Development and Validation of Experience Scale for Pilgrimage Tourists

ABSTRACT

This research measures and explores the dimensionality of pilgrimage experiences. This study used the free associations method to identify preliminary measurement items, solicited expert opinions to revise them, applied exploratory factor analysis to explore the underlying structure of pilgrimage experiences, and adopted confirmatory factor analysis to further validate the measurement scale. Five dimensions representing 19 items were extracted: Spirituality, Learning, Physicality, Help, and Unpleasantness. Developing a pilgrimage tourist experience scale is a welcome addition to the literature and can serve as a foundation for future research into pilgrimage tourists' behavioral intentions. The scale also provides an advantageous instrument for pilgrimage hosts to understand pilgrimage tourist experience level. Furthermore, the results can serve as a reference in destination planning process.

Keywords: pilgrimage experience; tourism; scale development, Dajia Mazu Patrol and pilgrimage

INTRODUCTION

During the past few decades, pilgrimage tourism has undergone a swift evolution in the globalized market. An increasing number of pilgrimage tourists are visiting religious sites worldwide, such as cathedrals, temples, and mosques, to gain spiritual value and accomplish recreational, educational, cultural (Hughes, Bond, & Ballantyne, 2013; Shackley, 2001), and sustainability objectives (Kumar & Singh, 2014). The importance of religion at a specific period is recognized as a must in the lives of pilgrims (Davie, 2007; Hughes et al., 2013) because they can expand their worldview and strengthen their link with society (Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Turner, 1973). Therefore, a pilgrimage is a representative fusing of religious tenet, practice, and travel (Norman, 2011) with the needs of pilgrimage tourists.

Many destinations are eager to host contests and events or festivals for consumption by tourists (Florek & Insch, 2011), as well as provide touristic or leisure experiences with social and cultural perspectives (Kruger, Rootenberg, & Ellis, 2013). According to statistics from the World Religious Travel Association, over 300 million pilgrimage tourists have traveled to sacred sites, contributing an estimated US\$18 billion of revenue to the industry (Gill, Packer, & Ballantyne, 2018; Uysal, 2019; Wright, 2007). Pilgrimages engender clear economic benefits due to the number of tourists participating in pilgrimages and the diverse services offered by disciples along pilgrimage paths.

There are two key reasons for the increasing conception of pilgrimage as an important type of tourism activity offered by destinations (e.g., Cheng & Chen, 2014; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Schmitt, 1999; Tian-Cole, Cromption, & Wilson, 2002). First, its religious nature enables pilgrimage to offer both tangible and intangible experiences to tourists. Second, pilgrimage provides a path for destinations to differentiate themselves in the increasingly competitive marketplace. A pilgrimage with quality service, strong experience, and distinct and recognizable image has a strong likelihood of being chosen, revisited, and recommended by tourists.

Common tourism activities are comparable to those derived from pilgrimages, namely satisfaction of tourists' spiritual, social, and intellectual needs (Cohen, 1979; Shuo, Ryan, & Liu, 2009). From a managerial viewpoint, pilgrimages also represent route-based tourism because a pilgrimage itinerary is tied to spiritual elements. Camino de Santiago exemplifies the integration of a unique cultural topic and specific event to extend a pilgrimage route while maintaining a niche market for tourism promotion (Murray & Graham, 1997). Modern route-based tourism is a mix of pilgrimage and tourist motivations (Lois-González & Santos, 2015), providing a new perspective on pilgrimage tourism.

Given international interest in religious culture and novel experiences, unique events such as pilgrimages, festivals, and sports are being recognized by many countries as valuable promotional tools (A. Smith, 2006). In destination marketing and branding, events significantly contribute to economic development and peak season expansion (Allen, O'Toole, McDonnell, & Harris, 2002). These events may generate "psychological impacts (i.e. disorder, security issues, & traffic congestion)" (Kim, Jun, Walker, & Drane, 2015), but the demand for hosting tourism events persists. Despite a rapidly developing pilgrimage market, little is known about pilgrimage tourists, especially their experiences. Pilgrimage experiences have often been only loosely defined in the literature (Nyaupane, Timothy, & Poudel, 2015; Thomas, White, & Samuel, 2018), and the dimensionality of the pilgrimage construct has yet to be explored. This insufficient academic understanding may prevent the tourism industry from providing quality services to the pilgrimage market.

To address this research gap, this study explores the content and structure of the pilgrimage experience and seeks to develop a comprehensive measurement scale to assess the pilgrimage construct and obtain a better understanding of the dynamics of pilgrimage tourism. In doing so, this study attempts to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on pilgrimage tourism by providing a clearer picture of the dimensionality of the pilgrimage experience. Another potential contribution of this study lies in its context of a folklore religion rooted in Chinese culture, which can be utilized for cross-cultural comparison of pilgrimage tourist experiences. By exploring the dimensionality of the pilgrimage experience, the study offers insight into pilgrimage tourism marketing and management strategies for destination marketing organizations and pilgrimage sponsors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pilgrimage Tourism

Pilgrimage is a developing term and practice that shifts from a purely religious origin to a secular time and activity (Badone & Roseman, 2004). A pilgrimage is defined as "a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit" (Margry, 2008, p. 17). Pilgrimages embody the intersection of "various cultural, social, political, economic and/or environmental dimensions of society," which have been investigated by scholars from "geography, religious, anthropology, and cognate disciplines" (Buzinde, Kalaver, Kohli, & Manuel-Navarrete, 2014, p. 2).

'Pilgrimage and tourism' are referenced for the use of sacred sites for tourism (Smith, 1992), and pilgrimage is regarded as the earliest type of tourism (Cohen, 2003; Jiang, Rvan, & Zhang, 2018; Singh 2005). Most studies on pilgrimage tourism have employed qualitative research methods to describe religious philosophers (Eliade, 1959), such as in the medieval Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Hajj to Mecca, and Hindus to the Ganges River (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Hyde & Harman, 2011; Rinschede, 1992). Research has also highlighted the environmental impacts of pilgrimages (Shackley, 2001), including hygiene problems, physical infrastructure misuse, and pollution (Shinde, 2012), along with strategies (Chang & Liu, 2009) and performance measurement (Aminian, 2012) related to sacred sites and tourists' decision-making processes (Pourtaheri, Rahmani, & Ahmadi, 2012; Shinde, 2007; Shuo et al., 2009).

