



Reframing and Reconceptualising Gambling tourism in Macau as a Chinese Pilgrimage

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ABSTRACT

While dominant discourses, media representations and corporate entities in China downplay the presence of Chinese mainland gambling in Macau, Beijing sanctions millions of its citizens to make the journey to Macau to gamble each year. While Macau's success is often put down to the extent to which visitors are drawn to a secular destination with integrated resorts to engage in individualistic activities, our approach explores Chinese gambling tourists' movements, rituals and behaviours along post-structuralist lines, so as to generate new insights. The analysis shows how the metaphor of pilgrimage is an important lens to address individual and communal practices amongst outbound Chinese gambling tourists and brings to light the hyper-meaningfulness, shared values, ritualization, play, risk, and liminal conditions that characterise the processes of their entanglements and the centrality of commercial and political interests. In particular, the analysis indicates the need to explore the significance of cultural, spiritual, economic and social dimensions of Chinese outbound tourism, as well as the unique discourses of power and control affecting their movement and practices. By reframing and reconceptualising gambling tourists as a Chinese pilgrimage, we account for manifestations of culture, governmentality and intentional ritualization as well as contribute an alternative construction of pilgrimage beyond euro-centric accounts, which in turn, will stimulate discussion on geographies of pilgrimage.

摘要

尽管在中国占主导地位的言论、媒体报道和企业实体淡化了中国内地博彩业在澳门的存在,但中国政府对每年数以百万计的中国公民前往澳门赌博的行为进行了制裁。虽然澳门的成功常常被归结为吸引游客来一个有综合度假区的世俗的旅游目的地,参与个人化的活动,但我们的路径是在后结构主义脉络下探索了中国赌博游客的运动、仪式及行为,以获得新的见解。分析显示了朝圣的隐喻是一种重要的透镜,来解决中国出境赌博游客的个人和公共实践问题,揭示了超意义化、共享价值观、仪式化、游戏、风险和阈限条件,描述他们赌博实践的复杂过程以及商业和政治利益的一致性。特别的是,分析表明了中国出境游文化、精神、经济和社会层面的重要性,以及对影响他们行动和实践的权力和控制的独特论述。通过将赌博游客重新定义为中国人的朝圣之旅,我们解

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释了文化、政府管制和刻意仪式化的表现, 并提供了超越以欧洲为中心的论述另一种视角建构朝圣之旅, 进而也将促进对朝圣地理学的讨论。

Introduction

Macau is located at the mouth of the Pearl River Delta, west of Hong Kong, and bordered to the north by Guangdong province. Even after it passed to Chinese control in 1999, Macau remains a space routinely described as an east-west portal, a bridgehead, gateway, stepping stone, frontier, door way, disputed territory, crossroads, nation-non-state and even 'drifting island' (Cheng, 1999). Under the 'one country, two systems,' model established by the 1987 Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration, Macau Special Administrative Region [MSAR] of the People's Republic of China became the only place in greater China where table gambling is legal. Its 35 casinos produced gross gaming revenues of US\$33bn in 2017 (up from US\$1.6bn in 1999) and attracted 32.6 million visitors (800,000 in 1999). The vast increases are largely down to how Beijing controls visas, with mainland visitors only allowed to travel to Macau by way of business visas, group tours, transit visas and the individual visit scheme (IVS). The IVS allows residents of mainland cities (currently set at 49) to apply for a visa in an individual capacity. Mainland visitors made up 29 million of the total number of visitors in 2017, with 48 per cent arriving through the IVS. A 2011 University of Macau (UM) - Macau Visitor Profile Study found that 47% of visitors (out of 7,314 interviews) either 'had gambled' or 'planned to gamble' in local casinos during their visit, while a survey of 1,204 mainland visitors in 2012 found that 47.2% of mainland visitors had gambled (Zeng, Prentice, & King, 2012). However, official discourses seek to position Macau as the 'World Centre of Tourism and Leisure', with the 2017 master plan not mentioning gambling tourists (MGTO, 2017). The positioning of gamblers to Macau in scholarly work has boxed the gambling phenomenon in Macau into Eurocentric structural-functional and positivistic accounts of leisure and rationality.

The purpose of this study is to move beyond what is already 'known' by exploring the realities of Chinese gamblers in Macau through their stories, words and actions. Chinese visitors to Macau are not a free floating population, given they reflect the society, history and culture in which they come from, as well as the administrative controls on their movement. Whilst researchers are prone to apply a priori reasoning on the growth of outbound Chinese tourism, a post-structuralist methodology seeks to explore areas such as meanings, practices, relationalities, spatialities, subjectivities, power and control. It is a methodology that does not look to identify themes in participant responses, but instead, identify meanings in stories that are context specific. 'Going against the grain' of established canons, facts, categories, distinctions, and boundaries, the study explores informants as part of a larger group whose identities are historically constituted. Rather than see a seemingly rational Chinese tourist culture, the authors came to understand Chinese gambler stories and activities involving movement, hyper-meaningfulness, ritualization, shared values, play, and risk as a pilgrimage. Our use of pilgrimage as a metaphor is not descriptive gloss, but a notion

91 that is directly applicable to gamblers to Macau. By isolating shared meanings, spatial-
92 ities and practices, the study contributes to our outstanding of intersections between
93 tourism and pilgrimage, Chinese pilgrimage characteristics, such as liminal space,
94 sacred places and temple festivals and how such findings diverge from extant research
95 on western pilgrimage. The study also contributes to our understanding of power,
96 control and release within the pilgrimage to Macau.

