




Article

What Is the Most Influential Authenticity of Beliefs, Places, or Actions on the Pilgrimage Tourism Destination Attachment?

Dan Wang¹, Ching-Cheng Shen^{1,*}, Tzuhui Angie Tseng^{2,*} and Ching-Yi Lai¹

¹ Graduate Institute of Tourism Management, National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism, No. 1, Songhe Road, Xiaogang District, Kaohsiung City 812301, Taiwan; c0912006@stu.nkuht.edu.tw (D.W.); mayday7621@hotmail.com (C.-Y.L.)

² Department of Environmental and Cultural Resources, National Tsing Hua University, No. 521, Nanda Road, Hsinchu City 30035, Taiwan

* Correspondence: sccheng@mail.nkuht.edu.tw (C.-C.S.); thtseng@mx.nthu.edu.tw (T.A.T.); Tel.: +886-926643183 (C.-C.S.); +886-930625770 (T.A.T.)

Abstract: Religious tourism attracts many pilgrims and tourists to travel to a sacred space, and the issue of its authenticity has become increasingly important. Convenience sampling was used to conduct a survey at Dajia Jenn Lann Temple, Taichung City, Taiwan, and 487 valid questionnaires were obtained. The linear structural equation model constructs the analysis results as follows: (1) The “authenticity of place” and “action authenticity” have a positive relationship on the “place attachment” and act as a mediator variable for the effects of “authenticity of belief” on “authenticity of action”. (2) Tourists who have visited twice or more have a higher impact on “authenticity of belief” than those who have visited once. (3) Among the factors of the “authenticity of belief”, “concept of life” and “concept of God” are the most important; among the factors of the “authenticity of the place”, “spiritual sustenance” is the most important; and among the factors of “authenticity of action”, “experiential action” and “consequential actions” are the most important. The “place identity” is the essential aspect of the “place attachment” factor. This study developed a scale of the authenticity of belief, place, and action. Research results can provide a reference for religious tourism development.

Keywords: religious tourism; place attachment; Dajia Jenn Lann Temple; Taiwan Mazu



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1. Introduction

Religious belief is not only a part of people’s lives but also spiritual sustenance and emotional comfort [1]. In addition to believers, tourists also flock to the religious tourism field, which has become a popular tourist spot [2]. In Taiwan, the “three steps and one small temple, five steps and one big temple” reflects the wish to respect heaven and ancestors and is also a manifestation of religious tourism to meet the spiritual needs of tourists [3]. According to the statistics office of the Ministry of the Interior, there are 12,281 registered temples in Taiwan [4], which shows the importance and prevalence of religious activities and beliefs in social development. Religious tourism is one of the oldest sight-seeing activities, and many scholars believe that pilgrimage is a popular project for global tourists [5].

According to the survey of Taiwanese tourism in 2020, the primary tourism activities are nature viewing (63.30%), followed by cultural experience (25.1%), of which religious activities account for about 8.2% [6]. This survey also reflects the value of Taiwanese temples for local culture and art and the trend that Taiwanese religious organizations and fields are actively developing toward tourism. However, among the 131,380 studies on religion on the Web of Science, there are only 1214 articles on religious tourism, accounting for less than 1%. Religious tourism has not received much attention in academic research. Therefore, the first aim of this research is to supplement the academic literature on religious tourism and provide industrial advice to relevant operators.

Authenticity is an essential topic in the field of tourism. MacCannell [7] believed that modern people's pursuit of culture is to seek the experience of authenticity. Carbone et al. [8] found that authenticity is critical in achieving people's satisfaction with the holy way, regardless of their initial motivation (religion, leisure, and sports). Moufahim and Lichrou [9] believed that authenticity was a crucial factor in the religious tourism experience, a sense of belonging to meet the spiritual needs of the people [3], and a key to ensuring the economic sustainability of the destination [3,8,10]. Therefore, authenticity is the foundation of all religious tourism research. However, a review of related research on religious tourism found that most of them were based on the motivation of festival participants [11], experience [12], impact benefit [13,14], marketing [15], or sustainable development [3,10,14] as the starting points, while ignoring the importance of authenticity for religious tourism. Thus, the second research aim is to explore the effect of authenticity on Taiwanese religious beliefs.

Belhassen et al. [16] noted that authenticity is subjective. The process of pilgrims going to the Holy Land to participate in activities and feel the atmosphere of the sacred space can build tourists' perception of authenticity. Religious tourism is to experience the atmosphere of sacred space by believing in God and going to religious holy places to produce participation behavior of religious activities and experience the authenticity and significance of religion [16]. In this study, authenticity in religious tourism is composed of the subjective perception of travelers towards the religious history, locations, scenery, activities, and significance. In other words, the authenticity of religious tourism is formed by the elements of belief, place, and action. Therefore, this research aims to understand the connotation and indicators of religious authenticity from the perspectives of the authenticity belief, place, and action, which also triggered the third aim of this research.

Religious tourism is essential in revitalizing local development [3,10] and a haven for people to communicate with God and solve problems [17]. People's recognition and dependence on places will increase their loyalty to the destinations [18]. Therefore, place attachment has become essential in that religious tourism drives local development. The safe harbor provided by the gods is regarded as a safe and reliable place to solve human problems and difficulties [17]. This haven acts as an emotional bond, connecting it to God [19,20], resulting in an attachment to God. Most of the previous studies focused on discussing the impact of God attachment on security [21], relieving life stress [22,23], spiritual comfort [1], and psychological well-being [24] from the perspective of God's attachment. However, the research on the antecedent variables of place attachment is relatively lacking. Therefore, the fourth aim of this research is how religious tourism authenticity affects place attachment.

