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# Turner's *communitas* and non-Buddhists who visit Buddhist temples

## Abstract

*Increasing numbers of people are participating in reflexive forms of spiritual travel. Rites of passage and intensification are becoming voluntary, and so is religion. Arguably, individuals travel to achieve mental and social escape. Their quests to religious sites are self-motivated, not obligated. Because of their mobility, Americans constantly explore new outlets for their spiritual growth, including different metaphysical movements and philosophies. This study focuses on what motivates Americans to visit Buddhist temples, including their desire to explore new ideas or life directions. The results of a survey study (N = 179) conducted in Los Angeles, California indicate that non-Buddhists visit Buddhist temples for stimulus-avoidance and intellectual purposes; to mentally relax and broaden themselves in the holy site. Furthermore, they may pursue a sense of communitas – defined by social relations that are no longer normative, hierarchical and distant, but close and egalitarian. American Buddhist temple visitors are not necessarily Buddhists. As religious options grow and obligations decrease, religion has become secularized. As a consequence, non-religious temple-goers may be seeking Turner's communitas – a transition away from mundane structures toward a looser commonality of feeling with fellow visitors. They may also seek healing and renewal as well as a higher level of freedom. These individuals may desire to re-structure or re-orient their life-direction through contemplating at Buddhist temples. By examining these new phenomena, this study contributes to the field of religious tourism research; it reveals what motivates Americans to visit Buddhist temples and provides an anthropological explanation for these motivations.*

**Key words:** *Buddhist temples; communitas; motivations; religious tourism; USA*

## Introduction

In modern society, increasing numbers of people are participating in reflexive forms of spiritual travel, in addition to the rituals of their chosen religion (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Moore (1980) states that these religious practices, like rites of passage and rites of intensification are becoming voluntary in contemporary society. In addition, increasing stress and urbanization motivate people to escape from their familiar routine and travel. Traveling is therefore meaningful in the twenty-first century. Travelers seek to travel for specific purposes and to satisfy genuine reasons and goals, such as mental and social escape (Ragheb, 1996).

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An important component of religious travel is that travelers are often motivated by individual quests; they are not seriously religious or otherwise obligated to travel. This individualization of tourists' movement makes religion and religious travel not a set menu, but *a la carte* (Possamai, 2000). As a consequence, modern Americans constantly explore new ideas and groups for their spiritual growth; they explore different metaphysical movements and philosophies (Possamai, 2000). This individualistic pursuit of self-fulfillment and spirituality is symptomatic of Western modernity (Hume & Mulcock, 2004). Westerners desire experiences of "authentic difference" and naturalness that act as an auto-critique of Western secular materialism (Hume & Mulcock, 2004). One consequential phenomenon that is particularly interesting is increasing American interest in Buddhism (Prebish, 1999), yoga, meditation, and related philosophy and activities.

Among theories, Turner's (1973) *communitas* can explain why non-religious people visit religious destinations including Buddhist temples. In *communitas*, social relations are no longer normative, hierarchical, and distant, but close and egalitarian (Turner & Turner, 1978). *Communitas* also denotes "a spontaneous sensation of mutual communication and unity that arises among pilgrims, which transcends the quotidian markers of social structure, such as class, status, education, employment, or political affiliations" (Di Giovine, 2011, p. 247). As such, individuals in *communitas* might have desire to feel free from social structure, and find new-relaxed fellowship. In Buddhism, its core teaching principles are being compassionate, and realizing that we all are linked, which can contribute to the sense of 'fellow feeling' to people who visit the temples, even though they might not actively socialize each other at a temple. This study aims to apply this theory to the motivations of modern tourists who visit Buddhist temples, using the *communitas* to examine tourists' desire to build a new sense of fellowship and explore new ideas and life directions.

