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Zen practitioners’ mindset returns to ZERO at all times. Those who cannot clean their mindset are not real Zen practitioners.

—Master Wanxing, Donghua Zen Temple

1. Introduction

The concept of mindfulness in Buddhism can be traced to ancient east Asia; more specifically to the Pali words, sati and vipassana. Sati means to stop and to maintain awareness of the object, and vipassana refers to deep observation of the object (Hanh, 2012). Hanh (2012) pointed out that in practicing mindfulness, “the first step is awareness of the object, and the second step is looking deeply at the object to shed light on it” (p. 117). Meditation is a traditional approach used in Buddhism to practice mindfulness (Austin, 1998). Buddhists often seek to incorporate mindfulness and meditation as part of their tourism experience (Jiang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2018). Even tourists who are not Buddhists often may wish to exercise mindfulness during tourism, or participate in some mindfulness-related tourism activities (Chen, I-Ling, Scott, & Benckendorff, 2017; Loureiro, Stylos, & Miranda, 2019). For those who seek advanced practice of mindfulness in tourism, Zen retreats are organized to offer intense professional practice of mindfulness (S.-Y. Shi, 2005). Such Zen retreats commonly provide seven-day retreats (S.-Y. Shi, 2005). According to Jiang et al. (2018), since 2014, over one hundred temples in China provide Zen mindfulness themed tourist retreats. Other examples of such retreats include the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in California, the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in New York, and the Plum Village Monastery in southern France. Similar Zen themed retreats are becoming popular around the world. Jiang et al. (2018) is widely regarded as a pioneer in the study of the Zen retreat experience. By integrating multiple qualitative methods to investigate Zen retreat participants at Nuonatayuan Meditation Center and Hongfa Temple in China, Jiang et al. (2018) identified influencing factors which defined tourists’ Chinese meditation experience. The study also conceptualized the motivational impulse (which includes two dimensions: search for meaning and search for escape) and meditative process (which has two dimensions: inner directed and outer directed) from tourists’ perspective. Although the Jiang et al. (2018) study blazed a trail for understanding the Zen retreat experience, there are still knowledge and literature gaps worth further exploration. First, despite some progress to reduce mindfulness gaps in tourism literature (Chen et al., 2017; Loureiro et al., 2019), a longitudinal understanding of why tourists choose to attend specific Zen sites and the expected outcomes of their visits has yet to be achieved. Second, while Zen retreat experiences...
vary according to individual differences in mindfulness performance (W. Shi, 2004), the hierarchical levels in Zen retreat experience has not yet been covered. Third, to offer Zen retreats to the public, as highlighted by Wong, McIntosh, and Ryan (2013), organizers’ perspectives should be included in research to understand contributing implications related to planning and development.

To fill these knowledge gaps, this study examined three areas. First, this study seeks to analyze the longitudinal path of what motivates Zen retreat tourists and what the expected outcomes of Zen retreats are from the tourists’ perspective. Second, this study intends to clarify the hierarchical levels in Zen retreat experience. Third, this study attempts to summarize insights and implications for planning and developing Zen retreats. This study was conducted using information collected from visitors to the Donghua Zen Temple located in Shaoguan City, Guangdong Province, China. Since 2014, the Donghua Zen Temple has offered more than 40 workshops on Zen retreats to over 1000 tourists. Findings from this study can further the understanding of the Zen retreat experience, as well as contribute valuable implications to Zen retreat organizers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Buddhist tourism and Zen

Religious tourism is defined by Rinschede (1992) as a “type of tourism whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons” (p. 52). Buddhist tourism, a sub-field of religious tourism, has attracted scholars to study destinations in China, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand, and Sri Lanka (Jiang et al., 2018; Michaud, 1991; Nyaupane, 2009; Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010; Peleggi, 1996; Pfaffenberger, 1983; Ryan & Gu, 2016; Wong, McIntosh, & Ryan, 2016). Wong et al. (2013) classified Buddhist tourism tourists by two factors: (1) the level of Buddhist’s seed’s germination (the Buddhist worldview), and (2) the level of devotion and understanding Buddhism (the mundane worldview). Based on these two factors, the study conceptualized four types of Buddhist tourism tourists: (1) leisure tourists (future Buddhists), (2) Shinshis (Buddhist believers), (3) Xiankes (Devout Buddhist believers), and (4) Jushis (Buddhist practitioners).

However, most studies of Buddhist tourism are based on the perspectives of leisure tourists or followers of Buddhism (Nyaupane, 2009; Ryan & Gu, 2016; Wong et al., 2016). As a result, there exists a knowledge gap in the literature as it pertains to understanding the experiences of devout Buddhist believers/practitioners who engage in Buddhist tourism (Jiang et al., 2018).

This study focuses on the Zen retreat experience – a subset of Buddhist tourism. Zen (same as Chan in Chinese), as explained by S.-Y. Shi and Stevenson (2001), is “a Chinese transliteration of the Indian Buddhism term dhyana, meaning meditative concentration or meditative practice” (p. 17). Bodhidharma (d. ca. 530) from India is the First Patriarch of Chan Buddhism who traveled to China and taught the Mahayana-oriented style of meditation; a philosophy that spawned a lineage which was continued until the Sixth Patriarch of Chan, Huineng (638–713) (Sørensen, 2012). Platform Sutra, which covers the life stories and insights of Huineng, became a foundation for development in Chan Buddhism (Schlüttner, 2012; S.-Y. Shi & Stevenson, 2001). From the eighth to twelfth centuries, Chan continued to develop and matured into the Chan school of Buddhism (Schlüttner, 2012). Chan Buddhism spread from China to Korea (where it became known as Son), and to Japan (where it became known as Zen) (Schlüttner, 2012). Through intercultural publications and introductions by Japanese Buddhist scholars such as Daisetsu Tetsuo Suzuki (1870–1966), the term Zen, has become well-known globally to represent both the Chinese Chan and Korean Son, and has contributed significantly to spirituality globally (Schlüttner, 2012). To maintain consistency with existing literature (Austin, 1998, 2013, 2014; Schlüttner, 2008) this study uses Zen to represent both Chan and Son.

2.2. Mindfulness and Zen retreat experience

The Satipatthana Sutta preserves the original Buddha teachings for the practice of mindfulness (Hanh, 2012). In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha said:

There is a most wonderful way to help living beings realize purification, overcome directly grief and sorrow, end pain and anxiety, travel the right path, and realize nirvana. This way is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (Hanh, 2012, p. 103).