Abdulsalam and Dahana [25] mentioned that tourists who visit a destination more frequently have a more profound place attachment than tourists who visit less frequently. Although Chen and Chang [26] found a positive correlation between religious participation and the degree of place attachment, it was also perceived that authenticity was correlated with the length of stay [27]. However, there is no research to explore whether there are differences in the effect of tourists' perceived authenticity on place attachment with different times of visits to religious tourism. Therefore, to fill the research gap, the four purposes were triggered:

1. To enrich the academic literature on religious tourism while offering practical advice to relevant industry operators.
2. To investigate the impact of authenticity on Taiwanese religious beliefs.
3. To comprehend the connotations and indicators of religious authenticity through the lenses of beliefs, places, and actions.
4. To examine how authenticity in religious tourism influences place attachment.

To solve the above research purposes, this research aims to integrate the above theories into a single conceptual framework and highlight the influence relationship between each variable in this comprehensive theoretical model. This research will propose seven hypotheses in response to the purposes. The questionnaire is the primary survey method,

while the Linear Structure Relationship Model (LISREL) and SPSS 21.0 were used as analysis tools.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Authenticity of Religious Tourism

Kolar and Zabkar [28] and Pine and Gilmore [29] both recognized that tourists describe authenticity through their perception of “how real their experience is”. That is, tourism authenticity comes from perceived authenticity. Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart [16] proposed an authenticity framework of belief, place, and action. Its characteristics include (1) Piety: A pilgrimage resulting from an individual’s religious beliefs and actions; (2) Geopiety: Cognitive and emotional attachment based on personal beliefs or the value of sacred sites; and (3) Pilgrimage itinerary: Visiting the scenic spot and the physical environment in tourism is indispensable to the tourists’ experience activities [30]. Moufahim and Lichrou [9] noted that authenticity includes religious belief forms and ceremonies, space/places to visit, and consumption or purchase behavior on site. This research explores the subjective authenticity of religious tourism among tourists in terms of belief, place, and action [9,16,31].

2.1.1. Authenticity of Belief

The pilgrims realized the truth of their faith through their belief in God and the place. The ideology of the divinity behind the pilgrimage is the basis for the pilgrimage’s behavior and significance. The physical environment will also have a common meaning of social construction, which is religious culture [16]. The primary motivation of pilgrims is to experience genuine religious belief and experience God’s belief through related religious ceremonies and consumption behaviors, as well as going to the Holy Land by themselves [9]. The authenticity of religious tourism belief includes the view of God, divinity, life, life belonging, and soul [32]. The authenticity of belief in this research is tourists’ trust in the image and power of God and their belief in obtaining spiritual comfort to have a sense of awe and confidence in a God.

2.1.2. Authenticity of Place

Pilgrims’ visits to the Holy Land will strengthen their emotional connection with religion and feel the sacred significance and strong emotions. Therefore, the Holy Land has inspired the pilgrims’ thoughts and aroused them emotionally [9]. The authenticity of space and environment is another experience in tourism [33], and this place experience can change tourists’ behaviors and thoughts. The pilgrimage place makes believers feel sacred, awe, and mysterious. Pilgrimage to the holy place can eliminate upset and miscellaneous matters, introspect and confess, pray to fulfill wishes, and purify the body and mind [34]. The authenticity of a place is defined in this research as a place of pilgrimage that brings tourists a feeling of mystery and awe and arouses tourists’ emotional resonance and thought conversion. Visitors believe that they can eliminate distractions and meditate in the pilgrimage place.

2.1.3. Authenticity of Action

Religious spaces’ social and collective organization help shape the significance of the pilgrims’ activities and experiences in the visiting space [16]. Articles and souvenirs related to religion are essential to experience factors of pilgrimage, which can materialize the experience and become the carrier of the ceremony. Ritual behavior represents the transfer of holiness from the holy place to tourists, which is the behavior to maintain and convey the self-awareness and significance related to belief [9]. Participation behavior in religious activities can be divided into four aspects: ideological behavior, literal behavior, empirical behavior, and sequential behavior [31]. In this research, the authenticity of action is defined as tourists praying and worshiping in a pilgrimage environment and participating in religious activities, which have meaning related to their beliefs.

2.2. Place Attachment of Religious Tourism

Attachment theory is widely used in leisure tourism research, but most focus on the discussion of place attachment. Place attachment means the emotional or emotional combination between people and unique places [35,36]. In this research, it is the emotional connection between pilgrims and pilgrimage places. The establishment of place attachment is the key to the unique attractiveness and competitiveness of tourism and can predict the loyalty of a tourism destination [18,37] or revisit intention [38]. Related scholars have extended attachment theory to explore the attachment relationship between people and Gods. People often turn to Gods when stressed [31,39]. Bradshaw, Ellison, and Marcum's [21] research showed that attachment to God is related to people's suffering and life pain, and religious people regard God's environment as a safe and reliable place to solve human difficulties [17]. Therefore, many religious places have become irreplaceable for people to contact and communicate with Gods.

Many studies use place dependence and place identification as the dimensions of place attachment [18,38,40,41]. Place dependence refers to the degree of dependence of tourists on the local particular environment or facilities, emphasizing the importance of place in the substantive function, which can only be provided in this unique environment or facility [42,43]. Place identity refers to an individual's emotional attachment and sense of belonging to a place. This place identity is produced by a combination of attitudes, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, purposes, meanings, and behavioral tendencies [44]. Place attachment is defined in this research as tourists' emotional attachment, dependence, and belonging to God and the pilgrimage environment.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Hypotheses

Many scholars have confirmed that believers believe in the existence of God and visit the pilgrimage place [45,46]. The presence of pilgrims in the Holy place increases their emotional connection [9]. Believers affect their emotional experience and transmission through contact with holy places. Religion and place are inextricably linked [47]. Visiting pilgrimage sites to feel the closest to God is also the best way to experience belief [16]. The authenticity of religious travel and belief often deeply influences the authenticity of the place itself. When travelers hold strong and genuine beliefs about a religious site or its significance, it tends to enhance their perception of the authenticity of that specific location [45,46]. As a result, this subjective connection to beliefs associated with religious sites can significantly impact how travelers interpret and experience the authenticity of the places they visit. Based on the above literature, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

- H₁: The authenticity of religious tourism belief has a positive and significant impact on the authenticity of the place.