## Literature review

### Tourism and Turner's *communitas*

*Communitas* is "the 'direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities, which, when it happens, tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured, and free community" (Turner, 1973, p. 193). In *communitas*, individuals "temporarily transcend the hierarchical social roles that often serve to divide them in their everyday life – as well as the arrangements of these positions and statuses that we call 'social structure' (Deflem, 1991, p. 4) – and experience a oneness with each other" (Di Giovine, 2011, p. 250). However, "*communitas* should not be confused with 'community,' an idiom that implies an organized, socially structured group of people, often (but not always) living within a particular geographic region" (Di Giovine, 2011, p. 250). In fact, Turner emphasizes the transitional phase as *communitas* emerges when individuals are separated from his/her social world but not yet transformed into a new social status, and when traditional social conventions are suspended. Thus, individuals who visit Buddhist temple without strong religious affiliation might look for this kind of free and more meaningful fellowship with others instead of being related with social statuses, work, and physical community, etc.

According to Turner (1973), a pilgrim is "one who journeys to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion" (p. 197). Likewise, pilgrimage can be defined as an external and internal journey: externally

to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and understanding (Collins-Keriner & Kliot, 2000). Through pilgrimage, individuals voluntarily remove themselves from the everyday world instead of succumbing to socially (?)-enforced removal (Turner, 1973; Coleman, 2002). Though pilgrimages are often institutionalized or obligatory, they also represent a higher level of freedom, choice, volition and structurelessness (Turner, 1973). As such, pilgrimages attract people who pursue higher levels of freedom and choice in unstructured space, and are more open to differences around them. Accordingly, a person extruded from existing relationships/social structures often becomes interested in the problem of individual salvation: "he seeks some transcendental source of support to relieve him from anxieties about his immediate security and ultimate fate as a self-conscious entity" (Turner, 1973, p. 215).

Beyond appealing to modern antistructure, pilgrimage has increasingly strived toward universalism and openness: liminoid characteristics unlike mechanical solidarity, which is a bond between individuals who are collectively in opposition to another solidarity group (Turner, 1973). For example, Americans at a Buddhist temple might share a pursuit of spiritual well-being, learning about new religions/cultures, and finding their true-selves (universal and open concepts), but not at the social or material expense of other groups. Through pilgrimage they may seek to experience an invisible community, and just being in a holy site may reconstruct their world view and approach to life. Maybe non-Buddhists at a Buddhist temple have the desire to escape existing social structures and relationships, and pursue to new directions. In both cases, former structure is rejected, and perennial *communitas* is accepted, promising renewed true fellowship (Turner, 1973).

In short, it seems that people go on pilgrimages to escape the structure of the natural world, expecting to gain a more loose and egalitarian sense of community. But, Turnerians are increasingly concerned with the dichotomies of individuals versus society, free choice versus obligation, and *communitas* versus structure (Coleman, 2002). Therefore, we ought to consider secular pilgrimages as an in-between point, negotiating the space between these dichotomies. *Communitas* is therefore a gateway into a new approach to pilgrimage/movement/tourism.

## Secularization

So, pilgrimage used to be related religious seriousness. But there are more secular understandings in the 20th-21st centuries. Moore (1980) argues that pilgrimage has re-emerged as a place for grand play, and "the playful pilgrimage is particularly appropriate to a secular, technologized society in which transition is constant" (p. 207). Using Disney World as a modern form of the sacred pilgrimage, he writes that "traditional pilgrimage centers evoke the supernatural, or at least mythic-heroic past. Walt Disney World does both" (p. 215). He goes on to write that Disney World's attractions capture the liminal character of true rites of passage: "In each attraction...the visitor effects a passage and is exposed to a marvelous array of symbols evoking myths – historical, literary, and scientific narratives" (p. 213). Therefore, like pilgrimages to Disney World, the modern secular pilgrimage does not require religious devotion. Playfulness can do the serious ritual work (Turner, 1974).