The four foundations of mindfulness, as addressed in the Satipatthana Sutta (Hanh, 2012), includes observations of the body, the feelings, the mind, and the objects of mind. First, observation of the body could be practiced through breathing. Awareness can also be practiced through other approaches such as being aware while walking, standing, sitting, and laying down (S.-Y. Shi & Stevenson, 2001). Second, observation of the feelings includes pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings. Third, observation of the mind covers the observation of all mind changes (e.g., aware my mind is desiring/hating as well as not being changed (e.g., aware my mind is not desiring/not hating). Fourth, observation of the objects of mind incorporates hindrances (e.g., sensual desire and anger), aggregates of clinging (e.g., arising of form and disappearance of form), sense organs (e.g., ears and nose) and sense objects (e.g., sound and smell), factors of awakening (e.g., concentration and letting go), and noble truth (e.g., suffering and origin).

The purpose of Zen meditation is to practice mindfulness, which assists individuals to realize peace, liberation, and joy in daily life (Hanh, 2012). Forms of practicing meditative concentration have been developed into various types, such as seated meditation, slow-walking, fast-walking, meditating while standing, meditating while lying down, and meditation in the midst of miscellaneous daily activities (S.-Y. Shi & Stevenson, 2001). The ultimate performance of Zen mindfulness practice is to reach enlightenment (also known as samadhi), which is conceptualized with nine levels in Buddhism (S.-Y. Shi, 2005). S.-Y. Shi (2005) explained that “a genuine enlightenment corresponds to the state of no-mind, and that is the same thing as no self” (p. 77). Zen retreats, as explained by S.-Y. Shi (2005), is “a practice in which practitioners gather for a period of intense meditation under the guidance of a Zen master” (p. 31). The reason why most Zen retreats are planned as a seven-day period could also be traced back to the end of the Satipatthana Sutta, in which the Buddha said:

Whoever practices the Four Establishments of Mindfulness for one week can also expect one of two fruits—either the highest understanding in this very life or, if there remains some residue of affliction, he can attain the fruit of no-return (Hanh, 2012, p. 115).

It should also be noticed that different Zen masters may prefer theoretical supports from different Buddhist texts (e.g., Lankavatara Sutra and Yogacarabhumi-Sastra) are often cited as the basis for practicing meditation as a design objective of Zen retreats. Like the Buddha frequently mentioned, 84,000 schools and methods of practice in Buddhism are created for 84,000 human personalities and preferences (W. Shi, 2012). That is, there is no best approach to practice meditation because all roads lead to enlightenment (W. Shi, 2012). More recently, the study of Jiang et al. (2018) explored experience of Zen meditation based on two Zen retreat sessions—one at Nuonatayuna in August 2015 and one at Hongfa Temple in January 2016. Based on shared experience data provided by tourists, Jiang et al. (2018) classified tourists to Zen retreats into outward tourists (i.e., practice Buddhism by discussing with others) and inward tourists (i.e., insist in understanding Zen in person as individuals under a Dharma of silence), and concluded that both generally take Zen retreats as a means of cultivating themselves, appreciating Buddhism, and achieving better improvement by meditating together.
2.3. Donghua Zen Temple

The history of the Donghua Zen Temple can be traced back to 502 A.D. when Indian Buddhist Master Zhiyao (463–656) is said to have arrived and founded a temple named Lingjiu (W. Shi, 2014). The Lingjiu Temple was later destroyed during a war which ensued under the Sui dynasty (581–618). Huiyineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, later practiced seclusion in a cave near this location, and rebuilt the temple under the new name of Donghua Temple. The renamed temple survived for roughly another 1000 years until it was again destroyed by war during the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty (d. ca. 1644).

In 1997, Zen Master Wanxing (1971-current) started three years of seclusion in the same cave. Upon completing his seclusion in 2000, Master Wanxing led an eight-year movement to rebuild the temple. Master Wanxing has served as the abbot of the newly reopened Donghua Zen Temple since the 2008 reopening.

Master Wanxing’s Zen practice has been highly recognized by various Zen Masters in Zen Buddhism around the world, and his books about Zen practice and meditation have been published nationally and internationally (e.g., W. Shi, 2007, 2012, 2014). Venerable Thich Minh Tinh, a well-known Vietnamese Zen Master at the Mt Adams Zen Buddhist Temple in Washington, USA, recommended that the Dharma Master Wanxing presents is “one of great cultivation and deep practice” (Shi, 2014, p. vii). According to Master Wanxing (W. Shi, 2004, 2007), individual growth of retreat participants includes two major phases, mingxin (knowledge growth) and jianxing (spiritual growth). The function of a Zen retreat is to assist participants with gaining knowledge (mingxin) as well as learning spiritual practice methods (jianxing). After a seven-day Zen retreat, most participants are still in the mingxin phase (W. Shi, 2004, 2007). Achieving jianxing requires years of continuous practice (W. Shi, 2004, 2007); that is, it is a lifelong journey. These topics, along with other lecture topics delivered at the Zen retreat, are described further in various books authored by Master Wanxing (e.g., W. Shi, 2004, 2007, 2010).

3. Method

3.1. Zen retreat at Donghua Zen Temple

The first session of seven-day Zen retreat at Donghua Zen Temple was held from June 24 to June 30 in 2014. Ten sessions of seven-day Zen retreats are offered annually at the Donghua Zen Temple. The sessions are offered as free admission retreats and include food (although voluntary fasting during the retreat is encouraged), educational materials, and accommodations. Sessions are limited to 40 participants. Odd-numbered sessions are all-male retreats and even-numbered sessions are all female retreats. Organized and taught by Master Wanxing and a group of Venerables, the seven-day Zen retreats consist of intensive practice starting at 4:30 a.m. and lasting until 9:40 p.m. daily. The retreat sessions include seated meditation, moving meditation, chanting the Three-Character Mantra, and a variety of lectures about Zen Buddhism.

