Mi casa, su casa: Asia’s Spanish heart

by Lã Huỳnh

Sandra Luque, 26, was browsing the familiar books on the Asian culture shelf at the Casa Asia Centre in Barcelona before her eyes settled on a book titled ‘Viet Nam.

Recalling the country from her high school American history class, Luque picked up the book and got her first glimpse of Viet Nam since leaving high school.

The Casa Asia Centre, where Luque found the book, is an Asian studies centre in Spain. While many Spaniards may still consider Asia a distant land, Luque is one of hundreds of people who frequent the Casa Asia.

Lea de la Riva, the manager-director of the centre, says Casa Asia was created to provide Spanish people with an opportunity to learn about different Asian cultures.

Translated as Asia House, Casa Asia was created three years ago and has many facilities for people to learn about the continent. These include the Casa Asia multimedia, a computerised multimedia archives centre, which holds more than 5,000 documents, and the Tagore Auditorium, which seats up to 75 people for conferences and seminars, and an art gallery that brings Asian art to the country.

De la Riva said the centre has created educational exchange programmes between European and Asian universities. Casa Asia has collaborated with universities like the Autonomous University of Madrid, the Pompeu Fabra University, the Open University of Catalonia and the University of Barcelona, to offer East Asia degrees.

Furthermore, in conjunction with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), and the Asia-South East Teachers Association, Casa Asia organised the First Meeting of European and Asian Educators to establish strategies to increase the cross-cultural educational programmes for children aged 10 to 15 in both continents.

The programmes the centre has helped create include the Summer School in the Orient (Mallorca) and the Bamboo School to provide a forum for cultural exchange. To further those programmes and other projects Casa Asia plans on co-operating with China, the Philippines and Viet Nam in the upcoming years.

“Spain was in the Philippines for 500 years,” Riva said. “China is a big country, a very important country in Asia, and we feel Viet Nam is on our right side.”

During many of his trips to Viet Nam, Riva felt the warmth of the Vietnamese in HCM City and Ha Noi.

Riva said the Vietnamese people are very courageous, as they proved during their wars. People think positively and open their hearts, their minds. I would say China, Viet Nam and the Philippines are the most important countries for Spain to develop relationships.”

Besides promoting education, the centre encourages Spanish and European institutions to pay attention to Asia.

It works with the Huang Tie Business Centre, also in Barcelona, which acts as a meeting place for Spanish and Asian companies. Casa Asia has co-financed programmes in different Asian countries. It has advocated Asian issues to Spanish representatives of the EU and it recently organised a conference with their partners Casa de America in Madrid, representing Latin America, to discuss Spanish, Latin American and Asian relations.

Riva added that Viet Nam had an active ambassador in Spain, Nguyen Quang Phong, who pays much attention to Casa Asia’s activities, and that the centre can offer internships to young Vietnamese people who speak Spanish or English at Casa Asia.

The centre has played a key role in fostering Asia’s relationship with Spain, the EU and even Latin America.

“Europe needs a point to establish links with Asia, both cultural links, educational links and economic links,” said Riva. “But above all, it needs people to people links.”

Casa Asia is located at 373 Avinguda Diagonal in Barcelona, Spain. VNS

http://vietnamnews.vn/sunday/