

Taiwan's Foreign Relations with Developing Countries

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1. Introduction

Taiwan, officially called by its own government the Republic of China (ROC), was led by the only legitimate Chinese government acknowledged by most countries of the world even after the unification of mainland China by the Communists in 1949. Later, due to regional developments and the changing interests of the great powers, the international influence of the government of the island diminished, with a major turning point in 1971, when a UN resolution gave the People's Republic of China¹ (PRC) representation in the organization instead of Taiwan. Subsequently, a significant number of the countries in the world, for political and economic reasons, sided with Beijing, acknowledging the Communist leadership as the real government of China (Salát, 2017). Today, in addition to the Holy See, only 13 of the 193 UN member states maintain full diplomatic relations with Taiwan, the vast majority of which are in the developing world (by the end of 2021, Nicaragua was the last state to sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan).

Diplomatic recognition is an important expression of a state's sovereignty. Therefore, the countries maintaining full diplomatic relations with Taiwan are extremely important international allies of the island's government. For this reason, their examination also points to the essence of Taiwan's foreign policy aspirations. At the same time, in some respects, relations between Taiwan and its diplomatic allies are more of a question of prestige, as third world states have little ability to advance Taipei's interests on the international stage. In addition, Taiwan has informal diplomatic missions in 57 countries around the world,² which is of great importance; it is enough to mention the case of the United States, Taiwan's most important patron.

¹ Hereafter: China.

² The name of these institutes varies: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office, Taipei Representative Office, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office. In addition to their regular consular duties, they are also working to strengthen bilateral relations.

Overall, the study of the relationship between Taiwan and the developing countries is still relevant today, as it highlights the process by which Beijing's global influence continues to grow while that of Taiwan recedes, and the Latin American, African, and Pacific countries need to respond appropriately.

2. The Development of Taiwan's Foreign Relations and the Foundations of its Relations with Developing Countries

The Kuomintang government, led by Chiang Kai-shek, was on the side of the victorious powers at the end of World War II and was considered the recognized government of China. However, it was defeated in the civil war by the communist forces of Mao Zedong and was pushed back to the island of Taiwan in 1949. The outbreak of the Cold War fundamentally determined the foreign relations of the Republic of China, as in contrast to the countries supporting Beijing, the US and its allies maintained relations with the Taiwanese government until the early 1970s (Dumbaugh, 2006). The transformation of the international environment and the UN Resolution No. 2758, adopted in 1971, which deprived Taiwan of China's representation in the organization and handed it over to the People's Republic, led to major changes in which more and more countries established diplomatic relations with Beijing, turning their backs on Taiwan. The US took this step in 1979 (Embassy of the PRC in the U.S., 2012). While Taiwan was recognized by 71 countries in 1969, only 23 states remained on the island's list of "allies" by 1986, mostly developing countries in a fragile political and economic situation.

In the international arena, Taipei has long sought to present itself as the only legitimate government of China, but since the 1990s, gaining dual recognition with the People's Republic has become an increasing priority. However, a serious obstacle to this was the "One China policy", which in turn is the basis of Beijing's foreign policy. The point is that there is only one sovereign Chinese state, the PRC, therefore a country that wants to establish diplomatic relations with it, must sever official ties with Taiwan (BBC News, 2021). To obtain support from third-world countries, Taiwan has essentially decided to make the most of the opportunities offered by development aids (McCord, 2017). A key feature of Taiwan's international aid policy³ was providing generous support for states in need from Latin America to the Pacific, while not imposing serious conditions on accountability. At the end of the Cold War, when ideology mattered little, a positive perception

³ It is no coincidence that Taiwan is a major supporter of Official Development Assistance.

of Taiwan's aid also helped stabilize foreign relations in the developing world. The success of "dollar diplomacy" is evidenced by the fact that between 1988 and 2000, during the Lee Teng-hui administration, Taiwan established diplomatic relations with 7 new states (Dahmer – Rich, 2018). At the same time, it should also be mentioned that Taiwan's political system has changed a lot over the years, and the democratization that began in the 1980s offered an attractive alternative to countries with reservations about authoritarian regimes.⁴

In 2008, under Ma Ying-jeou's presidency, a new phase of cross-strait relations began as part of Taiwan's diplomatic ceasefire, in which the PRC and the ROC informally promised to discontinue competition for international recognition, meaning that Beijing did not pressure Taiwan's remaining allies to change sides. The agreement, even if valid only for a short time, can be considered a success for Taiwan, as the island lost an ally almost every year before 2008, as the PRC's growing political and economic influence in the Third World became more and more felt (Yen, 2010).