Moore (1980) also writes that in modern civilizations, rites of passage cease to be obligatory, and they "...re-emerge in the context of leisure time" (p. 208). Turner calls this aesthetic behavior 'liminoid,' as distinct from 'liminal' because it has been freed from the specifically ritual context and its phase of transition" (as cited in Moore, 1980, p. 208). As a consequence, most modern societies are largely

secular and adhere to this understanding of ritual (Graburn, 1983). To this end, Turner and Turner (1978) emphasize that religion has, at some level, been moved into the leisure sphere, more subject to individuals' leisure time. This phenomenon is increasingly obvious in the U.S., and non-Buddhists visiting Buddhist temples is a consummate example. Turner and Turner (1978) also note that "Under the influence of the division between work-time and leisure-time, religion has become less serious but more solemn: less serious because it belongs to the leisure sphere it has become specialized to establish ethical standards and behavior in a social milieu characterized by multiple options, continuous change and large scale secularization" (p. 36). They add that "those who journey to pray together also play together in the secular interest in one common form of play associated with pilgrimage" (p. 37). The pilgrim's sense of sacred privacy no longer matters, and a pilgrim's journey becomes a paradigm for ethical, political or leisure behavior (Turner, 1973). As such, religion has been secularized. The increasing scale and complexity of modern society further serves the secularization of pilgrimage. As Turner and Turner note, liminoid phenomena (e.g., pilgrimage in service of universalism and openness) more often prevail in complex and large-scale societies. Graburn (1983) states the secular rituals and leisure activities may be *liminoid*, as opposed to liminal. To understand the secular and social aspect of religion, and its relationship to voluntary pilgrimage, it is necessary to understand these concepts (Turner & Turner, 1978).

Graburn (1983) also notes the distinction between ritual and religion. He writes, "ritual does not have to pertain to religion: what is held sacred by society – unquestioned, fundamental structure of beliefs about the world – may not be religious, but nevertheless may be felt as crucially important and capable of arousing strong emotions" (p. 13). He adds that while such feelings (strong emotions) may characterize those engaged in religious acts, they are also common to leisure occupations, such as hobbies, sex acts, recreation, and games. Moreover, strong emotions are more likely being applied to leisure occupations, since religion is less of a force in modern society. Turner and Turner (1978) write, "weekly attendance at religious services is becoming increasingly voluntary with games, sports, pastimes, hobbies, tourism, entertainment, and the mass media and they compete to fill the leisure sphere" (p. 35). As a consequence, many individuals are motivated to pilgrimage for recreation or entertainment. Beyond this, their principle motive remains secular: the fulfillment of a vow or personal request (Turner, 1973). Therefore, the secular tourist is motivated by personal or spiritual need (not dictated by organized religion), and they fulfill this need through tourism – specifically secular combinations of religious tourism defined by the individual's religious/cultural knowledge (Smith, 1992). In modern societies, secular tourists have desire to travel without religious commitment, in search of the answers to questions about life and true-self.

## Tourism motivations

Over the past few decades, many research reports have been published in an attempt to untangle the complex nature of people's motivation to travel. So what *are* the motives that drive people to travel (beyond those discussed above)? Why do people vacation periodically? From a social psychologists' perspective, a motive is "an internal factor that arouses, directs and integrates a person's behavior" (Murray, 1964, p. 7). In the context of tourism research, Dann (1981, p. 211) states that it is "a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such a decision." Moreover, Crompton and McKay

(1997) assert "tourism motivation is conceptualized as a dynamic process of internal psychological factors (needs and wants) that generate a state of tension or disequilibrium within individuals" (p. 427). All of these definitions indicate that examining tourism motivation may be the starting point in understanding human behavior with respect to travel and tourism.

There are several conceptual frameworks that have been used to explain tourists' decision-making processes in terms of taking vacation (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Kim, Borges & Chon, 2006; Luo, 2008). According to Pearce (1982, as cited in Crompton & McKay, 1997), "no single theory of tourism motivation could be expected to fully explain tourists' behavior." Therefore, it is not striking to find that multiple motives may simultaneously inform a travel decision. Maslow's (1954) *hierarchy of needs* model is the earliest theory to explore people's tourism motivation, paving the road for later theoretical contributions to this field. I will discuss each of the main theories at length below.

