XI'S VISIT

Memorial hall a testament to relationship

Guilin school helped educate many, including some of Vietnam's leaders

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong, **ZHANG LI** and **SHI RUIPENG** in Guilin, Guangxi

Even after half a century, Lu Meinian, 80, vividly remembers the time she worked as an interpreter at Guilin Yucai School, where many Vietnamese students received their education in China from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Lu began working at the school in Guilin, a city in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in 1971. During her three years there, she was mainly responsible for interpreting for senior officials from Vietnam.

More than 10,000 Vietnamese students received their education at the Yucai school in Guangxi, which borders Vietnam, during Vietnam's war against French occupation, from 1945 to 1954, and during its war against United States aggression, from 1955 to 1975.

Many of these students later took up leadership roles in Vietnam, including Le Kha Phieu, former general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee, according to organizers of the Vietnam School Memorial Hall, which was later established on the site of the school campus.

"China provided unprecedented support for the school," Lu told China Daily, recalling how the Chinese government even built a swimming pool — the only one in Guilin back then — for Vietnamese students and teachers.

As a living witness to the China-Vietnam friendship, Lu attended a special gathering of Vietnamese and Chinese alumni in March in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam.

At the event, To Lam, general secretary of the CPV Central Committee, emphasized the important role of students in shaping bilateral relations, as this year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Vietnam, and is also the China-Vietnam Year of People-to-People Exchanges.

In 2010, Guangxi Normal University established the memorial hall on the Yucai school site to commemorate history.

At the inauguration ceremony, Nguyen Thien Nhan, then deputy prime minister of Vietnam and its minister of education and training, who is also an alumnus of the Yucai school, said that Vietnamese students have studied in different parts of the world, but there is only one memorial hall of the Vietnam school.

Bi Yanlong, curator of the Vietnam School Memorial Hall, said that the hall is "a historical testament to the traditional friendship between China and Vietnam".

"It serves as a link for the alumni to connect with their alma mater … and a bridge in the new era for educational exchanges between China and Vietnam, and for the building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future," he said.

Ngo Tue Quan, a museum guide at the memorial hall, said she feels proud each time she tells visitors about the school's storied history.

Quan was among the first group of Vietnamese students who pursued higher education in Guangxi. After graduation, she married a Chinese man and was recruited by the university as a teacher and interpreter.

"Since I became a museum guide, I got to know more about this chapter in the history of China-Vietnam relations," she said, adding that "some people even cry when they hear the story".

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Two former students of Guilin Yucai School point to a group photo in which they are included during a visit to the Vietnam School Memorial Hall in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region on Oct 23, 2024.
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Clockwise from top left: A TV drama based on the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, costume drama *The Legend of Shen Li*, crime thriller *Escape from the Trilateral Slopes*, female empowerment saga *The Tale of Rose*, revenge drama *The Double* and urban romance *The First Frost* have all been a hit with Vietnamese audiences in recent years. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

C-dramas captivate Vietnamese viewers

By XU FAN in Beijing and **SHI RUIPENG** in Nanning

Ngo Minh Quang, a 23-year-old Chinese language teacher in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, has been a fan of Chinese dramas over the years.

At just 5 years old, he was captivated by the fantastic world of *Journey to the West*, a classic drama adapted from the novel of the same name that was written during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Describing the tale — a fictionalized account of the adventures of a Buddhist monk and his three powerful apprentices, including the heroic Monkey King — as his favorite drama, he told China Daily that he has watched it multiple times and even revisited it after beginning to learn Chinese.

"I used the drama to practice listening and reading, as well as to improve my understanding of grammar and words," he said, adding that the mythological story is not just entertainment, but also like a good friend drawing him deeper into ancient Chinese culture and history.

Quang, who is now introducing *Journey to the West* to his Vietnamese students, said the charm of most Chinese dramas lies in their exquisite costumes and lavish settings, which not only are beautiful, but also convey the country's cultural depth and values.

With its geographical closeness to China and centuries of cultural exchange, Vietnam has become one of the largest Asian markets for Chinese dramas, or C-dramas.

According to statistics from Youku, one of China's most popular streaming platforms and drama producers, more than 1,000 hours of over 30 dramas have been released in Vietnam in recent years. Among them, the fantasy series *Till the End of the Moon*, a romance tale known for its aesthetic style inspired by the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes' murals, soared to the top of local ratings on several Vietnamese platforms such as VieOn during its premiere.

Some of the popular Youku-financed series streamed in Vietnam in recent years also include the female revenge-themed costume drama *The Double*, the urban romance *The First Frost*, and the crime tale *Escape from the Trilateral Slopes*.

"When Chinese films and TV series started to spread abroad between the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vietnam was one of the earliest overseas markets to import domestic content, propelling it to accumulate a large fan base for C-dramas over three decades," said Zhu Xinmei, director of the International Communication Research Institute at the Development Research Center of the National Radio and Television Administration.

