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TÍTULO: Un estudio de caso sobre la competencia diplomática entre la República Popular China y la República de China (Taiwán): La experiencia de la República de Costa Rica de 1995 a 2010.

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RESUMEN: El presente estudio explora las relaciones diplomáticas entre la República de Costa Rica, la República de China (Taiwán) y la República Popular China desde finales de la década de 1990 hasta 2010. Se analizan los acontecimientos que condujeron al establecimiento de relaciones diplomáticas formales con la República Popular China en 2006, haciendo hincapié en el papel desempeñado por el Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, Premio Nobel y exPresidente de Costa Rica. El acceso a la ayuda internacional, y sobre todo, las impecables credenciales democráticas del Dr. Arias Sánchez, hicieron posible la radical transición de la política exterior.

PALABRAS CLAVES: competencia diplomática, República Popular China, política exterior, Costa Rica.

TITLE: A case study on diplomatic competition between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan): The experience of the Republic of Costa Rica from 1995 to 2010.

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the diplomatic relations between the Republic of Costa Rica, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China from the late 1990s to 2010. The events that led to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China are analyzed. in 2006, emphasizing the role played by Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, Nobel Prize winner and former President of Costa Rica. Access to international aid, and above all, the impeccable democratic credentials of Dr. Arias Sánchez, made possible the radical transition of foreign policy.

KEY WORDS: diplomatic competence, People's Republic of China, foreign policy, Costa Rica.

INTRODUCTION.

The Republic of Costa Rica is a small Central American country located between Nicaragua and Panama (Barry, 1991); (Perez-Brignoli, 1989). Known mostly for ecotourism and for its pacifist constitution, Costa Rica is the only country in the world without armed forces, a product of the enlightened decision of President Jose Figueres after winning a brief civil war (Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

Other factors that make Costa Rica unique is that it remained an oasis of peace during the difficult years of the Cold War in Central America (Leonard, 1991). While many of its neighbors suffered destructive civil wars and dealt with leftist insurgencies, Costa Rica remained stable through an implied social contract between the ruling elites and the lower classes. The ruling classes allowed the establishment of cooperatives and invested considerable resources into primary and secondary education in exchange for loyalty (Barry, 1991).

Public education, at the primary and secondary levels also became an important avenue for anti-communist indoctrination which was complemented by the large proportion of elite children sent to study to the United States for Tertiary education.

The Republic of Costa Rica was formally part of the allies in World War II, and it had formal relations with the Republic of China (Cordoba, 2005); (Leonard, 1991; (Perez-Brignoli, 1989). Even after the United States switched diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China after Nixon's historic visit, the Republic of Costa Rica continued to have close relations with the Republic of China and it refused to recognize the People's Republic of China (Cordoba, 2005). Initial reasons for the refusal to recognize the PRC included fears by the ruling elites about the spread of communism in Central America, a very likely prospect taking into consideration that Nicaragua had experienced the Sandinista revolution, and after the democratization of the Republic of China (Taiwan), another reason was ideological affinity (Córdoba, 2005).

Taking into consideration the many years of support for the Republic of China and the continued conservatism of the ruling elites in Costa Rica, one important question is "Why did Costa Rica switch diplomatic recognition to the PRC in 2006? The present paper explores the final years of the relationship with Taiwan and the events leading and following the switch of diplomatic recognition to the PRC. President Oscar Arias Sanchez played a central role in the transition and the success of the change can be attributed to both his personal characteristics and to the geopolitical context.

President Oscar Arias Sanchez took the opportunity of exploring new markets for Costa Rica products while negotiating the passage of the Central American Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Moreover, his stature as a defender of Human Rights and his background as a scion of one of the traditional landholding families of Costa Rica, partly shielded him from the political backlash of dealing with the PRC. At the time, President Oscar Arias Sanchez enjoyed widespread support after making a surprising come back to political life which required the changing of the constitution to allow him to run for a second term.

A final contextual factor that will also be explored in this paper is the changing priorities and alliances of the small yet important Chinese community in Costa Rica. The author argues that important changes in the commercial networks and priorities of the Chinese community in Costa Rica removed a further obstacle to the diplomatic switch. Many Costa Rican-Chinese had done very well in the business world through their links to the PRC, through the import of consumer goods from the mainland. Thus, the traditional opposition from the historically pro-RC Chinese community gradually turned into support for normalization of relations and the subsequent facilitation of trade.

DEVELOPMENT.

Historiography.

