocultivate practices to navigate the ride-hailing platforms, which constantly change their algorithms, promotional schemes, and politics. Drivers also develop contingent tactics of resistance in those networks; a practice known among drivers as "pinning the driver (in the map)" (*zhazhen* in Chinese) is a case in point. "Pinning the driver" can mean two different resistance tactics.

One tactic is to cheat and game the system. In the intercapitalist competitions between rival ride-hailing platforms, one common strategy for platforms is to inject millions of dollars in the form of discounts for passengers and bonuses for drivers to retain both groups on their platform while driving their rivals out of cash or out of market. In the heyday of such price wars, as between DiDi and Kuaidi in 2014 and between then-merged DiDi-Kuaidi and Uber in early 2016, a driver would collude with friends to claim the cash bonus by asking the friends to send fake ride requests and pretending to have completed the ride without having driven to the destination. The driver and friends would split the bonus afterward.

Another way of "pinning the driver" turns the location-tracking algorithm on the ride-hailing platforms on its head. During planned strikes, some participant drivers would request ride service in order to identify nonparticipants, and then cancel the order or offer bad ratings and complaints to punish the strikebreaking drivers. The tactics of "pinning the driver" show how drivers can exploit circumstantial opportunities based on their knowledge about the platform.

Online communities of practice are also important for mobilizing (Qiu 2016). In 2019, a group of food-delivery workers for a platform called Shansong protested the company's move to subcontract temporary staffing agencies to expand the workforce, which would lead to a decline in their wages. After sharing their grievance in several WeChat groups and online forums, the workers mobilized around 300 experienced

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riders to stage a protest at Shansong's headquarters in the Haidian district of Beijing.[5] The potential threat to social stability induced a swift intervention by the local police and concerned authorities, who in turn pressured the platform company to satisfy some of the riders' demands.

Although platform-dependent drivers and food-delivery workers are reported to be one of the fastest growing groups of recalcitrant and protesting workers in China (China Labour Bulletin 2017), workers' informal organizing efforts have yet to translate into institutional changes or sector-wide solidarity. Indeed, individual or collective tactics to circumvent platform labor control are more often driven by hopes of immediate economic gains or by the threat of income decline. In both the Philippines and China, while workers' contingent and hidden strategies may allow them to survive, or even some to thrive, under precarious conditions, they neither challenge the structures of power underlying digital platform labor nor make demands on the state. Instead, they inadvertently function to justify platform labor arrangements and allow the state to evade responsibility.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the experiences of Filipino crowdworkers and Chinese platform workers in the ride-hailing and food-delivery sectors. At first glance, one could categorize these into two distinct forms of platform work—namely crowdwork and "work on-demand via apps" (De Stefano 2016). But these two forms of platform work have much in common when it comes to local encounters with global platform capitalism and workers' resistance strategies to survive the platform economy in the long shadow of neoliberalism.

First, the global proliferation of digital platforms to mediate service provision, either through crowdwork platforms or through local job-match for transport or food-delivery services, is inseparable from the global dwindling of institutional labor protection in the past few decades of neoliberalism (Srnicek 2016). Both Filipino crowdworkers and Chinese platform workers face continued casualization and flexibilization of work in the prevailing informal labor market in their countries; these trends are aggravated both by platformization and also by the local government's development policies. These development policies, which resonate across many developing countries, help create symbolic value and discursive currency for platform work in the Philippines and China alike. The valorization of BPO work and the recognition by the state of Filipinos as distinct global knowledge service workers help explain why workers have positive imaginaries about platform work. Chinese development policy and state capital investment also help orient platform work toward an "aspirational labor" in the digital

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economy (Duffy 2016). This suggests that the global platformization of work cannot be attributed to the proliferation of digital platforms or capitalistic market forces alone. The proactive role local government plays in shaping and restructuring the workforce in the domestic and global platform economy, along with the limited or inadequate job opportunities in the country, contributes to workers' acceptance of platform work as a viable or even desirable alternative.

The second common trend revealed by Filipino crowdworkers and Chinese platform workers lies in their development of hidden resistance strategies. Filipino crowdworkers have initiated efforts to collectivize platform labor through social media groups (Soriano and Cabañes 2020), and Chinese platform workers use ICTs to inform and empower themselves (Qiu 2016) for economic gains.

Aligned with a historical orientation toward labor export and BPO work, Filipino workers contend with mostly global platforms engaging a foreign clientele. Given the difficulties of challenging global labor platforms and the lack of institutional support from local labor agencies to protect platform workers or to facilitate better alternatives for them, workers are compelled to strategize on their own while learning and exchanging these strategies through connective associations on social media. The geographic concentration of the Chinese platform workers in this study who engage with work-on demand via apps, on the other hand, has allowed them to actualize online mobilizations into physical protests (difficult for geographically dispersed online Filipino freelance workers), even as they also enact individual resistance strategies.

Yet both global platforms such as Upwork and local platforms like DiDi centralize power in designing and controlling labor arrangements that make it difficult for workers, even as a collective force, to negotiate changes on their own, especially when state governments either invest directly in the platforms or celebrate them as solutions to unemployment and are unable to meaningfully intervene. Therefore, everyday forms of resistance, deployed individually and often in covert ways, remain the most common survival skill for both groups of workers. The underlying neoliberal logic, as Brown (2015, 131) argues, "makes individual agency and self-reliance the site of survival and virtue," and this catalyzes workers to self-enterprise either individually or in communities of practice to capture contingent opportunities on their route to survival and success (or failure) in the platform economy. In this sense, even when some platform workers indeed thrive in both countries, they work to reinforce the global platform economy's oppressive conditions and further normalize the neoliberal worker subject.

This comparative study also reveals some unique resistance tactics enacted by Filipino crowdworkers and Chinese platform workers, which may inform future possibilities of

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worker empowerment and inspire further research. For example, Filipino crowdworkers' tactic of reoutsourcing large-scale projects is made possible through the informal self-organization and mobilization of a network of local workers. It remains to be seen whether platform workers in China and elsewhere in the world could develop similar worker-initiated informal collectives to engage in payment negotiation.

Notes

1. Emmy Lou Delfin, interview by Cheryll Ruth Soriano, February 5, 2020, DICT, Quezon City.

2. See http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0411/c1001-29917885.html [in Chinese].

3. After DiDi consolidated the domestic market in April 2016, it introduced a drive-to-own program to recruit drivers. Successful applicants only needed put down a RMB 20,000 ($3,060) deposit to get a free new car from a partner auto company that they would drive full-time for DiDi. For them to own the car, they had to join a revenue-sharing program and meet a certain number of fulfilled ride services in the next two to three years.

4. For example, Shouqi Yueche, a ride-hailing app introduced by the state-owned enterprise Shouqi Group in Beijing. Drivers on its platform are all formally employed by Shouqi Group.

5. Riders shared news and pictures of the protest and the workers' demands in an online forum called "Riders' Family," but the link was taken down quickly.

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