Overall, Taiwan's most successful diplomatic efforts are related to the least developed part of the world. This is both a positive and a negative aspect of Taiwan's foreign policy, which has again come under increasing pressure from the PRC in recent years. In the 2010s, in parallel with the emergence of the new world order, the global influence of the PRC increased spectacularly, thanks to, among other projects, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)⁵, which most developing countries wanted to join and hoped significant benefits from closer economic cooperation with China. Not surprisingly, in the last few years, Burkina Faso, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, São Tomé and Príncipe, Kiribati, Panama, and the Solomon Islands have severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan and switched sides. In early December 2021, Nicaragua cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan as well.

It is clear that the Tsai Ing-wen administration, which has been in office since 2016, has put a great strain on its relationship with Beijing since it did not accept

⁴ The first direct presidential election was held in 1996, when Lee Teng-hui of the incumbent Kuomintang party won the majority of votes.

⁵ In the fall of 2013, China announced a global project called Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), thus committing the Beijing leadership to building and modernizing transportation networks following the ancient caravan routes that once connected Europe and Asia. BRI is envisioned as an international development program led (funded) by China, which also meets Beijing's geostrategic goals by connecting remote regions to major trade routes. The project consists of two main parts: a land route (connecting China to Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe) and a sea route (covering the main trade routes of South and Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania) (Klemensits, 2020, pp. 137-138).

the “One-China principle”. Therefore Tsai Ing-wen is not in an easy position to keep its current allies, especially when even the US pressure is insufficient to prevent the changing of sides. Hence, the evolution of Taiwan’s foreign relations in the developing world will be increasingly determined by Beijing’s intentions (ChinaFile, 2019).

3. Development of Taiwan’s Relations with Latin American Countries

3.1. Taiwanese Presence in the Region, Diplomatic Rivalry with the PRC

Taiwan’s foreign policy has attached great importance to Latin America from the beginning, and it is no coincidence that Taipei has developed close ties over the years, especially with the states of the Caribbean and Central America. During the first half of the Cold War, under American pressure, most countries in the region agreed unanimously to choose Taiwan, but later the region became the focus of a diplomatic struggle between the PRC and the ROC, with both sides trying to help with “dollar diplomacy”—i.e., primarily through aid—and gain foreign policy benefits (Maggiorelli, 2019). After Asia, Latin America has become the main target of aid in Taiwan’s foreign policy, where the real needs of the host country mattered less than the political expectations of the donor.⁶ However, the region has benefited greatly from Taiwan’s aid policy, as it has offered a real alternative primarily to the poorest Caribbean states.⁷ It can be observed that the possibility of economic cooperation with the PRC is more attractive to more resource-rich, developed, and larger countries, meanwhile, the aid from Taiwan is more attractive to the smallest, non-self-sustaining nations (Esteban, 2008). Geographical factors are also worth considering here, as the distance from the PRC also gives more leeway to the states involved. In the 21st century, sustainability is becoming increasingly important for Taiwan, and in supporting its allies, it is primarily trying to promote its sustainable development agenda.

In addition to aid, Taiwan has sought to strengthen its position in trade and investment as well. Narrowing down our study to Central America, it can be stated that the volume of Taiwan’s trade in the region is only a third of that of the

⁶ Taiwan has generally dedicated 30-50 percent of its foreign aid to Latin America, which is quite significant given that Taiwan’s total foreign aid in 2015 reached 290 million USD.

⁷ Assistance to Latin American countries has focused mainly on the following areas: agriculture, infrastructure, business development, natural disaster recovery.

PRC, and the region also plays an insignificant role in the island's trade. In terms of investment, Taiwan enjoys an advantage over China, and increasing it has been a major goal in recent years.

In return for the aid, Taiwan, in addition to establishing and maintaining official diplomatic relations, also expected support from the host countries on the international stage, which, however, they did not provide in all cases. Naturally, they also did not have enough influence to effectively promote Taiwan's membership in the United Nations.⁸ All things considered, the effectiveness of aid-based foreign policy is controversial and it poses serious risks. It is undeniable, however, that Taiwan still has the most allies in Latin America (8), even though Beijing has enticed several of its rivals to its side in recent years. Panama, for instance, which had a significant influence in Central America for a long time thanks to the canal, was a key partner for the ROC until June 2017, when the small country established diplomatic relations with the PRC. Economic relations between Panama and China have steadily grown in recent years, and as Beijing is the second biggest user of the Panama Canal after the United States, it is clear that its political and economic influence has strengthened accordingly, with which Taiwan could no longer compete through its aid policy (BBC News, 2017). In 2018, both the Dominican Republic and El Salvador cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of China. The former switched sides after China offered a package of 3.1 billion USD in investment and credit, and the latter established diplomatic relations with the PRC after Beijing proved willing to fund a port project previously not supported by the ROC (Ellis, 2021). At the end of 2021, Nicaragua broke its diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favor of Beijing. Nicaragua recognized the ROC between 1962 and 1985, and after a brief transition to the PRC, the two countries re-established diplomatic relations in 1990. In 1985, Daniel Ortega, the leader of the left-wing Sandinista forces, severed ties with the ROC in hopes of cooperating with Beijing, but in 2006, when he took over the presidency again, in consideration of Taiwan's aid he maintained the pro-Taiwan foreign policy represented by his predecessor. Taipei also committed itself to strengthening ties. The development of personal relationships is indicated by the personal participation of President Tsai-Ing-Wen in the inauguration of President Ortega in January 2017. Despite the substantial financial support, technical assistance, and regular scholarships to Nicaraguan

