

# **A Study on the Relationship between Religious Consumerist**

## **Landscape Resources and Religious Experience**

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### **Abstract**

*Faith in a Gods or divinities has always been the focus and sustenance of the development of civilizations, and is closely related to people's lives. Coupled with the arts and humanities, astronomy, geography and customs, and living customs has played a part in shaping unique landscape resources and the possession of rich and deep cultural assets. With their involvement in religious activities, people have acquired sustenance and a sense of belonging from their religious beliefs and this has subsequently brought pleasure from tourism. There are over 12,000 registered temples in Taiwan, forming a special phenomenon in Taiwanese folk religion. Therefore, an important topic for discussion regarding to the development of religious tourism will be: how to shape landscape resources for religious consumerists in*

*order to offer the consumerists profound experience, as well as creating an in-depth understanding of Taiwanese religious cultures and generating a reliance on recognition and emotions of consumerists.*

*Themed on researches which were previously undertaken on the relationship between religious consumerist landscape resources and religious experience, this study adopts the Nankunshen Temple as the research object for empirical study. The research results of this study consist of: (1) through factor analysis, this study extracted the factor dimensions of religious consumerist landscape resources. In order, these dimensions are “the holiness and solemnity of the religion”, “the beauty of the magnificent art”, “atmosphere of the religious culture”, “the center of spiritual sustenance” and “the reliance of living philosophy”. The factor dimensions of experience are “sensory experience”, “thought experience”, “emotional experience”, “action experience”, and “relational experience”. (2) In terms of the dimensions of the landscape resources of religious tourism, “the holiness and solemnity of the religion” was placed first, followed by “the beauty of magnificent art”; (3) In terms of the experience dimensions, the first place went to “sensory experience”, followed by “thought experience”. (4) After regression analysis, it is found that religious consumerist landscape resources were the most important factor for experience. In terms of sensory experience, the beauty of magnificent buildings occupied first place, followed by spiritual sustenance. In terms of emotional experience, the first place went to the center of spiritual sustenance, followed by the reliance of life philosophy. Regarding thought experiences, religious cultural atmosphere was in first place, followed by the center of spiritual sustenance. For the action experience, the first place was given to the center of spiritual sustenance, followed by religious cultural atmosphere. For relational experience, the reliance of life philosophy was in first place, followed by religious cultural atmosphere. The research results of this study can offer a reference for relevant organizations involved in the development of religious tourism.*

## **Key Words**

## **1. Introduction**

Since the beginning of human civilization, belief in Gods and divinities has been the focus for the development of civilization and sustenance, with religion playing an important role in politics, economy and life. The Greek philosopher Block once said, “Where there is hope, there is religion”. Religion offers people hope and enriches people’s spiritual lives (Dugandzija, 1986; Vukonic, 1992). Even in the era of scientific progress, religion is an important part of people’s spiritual and recreational lives. In Taiwan, religion is popular, with 15,238 temples registered by the end of 2012 (Ministry of the Interior Department of Statistics, 2012). This has resulted in the special phenomenon in Taiwan’s folk religious beliefs that “there is a small temple five steps away and a big temple 10 steps away”, indicating that religious belief and activities are of great significance in the social development and daily lives of the Taiwanese. Because religion is coupled with the components of humanities and arts, astronomy, geography and customs, religion has shaped unique landscape resources and possesses rich and deep cultural assets. With the help of religious activities, such as pilgrimages, religious tours, and pilgrimage groups, etc., people involved can trace the beginnings of religious belief and have the enjoyment of travelling, and this can further lead to religious tourism activities. This is conducive to the development of religious tourism travel, indicating that religion is a cultural asset and an important tourism resource.