The first of the main conceptual frameworks is Iso-Ahola's (1980) *escape-seeking dichotomy*, providing a distinctive aspect for scholars of tourist motivation. He suggested two basic motivational dimensions in leisure behavior, escaping and seeking, which are also discussed in his following works (Iso-Ahola, 1982, 1983, 1990). According to Iso-Ahola (1982), escaping indicates "the desire to leave the everyday environment behind oneself," and seeking indicates "the desire to obtain psychological (intrinsic) rewards through travel in a contrasting (new or old) environment" (p. 259). These two critical determinants work respectively with two other dimensions – the personal dimension and the interpersonal dimension. Given these assumptions, Iso-Ahola (1982) concludes that "tourism is a dialectical process because it provides an outlet for avoiding something and for simultaneously seeking something" (p. 261). Many empirical studies of this model have since been conducted (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Kim, Borges, & Chon, 2006; Snepenger, King, Marshall & Uysal, 2006; Wolfe & Hsu, 2008).

Another popular theory of the three main conceptual frameworks is Dann's (1977, 1981) push-pull factors framework, which "provides a simple and intuitive approach for explaining the motivations underlying tourist behavior" (Klenosky, 2002, p. 385), further developed by Crompton (1979). Specifically, the push factor refers to the internal forces that drive people to travel, while pull factors are the external forces that explain why a particular destination is chosen over other locations. Some examples of push factors are "escape from a perceived mundane environment and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships and facilitation of social interaction" (Dann, 1981, p. 191). On the other hand, the characteristics of pull factors stem from the features and attributes of the designated destination, such as sunshine, relaxed tempo, friendly natives, etc, which "respond to and reinforce 'push' factor motivation" (Dann, 1981, p. 191). Empirical studies corresponding to the discussion and utilization of push and pull factor theory can be found in the travel and tourism literature (e.g. Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Oh, Uysal & Weaver, 1995; Klenosky, 2002; Correia, Valle & Moco, 2007; Wu, Xu & Ekiz, 2009).

According to Crompton and McKay (1997), Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking dichotomy and the concept of push-pull factors are not mutually exclusive. As a matter of fact, the push and pull factors are "similar generic categories" (p. 428) to escape and seeking determinants. Dann's push factors correspond to Iso-Ahola's escape determinant: both may indicate the desire to run away from normal daily routines. Likewise, "a significant refinement of the Iso-Ahola framework is that it interprets the pull force in

terms of intrinsic benefits" (p. 428), where "intrinsic benefits" corresponds to Iso-Ahola's seeking determinant. Many empirical studies of people's tourism/travel motivations stemmed from the use of these two interrelated theories.

## Motivations for visiting religious sites

Beyond questioning why people move, it is critical to ask: why do people visit *religious sites*? For Westerners who value individualism and self-reliance, tourism is a valued practice of life because it helps people feel renewed and self-fulfilled (Graburn, 1983). Tourism is the epitome of Western individualism, incorporating freedom and personal choice (Graburn, 1983). Pilgrimage provides meaningful places for people to visit (Coleman, 2002), and many people seek places that are at least in part spiritual. Even when intellectuals seek the wilderness in personal solitude, they are seeking the material multiplicity of nature, a life source (Turner & Turner, 1978). It therefore seems appropriate to blur the line between pilgrim and tourist (Turner & Turner, 1978).

One factor that contributes to this phenomenon is the growing sense of dislocation and rootlessness, particularly in American social life (MacCannell, 1976). As a consequence of this dislocation, Americans search to find themselves, seeking new points of orientation, and strengthening old boundaries while creating new ones (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). One outcome is that more Americans visit both local Buddhist temples and meditation centers, and Buddhist sites in India, Japan, Thailand, and elsewhere around the world. The general motivations for visiting these religious sites are to gain recognition of one's achievement, personal and spiritual growth, self-actualization, and the opportunity for an adventure (many pilgrimage sites are remote). Other motivational factors range from spiritual experience to idle curiosity (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). The special nature of sacred travel also derives from its being divorced from the routines and habits of everyday life (Coleman, 2002).

Religious events in particular attract large numbers of visitors, because they are unique and provide local color through music, song, and costume – details that prove more attractive than the event's religious content (Vukonić, 1996). For example, religious festivals attract large numbers of visitors who come as tourists, rather than pilgrims (Cohen, 1992). In all, these pilgrim-tourists are ushered toward three different types of religious destinations:

*(1) pilgrimages shrines, defined as places that serve as the goals of religiously motivated journeys from beyond the shrine's immediate locality; (2) religious tourist attractions, in the form of structures or sites of religious significance with historic and/or artistic importance; and (3) festivals with religious associations* (Vukonić, 1996, p. 62).

