



**From left:** Monks and guests pose for a group photo after the opening ceremony of the Dahongshan Chan Culture Forum. The handover ceremony of the South China Sea Buddhism Shenzhen Roundtable is held during the forum. Overseas student representatives from the Nanhai Buddhism Academy pose for a group photo.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Chan culture's effect on world explored

Suizhou in Hubei province plays host to international representatives of religion and academia

By **CHEN HONG**

chenhong@chinadaily.com.cn

Representatives from religious circles and cultural scholars from 20 countries and regions recently gathered in Suizhou, a historical city in Central China's Hubei province, for a forum on the spread and influence of Chinese Chan culture on Oct 20.

The Ci'en Temple, which is located on the main peak of the Dahong mountainous area in Suizhou and led by Master Yinshun as the abbot, organized the forum.

Chan, also known as Zen, is a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated from the mid-sixth century during the period of the Southern (420-589) and Northern (386-581) dynasties in China. It has had a profound effect on the world.

It has been a part of the efforts of China's Buddhist community to contribute Buddhist wisdom to promote people-to-people connectivity among countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, said Yinshun, who is also the vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China.

This initiative received a warm response from more than 500 forum participants, including venerable Buddhist monks and masters from Belt and Road countries and regions such as Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, India and Mongolia. They advocated the promotion of cultural exchanges and the pursuit of harmony through mutual learning during the forum.

Yinshun noted that fostering people-to-people connectivity is crucial for promoting the sustainable and long-term development of the BRI. In line with this vision, the Chan culture forum held at Dahong Mountain served as a meaningful initiative in response to the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which recently concluded in Beijing.

Qi Xuchun, vice-president of the National Committee of the 12th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said during the opening ceremony that the forum has worked tirelessly to assist the global exchange and dissemination of Chan culture. It also helped to enhance the international reputation and influence of Dahong Mountain Chan culture and inject vitality into the progress of human civilization, he noted.

Dahong Mountain is renowned for its rich Buddhist heritage spanning hundreds of years and is home to several major sects of Chan Buddhism. The Caodong sect, one of the five major sects, has spread to Japan and South Korea, attracting scholars and monks to seek their roots and ancestral connections in Dahong Mountain.

"Monks and temples across the

country have had intricate connections with this place (Dahong Mountain) since the Song Dynasty (960-1279)," said Li Aimin, deputy director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Hubei province.

Chan Buddhism, with its emphasis on meditation and mindfulness, has attracted practitioners worldwide who seek to find beauty and meaning in the simplicity of life.

"I hope as this forum proceeds we can focus on timely issues to make this world a better place for the generations that are living and for future generations by exploring ways to propagate Zen practices more vigorously," said Kirinde Assaji Thero, chief incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple Colombo.

The Chan culture forum marked the beginning of the "Silk Road Illumination: Exploring the Footprints of Chinese Civilization" series of events.

"By establishing institutions dedicated to spreading Chan culture abroad, along with other strategic measures, we strive to enrich the South China Sea region and the world with the wisdom and power of China's Chan heritage," Yinshun said.

## Closer ties

In addition to his role as an abbot for the Hongfa Temple and the Nanshan Temple in China as well as the Chinese Monastery Lumbini in Nepal, Yinshun

has initiated a number of projects to promote cultural exchanges among Buddhist communities in surrounding countries and regions.

One such initiative is the South China Sea Buddhism Shenzhen Roundtable, which has been held annually since 2016 to foster collaboration and integration among different religions and cultures.

In 2022, it was held overseas for the first time in Phnom Penh of Cambodia, attracting Buddhist representatives and guests from 18 countries and regions, including China, Cambodia, Thailand, Mongolia and Japan. They signed a pact during the conference to advocate more extensive cooperation in terms of culture and education, healthcare, charity and environmental protection.

Nergui Sainbuyan, abbot of Sain Nomuun Buddhist Monastery in Ulaanbaatar of Mongolia, said he has been a frequent participant in the roundtable.

"I felt that participants of all forms of Buddhism are exchanging and supporting each other (at the roundtable) on an equal footing and making unremitting efforts to pray for world peace and human well-being," he said.

Yinshun announced that this year's roundtable is scheduled to take place in December in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. The event aims to continue promoting inter-religious dialogue and cooperation for the advancement of peace and harmony in the region.