⁸ Under pressure from Beijing, Taiwan cannot be a member of many important international organizations, but in Latin America, its foreign policy influence is strengthened by the fact that it has gained membership in a number of regional organizations, such as the Central American Bank for Economic Integration.

students and the prospering bilateral trade thanks to the FTA, on December 9, 2021, the PRC and Nicaragua signed a joint communique on the resumption of diplomatic ties in Tianjin (Aljazeera 2021).

3.2. Taiwan's Allies and Key Features of Bilateral Relations

3.2.1. Guatemala

At present, Guatemala is considered the oldest ally of the ROC, the two entities established diplomatic relations in 1933. Over the years, intensive cooperation has developed between the two states in areas such as infrastructure, medicine, health, education, and economy, along with trade, and technology. In addition, agriculture and innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises have also been important areas for cooperation (EFE, 2019). Economic cooperation is facilitated by the free trade agreement between the two entities coming into force in July 2006 (SICE OAS, 2021). According to official data, trade between the two countries amounted to 230 million USD in 2017, while imports from Guatemala increased by 50 percent and exports by 6.4 percent (Yang – Huang, 2018) the same year. In terms of international politics, the ROC has always enjoyed the support of the Central American country, and this is still true today.⁹ In June 2021, the President of Guatemala, Alejandro Giammattei, knowing of the support of the United States, said his country remained firmly on Taiwan's side while ruling out the possibility of accepting vaccines against the coronavirus from the PRC. According to Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the relationship between the two countries is "proud and friendly". The two parties continue to deepen cooperation in various fields, emphasizing the fight against Covid-19 and the promotion of mutual, sustainable prosperity (McCartney, 2021a). The fight against Covid-19 is an important part of the two countries' cooperation, and Taiwan has promised to give Guatemala access to vaccines as soon as domestic production begins. According to Guatemala, Taiwan is a key partner in sustainable development, as Taipei makes a crucial contribution to "the effective implementation of Agenda #2030 for sustainable development in Guatemala" (Hsu, 2018).

⁹ Bilateral relations were overshadowed by the fact that in March 2014, Former Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo admitted in a New York court that he had received 2.5 million USD in bribes in exchange for continuing to recognize Taiwan diplomatically (Raymond, 2014).

3.2.2. Honduras

After Guatemala, Honduras is Taiwan's most loyal ally, given that the Central American republic established diplomatic relations with the ROC in 1941. In April 2021, on the occasion of celebrating the 80th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two entities, President Tsai Ing-wen stressed that Honduras is a reliable ally for Taiwan and a more and more important trading partner. Tsai pointed out that Honduras had managed to turn the trade deficit with the ROC into a trade surplus, largely due to white shrimp, Honduran melon, coffee, and cocoa exported to Taiwan (Asialink, 2021). Honduras is Taiwan's tenth largest trading partner in Latin America. Following the signing of the free trade agreement between the two territories in May 2007, total bilateral trade increased by 150 percent from 66 million USD to 166 million USD between 2007 and 2019, of which Taiwan's imports increased by 305 percent, clearly reflecting the positive impact of the free trade agreement (Ministry of Economic Affairs, ROC 2020a).

In addition to sharing views on freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights, the ROC has provided substantial humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Honduras in recent years in the events of natural disasters. However, the coronavirus epidemic put some strain on the relations as a result of a serious health crisis in the Central American republic, and in May 2021, President Juan Orlando Hernandez raised the possibility of opening a trade office in the PRC to procure Chinese vaccines, while not intending to sever ties with Taiwan (Reuters, 2021). A diplomatic switch of Honduras does not seem likely, but it cannot be completely ruled out after the 2018 case of El Salvador. In response to China's active vaccine diplomacy, the US has felt the gravity of the situation, and sold 4.4 million Pfizer vaccines to the Honduran government, helping to stabilize Honduras-Taiwan relations, of which health cooperation will continue to be a priority (Pantano, 2021).

