

Article [EN]

## Multitasking and Network-building: China's Party Diplomacy in Latin America

*Multitarea y construcción de redes: La diplomacia partidista de China en América Latina*

Xinyu Zhang

Investigadora del Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos  
Universidad Sun Yat-sen, Zhuhai, China  
Email: [zxy\\_2020@163.com](mailto:zxy_2020@163.com); ORCID: 0000-0002-9774-7092

**[EN] Abstract:** This paper examines China's Party diplomacy and its practice in Latin America. As part of China's overall diplomatic strategy, the CPC's diplomacy in the region aims to fulfill multiple tasks. Using publicly available documentation, this paper creates a dataset covering exchanges between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and Latin America to analyze the CPC's network-building in the region since 2013. The results show that to achieve China's strategic goals, the CPC's contacts in Latin America are characterized by diversification and openness. Daily interactions and knowledge exchanges are the main content of the CPC's interactions with its contacts. Additionally, global, regional, and bilateral exchange mechanisms, especially the cooperation mechanism between the CPC and Latin American leftists, have been established. Although the party-based approach to Sino-Latin American relations faces challenges from political volatility, ideological differences, regional fragmentation, and external intervention, China's party diplomacy in the region still has great opportunities for development. Inter-party exchanges not only help us understand the development of Sino-Latin American relations but also provide an important perspective for studying cooperation among Third World countries.

**Keywords:** Party diplomacy, Communist Party of China, China-Latin America relations, inter-party exchanges

**[ES] Resumen:** Este artículo examina la diplomacia del Partido de China y su práctica en América Latina. Como parte de la estrategia diplomática general de China, la diplomacia del Partido Comunista de China (PCCh) en la región tiene como objetivo cumplir múltiples tareas. Utilizando documentación disponible públicamente, este artículo crea un conjunto de datos que cubre los intercambios entre el PCCh y América Latina desde 2013. Los resultados muestran que, para lograr los objetivos estratégicos de China, los contactos del PCCh en América Latina se caracterizan por la diversificación y la apertura. Las interacciones diarias y los intercambios de conocimientos son el contenido principal de estas interacciones. Además, se han establecido mecanismos de intercambio globales, regionales y bilaterales, especialmente con los izquierdistas latinoamericanos. Aunque el enfoque basado en partidos enfrenta desafíos debido a la volatilidad política, las diferencias ideológicas, la fragmentación regional y la intervención externa, la diplomacia del PCCh en la región aún tiene grandes oportunidades de desarrollo. Los intercambios interpartidarios no solo nos ayudan a comprender el desarrollo de las relaciones sino-latinoamericanas, sino que también proporcionan una perspectiva importante para estudiar la cooperación entre los países del Tercer Mundo.

**Palabras claves:** Diplomacia partidaria, Partido Comunista de China, relaciones China-América Latina, intercambios interpartidarios

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## 1. Introducción

In modern politics, political parties are the principal political force of a country, and their influence has penetrated into all aspects of the country's internal and foreign affairs. With the increasing exchanges between countries, the transnational interactions between political parties are also expanding, and the importance of party diplomacy in international politics is becoming increasingly prominent. Since the birth of the Communist Party of China (CPC), its external work has always been synchronized with the cause of the Party. However, in the true sense of the word, the party diplomacy of the CPC began after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Up to now, the CPC has established ties of various forms with over 600 political parties and organizations worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term "party diplomacy" is used to describe the interaction between representatives of the CPC and elites from foreign political parties and organizations. The International Department of the Central Committee of the CPC (IDCPC, 中共中央对外联络部 Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu) is responsible for managing and coordinating the Party's diplomatic works.

Developing countries are in a fundamental position in China's international Strategic Layout. By and large, the countries in Latin America are still considered "developing" or "emerging" nations. The exchanges between the CPC and Latin American region began after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, and its historical evolution can be divided into four stages. The first phase was from 1949 to the late 1970s. In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, faced with the bipolar international pattern of confrontation and the blockade of the United States, China firmly sided with the socialist camp. "Leaning to one side" is not only the diplomatic strategy of the new China, but also the party diplomatic strategy of the CPC. Therefore, the CPC began to networking with the Communist Parties and other leftists of Latin American countries. However, with the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations and the split of the socialist camp in the 1960s and 1970s, the relations between the CPC and most Latin American Communist parties deteriorated or even broke off, which opened the second stage of China's party diplomacy in the region. The second phase was from the late 1970s to the end of the 1990s. The CPC has not only gradually restored party-to-party relations with the left-wing politics in Latin America, but also strengthened contacts with nationalist parties in this region, such as the Institutional Revolutionary Party of Mexico, the Aprista Party of Peru, the Justicialist Party of Argentina, and the Social Christian Party of Venezuela. The third phase was from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to 2012. During this period, on the one hand, the CPC enhanced the political mutual trust between China and Latin American countries through frequent inter-party high-level exchanges; on the other hand, the CPC has expanded and deepened party-to-party relations with non-diplomatic countries in Latin America. The fourth phase was from 2012 to present. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC in 2012, the CPC has attached greater importance to the Party's external work. Therefore, the mechanism of party-to-party communication between China and Latin America has been improved, and the forms of exchanges have been innovated, and the topics of inter-party exchanges have become more diversified and pragmatic.

