

19th CPC NATIONAL CONGRESS | International perspective

In the name of friendship

South Korean teacher in China has played a key role in boosting ties in education, business and cultural exchange and is confident in the future

Editor's Note: *The Communist Party of China will hold its 19th National Congress on Oct 18. In the run-up to the meeting, China Daily asked a prominent South Korean teacher living in China to talk about her experiences in promoting educational improvements, business cooperation and people-to-people understanding in her native country and her adopted home.*

By **ZHU LIXIN** in Hefei
zhulixin@chinadaily.com.cn

Over the last 21 years, Cho Sung-hye from South Korea has contributed much to the friendship between the people of her country and China.

A teacher of Korean at Hefei University in East China's Anhui province, Cho has helped to boost the two countries' ties in multiple aspects — not just in education.

In 2002, she became the first person from her country to receive China's Friendship Award, the highest honor given to foreigners by the central government. In 2006, she became the first South Korean citizen to gain permanent residency in China. And in 2010, she was listed as one of the most influential women of the century in Hefei.

"My husband and I came to China — to Hefei — to fulfill my elder son's dream. We didn't expect that we would come to love the country as much as we do," said Cho, who speaks fluent Mandarin.

Cho was born in the western city of Seosan, South Korea. Before coming to China, she worked at Soon Chun Hyang University in Asan, also in the west, as a teacher.

"When the eldest of my two sons was in the third year of middle school, his history teacher, who had some experience in China, suggested the students go to live there and have a close look at the old country," Cho said.

As a fan of Chinese history, her son could list more than 900 characters from the Chinese classic *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. The boy was eager to follow his teacher's suggestion.

"He wanted to go to the inland

provinces, and he had some knowledge of Anhui, so he chose Hefei as his destination," Cho said. She herself knew little of the province or its capital at that time, so she decided to have a look before taking her family there.

"On the visit to Hefei, I found it was not very developed but thought it would have great potential. Dozens of universities are located here, including the University of Science and Technology of China, one of the country's best," she said.

Within a year, she moved to the city with her husband, Park Nam-gyu, and her sons. The couple quickly found employment at Hefei University and began teaching Korean the next year. The university was the first in the province to have such a course.

After finishing middle school and high school studies in the city, Cho's elder son was admitted to Peking University for undergraduate studies, and then returned to Hefei later for his MBA at the University of Science and Technology of China.

The younger one received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Anhui University of Chinese Medicine.

After about a year in Hefei, Park took a job in the United States and tried to persuade his wife to give up Hefei.

"I told him that we had just started here and we should at least spend five years in the city before judging whether we should move to another place," Cho said.

Half a year later, Park returned to Hefei University and has been there ever since.

Cho's brothers and sisters also brought their children to Hefei. "At the peak, I had 21 relatives living here, and there are still 12 of them now," Cho said.

Impressed by how the history teacher had influenced her son, Cho has encouraged Chinese students to go to South Korea. She has helped more than 3,000 students from Anhui to study in her country, and more than 1,000 were given job opportunities there. She has brought even more students from South Korea to China.



Cho Sung-hye, a teacher of Korean at Hefei University in East China's Anhui province, talks with her students.
WANG XUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Cho and her husband, Park Nam-gyu, in Cho's office at Hefei University.
ZHU LIXIN / CHINA DAILY

To better promote the educational exchanges, Cho and her husband founded the Handa Cultural Exchange Co in Hefei in 2006, with Cho as president. Her son is general manager.

In 1998, when she was back in her hometown, Cho delivered a three-hour speech to 82 heads of primary schools, trying to persuade them to offer Chinese courses.

"China is developing very fast and will play more important roles in the world. The two countries must promote cooperation in many areas, but how can cooperation go well if our next generation doesn't understand Chinese?" Cho asked.

In 2000, with Cho's help, the Banyang Elementary School — in which she had studied — began teaching Chinese. It was the first primary school in South Korea to do so.

"Nowadays all the primary schools in my country have made Chinese-language courses available to stu-

dents," said Cho. Some local media have credited her with giving the strongest push to the achievement.

Cho's reputation is not limited to education, however. It also extends to boosting Sino-South Korean economic ties and helping the province's poverty-stricken areas.

She also serves as an economic counselor for the Hefei Economic and Technological Development Area, where Hefei University is based, and the Hefei High-Tech Industry Development Zone.

Some of the South Korean companies based in the two zones, the largest in the province, were attracted through Cho's efforts.

She is now helping the development area build a China-South Korea Industry Park, and she has already brought over three South Korean companies to invest in the city's high-tech zone.

"Now I often accompany Hefei officials to South Korea for business

recruitment and students for educational exchanges," Cho said. "In the early years, transportation between Hefei and South Korea was not convenient. Travelers had to change flights in Shanghai or Nanjing, (in the eastern) Jiangsu province.

"There were even South Korean businessmen who intended to invest in Hefei but decided to invest in Shanghai and Nanjing instead, as they found the two cities to be more developed," she added.

"Nowadays, flights connecting Hefei with Incheon in South Korea are available five days a week, and the situation is improving."

Cho and her husband have also donated hundreds of thousands of yuan to help prevent the children of poverty-stricken rural families in Anhui from dropping out of school.

The latest example was a 2016 donation of 20,000 yuan (\$3,020) to four high school graduates in Hefei's Feidong county who had been enrolled at universities but were about to give up for lack of money.

Cho said the number of poverty-stricken students is declining, and they can now get more financial support from the government, rather than relying on occasional social donations.

"In the five years since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, China has invested more than ever before in poverty relief, and President Xi Jinping has vowed to eliminate poverty by 2020," Cho noted.

"In the past 21 years, I have witnessed great development achievements in China, and I believe the five years to come after the pending 19th CPC National Congress will bring the country a more prosperous future."