3.2.3. Belize

Belize, another Central American country, established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1989. The two territories have since then maintained a friendly relationship based on mutual benefits. Belize has received significant technical and financial support from Taipei over the years. In return for the assistance, the small Central American state strongly supported Taiwan's aspirations on the international stage, aimed primarily at membership in major international organizations (Embassy of Belize Republic of China, 2021). During his American tour in

August 2018, President Tsai-Ing-Wen also visited Belize, where she offered hundreds of thousands of dollars of support to the country. The Belizean Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wilfred Elrington, reaffirmed in 2019 that his country made the right decision to stand up for Taiwan against the PRC, as Taipei does not impose severe conditions in exchange for aid and “they don’t flood the country with their citizens”, adding that Taiwan’s territorial dispute with Beijing is comparable to that between Guatemala and Belize (Everington, 2019). To strengthen relations, the parties concluded several significant agreements in September 2020. The Agreement on Economic Cooperation could be a step forward in reducing tariffs to promote investment and technical cooperation. According to official Taiwanese data, trade between Taiwan and Belize amounted to 7.51 million USD in 2019. The new agreement will allow Taiwanese producers to increase exports of industrial products to Belize while opening local markets to agricultural products imported from the Central American ally. The agreement to allow designated airlines to operate an unlimited number of cargo and passenger flights is also of great importance. The third agreement allows mutual legal assistance on criminal matters (Taiwan Today, 2020). In March 2021, the parties also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Cooperation 2021-2025, which provides for public health, agriculture, trade, education, women’s empowerment, and an environment for safeguarding the wellness and welfare of the peoples of both countries and driving sustainable development (Government of Belize Press Office, 2021). Climate change is also hitting Belize hard, with hurricanes, floods, torrential rains, and droughts causing severe economic damage in recent years. As a reaction, Taiwan has set up the Belize Urban Resilience and Disaster Prevention Project in 2019 to try to transfer Taiwan’s disaster management experience and techniques to the Central American country.

3.2.4. Haiti

The Caribbean country established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1956 and has remained loyal to its Asian partner ever since, despite the PRC’s intensified diplomatic efforts to isolate the ROC in recent years. In 1993, Beijing opened a commercial office in Haiti, but diplomatic relations were eventually not established. In May 2018, Haitian President Jovenel Moise visited Taiwan, which was returned in July 2019 by President Tsai Ing-wen. Contributing significantly to the fruitful relationship was the substantial assistance provided by Taipei to alleviate the damage caused by the earthquake in 2010, including an offering of 150 million USD in 2018 to develop the electricity grid (Everington, 2018). Some tension appeared in the relationship between the two territories in early 2020, when

Haiti expelled the Taiwanese Ambassador for “a small incident”, however, the “long-term partnership” of the two entities was not questioned (Strong, 2020). Celebrating the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations in April 2021, the parties recalled that in the international arena, Haiti had always strongly supported Taiwan’s efforts, while the ROC had launched significant infrastructure projects in the country in addition to aid and investment. Among the areas of cooperation, education, energy, the environment, infrastructure, and public health have also gained prominence, with the latter gaining particular importance following the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic. Besides, Taiwan’s assistance in the field of sustainable development cannot be considered negligible. Much is revealed about economic ties by the fact that in 2017, Taiwan’s exports to Haiti were worth 34 million USD, up 45 percent from 2016. Imports from Haiti were worth 3.6 million USD, up 55 percent from 2016 (Taiwantrade, 2018).

In the political upheaval following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, the Caribbean nation’s rapprochement with the PRC again emerged as a real threat to Taiwan.¹⁰ According to US political circles, it is highly probable that Beijing will take advantage of the situation to try to put pressure on Port-Au-Prince. However, a break with Taiwan does not seem likely, as the majority of Haitians have a positive view of their relationship with Taiwan, and changing sides in favor of China would not sit well with Washington. The 500,000 USD grant from the Taiwanese government to mitigate the damage caused by the earthquake in early August is also expected to weigh a lot (Taipei Times, 2021).

3.2.5. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG)

The state of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, covering just 389 square kilometers and having just over 111,000 inhabitants, has had diplomatic relations with Taiwan since 1981. It can be said that fruitful cooperation has developed between the two territories which rests on 5 pillars: diplomatic relations; people-to-people friendship; physical infrastructure cooperation; private sector investment; and trade (iWitness News, 2019). Approximately 220 Vincentian students have received scholarships to Taiwan since 2004, and the opening of an embassy in Taipei on August 8, 2019 (Yu-Chen & Lim, 2021a) helped to improve relations. On the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in August 2021, the Foreign Ministry of Taiwan confirmed that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

¹⁰ Interestingly, several of the assassins fled to the Taiwanese Embassy, where 11 people were arrested by the police (Khaliq, 2021).

is an important ally in the region and the two entities are working closely together for peace and prosperity while also cooperating in the fight against Covid-19. It is worth mentioning that infrastructure projects such as Rabacca Bridge, completed in 2007, and Argyle International Airport, which opened in 2017 to promote the country's tourism potential, were implemented with Taiwanese assistance, but Taipei also helped its partner after the eruption of the La Soufrière volcano in April 2021 (Yu-Chen – Lim, 2021b).