Timothy and Olsen (2006) discussed four research streams pertaining to the blurring of religion and tourism. The first is dichotomizing pilgrims from tourists, between whom several differences have been identified (Shuo et al., 2009). Pfaffenberger (1983) illustrated the

distinction between serious pilgrims and frivolous tourists in a pilgrimage in Sri Lanka. Henderson (2003) argued that devout pilgrims consider traditional religious festivals and rituals as important destinations, whereas few secular tourists comprehend the significance of these sites. A pilgrimage represents a transformational and hallowed journey with life-giving challenges rather than a vacation (Griffin, 2007). Cheng and Chen (2014) noted that two forms of pilgrimage tourism exist: one stresses personal religious beliefs as the embodiment of devotion (Onions, 1983; Rotherham, 2007), constituting a type of pure spiritual pilgrimage; the other is interwoven in the festival itself.

The second theme in pilgrimage research is its influence on economic development. Some famous religious or sacred sites have been developed into international destinations for pilgrimages (Zhang et al., 2007). For example, the temples of Khajuraho with sexual relief carvings, which are major cultural and economic resources in India, have attracted thousands of international and domestic pilgrimage tourists annually (Ichaporia, 1983). Rinschede (1992) found that pilgrimage sites nearby touristic areas flourish most from pilgrimage tourists. In Europe, pilgrimage tourists' transient stays at religious sites bring beneficial opportunities for local businesses involved in accommodation and food provision along with other services and commodities.

The third theme concerns the negative impacts of pilgrimages on destinations and associated rituals. Despite the overwhelming merits of pilgrimages, the increasing negative effects of consumption in sacred destinations are well documented and require intervention by local authorities. Some sacred sites face various dilemmas (financial rewards vs. ownership) caused by illegal entry of pilgrimage tourists (Digance, 2003) because not every sacred site is open to the public apart from true pilgrims or members. Some sites have suffered the depredations of large-scale pilgrimage tourist movements; destructive factors include pilgrimage visitor flows and the growth of urban areas (Shinde, 2007).

The fourth theme in pilgrimage research involves pilgrimage tourists' characteristics and travel patterns, given that religion has long been a key factor behind traveler behavior and travel patterns (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003). Pilgrimage tourists' participation is crucial for pilgrimage tourism development; thus, understanding pilgrims' characteristics and modes of travel is necessary. MacCannell (1973) initially proposed that the authenticity sought by tourists plays an important role in tourism. In 2008, Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart constructed a conceptual framework for authenticity by examining fundamentalist Christian pilgrimages.

Pilgrimage Tourists

Graburn presented Similarity Theory to describe both tourists and pilgrims as mutually experiencing a parallel process in the pilgrimage, which is related to "self-transformation, knowledge, and status" (Graburn, 1983). Similarity Theory was advocated by theorists and proponents in recent decades (e.g. Andriots, 2011; Cohen, 1979; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; della Dora, 2012; Marnham, 1980; Poria, Airey, & Butler, 2003; Thomas, Gareth, White, & Samuel, 2018, p. 413). Smith (1992) recognizes that tourists and pilgrims are potentially sacred-secular combinations. According to Barber (1993), pilgrimage tourists' purposes can be dichotomized into sacred destination participation and perceptions of one's internal spirit. Sacred destination visitation refers to pilgrimage tourists visiting religion-related destinations for superficial beliefs or sightseeing intentions. Perceptions of internal spirit characterize travelers who pursue strong spirituality in the sacred land. The former concept involves external behavior, whereas the latter encompasses internal feelings. Hence, there are two forms of pilgrimage tourists: pilgrims, who travel for purely religious purposes; and tourists, who travel for vacation-related purposes. These tourists represent two poles of pilgrimage culture (Pavicic, Alfirevic, & Batarelo, 2007; V. L. Smith, 1992). A study by Finney, Orwig, and Spake (2009) explored how different travelers consume the sacred and profane. Pilgrimage tourists were classified into four categories: lotuseaters, pilgrims, seekers, and accidental tourists. Lotus-eaters are pleasure seekers who only visit touristic spots and intend to see secular sites. Pilgrims visit purely sacred sites; they are classic religious travelers who are ideal customers for religious tourist sites. Seekers are interested in various experiences at secular and sacred sites, and their attention is likely to be deconcentrated. Accidental tourists have no explicit intentions to visit either type of site, being unlikely or too busy to travel but pleased when an area feels 'just like home'. In 2010, Triantafillidou, Koritos, Chatzipanagiotou, and Vassilikopoulou identified five types of travelers to religious destinations by synthesizing models from Adler (1989), V. L. Smith (1992), and Collins-Kreiner and Kliot (2000). Triantafillidou and colleagues' (2010) classification consisted of (1) pious pilgrims, (2) more pilgrims than tourists, (3) pilgrim–tourists or religious tourists, (4) more tourists than pilgrims, and (5) secular tourists.

In modern pilgrimage tourism, sacred and secular aspects can each apply. Conceptualizing a pilgrimage as a unique, modern-day activity reveals the need to link pilgrimages and tourism. Often, individuals who are pilgrims and tourists are referred to as *pilgrimage tourists* (Turner & Turner, 1978). Today, these tourists focus more on daily life in destinations where they can discover, experience, participate, learn, and be included (Robinson & Novelli, 2005; Simone-Charteris & Boyd, 2011). Pilgrimage tourism involves traveling to experience religion and culture while becoming immersed in local everyday life; most pilgrimage tourists proceed through a temporary or permanent transformation in their life attitude and connection to the sacred and God (Pavicic et al., 2007).