Tourists with different religious beliefs will behave differently according to their views on the place [48]. These behaviors may be explicit. For example, Chiu [49] believed that in folk beliefs, efficacy and miracles are the factors that affect religious behaviors and ideas, and the contribution to the temple incense money is explicit behavior. Therefore, belief will have a direct and significant positive impact on action. These actions may also translate into intrinsic value. For example, Chang [50] believed religious souvenirs have religious connotations, life attitudes, and values, which are gifts exchanged between people and gods. Religion has a profound impact on individuals and places. For believers, religious places are identity symbols and self-development [47].

To sum up, both explicit and internal behaviors reflect the influence of the authenticity of belief on religious tourism. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

- H₂: The authenticity of religious tourism belief has a positive and significant impact on the authenticity of action.

Constructing an authentic social space is an essential basis for travel-related experiences. Religious tourism attracts tourists to experience activities in holy places through their belief in God and the atmosphere of sacred space to perceive the authenticity and significance of religion [16]. Tourists' perception of the infrastructure and authenticity of religious places will affect tourists' authentic experience and participation behavior [8]. The authenticity of a religious tourism place can have a profound impact on the authenticity of actions because when individuals perceive a place as genuinely connected to their beliefs or values, it often inspires them to act in a manner that aligns with those sentiments [13,33]. This alignment between the perceived authenticity of the place and personal beliefs can foster genuine, meaningful actions or behaviors during the visit [51]. Therefore, this research puts forward the third hypothesis:

- H₃: The authenticity of the religious tourism place has a positive and significant impact on the authenticity of action.

Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart [16] pointed out that visitors to the pilgrimage place are the closest place to God and the best way to experience belief. That is, the emotional experience of tourists in the sacred place enhances their sense of attachment to the place and positively impacts their future actions [11,18]. Therefore, tourists' religious belief is a way to generate relevant perceptions and feelings about a place [52]. When individuals deeply believe in the authenticity of a religious site or its significance, it often strengthens their emotional connection and attachment to that particular place. This sense of belief and connection can enhance the overall experience and deepen the bond individuals feel with the location they are visiting [53–55]. Based on the above discussion, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

- H₄: The authenticity of religious tourism belief has a positive and significant impact on place attachment.

The authenticity of existence is a positive factor for the place's dependence on all influencing factors [56]. Tseng et al. [57] showed that the higher the authenticity of tourists' perception, the more emotional recognition and functional dependence they would have on the place, thus increasing tourists' place recognition, attachment, and dependence. Dai et al. [58] showed that tourists' perception of authenticity affected nostalgia and place attachment. Chen [59] believed that the place of pilgrimage was where history and physical experience were shared. In addition, it is the connection of space, people, and places that creates people's attachment to religious feelings and place identity. Therefore, many religious holy places have become essential and irreplaceable places for people to contact and communicate with God.

- H₅: The authenticity of the religious tourism place has a positive and significant impact on place attachment.

Religious acts can maintain and convey religious beliefs and doctrines through ceremonies, objects, pictorial symbols, and pilgrimage-related activities and actions. For example, ritual behavior and contact with sacred objects generate emotional and sensory memories and extend to the emotional connection between others and daily life [9]. In addition, pilgrims can experience a high degree of recognition from other people when they participate in pilgrimage activities and related ceremonies, thus creating emotional unity. At the same time, participation in public ceremonies is a way for pilgrims to realize the experience of religion. From this participation, they can feel the sacred significance of solid feelings, obtain peace of life, and ultimately identify with and rely on religion and places [9]. Therefore, when actions align with personal beliefs or values in a genuine manner, they often reinforce a stronger connection to the place, fostering a deeper sense of attachment and belonging [60]. This alignment between authentic actions and the environment cultivates a more meaningful and lasting bond with the place. For this reason, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

- H₆: The authenticity of action has a positive and significant impact on place attachment.

Authenticity is considered the result of tourism experience [28,61], while the authenticity of a tourism background needs multiple explorations and experiences to be discovered [28,62,63]. In other words, repeated tourism experiences can help tourists discover and perceive authenticity. Tao et al. [64], as well as Abdulsalam and Dahana [25], found that tourists with high participation are more likely to have place attachments than those with low participation. Chen and Chang [26] found that when residents participated in religion, there was a significant difference between the impact of visit frequency and place attachment. Another finding was a positive correlation between religious participation and place attachment. Therefore, different times or occasions, such as religious festivals, pilgrimage seasons, or specific cultural events, can influence how tourists perceive the authenticity of the place they are visiting [65]. Based on the above analysis, this research speculates the following hypothesis:

- H₇: Different times of religious tourism visits have significant differences in the impact of tourists' perceived authenticity on place attachment.

3.2. Questionnaire Design

In this research, the questionnaire is the primary survey method. The questionnaire design of this research is divided into five parts: the authenticity of religious tourism belief, the authenticity of religious tourism place, the authenticity of religious tourism action, and the place attachment of religious tourism. Demographic variables include seven categories, such as gender, age, education, occupation, marital status, place of residence, and monthly income. Except for demographic variables measured on category scales, the remaining variables were measured on the Likert five-point scale, ranging from 1 = extremely disagree to 7 = extremely agree.