China has also tried to put pressure on SVG in recent years, but the small state still stands firmly in favor of Taiwan, appreciating its benevolence. The projects also demonstrate that Taipei is doing its utmost to ensure that its partner successfully achieves the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

3.2.6. Saint Kitts and Nevis

The island country, officially known as the Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis, has a population of 53,000. It established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1983, immediately after gaining its independence. At the beginning of the 21st century, in addition to public health, agriculture, and education, combating climate change is also an important part of bilateral cooperation. Today, the two countries are committed to supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, education, and infrastructure development, while Taiwan also supports the socio-economic development of its partner. The scholarship opportunities for students in Taiwan are also appreciated by the island nation. In July 2019, President Tsai Ing-wen visited Saint Kitts and Nevis during his American tour, where she received high honors from the Governor-General in Basseterre as a token of appreciation for bilateral relations (Teng, 2019). The Prime Minister of the Caribbean state stressed on Taiwan National Day in October 2020 that Saint Kitts and Nevis have an interest in strengthening bilateral relations and his country appreciates the “treasured friendship” with Taiwan (Caribbean National Weekly, 2020).

3.2.7. Saint Lucia

The Caribbean island populated by just over 184,000 inhabitants has recognized Taiwan between 1984 and 1997, but after Dr. Kenny Anthony's Labor Party came to power, it committed itself to the PRC. In 2007, Saint Lucia re-established diplomatic relations with Taipei, which did not change after Anthony returned to power in 2011, acknowledging that the cooperation with China had not proved satisfactory and that the country could not behave “like a Jack-in-the-Box,

jumping from one country to another every few years.” (Edmonds, 2021). Saint Lucia opened its first representative office in Asia in Taiwan in June 2015, and during his visit to Taiwan in November 2017, Prime Minister Allen Chastanet stated that Taiwan was a real model for Saint Lucia in the areas of technology development, innovation, agriculture, science and technology, and education (Office of the President of the Republic of China, 2017). The two countries have achieved harmonious cooperation mainly in the fields of agriculture, fishing, information and communications technology, public health, and education. Addressing natural disasters caused by climate change is also an important part of bilateral cooperation, making Taiwan a reliable partner in sustainable development. Although the coronavirus epidemic has pushed the economy of the Caribbean state to the brink of collapse, it is firmly committed to the ROC, which has provided significant assistance in the form of medical equipment. Therefore, approaching the PRC is by no means an alternative.

3.2.8. Paraguay

In South America, Paraguay is Taiwan’s last remaining ally, with which the ROC established diplomatic relations in 1957. During the Cold War, close cooperation developed between the heads of the two entities, Alfredo Stroessner and Chiang Kai-shek, and officers from the Paraguayan army were happy to attend training at the Fu Hsing Kang College in Taiwan. Over the years, several important agreements have been reached between the two countries: the Cultural Convention in 1961, the Treaty of Friendship in 1968, and the Conventions of Tourism and Investments in 1975. In the early 1990s, under the new democratically elected President Andres Rodriguez, the possibility of rapprochement with the PRC arose, but Taiwan managed to prevent it. The ROC has provided significant support to the South American state and economic relations have also developed.¹¹ Taiwan’s commitment is well illustrated by allowing Paraguay to reschedule the 400 million USD loan in March 2009 (Central News Agency, 2009). At the same time, most of Paraguay’s exports (especially soybeans and beef) go to the PRC and Chinese investment has also strengthened, raising the possibility of the development of closer ties between the political elites from time to time. Bilateral trade with Taiwan has grown significantly since the February 2018 entry into force of a free trade agreement. In 2020, total trade turnover reached 155.4 million USD, an increase of 227 percent compared to 47.5 million USD in 2016. Of this,

¹¹ Since 2000, Taiwan has given 70 million USD in donations every five years, a figure that has doubled since 2019.

Paraguayan exports accounted for 123 million USD.¹² The total value of investments by Taiwanese firms in Paraguay was 157.35 million USD in May 2021, contributing to the creation of 1,900 jobs (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2021).

On the international stage, Paraguay has always been a committed supporter of Taiwan's efforts, and while its relations with Taipei are motivated by mutual respect between small states, they both view China's vast political and economic power as a source of danger. President Maria Abdo Benitez, taking up office in 2018, stressed in this regard that his country is seeking to expand economic ties with the PRC, but it is "always respecting our historic friendship with Taiwan" (Long – Urdinez, 2020).

The outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic has also put Paraguay in a difficult position—some politicians have called for recognition of the PRC—but in the spring of 2021, the President categorically stated that he would not accept vaccines from China under the condition of cutting off diplomatic ties with Taiwan (Premat, 2021). To counter Chinese diplomacy, India then sent 200,000 doses of the Covaxin vaccine to Paraguay at the request of Taiwan, and Taipei later made further offers.¹³ At the moment, it looks like Taiwan's last South American ally will continue to hold on to it and there is certainly no need to fear a severance of bilateral ties ahead of the 2023 elections.