There is a wealth of literature dealing with China's rise and its vision of world order (Callahan, 2008); (Hahn, 2006); (Komori, 2009). One such example is Callahan's article about Chinese visions of world order (Callahan, 2008). Callahan takes the position that the People's Republic of China is returning to pre-western ideas of world order, which emphasize China's central role in East Asia. Nevertheless, according to Callahan, the PRC does not aim to be a global hegemon but rather simply aims to be recognized as a regional leader by securing its borders and engaging its neighbors. Based on this school of thought, China's engagement with African and Latin America can be interpreted to secure natural resources and to secure its borders by combating Taiwanese separatism on the diplomatic front.

Fenby's overview of the history of Modern China, which covers the period from 1850 to 2008 also supports the view that China is simply concerned about regional stability and securing its borders (Fenby, 2008). The saga over diplomatic recognition in the developing world is covered by Fenby with an emphasis on development aid and infrastructure projects. Fenby's book favors the view that post-1972 PRC is not interested in influencing the internal affairs of developing countries, but

rather it is interested in increasing trade, promoting transfers of technology, and securing its borders through diplomatic means.

Malik and Lin deal with the importance of history in the PRC's self-perception (Lin, 2009); (Malik, 2013). Malik's study focused on the power of historical fiction in terms of the PRC's South China Sea claims, while Lin's article focuses on the tributary system in China's historical imagination. Both studies focus on the application of history to the understanding of contemporary China and stress the importance of China being not only a nation-state but the oldest continuously existing civilization (Lin, 2009); (Malik, 2013). Therefore, both articles emphasize the influence of the historical experiences, real and fictional, in the way the PRC leadership interprets current events.

Wang complements the conclusions reached by Malik and Lin by bringing to the fore the importance of historical memory and in particular the pivotal role of history education in terms of China's "national humiliation" (Wang, 2008). Wang explains that the PRC's "One China Policy" has a central place in the PRC's foreign policy partly because of history education and how it has shaped the interpretation of Taiwan's importance as a symbol of Chinese territorial integrity.

Sutter's book on Chinese foreign relations focuses on the post- Cold War period and posits that China's historical experience as a regional hegemon and then as a victim of imperialism shapes its foreign policy in the 21st century (Sutter, 2012).

In the post-Cold War period, economic growth and globalization became central goals that were pursued in parallel with regional security and the defense of territorial integrity. The PRC's focus in terms of foreign relations in this period, according to Sutter, was increasing economic engagement with the Global South and to promote multilateralism. Sutter also stresses the importance of isolating Taiwan diplomatically through the use of a mixture of economic incentives and cultural diplomacy.

Ge's study on global rebalancing further supports the view that the PRC is attempting to gradually rebalance an international system that it perceived to be inimical to its most basic security interest in the Asia Pacific region (Ge, 2013). Ge mentions the use of military resources only in China's immediate region to deal with border issues and the PRC's avoidance of getting involved in international conflicts not directly linked to its most immediate territorial interests. Ge also focuses on China's preference for economic tools of diplomacy in terms of engaging the developing world. The literature focusing on the PRC's relations with Latin America tend to focus on the economic aspects of the relationship and tend to favor large Latin American countries such as Mexico and Brazil (Cheng, 2006); (Mora, 1999); (Santander & Martínez, 2010). Nevertheless the last bastions of Taiwan's diplomatic recognition are small countries in the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Central America (Santander & Martínez, 2010).

Santander and Martinez provide a Latin American perspective on the PRC's relationship with Latin America. The overall assessment of the relationship between the region and China by the authors is positive, but they describe the relationship as a double-edged sword (Santander & Martínez, 2010). Among the many advantages of the relationship, the authors include development aid, cultural exchanges, and access to an increasingly important consumer market. At the same time, challenges include: similar stages of development and non-complementary export oriented economies, philosophical differences over issues of human rights and political participation, among other things (Santander & Martínez, 2010).

The authors of this study focus on the challenges of trade when countries are competing to export similar products and point out that cheap Chinese consumer products have hurt several sectors of Latin American manufacturing, particularly in the textile sector. Another point of contention is connected to issues of human rights and democratization, with most countries in Latin America

transitioning to democratic political systems after the Cold War and a renewed interest in issues of human and indigenous rights (Blau & Moncada, 2009); (Donnelly, 2013).