98 **Literature Review**

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100 The study framework is based on a literature review that finds pilgrimage is a fluid
101 metaphor within western (research) contexts. While Morinis (1992, p. 4) broadly
102 describes it as 'a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he
103 or she believes to embody a valued ideal', Turner and Turner (1978) introduced several
104 fundamental linkages between pilgrimage and tourism. Importantly, they note how 'a
105 tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (p. 20), with many individuals moti-
106 vated to pilgrimage for recreation or entertainment. Likewise, tourism can be seen as
107 a secular substitute for organized religion as it provides tourists with the opportunity
108 to seek meaning through the rituals of sightseeing (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Eade
109 (1992) argues that unitary categories such as pilgrim and tourist are superficial, whilst
110 Santos (2002) argues there is hardly any difference between them. More recently,
111 authors see a merging of the sacred and secular qualities of pilgrimage and tourism
112 (Raj & Griffin, 2015) with tourists metaphorically compared to pilgrims as 'a kind of
113 conceptual shorthand' (Moore, 2004, p.73). Through 'a wide range of approaches –
114 academic, confessional, personal and canonical' (Coleman & Elsner, 1995, p. 8), pilgrim-
115 ages has been linked to the religious sphere (Maddrell & della Dora, 2013), the cultural
116 sphere (e.g. Elvis's Graceland), nationalism (e.g. monuments, graves, battlefields) and
117 personal motivations (visiting or returning to an important place) (Olsen, 2016).
118 Pilgrimage is increasingly tied up with touristic characteristics of transience, spectator-
119 ship, non-engagement with the local culture and moral irresponsibility (Tidball, 2004)
120 with Ron (2009, p. 290) describing pilgrimage as simply 'a sub-type, or form, of tour-
121 ism'. Collins-Kreiner (2016) argues, for example, that 'Pilgrimage Tourism' can be
122 explored using the 'product lifecycle' (PLC) model. Pilgrimage has more recently
123 caught the attention of geographers (Dwyer, 2016; Scriven, 2014), who have largely
124 explored the concept of pilgrimage around Western examples of 'secular' or 'post-
125 secular' pilgrimage (Dubisch & Winkelman, 2005; Hede & Hall, 2012; Herrero &
126 Roseman, 2015; Di Giovine & Picard, 2015). While the pilgrimage metaphor is a phe-
127 nomenon in constant change, China is often represented as a post-secular society,
128 with scholarship largely focused on historical pilgrimages (Naquin & Yu, 1992) rather
129 than any exploration of any current manifestations of pilgrimage.

132 **Methodology**

133 The global spread of gambling has been critically explored with various overlapping
134 definitions which acknowledge, identify and demarcate gamblers as distinct socio-cul-
135 tural formations. Conventional studies, however, often strip the experience of

Table 1. Informant information. Source: Authors.

| Interviewees | Gender, Age | Ethnicity | Education | Occupation |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Sam | Male, 28 | Chinese | Secondary School | Business man |
| John | Male, 46 | Chinese | Primary School | Construction worker |
| Mary | Female, 62 | Chinese | Postgraduate | Retired |
| Peter | Male, 22 | Chinese | Graduate | Student |
| Fred | Male, 35 | Chinese | Graduate | Salesman |
| Jackie | Female, 52 | Chinese | Higher Diploma | Fashion Designer |
| Jane | Female, 42 | Chinese | Graduate | Unknown |
| Jenny | Female, 55 | Chinese | Vocational education | Retired |
| Nick | Male, 47 | Chinese | Vocational education | Self-employed |
| Martin | Male, 25 | Chinese | Graduate | Employed |
| Matt | Male, 24 | Chinese | Graduate | Bank Official |
| Pat | Male, 28 | Chinese | Graduate | Employed |

gambling tourism of its creativity, colour, character and context. The authors hired two Mandarin speaking assistants to interview mainland gamblers to Macau about their journey and experiences during the fall of 2014 and the summer of 2015. Twelve informants, using purposeful sampling, were interviewed in Mandarin in various public locations around casinos for between 30 and 45 minutes (see Table 1). The aim was to extract stories, so as to understand Chinese gamblers who visit Macau. Storylines are naturalized and conventional cultural narratives that can be used as the explanatory framework of one's own and others' practices and sequences of action (Søndergaard, 2002). Saturated with shared cultural meanings, given the particular discursive situation, the stories were accepted as representative of Chinese gamblers in Macau. In a process called 'translation - back translation,' the interview data was translated and transcribed into English, and then translated into simplified Chinese to ensure accuracy. The study uses post-structuralist notions of the subject to create a multifaceted interpretation of the informant's speech and actions. Rather than treat their stories as clear linear narratives that could be analysed into themes through thematic analysis, the authors consider informants dynamic entities, produced in a geographic, social, historical and political context and within a specific discursive formation (Hall, 1997). As identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, poststructuralist thinking explores how truth is unavoidably constructed, with comprehension emerging from incomplete, subjective positions. The post-structuralist approach didn't prioritise a single epistemology or Eurocentric systems of knowledge production such as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As poststructuralist-inspired empirical analysis is not something that can be acquired as a sort of technique, scholars have struggled with the role of interviews in the conduct of research (St Pierre & Jackson, 2014). While the primary authors had spent two years as Macau based academics, our foreign background made us outsiders. While our Mandarin speaking assistants provided access to informants, the authors utilised their position to draw out gambling stories that local researchers rarely do, as there can be professional consequences of turning one's gaze into the gambling industry in Macau (cf. Chen, 2017, pp. 164-165). The aim was to seek a standard of internal coherence or analysis which 'hangs together' and is 'non-self-contradictory' (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). The authors had access to interview