4. ROC Relations with African States

4.1. The Situation of Taiwanese Diplomacy on the Black Continent

Taiwan's relations with Africa can be seen in part of the legacy of the Cold War, in which both the PRC and the ROC sought to have themselves recognized as China's legitimate government and gathered allies in the region to do so. Initially, due to American influence, Taiwan's superiority proved to be overwhelming, but later on, when ideology mattered less and less, the influence of Taiwan diminished. By 1979, only 5 of the 50 African states recognized Taiwan (Rich – Banerjee, 2015, p. 146). Like in Latin America, it can be observed that more resource-poor, less developed small states tend to maintain closer ties with Taiwan.

¹² Main export articles: beef, sesame, grain sorghum, sawed wood, mate, and essential oils.

¹³ Among other things, in July, ROC donated 120 oxygen concentrators to Paraguay (The Times of India, 2021).

To facilitate relations, the ROC provided significant technical assistance to African states, focusing primarily on agricultural development. In addition to disbursing the Official Development Assistance (ODA), “dollar diplomacy” worked here as well, with, for example, Niger receiving 50 million USD in 1992 and the Gambia 35 million USD in 1995. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, Taipei could hardly compete with the PRC in this regard. Angola received 9 billion USD in loans in 2006 and the Democratic Republic of Congo 9 billion USD in 2008 (Rich – Banerjee, 2015, p. 150). After the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, the trend became even more spectacular, with the PRC gradually becoming the continent’s dominant economic partner. Not surprisingly, in the second half of the 2010s, Taiwan lost additional allies, namely São Tomé and Príncipe and then Burkina Faso.

São Tomé and Príncipe, an African island nation established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1975, from which it received significant assistance over the years in the fields of agriculture, energy, technology, and health. Nevertheless, in December 2016, after not receiving the 200 million USD aid demanded from Taiwan, it severed diplomatic ties with its former partner and recognized the PRC (Hsu, 2016).

Burkina Faso recognized Taiwan from 1961 to 1966, then the PRC until 1994, and then again Taiwan until 2018. Taiwan’s role in humanitarian aid and investment, as well as in health and agriculture, is unquestionable in the country. Yet, in May 2018, the Burkina Faso government decided to sever the relationship and recognize the PRC, justifying the step by stating that the partnership with Beijing had huge economic potential (Blanchard, 2018).

4.2. Eswatini

Taiwan’s last remaining African ally established a diplomatic relationship with the ROC in 1968. The absolute monarchy, formerly known as Swaziland, stands by Taiwan even after the rest of the whole continent recognized the PRC. For Taiwan, Eswatini is an important ally as well as an investment and trading partner that is also of great importance in exploiting market opportunities in Africa. The Taiwan-Eswatini Economic Cooperation Agreement, concluded in 2018, allowed Eswatini to export duty-free products, e.g., honey and avocado to Taiwan (Ministry of Economic Affairs, ROC, 2018). According to official figures, bilateral trade surged to 9.82 million USD during the first 11 months of 2018, up 41

percent from the same period in 2017. Twenty Taiwanese companies are operating in the country, investing a total of 80 million USD and creating nearly 13,000 jobs (Taiwan Today, 2018). In addition to the aid, Taiwan also helped Eswatini through the development of the electricity network and providing scholarships. It is noteworthy that for the African country, after South Africa, Taiwan is the second most important partner. The two countries are also committed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in which Taiwan is helping its African partner by transferring technology and experience. To further strengthen ties, in April 2018, President Tsai Ing-wen first visited Eswatini, and two months later King Mswati III travelled to Taiwan.

In 2018, the PRC stepped up diplomatic pressure on Eswatini while trying to isolate the African country. Saying “no diplomatic relations, no more business benefits,” China has made it harder for Swazis to gain access to visas. Nevertheless, the current government led by King Mswati III has rejected the PRC’s attempts and is adhering to the ROC. Following the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, Taiwan’s health support will certainly weigh a lot. The ruler appreciated that he himself had recovered from the Covid-19 disease thanks to, among other things, antiviral drugs received from Taiwan (Nikkei Asia, 2021). However, due to the domestic political events of recent months—protests and subsequent violent action by the authorities—the government’s popularity is declining, and its room for maneuver in foreign policy has narrowed. All of this could result in the administration being forced to turn to the PRC for political and economic support for survival in the future, with which Taiwan will no longer be able to compete, and this could lead to the severance of relations (Du Plessis, 2021).

5. Taiwan and the Pacific Region

5.1. The Results of Taiwan’s “Dollar Diplomacy” in the Region

After Latin America, the Pacific archipelago is of the greatest importance to Taiwan regarding diplomacy, since four of the 14 island states here still recognize Taipei. During the decolonization process, the newly independent countries welcomed the support of the ROC and the PRC, and in return, the latter sought diplomatic recognition and support for their affairs on the international stage.¹⁴ As

¹⁴ As the Pacific island states hold 7 percent of the vote in the UN, each of the largest donor states would need their support.

a significant part of the world's most aid-dependent countries are in the region, "dollar diplomacy" has intensified, contributing greatly to the strengthening of Sino-Taiwanese diplomatic rivalry.

