

THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIANS' SPIRITUAL FAITH VIEWED FROM TOURISM IN THE HOLY LAND**¹Dr. Ho Kwok Keung, ²Dr. Leung Hing Keung, Samuel and ^{2,*}Lam Kai Shun, Carson**¹Former Adjunct Professor of Biola University, U.S.A.²FSASS (Fellow member of Scholar Academic & Scientific Society), India**Received 17th April 2021; Accepted 25th May 2021; Published online 30th June 2021**

Abstract

There has been a lot of discussion recently about visiting the Holy Land (Israel), especially among those who believe in Jesus Christ. This paper qualitatively reviews the historical background of the Holy Land, introduces why people like to visit Israel, and looks at the religious and cultural affairs of the Jewish people. Specifically, this paper identifies and discusses five reasons for travelling to the Holy Land: (1) leisure; (2) pilgrimage; (3) experiential; (4) diversionary; and (5) experimental. The research methodology will look into the web statistical survey of 102 interviewees, as well as the documentary analysis of churches visited in Israel, among others. Qualitative analysis will then be used to determine the barriers to Christians' deciding to visit the Holy Land. One of the main focuses of the paper is the relationship between faith and feeling secure in the Middle East due to the current tensions between Islamic countries and Israel. This faith–security connection will be investigated to determine a new type of Christian typology for travellers to the Holy Land a mix of curiosity, depression (or anxiety), and desire for pilgrimage that disproves Erik Cohen's tourism model. Specifically, how faith overcomes feelings of anxiety in terms of security, thereby creating a corresponding experience. By determining that the motivation for travelling to the Holy Land for these types of Christians is out of curiosity (e.g., wanting to visit the birthplace of Christianity, concern regarding the on-going Israeli–Islamic conflict, desire for spiritual pilgrimage, etc.), one should be able to further deduce the role that faith plays in their final decision outcome. Finally, this paper empirically creates a Markov decision process model which lays the groundwork for future research.

Keywords: Tourism, Mathematics, Sociology, Science, and Religion.

INTRODUCTION

As has always been the case, Christians around the world like to visit holy sites. Many travel to Israel, sometimes even following the very route in the Bible that the Israelites took through Egypt. In biblical geography, the term "holy land" the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 17: 8) refers to present-day Israel, Palestine, western Jordan, and parts of southern Lebanon and southwestern Syria. Nowadays, while fewer Christians might visit the Holy Land in the traditional sense of a pilgrimage, Israel still holds a special place in their hearts. Due to the increase in Christian tourists visiting the Holy Land in recent years, Holy Land tourism as a concept has received more attention and been the subject of much research. It is also the focus of this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper uses Erik Cohen's idealistic travel motivations as a base. This model is used because it shows the full picture of the reasons (or modes) behind tourists' motivations. The model is superior to other tourism models (e.g., Valene Smith and MacCannell's topology of tourism) in that Cohen used the concept of authenticity—how it encourages tourists to construct and validate his/her identity [1]. Cohen's model comprises five modes of travel [2]: (1) Leisure: When a person's centre of world significance is living in the society in which they are accustomed to living, what they live every day is the life they recognise, and the work they do every day aligns with their goals [16]. These people can be said to be immersed in the values of life to which they agree.

(2) Pilgrimage: Compared to the negative attitude of the first mode, some people's centre of world significance is not in the society in which they live [22]. Hence, throughout the course of their daily lives, they might feel a slight sense of loss or separation, since there might be somewhat of a distance between them and their centre of world significance [23]. Much like how many Jews have a strong sense of national identity but are scattered throughout the world for various reasons [17]. (3) Experiential: This mode provides an opportunity to see the world from a different point of view. Through such experiences, the way in which one perceives things will change. Some might argue that this is true freedom, whereby a person can truly become who they desire to be. (4) Diversionary: This is derived from the everyday feeling of suffering and helplessness [18]. Tourism is often used as a tool to balance one's state of mind. In many cases, the purpose of tourism is about temporarily escaping from a monotonous lifestyle, and while travellers' experiences may vary, this mode reflects a certain degree of alienation [19]. (5) Experimental: Similar to drifters, believers in this mode leave their native home to pursue alternative ways of life in other cultural fields [20]. They often want to be exposed to all types people and cultures, and, as a result, are constantly experiencing change [2]. As such, they rarely stay or depend on a single cultural system. Indeed, Erik Cohen made a thorough and exhaustive analysis of the motivations for tourism in the Holy Land. However, he rarely mentions the spiritual experiences or signs of tourists' spiritual progress after experiencing the archaeology of the Holy Land. Archaeology being the process of excavating historical relics (simple objects) and using them to piece together complex ancient scenes of human life [4]. In philosophy, one abstracts subjective cognition from multiple levels to highlight the essence of things, with complex and cumbersome concepts and phenomena being summarised into simple descriptions. Here, the experiences obtained from

