



PATHWAYS TO THE DIVINE: PILGRIMAGE PRACTICES IN WORLD RELIGIONS

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Abstract: Pilgrimage behavior, which has been recognized as an important religious tourism motivation, is the main reason for religious believers to engage in pilgrimages. This study reviewed the impact of pilgrimage behavior in Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism and other religions and found that pilgrimage behavior has a positive and profound impact on believers' psychology, contributes to the sustainable operation of the tourism industry and promotes the economic development of religious holy sites.

Keywords: Pilgrimage, Religious tourism, Motivation, Experience

1. INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage sarewell-known religious and cultural phenomena in human society. Appearing thousands of years ago, they represent the first tourism activity [1]. Nelson-Becker, Pickard and Sichling (2023) indicated that a pilgrimage is an intentional journey undertaken to increase the sense of happiness [2]. Pilgrimages were once defined specifically as a religiously motivated journey, but they have come

to be seen aseither a traditional religious or a modern secular journey [3]. Moreover, the boundaries between pilgrimages and tourism have become blurred [4]. In the past, pilgrimages consisted of visiting holy places and experiencing the presence of God, and religious shrines were mainly sacred buildings visited by people (pilgrims) with religious motivations. Nowadays, pilgrimage centers usually consist of several buildings (often called sacred complexes or religious recreation parks) that provide additional cultural and tourist facilities for visitors with different motivations (pilgrims, religious tourists and general tourists) [5]. Iwaarden and Nawijn (2021) found that the pilgrimage experience createslong-term spiritual growth and positive psychological benefits to pilgrims [6]. The continued increase in the number of pilgrims has attracted widespread attention from tourism scholars [7,8]. Over the past 20 years,the number of people visiting historic religious sites around the world has increased rapidly. This growth is closely associated with the revival of traditional routes, the creation of new routes and the invention of new rituals (religious, spiritual and secular rituals) [9]. Since different religions have their own pilgrimage activities to holy places, this study reviewed the psychology of pilgrims from the world's

major religions, including Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism and other religions, to explain the themes of various religious studies in recent years.

1.1. Christian and Catholic Pilgrimages

In recent years, studies of Christianity have focused on the cognitive aspects of rational motivation related to pilgrimages [10]. The main impact of a pilgrimage is not only on individuals, but also on other aspects. The materialization of religion is often the focus of researchers. For example, Terzidou (2020) explored the activities of Christian Orthodox religious tourists on the Greek island of Tinos and argued that religion engages in material performances by endowing objects with symbols and use values [11]. Casais and Sousa (2020) conducted an ethnographic study of the routes of the Way of Saint James and discussed the interactions between pilgrims and conflicts in interconnected tourism and hospitality services along the pilgrims' routes [12]. Vistad et al. (2020) studied several historical pilgrim routes that make up St. Olav's Way, which ends in Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, Norway, and found that the most popular route is the 643-kilometer Gudbrandsdalen route from Oslo. They also found that foreigners were the main travelers, that the average pilgrim had little or no pilgrimage experience, and that hiking was the main purpose [13].

During the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions were imposed on the social distance between believers, which affected religious and pilgrimage practices. Therefore, research on the post-COVID-19 period has focused on the revival and development of holy places after the pandemic [14, 15], as well as the changes in pilgrim behavior and residents' attitudes towards the pilgrimage routes [16]. The popularity of making a pilgrimage to Camino de Santiago [17, 18] among believers has also attracted attention from researchers [19]. Despite the increase in secularization, modern pilgrimages are becoming increasingly popular in Western culture. Research has found that 74% of participants on the Camino DE Santiago have psycho-existential motivations [20]. Pilgrimage motivations are mainly divided into secular, spiritual and religious motivations. Religious motivations most commonly appear together with secular motivations [21] and can be divided into different types. Different types of pilgrims often have different motivations for pilgrimage [22].