181 data, various forms of practices and performances and as well the social, cultural and
182 material environment in which informants were subject. This study also sought to
183 explore how power acts on the subject to make the subject possible and what is
184 taken up and reiterated in the subject's own acting. The journey to Macau cannot be
185 broadly assigned as a 'pure' phenomenon as though they were 'uninfected' by culture
186 and constituting processes and conditions (Søndergaard, 2002). Post-structural curios-
187 ity about the subjectivating processes, the constructions of cultural, political and social
188 conditions and 'ambitions to transgress ahistorical and naturalized taken-for-granted'
189 (Søndergaard, 2002, p. 189) understandings, served as the impetus to explore different
190 discursive meanings. Categories, such as 'gaming tourists' have their own discursive
191 boundaries, with politicians and Macau based academics promoting certain 'rational'
192 and acceptable discourses and normative principles to the phenomenon of gambling
193 in Macau. By way of a poststructuralist methodology, this study sought to challenge
194 what is already 'known' about gambling tourists to Macau and challenge discursive
195 boundaries. Exploring pilgrimage as a conceptual metaphor, which is a discursive con-
196 struct, is done by way of the data, and based on the authors' analytical perspectives.
197 Søndergaard (2002) argues that researchers must interpret the discursive practices he
198 or she has access to. While there is criticism of conceptual metaphors, because of the
199 subjectivity involved in the interpretation, the authors sought to connect small specific
200 contexts, conversations, incitements, interviews, collective undertakings, activities, rit-
201 uals, public documents, observations and newspaper articles. Putting deconstruction
202 to work, this study sought to think against the stream of what is taken for granted
203 and make 'partial connections' between different constellations, processes and story-
204 lines. The authors sought to explore and link frameworks of available metaphors and
205 discursive categories to the events, moments and actions described by informants and
206 the sociocultural and subjectivating phenomena the authors observed (Bonham &
207 Bacchi, 2017). As stories of bodies, play, superstition, casinos, risk and spatiality
208 emerged; the authors came to explore the journey to Macau as a purposeful, some-
209 what arduous, ritual journey to a place of sacred significance. The study reached satur-
210 ation at the point when the authors began to know the data, were familiar with it and
211 with an analysis which makes visible a socio-cultural discursive reality (Aldiabat & Le
212 Navenec, 2018; Taguchi, 2012). The analysis makes visible new thought lines about
213 how 'people, places and pasts are conceived, constructed, and valued' (Hollinshead &
214 Jamal, 2001, p. 61). The study therefore came to challenge the categories of pilgrim-
215 age and gambling tourism, and Western ideas of what constitutes typical behaviors in
216 those categories. While pilgrimage is a 'comparative concept' (Clifford, 1997) and acts
217 as a metaphor of movement and flow within post-structuralist analyses, our dynamic,
218 open-ended analysis generates newness to our understanding of a specific pilgrimage
219 in China. The study uses quotations from informant stories to provide illustration.

222 **Liminal and transformative space**

223 Whether travel has been undertaken for noble, pious, pure, impure reasons or just
224 plain curiosity, relaxation or self-development (e.g. to bond with kin, to make money,
225 to avoid debts), the informants journeys combined 'freedom from' the immutable

(constrained) environment of mainland China, with its economic pressure, rigidly and corruptions and 'freedom to' a new symbolic world (Turner, 1974b) which is transformative. Macau and its casinos represent something special (sacrality of space), with informants recognizing Macau as a 'place on the margin,' with participants 'betwixt and between' two social worlds (Turner, 1969, p. 107). The respondents described Macau as a golden city, a miraculous city, a clean and ordered city, which allows the fulfilment of desires and fantasies. Informants were found to negotiate their visit to Macau by way of ritual knowledge, with timing particularly important (sacrality of time). Jane, 42 explained how she had a friend who accompanies her to Macau. She notes that and 'when her left eye has eyelid tremor, it means there is going to be an opportunity to make money, according to Chinese folklore.' Therefore, she only visits Macau to gamble when her friend has an eyelid tremor. Nick, 47 and self-employed argues that 'I think everyone has his/her luck, and it can be weak or strong at different times.' Jenny, 55 notes how her visits coincide with the Chinese zodiac. Jane and Martin, 25 also strongly believed in staying away during unlucky periods, with Martin noting; 'I think if people are really unlucky during a specific period, they will lose a lot when gambling.' Jenny, 55, notes:

If I am really in bad luck, I will just stop gambling for a while. Chinese people may have conflict with a particular animal year and they will be very unlucky during that period. If I have conflict with a particular animal year, I will not plan to visit Macau to gamble because of the greater possibility of losing money.

The informant's desire and agency to confront fate and escape from everyday mundane social roles, structures, hierarchies, identities and realities was evident in their stories, as well as vivid emotions from excitement to anxiety. The informants were faced with various issues such as getting a visa and seeking currency during a time of strict capital outflow controls. This voluntary embrace of a pilgrimage to Macau is experienced through ritual (symbolic) aspects rather than 'belief' given such rituals can reference or take the form of a journey as well as objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures, or spatial units (Turner, 1967). The potentially transformative ritual journey begins in the form of a concrete, bodily separation from mundane social structure, hierarchies and identities such as mother, wife, husband or student. Turner (1974a, p. 260) notes that 'the social need for escape from or abandonment of structural commitments seeks cultural expression in ways that are not explicitly religious, though they may become heavily ritualized.' The informants generally did not identify the trip as fun, or the activity of gambling as entertainment. Gambling was repeatedly linked to self-achievement and testing one's luck. Peter, a student and Jackie, 52 noted that the journey was about testing one's luck and knowing how lucky they were. Martin noted how 'a proper attitude to gambling was very important.' Nick noted that 'I will only concentrate on gambling, and I think that one important criteria to win when playing table games is luck but also intelligence.' The informants did indicate that the journey was always uncertain, given the limited opportunities to visit Macau. Neighbouring Guangdong province, for example, limits individual visits to Macau to once every two months. Macau and its casinos are 'set apart' from the workaday world, with Jane noting that in Macau, '[e]verything is unknown and uncertain, and you don't have idea about what are going to happen.' Despite gambling advertisements been banned in

the mainland (Tang & Wu, 2010) and any casino representatives who proselytize casinos at risk of arrest, Macau had an incredible pull on the informants. This was because daily social norms are suspended, and they are permitted adventure, fantasy, and pleasure by taking up an anti-structural position (Turner, 1982) in a space where Dionysian indulgence (gambling, shopping, legalised prostitution) is encouraged (Sacramento, 2011) and symbolic, cultural and spiritual rituals are enacted. For Jenny:

I go to worship regularly and wear an amulet. I will read books about Chinese zodiac horoscopes before I go to gamble, to know about which my lucky position is, for example, east or west, or what my lucky colour is. Then I will try to wear clothes in corresponding colour. What's more, I have a friend [who] tells me which crystal can create luck in making money or which crystal can counteract evil forces.

