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WHEN BACKPACKER MEETS RELIGIOUS PILGRIM HOUSE:
INTERPRETATION OF ORIENTAL FOLK BELIEFS

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Abstract: Backpacker travel has become an imperative trend in modern tourism. Previous research, however, has not discussed in-depth the intentions and motivations of accommodation selection, in particular, the religious organization e.g. church, mosque, synagogue, and temple affiliated pilgrim hostel. To fill the gap of previous studies, this study provides a new research direction involving the pilgrim hostel playing an essential role as more than mere pilgrim accommodation; pilgrim hostels in Taiwan have surprisingly included a certain percentage of backpacker tourists. A survey addressed the primary identity and service content perceptions of lodgers. Two historical temple-affiliated pilgrim hostels generated 287 valid responses; 112 backpackers, composing 39 % of the sample units, participated in person. Study findings indicated many significant differences between pilgrims and backpackers regarding self-recognised identity on journeys and perceptions of pilgrim hostel service content (for example, religious identification, reason for lodging, total travel expense, number of nights stayed, customer satisfaction, and service value). Implications of these findings provide suggestions and practical applications for the tourism stakeholder and for future research.

Key Words: Pilgrim hostel, Mutual pilgrimage, Group pilgrim, Backpacker, Service perception, Identity, East Asian religion

Introduction

The phenomenon of pilgrimage had existed many hundreds of years before tourism appeared in human behaviour. Each relevant historical period had its own lodging needs¹. Cameron and Garnsey² pointed out that currently existing tourism and travel to be derived from medieval Christian pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem. As early as AD 333, an anonymous traveller from the European continent set out on a distant pilgrimage to Jerusalem, intent only on the objective of visiting the holy places of the Bible. The practical response to this upsurge of mobility, whether localised or long-distance, was the emergence of a network of hostels (*xenodochia*). These lodgings were administered by churches and monasteries to provide for the needs of the common Christian traveller plying the routes of the empire near pilgrim shrines and holy places. The almost concurrent period in China also experienced the establishment of many temples in China provided the auxiliary hostel (*xiang fang*) under a heavily religious atmosphere, ideal for the needs of tourist monks and pilgrims searching for rest, secular citizens seeking quiet, and examinees of the imperial examination coming to concentrate and focus their attention. This type of accommodation is called *Gua Dan* in classical Chinese, meaning “lodging at the temple subsidiary pilgrim hostel”. Taiwan, as well as Romania, the people have generally perceived religious belief is the significant catalyst of the society and soothes the soul. Şandor and Popescu³ indicated that the religious identity is the catalyst of the common social value. Despite the official once utilised public authority utilised has oppressed some emerging religious sects such like Angi⁴ has pointed out the Eastern European communist regime discouraged the religious development. However, the devout believer and priest in Taiwan are standing firmly in religion freedom protection; moreover, Taiwanese religions are syncretistic and pantheistic due to the culture similarity with the Mainland China.⁵ To meet the demands of pilgrims and tourists in the present, many of the pilgrim hostels (*xiang ke da lou*) were built in a gorgeous style from the aspect of interior and exterior designs.

To clarify the ‘religious tourist’ and then define their lodge needs, the existing studies can be divided into twofold. First, many papers have discussed at length the differences and similarities between tourists and pilgrims. Smith⁶ observed that both tourists and pilgrims require discretionary income, leisure time, and social sanctions permissive of travel. In practical terms, distinguishing between pilgrims and tourists is difficult because religious communication and development have become increasingly secularised. Accordingly, Cohen provided another point of view that if a visitor to a pilgrimage site is not personally a follower, then she/he is an ordinary traveller. These descriptions, however, lack in-depth discussion of actual, more complex phenomena related to distinguishing the real motivations behind a pilgrim or a backpacking independent