Seated meditation taught at the Donghua Zen Temple retreat includes three “adjustment” techniques performed before meditation: body adjustment, breath adjustment, and thought adjustment (W. Shi, 2004). The purpose of body adjustment is to ensure practitioners can maintain a body posture that supports smooth circulation of Qi (energy) and blood (Yao, Yang, & Ding, 2013). The exercise is believed to enhance “loops” connected by conception vessels (mostly in the front of human body) and governor vessels (mostly in the back of human body) (W. Shi, 2007). Breath adjustment aims to assist practitioners to reduce distracting thoughts, which can be achieved by taking deep breaths gradually, slowly, slightly, softly, and long (W. Shi, 2007). Thought adjustment, according to Master Wanxing (W. Shi, 2007), can be utilized to direct Qi-blood circulation from conception vessels and governor vessels to the head. Practitioners are encouraged to focus their thoughts through a “third-eye chakra” (also called as ajna or guru chakra), and naturally look forward through the third-eye chakra (W. Shi, 2007). Meanwhile, practitioners try to imagine they empty their body of distractions – imagining the body is like a lotus flower, formed by a flower (their head) and one single lotus branch (their neck and upper body). Imagining the lotus flower as fully opened is believed to improve Qi-blood circulation from governor vessels to the brain (W. Shi, 2007).

The seated meditation technique was demonstrated by Master Wanxing in a YouTube video (W. Shi, 2020a).

Moving meditation is a tradition in Zen Buddhism, and different Zen masters may develop different practices for the purpose of accelerating Qi-blood circulation (S.-Y. Shi & Stevenson, 2001). The technique taught at the Zen retreat is named Donghua Zen moving meditation and covers seven sections consisting of (1) Avalokitësvara inviting a sage, (2) A crane opening wings, (3) River halting and redirecting, (4) Circularizing the universe, (5) Rhino’s gaze at the moon, (6) Lotus swaying, and (7) Upright standing and reaching the sky. There is a video on YouTube video demonstrating the seven-section Donghua Zen moving meditation technique performed by Master Wanxing (W. Shi, 2020b).

The Three-Character Mantra taught at Donghua Zen Temple covers chanting of the characters Om, Ga, and Hum. As explained by Master Wanxing in a YouTube video (W. Shi, 2018), all three are to be chanted with the mouth closed, but Om and Hum should be chanted with the tip of the tongue pressed against the hard palate (W. Shi, 2010). W. Shi (2010) explained that chanting the Three-Character Mantra at the start of seated meditation helps practitioners reduce distracting thoughts and opens the body’s chakras. When chanting Om, practitioners should imagine surrounding negative energies and personal bad habits/thoughts flowing away, disappearing into the universe (W. Shi, 2010). When chanting Ga, practitioners should imagine beautiful things and events coming toward them, and being surrounded by positive spiritual energies (W. Shi, 2010). When chanting Hum, practitioners should imagine the gathered energies from Ga spreading out from one’s body, making one’s whole body full of light which is then shared with fellow Zen retreat practitioners and all sentient beings in the universe (W. Shi, 2010).

3.2. Data collection and analysis

At the end of each retreat session, participants are encouraged to share their experience and provide feedback. During the first forty sessions from 2014 to 2018, feedback from 520 Donghua Zen Temple tourists was recorded. The research team utilized this tourist feedback as secondary data for analysis. Two raters conducted thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the data. The first rater studied Buddhist Zen meditation (taught by a Venerable nun from Donghua Zen Temple) for three months in late 2018 to become more familiar with the case study subject matter. The second rater is a multi-decade Buddhist who frequently attends Dharma lectures at Buddhist temples. These two raters conducted the analysis together following the six-phase guide for performing thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases consist of: (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. During thematic analysis, a total of 170 coded quotations were extracted from the data, and were later sorted into themes under the following five categories: (1) motivation to attend the retreat, (2) knowledge growth, (3) spiritual growth, (4) mechanism to knowledge and spiritual growth, and (5) outcome of the retreat. The Zen retreat experience is considered to be defined by categories (2) to (4).

From June 2019 to May 2020, the first author shared findings from the thematic analysis and exchanged various retreat observations and related experiences (via social media messaging app) with Master Wanxing and a Donghua Zen Temple Venerable. The Venerable has engaged in planning and hosting Donghua Zen Temple retreats since 2014. Under mutual agreement from the Venerable and Master
Wanxing, insights and thoughts from these communications were summarized and visualized as conveyed by Figs. 2 and 3 in section 4.3. Fig. 2 represents the sample theoretical support Buddhist texts provide to a typical Zen practitioner over the course of their lifelong journey. Fig. 3 represents the hierarchy of Zen involvement of tourists who travel for mindfulness.

4. Results

4.1. Participant profile

Because the data of 520 Zen retreat participants was recorded without a requirement for leaving background information, the detailed profile of these 520 participants is not available. Donghua Zen Temple provides the research team a summarized information by percentage regarding general background information of the previous sessions, including age, occupation, and education. In all-female sessions, 33.3% participants were aged 25–35, 41.2% were aged 35–45, and 25.5% were aged 45–55. In occupation, 37.3% were in business, 31.4% were in culture and arts, 13.7% were in health, and 17.6% were in others. In terms of the highest level of education, 17.6% completed senior high school or lower, 66.7% had a bachelor degree, 11.8% earned a master degree, and 1.9% had a doctoral degree. In all-male sessions, 31.4% participants were aged 25–35, 37.3% were aged 35–45, and 31.3% were aged 45–55. In occupation, 58.8% were in business, 13.7% were in culture and arts, 13.7% were in health, and 13.8% were in others. In terms of the highest level of education, 31.4% completed senior high school or lower, 56.9% had a bachelor degree, 9.8% earned a master degree, and 1.9% had a doctoral degree. Comparing these ratios between all-female and all-male sessions, it seems that there is a tendency for male working in business to attend Zen retreat. Additionally, female participants averagely have higher level of education than male participants.

4.2. Analytical results from tourist feedback

Fig. 1 represents a longitudinal overview of the Zen retreat experience from the tourists’ perspective. This study summarized four major motivations of tourists who attend Donghua Zen Temple retreats, and three major outcomes claimed by tourists related to the Zen retreat. As a longitudinal overview, these motivations result in the Zen retreat experience, which produces the outcomes. Within the Zen retreat experience, this study coded three sections: (1) knowledge growth, (2) spiritual growth, and (3) mechanism to knowledge and spiritual growth. Most tourists report knowledge growth – the experience gained through “external” learning directly related to the subjects planned and taught at the retreat. The spiritual growth is an “internal” personal function, which is less reported by tourists and differs significantly among individuals – especially as it pertains to what is characterized as “mysterious experience.” Master Wanxing explained that “mysterious experience” is the scenery along the way and should not be regarded as the final destination of Zen practice or be shared with others in a boastful manner (W. Shi, 2012).