Martin noted that his girlfriend asks him to wear red underpants if he is going to gamble, as she believes that it would make him luckier when gambling. Jane never goes to the toilet before gambling, noting how 'peeing can be understood as 'drawing off water from your body' in Cantonese, which also means losing something. Jane goes onto say that:

I believe in luck and fortune. I usually don't go to temple and pray, but I have to wear my bracelet which made by citrine [which the informant believes brings money making luck]. I will avoid to wear black if I am going to visit Macau to gamble, because for me black means bad luck when gambling.

Casinos as Sacred Places

This study re-emphasizes sacred space with the phenomenon of pilgrimage (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009; Maddrell & della Dora, 2013; Megoran, 2013; Tse, 2014). Little scholarly attention has focused on how the spiritual is made manifest, with Kong (2001, p. 213) noting that 'if sacredness is not inherent, attention must be paid to how place is sacralized.' The mainland visitors interviewed enter Macau through either the two border gates, one of the two ferry terminals or the airport. After disorientation, confusion and a loss of their sense of self that comes with the lengthy immigration and custom checks, the informants are met with young 'uniformed marshals' (Moore, 1980, p.214) from the various casinos, dressed up in bright regalia (see figure 1). Nick, 47 notes how 'I have to apply for visa to Macau, exchange currency, but I don't have to prepare too much for transportation as there are shuttle buses to different casinos in Macau.' The casino buses bring them to the liminoid space of casinos (Turner, 1969), with Comaroff and Comaroff (2000, p. 295) describing them as 'liminal places of leisure.' Jenny chooses which casino to visit based on her lucky colour, with each informant listing sacred places in terms of contrasts, similarities and degrees of manifest powers. Jenny notes how 'I don't have any lucky casino, but I will choose casino according to my lucky colour. For example, I may go to Wynn [casino] if the book mentions my lucky colour is red, or I may go to Galaxy [casino] if it is yellow.' She went on to note that:

Usually I will observe the FengShui of different casinos. For example, I seldom go to the old Lisboa [casino], because people say the design of its main entrance looks like a tiger opening its big mouth, which means throwing chum to sharks when people get into it. Besides, the

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Figure 1. Waiting for passengers at the Macau Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal. Source: Authors. Used with permission.

architecture design of old Lisboa looks like a birdcage and it means people will be trapped in it like birds after they get into the casinos and start to gamble.

The Venetian casino, for example, is a US\$2.4-billion replica of the Las Vegas Venetian, which in turn is a replica of Venice. Like entering a giant limen, one has to walk over a bridge to enter. This leads directly to the largest casino floor in the world, in the second-largest casino in the world. With extensive visible depth, high ceilings and excess décor, the casino is bright, airy and designed to reflect FengShui rules (Buzinde, Choi, & Wang, 2012) so as to function as a place that possesses divine power thus serve as centre of communication and interaction with divine forces (Singh, 2009).

The casinos use iconographic representation of sacred mythologies and Chinese cultural themes such as the Buccleuch Vases at Wynn Macau casino, Wishing Crystals at Galaxy, and two animal heads representing the Chinese zodiac looted from Beijing's Old Summer Palace in 1860 at the Lisboa. Novel sights, light, sounds, tastes and smells are designed to evoke awe, wonder, fear, power and ultimately offer both corporal inspiration and eternal satisfaction by superimposing beliefs and incorporating ritualization processes. Walter (1988, p. 75) writes sacred places 'organise sight and sound, introduces light to present clarity and order, or makes things dark to suggest unseen presence and

hidden power'.) In these sacred places, with no windows, no clocks, etc., time is never exhausted (Eliade, 1967). During this sacred and indestructible time, casinos present beauty and power with both aesthetic and intrinsic values to create potentials, perspectives and associated performances. Unlike American casinos, there are few slot machines with flashing lights or synthesized sounds. There are no bachelor parties, music, alcoholic drinks, fast music or scantily dressed staff to heighten the perceived level of excitement (Plate, 2009). Waitresses push trolleys and offer free water, orange juice and green tea around the sea of baccarat (primarily 'punto banco') tables which dominates the floor and 90 per cent of Macau's gross gaming revenue. For Jane, table games are easy to learn, and need the cooperation of each player at the same table. For Nick:

I prefer table gambling with more people. The atmosphere around me during the gambling experience is usually very lively, which can give people a sense of excitement. I like the table with more people, because I think that means more prosperity.

These table games were favoured by all the informants, with playing cards a totem of a faith. In theory, the result is determined as soon as the cards are dealt. However, the informants believe their chance of winning is increased when they throw the dice or draw a card themselves. While each described their own technique, a common approach is informants touching, squeezing and slowly 'peeking' at their dealt cards by peeling (bending) them upwards so as to look for clues about what the face value might be from the shapes on the edge. By shouting, touching, feeling, bending and blowing (away unwanted numbers), the informants feel they are in control of the game, with pilgrimages profoundly bodily as 'one moves physically through space to seek the physical presence of, if not contact with, the sacred' (Wheeler, 1998, p. 6). All informants shared stories of some notion of bodily devotions. Some described pounding on the table in the belief it would give their opponent a face card and bust their hand. Others indicated that they stand around the tables to see patterns in play before deciding to join in. As 'the gambler is a vehicle of Providence... a vehicle of precognition' (Neveu, 1967, p. 459 in Papineau, 2005, p. 167), players who notice a 'lucky' (or unlucky) player winning (losing) consecutive hands can side bet on the player. Gamblers may suddenly abandon a table and rush towards another where a lucky player resides. Nick notes how '[d]ifferent people have different luck, and they may influence each other's if they play together.' While Nick sometimes enjoys playing alone, he followed lucky players when he felt his luck was bad:

Usually I prefer to play alone, so that my luck will not be influenced by others. If I find that I am not very lucky at a specific time, I will change table or bet by following other people who are strongly lucky at that time.