tourist staying at a religiously affiliated hostel (and it should be noted that not all backpackers are followers of the concerned religion). This article illustrates survey results of pilgrims as well as a large number of self-described backpackers who stayed at religiously affiliated pilgrim hostels. Next, Cohen⁷ considered the backpacker to exhibit a “tourist role” pattern that differs from the conventional tourist. Generally, the unique characteristics of the backpacker lie in manners of consumption, idiosyncratic styles, travel patterns, and peculiarities that form a niche, albeit a growing segment of the tourist population. Backpacker networks can be broadly defined as routes or circuits that link travellers with their global destinations; for example, hostels, resorts, and main attractions within a region.⁸ Additionally, segmenting the backpacker population is difficult, at least regarding their accommodation selections. Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele, and Beaumont⁹ utilised a destination marketing organisations (DMOs) perspective to determine the main lodging selection of backpackers; the result suggested that backpackers might not be targeted by the DMOs due to scarce financial resources being directed towards increasing the number of visitors. Many underlying factors influencing the choice of backpacker accommodation still exist.

What is worth mentioning is the Sea Goddess Mazu as more than a guardian angel of fisherman in modern days that potentially helps to ease tensions, remove barriers to cooperation, and, ideally, result in peaceful cross-strait relations between Taiwan and China, and between Taiwan and other nations.¹⁰ Shuo et al.¹¹ indicated that an estimated 16 million people, accounting for 75 % of the Taiwanese population, are followers of Mazu. Hence, the grand “Greeting Mazu” (*ying ma zu*) event is officially listed as an essential element of the national folklore religious culture. Every 23rd of March of the Lunar Calendar is Mazu’s birthday, while thousands of believers from all over Taiwan hold various grand festivals. In particular, the scale of pilgrimage, patrols, and number of participants for famous temples dedicated to Mazu is regarded as the largest island-wide event. In the case survey of this study, the visitors lodged in the two representative Mazu temples are not limited to ordinary pilgrims worshipping their deities; a significant number of backpackers also come to the pilgrimage site for leisure activities. Furthermore, what pilgrims and backpackers have most in common with one another is that they both choose the pilgrim hostel as their guesthouse while travelling in Taiwan. We offer numerous suggestions to religious organisations and the regional tourism sector based on implications revealed and inferred from the interviewees. Additionally, satisfaction and service quality of related studies (for example, marketing and hospitality) are also widely discussed issues. Oliver¹² indicated that satisfaction involves determining the baseline of a product or service theme, and service itself entails fulfilment, including levels of under- or over-accomplishment. When customers receive high-quality service, they are satisfied.¹³ Therefore, a remarkable finding of this

study derives from above studies that address the reinforcement and acknowledgment of service content perceptions. The managerial implications of this study can be employed as a reference for tourism stakeholders such as the regional tourism sector and related industries.

Methodology

For the purposes of understanding exactly what the lodger source of pilgrim hostels is, and exploring their attitudes towards the details of travel service content perceptions, this section is divided into two steps as follows. First, for determining the identity of respondents, the survey employs a method from Wang et al.¹⁴ Next, we use a method from Ruiz et al.¹⁵ regarding service content measurement to ascertain exactly the lodger's feeling of service quality provided by the pilgrim hostel.

Sampling

At the initial stage of the survey, researchers went to two Mazu temples both are over one hundred years old and are listed as national heritage sites. Each temple has a subsidiary pilgrim hostel sponsored by temple funds of voluntary contribution, as well as joint ventures of related industries nearby; for example, incense stick makers, joss paper (a spirit currency that is burned for Chinese folklore deities or ancestor worship rituals during special holidays or festivals) fabricators, and street vendors. The survey period was from 1 October to 15 October 2010. During this period, this study employed cluster sampling that sampled lodgers of the two Mazu temples' pilgrim hostels who were chosen randomly to participate in this stage. A total of 368 questionnaires were issued and conducted in person. The survey ruled out both respondents who were unwilling to answer and invalid responses, leaving 287 valid interviewees ($n = 287$, approximately 78 %) used in this study. An interesting finding is that the samples of lodgers who claimed themselves as part of a group of pilgrimage tourists put up for the night in pilgrim hostels were not accounted for as an absolute majority as is generally perceived (175 of 287 sample units; 61 %). The 112 respondents were self-described as backpackers (39 %).

