

By YUAN SHENGGAO

How religions are able to coexist with each other in harmony, and how different civilizations can learn from one another were the topics of heated discussion in a religious dialogue as part of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023 in Boao, Hainan province, on Friday.

Co-hosted by the China Religious Culture Communication Association and China Committee on Religion and Peace and jointly organized by the Hainan Religions Affairs Bureau and the Buddhist Association of Hainan, the dialogue attracted participants within religious circles from different countries and regions, and they had extensive and warm discussions on a variety of topics related to the mutual learning among civilizations and the harmonious coexistence of religions.

Four representatives of the religious community from China, Mongolia, Peru and Germany conducted the main dialogue, and interacted with the audience.

Master Yinshun, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China, and president of the Buddhist Association of Hainan, opened the dialogue with a Zen poem, vividly explaining a profound truth: everything in the world is different because of different reasons, and it is their differences that create a diverse and colorful world.

In the dialogue, he reviewed the process of the integration of Chinese culture over thousands of years through the mutual learning among civilizations.

As the only guest speaker to attend the religious dialogue of the BFA Annual Conference seven times in a row since 2015, Yinshun believes that religions should consciously deal with the relationship between politics, economy, culture, society and ecology, and unify the pursuit of the other world with the creation of a better life in the present.

While taking questions from audience members on the crux of mutual learning among civilizations, he pointed out that the key lies in "a transcendental heart", and, as inspired by Chinese civilization, inclusiveness is the magic word to overcome an egotistical superiority mentality that is prone to estrangement and conflicts between different religions and civilizations.

"In Chinese history, the exchanges among different religions have always contributed to the enrichment and perfection of the country's religious system as a whole, so that different religions can flourish together," he said.

### Growing exchanges

Sainbuyan Nergui, chief of the Mongolian Sangha Federation and abbot of the Sain Nomuun Buddhist Monastery of Mongolia, agreed with Yinshun, who is an old friend, saying that the need for different cultures to understand each other, integrate with each other and learn from one another is unquestionable after giving a brief introduction on the exchange of Buddhism between China and Mongolia.



Representatives of the religious community from China, Mongolia, Peru and Germany conduct the main dialogue at a subforum on religion during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023 in Boao, Hainan province, on March 31. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Forum emphasizes religions as beacon of world peace

Reciprocal understanding coexistence highlighted by speakers during annual conference

## Roundup of previous sessions

**2015:** The first subforum on Religious Harmony and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations is held at the Boao Forum for Asia. It highlights China's commitment to the acceptance and inclusiveness of different religions from around the world.

Organizers say the subforum is conducive to the sound development and integration of world religions and helps to tell China's religious stories to the world. It promotes traditional Chinese culture and strengthens China's soft power.

**2016:** The religious subforum invited guest speakers from Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. The religious masters brought a feast of Buddhist teachings to the conference. The concept of "the South China Sea

Buddhism" is elaborated, with the mission of fostering peace and common development in the South China Sea region.

**2017:** Buddhist masters from six countries in the Lancang-Mekong valley, including China, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam, participate in the subforum. They jointly call for Buddhist cooperation among countries in the region to maintain social stability and boost common prosperity.

**2018:** Focusing on "a human community with a shared future", an in-depth dialogue is held among representatives of Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity. They share insights on the key to building harmonious relationships among different religions. They

conclude that religions can reduce misunderstandings and reconcile disparities by strengthening communications and mutual learning. It helps to promote global peace and build a community with a shared future for mankind.

**2019:** The subforum features a dialogue among Buddhist masters from Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Representatives reach a common view that Buddhist communities on both sides of the Straits should learn from each other, expand cooperation with mutual interest, and jointly contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

**2021:** On the religious subforum, Buddhist, Catholic and Islamic representatives as well as a Nobel Prize winner scientist offer great insights into

how religions contribute to the development of the Belt and Road Initiative. They believe that the BRI is an important foundation for building new international relations. All speakers call for expanded communication and mutual learning among different civilizations to promote world peace.

**2022:** The subforum invite representatives of Buddhism and Islam as well as an expert in traditional Chinese culture to discuss how different religions and ideological schools interact and inspire each other throughout history. All civilizations and religions in the world develop by communicating and integrating with various cultures, they say, adding that the harmony between different religions is conducive to global peace and a beautiful shared future for humanity.

Nergui sent Mongolian monks to study at the Nanhai Buddhism Academy in Sanya, Hainan, who, as he said, have mostly become the backbone in the religious field of Mongolia now. "They have learned the Oriental wisdom that makes them

more capable of helping others," Nergui said.

Inspired by the positive contributions Yinshun has made to the exchange of Buddhism between the two countries, Nergui said: "I am confident that China and Mongolia,

two neighbors and friends connected by mountains and rivers, will see their cooperation continue to flourish in all fields in the future."

In his interaction with audience members on a question about the influence of the COVID-19 pandem-

ic, Nergui said: "The pandemic has not only influenced the way of thinking and spirit of human beings, but also the progress of science and technology. I think it makes the world more aware of the importance of peace, harmony and unity, and tells

us that we should have a positive attitude toward life."

Elias Szczytnicki, secretary general of the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Religious Leaders, reviewed the history of South America over the past hundreds of years, during which the Christianity brought over by the Spanish and Portuguese colonists and the local primitive religions went through a process of resistance, conquest and then integration.