In 1993, *Kewang (Yearning)*, a drama set in Beijing during the transformative period of the 1980s, debuted on Vietnam Television, the country's largest broadcaster. It was hugely popular in Vietnam, exemplified by ratings as high as 90.78 percent.

Over the ensuing years, costume dramas — regarded by industry insiders as the most popular genre in Vietnam — have also made a splash in the country, with shows such as *My Fair Princess*, *Prime Minister Liu Luoguo* and *Yongzheng Dynasty*, all of which depict palace and court life during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

In 2015, *The Journey of Flower* — a romantic fantasy tale starring actress Zhao Liying and actor Wallace Huo — took Southeast Asia by storm, amassing more than 20 million views on Zing TV, one of the largest streaming platforms in Vietnam.

Zhao's popularity helped make her costume drama *The Legend of Shen Li* — a fantasy romance about a heroine from the fictional phoenix clan and a celestial being — a hit again in Vietnam last year.

With China's achievements in reform and opening-up and its efforts to alleviate poverty, television shows depicting realistic themes that reflect modern China's transition have also been well received in Vietnam, said Zhu, the institute director.

Zhou Xiaoqiong, a specialist in charge of Vietnamese business at Guangxi Television, said China Hour, a program launched in 2018 to promote Chinese TV shows to foreign countries, has translated more than 800 episodes of more than 20 projects into Vietnamese. Zhou said she has noticed that movies and TV dramas that soar in China usually gain recognition in Vietnam.

For instance, *Ne Zha 2*, China's biggest box-office sensation, "hasn't even been released in Vietnam yet, but I've already noticed a bunch of Vietnamese media covering it," she said.

Zhou, a Vietnamese major who graduated from Guangxi Minzu University, recalled that many of her Vietnamese friends, like her fellow Chinese, used to spend entire summer vacations glued to the television, captivated by iconic classics such as *Journey to the West* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Now grown up, they continue their passion through modern Chinese dramas like *Daughter of the Mountains* and *The Tale of Rose*.

Starring A-list actress Liu Yifei, *The Tale of Rose* — which follows the romantic experiences of Huang Yimei, or Rose — was broadcast on Vietnam Television in September. The series received praise from local media as a significant work highlighting the evolving and empowering portrayal of women.

"Chinese films and television series have become a vital window through which Vietnamese audiences explore not only the richness of Chinese culture, but also the evolving facets of its modern society," Zhou said.

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Visit: Role of regional economic alliances to increase

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Muhammad Habib, a researcher at the Department of International Relations of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia, said that President Xi's visit to Southeast Asia is timely and critical amid the ongoing tariff tensions.

"It provides an opportunity to reaffirm that this part of the world will not retreat from its commitment to multilateralism and a global open economy," he said, adding that the visit also will allow the region to better coordinate responses to the trend of protectionism.

"It is in our collective interest to formulate international norms on nonharmful means for realizing global fair trade. China and Southeast Asia already have many platforms to do that, including various ASEAN-China economy-related ministerial meetings, the ASEAN-China 3.0 FTA, and the RCEP. It is time to utilize them," he added.

Gu, the Beijing Foreign Studies University vice-dean, said that if Washington continues with its willful actions of practicing unilateralism and protectionism, challenging the global trade system, the role of regional economic alliances, which have advantages such as cultural similarities and strong economic complementarity, will only become more prominent.

"By reducing trade barriers, optimizing resource allocation and coordinating policies, regional economic alliances can better maintain the stability of industrial and supply chains, enhance regional economic competitiveness and strengthen the ability to resist external risks," Gu said.

As important drivers of global economic recovery, China and ASEAN will be able to uphold the multilateral trading system and help stabilize the regional economy through strengthening openness and cooperation, thus maintaining regional peace and stability and boosting confidence in global economic recovery, Gu added.

Luo, from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, said, "It is stability and certainty for the future and for development that all parties are expecting from the Chinese president's visit."

He added that during the trip, the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness guiding China's neighborhood diplomacy will help pool further consensus between China and neighboring countries in focusing on development and jointly building a peaceful, safe and secure, prosperous, beautiful and amicable home.

Bond: 'Comradely and brotherly friendship' highlighted

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"He was like a brother for Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai and other Chinese leaders," Xi wrote in a signed article published by the major Vietnamese newspaper Nhan Dan (People) ahead of his 2017 visit.

Xi holds dear the indelible contributions these great forerunners made to fostering the China-Vietnam friendship. During his first state visit to Vietnam in 2015, in a speech to Vietnam's National Assembly, Xi quoted Ho's words, "China and Vietnam enjoy comradely and brotherly friendship."

