

Modern Religious Tourism in Taiwan: A Case Study of Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center

現代台灣宗教觀光的研究：以佛光山佛陀紀念館為例

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by Shih, Miao Guang (釋妙光)
Fellow, FGS Institute of Humanistic Buddhism

Abstract

Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center, founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, is a newly opened Buddhist site in Taiwan, which not only serves as a combined museum, art gallery and religious landmark, but also a diverse cultural, education and art center whose total number of visitors in the first year of its opening exceeded ten million, higher than that of the Louvre in 2012, and has continued to rise in successive years. The Center also became the youngest museum to be recognized as a member of ICOM, receive ISO50001 certification, and listed on Tripadvisor as one of the top three tourist destinations in Taiwan within the first four years of its opening.

Owing to more than just the stunning architectural complex and open space layout, a rich collection of permanent and temporary art exhibitions, live Buddhist and Chinese cultural performances, interfaith festivities, as well as social welfare events are among the contributing factors of the Center's success. This paper aims to study the relationship between the modern approaches of Dharma propagation in Humanistic Buddhism and religious tourism in attempt to discuss the success of Buddha Memorial Center's development as well as its future prospective in the dissemination of Buddhism.

Keyword:

Hsing Yun, Fo Guang Shan, Buddha Memorial Center, museum, religious tourism, education, cultural tourism

1. Introduction

The hectic pace of modern day life is filled with mental and physical stress; consequently, travels to recreational and religious sites have become a means that people resort to in order to relax their minds and bodies, spend quality family time together, enhance knowledge, and fulfill spiritual needs. In general, such travel places these ‘mobile individuals’ within the spectrum of two polar types of movements, pilgrimage and tourism (Shinde, 2007). However, in today’s fast-changing world, these two forms of travel increasingly overlap, as many people travel with motivations for both recreational and spiritual needs, it therefore becomes more and more difficult to distinguish between the two. The resulting form of travel is thus described in composite terms such as pilgrimage tourism or religious tourism, which implies any visit to a sacred site that is motivated by religious motives (Rinschede, 1992).

Religious and spiritual travel in the form of pilgrimage and religious tourism is one of the fastest growing forms of tourism worldwide (WTO, 2011). Millions of pilgrims have been prompted to visit sacred places like shrines, temples, churches, landscape features, religious festivities, and so on. The number of visitors, local and foreign, to such sites in Taiwan too, is also growing. According to the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 49,577,173 people visited temples and historic sites in Taiwan in 2014 (Tourism Bureau, MOTC, 2014). Within the same year, 11,099,894 people visited the Buddha Memorial Center (BMC Report, 2014).

This paper outlines an integrative framework of Buddhist religious tourism based on the study of the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center, one of the fastest growing new religious tourist sites in Taiwan. How has the Buddha Memorial Center (hereafter BMC) been able to keep up with the diversifying needs of worldwide tourists? How did BMC become Northern Taiwan’s most visited site within a short period of just four years? The findings in this paper are derived from a study of different forms of tourism and multi-functional facilities and activities at the BMC to examine its success and future challenges faced as a religious-oriented organization.

2. Pilgrimage versus Tourism -- Differences and Convergence

The relations between pilgrimage and tourism have been studied by scholars within different theoretical constructs (Shinde, 2007), and many see pilgrims and tourists, whose paths, though seemingly divergent, frequently cross over (Nolan and Nolan, 1989) and sometimes may even become interchangeable lanes (Smith, 1992). The boundaries between pilgrimage, tourism, and other types of travel are only becoming more and more blurry due to the continued expansion of various forms of tourism.

Cohen presents that ‘pilgrimage’ poses greater demand than ‘tourism’ in terms of obligation, seasons and itineraries, demeanor, and relation with co-travelers, and concludes that tourism is a “modern metamorphosis of both pilgrimage and travel.” (Cohen, 1992, p.59).

a. Pilgrimage

The concept of pilgrimage exists in all major religions but with various meanings depending on the religious structure. Traditional pilgrimage involves pilgrims flying from faraway places arriving at a sacred site on foot, carrying a strongly religious or spiritual motivation together with a sense of renunciation of worldly matters. At the sacred site, the

pilgrim performs rituals to fulfill the purpose of their travel. (Shinde, 2007) However, modern day pilgrimage has shifted away from the sense of journeying towards quick and easy trips to the sacred site, where people are visiting on weekends, traveling by express vehicles such as cars, shuttle buses, or high speed trains to seek more than just spirituality but also leisure and information. Added with multifaceted travel purposes, modern pilgrimage can be generally divided into the following two types (Jackowski and Smith, 1992:93):