The findings confirm the statements of Master Wanxing (W. Shi, 2004, 2007) that knowledge growth (mingxin) is easy to build by learning from others and Buddhist texts, while spiritual growth (jianxing) is an advanced level which takes time to individually cultivate. Moreover, improvement in spiritual growth (jianxing) can contribute to knowledge growth (mingxin), especially with comprehension of Buddhist texts written by enlightened Zen practitioners (W. Shi, 2004). This view is often characterized with a paraphrased version of “only when one truly achieves such level of spiritual growth can one personally actualize, experience, and understand what enlightened Zen practitioners said” (W. Shi, 2004). Additionally, this study classified one higher-level category to foster a Zen retreat experience: “mechanism to knowledge and spiritual growth”). Summaries and sample quotations for each component represented in the figure are addressed in the following sections.

4.2.1. Motivation

This study coded four Zen retreat tourist motivation themes. First, many tourists reported some level of Donghua Zen Temple name recognition attributed to Master Wanxing’s books. This familiarity generated positive feelings and excitement; in some part due to the sentiment that authentic Zen Masters, able to offer practical experience and implications to the public, are rare and/or accessible. Second, some
tourists expressed feeling “lost and empty” and disappointed by “not knowing meaning in life and self.” Participating in the Zen retreat was viewed as a means of “fulfilling spirituality” and “peace of mind.” Third, some tourists stated they “encountered difficulties in life and/or career,” and thought “maybe the retreat can help them find solutions or guidance with future direction.” Fourth, some tourists claimed they registered for their retreats because they “want to pursue personal growth in Buddhism, and believe Master Wanxing and the Venerables are experts who can assist them through Zen” (Table 1).

4.2.2. Zen retreat experience

Four themes were coded for knowledge growth within the Zen retreat experience. First, tourists reported they learned a lot from lectures and interactions with Master Wanxing. From the practitioners’ perspective, the opportunity to meet and learn from a Zen Master seldom occurs during one’s lifetime. Second, the Zen retreat was well planned and delivered high quality lectures and Zen practices taught by a group of highly respected Venerables. Tourists found the knowledge gained to be valuable and relevant. Third, tourists reported the retreat provided them with a systematic approach for learning Zen Buddhism and Zen meditation techniques. Many participants felt learning directly from Zen experts was more effective than their own self-study/home based learning. Fourth, in addition to developing and improving their personal Zen practices, tourists felt enriched by being able to apply Zen principles and practices in daily life. This knowledge reinforces their commitment to practicing Zen and personal meditation as it produces tangible results which they extend to all aspects of family and work life (see Tables 2–4).

This study identified three themes of spiritual growth within the Zen retreat experience. First, most tourists reported physiological changes associated primarily with seated and moving meditation. Long term practitioners of seated meditation reported feeling calm and relaxed, while novices often reported various levels of discomfort (ranging from minor leg numbing to pain). Several tourists emphasized the value of exercising and attributed moving meditation with improving their physiological health. Second, the tourist feedback identified stronger sense of mindfulness and present-moment awareness. Tourists shared a perception of Qi-blood circulation throughout the body, as well as feelings of being relaxed and at ease during the later days of the retreat. Third, some tourists reported having “mysterious experiences” during seated meditation and the Three-Character Mantra chant. Some claimed to sense unusual sounds, sense electricity, saw unusual lights, saw mysterious experiences during meditation and the Three-Character Mantra chant. Some claimed to sense unusual sounds, sense electricity, saw unusual lights, saw spiritual images, with some even reporting out-of-body experiences.

Two themes were coded as higher-level mechanism to foster knowledge and spiritual growth during a Zen retreat experience. The first theme is the difference between practicing Zen at the retreat versus at home. Donghua Zen Temple retreat participants reported great atmosphere, landscape (feng shui), spiritual vibrations (ci chang), and collective mindset toward Zen, all of which reinforced their continued support of Zen practices. They also felt Donghua Zen Temple sessions were conducive to practicing seated meditation, and achieving aware higher levels in mindfulness. The second theme noted is integration and improvement in body and mind. This theme is linked to a well-planned Zen retreat program which allowed tourists to systematically practice mindfulness in all aspects, including both silent and moving activities. Tourists indicated they felt such body-mind integration reinforced their desire to practice Zen which ultimately led to comprehensive purification.

4.2.3. Outcome

Data provided by study participants were coded to reveal three findings. First, tourists cited the quality of the Zen retreat and intended to recommend the retreat to others. Second, tourists mentioned their intention to involve Zen mindfulness in their daily lives, and career activities. Third, many tourists indicated they would continue their individual Zen practice and pursuit of mindfulness and enlightenment as a lifelong journey (see Table 5).

| Table 1 | Summary of themes and sample quotations in motivation. |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| **Theme** | **Sample Quotation** |
| **Theme 1: Books of Master Wanxing** | Last year when I first came across the books of Master Wanxing, I was very shocked. I felt a particular closeness to this method, and the positive energy within was very powerful! (N2FS3M1) |
| **Theme 2: Feel Lost and Empty** | I have been working for twenty years. Yes, there has been some accomplishment career wise. But I often feel exhausted, both physically and mentally, and that my time has been wasted. (N3MS4M1) |
| **Theme 3: Dilemmas in Life and Career** | I am 45 years old now. I have my own company, and a son and a daughter. Everything looks perfect. I am 45 years old now. I have my own company, and a son and a daughter. Everything looks perfect. However, all the hardship behind everything, it is also I who knows it best. All the winning and dining with my clients lead to my gut. So many difficult issues lie ahead my company, and so much confusion in my life, such as the unexpected loss of love ones, departure of friends, and depression. All these make me feel deeply helpless. (N3MS10M1) |

An accident from a few years ago made me realize that nothing is permanent in life. You never know which would arrive first, tomorrow or an accident. Aware of this impermanence, what then is the meaning of life to me? Is it my career? It’s only my bread-winning skill. Is it my family? But there would ultimately be one day when my family or I myself die. What, then, is the meaning of my existence? With this question in mind, I registered for this term of Zen retreat. (N4FS1M1)

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4.3. Analytical results from organizer insights

Fig. 2 visualizes a simplified lifelong journey of the typical Zen practitioner. Adherents believe the main effects of practicing mindfulness and meditation are purification of the body’s organs and senses, gradual improvement of mindfulness which eventually leads to the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Zen practitioners also believe that individuals achieve results based on many factors, such as discipline and dedication (Wong et al., 2013). Ultimately, these factors are believed to allow some practitioners to actualize sudden enlightenment quicker than others. Moreover, Master Wanxing noted the importance of theoretical support obtained by consulting Buddhist texts for guidance and confirmation (W. Shi, 2010). Several texts representing this theoretical support illustrate this view in the figure shown below.