He also analyzed that a great change in language, culture and lifestyle happened in South America during that process.

"Although South America and China are far away from each other ... they share the same goal of striving for world peace and harmony," Szczytnicki said. "We hope that there will be more platforms like the dialogue in Boao to help promote mutual learning and harmonious development among major religions and civilizations."

Szczytnicki added that he was happy to be invited to the dialogue through which he could share his thoughts. He also spoke highly of the Global Civilization Initiative which was recently proposed, and he believes that religions can play an important role to put it into practice.

### Common goal

China has proposed a set of philosophies promoting exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations in recent years, which are characterized by "equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusiveness". These philosophies deeply embody the notion of inclusiveness, coexistence, and harmony in diversity within Chinese civilization and show a genuine sense of equality and humility toward other civilizations.

When asked how to promote religious exchanges between China and South America, he suggested that the two sides can find a lot of common space between each other, relating to the concept of family, climate change and social justices among others, which can help create a broad space to boost common development and cooperation.

He said that his firsthand experience of communicating with the Chinese Buddhist masters has deepened their mutual understanding, and he realized that although there are differences in their religions, they have a common goal of contributing to world peace.

Liu Chengyong, president of the German Taoist Association, reviewed how he learned about the traditional Chinese medicine and the *Tao Te Ching* in China when he was a teenager. He shared his experience of promoting Taoism in Germany, and demonstrated Taoist standing meditation to the audience, enlivening the atmosphere of the dialogue.

The religious subforum of BFA, since its inception in 2015, has been striving to provide a platform to promote exchanges and mutual learning among religions and civilizations. The aim is to advance the coexistence and integration of different civilizations, cultures and countries, so as to further consolidate the foundation of building the community of a shared future for mankind.

# Chinese Buddhist master keen on improving mutual learning among civilizations

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Communication, mutual learning and inclusiveness are the solutions to improve harmony among different civilizations, said a Chinese Buddhist master.

"We all wish to promote global peace and hold onto our original aspirations in an uncertain world. Never forget why we started and keep our mission in mind," said Master Yinshun, vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China, president of the Buddhist Association of Hainan and the great monk of several temples in China and one in Nepal.

As one of the initiators, the master has participated in all the sessions of the religious subforum of the Boao Forum for Asia, with a goal of building a community with a shared future for mankind, since

its commencement in 2015.

The religious subforum was set up in the economy-oriented BFA because culture comes first in social development, the master said. "Religious culture can play a unique role in helping to build a spiritual bridge for people of all countries and regions."

The subforum this year was titled "Inclusiveness and Coexistence: Striving for a New Level of Mutual Learning Among Civilizations" and was held on Friday.

"It is our common pursuit and spirit to embrace inclusiveness and harmony through cultural exchanges," Yinshun said, "for civilizations, communication transcends barriers, mutual learning transcends conflicts, coexistence transcends solitary superiority."

The subforum consolidates the



Master Yinshun, vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China

humanistic foundation of a community with a shared future for mankind, on which all civilizations can jointly achieve a new level of mutual learning and common prosperity, according to the master.

He mentioned that there were collisions and fusions among different religions in history. "Harmony in diversity is a key characteristic of

Chinese culture," Yinshun said. "Regardless of their differences, communications and mutual learning has enabled all religions to enrich and improve their system and to blossom in a better way."

In an internet-dominated world, where almost everyone becomes reliant on their phones and the web, the master is seeking a way to ensure that Buddhism advances with the times in contributing to the society and its people.

"First, we need to keep optimizing our management system with time. Second, enhance our ability to respond to cultural changes and third, strive to work together for an ideal world in the ever-changing times, and to bring Buddhism into the present," Yinshun said.

He launched the South China Sea Buddhism Shenzhen Roundtable in

2016, which has been seen as an important platform for safeguarding regional peace and common development, as well as promoting cultural exchange and mutual learning in the region.

Buddhist representatives and guests from 18 countries and regions, including China, Cambodia, Thailand, Mongolia and Japan attended last year's roundtable in Shenzhen, which was held in December, both online and on-site.

They signed a pact during the conference to advocate more extensive cooperation in terms of culture and education, healthcare, charity and environmental protection.

Also in the conference, the compiling of the China Buddhism Dictionary was officially launched. It will be popular and easy to understand but under a rigorous framework. Mean-

while, artificial intelligence technology will be used to implement automatic sorting and screening of candidate terms and corresponding interpretations, according to the master.

"Scholars from some prestigious universities in China have joined our compiling team," Yinshun said.

He also founded the Nanhai Buddhism Academy in Sanya, Hainan province, an institute of higher education specializing in religious studies, which was officially approved by the State Administration for Religious Affairs. It began enrolling undergraduates in 2017 and post-graduates in 2021.

It is also open for students from abroad. So far, hundreds of students, including those from Cambodia, Mongolia and Laos have graduated from the academy.



From left: Main entrance to the Nanhai Buddhism Academy in Sanya, Hainan province. Chen Ruifeng (center), head of the National Religious Affairs Administration, poses with other guests at a subforum on religion during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023. An aerial view of the Nanshan Temple. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY