

A glimpse into a sacred site

Journeying to the Buddhist Mount Putuo and a world set apart

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

Everyone who knows of my trip to Mount Putuo, a small and amazing isle in the Zhoushan Archipelago in East China's Zhejiang Province, remarked how lucky I was, as it is one of those places where everyone should go at least once in their life.

One of the four sacred mountains of Buddhism, Mount Putuo, the only one that lies in the sea, boasts a stunningly beautiful vista whatever the time of the year.

A 15-minute speed boat ride took me and several others from Shengjiamen, a well-known fishing port on the Zhoushan Archipelago, to the wonderful isle where we arrived at dusk.

On arrival, we were met by a group of Buddhist monks wearing their distinctive grey or dark-yellow robes and each carrying a cloth wrapper. Many were young, and some bespectacled. I later discovered they were students at the Buddhist Academy located there.

The neat Xilin Hotel that we stayed in is just beside the Puji Temple, the biggest temple on the island. Two large pools covered with lotus flowers and two pretty pavilions with eaves curving upwards at the edges set a scene of tranquility and harmony in front of the temple. In the glow of sunset, the pools, the pavilions, as well as the temple were all bathed with a soft light.

The front door of the temple was tightly closed and remains that way I was told, unless "emperors" come or on the occasion of major Buddhist events, such as the nomination of a new abbot. "That small side door is open to pilgrims and tourists on normal days," said Liang Jiangang, our guide.

But as it was already close to dark, the temple was closed. "You have enough time to observe the temple tomorrow," the guide said.

Magnet for pilgrims

We were woken at 3:30 am the next morning, to attend *zaoke* (morning prayers). The guide had forewarned us on the way that the *zaoke* would start at 4:30. As we made our way to the Puji Temple my eyes were still dim with sleep.

But I soon came round when I saw the crowd of people already waiting at the side door carrying crammed bags of offerings they had prepared.

Just as I was puzzling about why people gathered here so early, I was told that pilgrims believed that to be the first person to burn the joss sticks in front of the Guanyin Buddha would be rewarded by a priority position on the mercy list of Guanyin. That meant their prayers and requests would have the best chance of being granted.

The door was only about three metres wide. About 10 people formed a line pressing their bodies tightly up against the wooden door. The people waiting behind them naturally fanned out. Any sound coming from inside the door caused a stir among the waiting throng.

At 4 am, it finally opened and the pilgrims poured into the inner courtyard. Some of them surrounded a big bronze incense burner in front of the main hall of the temple and lit their joss sticks, while others gathered in front of the still closed door leading into the main hall.

Following the local guide, we were led around to the back door of the main hall and allowed to enter before the waiting pilgrims flooded in.

An 8.8-metre-high Guanyin Buddha reposes in the middle of the solemn and huge hall with six large yellow canopies with Buddhist scriptures hung around.

About five minutes after we entered, the door of the main hall opened. The ensuing scene left me astonished. Those who had brought offerings of food and fruits had within moments piled them on the altar, while others placed their prayer mats down, covering almost every available piece of floor space.



Just before the start of *zaoke*, a monk named Wu Gen who had let us in the back door warned that photography was forbidden during the holy ritual, as it is believed the flash lights would profane the sanctity of Buddha.

The restless crowd suddenly fell silent as about 40 monks processed in single file and took up their positions to the right of the Buddha.

As the monks began chanting scriptures, the pilgrims first clasped their hands and then knelt down with their heads heavenswards and heads touching the floor. This was repeated over and over in time with the monk's rhythmic chanting.

A young woman standing beside me said she had come with her aunt from Jinhua of Zhejiang Province. They attend the ritual at least five times a year, she explained.

"I get up at 1 am just to occupy a good position in the hall," said the young woman, a first year college student.

The prayers lasted for about 90 minutes without pause. Wisps of incense swirled in the air in front of the main hall, adding a solemn and mysterious aura to the ancient place and the sacred ritual.

According to Wu Gen, the daily schedule for monks there is fixed. They get up at 4 am and go to bed no later than 7 pm. Breakfast is served at 6 am, lunch at 10 am and dinner at 4 pm, with all the food vegetarian in accordance with Buddhist tradition.

Founded in the 10th century, Puji Temple is the largest on the island. Typical of the temples there, it has a courtyard adorned with a flower nursery, garden and pavilions.

Like many visitors, Zhao Zheng, one of the members in our group burned incense in Puji Temple, in honour of her grandmother. "She was a fervent Buddhist," Zhao explained.