With the continuous engagement of the CPC in Latin America, the literature on this topic has increased during the last years. Scholars have different perspectives and focus on the exchanges between the CPC and Latin American countries. First of all, scholar discussed the tortuous development of the relationship between the CPC and the Communist Parties of Latin America based on the perspective of Marxist inter-party relations theory (Xu, 2020). Among them, the exchanges between the CPC and the Communist Party of Cuba attract great attention of scholars (Mao & Yang, 2019; Cheng, 2007). Secondly, based on the identity theory, scholars analyzed the different choices of the CPC for identity positioning in foreign exchanges in different historical period (Zhang, 2011; Shi, 2011). Other scholars investigated the activities of the CPC at the local level in Latin American countries from the perspective of sub-national actors, and believed that compared with other actors, the CPC plays a less significant role in Chinese sub-national deal making and other related outreach (Myers, 2020). In addition, some scholars have examined the image lineage and generative logic of Chinese party diplomacy based on Communication Studies. For example, Wen (2021) points out that through packaging positive remarks by foreign political elites into domestic propaganda, the CPC seeks to not only exhibit the Party's international prestige and legitimize its rule, but also showcase the department's own competence. Hackenesch and Bader (2020) argument that China increasingly uses the party channel as a vehicle of authoritarian learning by sharing experiences of its economic modernization and authoritarian one-party regime.

Based on different perspectives, the research findings of these literature above have various focuses, which can inspire us to carry out further studies on China's party diplomacy in Latin America. Nonetheless, there still exist biases and gaps in research. The existing studies pay attention to the development in the inter-party relations between the CPC and Latin American countries, and recognize that this kind of relations is an important tool to help the CPC expand its

<sup>1</sup> Profile of IDCPC, <https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/Profile/profile/index.html>.

influence in the region. However, they were less helpful in explaining the CPC's decision-making and policy implementation in its dealings with Latin American countries. They seldom study party-to-party exchanges as a kind of foreign policy, nor evaluate their impact from the perspective of China's overall diplomatic strategy towards Latin America. Therefore, the question raised in this paper is: what is the status of party-to-party exchanges as a kind of foreign policy in China's diplomatic strategy to Latin America and what tasks should be performed? How does the CPC work with political parties, organizations or other social elites with different ideologies or policy orientations in the region? What are the challenges for party-based approach to the development of Sino-Latin American relations? Using publicly available documentation, this paper creates a dataset covering high-level exchanges between the CPC and Latin America to analyze the CPC's network-building in the region since 2013. Generally speaking, inter-party exchanges are a key to understanding the development of relations between China and Latin America, and also an important perspective for the study on cooperation among Third World Countries. This paper will define China's party diplomacy, and on this basis, analyze its tasks and network-building in Latin America, so as to explore the cooperation models and challenges faced by third world countries

## 2. Multitasking: Party diplomacy as an important constituent of Chinese overall diplomacy

In the era of globalization, with the increasingly diversified subjects and objects of diplomacy, its connotation and practice have also undergone major changes. Specifically, the diplomatic actors have expanded from a country's professional diplomatic agencies to non-professional diplomatic departments such as parliament, military, political parties, business representatives, and non-governmental organizations. And the subject matter of diplomacy has expanded from high politics of war and peace to issues of low politics such as economy, science, technology, cultural exchange, and environmental governance. Overall diplomacy was proposed in the context of diplomatic transformation in the era of globalization. The so-called overall diplomacy, according to former Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, means that "diplomacy has long gone beyond its narrow concept, but includes politics, economy, science, technology, culture, military, civilian and other areas of the overall diplomacy; its connotation has become more profound, so it requires all parties to cooperate and work together." (Li, 1998) It can be seen that the overall diplomacy should be comprehensive and three-dimensional. Within its framework, in addition to systematic government diplomacy, diversified diplomatic forms such as party diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy, people-to-people diplomacy, and sports diplomacy, complement each other. In a word, as a kind of diplomatic behavior in a broad sense, party diplomacy refers to the foreign exchange activities of a country's political party in order to promote state-to-state relations under the guidance of the country's overall diplomatic strategy. The importance of party diplomacy is not only reflected in its direct influence on the overall diplomatic decision-making, but also as an important means of implementing foreign policies. In general, as a component of China's overall diplomatic strategy, China's party diplomacy in Latin America needs to fulfill multiple tasks.