In terms of the experience during the pilgrimage, a previous study confirmed that participating in the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage together can help couples strengthen the relationship and trust between them, increase their communication, connection, and expression of care and affection, and enhance the connection with their children [23]. The most significant benefit of participating in a pilgrimage is an enhanced self-awareness, which is the product of six phenomena: detachment from everyday life, solitude, the companionship of the pilgrimage, spirituality, and pain, which arises from walking in the Camino environment [24]. Furthermore, during the pilgrimage, pilgrims form an egalitarian and creative community where people feel equal and united and develop a strong sense of comradeship and common kindness [25]. Jørgensen et al. (2020) studied St. Olav's Way in Norway and found that a pilgrimage can be a process of self-immersion that improves the pilgrim's body shape, sleep, persistence, and countermeasures [26]. In terms of the impact after participating in a pilgrimage, the study suggested that certain values generated by the Camino de Santiago tend to persist. These

meaningful and unforgettable experiences may lead to changes in the pilgrims' personal values, such as an increased concern for the welfare and interests of others (universalism and benevolence) and value shifts that reflect prosocial tendencies related to religious beliefs and spirituality [27]. In addition, other studies have found that: (1) pilgrimages are generally regarded as a rite of adulthood; (2) the journey provides an opportunity to break away from routine and embrace a simpler and slower pace of life; (3) pilgrims develop a sense of connection with nature and fellow humans; and (4) most pilgrims gain a sense of accomplishment from their journey [28].

In terms of Catholic pilgrimage research, Liro (2020) studied the motivations and behaviors of tourists in Polish pilgrimage centers and found that the motivations and behaviors of contemporary religious tourists are diverse and multifaceted. Although they include religious and tourism factors, they are also related to factors such as cultural heritage tourism, entertainment, and social/family life [29]. Liro (2023) analyzed six popular Roman Catholic pilgrimage centers and indicated that changes in religious beliefs have significantly impacted the development of pilgrimage tourism centers and methods. The attributes of religious tourists are becoming increasingly complex and diverse, which may also affect the development of other forms of tourism and their economic benefits and cause challenges for the management of pilgrimage centers [30]. Alvarado-Sizzo and Mínguez (2023) investigated the origin, motivations and behaviors of visitors to the celebration of St. Francis of Assisi in Real de Catorce, Mexico, and found a relationship between religious tourism and nostalgic tourism among regional immigrants [31].

1.2. Buddhist and Islamic Pilgrimages

Like religious holy sites in the West, Buddhist pilgrimage sites have existed for thousands of years. The study found that in contemporary India and Nepal, Buddhist pilgrim spaces constitute a ritual ecology in which pilgrim groups mostly travel with monks, nuns and tour guides from their respective countries. Despite the differences between the two countries in terms of culture, language and sect, the ritual practices associated with pilgrimages at most Buddhist holy sites create a common sense of identity that enables Buddhists to imagine themselves as part of Buddhism [32]. Wang et al. (2020) chose Mount Kailash in Tibet as the research site. The research results classified the types of tourists visiting pilgrimage sites as pilgrims, spiritual explorers, amateurs and accidental tourists [33]. Benoit, Thomas and Remley Jr. (2021) found that Tibetan Buddhism is the same as all major world religions. Vajrayana Buddhism attaches high importance to the ancient practice of making a pilgrimage to promote spiritual development and maintain spiritual health. Moreover, their study also highlighted the beneficial effects of pilgrimage on mental health, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic, since resilience can be built up by strengthening religious and spiritual responses and promoting integration [34]. Pilgrims are motivated to meet their needs, as shown in Maslow's hierarchy of needs [35]. Cheng and Wang (2023) studied pilgrims in Lashi, Tibet, and used market segmentation theory to divide the tourism preferences of different submarkets based on each pilgrim's subjective feelings about tourism quality [36].

The Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia) is a mandatory religious commandment for all able-bodied Muslims who can afford this journey [37]. Caidi (2019) indicated that the completion of the Hajj is often touted as a transformative experience. Pilgrims' information practices are diverse and

transcend personal (cognitive, affective) and social processes through shared imagination and a cross-regional network of people and resources [38]. Qazi et al. (2022) pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on large gatherings all over the world, and that social distancing has become a common measure to limit the spread of the new coronavirus [39]. Pilgrims who go to Mecca for the Hajj have religious, social and cultural motivations, as well as tourism (shopping)[40,41]. Quaium et al. (2023) found that in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, millions of pilgrims around the world encounter difficulties related to Masjid al-Haram, 21 negative experiences [42]. Moreover, the quality of services provided by Hajj Hospital deserves further investigation. Gaddoury and Armenian (2024) studied the pattern of all-cause mortality among hospitalized patients during the Hajj and the relationship between mortality and previous chronic diseases and services provided by Hajj hospitals[43].

