

RELIGION

# Masters’ program assists cultural communication

Course will give foreign students more insight into Chinese Buddhism

By **XU JINGXI** in Guangzhou  
*xujingxi@chinadaily.com.cn*

Sim Sokhaya, a monk from Cambodia, has been learning more about Chinese Buddhism at the Liuzu Temple in Guangdong province, where hundreds of worshippers gathered to celebrate the Buddha’s birthday on May 14.

The 28-year-old, who is pursuing a master’s degree in Chinese history at South China Normal University in Guangzhou, chanted in Chinese with the abbot of the temple to mark the special day.

As a fan of Chinese kung fu movies and costume dramas, Sokhaya has been interested in the country’s culture since childhood. But it was only after coming to China for a master’s program that he started to build up a comprehensive knowledge of Chinese Buddhism.

“My master sent me to China to learn the similarities and differences between Chinese Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism that is popular in my country. A better understanding of each other’s cultures will facilitate communication in the future,” said the young monk.

He is a disciple of the current Supreme Patriarch of the Dhammayuttika order of Cambodia and wants to open a tuition-free school in Cambodia to teach people Chinese and Chinese culture.

Sokhaya is among the first 12 foreign students enrolled by South China Normal University and the Liuzu Temple for a three-year master program.



The abbot of Liuzu Temple (left) talks with Sim Sokhaya, who is pursuing a master’s degree in Chinese history at South China Normal University in Guangzhou. XU JINGXI / CHINA DAILY

Cooperation links temple, university

South China Normal University and the Liuzu Temple in Guangdong province jointly launched a master’s program last year for foreigners who are interested in Chinese Buddhism and culture.

The three-year program mainly focuses on the history of Chinese Buddhism

and its exchanges with different schools of Buddhism overseas. But it also has an extensive curriculum covering many other perspectives of traditional Chinese culture such as language and philosophy.

Besides taking classes on the university’s campus in Guangzhou, students

are also shown around temples and tourist spots that display Buddhist culture. The Liuzu Temple covers the students’ study and living costs in China, as well as providing internship opportunities, while the master’s degrees will be granted and issued by the Ministry of Education.

“As China’s strength grows, more and more foreigners become interested in Chinese culture and the master’s program meets their needs,” said Chen Wenhui, dean of the faculty of history and culture at South China Normal University.

“Meanwhile, we hope the program’s graduates will serve as a bridge for cultural exchanges between China and their countries and spread Chinese culture overseas.”

Buddhism is an important

part of Chinese traditional culture, but the master’s program provides an extensive curriculum covering many other perspectives such as Chinese philosophies and an introduction to Chinese martial arts.

All 12 students admitted last year were from Asian Buddhist countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Sri Lanka.

But the program is not limited to Buddhists, said He

Fangyao, a professor who teaches the history of Buddhism in China.

“We also welcome believers of other religions, such as Christians,” He said.

The master’s program plans to expand enrollment to about 25 students this year.

HERITAGE

# Classes inspired by ancient arts offer moral teachings

By **ZHAO RUIXUE** in Jinan  
*zhaoruixue@chinadaily.com.cn*

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To Wang Mudi, a grade six student at a rural junior middle school, nothing beats calligraphy class every Wednesday.

“The class offers me a place to practice calligraphy with free tools and ink,” she said.

“In addition, I can learn the stories of the ancient calligraphers, which helps me form the right views on life.”

Wang goes to Shizhuang Junior Middle School in Houshi village, Shandong province, a place near Qufu, best known as the hometown of the renowned educator and philosopher Confucius.

Yan Xiaoli, Wang’s mother, said that without the classes her daughter would be unable to practice calligraphy in their village.

“The most important thing is that my daughter grows up with a positive attitude and is optimistic about her future,” Yan said.

The class Wang takes is one of the 20 the Shizhuang school arranges for students based on the six arts of ancient China — rites, music, archery, chariot riding, calligraphy and mathematics, which formed the basis of education in ancient Chinese culture.

The 20 classes include ones on social practice, dance, painting, drama, singing, computer technology and science.

“We create new courses based on the ancient arts to let our students fit in with modern society,” said Zhang Lei, head master at Shizhuang school.