As noted by Reader (2007), modern pilgrimage tourists with New Age ideas who join a pilgrimage possess more autonomous, individualized, and personalized spirituality without engaging in religious traditions. Various types of pilgrimage tourism have become popular (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003). Mustonen (2007) pointed out that volunteer tourism combines pre-modern and postmodern practices and denotes a dedicated group of people committing themselves to a pilgrimage. Sport tourism is another notable form of modern pilgrimage, which appeals substantially to sport fans worldwide and facilitates touristic activities for economic and urban development in the hosting country or cities. Sport tourism shares much in common with pilgrimage tourism, and both are classified as one-time hallmark events (Kim et al., 2015) that generate destination revenue, spirit, and image. However, the substantial costs incurred by host cities represent a downside distinct from pilgrimage tourism (Gibson et al., 2003).

As for destination environments, Andriotis (2011) linked five genres of authenticity (e.g., natural, original, exceptional, referential, and influential) with pilgrimage experiences to the last surviving Byzantine complex of monasteries. From an experiential perspective, Gilmore and Pine's (2007) genres of authenticity can be applied to explore aspects of authenticity in the pilgrimage tourist experience. Authenticity in the pilgrimage landscape is critical to reconfirming an individual's identity with a destination compared with other types of tourism.

Maoz and Bekerman (2010) discussed the postmodern phenomenon and argued that postmodernists (mostly Westerners) possess contradictory characteristics. For example, in the context of pilgrimage tourism, these individuals desire deep spiritual and existential answers in their travels or in society yet deny their roles as pilgrimage tourists. Triantafillidou et al. (2010) found that the monetary cost of traveling rarely deters pilgrimage tourists from traveling to sacred sites; however, the tour guide, trip schedule and itinerary, and travel agent's reputation can strongly affect these tourists' motivations and behaviors. Hosting a small portion of the world's population, Taiwan's famous Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage has been recognized as a pilgrimage market with remarkable participation. The Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage attracts over 1.5 million pilgrimage tourists per year, reflecting the size and scope of pilgrimage tourism. The number of pilgrimage tourists and extent of disciples' expenditures during pilgrimages carry substantial economic implications (Saayman, Saayman, & Gyekye, 2014). The Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage is the largest single annual religious event in Taiwan, both in terms of the number of pilgrimage tourists' emotional and authentic experiences directly and positively affect the festival identity of pilgrimage tourism in Taiwan. The current study focuses on the fourth theme of pilgrimages, namely pilgrimage tourists' characteristics and travel patterns, to construct a conceptual framework.

Dimensionality of the Pilgrimage Tourist Experience

Within pilgrimage experiences, the journey is intended "to provide the expected change within the pilgrim's ordinary time-space continuum during the passage to a different place over a period time" (Shoham, 2009, p. 5). As an extension of tourism, a pilgrimage is not an alleged religious phenomenon (Hyde & Harman, 2011). Because spiritual, cultural, recreational, educational (Hughes et al., 2013), and festive motivations for experiencing and engaging in pilgrimages outweigh religious ones, pilgrimages have been differentiated as either religious or secular (Collins-Kreiner, 2010).

Cohen (1979) identified and ranked five modes of touristic experiences for modern tourism and pilgrimages: (1) recreational mode, (2) diversionary mode, (3) experiential mode, (4) experimental mode, and (5) existential mode. The recreational mode analyzes society; it is an experience related to entertainment and the process of secularization during a religious voyage, which restores tourists' physical and mental strength and improves psychological well-being. In the diversionary mode, tourists "merely escape from the boredom and meaninglessness of routine, everyday existence, into the forgetfulness of a vacation, which may heal the body and soothe the spirit," despite the traditional dissociation of pilgrimages with recreation. Recreation is technically absent from the purely diversionary mode, in which pilgrimage tourists seek to evade the monotony of their daily routine to heal physical frailty and find spiritual peace. The diversionary mode is similar to the recreational mode despite being less meaningful.

The experiential mode is when tourists leave home in search of an authentic experience in a different life and culture; it is essentially a religious quest (MacCannell, 1973) to attract tourists for novelty-seeking in other landscapes (Cohen, 1972). In the experimental mode, "people do not adhere any more to the spiritual centre of their own society but engage in a quest for an alternative in many different directions," like drifters (Erik, 1973) with a decentralized personality (Kavolis, 1970) in exploring various religions. The existential mode suggests that people wish to go native and are devoted to their respective spiritual center, participating in periodic pilgrimages to acquire spiritual sustenance.

Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra (2013) proceeded a phenomenological analysis of tourism and spirituality. Tourism can provide tourists and pilgrims with spiritual experiences. Individuals may derive spirituality of transcendence and connectedness from their travel experiences. Buzinde et al., (2014) classified two categories of pilgrimage experiences: those of spirituality and those of social unity. Experiences of spirituality are related to pilgrimage tourists' perceived divinity, whereas experiences of social unity denote "unity, solidarity or belonging" experiences without

social status limitations (Buzinde et al., 2014, p. 12). Wiltshier (2015) surveyed volunteers who assisted pilgrims and visitors at a pilgrimage site and found that religious experiences can be both satisfied and optimized by help. Additionally, pilgrimage experiences enhance tourists' sense of cultural differences (Hottola, 2004). Pilgrimage tourists can build knowledge of the local culture by participating in the practices of locals and believers and by exploring personal meanings of experience (Thomas et al., 2018) they or their friends are not likely to encounter at home. Therefore, a pilgrimage is a physical movement that provides learning opportunities and helps pilgrims discover new information about themselves and their identities (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004) while fostering spirituality (Geertz, 1966).

Overall, a pilgrimage can be interpreted as a peak touristic experience rather than merely an onlooker experience. Seeking unique sites to visit and activities or events in which to participate can create valuable, unforgettable, and heart-warming experiences (Lee et al., 2015) but presents great challenges for pilgrimage hosts. In addition, for pilgrimage hosts and academics, scale development of pilgrimage tourist experience applies to pilgrimage tourism and provides insights for the pilgrimage destination planning process. As a summary, although studies have argued that pilgrimage experiences should be examined through a multidimensional lens due to their complexity, an associated scale has not yet been developed and validated.