Variable selection

For clarifying the survey further, this study referred to an instrument from Wang et al.¹⁶ for identity exploration of each respondent. The variables were: gender, age, marital status, religious identification, destination while lodging at the pilgrim hostel (at the time of interview), personal disposable income per month, total average tourism expenditure, numbers of lodging, and the most unique item was the average donation

put up for the night due to innate character of the pilgrim hostel belonging to a particular religious organisation, means of transportation, reason for lodging at the pilgrim hostel. Sequentially, the service content of the pilgrim hostel was designed according to Ruiz et al.¹⁷ and proposed a formative model of service value with four components: service quality, confidence benefits, and perceived sacrifice. This survey also employed the Likert 1-to-5 rating scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”). The questionnaire construction fully considered internal consistencies for each survey item, and prevented reliability and validity less than the normal value (Cronbach’s alpha value = 0.7). Each item reflected the list of selected topics and was distributed significantly different at 5 %.

Identity and primary perceptions of respondents on pilgrim hostel

The two sample units – pilgrim and backpacker – revealed numerous significant contrasts to many items, as shown in Table 1: Under the item of gender, the percentage of male pilgrims was 45.7 %, and male backpackers were 67.9 %; female pilgrims were 54.3 %, and female backpackers were 32.1 %. The majority age distribution of pilgrims were 50–59 (21.7 %), 60–69 (30.9 %), and 70 or above (37.7 %); backpackers’ age distribution was aged 20–29 (78.6 %); 86.9 % of pilgrims were married, and 92.8 % of backpackers were un-married. Most of the pilgrims participating in the pilgrimage tour formed a travel group, while 80 % of backpackers preferred to travel alone. Over 79.4 % of pilgrims’ personal disposable income was more than NTD40, 000 (approximately GBP 820.60) for each month. The backpacker, however, made NTD20, 000 (approximately GBP 410.30) to less than NTD40, 000 monthly. This was also affected by the total average of tourism expense: 97.2 % of pilgrims could afford higher consumption (GBP 306.90 and above) compared to backpackers having minimised expenditures on the journey (74.1 %; GBP 102.30–204.50). Finally, regarding transportation used for travel, 87.4 % of pilgrims travelled to temples on tourist group coaches, while 90.2 % of backpackers utilised transport means such as hiking, bike riding, riding a motorcycle, or utilising public transport due to their travel budget crunch.

The religious identification of respondents in this survey is noteworthy. Almost all pilgrims were naturally folklore followers (98.9 %). By contrast, backpackers’ reaction towards religious diversity was more obvious: 62.5 % observed the folklore based on relative majority proposition on the island; 17 % of backpackers were believers of other religions; twenty percent of respondents denoted that they were atheists (20.5 %). Religious identification, therefore, was not observed to affect the backpackers’ purpose of tourism and accommodation. A comparison of 91.4 % pilgrims denoted that they came only for worshipping the deities at temples, while 57.2 % of backpackers reported visiting both the sightseeing sites and the temple as the national listed heritage. Whether a pilgrim or backpacker lodging at the pilgrim hostel, the pattern of payment relied upon rejoice in donations in view of its characteristics as a

religious organisation. Therefore, the reason for most pilgrims lodging at the pilgrim hostel is simple: convenience for pilgrimage (48.6 %). A small donation required for lodging, however, was highly attractive for backpackers (45.5 %). Worthy of discussion was the lodger's average donation to lodging cost: most of the pilgrims were paying GBP 40.90 - 81.60 (72.6 %); conversely, backpackers' lodge donations were between GBP 20.40 - 40.80 (89.3 %). Questioning respondents about how many times they lodged at pilgrim hostels, most of the pilgrims denoted that they had stayed at pilgrim hostels at least 20 times or more due to the annual festival or parade of the deities (67.5 %); backpackers, by contrast, reported staying at pilgrim hostels less than five times (80.4 %). Regarding the average number of nights lodged at the pilgrim hostel, the primary survey shows that pilgrims were more highly motivated by pilgrimage, with the lodging nights mostly focused on short-term stays (77.1 % lodging for six nights). The backpackers' travel purpose was usually for relaxation and leisure; therefore, they tended to stay longer (staying 7 nights or more; 79.5 %) in contrast to the pilgrim.