“We don’t use horses for transport now, so we have created handicraft classes

The number of classes the Shizhuang Junior Middle School arranges for students based on the arts of ancient China

and security education classes under the ancient art of chariot riding.

“By taking these special classes, students, especially those who can’t get good scores, can develop their confidence as they can choose the special classes according to their interests.”

Primary and middle schools across China have been encouraged to explore new ways to cultivate students’ moral character by integrating moral education into school courses.

Shandong province issued a guideline on enhancing moral education in April, encouraging primary and middle schools to explore moral elements in all of the 14 standard courses taught in schools, including Chinese, English and mathematics.

Teachers are also encouraged to play a greater role in cultivating students’ morals through an appraisal system.

“The year-end appraisal for teachers will contain teachers’ performance on both teaching courses and developing students’ morality,” said Zhang Zhiyong, deputy head of Shandong Provincial Education Department.

Jiangsu province, meanwhile, aims to develop a strong foundation of comprehensive morality-related teaching with classic courses in Confucianism, for example.

China has revised its primary and secondary school textbooks to include more about ancient poetry and traditional culture, according to the Ministry of Education’s Language and Culture Press.

The aim of the revision is to enhance the textbooks’ role in cultivating students’ moral character, said Wang Xuming, president of the press, last week. The updated textbooks are scheduled to reach students by the autumn.



Students attend the rehearsal of a ritual dance in a class featuring ancient art at Shizhuang Junior Middle School in Shandong province. WANG ZHANBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

INTERNET OF THINGS

# Student visionaries seek to help left-behind children

By **TANG YUE**  
*tangyue@chinadaily.com.cn*

The internet of things may hold great benefits for left-behind children, one of China’s most vulnerable groups.

If you haven’t caught up with the concept yet, the internet of things refers to physical objects — devices, vehicles, buildings and other items — embedded with electronics, software, sensors, and network connectivity that enables the collection and exchange of data. Objects can be sensed and controlled remotely, for example.

But what has that got to do with left-behind children in China?

To explore the answers, 24 students from six different countries, many from technical disciplines, gathered in Shenzhen in May, to design prototype devices with the goal of improving the education of the more than 60 million children whose parents have gone to work in cities without them.

“Before I came to the event, I remember reading news that kids committed suicide when their parents were far away. It upset me,” said 18-year-old Kadallah Burrowes from the United States.

“I am glad that I got this opportunity, trying to do something to make a difference. It is not just something fun; it has the potential to help a lot of people. Small and cheap, with some government help, we might be able to turn the devices into something that helps the kids,” said Bur-

I am glad that I got this opportunity, trying to do something to make a difference. ... it has the potential to help a lot of people.”

Kadallah Burrowes, a US student

rowes, who majors in interactive media arts at New York University Shanghai.

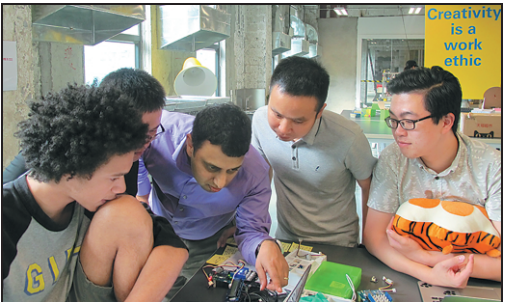
Burrowes and his teammates designed a mango-shaped device that allows parents, wherever they are, to set various tasks for their children. The children then go to their grandparents or teachers

for verification once a goal is achieved. Using the device, parents can stay involved in the growth of their children, the team said.

“Usually, the parents and children only meet once or twice a year. So the bond is weakening over the years,” said Xin Haiyang, a PhD candidate in information engineering at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

To tackle the problem, Xin’s team designed a “bonding tree”, decorated with some lights, which are connected to the family members’ phones. The lights turn from green to yellow and even red when the parents and children haven’t talked for a certain amount of time.

The next symposium focused on children’s issues in China will be held in December and more than 100 students, scholars and entrepreneurs are expected to attend, according to Eliot Gattegno, a director at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.



Participants discuss their creation at IoT Social Impact Symposium in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. TANG YUE / CHINA DAILY

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