1. Religious pilgrimage: This is a religiously motivated travel to a sacred place that could consist of: a) elements of the natural environment such as mountains, rivers, caves, groves or even animals; b) religious sites such as churches, temples, or shrines; c) venue for religious activities, rituals, or festivals (Cohen, 2000;439, 2006; Shackely, 2006). Those who embark on such sacred pilgrimages are considered the true pilgrims who typically spend their time in meditation, prayer, and performing religious rites. Their motivations is usually only concerned with holiness and worship in reference to a higher or supernatural being to gain a blessing, a cure of illness, and so on. Examples include the pilgrimage undertaken by the *hajj* to Mecca by Muslims, and Hindu pilgrimage to the Ganges River.

2. Secular pilgrimage: This involves religious tourists motivated by religion in combination with other types of motivations, for example, knowledge, culture, politics, or a seek for one's roots and identity. Their primary pursuit is to have an experience with the pilgrimage route on the basis of the information they have gathered from their surroundings, the countryside through which they pass and the people they meet. Ebadi (2015) further classifies secular pilgrimage into three forms:

i. Cultural pilgrimage: Ancient or religious sites that attract visitors not for religious reasons or sacredness but because of their cultural and historical heritage. For example, UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites such as shrines, synagogues, pagodas, monasteries, pyramids and so on. Cultural pilgrimage involves tourists who visit mostly out of curiosity about different cultures, regions, religio-cultural festivals, or cultural figures. In other words, such visitors do not have any sense of spirituality in the place that they visit, nor do they participate in religious acts at the place.

ii. Political pilgrimage: Travels to quasi-religious sites related to national leaders, heroes, or war victims in order to pay respect. For example, the intact body of Lenin in Lenin's Mausoleum in Moscow or Nelson Mandela's prison on Robben Island.

iii. Nostalgic pilgrimage (or roots tourism): The pilgrim's quest to know more about their social, religious, cultural, national, or ethnic identity by visiting places of relation to their ancestors or the past. It is a "metaphorical and terrestrial journey" to the source of belonging that they call 'home' (Basu, 2004:173). Bramer (2012:57) links the motivation of 'on-foot' pilgrims to nostalgic motivations such as 'a search for old values, simple life and partially seek for Christian symbols.'

The reasons to be on a pilgrimage can be manifold, with religion as the key motivation and secular tourism as others. People from different cultural, geographical and social-political backgrounds will have different perceptions of the meaning of pilgrimage. Certain places or events will be recognized by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion or visitation.

b. Tourism

The multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary characters of tourism makes it very difficult to come up with an all-encompassing definition since different types of tourism are derived from different motives for travel (Murphy, 1985). Based on the tourism definition of the UNWTO, "Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes."

As mentioned above, contemporary travel (or modern tourism) is considered as a metamorphosis of pilgrimage. Very often, tourism has been likened to pilgrimage. Many scholars have attempted to articulate travel that has both religious and recreational purposes by using terms such as pilgrimage tourism and religious tourism as a way to provide linkage to its sacred-profane facets (Santos, 2003).

1. Religious Tourism: In the book *I Pellegrino e il turista* (Costa, 200X, pp. 69 -82): "religious tourism is the synthesis of traditional trips to a shrine and cultural trips designed, guided and regulated by religious organizations or for religious purposes," to which we might add that religious tourism uses the tourism sector structure as a basis, but is comprised of elements pertaining to religious experience that "transform its quality, purpose, pace and style of action" (Parellada, 2009). Religious tourism is a desire to connect with spiritual, religious, historical-cultural, and artistic values, which implies a curiosity to find out about and perceive cultural and religious wealth, acquire values and relate historical-cultural events with religious phenomena. That said, taking an interest in cultural heritage excludes the undertaking of religious practices in the place being visited (Hakobyan, 2010). Many scholars maintain that pilgrimage represents the oldest form of tourism, where pilgrimage as a practice of religious tourism "encouraged people's participation, the spiritual and social enhancement of the guests and host, beside respect for environment." (Singh and Singh, 1999, p.194)

2. Secular Tourism: This is a case where the tourist, unlike a pious pilgrim, only visits a religious shrine for cultural or historical meanings but does not participate in any kind of veneration or worship (Nolan and Nolan, 1992). Unlike religious pilgrims, secular tourists seek to satisfy their inner anxiety, in other words, personal satisfaction found in the secular world.

c. Differences and convergence

As said above, while pilgrimage and tourism are two social phenomena with related dynamics, tourism is considered a "modern metamorphosis of both pilgrimage and travel."