METHOD

This study was conducted in the Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage, which has been institutionalized since 1914 with the integral function of connecting people in Mazu belief and culture. Mazu belief in Taiwan is denoted by power and transcendence (Sangren, 1993), and the associated pilgrimage has been recognized by the Discovery Channel as one of the world's three largest religious festivals (Mu et al., 2012).

The proposed measurement scale capturing the pilgrimage tourist experience was developed following widely accepted suggestions from Churchill (1979) and Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2009): (1) a theoretical domain and operational definitions of construct specification; (2) items generation; (3) item purification and pretest; (4) questionnaire development; (5) data collection; (6) confirmatory analysis; and (7) items and scale refinement. Based on the working definition from Shuo et al. (2009), respondents were classified as pilgrimage tourists if they met the following criteria:

(1) they reported that a "pilgrimage" was the main purpose of their trip, or

(2) they indicated a main trip purpose other than a "pilgrimage" but reported a "pilgrimage" as a significant secondary purpose.

After finalizing the operational definition of the pilgrimage tourist experience, a preliminary list of items corresponding to the definition was developed based on a literature review (e.g. Aziz, 1995; Cuffy, Tribe, & Airey, 2012; O'Brien, 2004; Washburne, 1936; Willson *et al.*, 2013). The free association procedure (Chen, 2001) was conducted with pilgrims who had experience with the Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage. Purposeful sampling was employed to identify interviewees who met the criteria. Purposeful sampling is defined as a strategy for informative cases, the nature and substance of which will clarify the survey questions being investigated (Patton, 2015), is a hallmark of qualitative method designs (Carter & Little, 2007). The number of interviewees was determined when theoretical saturation was achieved. In total, 24 interviews were conducted and analyzed.

Next, four steps were taken to create a pool of items for quantitative assessment. The initial pool of items was generated from the literature and interviews (e.g. Aziz, 1995; Cuffy, Tribe, & Airey, 2012; O'Brien, 2004; Washburne, 1936; Willson *et al.*, 2013). Then, researchers were invited to verify whether wording of the items was clear and appropriate for the general public in Taiwan and if any items should be added, replaced, or omitted. Corresponding adjustments were made to the questionnaire's wording and sequencing. A pilot study was then conducted to invite respondents familiar with the Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage to provide feedback regarding items' comprehensibility and applicability and to identify any items that may require refinement. Finally, five experts, including industry practitioners and researchers, were invited to assess the preliminary scale for content and face validity. Fifty-six items depicting the experience of the 2016 Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage were proposed and generated.

Pilgrimage tourists who had participated in the Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage were recruited online, and 385 questionnaires were distributed in the pilot study; this study phase returned 337 valid and usable questionnaires after screening, yielding a response rate of 87.5%. Respondents were asked to think about their pilgrimage experiences and to rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). The number of males and females participated in the pretest is 56.4% vs. 43.6%. The age of the pretest respondents ranged from 18 to 77 years, and the median age of the respondents was 36. There were more individuals who were un-married (60.2%) than married (36.2%). 3.6% were divorced, separated or widowed. 53.5% of the respondents received higher education at the bachelor-level or above. Regarding personal monthly income, some individuals earned less than US\$500 (22.6%) followed by US\$1,000 – 1,333 (18.7%) and US\$2,166 or above (12.5%). 24.3% of the respondents were unemployed including retired people, students, and housewives. As for those

who have a job, their occupations were relatively diversified. The demographic information of the 337 pilgrimage tourists is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

Scale Purification

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

In the quantitative stage, a standard scale development and validation procedure recommended by Churchill (1979) and Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2009) was followed. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using the first sub-sample to uncover the underlying factor structure of the 56-item pilgrimage tourist experience scale. EFA is a very popular approach in the psychology and behavioral science to test the basic structure of a set of variables, there is no strong a priori theory, the variables are most closely related to other variables, or the number of possible factors that exists in the data are not clear. Typically, the concept of EFA is to reveal the underlying structure of a set of variables. In the EFA model, the main interest is to identify the number of existing factors, whether these factors are related, and the strength of the relationship between the apparent variables and the extracted factors. EFA is applied when the underlying structure is not known, has not been developed in previous research, or has not been established with a particular subgroup (McNeish, 2017).

Before performing EFA, the appropriateness of the 353 responses for factor analysis was examined. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy of the analysis; KMO = 0.967 ("superb" according to Field, 2009), and KMO values for individual items were > 0.77, well above the acceptable limit of 0.5 (Field, 2009). Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (p < .001), indicating sufficient correlations between selected items. Items exhibiting low communalities (< 0.50) were candidates for deletion (Hair et al., 2009).

Fifty-six items remained and were subjected to EFA.

EFA with varimax rotation was conducted on the 56 items to identify the underlying structure among variables. The number of dimensions was identified using the criterion of an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 (Kaiser, 1960). Items were omitted in cases of low factor loadings (< 0.60) and high cross-loadings (> 0.40) (Hair et al., 2009). Items that did not meet these criteria were deleted one by one to ensure accuracy. After each deletion, KMOs and communalities were re-examined individually to determine whether any items failed to meet the criteria. After iterative rounds of EFA, 38 items remained in the pilgrimage tourist experience scale, producing a five-dimensional factorial structure (i.e., spirituality, learning, physicality, help, and unpleasantness) that explained 71.774% of the total variance (see Table 2), exceeding the suggested value of 60%. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each dimension and ranged from 0.97 to 0.80, indicating reasonable internal consistency (i.e., > 0.50) (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Following EFA, the 38-item, five-dimensional scale measured Spirituality (14 items), Help (4 items), Learning (11 items), Physicality (6 items), and Unpleasantness (3 items) in the context of the pilgrimage tourist experience.