One is to safeguard the core interests of China's overall diplomatic strategy. Bottom-line thinking is not only the thoughts and strategies on national governance of the CPC, but also an important part of China's overall diplomatic strategic ideas in the new era. China's bottom line is to never compromise on national core interests and major principles, and not allow any country or extraterritorial forces to challenge the bottom line of core interests. Any act of giving up sovereignty and territorial integrity is contrary to the will of the people (Yan, 2019). Adhering to the bottom-line thinking and goals of the overall diplomatic strategy, China's party diplomacy in Latin America not only clearly draws red lines to prevent risks, but also takes the initiative to defuse major risks. On the one hand, the CPC will explain China's position on issues related to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet and the South China Sea when carrying out foreign work, especially when meeting with political party leaders or senior government officials of Latin American countries. For example, in June 2020, after the Law on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was passed at the 20th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC), some western countries tried to politicize and stigmatize China's measures governing Hong Kong. In this situation, as the first multilateral meeting under the framework of the high-level dialogue between the CPC and the world political parties, the IDCPC held a video conference with the Communist Parties of Latin American countries. In this online meeting, the CPC briefed the leaders of these political parties on the legislation and necessity to respond to violent terrorist activities and illegal external interference in Hong Kong, revealed the practices of certain countries using COVID-19 to stigmatize China, and demonstrated the major achievements of China's fight against the epidemic under the leadership of the CPC (Southern Metropolis Daily, 2020). On the other hand, in diplomatic struggles involving sovereignty and territorial integrity, China's party diplomacy will actively strive for and expand the Latin American "circle of friends" to speak for China. In recent years, the United States has not only repeatedly reneged on the Taiwan issue, but also participated in creating tensions across the Taiwan Strait. On April 26, 2022, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced in Senate Foreign

Relations hearing that the US government would spend more to “help” with Taiwan’s defense. In response to the US “Taiwan protection” rhetoric, Central American countries have stepped forward to support China. On April 28th, the Parlamento Centroamericano, composed of more than 50 political parties from Central American countries, issued a statement firmly recognizing the *One China principle*. Most members of this organization were once “diplomatic Allies” of Taiwan, and there were still countries that have not established diplomatic relations with China.

The second task is to promote the stability and sustainable development of state-to-state relations. On the one hand, party-to-party exchanges are an effective complement to traditional diplomatic channels, especially in situations where diplomatic relations have not been formally established or intergovernmental communication channels are closed. For example, the CPC has always attached importance to exchanges with the ruling and opposition political parties in Latin American countries without diplomatic relations. China’s party diplomacy with countries without diplomatic relations is an important measure to promote the normalization of official relations and to restrict and influence elections in Taiwan (Yu, 2013). Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, China has achieved significant breakthroughs in normalizing its relations with non-diplomatic countries in Latin America. Panama established diplomatic ties with China in 2017, the Dominican Republic in 2018, El Salvador in 2018, Nicaragua in 2021, and Honduras in 2023. Currently, there are seven countries in Latin America have maintained official relations with the Taiwan authorities. Paraguay is the only South American country that has not established diplomatic relations with China, but its ruling party, the Colorado Party, and the main opposition parties, like the Authentic Radical Liberal Party and the Revolutionary Febrerista Party, have established inter-party relations with the CPC (Huang, 1996). Whether to interrupt diplomatic relations with Taiwan has become a hot topic in Paraguay’s presidential elections. In 2008, two days after winning the election, former President Fernando Lugo vowed to actively develop relations with China. In 2020, the third largest leftist opposition coalition in Paraguay, The Guasú Front, led by Lugo, once again called for “immediate establishment of diplomatic relations with Beijing.” On the other hand, party diplomacy and other diplomatic methods complement each other and jointly promote the implementation of the overall diplomatic strategy. The contacts of the CPC in Latin America are diverse, and both parties usually interact in the form of a group to promote exchanges and cooperation in various fields. For example, on August 25, 2020, the CPC and the Democratic Revolutionary Party of Panama held an online training course for cadres under the theme of “the ruling parties of China and Panama go hand in hand: comprehensively promoting the normalization of epidemic prevention and economic and socioeconomic development”. At the opening ceremony, Fujian Province of China and Panama City signed the “*Letter of Intent on Establishing Sister Province relationship between Fujian Province and Panama City*”, to promote the development of urban diplomacy between the two countries (IDCPC, 2020).

The third task is to push on China’s collective diplomacy towards the region. Since 2013, with the continuous deepening of mutually beneficial collaboration and convergence of interests between China and Latin American countries in various fields, “collective cooperation” has become the main line of the Sino-Latin American relations (Xie, 2018). The first Ministers’ Meeting of the China-CELAC Forum was held in 2015, which marked that the collective cooperation between China and Latin America has become a reality. In this context, the IDCPC seized the opportunity to propose the establishment of the China-CELAC Political Parties Forum as a subforum in specific fields, aiming to improve the high-level strategic dialogue between political parties, and guide and boost the multilateral cooperation between China and CELAC (Li, 2016). In February 2016, the 1st Meeting of China-CELAC Political Parties Forum was held in Beijing, with five topics of “Political Parties in the 21st Century”, “Economic Development”, “Poverty Alleviation”, “Paths of Development” and “China-CELAC Cooperation”. The invited foreign representatives included leaders of political parties, government officials, experts and scholars from Latin American countries. Under the multilateral cooperation mechanism of the China-CELAC Forum, there are also subforums in other specific fields such as China-LAC Agricultural Ministers’ Forum, China-LAC Scientific and Technological Innovation Forum, China-LAC Think-Tanks Forum, China-LAC Young Political Leaders’ Forum, China-LAC Infrastructure Cooperation Forum, China-Latin America and Caribbean Region People-to-People Friendship Forum. During other subforums, the IDCPC will also actively cooperate with various foreign affairs activities. For example, it will undertake diplomatic reception for Latin American politicians, party leaders and ambassadors to China.