Table 1 Identity and primary perceptions of respondents — pilgrims and backpackers

Variables		Sample units	
		Pilgrim (n1=175)	Backpacker (n2=112)
Gender	Male	80 (45.7%)	76 (67.9%)
	Female	95 (54.3%)	36 (32.1%)
Age	20—29	1 (0.6%)	88 (78.6%)
	30—39	7 (4%)	15 (13.4%)
	40—49	9 (5.1%)	8 (7.1%)
	50—59	38 (21.7%)	1 (0.9%)
	60—69	54 (30.9%)	0
	70 and above	66 (37.7%)	0
Marital status	Single	21 (12%)	104 (92.8%)
	Married	152 (86.9%)	7 (6.3%)
	Others	2 (1.1%)	1 (0.9%)
Travel pattern	Group (more than 3 person)	168 (96%)	32 (28.5%)
	Independent tourist	7 (4%)	80 (71.5%)

Religious Identification	Folklore belief (including Taoism, Buddhism & Confucianism)	173 (98.9%)	70 (62.5%)
	Protestantism	0	9 (8%)
	Catholicism	0	6 (5.4%)
	Others	0	4 (3.6%)
	Atheism	2 (1.1%)	23 (20.5%)
The destination while her/him lodging at the pilgrim hostel	Temple	160 (91.4%)	8 (7.1%)
	Sightseeing sites	3 (1.7%)	64 (57.2%)
	Both of two destinations (temple and sightseeing sites)	12 (6.9%)	40 (35.7%)
Reason for lodging at the pilgrim hostel	Nearby the temple (as national listed heritage)	75 (42.9%)	24 (21.4%)
	Located in the centre of the city	60 (34.3%)	34 (30.4%)
	Donations without burden	38 (21.7%)	51 (45.5%)
	Others	2 (1.1%)	3 (2.7%)
Monthly disposable personal income	GBP £ 410.3 – 615.4	8 (4.6%)	43 (38.4%)
	GBP £ 615.5 – 820.5	28 (16%)	52 (46.4%)
	GBP £ 820.6 – 1023.7	60 (34.2%)	6 (5.4%)
	GBP £ 1023.8 – 1228.1	67 (38.3%)	8 (7.1%)
	GBP £ 1028.2 and above	12 (6.9%)	3 (2.7%)
Average total travel expense	GBP £ 102.3 – 204.5	2 (1.1%)	83 (74.1%)
	GBP £ 204.6 – 306.8	3 (1.7%)	20 (17.9%)
	GBP £ 306.9 – 409.1	91 (52%)	4 (3.6%)
	GBP £ 409.2 – 510.4	54 (30.9%)	3 (2.6%)
	GBP £ 510.5 and above	25 (14.3%)	2 (1.8%)
Average donation of lodging at the pilgrim hostel (per night)	GBP £ 20.4 or below	4 (2.3%)	68 (60.7%)
	GBP £ 20.5 – 40.8	26 (14.8%)	32 (28.6%)
	GBP £ 40.9 – 61.2	73 (41.7%)	7 (6.3%)
	GBP £ 61.3 – 81.6	64 (36.6%)	4 (3.5%)
	GBP £ 81.7 and above	8 (4.6%)	1 (0.9%)