Insert Table 2 here

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was conducted to assess the latent factor structure of the pilgrimage tourist experience scale and to further purify EFA results. In total, 353 Taiwanese who had participated in the Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage were surveyed on site to verify the 38-item structure from EFA. Approximately 52.1% of the respondents were male and 47.9 were female. As for relationship status, 60% were single, while 35.1% were married. The youngest respondent was 18 years old, whereas the oldest one was 77, the average age of respondents was 36. Monthly income varied, with 30.6% of the sample earning less than US\$644, 31.7% earning US\$645 – 1,290, 22.9% earning US\$1,291 – 1,935, and 14.7% earning more than US\$1,936. The majority of the respondents were well educated. Three fifths of the respondents (61.2%) held a bachelor degree and above. The occupations varied widely, with the most frequently reported being students (24.6%), followed by technicians (21.0%), and clerk (14.4%). The demographic profile of the respondents for second pretest is shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 here

The maximum likelihood method was used for model estimation. In the proposed CFA model, all five dimensions were intercorrelated. A purification process was applied to the scale; items exhibiting large standardized residuals were eliminated one at a time. This purification procedure resulted in iterative deletion of 19 items, producing a parsimonious model consisting of 19 items (see Table 1). All 19 factor loadings exceeded the cut-off value of 0.40, and t values (Z-value) ranged from 11.38 to 20.40 (p < 0.001). All loadings for latent constructs in the CFA were significant (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The modified pilgrimage tourist experience scale presented a five-dimensional structure with the following model fit indices: $\chi^2 = 377.439$, df =147; GFI = 0.899; AGFI = 0.869; CFI = 0.951; NFI = 0.9233; RMSEA = 0.067. The χ^2/df value of 2.568, which was lower than the recommended threshold of 3, indicated that the model fit the data reasonably. Other goodness-of-fit indices had acceptable values close to 0.9, and the RMSEA was less than 0.08 (Bentler, 1990). Standardized factor loadings for the 19-item scale were all substantial and significant. Construct reliability scores of the five factors ranged between 0.83 and .0.94, indicating sufficient internal consistency within each dimension (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 here

Scale Validation

Convergent and discriminant validities of the pilgrimage tourist experience scale were examined after confirming the measurement model. Four forms of validity have been accepted in the scale development literature to establish construct validity: content, convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. Content validity was assessed using pilot tests and an expert panel after initial items were developed. The current and subsequent sections summarize tests of convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity for the proposed scale. Convergent validity assesses the extent to which two measurement items on the same factor are correlated (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2010). In this study, convergent validity was evaluated by checking the values of (1) estimated loadings of each item on the underlying construct (if r > 0.40 and significant); (2) average variance extracted (AVE) (if > 0.50); and (3) composite reliability (if > 0.70).

AVE values ranged from 0.60 to 0.72, all higher than the 0.50 threshold. Construct reliability estimates for the five factors exceeded the cut-off criterion of 0.70. Whereas convergent validity represents the internal consistency of a scale, discriminant validity refers to the distinctiveness of each factor from other factors. Discriminant validity of the proposed scale was examined by comparing AVE values for a construct with the squared correlations between that construct and any other. In other words, AVE values of any two of the five constructs were compared with the squared correlation estimation between these two constructs; all AVE values were greater than the squared correlation coefficients (see Table 5). Construct reliability was also calculated; results showed that all five dimensions exhibited substantial reliability scores ranging from 0.83 to 0.94. A final examination of the pilgrimage tourist experience scale yielded the following dimensions: spirituality, learning, physicality, help, and unpleasantness.

Insert Table 5 here

Strict CFA procedures were carried out on the 353 samples to verify the 38-item structure from EFA. Items with loadings of less than 0.4 were removed one at a time, and analysis was repeated until all remaining items met the criteria. Five dimensions of pilgrimage experiences were derived for pilgrimage tourists: spirituality, learning, help, physicality, and unpleasantness. Nineteen items were rated as important with mean values above the midpoint, indicating that respondents generally agreed with the measurement statements. As all factors demonstrated reasonable factor loadings and AVE values, convergent validity of the scale was confirmed. Discriminant validity was also evident, supporting the predictive validity of the proposed pilgrimage experience scale.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to develop a multidimensional scale to measure the pilgrimage tourist experience. Our research seeks to fill a gap in the tourism literature by developing a conceptual framework focused on pilgrimages. This study attempts to devise a scale to measure tourists' experiences during pilgrimages; the resulting instrument can be used to acquire a multidimensional perspective on tourists' pilgrimage experiences. The importance of understanding tourists' experiences has been substantiated in research on pilgrimage tourism. Following the scale development procedures recommended by Churchill (1979) and Hair et al. (2009), our work has generated a theoretical and empirical conceptualization of pilgrimage tourism as a multidimensional construct consisting of a 19-item pilgrimage tourist experience scale with five dimensions: spirituality, help, learning, physicality, and unpleasantness.

The first dimension, *help*, refers to "assisting, donating, volunteering, and giving social support" (Niesta Kayser, Greitemeyer, Fischer, & Frey, 2010, p. 1137). Help occurs when

individuals devote their time and attention to assisting others (Grodal, Nelson, & Siino, 2015). Help is prevalent within a pilgrimage context; receiving and providing assistance comprise a general theme in the tourism tradition. Two traditional lenses of Asian culture, which heavily influence the tourism industry, are Buddhism and Confucianism. The main beliefs and key values of these faiths are rooted in helping and loving others, which may partially explain why disciples serve others from the heart naturally. An inherent desire to help enables pilgrimage tourists to embark on a pilgrimage with enthusiasm and confidence. Assistance has been shown to be pivotal in helping pilgrimage tourists feel united. When receiving disciples' assistance, the spirit can be amplified within pilgrimage tourists' hearts by cultivating and maintaining a harmonious atmosphere and then shared with other pilgrimage tourists. Help can allow tourists to grow as individuals and as a family during pilgrimages and facilitate goal attainment during the hot and toilsome journey.

The second dimension, *learning*, is characterized by "an increase, through experience, of ability to gain goals in spite of obstacles" (Washburne, 1936, p. 603). Learning involves the acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience, practice, study, or being taught. A pilgrimage is a learning network that can provide a socially constructed and supportive learning environment (Reinl & Kelliher, 2010). This dimension is important for pilgrimage tourists and can foster knowledge creation and sharing. Learning is derived from experiencing something unique and memorable, such as culturally distinctive events that are unavailable at home (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Different cultures and lifestyles can offer new and unexpected experiences while satisfying tourists' needs and desires, known as self-directed learning (O'Brien, 2004).

