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## SIMILARITIES OF VIETNAM AND SOUTH KOREA – LINKING TO THE STRATEGY COOPERATION PARTNERSHIP AND ITS FUTURE DIRECTION

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### Abstract

The relationship of Vietnam and Korea was making by warmth, close friendship and understanding. On 22 December 1992, the two countries established the formal diplomatic relation, thus opening a new era in their bilateral ties. Since then, the friendship and cooperation between the two countries have been developing very dynamically in all areas. In 2001, during President of Vietnam Tran Duc Luong's State visit to the Republic of Korea, both sides agreed to establish the "Comprehensive Cooperation Partnership in the 21st Century". In October 2009, during President Lee Myung Bak's State visit to Vietnam, relationship was upgraded to Strategic Cooperation Partnership, setting a new important landmark in Vietnam-Korea relations. The two countries are closely cooperating and developing in the fields of trade, investment, education and training, science and technology, culture and tourism, and through a wide spectrum of people-to-people contact. Vietnam and Korea shared many commonalities and similarities in the geographical and natural conditions as well as historical and cultural traditions. For example, Vietnam and South Korea have experienced thousands years in history and were much influenced by Confucianism. Both Vietnam and Korea from the ancient time were the poor agricultural countries with water rice production, which heavily depended on the natural conditions. Hence the peoples of the two countries have the same or very similar psychology, mentality and the way of life. With their basic characteristics, the two countries have plentiful literature treasures. The most important factor which has promoted the bilateral ties between the two countries is sharing the common interest of building a prosperous and happy country for its people in a peaceful, stable, friendly and cooperative environment in the region and the world over. The similarities between two countries shared interests in building a peaceful and stable world.

**Key words:** Comprehensive Cooperation Partnership; diplomatic relation; South Korea; Strategic Cooperation Partnership; Vietnam

### Introduction

Though Vietnam and South Korea shared many commonalities and similarities in the geographical and natural conditions as well as historical and cultural traditions, and even had certain relations since old times. The relationship between the two peoples can be traced back to 13<sup>th</sup> century when Prince Ly Long Tuong of the Ly Dynasty self-exiled to the Koryo Dynasty in 1226 AD. About 100 years earlier, in 1127 AD, Prince Ly Duong Con of the same Ly Dynasty, who first defected to the Chinese Song Dynasty, came to Koryo when the Northern Song Dynasty was defeated by the Jin Dynasty and moved its capital to the south. Having settled successfully on the Korean peninsula, Princes Ly Duong Con and Ly Long Tuong created two separate Lee clans - the Jeongseon and Hwasan - in Korea (Park, 2012). In the late 1980s, Vietnam adopted the Doi Moi reform policy to transform itself into a socialist-oriented market economy, and South Korea launched its Nordpolitik-Northern Policy to normalize

diplomatic relations with socialist countries. On 22 December 1992, the two countries established the formal diplomatic relation, thus opening a new era in their bilateral ties. For the first time in the history, the official foundation for promoting mutual awareness, understanding and trust were built. Since then, the friendship and cooperation between the two countries have been developing very dynamically in all areas. When Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong visited Korea in August 2001, bilateral relations were enhanced to a Comprehensive Partnership, and eventually upgraded to a Strategic Cooperative Partnership in 2009 during Korean President Lee Myeong-bak's state visit to Vietnam (Park, 2012). The upgraded partnership between the two countries was confirmed in November 2011, when President Truong Tan Sang reciprocated President Lee's visit. The two leaders agreed in Seoul to strengthen strategic cooperation by expanding exchanges in foreign, security and defense and to increase the already substantial cooperation in search and rescue, anti-terrorism, crime prevention, personnel training and defense industries.

In this article, we would just study and review about some similarities between Vietnam and South Korea, and linking to the strategy cooperation partnership and its future direction

## Similarities of Vietnam and South Korea

### *Natural similarities*

- Both Vietnam and Korea are rather small countries, situated on the peninsulas (Indochina and Korean peninsulas) with 2/3 of the territories are mountainous areas. Both countries are faced to the East Sea.
- Both Vietnam and Korea have geographical form as letter "S" in Latin.
- Both Vietnam and Korea have very similar natural/climate conditions with 4 seasons as spring, summer, autumn and winter.
- Vietnam and Korea are situated at the very important strategic locations and bordering big powers. This would influence on their history and culture (Hanoi Culture and Information Publisher, 2002).