Religious tourism combined with religious culture and tourism is an in-depth travel experience and empowers the mass public to experience religious culture. In the meantime, such tourism can enrich the tourism industry’s resources and promote the development of both religion and tourism. What experiences will landscape resources formed by religious

tourism offer? Will tourism enhance the understanding of religious culture? These are important topics for discussion regarding religious travel. Therefore, this study, based on researches into the relationship between the landscape resources of religious tourist attractions and religious experience, adopted the Nankunshen Temple as the research object for empirical study, offering a reference to related organizations concerning with the development of religious tourism.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Landscape Resources**

The Oxford Dictionary defines a landscape as a picture representing an area of countryside. Landscape also refers to natural scenery and terrain and is often translated into 地景 (meaning: a picture representing an area of countryside) or 景觀 (meaning: landscape) in Chinese. Stamp (1961) believed that a landscape is the key to constituting the specific morphology relationship of an area, including both physical and cultural parts. Monkhouse (1970) held that landscape refers to the surface characteristics of an area, including the terrain and origin of every object, its appearance, and either its natural or human form. Landscape is the reflection of space and human behavior and plays an important role within the background of human activities, which will grow and change over time (Meining, 1979; Martinn & James, 1993). Comprehensively speaking, landscape can be divided into multiple meanings of both physical and non-physical resources, the natural landscape and the cultural landscape, tangible and non-tangible landscape and inherent and symbolic meanings, all of which reflects the interaction between humans and the environment. It is a dynamic system that grows and changes over periods of time.

Although landscape resources are tangible, through subjective perception and the interpretation of individuals, landscape resources can be given new meanings and values of

society. Neilson (1959) believes that a landscape refers to all visible natural scenery at first sight. Ward and Russell (1981) claimed that a landscape is a natural or manmade outdoor environment and people can observe it directly through appreciation and usage. Through the observation of landscape resources, individuals can directly experience an extension to their imagination and stimulus from landscape resources themselves. Santayana (1955) considered that natural landscape resources consist of multiple factors that enable eyes to freely choose, emphasize, and allocate and enrich association, whilst blurring the emotional stimulus. Except for natural landscapes, a tourist destination can form an attractive and charming image through the combination of manmade facilities and the destination's features. The establishment of tourist-oriented landscape resources is different from those of natural landscapes, and are named consumerist landscapes, an important topic worthy of discussion.

Taiwanese temples are often located in beautiful locations where natural landscape resources are abundant. The architectural planning of the space and formation of the layout are usually equipped with cultural and artistic features, which fully represent the rural culture of Taiwan, the paradise of God and the central beliefs of followers, all of which are full of touristic values. A visit to a temple is one of the key features of Taiwanese tourism. Therefore, Taiwanese religious landscape resources consist of abundant resources such as nature, humanities, historical and social resources. Through the subjective perception and interpretation of tourists, the religious landscape resources are given new social meanings and values and the formed images are known as religious consumerist landscape resources. When tourists are involved in religious tourism, the religious consumerist landscape resources consist of: (1) the holiness and solemnity of the religion as religion is a belief. Religious architecture embodies the relationship between humans and God through buildings and rituals, whilst integrating the real world and the imaginary world to make people feel the sacredness of the religion. The sacredness of the Nankunshen Temple comes from its decorated atmosphere. Taking the Jade Emperor Shrine as an example, it has a height of 6.21 meters.

The decoration of two meter wide gold decree and the increased dome generates sanctity and calmness. (2) The reliance of life philosophy: religion was the starting point for the original civilization of primitive human society and is an important part of a human's economic and cultural life. At the same time, religion is a type of specific thinking and belief and embodies a universal life phenomena and spiritual sustenance, which consists of the rich implications of life philosophy. The Nankunshen Temple is the source and origin of the religious beliefs of Taiwanese Wang Yeh and has many historical and belief cultural implications. The preserved literature and scriptures kept by the Nankunshen Temple includes the philosophy towards followers and the formation of its own belief philosophy. (3) Spiritual sustenance center: involvement in religious tourism activities empowers people to escape from the hubbub, enjoy the peace and tranquility, carry out self-cultivation, relieve physical and mental problems, enrich their lives, acquire support from the Gods, seek spiritual solace and acquire spiritual relaxation and satisfaction. In addition to the homage ceremony and atmosphere, tourists can be purified both physically and mentally. (4) The beauty of the magnificent art: religious cultural relics, carvings and literature can cleverly make use of the beauty of religious and cultural art to create a rich and artistic space, such as the Notre-Dame de Paris, Basilica di San Pietro in Vatican, the Pya Tha Da Pagoda, the Thousand Buddha Caves in Dunhuang, China, and the Taiwan Buddha Memorial Center, etc. The architectural beauty of the Nankunshen Temple consists of religious literature, religious figures, decoration and religious arts, such as the Grand Kun Garden, Stone Lion and other mythical stories. (5) Experiences of religious culture: religion tends to be kind towards people, and the magnificent religious palace is indeed attractive, offering a vision of compassion towards all society that moves the mass public. It is important to prostrate oneself before Buddha, and the experience of decree and the practices of charity can leave a strong impression in people's minds. Religious culture plays an important role in educating people in goodness, learning the power of mercy from the Gods and an inclusive state of mind through respect, sincerity and