The fourth task is to project a positive image of the CPC and China in Latin America. Due to historical reasons or cognitive biases, some Latin American political parties or social elites did not have an enough understanding of the CPC and its role in China. Through party-to-party exchanges, they will gradually build up a positive perception of the CPC and China, and then can make positive comments and support in matters involving China. At the same time, the level of initiative for contacts determines the degree to which they acquire a positive perception of the CPC and China. The higher the level of positive perception, the more likely the contacts will actively correct the negative comments of China in their countries. For example, a member of the Socialist Party of Chile pointed out in an interview: “Whenever there is a draft resolution against China in the Chilean parliament, the Chinese ambassador in Chile will quickly convene members of

parliament, many of whom have had many contacts and visits to China usually choose to abstain or absentee voting.” (Cardenal 2020) In recent years, on issues such as opposing the stigmatization and defamation of China’s human rights, democratic system and development path and other topics, the IDCPC has been able to win the support of political leaders in most Latin American countries.

The fifth task is to spread the governance of China. Both China and Latin American countries, as developing countries, are faced with the common task of developing economies and improving the quality of life. With the rapid growth of China’s economy in the 21st century, more and more Latin American political parties and social elites are eager to exchange governance experience through party-to-party channels. Even some Latin American political parties have chosen to engage with the CPC despite domestic pressure and have actively sought to learn from the governance of China. The Republican Proposal (PRO) party, a centre-right party in Argentina, can be an example. As the principal opposition party in Argentina, PRO started exchanges and cooperation with the CPC in 2009. In 2015, the presidential candidate of PRO, Mauricio Macri, won the national election. The next year, as the ruling party, PRO sent delegations to China at least four times to visit and inspect, which triggered doubts and debates about the interactions between two different ideological parties in Argentina. In response, Humberto Schiavoni, the leader of the party, published an article entitled “*China, the compass of our development (China, brújula para nuestro desarrollo)*”, refuting such doubts, believing that such statements in Argentina came from prejudice, and pointing out the experience that the CPC could learn from in governing the country (Schiavoni, 2016).

### 3. Contents, contacts and mechanism: How China’s party diplomacy build network in Latin America

Since the last decades, Latin America has been an important player in China’s party diplomacy. In 21<sup>st</sup> century, China has paid more and more attention to the status and role of party diplomacy in China’s overall diplomacy towards Latin America. The CPC has built a network in this region to foster personal bonding among political and social elites. In order to analyze the network-building of China’s party diplomacy in Latin America, this paper create a dataset covering high-level exchanges between the CPC and Latin American countries since the 18th National Congress of the CPC (from 2013-2022), based on the series of “*Survey of the CPC’s External Work (中国共产党对外工作概况)*” and the activities reported on the official website of IDCPC (<https://www.idcpc.org.cn>). The *Survey of the CPC’s External Work* is an annual publication that systematically introduces the policies of the CPC’s external work and its exchanges with political parties and political organizations in various countries. It was first officially published in 1993 and is compiled by the personnel of IDCPC. These two sources provide empirical evidence of exchanges with Latin American countries in the name of the CPC or the IDCPC, including information about who the CPC interact with in Latin America, what the CPC interact with them, and how the CPC interact with them, and so on.

Number	Date	Country	Type	Contact	Type of content	Mechanism
1	2022.2.23	Nicaragua	biliteral	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional	daily interaction	biliteral+leftist
2	2022.3.24	Cuba	biliteral	Theoretical Seminar with Cuban Communist Party	knowledge exchange	biliteral+leftist
3	2022.3.29	multilateral	multilateral	Training Course for Caribbean youth political cadre	knowledge exchange	regional
4	2022.5.18	Mexico	biliteral	Citizens Movement party	daily interaction	biliteral
5	2022.5.10	multilateral	multilateral	Training Course for party leaders of the São Paulo Forum	knowledge exchange	regional+leftist
6	2022.5.12	Ecuador	biliteral	the Creating Opportunities Movement	daily interaction	biliteral
7	2022.5.19	multilateral	multilateral	LAC’s participation in the BRICS Forum of Political Parties, Think Tanks, and Civil Soc	knowledge exchange	global
8	2022.5.24	Nicaragua	biliteral	Training Course for cadres the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional	knowledge exchange	biliteral+leftist
9	2022.6.24	Cuba	biliteral	Cuban ambassador to China	daily interaction	biliteral+leftist
10	2022.6.23	Mexico	biliteral	The CPC participated in the China-Mexico Business Dialogue.	knowledge exchange	regional
11	2022.5.27	Chile	biliteral	Communist Party of Chile	daily interaction	biliteral+leftist
12	2022.7.21	multilateral	multilateral	Training Course for cadres of Marxist political parties in Latin America	knowledge exchange	regional+leftist
13	2022.8.1	multilateral	multilateral	Meeting with Diplomatic envoys of LAC	daily interaction	regional
14	2022.9.6	multilateral	multilateral	Training Course for Latin American think tanks and scholars	knowledge exchange	regional
15	2022.9.8	Cuba	biliteral	Cuban Communist Party	daily interaction	biliteral+leftist
16	2022.9.15	multilateral	multilateral	Youth delegations from Latin American countries	knowledge exchange	regional
17	2022.11.15	Cuba	biliteral	political dialogue with Cuban Communist Party	knowledge exchange	biliteral+leftist
18	2022.9.16	Bolivia	biliteral	Training Course for cadres Bolivia’s Movement toward Socialism	knowledge exchange	biliteral+leftist
19	2022.12.14	Venezuela	biliteral	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela	daily interaction	biliteral+leftist