There is scant literature specifically dealing with Costa Rica's relationship to China. The most complete study of Costa Rica's relationship to China was conducted by Thais Córdoba of the National University of Costa Rica (Córdoba, 2005). Her monograph focuses on the importance of Costa Rica for Taiwan's diplomacy and covers the competition from Beijing for economic influence. The book was published in 2005, and therefore it precedes the change of diplomatic recognition to Beijing, and it provides a wealth of documentary resources, interviews, and statistics tracing the relationship between the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China and Costa Rica since the establishment of relations. Córdoba's conclusion is that the Republic of China's relationship with Costa Rica after the 1980s was focused on complementary aspirations and ideological affinity.

The core of the relationship, according to Córdoba, was a common belief in liberal democracy and in the importance of human rights. It is important to note, that economic considerations are also included but based on the documentary evidence and interviews conducted by Córdoba with policymakers both in Costa Rica and Taiwan, the core of the relationship was political and ideological. Córdoba points out that Costa Rica's image as the only country in the world without military forces and its reputation as a bastion of democracy in a troubled region, was perceived and presented by policymakers as the country's greatest foreign policy asset. Thus, Córdoba favors a view of Costa Rican foreign policy that is inspired by domestic values and that favors a world system based on liberal democracy and human rights.

Primary sources directly dealing with the diplomatic transition support a sharp break in terms of Costa Rica's foreign policy as a whole and in particular towards China (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República Popular de China, 2007a); (Córdoba, 2005); (Ministerio de Relaciones

Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007b); (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica 2007c). Oscar Arias Sanchez's Nobel Prize acceptance speech sharply contrasts with later pronouncements in relation to foreign policy, during his second presidency (Arias, 1987); (Arias, 2009). A clear and explicit focus on realism and trade characterize his second presidency, while human rights and democratization were the trademark of his first term (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007b).

Further evidence to support the argument that the diplomatic switch was unexpected and based on realist considerations can be found in the official announcement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007b). The document is very succinct and simply explains the change as a result of "realist" considerations (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007b). Moreover, the official reaction of the Republic of China to the diplomatic switch is also very explicit in the role of secret negotiations between a small group of policymakers working for Oscar Arias Sanchez (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica. (2007c).

The Republic of China's reaction stresses that the most likely reason for the switch was the inability of Taiwan to provide greater amounts of aid to Costa Rica. Predictably, the PRC's announcement focused on the "One China Policy" and development aid (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica. (2007a). Speeches delivered by Oscar Arias during this period avoid what used to be his trademark issues, human rights and issues of political participation and favor a constructive relationship between the PRC and Costa Rica based on common economic interests (Arias, 2009).

Individual Agency: Oscar Arias, Academic and Scion of the Arias Family.

To understand Costa Rican politics since the 1980s, it is necessary to look at the background of Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez. He was born in the province of Heredia in 1940 to a prominent landholding family.

It should be noted that the family's wealth dates back more than seven generations, and it is based on land, coffee plantations. Arias attended private Catholic schools for primary and secondary school and completed undergraduate degrees in law and economics at the University of Costa Rica. He completed his graduate studies in the United Kingdom, first at the London School of Economics and then at the University of Essex where he completed a PhD in Political Science (Arias, 1987).

Dr. Oscar Arias joined the National Liberation Party (PLN), a political party with a social democratic orientation with a strong tradition of cooperatives and cooperation between the classes. The PLN was established by another wealthy landowner, Jose Figueres, who won the short civil war and abolished the military forces (Barry, 1991). Dr. Arias ran for president in 1986 with a focus on transforming the economy from cash crop agriculture to tourism and new forms of agriculture (such as flowers for export). Moreover, Dr. Arias moved the political platform of the PLN towards the right with a clearly neoliberal approach to economics (Leonard, 1991).

Dr. Arias won the presidency in 1986 and focused his foreign policy on dealing with the instability of Central America (Perez-Brignoli, 1989); (Wehr & Lederach, 1996). Several Central American countries, including Guatemala and Salvador were dealing with leftist insurgencies in the last decades of the Cold War (Leonard, 1991). Moreover, the Sandinistas were in power in Nicaragua and the United States was supporting the Contras. President Arias negotiated the Esquipulas Accords, which eventually ended the violence in Central America (Arias, 1987). He received the Nobel Peace Prize for his contributions to international peace in 1987. Another challenge faced by

Oscar Arias during his first presidency was the American invasion of Panama to remove Manuel Noriega from power in 1989 (Leonard, 1991); (Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

The Costa Rican economy indirectly benefitted from the instability in Central America by making the country more attractive for foreign direct investment and in particular as a destination for retired Americans and Canadians (Leonard, 1991). Nevertheless, the economy was still mostly dependent on cash exports, in particular coffee. The instability and ideological divide in Central America also pre-empted the development of a regional market, making Costa Rica particularly vulnerable to volatility in the price of commodities (Barry, 1991).