thanksgiving, which is indeed spiritual sustenance. The religious activities held by the Nankunshen Temple every year, such as the enshrinement ceremony, salvation, Salt Peace Festival and the collection of the first incense enables the mass public to clearly feel the religious culture surrounding the temple.

## **2.2 Experience**

Experience is composed of many repeated similar feelings and the accumulative personal interpretation towards every day occurrences, a perception of customers (Goffman, 1974). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) further put forward the new perspective of consumption experience, stating that the purpose of consumption is hedonic consumption from the perspective of sensibilities and consideration of the functions from the side of rationality, with the belief that consumption experience comes from the pursuit of fantasies, feelings and fun. Kelly (1987) proposed his comment on experience whereby experience is the perception attained after a period of time or activities and the processing of the experience accordingly. Experience is no longer simple and pure feelings but is the interpretative consciousness of a behavior and the spiritual process that is closely connected with the time and space.

Experience is the responses generated after the stimulus of invisible events, and often originates from the observation or involvement of individuals and the generation of ideas that the experience is real or imaginary (Nagasawa, 2009). In 1999, Schmitt proposed the concept of experiential marketing consisting of two layers in its framework: the first layer refers to a strategic experiential module, the strategic basis of experiential marketing; the second layer refers to the medium of experience (communication, identification, product, the joint establishment of brands, environment, website and people), the strategic tool of experiential marketing attained through combined strategic modules. Schmitt (1999) proposed five

experiences, which are sensory experience, emotional experience, thought experience, action experience and related experience.

Based on the statements above, experiences are the responses of individuals towards involvement and feelings towards specific events or after activities. This response is generated by the stimulus of the feelings, emotions and perception of individuals, although individuals tend to be entirely different with regards to their feelings toward the experience. This study believes that the experience of religious tourism can be the direct stimulus of senses, feelings and thoughts toward the shared experience through actual involvement that further changes the lifestyle of tourists or the relationship of specific groups. Therefore, this study adopts the five experiences (senses, feelings, thoughts, actions and relations) proposed by Schmitt (1999) as measurement items to explore the experience of the Nankunshen Temple.

### **3. Questionnaire Design and Investigation**

This study adopted the method of questionnaire content analysis that makes use of the content from the Nankunshen Temple blog as the basis for the items. The questionnaire is divided into three parts: religious consumerist landscape resources, religious experience and the basic information of tourists. The first section applies to religious tourism and the measurement dimensions consist of the holiness and solemnity of the religion, the reliance on life philosophy, the spiritual sustenance center, and the beauty of the magnificent art and the experiences of religious culture. The second section refers to religious experience with measure dimensions consisting of senses, emotions, thoughts, actions and relations. This first and second sections of this study used a Likert five-point scale to measure both parts, with (1)—(5) representing strongly disagree to strongly agree. The third part consists of the basic information of tourists, including gender, age, educational attainment, number of times of

involvement, marital status, occupation, place of residence and monthly income. This study adopted a nominal scale to measure this data.

This study mainly adopted convenience sampling and the questionnaire was aimed at the tourists visiting the Nankunshen Temple. This study distributed a total of 600 questionnaires over January 17, 2014 (Friday), 18 (Saturday), 19 (Sunday) and February 14 (Friday), 15 (Saturday) and 16 (Sunday), a total of six days. 594 valid questionnaires were returned with a return rate of 99%.