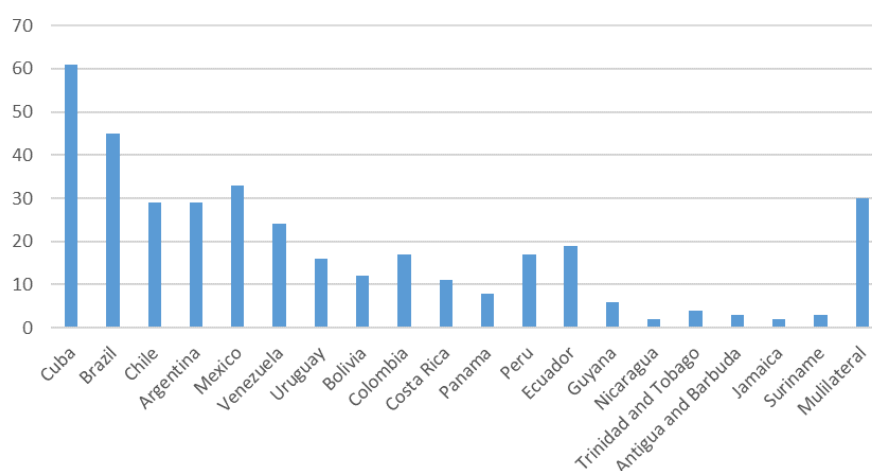
**Graphic 1.** Part of the dataset of high-level exchanges between the CPC and Latin American countries (2013-2022)

Source: author’s elaboration



### 3.1 Contacts

The dataset demonstrates who the CPC interact with in Latin America. In general, most of the contacts of the CPC in Latin American countries are ruling party elites who come from ruling parties, ruling coalitions or executive government. In addition, except Cuba, the CPC's contacts with all Latin American countries involve opposition parties and other social elites. Among these opposition parties dealing with the CPC, there are major and old parties such as the Party of the Democratic Revolution of Mexico, the Socialist Party of Chile, the Christian Democratic Party of Chile, the Christian People's Party of Peru, the Colombian Liberal Party, the Panameñista Party, and so on; there are also secondary political parties such as the Brazilian Social Democracy Party, the Social Christian Unity Party in Costa Rica, etc. In addition, the Latin American social elites who interact with the CPC include Latin American ambassadors and envoys in China, think tanks, media, as well as social groups and non-governmental organizations such as trade unions, youth and women delegations, etc. The contacts of the CPC in Latin America are characterized by diversification and openness, which shows that the party-based approach has more flexibility and initiative than traditional diplomatic approaches.