Information provided by Master Wanxing and Donghua Zen Temple Venerables describing their planning experiences was assessed and is represented in visual form in Fig. 3. This figure is proposed as a visual guide for Zen retreat organizers, temple managers, and destination management organizations (DMOs) seeking to plan Zen retreats for those interested in exploring this aspect of Buddhism tourism. Following guidance provided by Wong et al. (2013) for conceptualizing tourists represented using a pyramid shape, this study uses level of Zen involvement to classify Zen tourists into (1) Zen tourism, (2) Zen lifestyle, and (3) Zen retreat. The area under Zen tourism represents those who are not interested in or have no access to Zen. First, we defined Zen tourism as tourists who visit Zen-related sites (e.g., temples and retreat centers) and/or participate in Zen-related tourism activities (e.g., 10-min Zen meditation, Zen tea tasting, and/or Zen calligraphy). The Zen tourism category consists of leisure tourists and Shinshis in the model described by Wong et al. (2013). The second, category, Zen lifestyle, consists of tourists who apply some level of Zen to their daily lifestyle (e.g., regular Zen meditation practices), and use tourism as a means to expand their experience and understanding of Zen. For example, they may visit natural sites to “connect with the universe” or attend religious sites to experience “spiritual vibrations” (ci chang). Compared to Zen tourism, the difficulty associated with adhering to a Zen lifestyle is moderate, and equates to the Xiánkès (devout Buddhist worshipers) category defined by Wong et al. (2013). Third, the category of Zen retreat is the narrowest top section of the pyramid because it is rare to meet someone with actual practice, meditation, and guidance to mindfulness. (N23S1M6)

| Theme | Sample Quotation |
|-------|------------------|
| Theme 1: Lectures and Interactions with Master Wanxing | Everyday in the afternoon, during the discussion time I would sit next to the Master, and I wouldn’t miss even a second, for fear that I might lose a word of his. Maintaining this status was also quite beneficial to our practice, with regard to how to maintain mindfulness and concentration. It would be very rare to meet the Master in the future. On the off-chance that I might get to come to the temple, it would also be very brief that I might get to speak with the Master. (N14S1K2) |

There were some many things boggling in my mind. During these few days, especially with the Q & A and discussions with the Master, some many questions were resolved. I finally let go things that I should let go. (N14S1K2) The Master valued the learning of all the retreat participants. He came to us everyday to give us lectures and to answer our questions, not only limited to the practice, but also on our daily lives and work. It has been a great improvement for us through this learning experience. (N23S1M6)

| Theme | Sample Quotation |
|-------|------------------|
| Theme 2: Experience Sharing and Lectures from a Group of Venerables | The teachings of every Venerable reached my heart from every different angle. It felt like they were sincerely wanting to help us. (N14S1K2) Here, as I listened to the lectures of every Venerable, each and every one of them showed great power of both strength and compassion. I witnessed how they practiced the Dharma with their own lives. To be honest, at this day and age, watching these people gather together because of their faith and the power of their vow, I was inspired to become faithful. One’s vow precedes one’s practice. To make an altruistic vow, to do altruistic deeds, to always have a merciful heart, and to constantly stay mindful, that is how everyone can become Buddha. (N35S1K2) |

Through the seated meditation these past few days, and through the instructions and lectures of the Master, I have gained a lot, physically, spiritually, and regarding my understanding of the Buddhist study. (N35S1K2) Theoretically, I have been reading Buddhist books for years, so I knew some of the teachings already. This time, it was mainly the touch on my spirit. The greatest lesson I would take away from this time is a correction on the premise of my Buddhist study. I used to always want to achieve myself, and become a Buddha myself. I have changed that now. I think the

(continued on next page)
growth leads to knowledge growth when they personally experience and as their primary tourism objective to the most difficult level of fied masters. Moreover, practitioners believe cultivating spiritual titioners attribute to personal practice and dedication to Zen teachings tourists to attend Zen retreats, 2) their intentions to revisit, and 3) the findings from this study confirm our understanding of 1) what motivates knowledge and understanding of the Zen retreat experience. The find

Table 2 (continued)  

| Theme | Sample Quotation |
|-------|------------------|
| Theme 4: Insights for Applications in Daily Life |  
progress and improvement of others would bring me even more satisfaction. To bring achievement to your family, relatives, friends, as well as to all living things, that should be the purpose of our practice. (NIMS13K1) 
Before, when I watched the Master’s teaching, I did not actually comb through my thoughts clearly. Without a clear direction, I did not know what methods I should choose to best fit myself. As I came here, I learned that one shouldn’t practice blindly, but use a correct and tangible approach to observe it. (N2FS56K1) 
The words and deeds of the Venerables touched me greatly. Whatever they did, however small that thing might be, they did it meticulously. They maintained strict rules for us on even the most detailed things. I realized that we should do that in our own lives. We ought to regulate ourselves, starting from every tiny little thing we do. (NIMS15K1) 
Through these seven days, I realize that the practice of Buddhism and Zen is not the bookish study of Zen or the Dharma, but the realization of it in everything we do in our daily lives. (N2FS5K1) 
I used to think that Buddhism was way too complicated and hard, that you could get too indulged and fixated in it, and that it would have no relevance to one’s daily life. But now Master Wanxing has taught us to put the teachings of Buddhism into practice in reality. He also condensed the 84,000 methods into ten characters (three phrases): “protect the intention well, keep a clean heart, always be mindful and not fixated.” We are encouraged to bring this back to our daily life and put it to practice. We ought to cherish this. (N11MS27K1) |