3.3. Research Subjects

Dajia Jenn Lann Temple is one of Taiwan's most famous Mazu temples and has more than 200 years of history. The incense is prosperous throughout the year, and there is an endless stream of believers. In addition, Matsu Pilgrimage Procession is a world-class religious event held in March of the lunar calendar, attracting domestic and foreign tourists to participate. The 2016 Dajia Matsu Pilgrimage Procession was held from 9 to 17 April, and about 150,000 people participated each year. Therefore, the survey site of this research is mainly Dajia Jenn Lann Temple Square, and tourists who go to the Jenn Lann Temple in Dajia District, Taichung City, are the survey subjects.

3.4. Samples' Criteria

In order to make the sample representative, this research selects holidays and non-holidays for on-site questionnaire collection during the Pilgrimage Procession. Convenience sampling was conducted by trained interviewers wearing identification nameplates. Tourists were asked whether they met the following conditions (1) At least 20 years old; (2) Participated in religious activities or from religious tourism; (3) Were willing to participate in this research survey. The interviewer will choose the next interviewee if the above conditions are not met. In the same group, only one will be selected as the respondent, and interviewers will choose one person for every five people.

This research uses "absolute precision" to estimate the number of samples required [66], assuming that the sampling error is less than 5% (i.e., $e < 0.05$). At the 95% confidence interval level, the sample size is determined to be at least more than 5%. Three hundred eighty-five copies are required to ensure research precision. Since there were invalid questionnaires during the questionnaire survey, 500 questionnaires were distributed, and a total of 497 questionnaires were recovered, of which 487 were valid, and the effective questionnaire rate was 96.4%. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0) and LISREL 8.72 software were used as analysis tools for data analysis.

4. Analysis of Results

4.1. Demographic Statistics

There are seven demographic variables in this research (Table 1 displays respondent demographics). The results of the demographic characteristics of respondents showed that “male” and “female” accounted for 43.5% and 56.5%, respectively. Age was dominated by “20–29”, accounting for 27.5%, followed by “30–39” and “40–49” years old, accounting for 20.1% and 19.9%, respectively. Marital status was dominated by “unmarried”, accounting for 35.7%, and “married”, accounting for 59.8%. Education level was dominated by “university”, accounting for 42.3%, followed by “high school”, accounting for 33.5%. Average monthly income “under 20,000 NT (629 USD)” was the largest, accounting for 32.0%, followed by “20,001–30,000 NT (629–943 USD)” accounting for 24.0%. Occupations with “service” were the largest, accounting for 22.6%, followed by “student”, accounting for 17.0%. “The central region” was the most, accounting for 62.6%, followed by the “northern region”, accounting for 18.3%.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Items	Variables	<i>n</i>	%	Items	Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	212	43.5	Marital status	Married	291	59.8
	Female	275	56.5		Unmarried	174	35.7
Age	20–29 yrs	134	27.5		other	22	4.5
	30–39 yrs	98	20.1	Occupation	Services	110	22.6
	40–49 yrs	97	19.9		Student	83	17.0
	50–59 yrs	94	19.3		Civil servants	43	8.8
	60–69 yrs	64	13.2		Business	42	8.6
Elementary and middle	70	14.4	Industry		55	11.3	
Education	High school	163	33.5	retire	28	5.8	
	University	206	42.3	Agriculture	27	5.6	
	Graduate and above	48	9.8	Freelancer	73	15.0	
	Other	26	5.3	Monthly income	≤20,000	156	32.0
Northern region	89	18.3	20,001–3000		117	24.0	
Central region	305	62.6	30,001–40,000		113	23.2	
Southern region	83	17.0	40,001–50,000		63	12.9	
East region	7	1.5	50,001–60,000		27	5.6	
Outlying islands	0	0.0	Above 60,001		11	2.3	
Regions	Others	3	0.6				

4.2. Factor Analysis

This study comprises four main dimensions: (1) Authenticity of belief (AB), which consists of 16 items, segmented into four sub-dimensions through factor analysis. (2) Authenticity of place (AP), which comprises 19 items segmented into five sub-dimensions through factor analysis. (3) Authenticity of action (AA), which comprises 14 items segmented into four sub-dimensions through factor analysis. (4) Place attachment (PA), which comprises 13 items segmented into two sub-dimensions through factor analysis. Table 2 provides an overview of some indicators for these four main dimensions. Factor analysis extracts common factors by the principle component analysis and calculates the commonly explained variance of all measured variables. The factor loading of each item is greater than 0.5 and has good reliability (Cronbach’s α is greater than 0.7) (as shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Factor analysis of the authenticities of belief, place, and action, as well as the place attachment.

	Factor	Factor Loading	Communality	Explained Variance (%)	Cronbach's α	References
Authenticity of belief (AB)	Concept of life (CL)	0.63–0.73	0.53–0.68	19.82	0.816	[9,16,32]
	Concept of God (CG)	0.64–0.72	0.50–0.70	19.68	0.838	
	Concept of belongingness in life (CB)	0.60–0.72	0.50–0.70	16.98	0.830	
	Concept of the soul (CS)	0.69–0.74	0.70–0.76	8.47	-	
Authenticity of place (AP)	Religious art decorations in a temple (RD)	0.65–0.72	0.62–0.74	19.10	0.869	[9,33,34]
	Religious spiritual sustenance (RS)	0.66–0.71	0.57–0.80	18.51	0.850	
	Sanctity and magnificence of religious spaces (SM)	0.50–0.72	0.62–0.68	12.06	0.777	
	Dependence on religion in life (DR)	0.60–0.66	0.52–0.67	9.46	0.707	
	Ambiance of religious cleansing (AR)	0.51	0.78	0.71	-	
Authenticity of action (AA)	Experiential actions (EA)	0.57–0.80	0.59–0.80	20.82	0.855	[9,16,31]
	Consequential actions (CA)	0.69–0.77	0.72–0.77	18.86	0.836	
	Ritualistic action (RA)	0.68–0.77	0.65–0.84	17.10	0.841	
	Ideological action (IA)	0.67–0.69	0.70–0.79	15.07	0.750	
Place attachment (PA)	Place dependence (PD)	0.64–0.80	0.56–0.73	32.3	0.877	[42–44]
	Place identity (PI)	0.68–0.80	0.56–0.73	30.75	0.865	