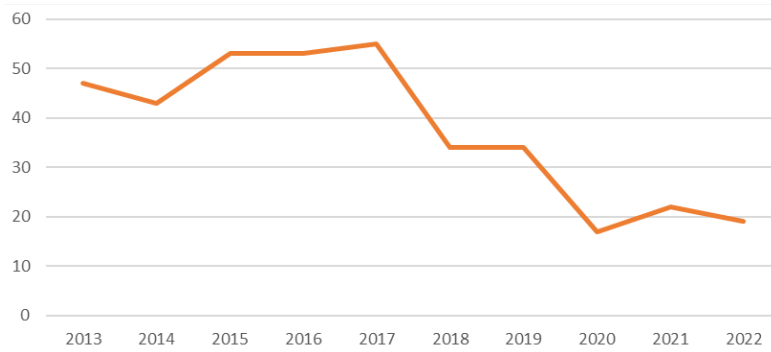


**Figure 1.** Distribution of the CPC's contacts in Latin America from 2013 to 2022

**Source:** author's elaboration

Bilateral and multilateral contacts exist in China's party diplomacy in Latin America. In this paper, the interactions between the CPC and a single Latin American country are recorded as bilateral contact. The interactions between the CPC and regional organizations or interactions between the CPC and multiple Latin American countries are recorded as multilateral contact. Then this paper counted these records and organized them in chronological order. As shown in Figure 1, between 2013 and 2022, there are at least 377 exchanges between the CPC and Latin American countries. Among the bilateral exchanges, the CPC has the most frequent contacts with Cuba, up to 61 times. This was followed by Brazil and Mexico, each with more than 30 times. The bilateral contacts of the CPC with Caribbean countries are relatively less. It can also be seen from Figure 1, there are at least 30 times multilateral contacts between the CPC and Latin America. It is worth mentioning that, the records of exchanges between the CPC and Latin American countries that have no diplomatic relations, have appeared many times in multilateral activities, while the direct bilateral interaction records only once. This only record occurred in April 2013, when the IDCPC congratulated "Horacio Cartes was elected as the President of Paraguay". There are two exchanges between the CPC and Nicaragua, both taking place after the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries in December 2021.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it can be seen from Figure 2 that the CPC had the most frequent contacts with Latin American countries in 2017. However, since 2020, due to the impact of COVID-19, the frequency of contacts between the CPC and Latin America has only been about half the level before the pandemic.

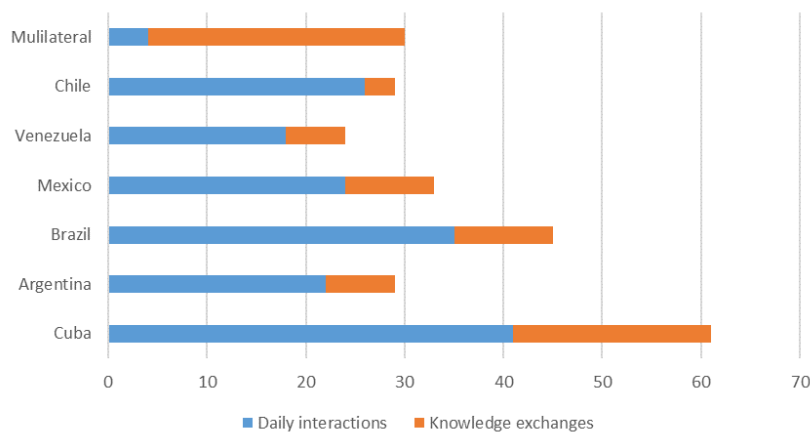
<sup>2</sup> The two records are: in February 2022, the IDCPC held a video with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Arlette Marengo, representative of the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua; In May 2022, the CPC and the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua held the first online training course for cadres.



**Figure 2.** Frequency of the CPC's contacts in Latin America from 2013 to 2022  
**Source:** author's elaboration

### 3.2 Contents

According to the dataset, in terms of content, China's party diplomacy in Latin America can be divided into two categories: daily interactions and knowledge exchanges. Daily interaction refers to the regular meetings, communications and condolences between the CPC and its contacts, through bilateral or multilateral forms, with the purpose of expressing comments, exchanging views and seeking consensus. The duration of a single daily interaction is relatively short, usually involving senior party and government officials as the main participants. For example, leaders of IDCPC regularly meet with ambassadors of Latin American countries to China. Knowledge exchange refers to the sharing and dissemination of knowledge about a specific issue between the CPC and its contacts, which can take bilateral or multilateral forms, including political dialogue, forum, theoretical conference, cadre training, field trip, etc. Compared with daily interaction, the main purpose of knowledge exchange is to share and spread the political knowledge extracted by the CPC from its own experience in development and governance. In such events, there are a large number of participants from different professions and the duration is also relatively long. Figure 3 shows the content of the CPC's multilateral exchanges and the content of its bilateral exchanges with the six most frequently contacted countries in the region. In Figure 3, knowledge exchanges is the main content of multilateral contacts and daily interaction is the main content of bilateral exchanges between the CPC and these six countries. In addition, in the bilateral exchanges between the CPC and Cuba, nearly half of the activities are related to knowledge exchange. It can be seen that, on the one hand, the knowledge exchange between the CPC and Cuba has continued the long-term tradition between socialist countries, in which ideology plays an important role. On the other hand, the knowledge exchange between China and other types of countries is not driven by ideology, but is hindered by ideological prejudice. Perhaps due to domestic pressure, political parties in other types of countries are less likely exchange knowledge with the CPC at the bilateral level. However, based on their recognition of China's development and interest in the CPC's governance experience, they chose to exchange knowledge with the CPC on multilateral occasions.



**Figure 3.** Content of the CPC's multilateral exchanges and content of its bilateral exchanges with the most frequently contacted countries in the region (2013-2022)  
**Source:** author's elaboration

### 3.3 Mechanism

The dataset also shows how the CPC interact with Latin America. From the empirical evidence recorded in the dataset, we can summarize four broad mechanisms constructed for building China's party diplomatic network in Latin America. These four mechanisms operate with the country's overall diplomatic tasks as the goals, and with the IDCPC as the coordinating and executing agency, and through the integration and coordination with other diplomatic forms. The first mechanism is global party dialogue exchanges. Seeing Latin American region as a whole and placing it on a global dialogue platform enable China to seize the initiative in multilateral diplomacy and to build all-round network of collective cooperation between China and Latin America. For example, in November 2017, the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High Level Meeting was held in Beijing. It was the first time the CPC held a high-level meeting with such a wide range of political parties from around the world. Representatives of political parties and party organizations from various Latin American countries attended this meeting, including the Communist Party of Cuba, the Argentine Republican Proposal party, the Brazilian Labor Party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution of Mexico, the Panameñista Party and so on.