Table 3  

| Theme | Sample Quotation |
|-------|------------------|
| Theme 1: Physiological Changes | During these past few days, the Master taught us several ways to work on the body. During seated meditation, my body was quite responsive. There was a lot of struggling during the whole process. When in pain, I applied the mantras that the Master taught us, to overcome and transcend the pain, knowing that the power of the mind can be stronger than the physical pain. After these days of retreat, the change in my body is clear to me. It becomes much lighter and calmer. And my complexion becomes rosier. I had been practicing Buddhism for years, yet for whatever reason I just couldn’t really get in the zone. But this time I have really benefitted, and for that I’m so grateful. (N2FS251) 
My waist used to hurt a lot before I came. I work in the IT industry, and I work overtime a lot. I would be in a trance every now and then. It has great improvement this time. After these seven days, I feel my head is not in the clouds anymore. I used to not be able to bend down on my waist when I did the 3rd, 4th, and 5th steps of the moving meditation. After doing it, though, my waist would feel so much more comfortable. It used to be that I had to go to the hospital to have my waist treated every eight months or so. When I get back, I’ll definitely share this Lotus Moving Meditation with my colleagues. (N15MS651) 
I need to stay up a lot for my work. When I first got here, I had pretty bad bloodshot eyes. It used to be that I would need to take a month-long break to somewhat recover from it. But on the third day of the retreat, I looked into the mirror and found that it had already been greatly alleviated. (N15MS751) 
The compact practice of Zen retreat in the past seven days brought me an awareness among all false thoughts. I could feel how it stabilized me as I ate or walked. It also revealed to me gradually, that Zen is not to be found somewhere else, but is within everyone of us. Whatever you do, as long as you focus your mind and concentrate, you are already in Dhyana. (N4FS751) |
| Theme 2: Mindfulness and Present-Moment Awareness | By participating in retreats like this, I can see that my heart slowly goes through a process of change from blurriness to clarity. I dare not say that I have reached total clarity and purity. But I do feel that there has been a huge change in the ways I think about things, from before I came to just these few days. (NIMS351) 
Through the Zen retreat of these past few days, I found the feeling of relaxation. I released the negative energy inside my heart, and I started to embrace both my strengths and weaknesses. (N4FS751) 
The compact practice of Zen retreat in the past seven days brought me an awareness among all false thoughts. I could feel how it stabilized me as I ate or walked. It also revealed to me gradually, that Zen is not to be found somewhere else, but is within everyone of us. Whatever you do, as long as you focus your mind and concentrate, you are already in Dhyana. (N3FS251) |
| Theme 3: Mysterious Experience | I experience, with my body and mind, whatever shows up along the way. I don’t fixate on whatever level it might be; instead, I just concentrate on the Dharma. (N3MS3151) 
I was quite dizzy on the first day. It felt like there was an axis on top of my head, and it kept spinning, and I got so dizzy that I would throw up. On the second day, it felt a lot more relaxed and easier during the seated meditation. During the evening seated meditation, I envisioned myself as a white lotus flower in full bloom. And that night I slept so well. On the third day, a sudden sense of gratitude hit me, and I cried like a baby. (N12FS451) 
With the Three-Character Mantra flowing through my body, the day brightens and shines right before my eyes. (N28FS2951) |

relatively few Buddhist tourism participants are actually Zen practitioners. This study assigns those tourists who plan and visit Zen retreats as their primary tourism objective to the most difficult level of achievement of the three categories – Jushis (Buddhist practitioners) as defined by Wong et al. (2013).

5. Discussion and conclusion

Building upon existing Buddhist tourism literature (Wong et al., 2013) and Zen meditation (Jiang et al., 2018), this study contributes to knowledge and understanding of the Zen retreat experience. The findings from this study enrich our understanding of 1) what motivates tourists to attend Zen retreats, 2) their intentions to revisit, and 3) the behavioral impact resulting from their Zen retreat visits. Using guidance provided by Zen Master Wanxing (W. Shi, 2004, 2007), this study categorized knowledge growth (míngxin), spiritual growth (jiánxíng), and related mechanisms to foster knowledge and spiritual growth. This study confirmed knowledge growth as a fundamental growth that can be directly obtained by attending lectures and experience sharing. This study also examined spiritual growth as an advanced growth Zen practitioners attribute to personal practice and dedication to Zen teachings and principles. That is, knowledge growth assists tourists to properly practice Zen mindfulness which results in spiritual growth. Practitioners believe achieving mindfulness and spiritual growth through the Zen retreat experience reflects individual experiences, commitment to adhering to Zen principles, and obtaining proper guidance from qualified masters. Moreover, practitioners believe cultivating spiritual growth leads to knowledge growth when they personally experience and

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To support both knowledge and spiritual growth in Zen retreats, this study found both the place (Zen retreat site vs. home) and the body-mind integration (integration and improvement in body and mind) are the key mechanisms. In line with the findings of Jiang et al. (2018), tourists who attend Zen meditation at temples reported atmosphere (e.g., temple context, scenic context, and peaceful context) as one key component of their meditation experience. This is supported by the experiences of several tourists in this study who also reported experiencing faster and more efficient growth because the Donghua Zen temple is a place attribute derived from coding descriptions of the temple (i.e., conducive atmosphere) for applying Zen practices. The formal practice at the Zen Retreat Hall is very different from my sloppy practice at home. There is no comparison. Here in the Retreat Hall, with the support of the Master and the Venerables, I feel a very strong energy. I don’t get tired easily, and instead I can stay calm easily. (N3MS7KS1)

Practice is more than seated meditation, moving meditation, reading the scriptures, chanting spells. The true practice is mindfulness, constant mindfulness the whole time, and staying one with everything. I learned a more systematic way to exercise my body and my mind. To put it to practice, I will start little by little. (N6FS3KS1)

Both physically and psychologically, this Zen retreat has been a breakthrough for me. This wholistic rest and realignment have greatly improved both my mind and my body. (N4FS10KS1)

My daily life becomes very regular, compared to how chaotic it used to be. There are changes in the body, as well as in the mind. It is an entirely new experience I’ve never had before. (NIMS3KS1)

actualizes the guidance provided by Zen Buddhist texts. To support both knowledge and spiritual growth in Zen retreats, this study found both the place (Zen retreat site vs. home) and the body-mind integration (integration and improvement in body and mind) are the key mechanisms. In line with the findings of Jiang et al. (2018), tourists who attend Zen meditation at temples reported atmosphere (e.g., temple context, scenic context, and peaceful context) as one key component of their meditation experience. This is supported by the experiences of several tourists in this study who also reported experiencing faster and more efficient growth because the Donghua Zen temple is a “great” place (i.e., conducive atmosphere) for applying Zen practices. The “great” place attribute was derived from coding descriptions of the temple’s atmosphere (describing the subjective emotional feelings in a space), landscape (feng shui; associated with natural environments), spiritual vibrations (ci chang; reflecting spiritual and sacred feelings in a space), and collective Zen mindset (describing the feelings toward a group of pure minds within the same space). In addition, findings suggest that a well-planned program provides Zen retreat participants with a sense of gradually achieving body-mind integration, absorbing knowledge from lectures, and achieving mindfulness through experiencing the spiritual aspects of Zen. The findings of this study offer Zen retreat organizers and Zen instructors with insights for creating a supportive Zen retreat experience by selecting or creating “great” places (i.e., atmosphere) conducive to promoting body-mind integration.