4.3. The Relationship between the Authenticity of Religious Tourism and Place Attachment

This research uses the structural equation model (SEM) to verify the influence relationship between variables. The solid line represents the significant path after verification, and the parentheses are t values (Figure 1). The basic fitness of the model in this research, the error variance is positive, and the estimated values are significant, which indicates that the model estimation results meet the standard.

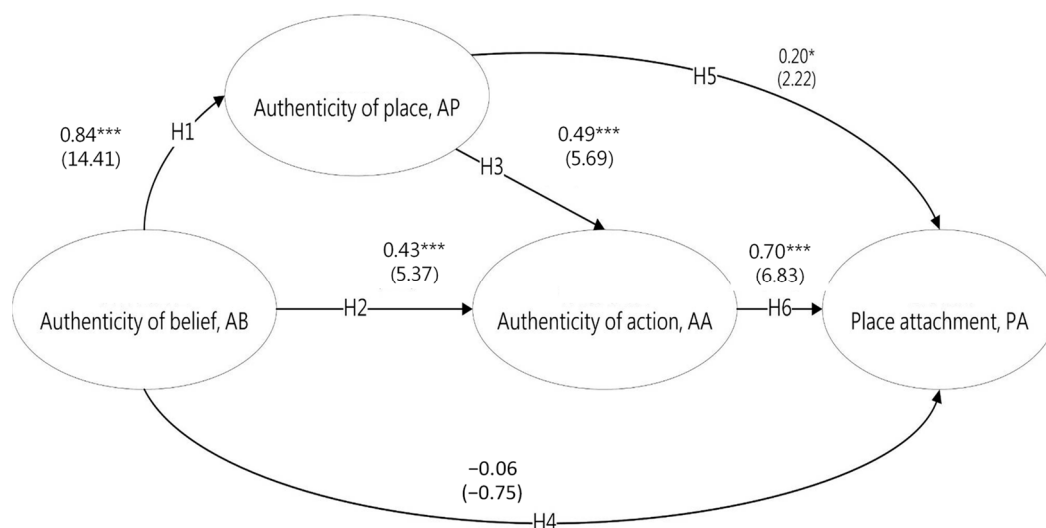


Figure 1. Path analysis of the authenticity to place attachment of all the respondents. (Note: *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$).

Concerning the goodness-of-fit index of the model, the chi-square statistic (χ^2) is 193.60, the degree of freedom (df) is 75, and the chi-square ratio (χ^2/df) is 2.87. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is 0.95, the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) is 0.92, the root means a square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.057, the normalized fit index (NFI) is 0.99, the non-normalized fit index (NNFI) is 0.99, and the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.99. All of the indices stated above are within an acceptable range, indicating that the model's overall goodness-of-fit is good [67].

Based on the prior factor analysis, this study will utilize the second-order structure derived from the analysis as the items to validate through structural equation modeling (SEM). The factor loading (FL) was greater than 0.5, reaching a significant level, indicating that the model estimation results meet the standard. The composite reliability (CR) ranges from 0.835 to 0.861, which surpasses the recommended 0.7 [68]. In terms of reliability and validity, Cronbach's α of the latent variables is higher than 0.7. These results showed that each dimension is acceptable (Table 3).

Table 3. The goodness of fit index in the basic model.

Latent Variable	Factor	FL	<i>t</i>	Error Variance (E.V)	Error Variance <i>t</i> Value (E. V. <i>t</i>)	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Authenticity of belief (AB)	Concept of life	0.79	19.75	0.37	11.51	0.806	0.847	0.586
	Concept of God	0.83	21.89	0.31	11.88			
	Concept of belongingness in life	0.85	22.21	0.27	9.88			
	Concept of the soul	0.55	12.54	0.70	14.99			
Authenticity of place (AP)	Religious art decorations in a temple	0.70	-	0.52	12.19	0.788	0.835	0.509
	Religious spiritual sustenance	0.89	15.43	0.21	8.38			
	Sanctity and magnificence of religious spaces	0.70	13.52	0.51	14.09			
	Dependence on religion in life	0.69	16.33	0.52	13.88			
	Ambiance of religious cleansing	0.55	10.20	0.70	14.79			
Authenticity of action (AA)	Experiential actions	0.76	-	0.42	13.13	0.858	0.861	0.636
	Consequential actions	0.80	17.88	0.37	12.50			
	Ritualistic action	0.82	18.43	0.33	11.81			
	Ideological action	0.74	16.42	0.45	13.47			
Place attachment (PA)	Place dependence	0.89	-	0.21	6.82	0.818	0.851	0.740
	Place identity	0.83	20.38	0.31	9.88			

Table 4 shows the discriminant validity of the constructs. The AVE square root of each construct has an excellent square root correlation with the same concept as the other, showing an acceptable discriminant validity.

Table 4. The discriminant validity of the latent variable.