Frequency of lodging at the pilgrim hostel (times)	1 – 5 times	2 (1.1%)	90 (80.4%)
	6 – 10 times	6 (3.4%)	15 (13.5%)
	11 – 15 times	7 (4%)	4 (3.5%)
	16 – 20 times	42 (24%)	3 (2.6%)
	20 times and above	118 (67.5%)	0
Average number of nights at the pilgrim hostel	1 – 3 nights	76 (43.4%)	1 (0.9%)
	4 – 6 nights	59 (33.7%)	22 (19.6%)
	7 – 9 nights	25 (14.3%)	53 (47.4%)
	10 nights and above	15 (8.6%)	36 (32.1%)
Transportation used for travel	Hiking/Bike riding/Motorcycle	0	70 (62.5%)
	Tourist group coach	153 (87.4%)	0
	Car	14 (8%)	11 (9.8%)
	Mass transportation e.g. bus, train	8 (4.6%)	31 (27.7%)

Results

The KMO value is 0.27, and the Bartlett test is significant ($p < 0.001$) in this survey. Table 2 illustrates subject recognition of the sub criteria with large percentages under each main service content dimension. Regarding respondents' attitudes towards service quality, most of them were happy with the pilgrim hostel experience (46.3 % of pilgrims; 48.2 % of backpackers). Additionally, a certain percentage of interviewees denoted that they were satisfied with the services offered by the pilgrim hostel (34.3 % of pilgrims; 35.7 % of backpackers). In respect to service equity, pilgrims have 52%, and 49.1% backpackers were preferred to lodged at the pilgrim hostel during the period of travel, relative to other patterns of accommodation; and a large part of pilgrims (34.3%) and backpackers (29.5%) were willing to receive the pilgrim hostel services even if other similarity service supplies. Furthermore, many similar service content perception responses on perceived sacrifice (not much; pilgrims have 86.6 % and backpackers have 92.8 %), service value presentation (convenience and comfort; 44% of pilgrims and 47.3% of backpackers), and almost all pilgrims (98.9 %) and backpackers (98.2 %) responded that they would be pleased to buy the services of the pilgrim hostels next time.

In addition to the higher similarity of several perceptions, there is still some variety towards confidence benefits and customer satisfaction between sample units, which require further identification. In respect to the pilgrim hostels' confidence benefits, 64 % of pilgrims recognised that they could completely trust and promote their merit to everyone; the

backpackers, however, deemed the safety to be an outstanding attraction for them to choose the accommodation (58 %). Respondents questioned about the most satisfaction part of the pilgrim hostel, yielded significantly different responses between the two sample groups: 55.4 % of pilgrims took comfort from the heavy religious atmosphere; 58 % of backpackers gained the most satisfaction from contributing low donations for a room.

Table 2 Service content perceptions of respondents - pilgrims and backpackers

Variables	Sample units	
	Pilgrim (n ₁ =175)	Backpacker (n ₂ =112)
<i>Service quality</i>		
The pilgrim hostel is always provided satisfaction services	60 (34.3%)	40 (35.7%)
The experience of lodging at the pilgrim hostel is quite good	81 (46.3%)	54 (48.2%)
<i>Service equity</i>		
I prefer to lodge at the pilgrim hostel even if other similar accommodations offers as well as the pilgrim hostel	91 (52%)	55 (49.1%)
If another accommodation provides services as good as the pilgrim hostel, I always prefer to accept the service of the pilgrim hostel	60 (34.3%)	33 (29.5%)
<i>Confidence benefits</i>		
I don't need to worry about the safety while I live at the pilgrim hostel	53 (30.3%)	65 (58%)
I know exactly what I can trust the pilgrim hostel, and I think I can tell its advantages to my familiar person	112 (64%)	46 (41%)
<i>Perceived sacrifice</i>		
Not much	152 (86.6%)	104 (92.8%)
<i>Service value</i>		
The pilgrim hostel offers good value for contribute with my donation	56 (32%)	29 (25.9%)
The pilgrim hostel makes me feel that I am obtained in time, money, safety, and comfort	77 (44%)	53 (47.3%)
<i>Customer satisfaction</i>		
I am happy with the pilgrim hostel's services	36 (20.6%)	16 (14.3%)
Lodge at the pilgrim hostel is save my purse	42 (24%)	65 (58%)
I feel a sense of comfort with the pilgrim hostel's atmosphere	97 (55.4%)	28 (25%)
<i>Repurchase intensions</i>		
I will select the pilgrim hostel to be accommodated in the future	173 (98.9%)	110 (98.2%)

Implications of the study

This study provides perspectives on historical development, economic approaches to tourism, and analyses pilgrims and backpackers lodging at temple affiliated pilgrim hostels. The functions of the pilgrim hostel could be the stimulating factor for macroscopic local tourism markets, instead of merely focusing on religious travel; this section discusses such implications as follows.

The functions of pilgrim hostel

This survey illustrated that, due to the Mazu temples being the national heritage, the great majority of contemporary backpackers spend significant periods of time on natural sights in terms of lower travel expenditure (for example hiking, bike riding, or utilising public transportation. Additionally, the pilgrim groups can be considered as a religiously purposed tourist group regarding conventional tourism during the specific religious events. This study shows that a parallel between conventional tourism and backpackers is nonexistent; the respective demands of comfort and service quality are quite the same. The differences are the ways to travel and the days to stay of between. Backpackers frequently cited reasons related to price and location at the downtown. Moreover, these reasons reflected the most satisfaction gained from using pilgrim hostel services. Cohen cited by Murphy¹⁸ indicated that backpackers generally understand the situation of tour destinations as referred to by other experienced backpackers, rather than by locals. The increasing strongly informal backpacker networks are ideal for playing the role of promoting inexpensive travel compared with other similar travel services. Therefore, the findings of this study are supported by the above study conducted by Murphy¹⁹ and Nash et al.²⁰ Simultaneously, as well as Ivan's²¹ study, we should pay more attention to the young generations attitude towards religious belief due to the student group has play a significant role in travel pattern of backpacker. For the backpacker tourist, being a believer is unnecessary; simply rejoicing in donations to lodge at pilgrim hostels is all that is required. The existing pilgrim hostel in this study provides an ideal choice for both pilgrims and backpackers regarding accommodation.

In terms of the hierarchy of needs proposed by Maslow²² to explain the motivation of pilgrims and backpackers, many of them travel to satisfy their original need for self-esteem or even self-actualisation. Their choice of destination enhances a sense of self-identity, a fact revealed by visiting a particular tourist or heritage site expresses who they are. Of course, it includes backpackers receiving services at pilgrim hostels under the heavy religious atmosphere, even if she/he is not a believer. In practical terms,

not only the pilgrim and backpacker, but also even the volunteer tourist is a potential customer of the pilgrim hostel.²³ A steadily growing number of volunteer tourists are gaining wider attention, which can be proved by the service ranges provided by pilgrim hostels.

While many backpackers are motivated by hedonistic considerations and perceive their trip as a period of recreation, various risks still exist along on their journeys. It is interesting to discuss that the backpacker risk perception according to the respondents considered high quality safety conditions to be one of the service satisfactions. Empirically, Reichel²⁴ concluded that the backpacker is more careful about the social security issue. Practically in this survey, both of the temple committees of purpose built religious attractions needing to be aware of the conflict between visitors' desires for authentic experiences and their need for security; therefore, security guards were hired to protect the two temples and its pilgrim hostels for 24 hours a day due to the temple status as the national heritage, addressing many unexpected tourists' problems. Additionally, both of the pilgrim hostels are located in downtown areas that provide tourists with extreme convenience. Furthermore, often from the viewpoint of East Asians, pluralists believe in relativism, suggesting that all possible explanations of religious beliefs must be equal. Regardless of the lodgers' religious beliefs, the pilgrim hostel is becoming a completely new option for backpacker accommodation.

As a new promotion channel of the tourism sector

Numerous existing articles focused on the relationship between inbound tourism and economy growth.²⁵ Furthermore, Demunter & Dimitrakoulou²⁶ discovered in 2009 that nearly 169.6 million tourist nights were spent in collectively similar accommodations, a decrease of 1.1 % compared with 2008 in the UK because of the influence of the global economic recession. In the same year, however, the nights spent exhibited contrarian growth in resident tourism (2.2 %). Tourists are beginning to participate in inbound tours to save money on travel expenses. People have defined numerous elements of natural and religious figures in terms of spiritual sites, regarding and endowing them with supernatural qualities. Even though the spiritual meaning has been lost over time, there is still immense interest in many of these ancient sites. People have always been interested in making sense of their lives and have looked for sacred meanings generating many specific festivals and events influenced by generations. Blackwell²⁷ observed that religiously motivated travel is increasingly manifested in religious festivals and events, visits to religious sites, and the undertaking of pilgrimages. Therefore, developing religious tourism is absolutely a booster shot for tourism market growth.

Economically, Pavicic et al.²⁸ suggested that the management of pilgrimage sites must fully consider the varying demands of their tourists

and enable them to immerse in the feelings of “ancient” and “sacred”. Furthermore, pilgrimage sites must concentrate on the promotion of intangible services (or on the inlay of tangible goods) in terms of the viable tool of memorable experiences. The two temples, as this case survey stated, are registered as national heritage sites that are not only for pilgrims to worship deities, but are also for tourists to visit (where thousands gather every year). Visiting temples leads to surrounding business growth covering a wide array of related industries such as those involving incense sticks, joss paper, and market vendors. Additionally, through cooperation between temples and these related industries are constructed firm partnerships; these relationships are also essential roles for the success of local tourism and economic development.

To date, regarding the tourist segment, backpackers can be an effective channel of tourism marketing; however, it still depends on strong policy support. Popescu²⁹ mentioned that the national value is basically reflected in multidimensional interpretation, of course included tourist attractions. Difference religious beliefs is no longer the barriers for religious- or secular oriented travellers due to the temple affiliated pilgrim house itself provides a field to promote mutual communication and understanding each other, as Frunza³⁰ has discussed. For instance, the National Youth Commission of Taiwan launched the “Let’s be friends - Youth travel in Taiwan” programme, establishing various youth travel spots throughout Taiwan by collaborating selectively with the organisations to provide year- round services (for example, bike rentals and backpack keepings) and in-depth experience activities (including seven cultural experiences as follows: cultural, tribal, ecological, farming, fishing, physical conditioning, and volunteering), all serving as entry points for youths to learn more about Taiwan's local cultures. Forty spots have been established so far, and for the year 2010, there is a famous folklore temple among the spots. The youths have been selected and recommended preferentially to the international young visitors, acting as ideal starting points for them to make friends with Taiwanese people, to get better acquainted with the island, and to learn about regional culture. There is no doubt that the backpacker segment of the market is gaining increased attention from the tourism stakeholder. Similarly, sectors devoted to promoting tourist attractions or regional characteristics can use the backpacker-oriented accommodations (for example, the Youth Travel Association (YHA) and YMCA hostels) as powerful advertising channels that can be excellent marketing channels for tourism promotion.

Conclusion

This study sought to consider, through an exploratory case study, the pilgrim hostel and backpacker as essential roles of local tourism development in terms of East Asian religion and cultural viewpoints.

Despite the cultural and geographical differences, this study proposed suggestions for the economic development of tourism that can be a useful reference for tourism stakeholders. Results of the survey showed that respondents representing the two groups of pilgrims and backpackers expressed numerous perspectives on self-recognition, identity, and perception of service content. This observation has implications for the strategic planning of future events involving study demographics.

Finally, the survey from this study concentrated on resident tourism according to data collection and sample representativeness. Future research, therefore, may engage in a similar study of backpackers under different religions and cultures, but explore in-depth the psychology of a similar donations to for-profit services provided by non-profit organisations. These issues are worthy of further exploration and discussion.

Notes:

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