Not all religious phenomena that are venerated or visited by devout believers or tourists have equal status or perceived holiness. "Motivation, furthermore, can change when the individual switches activities, for example, from being a pilgrim to a tourist and vice-versa, often without the individual being aware of the change." (Blackwell, 2003:33) While pilgrimage is largely associated with the attempt to get closer to certain sacred or supernatural power by means of religious practices, tourism is mainly about getting away from the routines of life in order to seek changes, whether spiritual, religious, or recreational. In the modern day world, the overlap between the two forms of travel is increasing, for people are now traveling with the objectives of achieving both their recreational and spiritual needs.

There is no clear boundary between the two poles of pilgrimage (sacred) versus tourism (secular). For example, sharing the same surrounding and space, a tourist may be interested in visiting a church or a shrine, while pilgrims may behave like tourists (Schoramm, 2004)

Sacred places have diverse functions, depending on the visitor. For those faithful to a particular religion, they may be places which carry a message or a system of values, a place for coming into contact with the mysterious and an artifact of interest. For a tourist they may represent a point of interest due to the works of art they contain, their architecture, location, atmosphere, or simply form part of a longer route. (Cassellas, Serrallonga, Costa, 2013)

The Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum developed by Collins-Kreiner and Kliot (2000), consists of two continua -- secularism-sacredness, and tourism-pilgrimage. This division in the forms of travel (pilgrimage and tourism) from the common interpretations (sacred and secular) maintains the essential meanings of each in terms of attitude, beliefs, and motivations, and are essential variables that identify the pious from the tourist features. This is illustrated in the following study of BMC, the most prominent attraction of Southern Taiwan today.

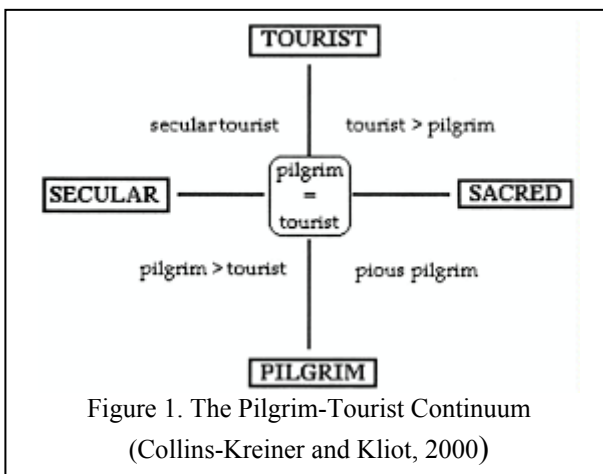


Figure 1. The Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, 2000)

3. Origin of the Buddha Memorial Center

After the Buddha entered nirvana, his body was cremated, and records show that three of his tooth relics remain in the world today, one in Sri Lanka, one in Mainland China, and the third, secretly taken away from Nalanda in India during the thirteenth century, eventually went into the hands of Tibetan Lama Kunga Dorje Rinpoche, who kept and protected the relic in secret for the next three decades.

As years went by, Kunga Dorje Rinpoche feared that he may not fulfill his wish to build a temple to enshrine the Buddha's tooth relic in his lifetime, and must entrust it to someone of great visions and achievements. Thus in 1998, he approached Venerable Master Hsing Yun, founder of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order, who was presiding over an International Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony in Bodhgaya, India, and offered to gift the relic to him, together with a certificate signed by twelve other Rinpoches to authenticate the relic.

Two months later, the relic was escorted to Taiwan on chartered flight from Nepal via Bangkok. During the presentation, Kunga Dorje Rinpoche reminded Venerable Master Hsing Yun that a place of grandeur was required to enshrine this treasured relic so that the entire world may be able to venerate it. For this reason, the idea of BMC was conceived.