The second mechanism is regional party dialogue exchanges. The friendly exchanges between the CPC and regional organizations in Latin America are a practical form of the construction of the multilateral dialogue mechanism of China's party diplomacy. For example, China-CELAC Political Parties Forum has become an important platform for the both parts to carry out high-level, multilateral and strategic dialogues, playing an increasingly important role in the development of the collective relationship between China and Latin America. In addition to this specialized mechanism of China-CELAC Political Parties Forum, knowledge exchanging programs held by the IDCPC have also become important platforms for multilateral interaction between China and Latin America, such as short-term training courses for political party cadres, training workshops for young military elites or journalists, and seminars for Think Tanks and scholars.

The third mechanism is bilateral dialogue exchanges. During the historic evolution of Sino-Latin American inter-party relations, the bilateral tie has been the main content of China's party diplomacy in Latin American. In all bilateral dialogues, the CPC attaches particular importance to the institutionalized exchanges with major parties in Latin America, with the purpose of enabling party diplomacy to serve government diplomacy and government diplomacy to consolidate party diplomacy, thus effectively promoting the long-term and stable development of bilateral state-to-state relations. For example, China has a long history of exchanges with Brazilian political parties. The CPC first maintained close relations with left-wing parties such as the Communist Party of Brazil and the Brazilian Labor Party, and then had contacts with the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, the Democratic Labor Party and the Social Democratic Party. Since 2004, with the development of the strategic partnership between the two countries and the establishment of China-Brazil High-level Coordination and Cooperation Committee (COSBAN), the Sino-Brazilian relation has achieved comprehensive and rapid development, and the inter-party relation has also entered a stage of rapid development. China has established regular exchange mechanisms with major political parties in Brazil, and the two sides have conducted dialogues and exchanges on governance, and major regional and global issues, such as the bipartisan theoretical seminar between the CPC and the Brazilian Labor Party, and the dialogue between young Party members. In addition, as members of BRICS, China and Brazil attach great importance to the exchanges and coordination among BRICS countries at the inter-party level. In 2017, the CPC established and held the first BRICS Political Parties Plus Dialogue in China, which has realized the synergy between the institutionalization of China's party diplomacy and the cooperation mechanism of BRICS.

The cooperation between the CPC and left-wing political parties is the fourth mechanism for building China's party diplomatic network in Latin America. In the view of the CPC, left-wing parties have long been natural partners for its external work in this region. In particular, the Communist Party of Cuba, as the only ruling party of a socialist country in the western hemisphere, is the first Latin American Communist Party to establish inter-party relations with the CPC. In September 2004, the IDCPC and the Department of International Relations of the Communist Party of Cuba, signed the *Agreement on Exchanges and Cooperation between the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Cuba*, marking the realization of institutionalized exchanges between the two parties (Yu, 2017). Since then, the two parties have not only formed a mutual reporting mechanism for major issues within the party or within the country, but also formed a mechanism for exchanging experiences on national governance. By 2022, the two parties have held four theoretical seminars, continuously deepening their understanding of socialist theory and practice. In addition to the Communist Party of Cuba, the CPC has also conducted theoretical discussions with other leftist parties in Latin America, such as the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, the Movement Towards Socialism of Bolivia, the Brazilian Labor Party, and the Justicialist Party of Argentina. In recent years, the IDCPC has not only invited many delegations of leftist party leaders to visit China, but also has participated in multilateral platforms of leftist parties in Latin America, such as the



International Seminar on “Political Parties and the New Society”, the São Paulo Forum, and the Latin American Conference on Progress (Encuentro Latinoamericano Progresista).

#### 4. Challenges for Party-based Approach to Sino-Latin American Relations

In the name of a political party, the CPC, through the coordination and organization of the IDCPC, has established frequent and in-depth contacts with various political parties, organizations and other social elites in Latin America. These contacts, in various forms and on various topics, represent a unique path in the development of Sino-Latin American relations. The Party-based Approach has its advantages in building a network that fosters personal bonding among Latin American elites, but it still faces some challenges. First of all, the high degree of volatility in electoral outcomes in Latin America is not conducive to the stability and sustainability of the inter-party exchanges between China and the region. Electoral volatility is a function of short-term economic perturbations, the institutional fragilities of both democratic regimes and party systems, and relatively fluid cleavage structure (Roberts & Wibbles, 1999). Mainwaring, Gervasoni and España-Najera (2016) compared the determinants of electoral volatility attributable to new versus established parties, and found that the volatility of Latin American new parties was significantly lower than that of established parties, and the regional average of volatility in Latin America was lower than in other regions of Third World Countries, such as Africa and Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Union, but twice as high as that of developed countries in Western Europe, North America and Oceania. Due to the strong election volatility in Latin America, there are phenomena of “political parties taking turns in power” or “remarkable divergences existing within ruling coalition” in the political ecology of the region. Under such circumstances, when it comes to China’s major interests and bilateral cooperation, political parties often hold different views and their interests are difficult to coordinate. In order to attract more voters or increase voting, some political parties have “thrown the pot” on China for its domestic development issues, which has created obstacles for bilateral exchanges and cooperation.