Latent Variable	M	SD	AB	AP	AA	PA
AB	4.27	0.50	0.766			
AP	4.42	0.42	0.703	0.713		
AA	4.18	0.57	0.683	0.696	0.797	
PA	4.14	0.53	0.583	0.637	0.761	0.860

4.4. Analysis of the Influence of Visiting Times on Tourists’ Perceived Authenticity and Place Attachment

The tourists who participated in religious tourism are divided into two groups: first-time visitors (106, accounting for 21.3%) and revisiting more than two times (inclusive) tourists (381, accounting for 78.7%). Figure 2 (the first-time visitors) and Figure 3 (the revisiting visitors) establish a linear structural model according to the relationship between the variables in Figure 1 to discuss their differences and then use an independent sample *t*-test to analyze their differences. The analysis results are shown in Table 5.

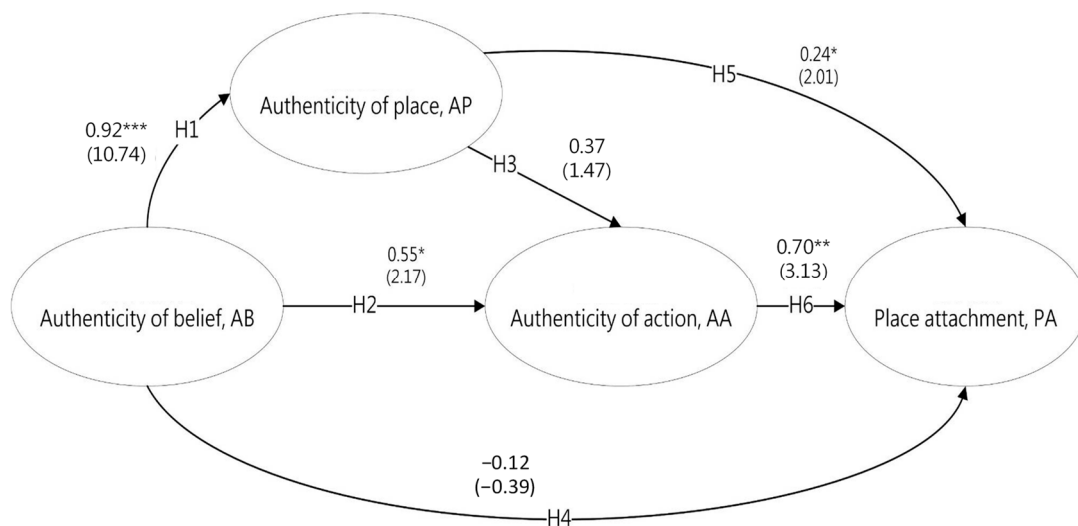


Figure 2. Path analysis of the authenticity to place attachment of the first-time visitors. (Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$).

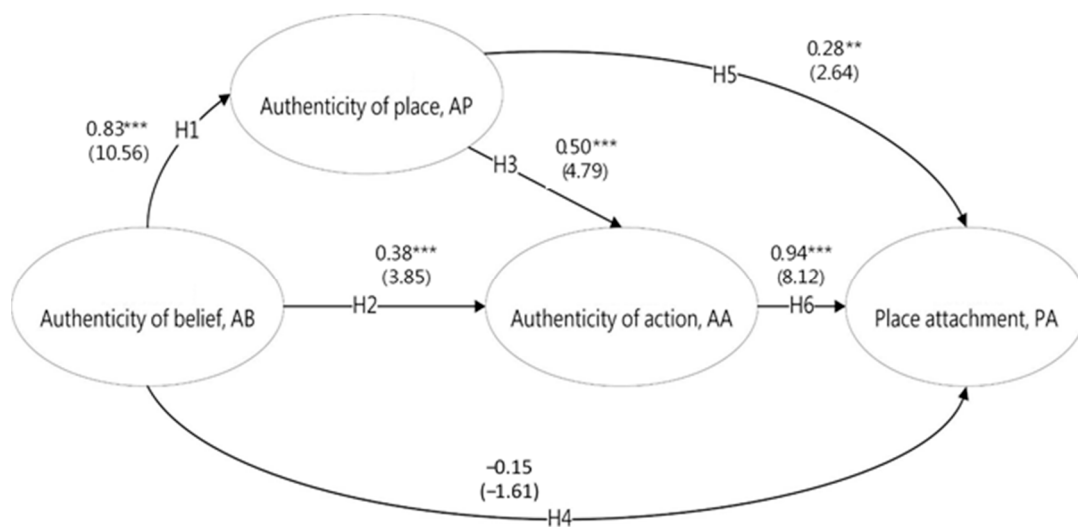


Figure 3. Path analysis of the authenticity to place attachment of the revisiting visitors. (Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$).

Table 5. Difference analysis of the visiting times of the authenticity on the place attachment.

Path	First-Time (A)	More Than Two Times (Inclusive) (B)	A–B	SD A–B	t	p
AB → AP	0.92	0.83	0.09	0.0275	3.27 ***	0.000
AB → AA	0.55	0.38	0.17	0.0331	5.14 ***	0.000
AP → AA	0.37	0.50	−0.13	0.0339	−3.84 ***	0.000
AB → PA	−0.12	−0.15	0.03	0.0336	0.89	0.368
AP → PA	0.24	0.28	−0.04	0.0364	−1.10	0.271
AA → PA	0.70	0.94	−0.24	0.0349	−6.87 ***	0.000
AB → PA	0.72	0.81	−0.09	0.0236	−3.81 ***	0.000

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

4.5. Tested Result of Hypotheses

From the above results (Table 6), this research found that different visiting times affect tourists' perceived authenticity on place attachment. Therefore, H_7 (different times of religious tourism visits have significant differences in the impact of tourists' perceived authenticity on place attachment) is acceptance.

Table 6. Hypotheses test.