To deal with the challenges of a small domestic market, Dr. Arias favored regional integration through the establishment of the Central American Parliament, nevertheless the plan was later abandoned because of deep ideological differences with Costa Rica's neighbors. This early attempt at regional integration would influence his second presidency many years later, and most importantly his approach to international trade with the United States and China.

Costa Rica's Foreign Relations with China: A Brief Overview.

The first Chinese envoy to visit Costa Rica was Tam-Pui-Shum in 1911 (Córdoba, 2005). Fluent in Spanish and with diplomatic experience in both Mexico and Spain, he made an official visit to the country and had meetings with government officials and with the local Chinese community. This goodwill visit did not result in any concrete agreements. In 1948 formal relations were established, and a friendship agreement was signed.

The first Costa Rican ambassador to China was Jorge Zeledon Castro, appointed in 1953. It would take until 1958 and a visit from the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China to sign the first cultural agreement. In 1959, Costa Rica opened an embassy in Taipei headed by Fernan Vargas Rohmoser, of the aristocratic Rohmoser family. It is important to note that one of San Jose's most exclusive districts is named after this family and that most embassies are located

there. A trade agreement was signed in 1966 and President Jose Joaquin Trejos received a decoration from Sampson C. Chen (Córdoba, 2005).

Costa Rica's relationship with the Republic of China continued to strengthen with greater cooperation in the field of technology in the 1980s and reached its apex with the Bridge of Friendship which was donated by the Republic of China in 2003 (Córdoba, 2005); (Feigenblatt, 2009); (Von Feigenblatt, 2012); (Von Feigenblatt, 2008); (Von Feigenblatt, 2009a) The formal relationship with the Republic of China ended with the departure of Mari Acon Chea, the last ambassador of the Republic of China to Costa Rica (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007a, b).

From the Bridge of Friendship to the Soccer Stadium.

The period between 2003 and 2013 saw drastic changes in the relationship of the Republic of Costa Rica and the Republic of China, as well as the People's Republic of China. A strong relationship with the Republic of China reached its apex with the donation of the Bridge of Friendship, officially known as the "Puente de la Amistad de Taiwan" (Bridge of Friendship of Taiwan) in 2003 (Córdoba, 2005). In addition to infrastructure projects such as the Bridge, other areas of cooperation included scholarships for Costa Rica students to attend college in Taiwan, a commerce park in the vicinity of the Juan Santamaria International Airport, and many other types of cultural exchange. Costa Rica supported Taiwan's attempts to join international intergovernmental organizations until 2007 (Córdoba, 2005).

The Partido Liberación Nacional, Oscar Arias' political party, managed to change the Costa Rican constitution to allow him to run for a non-consecutive presidential term. After winning the elections, Oscar Arias started secret negotiations with Beijing about a possible normalization of diplomatic relations (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007b).

The secret negotiations eventually resulted in a surprise announcement by the Arias administration

about the switch of diplomatic recognition to the PRC (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007a). The announcement was followed by the announcement of the donation of a New National Stadium in San Jose.

Later developments in this period also included the negotiation to improve the management of the National Petroleum Refinery and most importantly the signing of a Free Trade agreement in 2011. This notable period closed with the visit of President Xi Jinping in 2013 during the presidency of Laura Chincilla, Oscar Arias' successor, from the same political party and same political faction.

Understanding the Switch: Individual Agency, Domestic Factors, and the International Context.

Costa Rica's diplomatic switch to the PRC is important because of the handful of countries that still recognize Taiwan, and also because of Costa Rica's international standing as a leader in the field of human rights and environmental issues (Feigenblatt, 2009).

Costa Rica's foreign policy after the conclusion of its Civil War and the dissolution of its military forces has focused on issues of international norms and most importantly on issues of democracy and human rights (O. (Von Feigenblatt, 2008). Until the end of the first decade of the new millennium, foreign policy statements were always worded based on shared values and the promotion of international norms such as human rights and other related liberal values (Córdoba, 2005). In other words, efforts were always made by administrations to integrate foreign policy into domestic policy.

Issues such as Costa Rica's support for greater international efforts to curb climate change were explained as compatible with Costa Rica's emphasis on eco-tourism and national conservation efforts (Córdoba, 2005). Moreover, Costa Rica invited human rights leaders such as Tenzin Gyatso (the XVI Dalai Lama) on repeated occasions and presented itself as an international defender of human rights and democracy (Barry, 1991); (Córdoba, 2005).