***Corresponding Author: Lam Kai Shun,**

FSASS (Fellow member of Scholar Academic & Scientific Society), India.

visiting the Holy Land and Cohen’s idealistic travel motivations collide, and this contradiction lies between idealism and materialism [3]. Although both idealism and materialism are diametrically opposed, this author puts forward that it is important to balance the physical experiences of archaeology with the motivations behind Holy Land tourism; the philosophy of life might be a possible answer to this connection [5]. The philosophy of life sees the world as a process that creates and develops, with creationism providing an explanation, in that the reason behind everything is God’s Word—Rom 1:20. It can be seen that this balance makes Holy Land tourism more instructive and educational, as well as enabling travellers to benefit from spiritual change. This paper uses quantitative and qualitative data to verify the reliability of Cohen’s five tourism motivations. It also surveys tourists to determine what they gained after visiting the Holy Land, and how going there influenced their faith.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Christian Holy Land tours are based on the history of the Bible, which is the main source of information. The purpose of this study is to discuss the spiritual quality of ordinary Christians in Hong Kong before and after going on a Christian Holy Land tour. These tours allow them to better understand the history of the Bible, as well as the relationship and theological significance of holy monuments. As a result, they become more involved in the ministry of the church, better understand God, and help to fulfil the Great Commission of spreading the gospel around the world. The paper first discusses the Bible’s interpretation of revelation. The Bible’s primary focus is the teachings of Jesus Christ, who provided wisdom and saved others [6]. Notably, many philosophical works only focus on how to live more intelligently; that is, to see life more intelligently. Yet, Paul the Apostle (commonly known as Saint Paul) explains that people have no wisdom or power to save themselves and that it is only achievable through the revelation (unveiling) of God—the Bible just reveals the wisdom of salvation. In fact, Christians are able to understand the definition of true salvation through the Bible. Saint Paul clearly explains the true meaning of the Bible in the New Testament when he says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (Timothy 3:16). Second, the web survey data was collated in a spreadsheet, then assigned a number on a scale of 1–5 in terms of likelihood. The numbers were then input (using the variable mean for the null/zero entry) into MS Excel and SpiceLogic for detailed data analysis. The following steps summarize the process [8]:

1. Input data into MS Excel in order to construct a graph to investigate Christians’ Bible reading habits to uncover initial motives behind Christians visiting the Holy Land.
2. Perform a web search to identify churches’ travel book(s), as well as quantitatively and qualitatively analyse interviewees’ data to determine the relationship between faith and feeling secure in the Middle East due to the current tensions between Islamic countries and Israel.
3. Qualitatively study Christians’ decisions to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land from the spiritual point of view.
4. Apply SpiceLogic to determine if there is a new type of Christian typology for travellers to the Holy Land.
5. Use the same software to empirically create a Markov

decision process model which lays the groundwork for future research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, let us look at the number years that interviewees have believed in Jesus. Specifically, the relationship between the number of participants and the number of years that they have believed. The following is the relevant statistical data (N =98).