### *Historical similarities*

Formation of States: Both Vietnam and Korea had established the sovereign states at very early stage and have the long history of over 4,000 years. According to legend in Korea, Hwanung was prince sent from the Heaven to the Earth (Park Yeon Kwan, 2001). He married to Fairy Lady Ungnyo, who belonged to the Bear tribe, and gave birth to Tangun, who founded the Chosun state (the Land of Morning Calm) in 2333 BC in the area of Pyongyang today. Tangun was considered the ancestor of the Korean nation. Nowadays, Koreans celebrate the day of foundation of its State on 3 October (day 3 month 10) of the Lunar Calendar. At the same time, in Vietnamese mythology, Kinh Duong Vuong was also sent from the Heaven to the Earth. He married to Fairy Lady who was the daughter belonging to the Dragon family of Soo Yong Wang (Thu Long Vương - God of the Water World) in the Đong Đình Lake and gave birth to Sung Lam (Lac Long Quan). Lac Long Quan married to Fairy Lady (Au Co) and gave birth to 100 eggs which afterward became 100 children (50 sons and 50 daughters). 50 children followed their Mother to mountainous areas and 50 other followed their Father to the coastal areas. The elder son Hùng Vương succeeded his Father to become the King and founded the State of Văn Lang at Vinh Phu province. Nowadays, Vietnamese celebrate the Demise day of Kinh Huong Vuong on 10 March of the Lunar Calendar.

Long struggle for independence and freedom: Because of the geographical location at the important strategic positions, Vietnam and Korea have had for thousands years

to fight against foreign big power's aggression for their independence and freedom.

### *Cultural similarities*

Both Vietnam and Korea from the ancient time were the poor agricultural countries with water rice production, which heavily depended on the natural conditions (climate and weather, natural calamities). Hence the peoples of both countries have the same or very similar psychology, mentality and the way of life (Lung, 2002). The Korean "Chunhyang Cheon" or story of Chun Hyang and Mongryong is much alike the Vietnamese "Kieu Cheon" or story of Thúy Kiều and Kim Trọng – both reflected the woman's poor fates as well as young couples's aspiration for love and better life in the feudal time. The famous Vietnamese Cheo Opera "Quan âm Thị Kính" is based on the old story originated from Korea.

Vietnam and Korea share the important religions such as Buddhism (which became state religion during the Shilla Dynasty in Korea and Ly and Tran Dynasties in Vietnam), Confucianism (which became the official religion of Joseon Dynasty in Korea and Le Dynasty in Vietnam). Buddhism and Confucianism have exerted a great influence on developing systems of education, arts, architecture, ceremony, social and family traditions and civil administration. The influence can be seen even nowadays in both countries.

Religious tolerance: Vietnam and Korea have many religions and both countries respect religious pluralism with coexistence of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, local religions (Shamanism in Korea and Caodaim and Hoahaoism in Vietnam). There is no fighting among religions.

Successfully preserving national cultural identity throughout thousands of years: This is most remarkable feature of the Vietnamese and Korean societies proving the invincible vitality of our nations and cultures despite the pressure and danger of assimilation created by the foreign forces during their aggression and domination. The Koreans have remained very Korean and the Vietnamese have remained very Vietnamese in the long course of history with many ups and downs.

### *Psychology and character's personality similarities*

The characters' psychology and personality in Vietnam and South Korea have many similarities. The characters are divided into: good and evil, high-minded and humble, honest and deceitful... It can be seen at folk literature of two countries as the person with altruistic, compassionate, hardworking like Hung Bu in story *The gift of wild goose queen* (South Korea), or Hung Bu in story *Hung Bu and Nol Bu* (South Korea), a good-natured farmer in story *The strange flower* (South Korea), a kind-hearted younger

brother in story *The thistle* (Vietnam), *Hà rằm hà rạc* (Vietnam) (Ngan, 2011).

Positive characters (kind-hearted, good natured, truthful...) – represent for the good, high-minded things usually have a life with a happy future. For example, as in story *Thạch Sanh* (Vietnam), Thạch Sanh is a good-natured and charitable person; lastly he got married with a princess. In story *The magpies' gratefulness* (South Korea); a charitable and hard-working student was saved from a snake's poison by a couple of magpies because he saved their flock of spring magpies (Ngan, 2011).

Vietnam-South Korea building the story about the way of behavior in daily life, which is similar in development, and the way to resolve (Ngan, 2011).

### **Achievements of Vietnam-Korea relations**

The establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Vietnam and South Korea is a historic decision in accordance with the interests of the two countries (Minh, 2012). In the past 20 years, Vietnam-Korea friendship and cooperation have developed dynamically and effectively in all fields: political and economic, social and cultural, security and defense, scientific and technological, educational and training, and people-to-people relations.