Martin noted that:

If I feel that I am unlucky when gambling, I will not bet and just stand there and watch my friends' play, or I will just bet with those people who are really lucky during that period.

The casinos are containers of ritual activities as they promote a 'microscopic battle' (Lam, 2007) where seriousness and playfulness combine in public between science and faith, with the performed gestures and 'acting up' part of the indissoluble connection between sacred earnest and 'make-believe' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 24). While the casino can reliably calculate its advantage to two decimal points, the informants rely

406 on a combination of fate as well as earthly and supernatural skills (Basu, 1991). The
407 extremity of the situation renders participants decidedly equal with 'unprecedented
408 modes of ordering relations between ideas and people become possible and desirable'
409 (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 3). 'Communitas' means the gamblers relate to one another
410 independent of social categories as they shift into spontaneous social bonding in a
411 contained space considered safe, egalitarian and divine.

412 **Temple Festivals**

413 The rituals surrounding gambling creates a bridges across social divides to divine
414 realms and a festival like atmosphere that can be likened to a traditional Chinese
415 'Temple Festival' (Ward, 1979). Gambling had a sanctioned role in such festivals (now
416 largely banned in mainland China), since they provided economic benefits for local
417 communities. They were a special time marked off from ordinary time as people could
418 do things they would not normally do. At these gatherings, people ate, drank,
419 shopped, smoked, gambled or simply watched, so as to be 'part of the scene' (Chau,
420 2006, p. 155). Rather than competitors in a 'market for hope' (Lutter, 2011), as might
421 be the case in the West, religiosity was a significant factor in facilitating popular par-
422 ticipation in gambling (Ho, 2006). Common elements to both include notions of
423 chance, fate, uncertainty and risk as well as imagery of receiving a reward that
424 changes life for the better (Binde, 2007; Gabb 2001; Papineau, 2005). Gamblers made
425 offerings to the gods 'in order to allow the god to enjoy their spiritual essence' (Ward,
426 1979, p. 24). Just as in a temple festival setting, the casinos are designed to conform
427 to 'the correct geomantic orientation is also necessary in order to secure proper align-
428 ment with cosmic forces and to ensure their full, auspicious flow' (Ward, 1979, p. 28).
429 The pilgrims play all day and night, 'in ritual time and ritual space, in other words in
430 symbolic time and space' (Ward, 1979, p. 25). Casinos are whole, permanent institu-
431 tions rather than ephemeral, with informants explaining how they conspicuously
432 made offerings which they hoped would be multiplied and returned. The informants
433 felt that by 'giving,' they would receive wealth in return. Jenny felt by donating
434 money to casinos via 'wishing wells,' one might get a return from the casino. Nick
435 noted that by donating money to people or charities on the streets, 'good luck will
436 come to you if you do enough good deeds.' Jane noted that; 'I must not enjoy the
437 free meal [from the casino] before gambling, because if I eat their free meal first, it
438 means I have to give back something to the casinos later, and that is losing money.'

439 The temporality of space-time makes gambling time dense and trance like. Kairos
440 time lives outside the bounds the time we know via our clocks and means time passes
441 effortlessly (Sipiora & Baumlin, 2002). Gambling aids in the step away from the tem-
442 poral world into the sacred one. None of the informants spoke of succumbing to bod-
443 ily needs even as they told stories of staying up 24 hours straight gambling to risk
444 one's well-being (health, safety, money, etc.) in exchange for divine intervention.
445 Informant stories emphasised their active participation in a social sensorium (Chau,
446 2008). Although crowds push and shout and stimulation as hysteria 'literally assault
447 and saturate the senses of the worshiper' (Hau, 2006, p.162), such rituals have been
448 noted in Chinese ethic communities who gamble in Taiwan (Harrell, 1974) and around
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451 the globe (Basu, 1993; Choong, 1983; Papineau, 2005). As gamblers produce and
452 experience 'red-hot sociality' (Chau, 2008), the noisy, excited 'bustling crowd' is held
453 to bestow a highly auspicious blessing (Ward, 1979). Gambling is rarely imagined and
454 performed without others, with Huizinga (1955, p. 13) describing play-mood as one of
455 rapture and enthusiasm. Singh (2009, p. 251) describes an identity quest at sacred places
456 as 'a public performance and an open ballet in which overseers and devout spectators
457 play their own role.' The embodiment aspect of ritual (and the senses) sees the
458 body enacting cultural meanings. Ritualization occurs 'through the interaction of the
459 body with a structured and structuring environment' (Bell, 1992, p. 98). Spectacle,
460 'heat' and ritual structure the environment and the bodily experience, where ritualized
461 bodies with changed attitudes towards time, belief and the quest for self-transformation
462 are invested with a 'sense' of ritual. Gamblers challenge a mysterious 'other'
463 (fate, chance, and luck) to produce sociocultural situations that the ritualized body can
464 dominate in some way (Fieldman, 2017). While gamblers have differing needs and
465 intensity of belief (Wheeler, 1996), all those at the casino tables perform rites, ritual
466 speech, and choreographed movement.

