

China and Vietnam have a shared future, President Xi Jinping says in Lunar New Year note to fellow communist leader

- *Xi Jinping, who is also chief of the Chinese Communist Party, has greeted Vietnamese party counterpart Nguyen Phu Trong ahead of the Lunar New Year*
- *Pledge to deepen 'comrades and brothers' relationship comes as China's ties with the West, especially the US, remain tense*

Frank Tang in Beijing

China sees a shared future with Vietnam and will give priority to the fellow communist state when it comes to regional diplomacy, President Xi Jinping has pledged.

The promise from Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China, came in a letter to his Vietnamese party counterpart Nguyen Phu Trong on the occasion of the upcoming Lunar New Year, which is observed by both countries.

“We will work with the Vietnam side to further integrate bilateral development strategies, enhance all round cooperation, and increase communication and coordination on international and regional affairs,” Xi was quoted by the official Xinhua News Agency as saying.

This comes as China's relations with the West, and the United States in particular, remain tense.

Points of contention have ranged from Washington's support for Taiwan, attempts to thwart China's technological advancement, by squeezing hi-tech chip access, for instance, and to reduce the Chinese role in global supply chains by teaming up with southeast Asian and other allies.

Their similar ideological past, political structure and economic development model have warmed ties between China and Vietnam, despite a border war four decades ago and lingering territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Nguyen paid a three-day visit to Beijing in October, becoming the first foreign leader to do so after Xi secured a norm-breaking third term as party chief at its 20th national congress.

In a joint declaration following that visit, Xi and Ngyuen agreed to join hands in tackling external challenges, including “colour revolutions” and criticism of their human rights records, and pledged to push their special “comrades and brothers” friendship to a new level.

Both sides also agreed to “properly manage” the South China Sea and other disputes.

“Both are stepping up efforts to implement the consensus we have reached. I believe this will consolidate political mutual trust and traditional friendship between the two sides, and effectively improve the well-being of the two peoples,” Xi said in his letter, according to the Xinhua report.

Vietnam is a member of the formerly US-led Pacific Rim trade pact called the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and has become an investment hotspot in recent years, with projected GDP growth rising to a 15-year high of 8 per cent in 2022.

China is not a signatory to the CPTPP but has applied to join the currently 11-member group after then president Donald Trump withdrew the US from the deal in 2017.

Vietnam, one of the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is also a preferred destination for Chinese investors keen to transfer production facilities there to reduce costs, or to bypass US tariffs or other trade barriers.

Annual bilateral trade rose 2.1 per cent to US\$234.9 billion in 2022, according to Chinese customs data, accounting for about a quarter of the China-Asean total.

Chinese exports to Vietnam grew 6.8 per cent to US\$147 billion last year, leaving China with a trade surplus of US\$59 billion.