Oscar Arias played a pivotal role in the switch of diplomatic recognition, and his training as an economist had a lot to do with the decision to take the radical step. Costa Rica's economy at the beginning of the second millennium was mostly based on services such as tourism and a few cash crops such as sugar and coffee (Barry, 1991); (Santander & Martínez, 2010). President Oscar Arias defended Costa Rica's inclusion in the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2005 based on the principles of neoliberal economics. Costa Rica has a very small consumer market, and therefore access to larger markets such as the United States was considered to be necessary in order for the economy to grow. Moreover, the price index in Costa Rica had risen over the last two decades of the twentieth century while salaries and wages had stagnated (Barry, 1991).

CAFTA was heavily criticized in Costa Rica because of the negative effects it was expected to have in terms of opening competition in the field of light manufacturing and retail. Therefore, from the perspective of President Oscar Arias, it was a good way to balance trade and to open a potentially immense market for Costa Rica exports. Another important factor was the possibility of attracting Chinese tourism and to have access to cheaper consumer products to appease the deteriorating purchasing power of the middle class.

President Oscar Arias played a central role in this saga, and without his leadership and personal characteristics it is very doubtful that the diplomatic change would have taken place at that particular time. As mentioned in a previous section of this study, Oscar Arias Sanchez had impeccable credentials as a member of the traditional upper class. Moreover, his first presidency established him as the Costa Rican equivalent of a "Cold War Warrior". His status as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate shielded him from criticism about human rights issues, and therefore he was one of the few political figures in Costa Rica with enough political capital to lead the change of recognition to the People's Republic of China and to realign Costa Rica's foreign policy in a realist direction.

Dr. Arias was very careful to frame the diplomatic switch on realist terms, rather than attempt to frame the change on friendship between the two countries or on common values (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto República de Costa Rica, 2007b). His emphasis on the economic need to access new markets resonated with the Costa Rican population at a time of great economic concern over the deteriorating position of the country as an exporting country of relatively expensive cash crops with a very small manufacturing sector and a growing service sector. The international context facilitated the transition by showing that the United States was gradually increasing trade with the PRC, the PRC was very close to becoming the second-largest economy in the world at the time, and the Republic of Taiwan was not able to provide the same amount of development aid and possible trade as the PRC (Evans, 2011); (Gouvea & Kassicieh, 2009); (Kim, Fidler, & Ganguly, 2009).

One interesting part of the final agreement leading up to the normalization of relations between the Republic of Costa Rica and the People's Republic of China was the donation by the PRC of a new national stadium. Costa Rica's most popular sport is soccer, and its national stadium was aging and was not up to contemporary international standards. The main constraint was that the National Stadium could not hold a large number of fans. Soccer and liquor have both been historically subsidized by the government in Costa Rica and in many other Latin American countries as a way to provide entertainment for the common people and to provide a safety valve for social tensions (Barry, 1991).

The Arias administration negotiated with the PRC that the PRC would donate a fully equipped state of the art soccer stadium to replace the old National Stadium in San Jose. With over 35,000 seats, it is the first modern stadium in Central America, and it is used a multipurpose venue, hosting concerts and other events. The donation of the Stadium was initially criticized by some people as a cynical way to keep the people happy. Other criticism included that the entire project

would be implemented by PRC nationals and thus would very few jobs for Costa Rican nationals. A third, a final criticism was related to the high maintenance costs of the stadium.

CONCLUSIONS.

The role of Oscar Arias Sanchez in the diplomatic switch from the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China was central. His personal characteristics, such as his socio-economic status as a member of the traditional landed aristocracy, and immense political capital combined with domestic needs such as access to affordable consumer goods and securing market access for Costa Rican export products allowed him to make a sharp turn in terms of foreign policy. The literature supports the assertion that the switch marked a turning point in Costa Rica's foreign policy, and that individual agency played a central role.

The future relationship between Costa Rica and the PRC will be based on realist considerations, and therefore, it is not as stable as the previous relationship with the PRC. Thus, future obstacles can come from many directions.

A perceived decline in local manufacturing in Costa Rica and the failure of Chinese high-end tourism to materialize can influence the calculus in the direction of Taiwan. Moreover, the emphasis on human rights issues on both the left and the right of the political spectrum can become a considerable challenge to the relationship with the PRC in the near future.

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