#### **Political relations**

Immediately after establishing diplomatic relations, the two countries have maintained a steady annual exchange of high-level delegations and senior leadership meetings (ruling Party Chiefs, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Chairmen of National Assembly and of ministries, national agencies and local authorities...). Two of the important milestone of upgrading relations between the two countries should be mentioned: in 2001, the relation between the two countries from regular partners was raised to "Comprehensive Partnership in the 21st Century"; and 2009 continues to be upgraded to "Strategic Cooperative Partnership". So after two decades, Vietnam and South Korea have become "Strategic Cooperative Partnership" of each other. Among the many countries that Vietnam has official diplomatic relations in the early 1990s, South Korea was the first country to become a strategic partner of Vietnam. This is a very rapid growth and spectacular. The two countries agreed to upgrade relations to a "Strategic Cooperative Partner" is the inevitable result of the development of bilateral relations in the last two decades, as well as an expression of determination of the Government and people of the two countries to promote that relationship grows deeper well and in the future. Furthermore, over 30 cities and provinces (Hanoi-Seoul, Hochiminh City-Busan, Hai Phong-Incheon, Dong Nai-Gyeongsangnam-do, Hue-Changwon, Long An-Chungnamdo, Quang Ninh-Gangwondo, Binh Duong-Daejeon, Kien Giang-Jejudo, Da Nang-Daegu...) have established sister relationship. All these contributed to improving our mutual understanding,

trust and cooperation. Korea and Vietnam have also closely cooperated in regional and global issues. Since Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, Vietnam has successfully held the rotating presidency of ASEAN twice and has already hosted important summits of ASEAN, ASEAN+3, APEC, ASEM and EAS. Vietnam strongly supports Korea in its strategic cooperation partnership with ASEAN (signed in October 2010), Korea's increasingly important role and position in regional and global mechanisms, such as EAS, APEC, ASEM, G20, WTO and UN (Tran Trong Toan, 2012). Korea supported Vietnam in recognizing Vietnam's market economy and its accession to the WTO, participation of Vietnam as the Chairman of ASEAN in G20 Summit in Seoul and Vietnam's active participation in regional and global organizations. As members of all these regional cooperation bodies, the two countries have cooperated and shared the same vision for peace and prosperity in the East Asian and also in the world (Tran Quang Minh, 2012).

#### **Economic Relations**

Korea is among Vietnam's top economic, trade and investment partners. Regarding investment, as of April 2012, Korea ranks 1st place in terms of number of investment projects (with 3.003 projects) and 2nd place on investment capital volume with the total amount of more than 24 billion USD among 95 countries and territories investing in Vietnam. For trade relations, according to statistics from Korean Custom, in the last two years, Korea has overtaken Japan to become the second largest goods supplier to Vietnam, such as textile and leather materials, electronic components, plastics, machinery, and automotive parts (Ha Hong Van, 2010). Korea is also the fourth largest importer of Vietnamese goods, accounting for around 4% of total Vietnam's export turnover, mostly agricultural products, footwear, etc. Although affected by the global financial crisis and economic slowdown, the two-way trade between Vietnam and Korea still gains a high-speed growth. In 2009, the bilateral turnover was USD8.75 billion (Kien *et al.*, 2010). In 2010, the number reached USD12.85 billion, up 46.8% compared to 2009. In 2011, the result was impressive with 39 % growth compared to 2010, reaching 17.88 billion USD. For only in the first 4 months of 2012, the number climbs up to USD 6.46 billion. Two countries have been continuing to promote trade relations to reach the goal of total two-way trade's turnover of 20 billion USD in 2015, and 30 billion USD in 2020; while actively cooperate to reduce and towards the balance of trade between the two countries.

Korea is the 2nd largest donor of official development assistance (ODA) to Vietnam. In April of 2012, Korea has committed to provide USD1.2 billion for Vietnam in the period of 2012-2015, out of which 70% will be focused on the green growth, infrastructure and human resource development (Tran Trong Toan, 2012).

### ***Culture and Social relations***

Culture and art are also important sectors contributing binds two nations Vietnam and South Korea. Hallyu - The Korean Wave began in Vietnam with the export of Korean TV dramas like “*Jewel in the Palace*” and “*Winter Sonata*” (Avivek, 2008). The Agreement on Cultural Cooperation signed in 1994 and the MOU on Cooperation in Culture, Arts, Sports and Tourism signed in 2008 as well as other related framework documents have laid solid foundation for further enhancing cooperation between the two countries. In 2006, the Korean Cultural Centre was launched in Ha Noi with the aim of promoting mutual understanding and raising public awareness about Korean culture as well as the Korea-Vietnam relationship. Cultural exchange programs between Vietnam and Korea such as cultural exhibitions, film festivals, artistic performances, etc. have been held regularly in both countries.

About people exchange, from just a few dozen people, far above every country has about 110,000 people living across. In each year, about half a million people visited each other. General Secretary Nong Duc Manh of Vietnamese Communist Party, during his visit to Korea in November 2007, likened relations between the two countries to those between “*sadon*”, a word meaning “in-laws” in Korea, apparently a reference to the growing number of intermarriages between Koreans and Vietnamese. More than 46,000 Vietnamese women have married Korean men, making Vietnam the number one source of foreign brides for Koreans. With the number of multicultural families growing, some unfortunate unions have also been reported (Soon-Yang Kim et al., 2007). Our hope is that Korean-Vietnamese families will contribute to bridging the two peoples with kinship and also help the mostly homogeneous Korean society diversify culturally with a growing number of intermarriages with other countries.