Hypotheses	β Coefficient	t Value	Testing	Result
H_1	0.84	14.41 ***	$p < 0.001$	acceptance
H_2	0.43	5.37 ***	$p < 0.001$	acceptance
H_3	0.49	5.69 ***	$p < 0.001$	acceptance
H_4	−0.06	−0.75 ***	$p > 0.050$	rejection
H_5	0.20	2.22 *	$p < 0.001$	acceptance
H_6	0.70	6.83 ***	$p < 0.001$	acceptance

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Top Impact Items for Each Dimension

According to Table 3, among the four observed variables of belief authenticity, their effects reach a significant level, of which the "concept of loyalty in life" (0.85) and "concept of God" (0.83) are the most important. Among the five variables of the authenticity of the place, the influence effect reaches a significant level, of which the most important is "religious and sexual sustenance" (0.89). Among the four observed variables of the authenticity of action, the influence effect reached a significant level. The most important are "empirical actions" (0.82) and "consequential actions" (0.80). Of the two observed variables of place attachment, place identification (0.83) was the most important.

5.2. The Relationship between the Authenticities of Belief, Place, Action, and Place Attachment

The authenticity of belief significantly impacts the authenticity of place (0.84), which is similar to the research findings of Shen and Hsieh [45], and Granqvist [20] put forward that the attraction between belief and place is a positive relationship, and believers connect themselves with God through contact with holy places.

The authenticity of belief significantly impacts the authenticity of action (0.289). The result is similar to the experience of the miracle of Gods and affects the concept of religious behavior and donation [49]. The result is also identical to the findings of Huang, Huang, and Yu [46]: most religious tourists believe in the existence of ghosts and gods, which positively affect their worship behaviors and pray for blessings.

The authenticity of the place significantly impacts the authenticity of action (0.49). Tourists go to religious holy places to feel the atmosphere of the sacred places and enhance their attachment to the heavenly places, and so will their pilgrimage motivation and behavior [69,70]. Due to their religious beliefs, tourists are willing to participate in religious tourism, celebration activities, pilgrimage processions, ceremonies, etc., and devotion and

purchases are generated through these activities. Chang and Chu [70] found that Dajia Matsu's efficacious deeds are frequent, and the devotion of believers makes Dajia Matsu's sesame oil money soar.

The authenticity of the place significantly impacts place attachment (0.2), which shows that the accessibility of pilgrimage sites is also regarded as a reliable place to solve human problems and difficulties [17]. Chen [59] believed that the pilgrimage site connects space, people, and place and creates the place identity shared by individuals and groups through religious attachment.

The authenticity of the action significantly impacts place attachment (0.7). The residents of the Kinmen area have a place attachment to the "City God Reception Parade" activities, and temples can be regarded as tourist destinations for religious tourism [71]. Therefore, tourists' place attachment to temples will affect the sustainable development of the destination's social economy [3] and the people's spiritual sustenance and happiness [24]. These analyses also explain that religious holy places are essential for people to pray for God to communicate with God.

The authenticity of belief has a high indirect effect on place attachment through the authenticities of place and action, which shows that the authenticities of place and action are mediating variables of the authenticity of belief affecting the place attachment. Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart [16] proposed that belief in religious tourism depends on tourists' perception of pilgrimage sites, which affects their participation in religious activities and actions. Mazumdar and Mazumdar [47] noted that when believers come into contact with holy places, they will significantly affect their emotional experience, making them have a good connection with the religion.

5.3. Path Analysis of Authenticity of Belief on Place Attachment

Figure 1 shows that there are three paths of the influence of the Authenticity of beliefs on place attachment: First, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AA \rightarrow PA$ is 0.30; Second, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AP \rightarrow PA$ is 0.17; Third, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AP \rightarrow AA \rightarrow PA$ is 0.29. The above analysis shows that the total effect of the authenticity of belief on place attachment is 0.76, which shows that authenticities of place and action are the mediating variables of the authenticity of belief affecting the authenticity of action.

Figure 2 shows that there are three influence paths of first-time tourists in the influence of the Authenticity of religious tourism beliefs on place attachment: First, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AA \rightarrow PA$ is 0.39; Second, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AP \rightarrow AA \rightarrow PA$ is 0.23; Third, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AP \rightarrow PA$ is 0.22. The above analysis shows that AA as a mediating variable is the most crucial path for the authenticity of religious tourism beliefs to affect place attachment.

Figure 3 shows that there are three influence paths of revisiting more than two times (inclusive) tourists in the influence of the authenticity of religious tourism beliefs on place attachment: First, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AA \rightarrow PA$ is 0.36; Second, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AP \rightarrow AA \rightarrow PA$ is 0.39; Third, the influence of $AB \rightarrow AP \rightarrow PA$ is 0.23. The above analysis shows that AA and AP as mediating variables are the path for the authenticity of religious tourism beliefs to affect place attachment. Reviewing more than two-time tourists has a higher impact on place attachment than first-time tourists.

In the second path, it is found that tourists who have more than two times (inclusive) have a higher authentication of place, which also improves the authentication of action and place attachment.

5.4. The Impact of Visiting Times on Authenticity and Place Attachment

In this research, religious tourists were divided into two groups: first-time and revisiting-more-than-two-time tourists. The difference in place attachment between the two groups was analyzed by *t*-test. This research found that the authenticity of belief has three influence paths on place attachment. This discovery reveals that authenticities of place and action are essential factors that affect place attachment.

Through further comparison, this research found that tourists who have visited more than two times (inclusive) have a more excellent perception of the authenticity of the place than those who have visited for the first time, which also improves the sense of authenticity of the place and place attachment. Therefore, this finding is similar to previous studies in that tourists can further perceive the authenticity of the existence of places through multiple visits [28,62,63].