Table 1. Number of years people have believed in Jesus

Years believing in Jesus	Number of people
0	13
1–5	2
6–10	8
11–15	7
>16	67

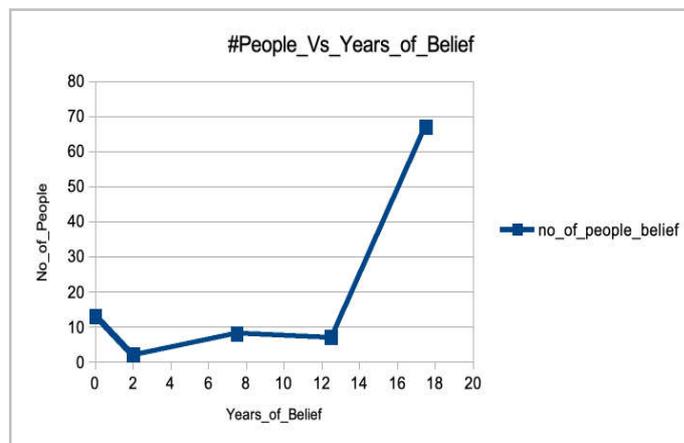


Figure 2. Number of people vs years of belief in Jesus

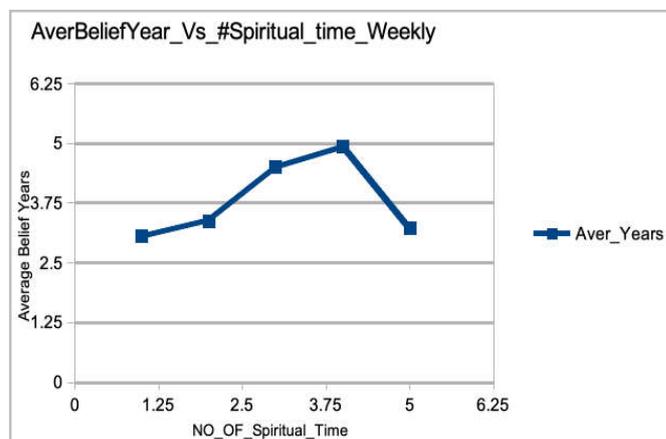


Figure 3. Average number of years of belief vs weekly amount of spiritual time spent

Figure 2 shows that the longer one believes in Jesus, the more willing one is to travel to the Holy Land (67 people, or roughly two-thirds of participants). This may be associated with age and beliefs, as local Hong Kong people have a tendency to seek origins, or the “root”, when they get older [26]. Therefore, they will likely have the desire or an initial curiosity, which acts as the motivation, to visit the Holy Land and see for themselves the places described in the Bible [9]. Second, let us look at the concerns regarding safety when visiting the Holy Land. To begin, we qualitatively analysed local Christian churches traveling books that we found in Christian book stores and libraries. According to Eva, the Israel traveling book

author in 2020 [10], both of her parents were worried about the on-going Israeli–Islamic conflict. Her mother said, “There is a war going on in Israel, hence the situation is very complex and very disordered”. While her father stated that, “There will be a typhoon on the day you leave Hong Kong for Israel”. However, Eva enjoyed travelling and felt as though Jesus was with her on every journey. For example, she explained that whenever the weather report said there was going to be a typhoon, it turned out to be calm, and whenever it was raining, by the time she left for the bus, it would be sunny. This was true when she was in England, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Italy. As such, Eva wholeheartedly believes in Jesus and has full faith in Him based on her travelling experiences. She feels that the connection between herself and Jesus is a personal one, and not only founded on knowledge. If there is no personal relationship, Christianity turns into a philosophy of life, one that will phase out over time and become obsolete (Colossians 2:8; Hebrews 5:12). Eva also believes in an eternal link between God that forms before we are born. Christians’ experiences can strengthen this connection throughout their lives. For example, if we continue to believe in Him in times of trouble and rejoice even when in pain. Having the same mindset as Jesus, Christians are able to spread Christ’s love and His salvation around the world. For those with true faith in Jesus, they value their connection with God, while non-believers do not have such a link.