The third factor is *spirituality*; these items underscore tourists' interests in exploring and discovering various aspects of the pilgrimage atmosphere. Although spirituality has been largely

overlooked in empirical research given its ambiguous definition (Willson et al., 2013), the concept is important within a pilgrimage context. Pilgrimages may offer insight into how pilgrimage tourists derive personal meaning from pilgrimages. Spirituality is becoming increasingly popular as an aspect of cultural tourism studies owing to its alignment with personal humanistic research (Belhassen et al., 2008; Willson et al., 2013).

The fourth factor is *physicality*. During pilgrimages, people search for meaningful experiences or spiritual fulfillment (Digance, 2003; Noy, 2004) to improve their physical condition. Physicality refers to "a transformation of the self that brings positive physical benefits through a restoration of health that is attributed to sacred forces beyond individual control" (Higgins & Hamilton, 2016). Unique and meaningful travel experiences are increasingly sought to satisfy travelers' physical needs and are regarded as a journey of personal growth and self-development (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Based on a study from Higgins and Hamilton (2016), physicality is a subjectively experienced mini-miracle and benefit for pilgrimage tourists. Such physical miracles often stem from pilgrimage experiences.

The fifth dimension of the pilgrimage experience is *unpleasantness*, although this theme was recognized in this study to a lesser degree than others. Unpleasantness is simply "negative psychological feelings" (Aziz, 1995). Relevant measurement items involving unhappiness, disappointment, and regret capture a holistic experience for tourists participating in a pilgrimage. However, this factor was somewhat weaker than its more positive counterparts. A possible explanation for its lesser importance could be pilgrimage tourists' tolerance for unpleasantness; that is, respondents may tolerate negative feelings evoked by unexpected situations, such as a chaotic environment, inconvenient transportation and noise pollution (Cheng & Chen, 2014), air pollution, food waste, fighting, crowding, and so on.

Implications

This study has theoretical and practical implications. A major contribution of the study is the establishment of a new construct for the pilgrimage tourist experience. Given that no research has sought to develop a pilgrimage tourist experience scale, this study represents the first empirical examination of the concept. Findings confirm that the proposed pilgrimage tourists experience scale applies to pilgrimage tourism. This study contributes an effective measure of pilgrimage tourists' experiences based on standardized scale development procedures. Most studies on pilgrimage tourism have adopted a qualitative (i.e., descriptive) approach. Developing a pilgrimage tourist experience scale provides a starting point for quantitative investigation into pilgrimage tourism behavior, thereby enriching the fourth theme of pilgrimages (pilgrimage tourists' characteristics and travel patterns) as discussed in the literature review. Findings show that all dimensions were grouped successfully under pilgrimage tourist experiences.

Second, pilgrimage tourism is expanding. By addressing tourists' pilgrimage experiences, this study offers a timely framework for researchers to assess this emerging tourist market. Pilgrimage tourism is a new form of tourism; hence, this topic is relatively novel in tourism research. Different from previous studies that focused on the typology of pilgrimage experiences, including differentiating between tourists and pilgrims, the current study identified layers to decompose the pilgrimage experience. Although this instrument was created in a Taiwanese context, its implications are applicable to markets that include pilgrimage destinations. These findings fill a gap in research on pilgrimage tourism and may help in recommending host nations or cities.

The third theoretical contribution lies in its unique study context; this study addresses the absence of a customized pilgrimage tourist experience scale by targeting a highly influential

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cultural context. The sampled population in this study is noteworthy; Taiwan represents a pilgrimage market with remarkable participation. The study focused on the emerging pilgrimage market alongside Chinese and folklore religion, whereas previous studies were conducted in relatively mature pilgrimage sites or Western countries. Given that pilgrimages are universally embedded in human culture (Solnit, 2001), various incarnations of pilgrimages have emerged in diverse religions worldwide; however, the salience of medieval Christian pilgrimages is prominent in the Western world (Amato, 2004; Bixler, 2014). The uniqueness of pilgrimages warrants careful consideration. First, more attention should be paid to pilgrimage experiences from the perspectives of pilgrimage hosts, pilgrimage tourists, and local society. Second, these factors should be explored based on the fundamental principles of pilgrimage tourists' experiences and corresponding dimensions. Further studies should be conducted to validate the proposed scale in diverse contexts.

Pilgrimages are political, economic, social, and cultural sources of power throughout the world (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Although pilgrimage tourism is the dominant form of religious tourism, it has garnered limited attention from policy makers and development researchers (Bleie, 2003; Rinschede, 1992). Practically, the results of this study offer meaningful insights for pilgrimage management and marketing, namely in terms of destination marketing practices and individuals pursuing pilgrimage experiences. First, pilgrimage marketing and management organizations (e.g., host temples and governments) should effectively allocate marketing and development resources by focusing on the five identified dimensions of pilgrimage tourist experience development. Pilgrimage destination marketers could promote the potential of pilgrimage experiences to fulfill certain levels of experience and identify critical pilgrimage experiences that can clarify pilgrimage tourists' attitudes and behaviors. For instance, to attract

international pilgrimage tourists, pilgrimage marketers may highlight life-changing elements of pilgrimages. In addition, host organizations could design a strategic plan and deliver customized programs, using local knowledge and resources, to help pilgrimage tourists cope with and recover from negative emotions (e.g., unpleasantness) (Kim et al., 2015), enhance their experience, and fully enjoy their participation. Successful pilgrimage experiences that coincide with tourists' expectations would likely render pilgrimage destinations more appealing.

Second, pilgrimages are traditionally sacred or modern secular journeys (Collins-Kreiner, 2010) that offer "a highly individualized scope for self-expression and religious search, as well as for escape from the restrictions of everyday social bonds and contexts" (Reader, 2007, p. 226). Governments, non-governmental organizations, and cultural and educational institutions should thus encourage pilgrimages. We recommend that more countries/regions consider promotional schemes to maintain traditional culture and facilitate pilgrimage experiences. Human care and natural pilgrimage environments, such as destinations, routes, shrines, and temples, play driving roles in cultivating and enriching tourists' experiences during pilgrimage journeys (Andriotis, 2011). Third, pilgrimages influence disciples' commitment to offering various supplies and gifts, such as ordinary liturgical gifts, supplication gifts, and soteriological gifts (Moufahim, 2013). This study expands efforts to attract secular pilgrims and tourists because of the potential economic benefits they may bring to host areas.