Between 2011 and 2016, China distributed 1.05 billion USD in aid to states in the region, compared to Taiwan's 271 million USD, while in per capita terms, Taiwan leads with 237 million USD versus PRC's 108 million USD (Zhang, 2020). PRC is spending more by several orders of magnitude on infrastructure development, e.g. in 2017 it provided 4 billion USD to the Pacific islands.¹⁵ For China, the main significance of these countries is that one of the important routes of the "21st Century New Maritime Silk Road", which is part of the BRI, passes through the region.¹⁶ For individual countries, China is not only an attractive alternative because of its huge economic potential, but also due to Beijing's UN membership (Saleem, 2020).

Taiwan is also trying to gain influence by joining regional organizations, for which the Taiwan-Pacific Allies Summit was held in 2006 for the first time.¹⁷ In 2007, Taipei provided 700,000 EUR in aid to regional organizations. Taiwan's foreign policy priorities are well reflected in the announcement in 2016 of President Tsai Ing-wen's New Southbound Policy (NSP) initiative, which envisioned closer cooperation with the Pacific islands alongside South and Southeast Asia (Zhang, 2020).

The US and its allies are not welcoming the PRC's increased influence and they are constantly warning of the dangers of indebtedness to China, yet Taiwan is less and less able to compete with its rival. A serious foreign policy blow to the ROC was the loss of two allies in September 2019, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati. The Solomon Islands established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1983. However, in September 2019, after the island's parliament assessed that they could not rely on aid from Taiwan in the long term, while the country could benefit much more from economic-political cooperation with China, diplomatic relations with Taipei were severed (Lyons, 2019). Kiribati was on the side of the PRC from 1980 to 2003, after which it established diplomatic relations with the ROC. However, in September 2019, Taiwan rejected the request of Kiribati's head of state for aid

¹⁵ Taiwan's assistance focuses primarily on technical support, scholarships, and small and medium-sized infrastructure investments in agriculture and health care.

¹⁶ To be more specific, the China-Oceania-South Pacific blue economic passage.

¹⁷ In addition to Taiwan, the participants were from the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands and Kiribati.

to buy an aircraft, so the President decided to normalize relations with the PRC, citing the interests of the nation (Reuters, 2019).

5.2. Regional Allies of the ROC

5.2.1. Tuvalu

The Polynesian state with a population of approximately 12,000 was the first of the Pacific states to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1979. The two countries are cooperating effectively in the areas of climate change, education, energy, fishing, and health care, while Taipei is working to promote sustainable development in the region (Taiwan Today, 2019). Taiwan is willing to share its experience with its partner, as both states face similar challenges. The PRC also tried to influence Tuvalu, as in November 2019, Chinese companies offered help to implement a 400 million USD government plan to build artificial islands. However, Foreign Minister Simon Kofe said the government, fearing indebtedness and the possibility of the establishment of Chinese military bases, rejected the offer and remained firmly on the side of Taiwan (BBC News, 2019). He also stressed that they intend to work together with Taipei, as well as with the other three countries supporting Taiwan (China says Tuvalu's government has misunderstood its intentions, as Beijing has only tried to help by bridging the development gap left by the West with good intentions) (Korybko, 2019). Following the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, to neutralize Chinese vaccine diplomacy, in July 2021, Japan promised economic assistance and vaccines to the Pacific states that remain on the side of Taiwan (Okuyama, 2021).

5.2.2. Nauru

The small state in Micronesia, with a population of less than 11,000, entered into diplomatic relations with the ROC in 1980, but in 2002, after receiving 135 million USD in aid from China, it recognized the PRC (BBC News, 2002). However, this situation did not last long, and in 2005 Nauru and Taiwan re-established diplomatic relations. For Nauru, besides Australia, Taiwan is the most important donor country, playing an important role in regular health care in addition to economic assistance, and from 2011, Taipei sent a permanent medical team to the country with a five-year mandate. Following the change of diplomatic partners by the Solomon Islands and Kiribati in September 2019, the new President of Nauru, Lionel Aingimea, immediately reaffirmed his commitment to Taiwan,

and during his visit to Taipei in December 2019, the parties pledged to further strengthen bilateral relations, including an agreement allowing direct flights to be launched (Taiwan News, 2019). President Aingimea has repeatedly praised Taiwan's achievements in the field of sustainability on the international stage and described the ROC as an example for small oceanic states to follow. The 25th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change "called upon the world to embrace Taiwan and recognize the rights of the Taiwanese people" (Embassy of the Republic of China, 2019). Although Taiwan has repeatedly accused China of buying the support of individual states and politicians, in early 2010, thanks to WikiLeaks, it became clear that many Nauru politicians were receiving a monthly allowance from Taiwan, while in election campaigns the presence of both Chinese and Taiwanese money can be detected.