Hence, Christians such as Eva must have strong faith in Jesus whatever difficulties they face on their journey to Israel. Indeed, this is what the Bible teaches us: “The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore” (Psalms 121:8). Another personal experience comes from Mr X, who had the following reflection after visiting the Holy Land [11]: “On the evening of the Lord’s Day, I returned to Hong Kong from Israel, ending the 11-day trip to the Holy Land. But what rang in my mind was the thunder of shells on the northern border of Israel. The sound was relatively far away in Syria. Before we set off for our tour of the Holy Land, we were worried, and some brothers and sisters advised us not to go, feeling that it was not safe. In fact, due to the strict entry and exit requirements, and because of the security on the Temple Mount, Israel is very safe. It was just the sound of artillery from across the border, but it continues to echo in my mind. After returning to Hong Kong, I watched the news about Syria, especially about Eastern Ghouta, which has caused international concern due to a lack of food and water, and the indiscriminate bombing of civilians. Although there was meant to be a ceasefire, the bombing increased. May the Lord have mercy on this land, especially on the weak and the elderly. In a short video circulated on Facebook, I saw a Syrian girl crying. She had no water, no food, and she had to sleep on the ground. If she left where she was, there was a chance of being killed. Outside each room in the hotel in which we stayed, there were mezuzahs hanging from doorposts. A mezuzah, which means “doorpost” in Hebrew, is affixed to the entrance of a home and consists of a small scroll of parchment which are written two biblical passages: Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Deuteronomy 11:13–21. I also saw people wearing tefillin at the Wailing Wall. These tefillin or phylacteries are small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah; specifically, Exodus 13:1–10, Exodus 13:11–16, Deuteronomy 6:4–9, and Deuteronomy 11:13–21. Literally translated, the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is “hear”. This reminded me of hearing the sound of the shell fire and I thought, ‘May the

Lord have mercy on Syria and all refugees scattered around the world’. Those of us who do not have to worry about food or water should donate money and help, if possible, besides just praying”. Based on the reflections of Mr X [11], it can be seen that all of the members of his church were worried about the safety of the Holy Land. However, after arriving in Israel, he found that it was, in fact, very secure. His only concern was the Syrian refugees who suffer greatly from the conflict. Nevertheless, Mr X has full faith in Jesus and continues to pray for their salvation. Another personal recollection comes from Mr Y, who had this to say after travelling to Israel [12]: “Israel is surrounded by countries that believe in Islam, and there are unstable factors within the country as well, namely Palestinians seeking independence and self-government. As a country, Israel’s sense of security comes from its modern military forces and Western society. From a global perspective, there seems nothing wrong with this. I reflected that the Israeli government seems to have failed to learn from history, relying increasingly on its physical strength and that of its allies than on God. From the above accounts, the Israeli–Islamic conflict is extremely destabilising for Holy Land tourism, as there is a real concern over safety. Therefore, Israel should rely on God instead of its Western allies. Simply put, Israel should have faith in God, not weapons. Quantitatively, if we compute the statistical data collected from the 102 interviewees, we can construct a pie chart (Fig. 1) representing the views of Christians who have believed in Jesus for more than 16 years on the Israeli–Islamic conflict after visiting Holy Land [29]:

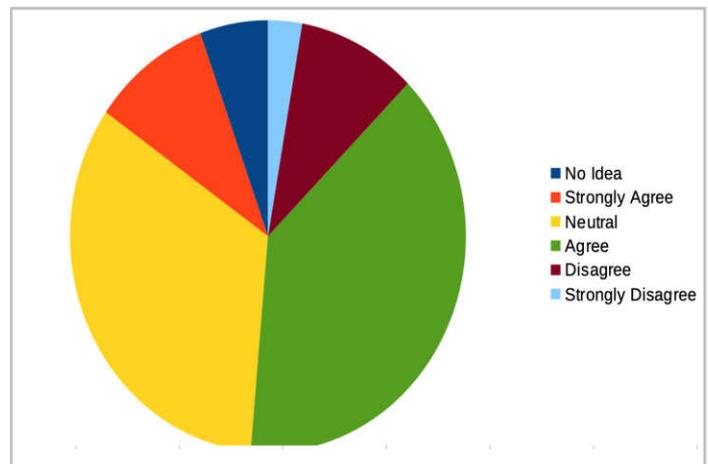


Figure 1. Views of Christians who have believed in Jesus for more than 16 years on the Israeli–Islamic conflict after visiting the Holy Land