468 **Power and Control in Pilgrimage**

469 Casinos operate a system of practices and rituals in relation to sacred things as culture,
470 history and religiosity are discursively commodified for performance (Buzinde
471 et al. 2012). While sacred places in Macau, such as community temples, were often
472 used by both the Portuguese and Chinese authorities to serve their own national
473 interests, the development of new forms of ritualistic sacred spaces does not imply a
474 retreat into tradition. These casinos are granted new symbolic value, as rituals – as
475 performances - become rearticulated as acceptable social dramas. They are intentionally
476 shaped to work at various levels of social organisations from individual to cultural
477 group. The opportunities for monetization and commercialization ensure that pilgrimage
478 is a ritual form 'most susceptible to appropriation by commercial, secular interests'
479 (Moore, 1980, p. 216). In Macau, rituals are manipulated in a symbolic economy by
480 non-state transnational actors, officials and investors. These actors have materialized
481 their vision of a transformative (and profitable) aesthetic of pilgrimage by (re)inscribing
482 and (re)articulating rituals through the expertise of designers, architects, creative
483 advertisers, consultants, marketers, psychologists and IT specialists. The concept of
484 miracles and 'salvation play' in the pilgrimage experience is a recurring theme with
485 informants, with most noting the possibility of a psychosomatic transformation breaking
486 through into everyday through miracles (e.g. gaining unexpected wealth).

487 Macau casinos use staff uniforms (as ritual garments), monuments, paintings, performances,
488 statues, festivals, ceremonies, membership schemes and an array of symbols as emotional
489 stimuli and even create stories, folktales, legends, myths and legends to guide performances.
490 These ritual inducements coexist with a highly developed scientific world that seeks to
491 extract maximum revenue per available customer by enabling transitional conditions through
492 liminalization (Schüll, 2012). As casinos focus on desires that can be validated through
493 the aesthetic of a playful pilgrimage, the resulting mishmash of rituals communicate fate
494 and luck, protection and success,

496 security and prosperity and tradition and modernity. Appropriated from earlier forms,
497 the rituals are formed to suit the culture and incite a response as gamblers co-con-
498 struct meaning around Macau and particular casinos. While the Chinese Communist
499 Party (CCP) 'battles' a growing trend of religiosity, China remains a 'religious state'
500 (Lagerwey, 2010), given that religiosity incorporates a wide range of ritual practices
501 that might include fortune telling (numerology, physiognomy, graphology, palmistry,
502 fengshui, geomancy, face reading and Bazi), good luck charms, magic, shamanism,
503 deity and ancestor worship, exorcism, demon and ghost worship, polytheism, ritual
504 healing and communicating with the dead (Yang, 2011). Diffused, non-exclusive and
505 pluralistic rituals are designed hope is to gain favour for endeavours in this world and
506 is therefore predominantly linked to the economic and the personal (Bosco, Liu, &
507 West, 2009, Steinmüller, 2011). Jenny notes:

508 *There is a huge red crystal chandelier in main entrance of Wynn, and some people say it*
509 *works as western magic to confuse gamblers and make them play badly when gambling.*
510 *However, some experts in FengShui say there is a way to beat it, which is walking into the*
511 *casinos by touching the wall so that you can bypass the red crystal chandelier.*

512 There are repeated stories of symbols and buried animal bones linked to particular
513 casinos, which connect them to the supernatural power of animatism, FengShui geo-
514 mancancers and 'numerological mysticism' (Needham, 1995). Walter (1988, p. 117) suggests
515 that the quality of a place depends on memories and expectations, 'by stories of real and
516 imagined events - that is, by the historical experience located there.' Casinos balance the
517 ritual-liminal forms of ritual heritage with industrial-liminoid forms as they facilitate, evoke
518 and mimic culturally familiar rituals to enhance a person's perceived self-efficacy, sense of
519 control and self-confidence, whilst reducing anxiety and stress (Damisch, Stoberock, &
520 Mussweiler, 2010). They call forth certain thoughts, beliefs and ritualistic behaviors using
521 multivocal and supernaturally charged symbols which are anthropological, metaphysical,
522 historical and cosmological. These evoke narratives already known to the informants, and
523 are articulated as vital knowledge. The admixture of 'idiosyncratic and quirky' (Turner,
524 1979, p. 493) symbols are playful but richly textured, dramatic symbolic vehicles that give
525 many rituals a metaphysical dimensions and processual armature (Turner, 1980). As many
526 informants remained in one casino during each trip, they submit to the ritual performan-
527 ces, which nearly always 'accompany transitions from one situation to another and from
528 one cosmic or social world to another' (Van Gennep, 1960, p. 13). Such rituals prepare the
529 organism to act, transforming them from irrational creatures of desire into extremely effi-
530 cient gamblers seeking to understand mysterious modes of accumulation. These symbolic-
531 vehicles meld old and new, elite and popular culture, east and west, invented pasts and
532 futures to the specific and the vague. They evoke the mythic-heroic past by using technol-
533 ogy and special effects to make them 'sensorily perceptible' (Turner, 1982, p.27). The 3-
534 meter tall Fortune Diamond (see figure 2) located in the hotel lobby of Galaxy Macau is
535 based on the plumes of the peacock, and symbolizes prosperity and good fortune. The
536 Wynn casino has a mechanical and multimedia Golden Tree of Prosperity (see figure 3)
537 and a Dragon of Fortune whose centerpiece depicts Chinese and Western astrological
538 symbols. As a symbol of prosperity and luck, crowds will throw coins and wish for good
539 fortune. Participation in ritual processes can take multiple meanings as gamblers co-con-
540 struct meaning in rituals where metaphysical prototypes and heavenly patterns of material



Figure 2. Fortune Diamond. Source: Authors. Used with permission.