In the mind of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, "the Buddha Memorial Center serves to acquaint the public with the Buddha's quantities, through which the Buddhist practice can be inspired. The Buddha Memorial Center was thus built not only to venerate the Buddha, but

more importantly with the interests of sentient beings kept in mind.” (BMC Website, 2015)

Inheriting the objectives of Fo Guang Shan (lit. Buddha’s Light Mountain) Monastery: 1) To propagate Dharma through culture, 2) to foster talents through education; 3) to benefit society through charity; 4) to purify human minds through spiritual cultivation, BMC serves not only as a Buddhist historical site, but also a museum, an art center, a cultural hub, an education center, and also a tourist site for families. “The Buddha Memorial Center is a historic construction that resides in the minds of all beings. The Center belongs to everyone and anyone can come to the Center. It is also a place of culture and education. Visitors ranging from individuals to families, schools, and organizations, are free to gather and learn here.” (BMC Website, 2015)

Situated beside Fo Guang Shan Monastery, construction of BMC began in 2003 over 100 hectares of land, and was completed on December 25, 2011.



Figure 2. Map of Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center (BMC: 2015)

a. Historical and Religious Significance of the Architectural Layout

What greets visitors’ eyes are BMC’s magnificent architecture and landscape. Laid out at one end of the vertical symmetry of the 300-meter long central Great Path to Buddhahood is the Front Hall that serves as the entrance point into the rest of BMC. Flanking the central path are eight Chinese style Pagodas that represent the Eightfold Noble Path which connect to the Main Hall through the 100-square-meter Bodhi Wisdom Concourse on which statues of Buddhist masters from Indian and Chinese traditions are found. The Indian-style, pyramid-shaped Main Hall houses the sacred Buddha’s tooth relic, three Buddhist shrines, four permanent Buddhist exhibitions, a 360-degree Great Enlightenment Auditorium, and art galleries. At the end of the central path seats a 108-meter tall seated Fo Guang Big Buddha bronze statue that gazes upon the entire center from up high. Situated to the right of the Big Buddha is the Vulture Peak that symbolizes the great gathering of Buddha’s disciples who

learn and vow to disseminate his teachings, while to the left is the Ganges River that commemorates the site of spiritual cultivation for the historic Buddha.

This layout rendition by the Venerable Master himself holds historical, religious, and cultural significances:

1. Historical significance: Historical-wise, starting backwards from the complex's far end is Sakyamuni Buddha (Fo Guang Big Buddha), who founded the religion of Buddhism that began in India (India-styled stupa structure of the Main Hall) and was passed by Indian Buddhist masters who brought the faith into China (statues of Indian and Chinese Buddhist masters on the Bodhi Wisdom Concourse), which became the land over which Buddhism thrived (eight Chinese-styled pagodas). This linear heritage line spans across one single way (Great Path to Buddhahood) from Sakyamuni Buddha through to the entrance gate (Front Hall) which connects BMC with public road, signifying the connection of Buddhism from India to China, and then with the entire world. In the dimensions of both time and space, the BMC structure offers the historical and geographical development of Buddhism in a nutshell. (Hsing Yun, 2011)

2. Religious significance: Religious-wise, all teachings began with the Founder himself (Fo Guang Big Buddha), and were first disseminated in India in the concept of the Four Noble Truths (four Indian-style stupas at the corners of the Main Hall), known as the early Buddhist teachings. The four Bodhisattvas found inside each of the four stupas symbolize the transition of self-liberation-oriented goals commonly identified in original Buddhist teachings to universal-liberation-oriented goals of Mahayana Buddhism commonly represented by the figures of bodhisattvas (Sanskrit for "enlightened sentient being"). This transition continues onwards to disciples of the Buddha (statues of Indian and Chinese Buddhist masters on the Bodhi Wisdom Concourse) along the Fourth Noble Truth, the path leading to the end of suffering for oneself and others (Great Path to Buddhahood), that is, the Noble Eightfold Path (Eight Chinese-style Pagodas). Along the path, each of the eight Pagodas represents the practices of One Teaching (Pagoda number one): Humanistic Buddhism by the Two Assemblies (Pagoda number two): monastic and lay who abide by the Three Acts of Goodness (Pagoda number three): Do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts and also the Four Givings (Pagoda number four): give others faith, give others joy, give others hope, give others confidence in the hopes of realizing the Five Harmonies (Pagoda number five) for the self, between people, within families, in societies, and for the entire world. Buddhists are inspired to follow these ways of cultivation under the guidance of the Six Perfections (Pagoda number six): generosity, discipline, endurance, diligence, concentration and wisdom; the Seven Admonitions (Pagoda number seven): abstinence from intoxicants, pornography, violence, stealing, gambling, alcohol abuse, and coarse language (Hsing Yun, 1999); and ultimately the Eightfold Noble Path (Pagoda number eight): right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right exertion, right mindfulness, right concentration. The covered walkways along either side of the Eight Pagodas are engraved records of BMC and Fo Guang Shan's history, as well as a Benefactor's Wall (that spans the perimeter of the central complex) to commemorate the contributions by a thousand temples, and a million people across the world who have made BMC possible. This is also to symbolize the wondrous causes and conditions that are the