Table 2. Percentage distribution of Christians who have believed in Jesus for more than 16 years on the Israeli–Islamic conflict after visiting the Holy Land

View	Percentage
Agree	23.08%
Strongly Agree	7.69%
Neutral	46.15%
No Idea	7.69%
Strongly Disagree	15.38%
Disagree	0%

Figure 1 and Table 2 reveal that even after visiting the Holy Land, Christians are still concerned about the Israeli–Islamic conflict, with roughly only 16% having lukewarm opinions of disagree or strongly disagree opinions). This is because the conflict is the main point of focus in Middle East politics and strongly related to religion and faith.

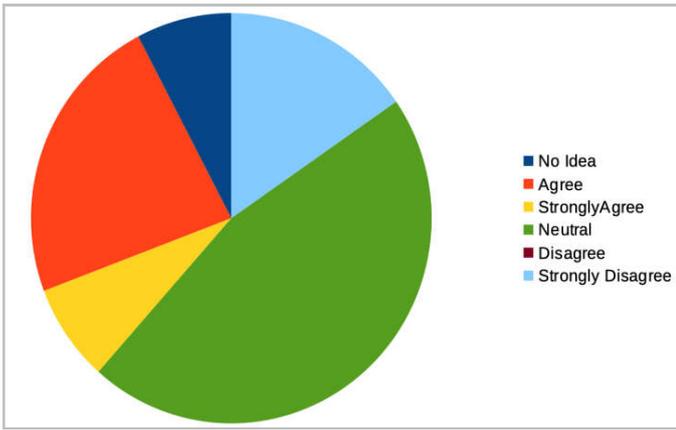


Figure 3. Views of non-Christians (13 candidates) on the Israeli-Islamic conflict after visiting the Holy Land

Table 4. Percentage distribution of non-Christians on the Israeli-Islamic conflict after visiting the Holy Land

Agree	38.89%
Strongly Agree	9.72%
Neutral	33.33%
No Idea	5.56%
Strongly Disagree	2.78%
Disagree	9.72%

While for those non-believers (13 candidates), about 46% of the population are neutral that compared with the largest proportion in believers (only 33% and agree 38%) would concern the Israel-Islamic conflicts. This event may be due to the fact that most believers have connection with the Bible (and Jesus) where the context were based in the Middle-East area. As from the qualitative reflections, they all show faith in the issue of visiting Israel Holy Land. Hence, we may further have a conclusion that faith has a determining influence to affect the depression factor (concerns in Israel-Islamic conflicts) in the matters of Israel Holy Land travelling decision for those Jesus believers. Also from the Eva's book, she has trust and full faith in Jesus, that is the reason why she can transcend the anxiety or depression wall of concerns in Israel-Islamic conflicts and visit the Bible depicted Holy Land area for the searching of her religious roots [27]. Figure 5 also tells us that most Christians believe that they are not depressed before travelling. This may be due to misconceptions regarding depression that pervade Christian culture. Figure 6 shows that most Christians feel as though they suffer from depression before travelling to the Holy Land due to circumstances in their daily life.