Xi once shared his personal regard for Chairman Ho while speaking with Vietnamese youths. "We call him 'Uncle Ho'," Xi said. He noted that in the hearts of the Chinese people of his generation, Chairman Ho is remembered as the best friend of the Chinese people.

In 2011, Xi, then Chinese vice-president, visited Ho's former residence to learn more about his life. Before his departure, Xi left an inscription, "The great man's spirit shall be honored for millennia, and the China-Vietnam friendship shall endure through the ages."

Six years later, during the 2017 state visit, Xi once again toured Ho's former residence. At a pond near the Ban Sao Nak, the wooden house where Ho once lived and worked, Xi learned to clap his hands before feeding fish, the same practice that Ho used for drawing fish closer.

Reflecting on bilateral ties during that visit, Xi said, "We should learn from Chairman Mao, Premier Zhou and Chairman Ho, and carry forward and develop the China-Vietnam friendship for the benefit of both our peoples."

Tea chats

During To Lam's 2024 China tour, Xi prepared a tea gathering for him at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. The Vietnamese leader chose China as his first overseas destination only two weeks after being confirmed as general secretary of the CPV Central Committee. An editorial in Nhan Dan highlighted the value both countries place on their traditional friendship.

President Xi's wife, Peng Liyuan, also invited To Lam's wife, Ngo Phuong Ly, to a tea gathering, where they enjoyed traditional Chinese performances, including Chinese opera.

Over the years, tea chats have evolved into a routine yet distinctive tradition during mutual visits between Chinese and Vietnamese leaders, given the two countries' similar tea cultures.

"Unlike formal talks, tea talks offer a more intimate and personal form of communication for both leaders," said Pan Jin'e, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Department of International Communist Movement.

Gift-giving during tea chats has created lasting memories in bilateral interactions. During Xi's state visit to Vietnam in 2023, then Vietnamese leader Nguyen Phu Trong, at a tea gathering in Hanoi, presented Xi with a painting depicting a previous tea chat they had shared in Beijing. "It might not be particularly remarkable, but the true value lies in the cherished brotherly friendship," Trong told Xi.

In 2017, after a tea talk in Beijing, Xi presented Trong with a replica of Chairman Ho's handwritten poem in Chinese titled "*Walking*". The poem is about Ho's arduous yet determined quest for his nation's liberation.

Xi also quoted the poem in his speech to Vietnam's National Assembly in 2015, to encourage both sides to take a farsighted view on bilateral ties.

China and Vietnam are both socialist countries led by communist parties with similar political systems and development paths.

Xi once said, "China and Vietnam have achieved what we have today, because we have insisted on reform, opening-up and innovation, and because we have found a development path that meets our own national conditions."

In this era of transformation and challenges, the two neighbors have decided to set their sights higher. During Xi's state visit to Vietnam in 2023, they pledged to build a China-Vietnam community with a shared future that carries strategic significance. "We should walk along this path together," Xi told Trong at the end of that trip.

Young front-runners

During Xi's 2023 state visit, Trong arranged a special meeting in Hanoi for the Chinese leader. The event brought together young Chinese and Vietnamese representatives, as well as individuals who had contributed to building the friendship between the two countries.

Xi encouraged the attendees, particularly the young people, to "take the lead" in promoting bilateral friendship as "front-runners". It was during this occasion that Le Nguyet Quynh, a Vietnamese student, met Xi for the first time.

Quynh is now a 19-year-old freshman majoring in economics at Tsinghua University, which is Xi's alma mater. Describing her impression of Xi, she said, "He is kind, tall and dignified."

Representing Vietnamese youths, Quynh gave a speech in front of Xi at the event in 2023. A picture of that moment is now the cover image of her profile on WeChat, China's most popular all-in-one messaging app.

"Every time a classmate adds me on WeChat and sees that I had met Xi Dada, they are all curious about how it happened," Quynh said. "It was a marvelous experience, indeed."

The affectionate title "Dada" refers to uncle in Chinese dialects, and has been given to Xi by Chinese netizens.

Quynh, whose hometown is in Vietnam's Nghe An Province, the birthplace of Ho Chi Minh, started learning Chinese in junior high. After stumbling upon a video report of Xi's visit to his alma mater, she set her sights on attending Tsinghua University.

Like Quynh, many Vietnamese students have chosen to pursue higher education in China. Around 20,000 Vietnamese students studied in China during the 2023-24 academic year. The number of Chinese students in Vietnam is also on the rise.

Xi's belief that amity between nations lies in the affinity between their peoples strikes a chord with Quynh.

"No matter where you go, if people from two countries can get along well, they'll naturally start sharing elements of their cultures with one another. That's how friendships grow and last," Quynh said.

"And when it comes to maintaining the friendship between our two nations, it's indeed we the youth who should carry that responsibility forward," she added.