## **4. Empirical Analysis**

### **4.1 Analysis of Sample Structure**

There are seven items for the demographic statistics; gender, age, educational attainment, marital status, place of residence, occupation and monthly income. The analytical results are shown in table 1. It shows that 54.7% of the respondents were male and 45.3% were female. The majority of the respondents were aged from 20 to 29 (26.1%), respondents aged 19 and under ranked second (23.2%), followed by respondents aged from 30 to 39 (22.1%). With respect to educational attainment, respondents who had graduated from junior colleges accounted for the majority (41.2%), and respondents who had graduated from higher and secondary vocational schools ranked second (25.9%). 57.9% of the respondents were unmarried, and 40.6% were married, with the number of unmarried people larger than that of married people. The majority of the respondents were from the South (70.4%), with respondents from the North (16.7%). With respect to their occupations, most of the respondents were students (31.6%), with respondents from the service industry ranked in second place (19.5%). Most of the respondents had a monthly income under NTD 20,000 (41.8%), with respondents with a monthly income between NTD 20,001 to 30,000 ranked second (24.6%).

**Table 1 Analytical results of the Sample Structure**

Sample Structure	Item	Number of Respondents	%	Sample Structure	Item	Number of Respondents	%
Gender	Male	325	54.7	Marital Status	Unmarried	344	57.9
	Female	269	45.3		Married	241	40.6
Age	Under (including) 19	138	23.2		Other	9	1.5
	From 20 to 29	155	26.1		Occupation	Student	188
	From 30 to 39	131	22.1	Military, Public and Teaching Personnel		41	6.9
	From 40 to 49	72	12.1	Service industry		116	19.5
	From 50 to 59	69	11.6	Freelancing		60	10.1
	Above (including) 60	29	4.9	Manufacturing industry		82	13.8
Educational Background	Primary and middle schools	135	22.7	Business		48	8.1
	Higher and secondary vocational	154	25.9	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Animal	12	2.0	

	schools		Husbandry				
	Junior	245	41.2	Retired	17	2.9	
	college		Others		30	5.1	
	Graduate	60	10.1	(including above)			
Residence	The North		99	16.7	Under NTD 20,000	248	41.8
	The central area		66	11.1	From NTD 20,001 to 30,000	146	24.6
	The South		418	70.4	From NTD 30,001 to 40,000	89	15.0
	The East		5	1.0	From NTD 40,001 to 50,000	37	6.2
	Off the main island		2	0.3	50,001-60,000	28	4.7
	Others		3	0.5	From NTD 50,001 to 60,000	46	7.7
					Above NTD 60,000	46	7.7

#### 4.2 Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

This study adopted factor analysis for religious consumerist landscape resources. First, this study adopted the appropriateness of the samples, KMO=0.95. The approximate chi-square distribution of Bartlett's ball line verification was 9947.07, and its significant was 0.000. The results show that it is suitable to conduct factor analysis. This study used the principle

component analysis to extract five dimensions. There were seven items for the first factor dimension and the interpretation variance was 15.26%, named as “the beauty of magnificent art”. There were six items for the second factor dimension, the interpretation variance was 13.26%, and it was named as “the holiness and solemnity of the religion”. There were six items in the third factor dimension, the interpretation variance was 13.73%, and it was called “atmosphere of religious culture”. There were four items in the fourth factor dimension, the interpretation variance was 15.30%, and it was named as “the center of spiritual sustenance”. Finally, there were four items in the fifth factor dimension, the interpretation variance was 10.47%, and it was called “the reliance of living philosophy”. Regarding the dimensions of religious consumerist landscape resources, “the beauty of magnificent art” scored the highest, with “the center of spiritual sustenance” in second place. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value for each factor of the religious tourism consumerist landscape resources were 0.86, 0.86, 0.84, 0.86, and 0.86, respectively, indicating that the internal consistency of each dimension of the religious tourism consumerist landscape resources was good.