quintessence foundation to the existence of everything in the universe, and a reminder of each individual's connection with the rest of the world.

Along the path of such guidance then leads to the entrance of the Front Hall, where statues of the lion and elephant remind Buddhists to voice the Truth (of Dharma) like a roaring lion, and be mindful of the historical Buddha who was said to have been conceived through a white elephant in Queen Maya's dream. The Front Hall, which holds the significance of a mountain gate, symbolizes a two way connection: 1) entrance into the sacred space of spirituality, and 2) connection out into the secular world in an era of globalization.

3. Cultural significance: Every structure and facility within the BMC signifies a particular meaning (of the Dharma) and serves a purpose that falls under the categories of art, culture, education, and religion. Treading backwards along the same path from the Front Hall, visitors are introduced to the Buddha who was born into this world (through the conception of the white elephant to speak the Dharma (like a roaring lion). Before the journey along the Great Path to Buddhahood begins, information, memorabilia, meals and refreshments are provided inside the Front Hall for visitors to freshen up, recuperate from the traveling, and prepare themselves for a religious, cultural, artistic and educational experience within BMC. Beyond that, the trip along the main axis are indoor galleries that include: a benefactor's lounge for welcoming, meeting, and briefing purposes; a "Home for Celebration" (喜慶之家) for families to celebrate weddings, anniversaries, coming of age, or birthdays; a bookstore for intellectuals who wish to seek information and knowledge on Buddhism; a children's multimedia gallery to learn the good qualities of the mind through the Three Acts of Goodness; the Venerable Master Hsing Yun One-Stroke Calligraphy exhibition that brings visitors into the profound wisdom of Dharma through his writings; and bas-reliefs depicting the wisdom of Chan Masters (Ch'an Art and Stories) by Gao Ertai as well as protecting and respecting lives (Life Protection Murals) by Feng Zhikai. In addition with the eighteen arhat and eight Chinese Buddhist master statues on the Bodhi Wisdom Concourse, these art pieces serve the purpose of exhibition as well as inspiration, as each of them tell a story, each piece becomes a stop for school excursions where students are able to learn from the value and wisdom of them by forms of visual connection and story-telling.

Coming towards the end of the path are the Main Hall and Fo Guang Big Buddha. The traditional Buddhist architecture provides a space of worship and spiritual connection where Buddhists can climb onto the main pagoda for religious activities such as circumambulating, venerating, and making prayers to the buddha statue and reliefs found in and outside of the Main Hall.

On the first floor of the Main Hall are four permanent exhibitions on Buddhist Festivities, Life of the Buddha, History of Fo Guang Shan, and Treasures of Underground Palace of Xi'an Famensi Temple built with cutting-edge technology such as 4D movies and interactive displays for visitors to connect historically, culturally, religiously, and even leisurely.

On the second floor are exhibition spaces that have so far housed hundreds of exhibitions of art and photography mainly by artists from Taiwan and mainland China, and also prestige cultural artifacts under consecutive five-year cooperation contracts with China Cultural Relics Exchange Center, thereby enhancing cross-strait exchanges and relationships

through cultural and artistic cooperation.

The Great Enlightenment Auditorium located within the central space of the Main Hall is a multi-media, multifunction performance-conference space (seats up to 2,000) that has so far staged performances by international professional troupes for visitors who have a liking to Chinese acrobatics, musicals, traditional dances, forums, lectures, concerts, and Buddhist chanting performances. Located beneath the Main Hall are forty-eight underground palaces which are planned to house both ancient artifacts and items from modern era to serve as a reserve of human wisdom and history. One palace will be opened once every hundred years to remind those in future of what life was once like in each period of human history.