5.2.3. The Marshall Islands

The Micronesian state of 1,100 small islands, with just over 59,000 inhabitants, established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1998, after cutting ties with China. This unexpected foreign policy move greatly helped stabilize President Imata Kabui's power. The most important areas of bilateral cooperation with Taiwan are nuclear waste management, climate change policy, development assistance and trade, tourism, and Austronesian cultural ties. An important goal of the Taiwanese government for small island countries is to promote the energy transition and to enhance resilience to climate change. It is no coincidence that the ROC is the first actor to help the Marshall Islands develop renewable energy. After 1999, in addition to investment in infrastructure, the Marshall Islands owed a great deal to the ROC in terms of agricultural development. Strengthening cultural ties also deserves attention: in October 2019, the Marshall Islands and the Taiwanese Council of Indigenous Peoples signed an agreement aimed at "strengthening Austronesian exchanges" (Stünkel – Tucker, 2020). During President Hilda Heine's visit to Taiwan in October 2019, the parties signed several bilateral agreements, including an Economic Cooperation Agreement. In 2020, the new government led by President David Kabua also appreciated Taipei's help after receiving significant health support following the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic. The Marshall Islands have even asked the WHO to allow Taiwan to participate in the talks, sparking resentment from China. And in October 2020, it called on China to refrain from using intimidation tactics, while reaffirming its support for the ROC (Rovoi, 2020).

5.2.4. Palau

With a population of 18,000, Palau established close cooperation with the Taiwanese government as early as the second half of the 1990s, and in 1999 diplomatic relations were formally established. Cooperation is particularly significant in the fields of agriculture, culture, education, fishing, medical services, tourism, and water supply infrastructure (Harwit, 2000). Considering the touristic significance of Palau, substantial investments have also been made by Taiwan, suffice it to think of the construction of the Palasia Hotel, Palau Royal Resort, Hung Kuo Resort, and Papago International Resort. The Palau government was also open to economic cooperation with the PRC, and in 2010, the two states signed an agreement on joint oil production. Palau appreciates Taiwan's commitment to the sustainable development of the Pacific region and its willingness to support the countries concerned. It maintains its commitment to Taiwan. After Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen visited Palau in 2019, Palau President Surangel Whipps returned her visit in March 2021, during which the two parties set up a Covid-19 travel bubble for tourists. Whipps, who is a serious critic of China in the region, complained that China wanted to put pressure on the Micronesian country in 2017 by withholding tourists (McCartney, 2021b). With the outbreak of the pandemic, the travel bubble was suspended in May 2021 but restarted in mid-August the same year, while Palau offered 2,000 doses of vaccine to Taiwan tourists visiting the island, citing its cordial relationship with the ROC (Focus Taiwan, 2021).

6. Conclusion

Taiwan had extensive foreign relations in the first half of the Cold War, but this changed in the 1970s, and the People's Republic gained a dominant position internationally. Serious competition has begun between the ROC and the PRC to gain diplomatic recognition, and developing countries have welcomed support due to the unfolding "dollar diplomacy". Thus, Taiwan has sought to build closer ties with the third-world countries in Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific. The balance of aid-based foreign policy in Taiwan is not clear, but it is a fact that despite its negative effects, it produced several achievements, especially in Latin America, where today the majority of the ROC's allies (8 states) are located.

China has tried to isolate Taiwan, albeit with varying intensity, and has stepped up its efforts in this regard since the election of pro-independence President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016. In both areas mentioned above, Taipei is becoming less and

less able to keep pace with the economic opportunities offered by Beijing (aid, credit, investment, trade), as since 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative has offered an extremely attractive alternative for most countries around the world. All of this has led to Taiwan losing more allies, leaving only 13 developing countries in addition to the Holy See. The coronavirus epidemic has opened a new chapter in the competition between the PRC and the ROC, in which the PRC's active vaccine diplomacy can be counterbalanced by Taiwan only with the help of the US and its allies (Japan, and in this case, India). While the position of Eswatini, the last ally in Africa, is precarious, Taiwan's partners in Central America and the Pacific archipelago are expected to stand by Taiwan in the longer term. This is especially true for the Pacific states worrying about Chinese dominance, such as Tuvalu, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, and Palau. In Central America and the Caribbean, in the case of Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize, Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and in South America the situation is vaguer, but the active US presence could be grist to Taiwan's mill. While the transition from the PRC to the ROC by some states is unlikely, there is also no need to fear the immediate loss of allies. On the whole, the development of Taiwan's bilateral relations with its partners who are strongly representing Taipei's interests on the international stage in exchange for economic support, is spectacular. In the longer term, however, it is clear that Taiwan's foreign relations are heavily dependent on China's actions. Of course, this will also raise serious questions about the future of cross-strait relations, which will be further complicated by the process of the Cold War-like struggle between the PRC and the US, in which Taiwan has profound geopolitical value.

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