Following the instructions of our guide, she lit three joss sticks with her right hand from candles inside the large bronze incense burner, then holding them with both hands, she bowed three times before Buddha and made her request. She was then told to arrange the burning joss sticks in the ashes of the incense burner with her left hand which is considered by Buddhists to be cleaner than the right.

Study sanctuary

After experiencing the enthusiasm of pilgrims and inhaling rather too much incense and smoke, which left my eyes watering, I asked our guide whether there are other quieter temples.

He recommended I visit Yinxiu'an Monastery, where the Mount Putuo Buddhism Culture Research Institute is located.

So when other members of our group set off for Fayu Temple, another large



temple, Zhao Zheng and Yinxiu'an Monastery, just walk from our hotel.

There I met master Jingmin, vice-director of the research in the leader of the Yinxiu'an Monastery. He showed us some beautiful Buddhist architecture.

Totally different from Puji Temple, Yinxiu'an Monastery has a serenity, its serenity complements plants and birds' singing.

First built in the late Ming (1368-1644), the monastery was destroyed by fire during the Qing (1644-1911), but was soon rebuilt.

Before 1997 when it was the Mount Putuo Buddhism Culture Research Institute, the temple had been occupied by farmers since 1960.

The late Master Miaoshan (2000), former abbot of the Mt Putuo, gave the task of rebuilding to Master Jingmin.

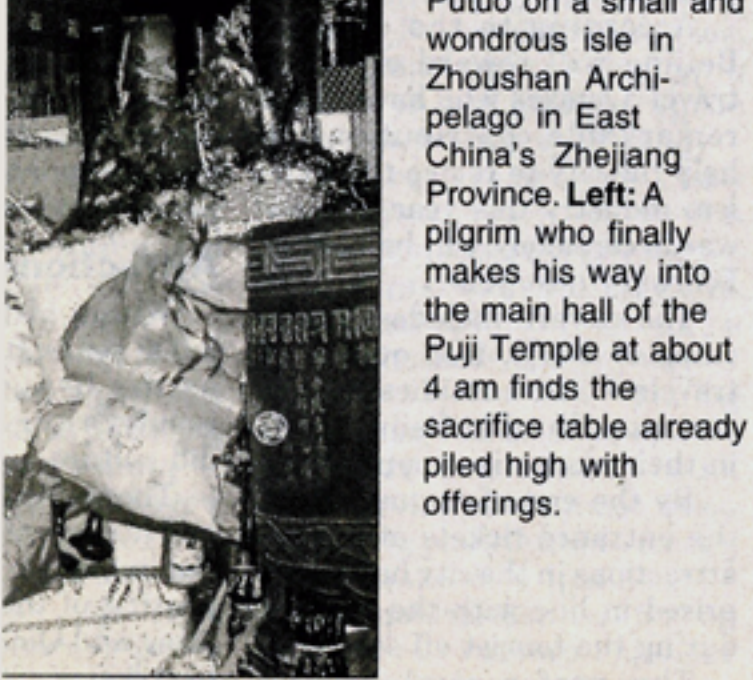
Born in Dinghai of Zhoushan Archipelago, Master Jingmin was a Buddhist from an early age, loved reading books and joss sticks. He insisted on becoming a nun finishing high school, ever parents, especially his father, were strongly opposed.

But his wishes held sway. He entered the Buddhist Academy in 1988 and provides a standard education for novice monks.

"We were expected to complete Buddhist courses, which are 70 per cent of the curriculum. The rest of the curriculum covers mainly on doctrine," said Jingmin. "The rest of the curriculum includes mathematics, English, Chinese and philosophy."



Above: The front of the Puji Temple at Mount Putuo on a small and wondrous isle in Zhoushan Archipelago in East China's Zhejiang Province. Left: A pilgrim who finally makes his way into the main hall of the Puji Temple at about 4 am finds the sacrifice table already piled high with offerings.



Although a master in Buddhism, Master Jingmin said he knew little about architecture when he was appointed.

Something of a "perfectionist," he described how he tried very hard to learn architectural techniques with the help of books and country-wide travels where he could see first-hand famous temples and ancient buildings.

"I try to combine modern architectural techniques with the ancient beauty of Buddhism, which is solemn, dignified and sacred," he said.

And the monastery is indeed a perfect example of these philosophies, with its solemn and huge main hall, delicate gardens, elegant corridors, exquisite depositories of Buddhist texts and a line of fine rooms for research.

Altogether six monks are working in the research institute and Master Jingmin said he has invited many masters from elsewhere to do research.

Master Miaoshan, the initiator of the institute once said the academy's main aim is to develop research in the field of Buddhism.