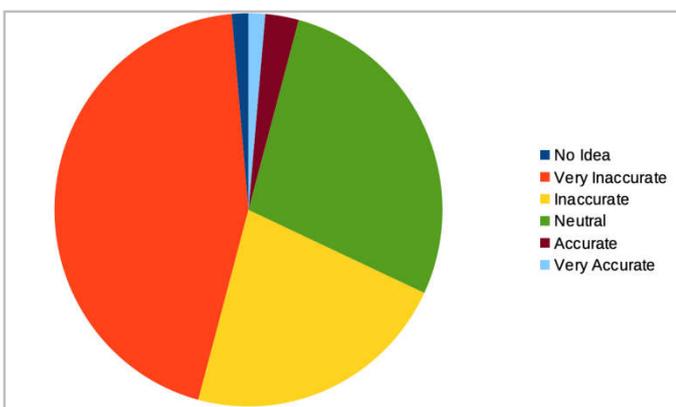


Figure 5. Most Christians believe that they are not depressed before travelling

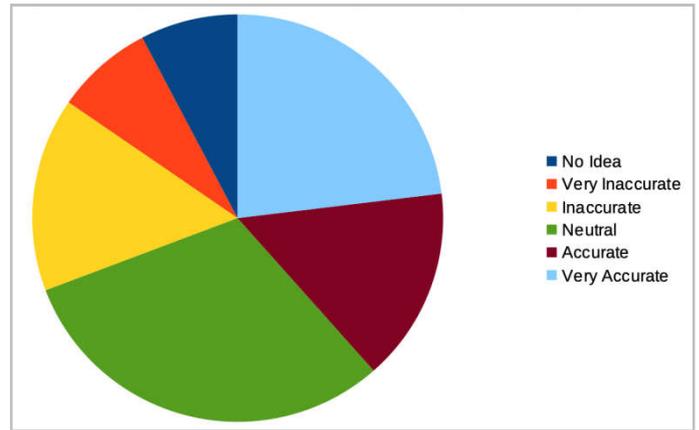


Figure 6. Most Christians feel as though they suffer from depression before travelling to the Holy Land

Based on the collected data of 102 randomly recruited web interviewees [25], a Markov decision process tree can be generated using SpiceLogic (Fig. 7a).

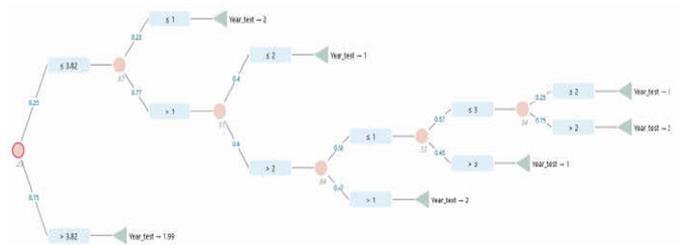


Figure 7a: Generated SpiceLogic decision tree.

Learned Rule Set	
- If Year_test is ≤ 1 then Year → 1	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is ≤ 3 then Year → 4.9	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is ≤ 4 AND X2 is ≤ 2 then Year → 4.94	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is > 4 AND Income is ≤ 2 then Year → 4.88	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is ≤ 4 AND X2 is > 2 AND S5 is > 2.56 then Year → 4.75	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is > 4 AND Income is > 2 AND X4 is > 1 then Year → 2	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is ≤ 4 AND X2 is > 2 AND S5 is ≤ 2.56 AND X1 is ≤ 3 then Year → 4.5	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is ≤ 4 AND X2 is > 2 AND S5 is ≤ 2.56 AND X1 is > 3 then Year → 3	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is > 4 AND Income is > 2 AND X4 is ≤ 1 AND X6 is > 4 then Year → 5	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is > 4 AND Income is > 2 AND X4 is ≤ 1 AND X6 is ≤ 4 AND X7 is > 3 then Year → 3	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is > 4 AND Income is > 2 AND X4 is ≤ 1 AND X6 is ≤ 4 AND X7 is ≤ 3 AND X3 is ≤ 3 then Year → 3	
- If Year_test is > 1 AND X9 is > 3 AND S6 is > 4 AND Income is > 2 AND X4 is ≤ 1 AND X6 is ≤ 4 AND X7 is ≤ 3 AND X3 is > 3 then Year → 4	

Fig. 7b. Learned rule set generated using SpiceLogic. When Year_test is >1, X9 is >3, S6 is ≥4, income >2, X4 is ≥1, and X6 is >4, then the maximum number of years of belief can be obtained (=5, i.e., more than 16 years)

The results of the machine learned rule set based on the SpiceLogic decision tree (Fig. 7b) reveal that a new typology in tourism exists in those with the greatest number of years of belief. Specifically, they visited the Holy Land out of curiosity and depression, and not just for pilgrimage. In other words, they had mixed reasons for going, which contradicts Cohen's typology as discussed earlier in the literature review. The implication being that this new typology of Christian Holy Land tourist may require spiritual revival. As such, there is a need for a travel agent to identify this group of Christians in Hong Kong's churches and help them travel to the Holy Land, together with a follow-up spiritual revival programme.