Fourth, cultural tourism includes various travels, whereby pilgrimage tourists learn about the past and the contemporary during the pilgrimage; while economic benefits are generated from this cultural activity, cultural exchanges between pilgrimage tourists and locals are also developed (Anderson, 2015). Culture and religion are critical determinants of tourists' attitudes and behaviors (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004), which could significantly impact tourists' experiences during pilgrimages. This study developed a 19-item, five-dimensional pilgrimage tourist experience scale (help, learning, spirituality, physicality, and unpleasantness) for which reliability, construct validity, and predictive validity were verified. The pilgrimage tourist experience dimensions identified in this study revealed that culture and religion shape pilgrimage tourists' attitude and behaviors. This study fills the void of a customized pilgrimage tourist experience scale targeting a highly influential cultural context. As indicated by the findings, different dimensions of the pilgrimage tourist experience have unique effects on pilgrimage tourists' behaviors. Pilgrimage destination marketers can use this scale to evaluate and identify tourists' experience level and tailor promotional strategies to potential pilgrimage tourist more effectively.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This study developed a valid and reliable instrument to measure tourists' experiences during pilgrimage tourism events. Although this study represents a pioneering attempt to measure the pilgrimage experience, its limitations must be acknowledged, which points to potential future research directions. First, because data were collected from respondents who participated in the Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage, the sampling approach may temper the generalizability of our findings. Also, most respondents in the baseline and validation samples were well educated, having earned a bachelor degree or higher. The experience patterns might vary for pilgrimage tourists with less education. Therefore, the pilgrimage experiences identified may not capture all possible realities and should not be generalized to the entire pilgrimage tourist population. Future studies are encouraged to further validate both the theoretical justifications and our proposed scale across different nationalities and geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic parameters. Examples would be future purposeful sample of people from

different countries, lower education strata, and first participators to validate the current findings. Evaluating the instrument in diverse contexts would likely provide rich managerial insights for pilgrimage and tourism marketers based on a comprehensive understanding of tourists' experiences.

Second, only five factors were retained in this study, and the authors relied heavily on statistical procedures to purify and reduce dimensions of the pilgrimage tourist experience. Several factors were discarded due to ambiguous factor justification. The instrument may have also been influenced by potential recollection bias when respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires based on their recent pilgrimage experiences. Although every effort has been made to reduce the possible cause of such bias, such as allowing enough time for the response (Tanur, 1991), the retrospective nature of the survey questions may be subject to inaccurate recall. In addition, for the purpose of scale development, researchers have sampled pilgrimage tourist population with as varied pilgrimage experiences as possible. Subsequent research should examine travel-related, contextual characteristics to detect variations in reported pilgrimage experiences. As the Dajia Mazu Patrol and Pilgrimage market is quickly growing in size, pilgrimage tourists demand a more refined investigation. To that end, this study is timely but also calls for more critical scholarly endeavors in the field of measuring pilgrimage experiences and beyond.

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Gender	Frequency	Percent	Relationship Status	Frequency	Percent
Male	190	56.4	Single	157	46.6
Female	147	43.6	Married	122	36.2
Total	337		In a relationship	46	13.6
			Divorced, separated or widowed	12	3.6
			Total	337	
Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Personal Monthly Income	Frequency	Percent
Manager / Supervisor	22	6.5	Less than NT\$15,000	76	22.6
Clerk	55	16.3	NT\$15,000 - 19,999	14	4.2
Government officer	11	3.3	NT\$20,000 - 24,999	24	7.1
Soldier / Police	40	11.9	NT\$25,000 - 29,999	28	8.3
Technician	93	27.6	NT\$30,000 - 39,999	63	18.7
Farm industry / Fishery	4	1.2	NT\$40,000 - 44,999	34	10.1
Self-employment	30	8.9	NT\$50,000 - 54,999	32	9.5
Retired	2	0.6	NT\$55,000 - 59,999	10	3.0
Student	61	18.1	NT\$60,000 - 64,999	14	4.2
Others (Housewife, unemployed)	19	5.6	NT\$65,000 or above	42	12.5
Total	337		Total	349	
Education	Frequency	Percent	Age		
Doctoral Degree	9	2.7	Mean	35.86	
Master's Degree	41	12.2	Minimum	18	
Bachelor Degree	130	38.6	Maximum	77	
College	67	19.9			
High School	64	19.0			
Junior High School	15	4.5			
Primary	10	3.0			
Below Primary	1	0.3			
Others	0	0			
Total	337				

Table 1 Demographic Information of Respondents in Pilot Study (N=337)

Latent Variables and Observed Variables	Factor Loading	Variance Explained	Reliability Coefficien	Retained for t Next Round
Spirituality		25.10	0.97	Six
S1. I interacted with Mazu during pilgrimage.	0.598			Y