Dusk was falling as we made our way back to our hotel, but we had to stop when we came across a small nunnery whose door was almost covered by lush green trees, the reason why we had not noticed it on the way to the Yinxiu'an.

We wandered in and found a group of nuns chanting Buddhist scriptures in the hall — evening prayers. Most of the women appeared to be in their 20s.

We were struck by the peaceful countenance of their faces. To us it spoke volumes about the life of contentment and meaning they had found in holy orders, separated from the world we inhabit.

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic & Magic Shows

Chaoyang Theatre specializes in Acrobatics by top acrobatic artists from all over the country.

Time: 7:15-8:30 pm, nightly

Magic Shows

Time: 6:00-7:00 pm; 7:30-8:30 pm, nightly

Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

STAGE

Drama of love: "I Love Plum Blossom," a small-theatre drama, will be staged until the end of the month.

Performed by two actors and one actress from the Beijing People's Art Theatre, the play has both modern and ancient scenes, trying to explore attitudes towards love and passion.

The drama is the first by Zou Jingzhi and has been well-received by audiences.

Time: 7:30 pm, every evening in July (except Mondays)

Place: The Experimental Theatre of Beijing People's Art Theatre, on the third floor of the Capital Theatre, Wangfujing Dajie

Tel: 6524-9847

Beijing flavour:

Lao She Teahouse, located in the Qianmen area, is an ideal place for fans of Peking Opera, Dagou (Big Drum), Pingju Opera, Danxian, and other traditional folk art forms with a Beijing flavour.

Time: 9 am-9:20 pm (tea house running hours), 8 pm-9 pm (with performances), Daily

Place: Lao She Teahouse, Qianmen, 100 metres to the west of Kentucky Fried Chicken

Tel: 6303-6830

Peking Opera outdoors:

Beijing Peking Opera Theatre is to stage outdoor shows at various venues in Beijing, including the Lotus Flower Pond Park in Fengtai District, Zhongshan Park and places in Mentougou District.

People who buy tickets to enter

these parks can enjoy the colourful performances free of charge, including a newly created Peking Opera piece called "Special Meeting." It is themed on spreading the special stories of how SARS affected their way of life after it hit Beijing a couple of months ago.

For more information, call Beijing Peking Opera Theatre at 6726-7830.

EXHIBITIONS

Joint show: A collective exhibition of paintings is on at the Wanfung Art Gallery.

On show will be ink paintings by Li Xiongcai, Lin Fengmian and Zhang Daqian; oils by Ai Xuan, Yin Kun and Zhu Xinyi; watercolours by Huang Youwei and Yu Jiantao; and prints by Wei Jia and Xie Feng.

Time: 10 am-5:30 pm until August 24

Place: 136 Nanchizhi Dajie, Dongcheng District, Beijing

Tel: 6523-3320

Ink show: Representative works by more than 60 active Chinese ink painters are on show at the Yanhuang Art Museum in northeast Beijing's Asian Games Village. Among the artists are Huo Chunyang, Long Rui, Lu Yushun, Wu Shanming, Yu Zhixue and Zhang Sen. The artists whose work is on display were chosen by the Institute of Fine Arts of the Beijing-based China Academy of Arts.

Time: 9 am-4:30 pm until July 25

Place: 9 Huizhong Road, Yayuncun, Chaoyang District

Tel: 6493-5334

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

The World Bridge Federation classifies players based on success in its championships. The top-ranked woman is Shawn Quinn, from Richmond, Texas. Her partner, Mildred Breed, from Austin, Texas, is no. 4 on the WBF list. In Philadelphia, they won the Women's Swiss Teams with Judi Radin and Valerie Westheimer, from New York City.

On this deal from one of their matches, the bidding and opening lead were identical at both tables.

took five tricks: one spade, one heart and three diamonds.

The diamond two is a feasible but fatal opening lead. Starting with the diamond king is successful. If declarer ducks, a spade shift goes to East's ace, and a diamond return seals South's fate. Alternatively, if declarer wins the first trick with her diamond ace, when East gets in with the spade ace, the lead of the diamond 10 allows the defenders to run the suit.