For families that have come to bond and relax, the open landscape gardens are fitted with mini-stages for games and performances, and also animal figures to create a friendly and relaxing outdoor environment for children.

In general, Venerable Master Hsing Yun's design of the BMC is one of multifaceted purposes and functions based on the objective of presenting the Dharma through any possible means suited to the needs and interest of visitors.

4. Statistics:

i. Number of visitors since opening:

Year Month	2011/12/25 - 2012/12	2013	2014	2015
January	1,266,757	405,482	473,220	696,025
February	1,580,943	4,740,975	4,821,757	2,031,737
March	659,654	604,240	480,052	1,558,080
April	824,188	562,572	432,860	631,329
May	638,519	440,356	418,481	627,912
June	509,071	453,111	402,458	561,818
July	661,426	451,240	676,651	590,092
August	483,586	437,195	650,561	535,557
September	436,979	568,898	600,856	492,866
October	558,834	437,887	697,244	
November	668,024	453,386	727,831	
December	772,006	745,022	717,923	
Total	9,059,987	10,300,364	11,099,894	7,725,417

Figure 3. Annual number of visitors since BMC's opening
(Source: BMC Report, 2014)

ii. Number of visitors to world's major museums in 2014:

Museum	Founding Year	Admission	Annual Visitors
The Palance Museum, Beijing	1420	Paid	15,340,000
Buddha Memorial Center, Kaohsiung	2011	Free	11,099,894
The Louvre, Paris	1793	Paid	9,300,000
British Museum, London	1753	Free	6,800,000
National Palace Museum, Taipei	1965	Paid	5,400,000

Figure 4. Annual number of visitors of world's top museums
(Source: official museum websites)

iii. Number of booked services in 2014:

Services for groups are provided in the form of guided tour, school excursion, and family celebrations (weddings, anniversaries, coming of age and so on.)

	Pre-Booked Services	Requests Upon Arrival
Groups	12,043	6,308
Individuals	341,283	49,271

Figure 5. Number of booked services (by group & individual) in 2014
(Source: BMC Report, 2014)

	Asia	America	Europe	Oceania	Africa
Groups	11,482	239	87	63	8
Individuals	248,286	2,359	582	554	61

Figure 6. Number of booked services (by continent) in 2014
(Source: BMC Report, 2014)

Region	Number of Countries	Countries
Asia	20	1. Taiwan, 2. Mainland China, 3. Singapore, 4. Malaysia, 5. Philippines, 6. Thailand, 7. Japan, 8. Nepal, 9. Korea, 10. Vietnam, 11. India, 12. Indonesia, 13. Myanmar, 14. Brunei, 15. Sri Lanka, 16. Bhutan, 17. Mongolia, 18. Israel, 19. Laos, 20. Cambodia
America	14	1. US, 2. Ecuador, 3. Canada, 4. Haiti, 5. Chili, 6. Honduras, 7. Mexico, 8. Panama, 9. Nicaragua, 10. Guatemala, 11. Paraguay, 12. Brazil, 13. Porto Reco, 14. Argentina
Europe	15	1. Italy, 2. France, 3. Germany, 4. Austria, 5. Netherlands, 6. Switzerland, 7. Denmark, 8. Belgium, 9. Spain, 10. Russia, 11. Sweden, 12. Poland, 13. Finland, 14. Czech Republic, 15. Ukraine
Oceania	4	1. Australia, 2. New Zealand, 3. Solomon Islands, 4. Papua New Guinea,
Others	Multinational Groups	1. Greece, 2. Gambia, 3. Fiji, 4. Swaziland, 5. Belize, 6. Nauru, 7. Salvador, 8. Dominica, 9. Columbia, 10. Costa Rica, 11. Malawi, 12. Marshall Islands, 13. The Commonwealth of Dominica, 14. Denmark, 15. Tuvalu, 16. Sudan, 17. Sao Tome and Principe, 18. Slovakia, 19. Jordan, 20. Lithuania, 21. Latvia, 22. Luxembourg, 23. Portugal, 24. Nigeria, 25. St. Lucia, 26. Palau, 27. Bahrain, 28. Burkina Faso

Figure 7. Number of booked services (by country) in 2014
(Source: BMC Report, 2014)

iv. Awards received:

Year	Award
2012	Winner of the Golden Lion Award for Culture and Education in the 13th National Architecture Golden Award.
2013	Listed as “Top Hundred Religious Spots in Taiwan” by the Ministry of the Interior.
2014	Certified as a member, the youngest, of International Council of Museum (ICOM).
2014	Winner of TripAdvisor 2014’s Traveler’s Choice Award and ranked top as the most popular tourist spot in Kaohsiung
2014, October	Award for Outstanding Lavatory Structure by the Kaohsiung government.
2014, November	Became the first religious organization and museum to receive the ISO 50001 energy management certification.
2014, December	Bus Lavatory listed as an Excellent Lavatory by the Environmental Protection Administration, and in the digital book The Magic Journey of the Toilet Kingdom.