S2. Participating in the pilgrimage helped me understand and think more about myself.	0.575			Ν
S3. Pilgrimage participation is a great achievement for me.	0.587			Ν
S4. I felt a sense of becoming one with Mazu during pilgrimage.	0.636			Ν
S5. I feel a sense of enthusiasm toward pilgrimage.	0.661			Ν
S6. I feel I have a spiritual attachment to Mazu.	0.717			Y
S7. I feel a sense of encouragement toward pilgrimage.	0.704			Ν
S8. I feel I have been purified after pilgrimage.	0.740			Ν
S9. I felt I was very close to Mazu during pilgrimage.	0.746			Y
S10. I feel a sense of ebullience toward pilgrimage.	0.681			Ν
S11. I felt Mazu is very efficacious after pilgrimage.	0.724			Y
S12. I feel a sense of inspiration about pilgrimage.	0.707			Υ
S13. Pilgrimage participation tests my physical strength.	0.538			Ν
S14. I felt blessed during pilgrimage.	0.698			Y
Learning		17.35	0.94	Four
L1. Pilgrimage possesses a spectacular element.	0.770			Ν
L2. Pilgrimage possesses a sensational element.	0.758			Ν
L3. I learned the cultural and historical meanings of pilgrimage via this participation.	0.579			Y
L4. The way disciples worship Mazu is special during pilgrimage.	0.590			Ν
L5. I feel pilgrimage is a great festival with traditional folklore culture.	0.529			Ν
L6. I had an opportunity to learn more about Taiwanese religion and culture.	0.571			Y
L7. I feel a sense of amazement toward pilgrimage.	0.656			Ν
L8. During pilgrimage, I learned some temples have a long history.	0.658			Y
L9. I learned Mazu is distinct from other religious pilgrimages via participation.	0.594			Ν
L10. The performances during pilgrimage are unique.	0.611			Ν
L11. I had a brand-new religious culture experience during pilgrimage.	0.584			Y
Physicality		12.80	0.85	Four
P1. I feel my sins can be repented and forgiven during the pilgrimage.	0.741	-		Ν
P2. I feel the pressure of body and mind can be released during pilgrimage.	0.568			Y

P3. I feel bad if I cannot participate in the whole course of pilgrimage.	0.633			Ν
P4. Pilgrimage participation can be a family tradition.	0.666			Ν
P5. Pilgrimage participation improved my physical condition.	0.611			Y
P6. I felt reborn after pilgrimage.	0.640			Y
Help		9.29	0.81	Three
H1. I was greatly assisted by disciples during pilgrimage.	0.651			Y
H2. It is better to put environmental consciousness into pilgrimage activity.	0.653			Ν
H3. I experienced tangible things generously provided without charge by disciples, such as free food, beverages, and resting areas.	0.681			Y
H4. I experienced intangible things generously provided without charge by disciples, such as help, service, friendliness, etc.	0.660			Y
Unpleasantness		7.21	0.80	Three
UP1. I feel a sense of unhappiness toward pilgrimage.	0.744			Y
UP2. I felt a sense of disappointment during pilgrimage.	0.835			Y
UP3. I felt a sense of regret toward pilgrimage.	0.802			Y

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Relationship Status	Frequency	Percent
Female	184	52.1	Single	160	45.3
Male	169	47.9	Married	124	35.1
Total	353		In a relationship	52	14.7
			Divorced, separated or widowed	17	4.8
Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Personal Monthly Income	Frequency	Percent
Manager / Supervisor	33	9.3	Less than NT\$19,999	108	30.6
Clerk	51	14.4	NT\$20,000 - 29,999	55	15.6
Government officer	19	5.4	NT\$30,000 - 39,999	57	16.1
Soldier / Police	20	5.7	NT\$40,000 - 49,999	40	11.3
Technician	74	21.0	NT\$50,000 - 59,999	41	11.6
Farm industry / Fishery	13	3.7	NT\$60,000 - 69,999	22	6.2
Self-employed	27	7.6	NT\$70,000 or above	30	8.5
Teacher	17	4.8			
Student	87	24.6			
Other (Housewife, unemployed, or retired)	12	3.4			

Table 3 Demographic Information of Study Respondents (N=353)

Frequency	Percent	Age	
2	0.6	Mean	35.31
52	14.7	Minimum	18
162	45.9	Maximum	77
56	15.9		
62	17.6		
9	2.5		
10	2.8		
	2 52 162 56 62 9	2 0.6 52 14.7 162 45.9 56 15.9 62 17.6 9 2.5	2 0.6 Mean 52 14.7 Minimum 162 45.9 Maximum 56 15.9 62 9 2.5 17.6

Table 4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Pilgrimage Tourist Experience (N = 353)

Construct	Item	Sig. Te	st of Pa	rameter Es	stimatio	ⁿ Item Reliat	oility	Composite Reliability	Convergent Validity
	itom	Unstd.	S.E.	<i>z</i> -value	р	Std.	SMC	CR	AVE
Spirituality	S1					.825	.681	.942	.729
	S6	.015	.052	19.657	***	.854	.729		
	S7	0.951	.048	19.678	***	.855	.731		
	S9	1.052	.052	20.146	***	.867	.752		
	S11	1.024	.053	19.430	***	.848	.719		
	S14	0.977	.048	20.408	***	.874	.764		
Learning	L3	1				.782	.612	.905	.614
	L6	0.725	.054	13.496	***	.749	.561		
	L8	0.871	.066	13.275	***	.737	.543		
	L11	0.995	.071	13.998	***	.780	.608		
Physicality	P2	1				.733	.537	.900	.601
	P5	1.140	.100	11.408	***	.770	.593		
	P6	1.098	.096	11.388	***	.756	.572		
Help	H1	1				.717	.514	.866	.684
	Н3	0.883	.060	14.773	***	.893	.797		
	H4	0.648	.044	14.748	***	.861	.741		
Unpleasantness	UP1	1				.723	.523	.834	.627
	UP2	1.289	.098	13.097	***	.877	.769		
	UP3	1.363	.105	12.986	***	.768	.590		
Pilgrimage	Spirituality	1				.974	.949	.931	.608
experience	Learning	0.811	.054	15.064	***	.861	.741		
	Physicality	1.097	.066	16.706	***	.968	.937		
	Help	0.332	.028	11.962	***	.671	.450		
	Unpleasantness	0.645	.070	9.219	***	.569	.324		

Parameter	Unpleasantness	Help	Physicality	Learning	Spirituality
Unpleasantness	1				
Help	.413 (.170)	1			
Physicality	.425 (.180)	.546 (.0229)	1		
Learning	.418 (.174)	.651 (.423)	.639 (.408)	1	
Spirituality	.478 (.228)	.602 (.362)	.818 (.669)	.737 (.543)	1
AVE	62.7%	68.4%	60.1%	61.4%	72.9%

Table 5 Correlations (Squared Correlation) and AVE for the Pilgrimage Tourist Experience