Dealer: South
Vulnerable: Neither

Opening lead: ♠ 10

North	Q 7 2
♥	A Q 8 4
♦	9 4
♣	K Q J 5
West	10 9 3
♥	9 7 6 3
♦	K Q 3 2
♣	8 6
East	A 8 6 5
♥	K 5
♦	10 8 6 5
♣	10 7 4
South	K J 4
♥	J 10 2
♦	A J 7
♣	A 9 3 2

CROSSWORD (No 6948)

ACROSS

1 Ltd. kin
4 Waterfall sound
8 Bored response
12 Popular cruise stop
13 Showy
14 Tony's cousin
15 Wade through
17 Blvd. cousin
18 Tenderfoot
19 Sums for CPAs
21 ABC's — Jennings
22 Fix a scrapbook
25 Part of RSVP
26 "Vogue" rival
27 Ordered around
30 College maj.
31 Abdul or Zahn
33 NBA official
35 Holds off for
37 Adventurous
38 Golf gadget
39 Tough grass
41 Big house

DOWN

1 W-2 collectors
2 Less than one
3 Dove's sound
4 Egyptian sun god
5 Take the dais
6 Off-road vehicles
7 Reuben bread
8 Alpine refrains
9 Border on
10 Far-flung
11 Not 'e'en once
16 Strong wind
20 Greek "M"
21 Galileo's home
22 Soldier in gray
23 Lamb's pen name
24 Warmth
25 Our sun

27 Mass-transit vehicle
28 Son of Aphrodite
29 Pastrami purveyor
31 Dock
32 Had a pizza
34 Cosmetic safety org.
36 Expatriates
37 Eight bits
39 Striped animal
40 Lay it — thick
41 Kind of swan
42 Triangle tip
43 Reminder
44 Go off at an angle
46 Md. neighbor
48 — Moines, Iowa
49 Highest degree
50 Pleased sigh
53 Air rifle pellet

Holy mount in the sea

Mount Putuo, together with Mount Wutai in North China's Shanxi Province, Mount Jiuhua in East China's Anhui Province and Mount E'mei in Southwest China's Sichuan Province, are the four sacred mountains of Buddhism in China.

But Mount Putuo is the only one that lies in the sea. Four different Buddhas — Guanyin for Mount Putuo, Puxian for Mount E'mei, Wenshu for Mount Wutai and Dizang for Mount Jiuhua — are honoured respectively on the four mountains.

Buddhism reached Mount Putuo more than 1,500 years ago and left behind some 80 temples and monasteries. Among them 35 are open to pilgrims and tourists, among which three principle temples and one Buddhist monastery — Puji Temple, Huiji

Temple, Fuyu Temple and Dacheng Monastery, represent the unique style of Mount Putuo.

Guanyin (the Goddess of Mercy) is honoured in most temples and monasteries on Mount Putuo.

The legend said that a famous Japanese monk, Hui E, went to the Wutai Mountain to pay tribute to Buddhism and obtained a Guanyin Buddha statue there in AD 863 during Tang Dynasty (AD618-907). He decided to take the Buddha home, but was stopped by turbulent seas as he passed Mount Putuo.

He was told in his dream that he could never leave the isle unless he left the Guanyin statue there. From this he understood that Guanyin was unwilling to leave.

A local resident on the island witnessed all this and helped the Japanese monk put the Buddha in his house which later be-



Sacred isle: A bird's eye view of the small isle where Mount Putuo is located.

came a famous shrine, *Bukenqu* (Unwilling to Leave) — and the island's first temple, now the site of the Puji Temple.

China Daily news

Bud

By SC
Chir

Nanjing University set up the Nanjing Sun Buddhism Centre this

month. With a donation of 10 million yuan (US\$1 billion) by Hong Kong Holdings Ltd, first of its kind in China, the university has a long history of Buddhism studies. For the first time since it was founded in 1902, Buddhism has become a major study and research area at the university. The field has been opened up to a Chinese history department and philosophy department.

University opens Buddhism research studies

WENWEI
Daily staff

Nanjing University set up the Nanjing Sun Buddhism Centre this

month. With a donation of 10 million yuan (US\$1 billion) by Hong Kong Holdings Ltd, first of its kind in China, the university has a long history of Buddhism studies. For the first time since it was founded in 1902, Buddhism has become a major study and research area at the university. The field has been opened up to a Chinese history department and philosophy department.

comprehensively study the development of Buddhism in China from a variety of perspectives. These include the Buddhist influence in ancient literature, the spread of Buddhism along the Silk Road, Buddhist reflection in art and so on.

In the early 1980s, the university began to offer an MA programme in Buddhism, and later in 1994 a post graduate programme was developed, both of which have drawn students from different parts of the world, including Japan, Canada, Poland, Chile and a number of Southeast Asian countries.

The centre will take as its major responsibility the training of researchers and teachers in the discipline of Buddhism, said Wang Yueqing, an information officer at Nanjing University.