Figure 8. Achievements of the Buddha Memorial Center
(Source: BMC Report, 2014)

b. Objectives and Missions

The future directions of missions of BMC are set as follows:

i. Development Goals: “To present the Buddha Memorial Center through the arts and movies, on the humanistic and international dimensions.”

ii. Missions:

1. To reserve human wisdom and history through the forty-eight underground palaces.
2. To promote life education through the promotion of cultural arts and environmental protection.
3. To enhance cross-straits cultural exchange for the revival of Chinese culture.
4. To preserve and recreate Buddhist arts through exhibitions and academic conferences.
5. To serving the public with respect and tolerance, through sharing resources, and with warm hospitality. (BMC Website, 2015)

The purpose-built facilities, development, and organizational structures of BMC as a whole clearly shows that it has the capacity of more than just a religious tourist site. It illustrates the changes that are taking place in contemporary religious tourism in Taiwan.

4. Forms of Modern Religious Tourism at the Buddha Memorial Center

The open landscape, multi-function buildings, diverse missions and solid religious background of Buddhist beliefs at BMC have brought about substantial quantitative and qualitative changes with regards to motivation, journey, needs, and participation in visitors.

a. Role shifts in the visitor(s)

By applying Collins-Kreiner and Kliot’s Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum (2000) (see figure 1) to the BMC phenomena, the motivations and roles of visitors are able to shift and change more readily depending on the location of BMC which they visit. For example, starting at the Front Hall where shops (Starbucks, 7-11, Water Drop Teahouse, memorabilia), food and information are located (see photo 1 & 2), most visitors start off as secular tourists seeking to satisfy their needs for recreation, but as they step out of the Front Hall and proceed onto the Great Path to Buddhahood, their behaviors upon the sight that greets their eyes (see photo 3) begin to vary depending on their religious or cultural background. For example, for a non-Buddhist who has decided to visit BMC for merely tourist and cultural purposes, his reaction upon first encounter of the Great Path to Buddhahood may be “wowed” by the grandeur of the architecture, and then proceed to examining the buildings and art displays around BMC.



Photo 1: Gift shop and café inside BMC



Photo 2: Vegetarian meals of The BMC Water Drop Teahouse



Photo 3: A view of BMC's Great Path to Buddhahood



Photo 4: Life Protection Mural by artist Feng Zhikai

As he walks along the covered walkways behind the Eight Pagodas, he begins to appreciate the artistic aspects of BMC found on the bas-reliefs of Ch'an stories and life protection murals (see photo 4), and even the galleries exhibitions of artifacts or paintings inside the Main Hall, his increased attention on the cultural and artistic aspects of BMC shifts him back towards the role of a tourist.

However, as he proceeds into to the Main Hall and witnesses a prayer service that is taking place inside the Jade Buddha Shrine where the Buddha's tooth relic is located, or on the Big Buddha platform where those identified as pious pilgrims are devoting themselves to the rituals of prayer, circumambulating the pagoda, and if he happens to be troubled by life and is seeking guidance and comfort, his sentiment may change, causing him to also join his palms and passively participate in the prayer as an observer. At this point, being affected by the sacred ambience, his connection with the Buddha may change, and thus his role shifts towards being a pilgrim. Thus his role shifts being a secular tourist to a cultural tourist, and on some level, to being a pilgrim all within the same visit.



Photo 5: Prayer service inside the Jade Buddha Shrine.



Photo 6: Circumambulating the Main Stupa of BMC

In cases of visitors who come to BMC with other than the above motivations, for example, for the reason of accompanying friends or family to BMC, their motivation may be merely social or ethnical. For example, being invited to the Home for Celebrations (Five Harmonies Pagoda, see photo 8) to attend a Buddhist wedding, family gathering, or anniversary. Another case would be finding a Sunday family outing place, and thus arrive at the children's gallery (Two Assemblies Pagoda, see photo7), their visit to the Center would have very little with being either a tourist or a pilgrim. At the same time, after their attendance of scheduled events, if they start to walk around BMC, their role may suddenly start to shift again and again.