Conclusion

Everyone has worries. Worry comes from people's uncertainty and inability to control the future [13]. People often say that "Everything is impermanent". Which is why it is no surprise that Buddhists look to shed themselves of all attachments. This is not an unreasonable goal, because if people let go of their obsessions, they will naturally become emotionally detached when things are not done according to their own hearts. When that happens, there will be less of a mood gap. However, is it possible to have no emotional involvement? Is it possible for us to be indifferent [14]? Is it possible for us to face the death of a loved one and do nothing? This author would argue, no. It is impossible for people to ignore their own life needs, to have no emotions, and to let go of our emotional involvement with all people and things. When Jesus spoke to his disciples on the mountain, he had a clear message about "worry": "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them" (Matthew 6:25–32).

Faith is fundamental to Christians [15]. However, it is unlikely that one will always be full of confidence, and trust in the Lord will never be completely unshakable. Even if one believes in the Lord for many years, there will still be moments of weakness. It is worth noting that not everyone who came to speak to Jesus was full of faith; for example, the father in Mark 9:14–29. Then, in Luke 9:37–42, we discover the reason for this lack of faith. Jesus took three disciples, Peter, John, and Jacob, up the mountain to experience the miracle of transfiguration. The next day, when they returned, a large crowd was there to meet Him. Among them, a man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not". At this, Jesus said, "You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here". What Jesus was saying was that not only did the father lack faith, but so too did the disciples. This is similar to what the Bible says about people: "I have confidence, but my confidence is not enough". According to Hebrews 2:5–8: "What is man that you remember him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him lower than the angels for a short time; you crowned him with glory and honour and subjected everything under his feet. For in subjecting everything to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. As it is, we do not yet see everything subjected to him". The message Christians should take from this is to follow the gospel of Jesus Christ through small acts and habits, and let Jesus become the true master of our lives and lead the way

forward. "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in manner of living, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (Timothy 4:12). In other words, Christians must listen to the Holy Spirit's voice inside us and follow His teachings. Finally, since there is an internal relationship between the Christian Holy Land tourism curiosity, depression, anxiety, and faith decision-making, this paper presents an empirical Markov decision process model for the above hypothesis that will be investigated in the future research.

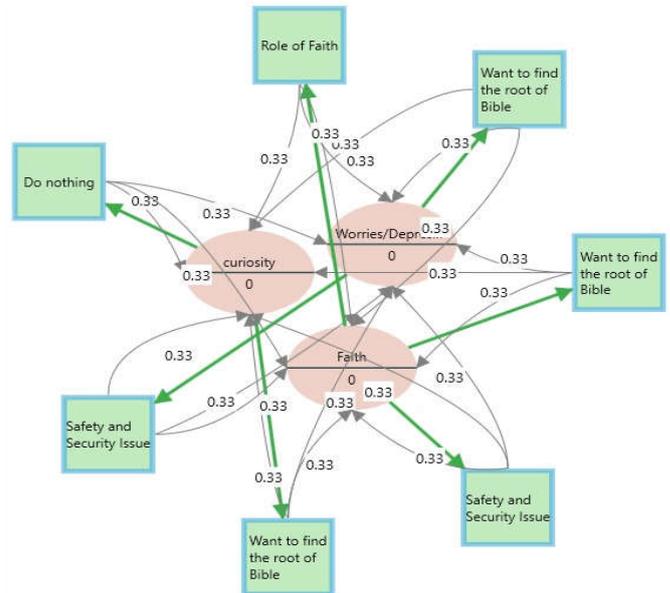


Figure 8. Empirical Markov decision process model for the Christian Holy Land tourism curiosity, depression, anxiety, and faith decision-making hypothesis [28]

Appendix

Depression and anxiety are highly related. Some experts believe that they co-occur [24], because when one is anxious, one might start to think negative thoughts, start worrying further, and feel as though they have failed, resulting in depression. That said, the focus of this paper is not about the relationship between depression and anxiety or the general implications of such a connection [24].

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