These visitors include foreign, non-Buddhist visitors to Buddhist temples, and are more generally called "traveler-tourists" (Cohen, 1992). A specific example is travelers to Tiruketisvaram in Sriranka, who are *tourists*, not pilgrims, that travel "without any particular purpose, freely, easily, without any expectation of reciprocity, without any corporeal relationship to the deity, without any obligation" (Pfaffenberger, 1983, p. 66).

In the twenty-first century, we have come to recognize that pilgrimage and tourism are functionally similar, providing both pilgrims and tourists with spiritual experiences (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Tourism is a secular substitute for organized religion: it provides tourists with the opportunity to seek

meaning through the rituals of sightseeing (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). MacCannell (1976) noted that tourism is a ritual expression of deeply held values about health, freedom, nature, and self-improvement; a re-creation ritual which parallels pilgrimages. Tourism should therefore be understood to be just as 'serious' as pilgrimage: Cohen (1979) argued persuasively that tours can and do range from superficial and frivolous experiences to encounters analogous to pilgrimages in the depth of their meaning to the tourist (Pfaffenberger, 1983). For example, before the rise of mass pilgrimage, pilgrimage used to be and still can be a curious but enjoyable experience, not in the least part owing to the meditative isolation the pilgrimage site afforded (Cohen, 1979). Like pilgrimages, arduous rite-of-passage types of tourism consist of prolonged absences, which are a kind of self-testing wherein individuals prove to themselves that they can make life changes.

## Methods

The survey data were collected to a sample of 240 participants on a public sidewalk in front of the Chua Ba Thien Hau Buddhist temple in Chinatown, Los Angeles, California, between April 24 and July 4, 2007. The number of usable surveys was 179. Only visitors who were 18 years of age or older and non-temple members were considered as the study participants. Survey packets were hand delivered to each respondent and the investigators collected the completed data after approximately 10 to 15 minutes. I, the investigator, remained close at hand to provide assistance as needed while the self-administered questionnaires were being completed.

This study used the Beard and Ragheb (1982) Leisure Motivation Scale (LMS) within the context of Buddhist temple visitation. The goal was to determine whether linkages existed between dimensions of the scale and variables associated with visiting a Buddhist temple. The scale was chosen because it is relevant to leisure experiences, possesses a proven measure of reliability and an acceptable level of content validity (Mohsin & Ryan 2007; Lin, Chen, Wang & Cheng 2007; Murray & Nakajima, 1999; Ryan & Glendon, 1998; Blakely & Dattilo, 1993; Lounsbury & Polik, 1992; Uzzell, 1984). A survey questionnaire based on the LMS scale was designed to examine the nature of motivations to visit Buddhist temples. This scale denotes four main components including intellectual, social, mastery-competence, and stimulus-avoidance. Sections of the questionnaire comprised Buddhist temple visit-related questions and questions based on the leisure motivation scale. Participants were also asked to indicate the extent to which each of the four motivations comprised reasons for engaging in leisure activities. The questionnaire ended with a series of demographic characteristics including gender, age, education, income level, and state or country of residence.

For data analysis, SPSS was used to calculate mean scores for each variable. In order to determine if significant relationships existed, one-way ANOVA procedures were conducted with a chosen level of significance at 0.05 to evaluate relationships between age, education, and income and visitors' scores on the LMS. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate if there were significant relationships between visitors' desire to visit a temple and visitors' scores on the LMS. A post hoc analysis using the Bonferroni test was utilized to clarify the nature of any significant differences.