This study adopted factor analysis for “religious experience”. First, this study conducted the appropriateness test,  $KMO=0.95$ . The approximate chi-square distribution of Bartlett's ball line verification was 6512.75, and its significance level was 0.000. The results show that it was suitable for factor analysis. This study used the principle component analysis to extract five common factors. There were four items for the first factor dimension and the interpretation variance was 19.28%, known as “sensory experience”. There were three items for the second factor dimension and the interpretation variance was 18.89%, known as “relational experience”. There were three items in the third factor dimension and the interpretation variance was 15.67%, known as “action experience”. There were three items in the fourth factor dimension and the interpretation variance was 14.25%, known as “emotion experience”. Finally, there were two items in the fifth factor dimension and the interpretation variance was 11.51%, known as “thought experience”. Regarding the experience dimensions,

both “sense experience” and “relational experience” scored the highest, with “thought experience” in second place. Regarding the experience dimensions, “sense experience”, “relational experience” and “thought experience” scored the highest, with “emotional experience” in second place. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value for each factor of the religious tourism consumerist landscape resources were 0.90, 0.88, 0.86, 0.87, and 0.88, respectively, indicating that the internal consistency of each experience dimension was good.

**Table 2 Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis of Religious Consumerist Landscape Resources and Religious Experience Dimensions**

	Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Eigenvalue	Explained Variation %	Cronbach’s $\alpha$
Consumerist Landscape Resources	Beauty of the magnificent art	4.38	0.51	1.95	15.46	0.86
	Center of spiritual sustenance	4.50	0.48	1.67	13.26	0.86
	Atmosphere of religious culture	4.33	0.56	1.73	13.73	0.84
	Holiness and solemnity of the religion	4.17	0.68	1.93	15.30	0.86
	Reliance of living philosophy	4.03	0.68	1.32	10.47	0.86
Experience	Sensory Experience	4.33	0.56	2.89	19.28	0.90
	Relational Experience	3.89	0.82	2.83	18.89	0.88
	Action Experience	3.99	0.77	2.35	15.67	0.86
	Emotional Experience	4.18	0.66	2.13	14.25	0.87
	Thought	4.20	0.70	1.72	11.51	0.88

	Experience					
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### 4.3 The Relationship between Religious Landscape and Religious Experience

In order to understand the relationship between a religious landscape and religious experience, this study took sensory experience (Y1), emotional experience (Y2), thought experience (Y3), action experience (Y4) and relational experience (Y5) as the dependent variables and considered five dimensions of consumerist landscape resources, namely, holiness and solemnity of the religion (X1), reliance of living philosophy (X2), center of spiritual sustenance (X3), beauty of the magnificent art (X4) and atmosphere of religious culture (X5). A stepwise regression analysis was carried out and the results are shown in Table 3. The results tell us that, regarding the influence of consumerist landscape resources on sensory experience, “beauty of the magnificent art” scored the highest, followed by “center of spiritual sustenance”. With regards to the influence on emotional experience, “center of spiritual sustenance” scored the highest, followed by “reliance of living philosophy”. In terms of the influence on thought experience, “atmosphere of religious culture” scored the highest, followed by “atmosphere of religious culture”. In terms of the influence on action experience, “center of spiritual sustenance” scored the highest, followed by “atmosphere of religious culture”. Lastly, regarding the influence on relational experience, “reliance of living philosophy” scored the highest, followed by “atmosphere of religious culture”.

**Table 3 Stepwise Regression Analysis of Consumerist Landscape Resources on Religious Attachment**

Y1= 0.135*X1 + 0.268*X3 + 0.411*X4				
T Value	(3.343)	(7.065)	(10.634)	
P Value	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	
F value=185.406 , P value=0.000 , R2=0.486				
Y2= 0.111*X1 + 0.146*X2 + 0.480*X3 + 0.111*X4 + 0.093*X5				
T value	(3.121)	(4.189)	(13.487)	(3.309) (2.190)
P value	(0.002)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000) (0.029)
F value=220.501 , P value=0.000 , R2=0.652				
Y3= 0.146*X2 + 0.197*X3 + 0.189*X4 + 0.235*X5				
T value	(3.351)	(4.352)	(4.127)	(4.442)
P value	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
F value=109.876 , P value=0.000 , R2=0.427				
Y4= 0.210*X2 + 0.412*X3 + 0.247*X5				
T value	(5.770)	(10.715)	(6.387)	
P value	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	
F value=277.372 , P value=0.000 , R2=0.586				
Y5= 0.102X 1 + 0.292*X2 + 0.108*X5				
T value	(2.517)	(7.336)	(2.464)	
P value	(0.012)	(0.000)	(0.014)	
F value=172.032 , P value=0.000 , R2=0.539				