Talking about Vietnam-Korea relations, we can not fail to refer to a very important field of labor cooperation between the two countries. Vietnamese labour in Korea is not only contributes very greatly to poverty reduction in Vietnam, but also facilitate the integration of Vietnamese into the daily life as well as the culture of Korea. Moreover, the Vietnamese labor who works at Korean companies have been understood of Korean culture and language, it will be one of the important bridges to strengthen the understanding and friendship between the two peoples (Tran Trong Toan, 2012).

### **Future direction**

In the past 20 years, Vietnam - South Korea relations has developed very rapidly in all aspects. Following the foundation of this development, the two countries have selected 2012 as the year of Vietnam - South Korea friendship. It can be seen as a new milestone for the further development of the two country’s long-term relationship.

New stage of bilateral relations marked by the visit to Korea of the President of Vietnam, Mr. Truong Tan Sang, at December, 2011 and the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Mr. Nguyen Tan Dung on March, 2012. During the visit, the two states have given the statements that expressing general awareness as well as the determination of the leaders of the two countries in bringing bilateral Strategic Cooperation Partnership to a new high level. According to the President of South Korean, Mr. Lee Myung Bak, “Korea and Vietnam must cooperate more closely for peace and prosperity of Asia ...” and he wished that the Korean and Vietnamese people have the closer relationship and better mutual understanding so as to jointly open “a new era of cooperation and interaction”, ready to cooperate more closely with Vietnam on all sectors, both in terms of economic, commercial, political, defense, people exchange and cooperation in international forum such as ASEAN plus Korea, ASEAN+3, ARF, EAS, ASEM, APEC, WTO and UN (Tran Trong Toan, 2012).

In the economic fields, the two states have agreed to start negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). This will open up a tremendous prospect for trade relations between the two countries, towards a balancing bilateral trade cooperation and mutual benefit. Korea has also agreed to consider the proposal of Vietnam on creating favorable conditions for importing Vietnam goods to Korea as well as to help Vietnam in important areas such as mining, industrial production, food processing and infrastructure (power plants, ports, transport facilities, water processing and supply plants...) (Tran Trong Toan, 2012).

In development cooperation, to successfully complete those important projects being undertaken by Korean companies: Vam Cong Bridge over the Mekong River, the Sea Port of Cai Mep; the expressway of Ha Noi-Hai Phong, Ha Noi-Lao Cai, Long Thanh-Dau Giay, National Highway no.18, the Ho Chi Minh City Ring Road, the Express Road in the western coastal areas of South Vietnam, the Mong Duong Thermal Power Plant, Ba Ria-Vung Tau Thermal Power Plant, Nam Dinh Coal-fired Power Plant, Ninh Thuan Steel Plant, Thien Tan Water Supply Plant, etc.; to facilitate Korean companies’ participation in construction of Hanoi Red River City project approved as national-scale project; to promote exchange of experience in financial policies, environment policies, rural development, land policies, science and technology, etc.; to further enhance cooperation in labour and employment, IT and communications, television and broadcasting; to promote Korea’s participation in Vietnam’s nuclear power energy programme (e.g. development of nuclear energy, HRD training, improvement of legal framework, safety regulations, provision of experience and technical assistance), cooperation in green growth projects (such as the Vietnam-Korea Green Technology Park) (Tran Trong Toan, 2012).

To further strengthen the cultural, educational, sports cooperation and people-to-people exchanges; to enhance mutual understanding and trust between two countries; to work out concrete measures to forge cultural exchanges and revitalize exchange of youth for future-oriented development of bilateral ties; to expand consular cooperation to meet the growing demand of peoples for travelling between Vietnam and Korea; to sign an agreement on civil justice support to improve the current judicial support systems and to facilitate people-to-people interaction and exchange between the two countries.

## Conclusions

The two countries share commonalities and similar values in many aspects: natural and geographical conditions as well as historical and cultural traditions; there is no contentious issue or conflict of interests. It is the strong aspiration shared by both countries to build prosperous and happy countries for their people in a peaceful, stable, amicable and cooperative environment in the region and the world at large that has bound Vietnam and Korea together. Over the past 20 years, Vietnam-Korea friendship and cooperation have developed dynamically and finely in all fields: political and economic, social and cultural, scientific and technological, security and defense, education and training as well as people-to-people interaction. What are happen for the next 20 years? The answer is not difficult because with the strong momentum of the development of bilateral relations in over past 20 years, we strongly believed that the friendship and cooperation between Vietnam and South Korea will continue to grow more rapidly.

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