## Findings

Respondents were equally likely to be male or female, with the majority of participants 21-30 years old (35.8%), possessing a four-year college degree (37.3%), and earning an annual income of \$105,000 or more (18.7%). Participants identified leisure motivations for visiting a Buddhist temple. Of the four motivations on LMS, two showed a relation between the motivations of visiting a temple and leisure motivations, which are intellectual and stimulus avoidance. The significant subscales for the intellectual component were "to discover new things," "to learn about things around me," "to expand my interests," and "to expand my knowledge" while those for the stimulus avoidance were, "to relieve stress and tension." Thus, the important leisure motivations for these participants were desires to engage in leisure activities of an intellectual, and mentally relaxing nature.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate whether significant relationships occurred between visitors' desire to visit a temple and visitors' scores on the Intellectual component of the LMS. The dependent variable, likelihood of visiting, included five levels: very unlikely, unlikely, neutral, likely, and very likely. The independent variable was the Intellectual component of the LMS: the significant results of the one-way ANOVA,  $F(4, 174) = 4.25, p = 0.00$ . Since there were five levels of likelihood of visiting, a post-hoc analysis was conducted in order to determine the nature of the significance.

In the post-hoc analysis using the Bonferroni test, those who marked "very likely" had significantly higher scores on the Intellectual Component of the LMS (mean = 4.13,  $SD = 0.78$ ) than those who marked "very unlikely" (mean = 3.47,  $SD = 0.79$ ). All other post-hoc comparisons were not significant. Thus the finding of significance in the ANOVA of a relationship between the score on the Intellectual component of the LMS and likelihood of temple stay was due for the most part to the significant difference between the outer groups – "very likely" versus "very unlikely." Based on the finding that the mean scores for those "very likely" to visit a temple (4.13) were higher than those who indicated "very unlikely" (3.47), visitors' desires to visit a temple appeared to be strongly related to intellectual leisure motivation.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were significant relationships between visitors' desire to visit a temple and their scores on the Stimulus Avoidance component of the LMS: the one-way ANOVA was significant,  $F(4, 173) = 4.14, p = 0.00$ .

In the post-hoc analysis using the Bonferroni test, those who marked "very likely" had significantly different stimulus avoidance scores on LMS (mean = 4.10,  $SD = 0.95$ ) from those who marked "very unlikely" (mean = 3.36,  $SD = 0.91$ ). All other post-hoc comparisons were insignificant. Thus finding significance in the one-way ANOVA of a relationship between the score on the stimulus avoidance component of the LMS and likelihood of visiting a temple was due, for the most part, to the significant difference between the outer groups – "very likely" versus "very unlikely." According to the fact that mean score of "very likely" (4.10) was higher than that of "very unlikely" (3.36), the findings suggest that visitors' desires to visit a temple were strongly related to stimulus avoidance leisure motivation. These results may indicate that participants who were "very likely" to visit a temple may wish to engage in the experience as a way of avoiding stimulus, given that the atmosphere of a Buddhist temple is considered to be relaxing.



## Discussion

The results may shed light on why non-Buddhists visit Buddhist temples in the U.S. The study result indicates that participants are motivated to visit Buddhist temples for stimulus-avoidance. The items under the "stimulus-avoidance" component were "getting away from everyday burdens," "being away from family and friends," and "mentally and physically relaxing." Therefore, the people visiting Buddhist temples might seek to relax and contemplate being away from all kinds of burdens, ranging from the mundane to close interpersonal relationships. They may have the need to escape overly stimulating life situations, by seeking solitude and calm situations, avoiding social contacts and unwinding (Choe et al, 2013). Accordingly, it is possible to interpret the results to mean that visitors seek to find meaning in and new orientations for their lives when in the holy site. Turner's (1973) *communitas* can be what they seek – a transition away from mundane structures and social independence into a looser commonality of feeling with fellow visitors; they can "transcends the daily differences of their social life, a spontaneous and 'sympathetic' sensation of mutual 'fellow-feeling'" (Di Giovine, 2011, p. 247). Furthermore, they may seek healing and renewal through this experience.

The study result also indicated that people visit Buddhist temples for the "intellectual" motivations. Visitors are often interested in learning about different cultures and religions. The process of learning itself, and the fact that it opens up new cultural horizons, appeals to visitors. Urry's (1990) post tourist is also arguably relevant, explaining why tourists are interested in broadening their world through religious or spiritual experiences. Urry discusses that the *post-tourists* are aware of change and delights in the multitude of choice: they want to seek something sacred, something informative to broaden them and make him finer. Beyond just enjoying the art and environment the temples have to offer, the visitors might view the experience as "broadening." Urry adds that post-tourists usually have white collar occupations. The current study supports Urry's notion: the majority of participants had a high education and high income level; they can be educated professionals who are tired of pursuing material wellbeing and seek spiritual well-being.