Findings of this study also recall and enrich the existing literature in tourism motivations and experiences, especially Wickens (2002) and Alexander, Bakir, and Wickens (2010, Wickens (2002) proposed the Shirley Valentine type as one of the individual mass tourist types, in which tourists have the tendency to search for their better half in tourism experience. As we expanded the concept of better half into a wider definition, it can also refer to finding the ideal self in tourism experience, including pursuing the status of mindfulness at a Zen retreat experience. That is, building upon Wickens (2002), this study argues that actions taken by tourists in the Shirley Valentine type can be externally oriented (e.g., find a charming Greek gentleman) or/and internally oriented (e.g., search for personal inner peace). On the other hand, Alexander et al. (2010) identified the type of tourism experiences into people, wildlife, scenery-natural, emotional and spiritual, scenery-man made, sport and activity, and an event. What we found from this Zen retreat experience is a great example of mixing these tourism experience types of Alexander et al. (2010). Based on Alexander et al. (2010), the Zen retreat is “an event” for tourists to participate, the retreat program covers “people” (e.g., other tourists and the monks and nuns at the case temple), “scenery-natural” (e.g., landscape of the case temple) and “sport and activity” (e.g., silent and moving meditation), and then the knowledge growth (mingxin) and spiritual growth (jianxing) identified in this study are related to “emotional and spiritual” and “scenery-man made” of Alexander et al. (2010). Moreover, themes identified for knowledge growth (mingxin) and spiritual growth

Table 4

| Theme | Sample Quotation |
|-------|------------------|
| **Theme 1: Zen Retreat Site vs. Home** | Changes have been taking place nonstop these few days, physically and mentally. There was very drastic bodily reaction the first day here. At home, I did my seated meditation very cavalierly, without any systemic understanding and practice. Here professional Venerables are available for guidance. It makes a great difference to have correct theoretical knowledge of meditation to base my practice on. (NIMS11KS1) There are rules for everything here, how to sit, how to walk, how to lie down. It gradually calms down my heart to be in the present. The daily teachings we receive from the Master and the Venerables make us understand that a true practitioner takes control of one’s own mind, words, thoughts, and behaviors on a daily basis, and stays mindful for the initiation of every thought. My heart is calmer and more peaceful day by day. (NIFS04KS1) The formal practice at the Zen Retreat Hall is very different from my sloppy practice at home. There is no comparison. Here in the Retreat Hall, with the support of the Master and the Venerables, I feel a very strong energy. I don’t get tired easily, and instead I can stay calm easily. (N3MS7KS1) To support both knowledge and spiritual growth in Zen retreats, this study found both the place (Zen retreat site vs. home) and the body-mind integration (integration and improvement in body and mind) are the key mechanisms. In line with the findings of Jiang et al. (2018), tourists who attend Zen meditation at temples reported atmosphere (e.g., temple context, scenic context, and peaceful context) as one key component of their meditation experience. This is supported by the experiences of several tourists in this study who also reported experiencing faster and more efficient growth because the Donghua Zen temple is a place attribute derived from coding descriptions of the temple (i.e., conducive atmosphere) for applying Zen practices. The “great” place attribute was derived from coding descriptions of the temple’s atmosphere (describing the subjective emotional feelings in a space), landscape (feng shui; associated with natural environments), spiritual vibrations (ci chang; reflecting spiritual and sacred feelings in a space), and collective Zen mindset (describing the feelings toward a group of pure minds within the same space). In addition, findings suggest that a well-planned program provides Zen retreat participants with a sense of gradually achieving body-mind integration, absorbing knowledge from lectures, and achieving mindfulness through experiencing the spiritual aspects of Zen. The findings of this study offer Zen retreat organizers and Zen instructors with insights for creating a supportive Zen retreat experience by selecting or creating “great” places (i.e., atmosphere) conducive to promoting body-mind integration. Findings of this study also recall and enrich the existing literature in tourism motivations and experiences, especially Wickens (2002) and Alexander, Bakir, and Wickens (2010, Wickens (2002) proposed the Shirley Valentine type as one of the individual mass tourist types, in which tourists have the tendency to search for their better half in tourism experience. As we expanded the concept of better half into a wider definition, it can also refer to finding the ideal self in tourism experience, including pursuing the status of mindfulness at a Zen retreat experience. That is, building upon Wickens (2002), this study argues that actions taken by tourists in the Shirley Valentine type can be externally oriented (e.g., find a charming Greek gentleman) or/and internally oriented (e.g., search for personal inner peace). On the other hand, Alexander et al. (2010) identified the type of tourism experiences into people, wildlife, scenery-natural, emotional and spiritual, scenery-man made, sport and activity, and an event. What we found from this Zen retreat experience is a great example of mixing these tourism experience types of Alexander et al. (2010). Based on Alexander et al. (2010), the Zen retreat is “an event” for tourists to participate, the retreat program covers “people” (e.g., other tourists and the monks and nuns at the case temple), “scenery-natural” (e.g., landscape of the case temple) and “sport and activity” (e.g., silent and moving meditation), and then the knowledge growth (mingxin) and spiritual growth (jianxing) identified in this study are related to “emotional and spiritual” and “scenery-man made” of Alexander et al. (2010). Moreover, themes identified for knowledge growth (mingxin) and spiritual growth