Photo 7: Interactive Children's Gallery.



Photo 8: A Buddhist Wedding inside the Home of Celebrations

b. Cultural Tourism: Due to the complexities of motivations in cultural tourists from some seventy countries across the five continents (see figure 7), the BMC has been designed as a multi-functional site. In other words, not only does it satisfy the religious needs of the visitor, it might also comprise of a special attraction -- like its unique architecture and wall paintings. Since the line between religion and culture could be an arbitrary one, when visitors come to see Taiwan's tallest bronze Buddha statue, the One-Stroke Calligraphy pieces written by a ninety-year-old Buddhist master who has lost 90% of his vision, to taste delicious vegetarian food, experience Tea Ceremony, or even simply to check out the most visited tourist spot in Southern Taiwan, visitors are indirectly experiencing the Buddha culture of veneration, Dharma in words, respect for life, and so on.

Furthermore, as art sees no boundaries, performances such as Taiwanese Opera, Chinese Opera, Chinese acrobatics, English musical on the Life of the Buddha, and Hokkien dramas (BMC Report, 2014) have been staged inside the Great Enlightenment Auditorium for performing arts and show enthusiasts.

c. Religious Tourism: In satisfying religious pilgrim's need for a spiritual, devotional, and even a disciplined religious experience, BMC's regular prayer services, circumambulation of pagodas, three-steps-and-one-bow pilgrimage, and temple stays at the nearby Fo Guang Shan Monastery provide a variety of itineraries and programs for members of the monastery and BMC. For the less pious on the other hand, or the less devoted quasi-pilgrims, religious festivals can also be classified as cultural pilgrimage, as they have both cultural and religious rituals and traditions that are visited by both secular and religious tourists. The festival and services at BMC are not always exclusive to Buddhism. Being aware of the importance of not just world peace, but also interfaith harmony, BMC holds an annual "When Buddha Meets the Gods Event" (see photos 9-11) where Buddhist, Taoist, and even Catholic processions can be witnessed gathering inside the Center. BMC is also home to the newly founded Federation of Chinese Traditional Religious Associations (中華傳統宗教協會) to enhance greater interfaith exchange and fellowship.



Photo 9, 10, 11: The annual “When Buddha Meets the Gods Event” inside BMC

d. Diverse Modern Religious Tourism:

The meaning of the pilgrimage is related to the experience of traveling itself (Tomasi, 2002). Pilgrimage in BMC can be a “sacred sightseeing,” where the majestic architecture and landscape are experienced by journeying through the complex itself and appreciating the legends associated with it (Kinsley, 1998).

In modern religious tourism, the convenience of travel enables a quick getaway to “sacred places” as a change from the mundane urban life to spend a holiday and a satisfying experience of fulfilling a religious need. At the same time, increasing demands for good accommodation, contemporary food and a greater choice of leisure are only becoming higher and higher.

The diverse range of activities and multifunction facilities of BMC certainly have done, if not a fantastic job, at least a more than satisfactory effort to provide a leisurely, informative, spiritual, and satisfying experience for whole families, foreign or local. This could be one of the reasons that BMC is being included in travel packages for visitors who are looking for a quality getaway, and clear evidence of existing professionalism (usually inherent in tourism enterprise) now appearing in contemporary religious tourism.

5. Conclusion

The study of the Buddha Memorial Center illustrates the changes that have taken place in religious tourism in Taiwan. Without replacing or eliminating pilgrimage in its traditional form, BMC has been able to integrate it with a more leisure-oriented travel that enables tourists to maintain their freedom in choosing between behaviors that are religious and those that are of tourists merely looking for a quality getaway. At the same time, interests of visits across all ages can be satisfied in one way or the other, either through the religious cultural, historical, social, or ethnical aspects of tourism.

While integrating various forms of tourism into a site of strong Buddhist dimension, people are able to visit BMC to fulfill their religious needs without the pressure of having to separate their other needs from it. Thus a new form of modern religious tourism appears fit to explain the phenomena. A strong connection between religion and tourism with greater flexibility and boundless potential is certainly a key to this modern form of religious tourism.

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