## Conclusion

Religious tourism might be one of the most understudied areas in tourism research (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). This study tackles one major inquiry of the field (MacCannell, 1976): the motivations behind tourists' travel plans. Revealing non-Buddhists' motivations for visiting Buddhist temples through an anthropological lens will contribute to this inquiry.

This study suggests that the collapse of a large number of traditional rules in many communities, has strengthened people's traditional beliefs in contemplation, and thus in religious belief (Vukonić, 1996). Like Geertz (1966) writes, all humans fundamentally need to make sense of life, and religion serves this purpose. This might motivate modern-day people, especially Westerners, to engage in traditional religions, such as Buddhism, which has endured/thrived over the past 2500 years.

The interesting point is that the people who are engaged in Buddhism in America are not necessarily Buddhists. In greater and complex societies, religion has become secularized as religious options, personal choice, and quests outweigh religious obligation (Turner & Turner, 1978; Graburn, 1983). Americans

traveling to Buddhist temples may have desire to re-structure or re-orient their life direction through contemplation or meditation at Buddhist temples. Interestingly, many pilgrims on the Catholic shrine of St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina acknowledge secular inclinations like "comfortable amenities, satisfying food, reliable information by guides and interpretative markers" (Di Giovine, 2010, p. 249). Thus, the distinction between pilgrims and secular tourists has been diminishing as many anthropologists and tourism scholars argue – "a pilgrim is half a tourist if a tourist is half a pilgrim" (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 20). Additionally, "not only pilgrims not be easily separated out from secular tourists in this (post-) modern and 'post-traditional' age wherein sacrality is often divorced from pure religion" (D'Agostino & Vespasiano, 2000, p. 5); "pilgrimage sites have often themselves become secularized" (Di Giovine, 2011, p. 261). Thus, tourism can be a 'sacred journey' (Graburn, 1977) and a 'secular ritual' (Graburn, 2011) that shares with pilgrimage a similar ritual structure, which can be an important production of *communitas* (Di Giovine, 2011). Plus, "pilgrims often share many of the physical infrastructures and service providers as secular travelers...pilgrimage trails and destinations have been given new life through modern, secular tourism" (Di Giovine, 2011, p. 249). Thus, the distinction between tourism/pilgrimage, tourist/pilgrim, and secular/sacred is rather complex.

Finally, interest in religious content has been increasing in the field of tourism study. The reason for this interest is found in the cultural content or historical value of a sacred building, rather than its original religious purpose (Vukonić, 1996). However, Di Giovine (2011) notes that it is still challenging to categorize visitors at a destination – religious or not – despite frequent attempts by academics and practitioners to do so (Pfaffenberger, 1983; Adler, 1989, 2002; Badone & Roseman, 2004; Sharpley, 2009; Stausberg, 2011; cf. Cohen, 1979; Nolan & Nolan, 1989; Eade, 1992; Rinschede, 1992; De Sousa, 1993; Bauman, 1996; Poiré, Butler & Airey, 2003; Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006; Afferni, Ferrario & Mangano). The current study can provide insights to the secular-religious tourism area by providing an anthropological interpretation of the motivations of non-Buddhists visiting temples in the U.S.

## Limitations

This current study was limited to a method of a sample survey that requires additional data with a more in-depth approach such as a holistic, comparative, and ethnographic study for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon based on the complex nature. Tyler (1969) suggested "the differences in ethnographic description and sample survey research are the wealth of tacit and unexamined assumptions that inform the questions on surveys" (Durrenberger, 1999, p. 428). "Many sociologists have become so intrigued with the mechanics of statistics that they are busily inventing mathematical and quantitative methods and have forgotten that they started out asking questions about how societies work" (Durrenberger, 1999, p. 428). In short, adding the ethnographic observation will make the study more scientific and evident.

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