Table 5

| Theme | Sample Quotation |
|-------|------------------|
| **Theme 1: Sharing and Recommendation** | I hope that more friends who I do business with, or those who are busy at work, or those facing troubling questions, they would all come and experience something like this, instead of simple relaxations like traveling or enjoying a big meal. (NIMS301) I’d like to bring this status back into my life, or share it with my family, relatives, and friends, and immerse them in it. (NIMS901) I will dedicate my humble power to help develop this Zen retreat program, bringing the opportunity to experience the retreat to more people. (N3FS701) I hope to bring the mindset into seated meditation into my future work and life, and influence every single one of my students. I hope they can start benefitting from childhood. (N2FS1101) May I bring what I realize here, and share it through my floral arts in the future. To share beauty, love, and the Dharma, to light up the lamp in my heart, and to shine upon myself as well as others. (N1FS501) After the Zen retreat in the past seven days, my faith has become more steadfast. I will put my faith into practice in my life, observe Zen in my work, and work to observe Zen. (N3FS501) From now on I won’t value work or money over the elevation of one’s own character. I believe that one needs to purify oneself, and that’s how good energy can be transferred to others around, and the world as a whole gets purified as well. (NIMS1301) From now on, I will not avoid, instead I’ll be accepting to all causes. I’ll follow the path, and be peaceful with all lives. (N4FS901) Many are practicing the way of the Bodhisattva. I will also dedicate my life to the way of the Bodhisattva. I believe that the power of the mind is great. (N9MS601)
Tourism practitioners’ lifelong journey and sample theoretical supports from Buddhist texts.

**Fig. 2.** Zen practitioners’ lifelong journey and sample theoretical supports from Buddhist texts.

**Fig. 3.** Hierarchy of Zen involvement of tourists who travel for mindfulness.

- **Zen Retreat**: Tourists who attend Zen retreats and take the Zen retreat experience as the major or sole plan in tourism
  - **Difficulty of Achievement**: Advanced

- **Zen Lifestyle**: Tourists who already involve Zen in their daily lifestyle (e.g., regular Zen meditation practices), and take tourism as a means to expand their experience of Zen (e.g., visit natural sites to experience connection with the universe)
  - **Difficulty of Achievement**: Moderate

- **Zen Tourism**: Tourists who visit Zen-related sites (e.g., temples and retreat centers) and/or participate in Zen-related activities (e.g., 10-minute Zen meditation, Zen tea taste, and Zen calligraphy) in tourism
  - **Difficulty of Achievement**: Easy

To guide future research, this study proposes exploring how tourism can assist Zen practitioners in their quest for enlightenment and study of Buddhist texts which provide theoretical support. As explained in our literature review, Zen retreat programs vary based on organizer selection of theoretical supports and organizer experience. Given that no one Buddhist text is regarded as the single best guide to meet all lecture and planning objectives, and there is no one best Zen retreat in the world (W. Shi, 2012), tourists will formulate their own personal answer to what is “the best” retreat for them (S.-Y. Shi & Stevenson, 2001; W. Shi, 2007).

This study relied on the work of Wong et al. (2013) to classify (jianxing) of a Zen retreat experience contribute to knowledge building on the existing understanding of spirituality and scenery of a tourism experience (Alexander et al., 2010).
Buddhist tourist represented as a pyramid showing three levels of Zen involvement. This study suggests that Zen temples, retreat centers, and DMOS can utilize available resources to develop and attract those seeking Zen tourism, lifestyle, and retreat experiences. Following the guidance of Wong et al. (2013), this study indicates a greater overall interest in Zen tourism than the Zen retreat experience. Despite attracting fewer tourists to Zen retreats (largely due to requiring more dedication and thus being more difficult to appreciate than general Zen tourism), experiences built through Zen tourism may lead to future growth (resulting from Buddhist “seed germination” – i.e., implanting an initial interest that may be cultivated over time), which may lead tourists step-by-step to interest in the Zen lifestyle, and then to seeking the Zen retreat experience. The Taizo-in Zen Buddhist Temple in Japan is one of the role models where tourists can learn/practice Zen Meditation, experience Zen tea tasting, try Zen Buddhist cuisine, and Zen calligraphy. Sessions are regularly held for tourists to experience Zen through participation in different Zen involvement levels. The Taizo-in Zen Buddhist Temple is a popular tourist attraction – which has earned a two-star rating in the Michelin Green Guide, Japan – and serves as an example of how good planning and execution of tourist involvement and cultivation can gradually lead to the growth of the Zen Buddhist tourism sector.

Finally, the research team would like to highlight the importance of Zen in the post-pandemic world. Hong and Handal (2020) are noted for their expertise in psychiatry and have recently recognized the role of religion on forming psychological resilience and health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Stankov, Filimonov, and Vujčić (2020) have garnered attention for examining how mindfulness-driven tourism may improve tourist wellness and sustainability after the COVID-19 pandemic eventually subsides. This study serves as an initial step in that same direction by encouraging future research investigations into the benefits of mindfulness and Zen in tourism. The authors hope this study contributes to the body of knowledge and provides valuable implications to those who share the wisdom of Zen.

Impact statement

This study contributes to the knowledge of Buddhist tourism, a sub-category of religious tourism. By building upon previous studies of visitations to Buddhist temples (e.g., Wong et al., 2013) and Zen retreats (e.g., Jiang et al., 2018), this study provides an increased understanding of the Zen retreat experience, from the perspectives of both the tourist and the retreat organizer. Study findings provide valuable implications for retreat organizers responsible for shaping the Zen retreat tourism experience. Following the inevitable end of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe Zen retreats will experience increased popularity among tourists seeking to escape from stress and regain a sense of improved mental health and well-being.

This qualitative research was conducted by collecting information from multiple perspectives, including Zen retreat organizers and tourists. To become more familiar with Zen meditation, the first author trained under the organizer for over one year prior to completing this study. Doing so not only provided significant understanding of the practices, views, and challenges encountered by the case study site organizers, it also provided unique first-hand experiences which contributed greatly to the first author’s understanding of the tourist perspective. In addition to current tourism literature, the authors also relied on Buddhist texts and interaction with Zen masters to improve understanding of the religious-social context. As a result, this paper is an interdisciplinary research work in social science, which covers fields in tourism, religion, and psychology.

Credit author statement

Yao-Chin Wang: Methodology and Writing (Original draft preparation). Po-Ju Chen: Qualitative Analysis and Writing (Reviewing and Editing). Huiming Shi: Conceptualization and Qualitative Analysis. Waxing Shi: Supervision and Validation.

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