Figure 3. Golden Tree of Prosperity. Source: Authors. Used with permission.

things meet (Singh, 2009). Situational belief (Coleman, 2014), means those sites can either be a good 'selfie' to a ritual site where coins and bills are purified and invested with divine qualities. We argue that 'pretence-ridden liminality' (Driver, 1998, p.160) has substance and plays an important role in sacred places by creating variety of patterns, relationships, interactions, meanings between participants and the divine realm (Singh, 2009). For Jenny:

586 *In Macau, I may visit the dragon or tree at Wynn if I am going to Wynn to gamble, I may*
587 *throw a coin to the dragon or tree when they come up before gambling, and that means I*
588 *already give something to them, and they have to return something to me later. For*
589 *example, to let we win money when gambling.*

590 Any failures or destruction associated with the pilgrimage are hidden, as the rituals
591 which displace feelings are validated 'at the cost of preserving the general unreality
592 which it obscures: the real failures of society' (Williams, 1980, p.189). Gambling addic-
593 tions were never addressed by informants, along with any unresolved dilemmas, such
594 as loneliness, frustration, and the search for identity. Such tensions are condemned
595 and even censored when it spills out from Macau into other areas of life (Basu, 1991).
596 The magic of symbolic vehicle apparatuses celebrate blind ritual behaviour that moti-
597 vates gamblers to persist at tasks when they might otherwise give up. Casinos are a
598 by-product of rational materialism, with its owners cementing new meanings, myths
599 and rituals in their buildings. They hope to foster a bond between people and place
600 and serve as repositories for collective memory. The practice of ritual actions produces
601 new layers of meanings embodied in the materiality of casino temples, as they
602 'inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically
603 implies continuity with the past' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1). This study argues
604 that the rituals taking form in the pilgrimage to Macau are being wrestled free from
605 ritual contexts as casinos market cultural resources and experiences through a form of
606 'tourism' approved by Beijing. The pilgrimage is built on the 'organization of symbols
607 or rituals that carries the pilgrims through the ambiguity and risk of a world of symbol
608 and myth' (Holmes, 1976, p.126) and makes them vulnerable to exploitation by way of
609 deliberate, symbolic mechanisms. In such a context, Macau's cultural resources risk
610 over exploitation and depletion at the hands of commerce as ancient beliefs are
611 appropriated, without authorities fully questioning the consequences.

613 ***Pilgrimage as a release valve***

614 Gambling is associated with irrationality and corrupt practices in the mainland, with
615 the socio-political order viewing it as a threat. While they have come close to eradicat-
616 ing it through legal sanctions, the pilgrimage to Macau is assigned to a different realm
617 by Beijing. Its playful, temporary nature and ritual levities means it is sanctioned as
618 long as it remains contained. The rituals in the journey to Macau compensate for the
619 lack of other forms of effective societal control in China such as bonds of religiosity or
620 kinship. Given the 'restorative quality implicit in ritual play' (Raj & Dempsey, 2010, p.7),
621 the pilgrimage to Macau is a socially sanctioned outlet for managing potential crises
622 and change. As a ritual, gambling functions as a release valve where excess energy is
623 released and facilitates the contradiction 'between superstitious belief or hope in luck
624 and the upright thrifty values promoted by Confucian and equally by communist
625 teaching' (Kelen, 2009, p. 41). The concept of Chinese citizenship, governance and
626 society underlines discipline, order, planning, predictability, central control and
627 accountancy and obedience to external demand, so as to keep a country of over one
628 billion people together. The participation in playful defiance helps to reinforce those
629 values and the significance of the status quo (Raj & Dempsey, 2010). Rites of
630

631 intensification are rituals that increase group solidarity, and reinforce commitment to
632 the beliefs of the group. The rites seen during the pilgrimage and at the casinos seek
633 an emotional response as basic beliefs and sentiments are focused upon and experi-
634 enced anew. Integral to one's mental and biological health (Di Giovine, 2009), the rit-
635 uals periodically refresh and renews the social order.

636 Given that work and leisure are complementary parts of the same living process in
637 China (Schumacher, 1973), this study leads us to disagree with Huizinga who views
638 gambling largely as sterile, unproductive and dispensable to culture. Furthermore, the
639 pilgrimage is produced and given meaning within relations of power, with the journey
640 to Macau strongly related to mainland law, policy and the conditions of pilgrimage
641 (i.e. immigration provisions). China, we argue, sanctions it as long as the pilgrimage is
642 not seen as contrary to the approved social scripts in everyday life. It is a sanctioned
643 way of safely 'letting off steam' (i.e. from the overdose of social order in the mainland).
644 It also allows a means of inducing citizens to learn from being disorderly or 'new para-
645 digms and models which invert or subvert the old' (Turner 1979, p.474). The pilgrimage
646 stimulates and releases the excess energy of millions, so as that their sacrifices can be
647 transmuted through a marathon orgy of compulsive spending and acquisition.
648 However, given such excess, the pilgrimage is breaking through the boundaries in
649 which it is usually confined. Unrestrained, it 'becomes a symbol not of the interplay of
650 fate and control, but of total failure and lack of discipline' (Basu, 1991, p. 249). The CCP
651 has shown its displeasure at excesses (e.g. gambling by corrupt officials) or communitas
652 breaking into society to attack the social structure. The contained exorcism at the mar-
653 gins is accepted, only if it ensures national stability and sustains periodic renewal. The
654 pilgrimage only works because it offers visitors freedom (e.g. hotel registrations data is
655 not shared to entities outside the MSAR) and the ability to engage in activities that are
656 illegal in China. It enables individuals to withdraw out of view and become to some
657 degree detached from everyday roles and structure (Di Giovine, 2011).

658 However, freedoms and license are threatened by intensive degrees of surveillance
659 and control by way of ubiquitous surveillance cameras, paid informers and plain
660 clothes security agents in Macau. Plans for the installation of public CCTV cameras,
661 facial recognition and data sharing with Beijing may upset the mutual inter-dependent
662 relationship between casino, local people, gamblers and the MSAR government. If the
663 superimposition of sacrality becomes regulated by counter-rituals imposed by Beijing,
664 the restriction of gamblers as active explores and negotiators of societal possibility
665 may bring more control, but also new tensions as they return to their daily lives
666 (Henricks, 2011). However, while casinos are being built in Vietnam, Cambodia, Taiwan
667 and Singapore with similar 'pull' factors for Chinese gambles, Macau's liminality and
668 marginality have generated lasting myths, symbols and rituals worth sacrificing for.
669

671 **Discussion: Reconceptualisation of the Pilgrimage concept** 672 **in modern China**

673 This study found pilgrimage to be a productive metaphor to describe the journey and
674 experiences of gamblers to Macau. While the study does not characterize all travel to
675 Macau as movement towards sacred space as individuals have private and often