6. Implications

6.1. Theoretical Implication

This research has important implications for both theoretical and industrial implications. From the theoretical implications, this research understands the theoretical impact of belief authenticity on place attachment and determines the critical mediating role of the authenticities of place and action between the authenticity of belief and place attachment. From the industrial implications, put forward practical suggestions on the attachment of religious tourism from the authenticities of place, belief, and action, to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of religious tourism.

This research understands the connotation and indicators of religious authenticity from the authenticities of place, belief, and action and examines the effects of these variables on place attachment to explore whether the difference in visiting times to perceived authenticity affects place attachment and fills the gap in religious research. The results of data analysis show that these integrated driving factors produce a robust model of religious tourism authenticity and place attachment. When the authenticities of place, belief, and action are integrated into a model, it provides a reasonable explanation for how religious tourism authenticity affects place attachment. Therefore, this study verifies the relationship between these variables; in particular, the authenticity of belief positively affects the authenticities of place, behavior, and place attachment.

In addition, this research's other two theoretical breakthroughs are: (1) Verified that the authenticities of place and action are the mediating variables that the authenticity of belief affects place attachment; (2) The *t*-test was used to analyze the difference between the two groups of tourists in place attachment. The results show that the tourists who visited many times could further perceive the authenticity.

6.2. Industrial Implications

6.2.1. Mobilize Tourists' Sense of Participation with the Authenticity of Belief

As tourists achieve their belonging in life through religious belief, this research suggests that temples should deepen their cultural and historical allusions, enhance their awareness and cohesion of belief, and organize temple-related activities to attract tourists to participate. Tourists' perception of the concept of the soul is relatively low. This research advises that the temple should pay attention to tourists' "real self" and conceptualize religious tourism products as spiritual experiences generated by the internal interaction between tourists and religion to help realize self-value through belief [51,72]. This includes shooting micro-videos of volunteers serving religious services, making relevant statues, histories, deeds, etc. into books or digital content of religious beliefs, and regularly holding activities related to religious beliefs.

6.2.2. Create Multiple Visits for Tourists

Keep in touch with other people (such as residents, travel partners, etc.) in a natural environment, with real on-site experience and a friendly way, such as packaging religious stories to enhance tourists' sense of connection with local religious history and culture [73]. In addition, moderate guided tours can help tourists to have a deep understanding of actual religious events. When tourists interact spiritually with religious beliefs, they can also help them generate self-worth. The authenticity of existence is self-creation and self-discovery generated in the interaction of activities [33].

The place of pilgrimage should create an authentic cultural atmosphere and pay attention to the construction of infrastructure because tourists will perceive the authenticity of the place through the infrastructure of religious places, thus affecting their participation in and satisfaction with religion [8]. Jin et al. [74] noted in the study that tourists' perceived authenticity is positively correlated with leisure well-being, enjoyment, and tourists' use of technology [75]. Although temples are places for tourists' hearts and wish bailment, tourists' perception of the temple's art and atmosphere, the holy place, and the surrounding environment also affect their perception of authenticity. Therefore, this research suggests that the quality and environment of pilgrimage guidance should improve the comfort of tourists in the overall environment.

6.2.3. Reshaping the Authenticity of Religious Place

Tourism destination managers play a leading role in the authenticity of the place, such as protecting and reshaping local culture, customs, architecture, and historical landmarks to present an accurate portrayal [76]. Proper innovation based on the original foundation will not damage the authenticity of the place [77]. Therefore, this research suggests that religious buildings, cultural relics, customs, and traditions can be restored to show the natural environment of the pilgrimage site to tourists, which can also significantly impact tourists' perceptions.

In addition, this research also calls on destination managers to develop strategies to improve tourists' social interaction and participation in local activities and improve the pilgrimage site's good religious tourism image; for example, learning-oriented tourist activities, lectures, seminars, and interactions with residents. Through these ways, tourists can be deeply integrated with the local culture to achieve a more authentic experience [78].

7. Limitation and Future Research

First, this research only distributed questionnaires in Dajia Jenn Lan Temple and did not collect questionnaires in other regions. It is suggested that researchers can collect samples in different regions in the future. Second, Taiwan has a multi-belief culture, and each religious belief has its characteristics of history, culture, pilgrimage sites, religious activities, etc. This research only takes Taoism as an example and suggests that future researchers can explore different religious beliefs. Third, Religious tourism is often regarded as the goal of achieving the sustainable development of tourism destinations. Future research can further explore the research on authenticity, place attachment, and the impact of the sustainable development of destinations. Fourth, whether authenticity has a new relationship path model in religious tourism is a topic that can be further studied. Finally, this research uses convenience sampling for data collection, which limits the precision of sample selection. It is suggested that random sampling can be used for related research in the future.

8. Conclusions

Religious tourism holds considerable significance in numerous locations, drawing visitors eager for experiences tied to faith, culture, and history. Nonetheless, the engagement and requirements of tourists are pivotal, as their experiences and participation stand as pivotal elements for the continuous progress of religious tourism. Moreover, religious tourism has the potential to encourage sustainable development. Preserving religious heritage and advocating associated activities not only present economic prospects for local communities but also bolster appreciation for cultural heritage and natural assets. In comparison to other tourism themes, research dedicated to religious tourism remains relatively scarce.

This study supplements the academic literature on religious tourism from the perspective of authenticity and provides industry recommendations for relevant stakeholders. By examining the impact of authenticity on Taiwan's religious beliefs and understanding how this authenticity influences place attachment, the research aims to offer actionable

suggestions for both academia and industry. Additionally, based on quantitative analysis, the study further explores the implications and indicators of religious authenticity from the angles of belief in authenticity, place, and action. Finally, the study's innovation lies in emphasizing differential effects on the connection between belief authenticity and place attachment among visitors with varying frequencies of visits, thereby offering tangible recommendations for the future management and sustainable operation of the Dajia Jenn Lann Temple.

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