Wang Qiang, chief of the Shen-

zhen city's united front work department, represented the city in handing over the hosting rights of the roundtable to Sri Lanka. He was joined by Bour Kry, the great supreme Patriarch of Dhammayut-tikanikaya of Cambodia.

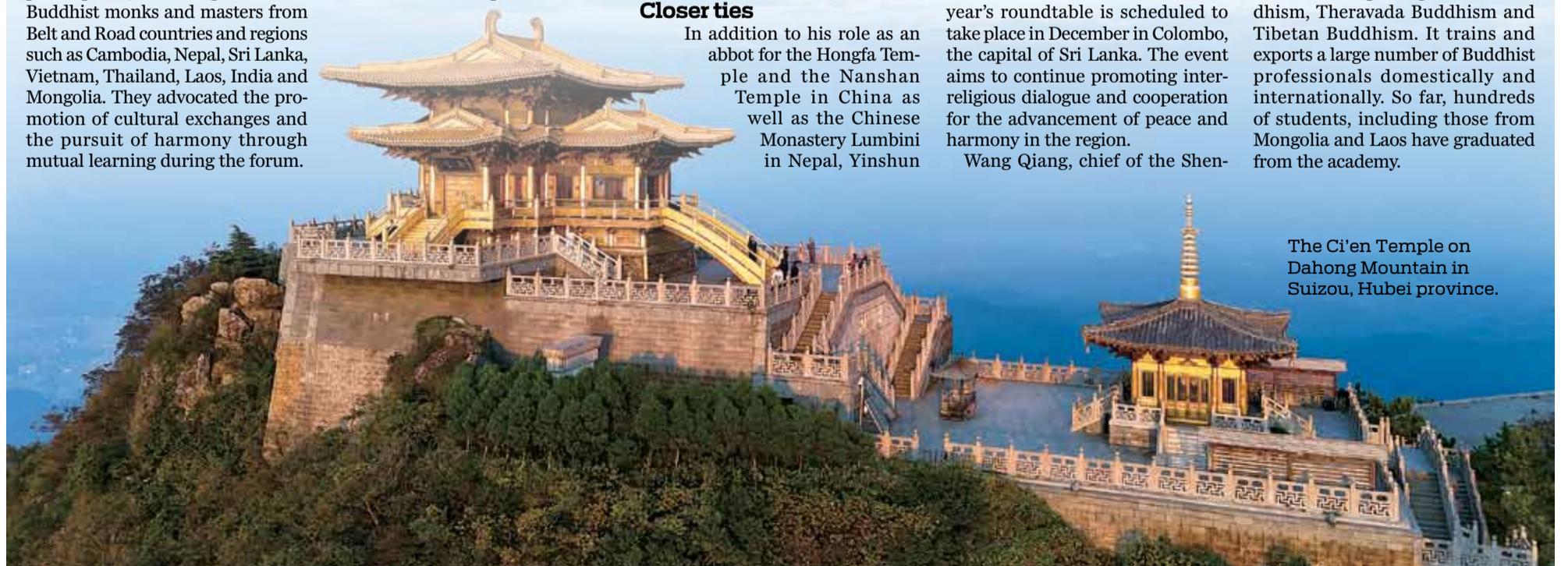
Wang said the circle of friends of the roundtable is expanding, becoming an important window for domestic and international Buddhist exchanges and cooperation.

Yinshun also shared his plans to deepen the "Way to Light" campaign, which aims to provide medical treatment and support to visually impaired patients, particularly those suffering from cataracts, in surrounding countries and regions. The campaign has aided education in poverty-stricken areas simultaneously.

Supported by the Youth Chawnese Sodality of Shenzhen, the campaign has benefited nearly 2,000 visually impaired patients in countries such as Cambodia, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In terms of education cooperation, the master founded the Nanhai Buddhism Academy in Sanya, South China's Hainan province.

Known as "Nalanda University of China," the higher education institution specializes in religious studies encompassing Chinese Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. It trains and exports a large number of Buddhist professionals domestically and internationally. So far, hundreds of students, including those from Mongolia and Laos have graduated from the academy.



The Ci'en Temple on Dahong Mountain in Suizhou, Hubei province.