676 competing desires, drives, and identities, the study did find Macau to be a free, liminal
677 zone for informants. The study also found casinos to be sacred places, where a festive
678 sociality ensures a community of 'collective joy' (Turner, 2012) and timeless absorption.
679 This study not only locates an active, modern pilgrimage in modern China, but also
680 reconceptualises the pilgrimage concept by transgressing the oppositional categories
681 of the religious and the secular in the literature. While the distinction between tour-
682 ism/pilgrimage, tourist/pilgrim, and secular/sacred is complex (Di Giovine, 2011;
683 Badone & Roseman, 2004), the study highlights how competing discourses can co-
684 exist and be concurrent (Wheeler, 1998). This study utilised storylines about moving,
685 thinking, feeling and doing into objects of study to conclude that the tourist-pilgrim
686 dichotomy does not exist (Pffaffenberger, 1983) as pilgrimage and tourism may be con-
687 ceptualized as 'two parallel, interchangeable lanes' (Smith, 1992, p. 15). Whilst accept-
688 ing that there may be no single underlying truth, the study argues that for
689 informants, the pilgrimage and sacred space are not secondary to 'tourism' given it is
690 produced through pilgrimage and ritual systems. The use of the pilgrimage framework
691 as a conceptual metaphor finds euro-centric descriptions of tourists as (secular) pil-
692 grims in a quest of authenticity (Graburn, 2001; MacCannell, 1976) lacking in the
693 Macau context.

694 The study highlights that pilgrimage is a complex and varied human activity, with
695 western understandings not equally applicable to the Chinese setting. While the study
696 uses the euro-centric body of pilgrimage knowledge and extant research, it also draws
697 heavily on Chinese religious and pilgrimage history. While Macau's success is often put
698 down to the extent to which visitors are drawn to a secular destination with inte-
699 grated resorts to engage in individualistic activities, the manifestations of culture, gov-
700 ernmentality and intentional ritualization should be central to future research. The
701 study argues against universalizing the relevance of historical contexts, and cultural
702 meanings to other communities and practices, given Macau is an anchor, with its
703 sacred places possessing 'manifestive power like spirituo-magnetism that always get
704 re-awakened by rituals' (Singh, 2009, p.231). The iconicity of a metaphor 'depends on
705 cultural codes, and cultures themselves vary, there can be no universal metaphors'
706 (Dann, 2002, p. 1). This study provides us with an understanding of how Chinese cul-
707 ture and cultural tradition is preserved in the present, with symbolism, mythology,
708 and intentional ritualization processes interwoven into journeys and spaces. The study
709 reveals the intentional ritualization that surrounds the informants and enables them to
710 enter, co-create and tolerate liminal conditions. By considering the significance of pol-
711 itical and commercial dimensions, the study identified how rituals are embraced articu-
712 lated, harnessed and optimised. The study also identified the linkage between the
713 political, economic and spiritual spheres and elements of power and control in the
714 release valve of pilgrimage.

715 Furthermore, this study found that in a Chinese context, play takes on much of the
716 organized ritual form of the pilgrimage, with the 'ludic' or playful elements now doing
717 the serious work of ritual (Huizinga, 1955; Turner, 1974). The notion of play has often
718 been forgotten in western contexts as an essential aspect of the liminality of pilgrim-
719 age, with Turner (1967) specifically using the concept of 'liminoid' or 'ludic liminality'
720 rather than liminal to describe liminoid experiences that are closer to play. A playful

721 pilgrimage doesn't deviate from notions of pilgrimage as involving rites (Van Gennep,
 722 1960), liminoid behaviour, ludic capacity and sacred space, and retains the notion of
 723 pilgrimage as giving license to behaviour beyond and outside conventional norms of
 724 propriety. A pilgrimage may also involve 'deep play' (Geertz, 1972). Despite being play-
 725 ful, the study finds gambling is passion-laden deep play, hyper-meaningful, steeped in
 726 symbols and symbolic actions (Di Giovine, 2011), as well as situated within 'accrete[s]
 727 rich superstructures' of mythological representations (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 23)
 728 and ritual (Tsang, 2004). Indeed, the playfulness partially comes from the sense that
 729 the social structure is just one step behind.

730 More broadly, the study draws us away from euro-centric studies that point to gam-
 731 blers disdain of rituals (Shalin, 2016) and its characterisation as sterile and unproductive.
 732 While Huizinga (1955, p. 13) argues that gambling was dispensable to culture, given it is
 733 'connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it', the study argues
 734 that this is not true within Chinese society where fate and fate control is manifest in lim-
 735 inal conditions (Langer, 1975; Leung & Bond, 2004; Presson & Benassi, 1996; Sangren,
 736 2012) and where gamblers are not seen in pejorative terms. Future research should
 737 explore other pilgrimages in China at the centre of (geopolitical) conflict (Zhang, 2017)
 738 and as they manifest as more controlled political pilgrimages (Li & Hu, 2008).

740 **Conclusions**

741
 742 The study found a ritual path of pilgrimage interwoven in the storylines and practices of
 743 mainland gambling tourists to Macau. The role of movement, the body, play, time and
 744 space scarcity, hyper-meaningfulness, intentional ritualization, risk-taking and sacred
 745 spaces was explored within a particular geographic, political, social and cultural context
 746 that derives from Macau's position as a liminal space (and time) marked by sacred places,
 747 temple festivals and kairos time. By linking gambling tourism by mainland Chinese with
 748 pilgrimage contributes to our understanding of geographies of pilgrimage in an under-
 749 studied context. The study takes into account meanings, practices, relationalities, spatial-
 750 ities and subjectivities to study a pilgrimage outside a Western context. We found
 751 gamblers are moulded in a process defined by their interactions with others, the material
 752 environment, the commercial, cultural, political and spiritual spheres as well as unique
 753 discourses of power and control that affect the release valve of the pilgrimage.

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