Secondly, ideological differences and cognitive biases are still important factors that constrain China’s party diplomacy in Latin America. Generally speaking, political parties have a natural affinity for foreign parties with the same or similar ideology as their own, and have concerns about establishing ties with those that differ significantly from their own ideologies (Jin, 2022). Although more and more Latin American political parties are willing to carry out exchanges and cooperation with the CPC, some political parties and social elites have always had deep-rooted prejudice against China’s political system and ideology. For example, since the pandemic Covid-19 started, some right-wing political parties and leaders in the region who used to have friendly exchanges with China, in order to meet their self-interests or to attract voters, have stigmatized, labeled, and politicized China’s practical measures of COVID-19 prevention or even the national political system, creating negative opinions against China in their own countries. In addition, some scholars believe that the reason why China can attract different ideological parties is because of the undemocratic context in Latin America. “Amidst political corruption and growing dissatisfaction with democracy, the specter of Latin American political leaders is emerging. In a chaotic environment, Chinese diplomacy moves like a fish in the water.” (Cardenal, 2021) The increasing inter-party exchanges between China and Latin America have also become a new footnote for some Western politicians and scholars to ramp up the “China threat” theory. Berg and Zhang (2020) point out that the IDCPC performs a valuable and often overlooked service in maintaining party-to-party ties that can lead to progress and breakthroughs on broader strategic goals.

Thirdly, it is difficult to improve the level of integration in Latin America, which is not conducive to the CPC’s multilateral and collective cooperation in the region. Starting from Simon Bolivar there have been many integration attempts in the Latin America. Political fragmentation, lack of motivation for regional economic cooperation, complex nationalities, and even the intervention of the US, have been the main obstacles of the regional integration process. This is especially visible in the political processes of the countries such as economic crises in Argentina, political instability in Venezuela and increasing migration to the US from Latin American countries (Görger, 2023). The China-CELAC Forum has become the most important channel for the CPC to promote comprehensive cooperation between China and Latin America. Due to the fact that CELAC is only a general policy coordination mechanism among Latin American countries, it lacks effective political leadership and thorough institutional design, which means that its implementation of cooperation and resolutions on major affairs involving China and Latin America cannot be guaranteed. In addition, the work agenda of the China-CELAC Forum is considerable broad, inevitably leading to the misunderstanding of pursuing scale and neglecting effectiveness in Sino-Latin American cooperation. Besides, there are also divisions within CELAC, especially on key issues related to Sino-Latin American cooperation, and it is difficult to take collective action and coordinate interests.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper has contributed in two ways to the literatures on China's Party diplomacy and its practice in Latin America. In the context of China, the CPC's external affairs can be regarded as a practical foreign policy. Safeguarding the core interests of China's overall diplomatic strategy, promoting the stability and sustainable development of state-to-state relations, pushing on China's collective diplomacy towards the region, projecting a positive image of the CPC and China, and spreading the governance of China, are all tasks that the party diplomacy, as an important part of China's overall diplomacy, needs to accomplish. In order to achieve China's overall strategic goals, the CPC's contacts in Latin America include not only political parties and organizations, but also diplomatic envoys, journalists, think tanks and various civil organizations. Daily interactions and knowledge exchanges are the main content of the CPC's interaction with its contacts. In addition, global, regional and bilateral exchange mechanisms, especially the cooperation mechanism between the CPC and the Latin American leftists, have been formed.

As a component of China's overall diplomatic strategy, the CPC's engagement in Latin America has achieved positive effects. Although the party-based approach to Sino-Latin American relations is facing some challenges from political volatility, ideological differences, regional fragmentation and even external intervention, China's party diplomacy in the region still has great opportunities for development. On the one hand, Latin American countries have continuously deepened their understanding of the importance of inter-party exchanges with China, so that the demand for experience sharing on party building and state governance with the CPC has also increased. With the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and international engagement, some political parties or social elites that have interacted with the CPC are not satisfied with the existing level of exchanges. Others that have not yet established relations with the CPC have taken the initiative to do so.

On the other hand, the strategic transformation of Sino-Latin American relations has provided the impetus for deepening China's party diplomacy in the region. Since the first Ministers' Meeting of the China-CELAC Forum in 2015, the Sino-Latin American collective cooperation has made steady progress in various fields, helping Sino-Latin American relations move from "spontaneously complementary development" to a new stage of "autonomously constructive development" (Cui, 2019). Party-to-party exchanges and cooperation are the endogenous driving force for the strategic transformation of Sino-Latin American relations, which can not only consolidate the political mutual trust and recognition between China and the region, but also deepen the political will of the two sides to cooperate in other fields. Based on this, party diplomacy will play a more prominent role in China's overall diplomatic strategy towards Latin America and undertake more heavy tasks. Future research can compare party diplomacy with other diplomatic tools within the framework of China's overall diplomacy; The cross-regional analysis of the CPC's outreach can also be carried out.

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