As for other regions, data from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics shows that 87.18% of the country's total population is Muslim. In addition to serving as the rulers of Islam and pillars of the faith, Muslims also maintain religious tourism. A form of religious tourism widely followed by Muslims in Indonesia is to complete the pilgrimage to the tomb of the *wali* (Guardian), both *wali limo* and *wali songo*[44].

1.3. Pilgrimages of Other Religions

After the review of the research on the world's four major religious pilgrimages, the author also listed some research on other religions for researchers' reference. Nisar et al. (2022) collected data from 374 pilgrims from the Sikh community who visited Pakistan during Vaisakhi, an important religious event. The research results showed that experience risk, motivation and loyalty significantly affect experience relationship quality, experience support and experience desire [45]. Jyotsna and Prakash Sai (2022) investigated the critical influencing factors and expected outcomes of the Hindu pilgrimage experience and developed a psychological model to analyze the interrelationships between these factors. They found that destination popularity, safety, local culture, accessibility, hygiene, duration of visit, number of pilgrims and price of temple services are important drivers, while overall expenditure, destination hospitality, spiritual ambience, hedonic experience and overall pilgrimage experience were the outcomes [46]. Nayak, Polus and Piramanayagam (2023) used the cognitive, affective and conative components of the tourist destination image (TDI) to examine the destination image of Temple at Tirumala Tirupati, one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in India[47]. Pande and Shi (2023) investigated tourist experiences at two religious heritage sites—one related to Hinduism (the Pashupatinath temple complex), and one related to Buddhism (the sacred garden inside the Mayadevi Temple), and used cross-site analysis to propose common management strategies. The importance performance framework was used to assess tourist expectations and perceived experience across five factors, of which religious and cultural factors were considered the most prominent [48]. Shi and Pande (2023) studied tourists' attitudes towards different forms of commercialization at religious sites. Their study used a mixed-method design and was conducted at two Hindu and Buddhist holy sites in Nepal. 44 semi-structured interviews were performed first, followed by a questionnaire survey. The attitudes of four types of visitors toward commercialization were identified. Differences in attitudes

were explained by considering the visitors' motivations, social exchange theory of income and religious backgrounds [49].

2. CONCLUSION

Pilgrimages play an important role in religious tourism. Religious holy places are a motivation for believers to make a pilgrimage there, and they will have different experiences in the process. A systematic review study on religious tourism found that there are four main structures of the tourist experience, namely, destination attributes, tourist attributes, participation and image, with 15 substructures [50]. Moreover, the experience after participating in a pilgrimage has a long-lasting and profound impact on the psychology and life of the pilgrims. The COVID-19 pandemic restricted people's pilgrimage activities, but it also brought about changes in the operation and management of pilgrimage sites, as well as the reflections on sustainable development. Although the commercialization of religious holy sites and the secularization of pilgrimages are frequently mentioned in studies, these are also the effects of the social and cultural transformations and changes in religious beliefs in the 20th and 21st centuries. Since religious holy sites receive both pilgrims and ordinary tourists, commercial operations represent a sustainable development strategy.

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The study points out that modern pilgrimages still have a transformative potential, suggesting that modern pilgrimages are a multidimensional psychological existential phenomenon associated with the six main themes of the Camino experience: (1) authentic experience; (2) walking in nature; (3) self-transformation; (4) community;

(5) simplicity and (6) spirituality.

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The study indicates that contemporary pilgrim motivations may include anticipated religious, spiritual and humanistic benefits, as well as appreciation of culture and geography, with five critical themes emerging: challenge and adventure, spirituality and intrinsic motivation, cultural or historical interest, and interest in life experience and grateful recognition and relationships.

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What is interesting about this paper is that its author suggests that pilgrims who only join an organized group for the last 100 kilometers of their journey, whether traveling to Santiago alone or with a significant other, are not considered part of that group and can only be classified as pseudo-pilgrims.

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(Jasna Gora, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, sanctuaries of the Divine Mercy and John Paul II in Krakow, Lichen Stary and Gietrzwald). The interdependence of tourist attributes are analyzed, and a conceptual model is proposed: (a) the conditions of religious tourism, and (b) the path of religious tourist attributes only provide the opportunity to understand the complexity and multifaceted nature of religious tourism that changes the world and determines its development direction and destination.

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