## **5. Conclusion and Suggestions**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Regarding the cognitive factors of religious landscape resources from the perspective of tourists, this study extracted five factors (in order): holiness and solemnity of the religion, beauty of the magnificent art, atmosphere of religious culture, center of spiritual sustenance and reliance of living philosophy, indicating that, for visitors, the holiness and solemnity of the religious places, the solemn atmosphere, the religious artistic decoration, carvings, color paintings and the publicity on the religious culture are important consumerist landscape resources. Therefore, such physical, tangible, visible and touchable resources can directly affect the tourists' perception towards religious holy places.

Regarding the factors of the religious experience from the perspective of tourists, this study extracted five factors (in order): sensory experience, thought experience, emotional experience, action experience and relational experience, indicating that the most direct experience effects of religious holy places on tourists come from sensory touch and the religious culture and history. Therefore, through individual endeavors, thoughts and communication, tourists can feel the holiness and solemnity of religious holy places and better understand a religious culture, enhancing the experience levels of tourists towards religion.

Through regression analysis, this study shows that there consumerist landscape resources have a significant influence on experience and these levels of influence vary according to the different consumerist landscape resources. Regarding the influence of consumerist landscape resources on sensory experience, "the beauty of magnificent art" scored the highest, followed by "center of spiritual sustenance". Regarding the influence on emotional experience, "center of spiritual sustenance" scored the highest, followed by "reliance of living philosophy". In terms of the influence on thought experience, "atmosphere of religious culture" scored the highest, followed by "center of spiritual sustenance". In terms of the influence on action experience, "center of spiritual sustenance" scored the highest, followed by "atmosphere of

religious culture”. Lastly, regarding the influence on relational experience, “reliance of living philosophy” scored the highest, followed by “atmosphere of religious culture”.

## **5.2 Suggestions**

In order to enhance the integration of the religious resources at the Nankunshen Temple, this study suggests that the Nankunshen Temple connects the resources of related religious activities, religious rituals, religious cultural artifacts, religious art and unique landscape resources and further shapes the spiritual sustenance center of the Nankunshen Temple by constructing the religious Wang Yeh Culture atmosphere. The Nankunshen Temple possesses abundance of religious artist resources, and with a sound plan, these resources can be put in order and further affect the perception of tourists towards other religious landscape resources, finally enhancing the image of the consumerist landscape resources of the Nankunshen Temple to attract further attention from tourists.

The Nankunshen Temple is a religious holy place that features an abundance of religious culture, artistic and landscapes. In order to deepen the public of religious experience from the Nankunshen Temple, this study suggests that the Nankunshen Temple should plan Wang Yeh culture experience activities to bring together the tourists and the religion, such as camping, volunteering, and rituals, etc. so as to enhance the system and resource management of the temple services. Dissemination of the related religious activities information through various channels can increase the opportunities to experience the Wang Yeh culture. Furthermore, because the religious buildings of the Nankunshen Temple are quite abundance and magnificent, the temple relatively ignores the necessity for agreeableness of service facilities, interpretation and guided tours, and these can easily affect the experience level of tourists visiting the Nankunshen Temple. Consequently, this study suggests that the temple should add facilities for rest, guided tours and interpretation to enhance the experience for tourists.

Regarding food, after approval by the governmental health department, the temple could increase diversity, specialty and promote vendors to enhance reliability and attractiveness. This will enable the Nankunshen Temple to acquire the trust and preference of visiting tourists and further deepen the religious experience for tourists.

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